



Ordsall Hall

Large Print Guide

General History

Ordsall Hall has had a varied and interesting history. It has been a self-sufficient estate, a family home, a Working Men's Club and a Clergy Training School and has been associated with many prominent people and events throughout its life. Unlike many old halls that have fallen victim to new developments, Ordsall Hall has survived. In 1959, Ordsall Hall was the subject of a council vote about whether or not to save it from demolition. 30 councillors voted to save it, 18 voted to pull it down - with one opposition speaker describing it as "a heap of rubbish." In 1959, it was purchased by Salford Corporation from the executors of Baron Egerton of Tatton. Following major restoration work, it was opened to the public in April 1972 and was restored in 2009. The Hall is Grade I listed because parts of the building fabric and spaces from the mid-1300s survive.

Ordsall was part of the Manor of Salford at the time of the Norman Conquest (1066). The name first appears in written records in 1177 when 'Ordeshala' paid two marks towards an aid, feudal due or tax. There was probably a house at Ordsall by 1251 when William de Ferrers, Earl of Derby, exchanged the manor for land in Pendleton which belonged to David de Hulton.

The manor of Ordsall was bequeathed to Sir John Radclyffe in 1335 by the childless Richard de Hulton. The Radclyffes of Ordsall were an important and influential local family. Sir John Radclyffe distinguished himself in Edward III's military campaign to establish the King's claim to the French crown. Following these victories, the Radclyffes were granted the right to use one of the oldest mottoes for service - "Caen, Crecy, Calais." Sir Alexander (who died in 1549) was High Sheriff of Lancashire four times. His grandson, Sir John (who died in 1590) was MP for Wigan from 1563-67. Some stories suggest that Sir Alexander Radclyffe (who died in 1654) carried the purple robe at the coronation of Charles I in 1625 and was made a Knight of the Bath.

Many of the family took part in prominent military campaigns such as the Hundred Years War, the Wars of the Roses and the English Civil War as well as campaigns in Scotland, Ireland and abroad.

There is a tradition that Sir John Radclyffe helped to establish the early textile industry in Salford. Some sources suggest that, in 1337, Sir John was sent to Flanders to negotiate a treaty between Edward III and the Flemish trading cities. As a thank you for his work, he was allowed to bring a number of Flemish craftsmen with him to England to teach their trade to the local people.

In about 1510, the Great Hall was rebuilt by Sir Alexander Radclyffe. The earlier domestic apartments dating from the 1300s were kept but the kitchen and service wing (which included a buttery and a pantry for storing drink and food) were probably rebuilt. There would probably also have been a brewhouse and stables.

Margaret Radclyffe (1575-1599) and her brother Sir Alexander Radclyffe were extremely close. When he went to court he took Margaret with him. Margaret was chosen by Queen Elizabeth I as one of her Maids of Honour. It was not long before she became a favourite of the Queen. In 1599 Sir Alexander was killed whilst fighting in Ireland. Margaret was very upset and out of anxiety for her friend, Elizabeth I insisted that she was brought to Richmond Palace so that she could tend to her in person. Margaret died on 10th November 1599. The post-mortem showed that she died of 'strings around the heart'. Some historians believe these 'strings' were fatty deposits caused from starvation. At the Queen's command she was buried as a nobleman's daughter in the Church of St. Margaret in London. When Margaret died, Queen Elizabeth I instructed the playwright, Ben Jonson, to write a tribute for her grave.

Rare as wonder was her wit

And like nectar ever flowing...

...Earth, thou hast not such another.

From 'Ode to Margaret' by Ben Jonson,
dramatist and poet 1572-1637

In the 1600s, Ordsall Hall was the centre of a large self-contained community that included a farm, a chapel (where members of the family were buried) and, from the 1650s, a water mill for corn as well as a saw-mill and a brick kiln. In 1656 the estate is described as having 40 acres of arable land, 50 acres of meadow and 140 acres of pasture.

From the early 1600s, the Radclyffe fortunes began to decline as the family fell into debt. Part of the reason for this may be that some of the family still had to pay heavy fines for 'recusancy' meaning that they continued to practise the Catholic faith.

During the English Civil War (1642-49) the Radclyffe's of Ordsall were Royalists (they supported the King). In 1642, one of the Royalist leaders, Lord Strange, was staying as a guest at the Hall when a group of local people (Parliamentarians) who supported Oliver Cromwell attacked it. Two months later (September 1642), Lord Strange and Sir Alexander Radclyffe took part in an unsuccessful siege of Manchester. At this event, there was a fight in the streets and the first blood of the Civil War is said to have been spilt.

At the Battle of Edgehill in 1642 Sir Alexander was wounded and taken prisoner. In November 1642 he was sent to the Tower of London. We don't know how long Alexander remained in the Tower of London but records place him back in the Manchester area in 1653, Sir Alexander was laid to rest in Manchester Cathedral, on April 14th 1654.

In 1658, Sir John Radclyffe (who died in 1669) mortgaged the rest of the estate £3600 to Edward Chetham. This ended over 300 years of ownership by the Radclyffe family.

In 1662 Ordsall Hall was sold to Colonel John Birch. He cleared the mortgages and left the estate to his daughter. During the next 100 years, the Hall changed hands a number of times.

In 1758, Ordsall Hall passed to the Egerton family of Tatton. The Hall was divided into separate residences and rented out to tenants. In 1780, the occupants were a cotton merchant called Joseph Ryder and Richard Alsop, who was innkeeper of the Bull's Head Inn in Manchester.

From 1815 until 1871 the main tenants were the Markendale family. They were prosperous local butchers. In 1849, the area around the Hall was open

fields, but its nearest neighbours were a chemical and dye works and a paper mill. The area quickly started to change into an industrial area. In the early 1900s the area of Ordsall was described as “a wilderness of mean and dirty streets”.

In 1875 Ordsall Hall was rented to Haworth's Mill for use as a Working Men's Club. The Great Hall became a gymnasium, and there were billiard tables, a skittle alley and a bowling green. For a small fee, members had the run of the Hall were entitled to hearty meals and could play bowls and billiards. Part of the Hall was managed by the Wesleyan Home Mission. An infant school was established on weekdays, and a Sunday School at the weekends, and it became a preaching station in the evenings.

When Haworth Mill's lease ran out in 1896, Earl Egerton of Tatton decided to convert the Hall into a Clergy Training School affiliated to the Church of England. The Hall was in an appalling condition so he employed the Manchester architect Alfred Darbyshire (1839-1908) to restore it. The work cost £6000.

St. Cyprian's church was built in the grounds of the Hall as part of the 1896 restoration. It was demolished in the late 1960s due to subsidence.

During the First World War, part of Ordsall Hall's gardens were divided into allotments. In the 1920s, the Hall was used as a community house and job centre to keep people off the streets. During the Second World War two large huts in the garden were used by the Air Training Cadets. The building was put to various uses connected with the war effort; at one stage it was being used as a detection centre for bombers going to the docks, part was used as a wireless station (and was damaged by fire), while other areas of the building were badly shaken by bombing.

Room by Room Guides

The Great Hall

The Great Hall was built in 1512 by Sir Alexander Radclyffe. It replaced an earlier free-standing hall. The distinctive quatrefoil ('four leaf') design seems to have started a fashion in the region. Other examples of it can be found at Rufford Old Hall, near Ormskirk, Speke Hall, Liverpool, and Samlesbury Hall in Preston. The south wall (the one with the 'churchy' windows) dates from 1897 and was part of Earl Egerton of Tatton's renovations to make the Hall into a clergy training school.

Screens Passage

At the end of the Great Hall (by the entrance), between the doors and the elaborate archway that supports the roof, there would have been a screens (or cross) passage. The passage was created by positioning a heavy moveable screen in the archway. The screen helped to protect the household from draughts from the two external doors. The south door was bricked up during the 1896 restoration but was reinstated during the 2009-11 restoration.

Originally, the central door would have led, via a passageway, to the kitchen. The left hand door opened directly into the buttery (or drinks store), while the right hand one opened into the pantry (or food store).

The platform (or dais) is where the Lord, his family and high-ranking guests would have sat. A curved timber canopy above protected them from soot and draughts. The line of the canopy's curve can still be seen.

The table is on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. It was made in the 1600s. The carving on the front is about the War of the Roses and shows the red rose of Lancaster and the white rose of York. The Welsh dragons at either end represent Henry Tudor and his victory over Richard III of England at the Battle of Bosworth in 1485. This made him Henry VII of England and the first Tudor monarch.

The table would have been used for special guests. They would have sat on the plain side of the table with the carving on show. Chairs were rare and were reserved for those of high status; most people would have sat on benches and stools.

Ordsall Hall was one of the few Tudor Halls to have had a central fireplace. The hexagonal outline on the floor

marks where the fireplace was positioned. The smoke would have risen out of a small hole (a “louvre”) in the roof.

Oriel Window- Bay Window

The window was probably built in the late 1500s. It has seven sides and still has its original carved decoration of a grapevine. It was used as an informal dining chamber.

Myth and legend suggests that the grapevine design was used by Catholics during the Reformation as a secret symbol of their faith. Unusually, the Radclyffes of Ordsall Hall were Catholic but supported the Royal family.

The stained glass dates from the 1550s. One panel is the shield of Robert Radclyffe, Lord Fitzwilliam, and the other depicts the shield of Thomas Stanley, second Earl of Derby. Robert Radclyffe was the cousin of Sir Alexander Radclyffe of Ordsall Hall. In 1532, Robert Radclyffe married Margaret, daughter of Thomas Stanley, second Earl of Derby. The stained glass was conserved and reinstated during the 2009-2011 renovation of the Hall.

Minstrels' Gallery

The minstrels' gallery was probably originally reached via a bridge from the demolished east wing. The current staircase up to it was installed in the late 1800s.

Today, the gallery is said to be haunted by the Hall's most famous ghost - the White Lady. Some say she is the ghost of Margaret Radclyffe who looks out from the balcony, waiting for the return of her beloved brother, Alexander. Or it could be a bride-to-be, jilted at the altar of the once-adjacent St Cyprian's Church. Grief stricken she is rumoured to have climbed the stairs to the minstrels' gallery and jumped to her death. Then again, she could be the legendary Viviana Radclyffe, with whom Robert Catesby fell in love when he supposedly came to Ordsall Hall to devise the Gunpowder Plot.

The Star Chamber

The Star Chamber was built around 1360 by Sir John Radclyffe (who died in 1362). The surviving rooms of this part of the Hall are amongst the best-preserved and finest private domestic apartments of their date and type in the North West of England.

Today, the room is set as the 'man's world' where Sir John would have conducted his business, written letters, held meetings, heard small court petitions and kept his armour

The room takes its name from the gilt lead stars on the ceiling. It is thought that they date from the late 1700s or early 1800s and a few of the original lead stars can be seen in the far section of the chamber. The stars directly overhead are plaster replicas.

The floor tiles were uncovered during the 2009-2011 restoration work. They are believed to have been put into the Hall as part of Earl Egerton of Tatton's 1896 restoration. If you look closely at the tiles, they include a repeat pattern of Ordsall Hall's distinctive quatrefoil motif.

There was one star in the ceiling that could be moved from the room above; ideal for spying on your Master while he was working! These whisper holes were blocked up in the 1960s.

In 1428 Sir John Radclyffe (who died in 1442) was charged for an offence against the Sumptuary Laws. These laws were used to control spending. Sir John was fined for the distribution of cloth used for liveries.

Giving men your livery was similar to giving them a badge that demonstrated that they belonged to your gang. The penalty was a fine of 100 shillings for every livery given, while those who received liveries were fined 40 shillings each.

It is thought that the scratches on the fireplace were made by people sharpening their swords!

The Radclyffe Bed-Carved oak, early 1570s

The bed once belonged to the Radclyffe family who built Ordsall Hall and lived here from 1360 to 1660. We believe that the bed was made in the early 1570s to commemorate the marriage of John Radclyffe (c.1536-1590) to Anne Asshawe (1548-1629).

It is the only piece of furniture that we have on display that is original to the Hall.

The bed bears the coat of arm of the Radclyffe family (left side of the headboard) and the panel on the right features the arms of the Radclyffe and Asshawe families plus two other families. We believe that the carved figures on the headboard represent Anne, John and either John's father William or his elder brother Alexander (who died a few days before William in 1568). John died in 1590 aged 54 and Anne died many years later in 1630 – they are buried next to each other in Manchester Cathedral.

The Royal coat of arms can be seen on the tester (the roof). It has been painted at some point and it is likely it has come from an earlier piece of furniture – we think they are the arms of Henry VIII (1491 – 1547).

The footboard was added later but is made from the carved front of a 1600s panelled chest and features the Radclyffe coat of arms too.

Animals feature heavily on the bed – there is the lion and dragon of the Royal family and mythical beasts can be seen on the frieze round the tester. It is also embellished with many bulls - the emblem of the Radclyffe family.

In early 2014, the bed was sold at auction by a private collector from Derbyshire. It was bought by the Sehnaoui family and they have generously agreed to loan the bed to us for a minimum of five years to allow our visitors to see this amazing piece of Salford's history.

The Italian Plaster Ceiling Room

This room was built at the beginning of the 1600s by Sir John Radclyffe as a private chamber. It has a rare panelled plaster ceiling. Visitors cannot enter this room because the ceiling is so fragile.

The ceiling 'lozenge' pattern is based on an Italian design. Some believe that the plasterwork may have been completed by craftsmen from Venice. It is more likely that it was done by English plasterers who had studied in Italy. The plaster ceiling underwent complete restoration and conservation in 2010.

This oak panelling, believed to date from the 1600s, was removed from the Hall in the early 1960s. It was reinstalled in 2010. The dark coloured wood is the original panelling and lighter colour oak has been put in to fill parts that were missing.

The stone fireplace in this room dates from the late 1400s. There are remnants of a red, black and white painted design on it. Recent investigations have revealed the design to be a geometric pattern and of great significance, given its age.

Lobby

This space looks out over where St Cyprian's Church once stood. The church was built in the late 1800s as part of the Clergy Training School at the Hall. It was demolished in the late 1960s

The panels have some information about the religious life of the Hall and its inhabitants.

The two stained glass panels date from around 1500. It is thought that they were originally in the Hall's private chapel (which was demolished before 1800). The panels depict the Virgin Mary and St. Catherine. Some sources believe St. Catherine to have been the patron saint of the Radclyffe family.

The end of the pew dates from the late 1400s, but the seat and back are from a later date. The top of each pew end has a carving, sometimes called a 'poppy head'. The end on the right has a carving of a figure of a bishop with a book and staff.

The Great Chamber

This room is in the oldest part of the Hall and dates back to around 1360 (as does the Star Chamber beneath it).

The room is dressed as the bed chamber of Alice Radclyffe from around 1510. It is a light, bright space that was used for rest and relaxation and where the lady of the house might pass on valuable skills, such as embroidery or playing an instrument, to her daughters.

The paintings on the beams are thought to date from around 1360. It is rare for painting from this period to have survived. The original paintwork is on the side

nearest the bed. It depicts a pomegranate. This represents unity and fertility – a symbol which often appeared in private bed chambers. The painting has been accurately recreated on the opposite side of the roof brace to show what it would have looked like in its prime.

The Bath

We all know that, back in the 1400s to the 1600s, baths were not as popular as they are today. There is a rumour that Elizabeth I only had a bath once a year! However, noble families (such as the Radclyffe family) would have had baths made out of barrels. The reproduction one in this room is made out of a sherry barrel – you can still smell the alcohol on it! The linen canopy around it gave privacy.

The Coffers

Coffers were common pieces of household furniture for many centuries. They had many uses such as storing clothing, bedding, food, treasure and weapons. They were also used as chairs, dining tables, draught excluders and even beds.

Heraldry Room -Coat of Arms Room

This room was added to the original East Wing sometime in the 1600s. The panel above the fireplace shows the coat-of-arms of John Radclyffe (1582-1627). On the panel are the letters I and R (I was the Olde English form of J). It is made from hand modelled lime plaster.

The wallpaper is a reproduction of a small fragment that was found in the skirting boards near the fireplace during the restoration work in 2010. It is a late 1800s design (by a London-based designer). The original may once have covered all four walls of this room. We have decided to recreate the look on one wall so that you can get an idea of how this room would have looked when it was used as part of the Clergy Training School in the late 1800s and early 1900s

The viewing panel on the stairs allows you to see up into the roof space of the Hall. Sensitive lighting illuminates centuries old timbers, purlins and brickwork. It is a truly magical site!

Kitchen

The current kitchen dates from the last major phase of building (in brick) by the Radclyffe family in the late

1630s. It probably replaced a kitchen that was built in the 1500s.

The kitchen is set as if preparing for the wedding feast of Sir John Radclyffe to Lady Ann Asshawe in May 1572. Once the hub of the Hall, the kitchen is alive with the sights, sounds, smells of Tudor Salford - a time when the Hall was once described “a manor house of exceptional beauty”

After 1639, a ‘smoke jack’ was installed above the kitchen fireplace. This was a type of rotating spit powered by hot air from the fire. This was a new and exciting invention at the time! It is understood that the Radclyffes of Ordsall Hall were among the very first people in the North West to have a rotating spit. It is believed people used to readily accept invitations to dine at the Hall in order to taste food prepared on this revolutionary machine!

The two wall ovens with cast iron doors were inserted in the 1860s when meals were provided for the workers of Haworth’s Mill (who were renting the property at this time). The kitchen was used to provide cheap, hot dinners for over 400 local people.

In the 1500s everyone, including children, was allowed eight pints of beer a day (children’s beer was weaker

and called 'small beer')! Water was unreliable and not always safe to drink. The beer would have been brewed in a nearby brewhouse by the Hall's staff.

The Well

Archaeological excavations prove that from the 1300s to the 1500s there were at least 2 wells in the Hall's grounds. This well is over 4 metres deep. Some believe that, in the early life of the Hall, the well was used for accessing water; later on it may have been used as a pit to dispose of animal dung from the farm animals that once lived in this room. Put some money in, make a wish and see the well light up with Ordsall luck!

In the 1700s, the "clear Waters" of the River Irwell that ran past Ordsall Hall were filled with jumping trout, grayling and salmon. In the 1740s, the Hall was tenanted by Mr Frith. He appears on the earliest known picture of the Hall, sketched by Thomas Barritt around 1782. Some contemporary commentators described Mr Frith as a man of "remarkable genius." He was the discoverer of Nankeen Buff which, at that time, was a secret dye known only to the Chinese. He built a local dye-house for the purpose of developing this colour.

Smoke Corridor

This corridor was used to hang and cure a variety of animals, birds and fish. The smoke from the fire in the kitchen would have helped to cure the food. Smoking was a good way of preserving meats and fish in the days before refrigeration.

Frederic Shields Gallery

Built in the 1510s, this room was part of Sir Alexander Radclyffe's major rebuilding of Ordsall Hall.

This room has had many uses – from the private chambers of the Radclyffe family in the 1500s and 1600s, to an artist's studio in the 1870s, a billiard room for the workers of nearby mills in the late 1890s, to a place of study and socialising for trainee priests in the early 1900s. Since the 1970s, it has been used as an exhibition space. Today this gallery takes you on a journey through the hall's history - from the landscape it was built in through to its uses over the centuries.

Frederic Shields

Between 1872 and 1875, Ordsall Hall was home to the noted artist and friend to the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, Frederic Shields (1833-1911).

He used this room as his studio because of the light that flooded in from the bay window. Shields was born into humble surroundings on the coast of Durham and started his working life as a lithographer's assistant in Manchester. In 1856 he exhibited at the Royal Academy in London and his work came to the attention of the influential critic John Ruskin.

He was living at the Hall when he married Matilda Booth, his former child model. In a letter to John Ruskin he described Ordsall Hall as "the happiest refuge I have ever nested in". Whilst here, Shields largely devoted himself to drawing and painting local children, the children of labourers and little drummer boys. In a letter written to John Ruskin, Shields describes how the immediate area around the Hall was being developed with mills and mill-workers houses.

The chief work of his later years was the decoration of the Chapel of Eaton Hall, Cheshire, in mosaic and stained glass, and the mural paintings of the Chapel of the Ascension, in Bayswater Road, London. These pieces were considered to be the crowning works of his career. After leaving Manchester, Shields settled in London, and later retired to the village of Merton in Surrey, where he died in 1911.

Viewing Window

This window was originally part of the Hall and has been reinstated as part of the 2009-11 restoration work. Many Tudor manor houses, like Ordsall Hall, had windows looking down into their Great Halls. They were useful for servants and for nosy guests and staff wanting to get a bird's eye view of what was happening below!

Stained Glass Panels

The two stained glass panels were restored in 2009. The shield of the Halton family dates from the late 1500s to the early 1600s. The Halton family have no known connection with Ordsall Hall. This piece may have been brought here from another building. The other panel is made up from pieces that were in the Salford Heritage Services collection. The pieces date from the late 1500s to the early 1600s.

Log Boat

This dug-out canoe dates from around 1085. It was probably used on the River Irwell and River Mersey and the marshes between them. It is made from a single oak log and was found near Irlam in June 1890, during

excavations for the Manchester Ship Canal. The River Irwell runs just across the road from Ordsall Hall.

During the time that the Hall was used as a Working Men's Club by Haworth's Mill there were 3 full-size billiard tables in this room!

The Egerton Gallery

This room is part of the 1639 renovations of the Hall that were carried out by Alexander Radclyffe (who died in 1654).

During the restoration work in 2009-11, the walls were stripped of their white paint to reveal beautiful brickwork. You can still see evidence of previous fireplaces and doorways.

This room is used to show a variety of temporary exhibitions connected to the Hall, its history or surroundings. The exhibitions range from local history, art, and craft, to costume and photography.

The Roof Space

The roof space, like the rest of the brick-built West wing, dates back to the early 1600s. It was originally the servants' quarters. It is thought that the housekeeper's private room would have been in this area. It is possible to see smoke marks around the fireplace. The other servants would have been housed in the remaining parts of the roof space.

The roof space is also reported to have housed a small garrison of soldiers during the English civil war in the 1640s. It was used as private rented accommodation in the late 1800s.

'Wattle and Daub' panels

The walls date back to the 1600s and are made from 'wattle and daub'. This is an ancient building material that is still used in many parts of the world. It is made from wooden strips known as the wattle. This is then 'daubed' with a sticky mixture usually made from soil, clay, sand, animal dung and straw. It is said that bulls' blood was often added to the mixture to give the walls extra strength.