

## WHARFEDALE HOMES OF THE MIDDLELTON FAMILY.

### LOW HALL.

Crossing the River Wharfe by the old Ilkley Bridge, a time worn structure erected in 1676, the tourist will wend his way up the steep hill on the north side of the river towards Middleton Lodge, the last home in Wharfedale of the ancient family of Middleton. The Middletons were Lords of the Manor of Ilkley for centuries and held their lands uninterruptedly until 1895 when the Local Authority purchased the manorial rights.

Before visiting the Lodge, it may interest the reader to know something about the original Wharfedale home of the family at Low Hall, Middleton. This charming early-Tudor building is situated on the North bank of the river at the eastern extremity of Rupert Road and is now the property and residence of . According to Mr Swift — a former owner — Low Hall was built about 1580 and is older than Middleton Lodge, the last home, as has already been remarked, of the Middletons in Wharfedale.

Standing with its splendid walnut tree in front and ancient fish-pond once famous for its tench, the old house and garden have been renovated during recent years with great care and taste. The late Squire, Mr Middleton, whose generosity and fair fame are still remembered by old Ilkley folk would no doubt

turn in his grave could he but see the havoc wrought by builders since the sale of the Middleton Estate, but one likes to think that at Low Hall, his spirit can still brood, satisfied that here due reverence has been paid to the natural beauties he loved so well." ( W.A.J. in " Yorkshire Homes," August 1925 ).

The Middletons had, of course, associations with the district dating back to the days of the Norman Conquest and when first mentioned are Lords, not only of the Manor of Middleton but also of Stubham, residing at Stubham and Stockeld, near Wetherby. The woods behind Low Hall were formerly known as Stubham Woods, and it is rather strange to record that on a map of the West Riding published in 1610, only the name of Stubham appears with no mention whatever of the district of Middleton. The valley portion of the present Middleton seems to have been the Stubham of former days.

Some writers are of the opinion that Low Hall was erected much earlier than 1580. At all events, there is extant an inventory made by Henry Currier of household goods delivered to him at Stubham Lodge ( now Middleton Lodge ), July 27th 1621.

Among the large number of articles mentioned are " certayne Iatts taken from the house at Stubham Hall " ( now Low Hall ). The South porch seems to be the oldest portion of the present building, but even here, some structural alterations have been made, and the building up to a gable on the West side of the

porch shows that the Old Hall has been altered a good deal during the centuries of its existence. Interiorly this is very noticeable in the nature of walls of great width and huge fireplaces that must have heated rooms of palatial dimensions in the dim distant past. During structural alterations two of these fireplaces were accidentally discovered. One of them had been, at some time, covered up by a somewhat modern fireplace and when this and the surrounding masonry had been removed, a "Priest-hole" was found at the side — a secret place where the family Priest hid himself when danger threatened during the early "Reformation" days. In these "dark and evil days" to be found saying Mass meant almost certain death. Writing some years ago the late Rev. Father A. Galli, Parish Priest of Ilkley, (1893-1916), records, "An Alabastrer Herodas representing the Crucifixion was found in Low Hall which is a farm quite close to Middleton Lodge. An old report has it that Mass used formerly to be said at Low Hall during the times of persecution. The room over the doorway was called the Priest's room and close to it in the wall two feet thick, is a Priest's hiding place."

The opinion that the Middeltons resided at Low Hall (Stubham Hall) before removing to Myddelton Lodge (Stubham Lodge) seems to be well established. Low Hall, as we now term it, must have been a place of some importance in olden days for here the Manor Court of Stubham is believed to have been held during the latter part of the 16th century. The Stubham Court Records, however, date back much further than this century.

Those of us who only know Low Hall as it exists today will find it difficult to visualise it in the days of its original setting. Before the modern villas of Ilkley were built, it occupied a charmingly secluded position under the woods and was approached by an old winding lane which led past the house and right through the woods to the lane above. This lane, however, was closed to the public when the new Ilkley Bridge was erected over the river and the roads on the Middleton side constructed as we know them today.

It is not definitely known who were the immediate occupiers of Low Hall after the Middletons had removed to Myddelton Lodge. It is recorded, however, that Robert Smith, of Stubham Hall, died in 1642. Abraham Atkinson, of Stubham Hall, died in 1732, and William Robinson, of Stubham Hall, died in 1735, all men, we are informed "of substance and good standing in the district." Joseph Cowper, gentleman, died in Stubham Hall, in 1765 and "Cowper Cross," on Ilkley Moor, is said to have been named after him. Mr Alderson lived at Stubham Hall ( Low Hall ) in 1822.

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*As a sentinel centuries old stands the massive chestnut tree by the ancient porch.*