

Liversedge Hall: the significance of the heritage asset and its setting

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The significance of the heritage asset

The settlement context of the Liversedge Hall site

The township of Liversedge, formerly in the West Riding of Yorkshire and now in Kirklees District, was in medieval and more recent times an area of ‘dispersed’ settlement, as defined in the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service’s Research Agenda for *Medieval Rural Settlement* (sections 1.1, 1.8):

<https://www.wyjs.org.uk/media/69596/wy-medieval-rural-settlement-research-agenda.pdf>

In such areas, prominent residences, such as manor houses and yeomen’s farmsteads, were often established in isolated locations, rather than as elements of more extensive villages. The less prosperous farmers occupied holdings which were often strung out along the sides of areas of common pasture some distance from the manor house. This pattern can be seen across the western part of West Yorkshire, for example in the manor of Haworth, in Bradford District, where Haworth Hall stood in an isolated location (Roberts and Wrathmell 2002, 90-93). The presence of dispersed settlement patterns in Liversedge indicates that Liversedge Hall, too, was probably always an isolated manorial homestead rather than just one element of a larger settlement in this location.

The layout of the manorial homestead is probably closely reflected in the layout of Liversedge Hall and its farmstead as depicted by the Ordnance Survey first edition Six Inch map, surveyed between 1847 and 1851 (Fig. 1). This map shows a large rectangular court aligned north-west to south-east (*though for ease of description in this report the alignment is taken to be north to south*). The northern and eastern sides of the court are partially marked by peripheral farm outbuildings, probably including a large barn for crop storage. To the south is the main residence taking the form of an ‘H-plan house’ – a central hall with projecting wings at either end – and several other smaller buildings.

Though the dates of the individual buildings are unknown, the broad rectangular layout of the buildings is typical of medieval manorial homesteads – series of residential and farm buildings set around the edges of a walled court or *curia*. The court is bounded on the west by the lane giving access to the hall, and on the other sides by fields, including orchards on the east and south sides.

The Ordnance Survey map revision of 1889-92 indicates significant changes to the buildings (Fig. 2). Two of particular relevance here are the apparent demolition of part of the H-plan hall, and the creation of gardens to the east of the hall, outside the court in an area previously occupied by fields and an orchard.

History of the manor and hall

The early history of the manor, in the late 11th and 12th centuries, is unrecorded in surviving charters or other records, but it was part of the great Honour of Pontefract which had been given by William the Conqueror to his close supporter Ilbert de Lacy. In 1242/3 Ilbert's descendant, Edmund, provided the king with a list of knights' fees in his Honour, which included a quarter of a fee held by Robert de Liversedge (WYAS 1981, 436). Robert's surname indicates that there may already, by the mid-13th century, have been a dwelling on the site of the later Liversedge Hall. In the early 14th century, the manor passed to the Neville family, who held it from the Honour of Pontefract, which became part of the Duchy of Lancaster (WYAS 1981, 436).

The most prominent member of the Neville family of Liversedge was Sir John Neville, born in about 1450. He was appointed constable of Pontefract Castle by Edward IV, and in 1481 he was knighted for his service in the recent campaign against the Scots. Initially a leading supporter in the North of Richard III, he subsequently became, after the battle of Bosworth, a leading supporter of Richard's opponent, Henry VII. Sir John was sheriff of Yorkshire in 1487-8 and in 1494-5 (Marcombe 2012, 126-33).

Sir John died in 1502, and an enquiry after his death, plus his will, provide details of the layout and contents of his residence, Liversedge Hall. His house, or 'capital messuage', comprised sets of buildings and suites of rooms typical of late medieval gentry houses. There was a hall, which would have been open to the roof (with no first floor), a great chamber and a 'lower parlour' (probably the one above the other in a wing attached to one end of the hall), and a wardrobe and kitchen. The kitchen may have been attached to the hall or it may have occupied a detached building. The house also contained a private chapel, set up by Sir John's parents and first licensed by the archbishop of York in 1454 (Marcombe 2012, 133-4; WYHER PRN 759).

This early 16th-century description does not enable the original layout of the hall to be related to the surviving building known as the Hall, but an early 19th-century description is much more helpful. Liversedge Hall is described in Rev Thomas Whitaker's *Loidis and Elmete*, published in 1816, as follows:

'a hall house, with a centre and two wings, about the time of Henry VII. The hall, which in later times has been cut asunder horizontally by a floor, has a deep bay window to the south yet entire except the battlement. The roof has light flying principals, and, as is usual in halls of that age and rank, a wall-plate with embattled carvings. The chapel is said to have been in the west wing' (Whitaker 1816, 249, cited in Giles 1986, 203).

The building described by Whitaker conforms to what is shown on the Ordnance Survey map of the 1850s: a 'H-plan' structure consisting of a central hall and projecting cross wings at each end (Fig. 1). The open hall with its carved wall-plates running along the tops of the walls had gone by about 1890 (Fig. 2), although at least part of the west wing may still have survived at that time. The surviving building now known as the Hall had, by 1890, taken on its current shape and size. It was clearly created out of the east wing, and possibly also out of a staircase tower set at the junction between this wing and the open hall.

Whitaker describes what is a standard late medieval hall house, with an open hall (subsequently floored over to create a first floor) aligned east to west, its south side forming the main façade.

This side contained the bay window which would have lit the dais at the east end of the hall, where Sir John and his immediate family would have dined. The main entrance would have been at the west end of the hall, next to the west wing. The wings would have run at right-angles to hall, their roofs aligned south to north, as confirmed by the earliest Ordnance Survey six-inch map (Fig. 1), and by the main current roof line of the designated heritage asset.

The written evidence and historic mapping therefore lead to three important conclusions with regard to the significance of the heritage asset and its setting. First, what survives of the ‘Hall’ is its former east wing, a two-storey block which in the early 16th century had almost certainly contained the great chamber on the first floor and the lower parlour below it. Secondly, the main façade of the open hall to which this wing was attached faced south, and therefore any formal gardens related to it would have been on this side, along with the main access to the house, not at the east end beyond the east wing. Thirdly, the ‘front’ façade of the current building – facing east (strictly south-east) – is the result of the changes which took place in the second half of the 19th century, after the medieval open hall had been demolished. The broadly symmetrical façade, facing the current garden, with its central doorway and windows to either side, was evidently created at this time, reusing earlier architectural features. This work would almost certainly have involved the removal of projecting chimney stacks heating the first-floor and ground-floor chambers, conventionally placed against the wall on the opposite side to the hall.

What is now the principal frontage, together with the garden which provides its setting, is probably less than 150 years old, articulating a Victorian residence, not the 17th-century and earlier gentry house which is what is cited in the List entry.

The setting of the heritage asset

A settings analysis was carried out in accordance with the principles and methodology set out in Historic England’s relevant advisory note (Historic England 2017). In its introductory section, the note describes the twin roles of setting: how it can contribute to the significance of the heritage asset, and how it can allow that significance to be appreciated. Assessment of setting almost always involves views, both from and towards the heritage asset (Historic England 2017, 1, paras 3-5).

Though Liversedge Hall and its farmstead remained in what was largely a rural setting until the mid-20th century (see Fig. 3), its setting is now uncompromisingly suburban thanks to waves of residential development during the second half of the 20th century:

- To the north, the farm outbuildings in the northern part of the former courtyard area have been replaced by houses and gardens along the south side of Hall Close. These back on to the heritage asset and their gardens extend to within about 10m of it. They are prominent and immediate when viewed from the heritage asset, and obscure views of the heritage asset in the opposite direction.
- To the west, a house with garden has been erected on or close to the site of the former west wing of the medieval hall, within about 10m of the surviving heritage asset. This obscures the view from the heritage asset and effectively shields the heritage asset from Liversedge Hall Lane, the original approach to the hall. A house and garden at the

south-west corner of the heritage asset is at a similar distance and again masks views to and from the heritage asset.

- To the south, the houses on the north side of Cornmill Lane have gardens which back on to the Liversedge Hall site, at distances of about 20-30m. The narrow valley containing a stream which lies south-east of the heritage asset can still be seen from the hall site, and it will once have been viewed from the original main façade (and bay window) of the medieval hall; but the views beyond have been closed off by the houses, and from Cornmill Lane the heritage asset can only be glimpsed between the modern buildings (see Fig. 4).
- Longer views can be achieved from the east side of the heritage asset, to a distance of just over 50m before reaching the nearest modern house (see Fig. 5). Similarly, the whole of the east side of the heritage asset can be appreciated from the boundary of the nearest modern house (see Fig. 6).

The objective of the present proposal: an appraisal of the options to achieve it, and an assessment of their impact

The proposed development is intended to provide an appropriate and manageable home for the elderly owner of the Hall and grounds, who has lived abroad for a number of years. Her son and daughter (with their families) live in the two houses at the east end of the grounds. The objective of the present proposal is to enable the owner, now a widow, to spend her declining years in an environment which provides close family support. Two options have been identified for achieving this.

The first is to modify the current Hall to meet the owner's needs. This would entail a number of significant modifications to the Hall. Though the present Hall, formerly the east wing of the medieval hall, underwent considerable modifications in the late 19th century (notably the insertion of an entrance hall or lobby in its centre), the main spaces within it – two large rooms, in line, on each floor – probably reflect fairly closely the original layout of the wing. Furthermore, the current staircase position may well broadly reflect the position of the stairs which once provided access between the medieval (ground floor) hall and the great chamber and its vestibule on the first floor of the east wing. The impact of this option would be a direct one, on a designated heritage asset. Also, the hall is currently occupied by tenants who have lived there for some time and who we understand have a long-term agreement to remain in the property.

The second option is a new-build home, with a purpose-designed layout in one-and-a-half storeys, on a site adjacent to the houses occupied by the owner's son and daughter. The impact of this option is on the setting of the designated heritage asset, not on the designated asset itself. This option would essentially reduce the viewing distance between the Hall and the nearest house on the east side by about 10m. The shortening of the view westwards, towards the heritage asset, does not prevent the viewer appreciating the full extent and character of its east façade, as can be seen on Figure 7. As indicated in the site elevation drawings accompanying this application, the impact of this option on the view eastwards from the heritage asset would be much reduced by the newly revised development proposal, being at a much lower level than the Hall, and with a lower profile in relation to the nearer existing house.

The preferred option is the second of these: the one that impacts on the setting of the designated heritage asset, as opposed to the one impacting directly on the heritage asset.

The Historic England advisory note makes clear that assessment of the impact of proposed development on the setting of a heritage asset has to take into account, and be proportionate to, the significance of the asset and the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it. It also recognises that the setting of a heritage asset is not fixed, and may change over time as the asset and its surroundings evolve. It notes that *settings which closely resemble the setting at the time the asset was constructed are likely to contribute particularly strongly to significance* (my *Italics*: Historic England 2017, 2, 4).

The designation of Liversedge Hall is as a hall-house of c.1600. The Historic England List description (List entry number 1134606) describes it as a hall dated to c.1600, altered, with a symmetrical façade containing rebuilt openings, thus:

Hall. Circa 1600. Altered. Deeply coursed ashlar. Many gabled stone slate roof with chamfered gable copings and ornamental finials. Two storeys with continuous drip moulding over each floor. The symmetrical facade is surmounted by tall ashlar parapet and has central door, possibly rebuilt, with small flanking windows. To left and right, both floors, and over doorway is 6-light double chamfered mullioned and transomed window, those to ground floor having been extended downwards at later date.

Implicit in this description is the idea that the symmetrical façade facing east is the original main façade, with a central doorway ‘possibly rebuilt’ and ground-floor windows ‘having been extended downwards at later date’.

This is not the case. The building should, instead, be understood as originally one wing of an earlier house which faced south rather than east. It probably took on its present form, including the east-facing symmetrical façade, in the second half of the 19th century when the open hall was demolished, a conclusion in keeping with Colum Giles’s authoritative assessment of the building: ‘Parts of early building survive, but largely 19th cent.’ (Giles 1986, 203). It reuses architectural elements which can be assigned to the 17th century, but these are probably not, on the east side, in their original locations. The east-side setting of the asset is therefore far less significant than implied by the List description.

Historic map evidence indicates that the garden fronting the east façade of the designated asset was not created until the second half of the 19th century, over two centuries after the date of the architectural features which led to the designation, and probably six centuries after the asset – the medieval hall house – was formed. The garden does not reflect the orientation of the original hall house, being located in an area occupied by two fields (one containing an orchard) in the mid-19th century.

The intrinsic value of the garden can therefore now be seen to be no greater than, for example, the grounds of the nearby late 17th-century Duxbury Hall. A report by the Yorkshire Vernacular Buildings Study Group notes that Duxbury Hall originally faced north; but in the mid-19th century it was provided with a new façade on the opposite side, facing gardens to the south (WYHER PRN 10894). These gardens have recently been developed for housing.

Whilst the first of the above options would involve ground disturbance within the footprint of the medieval building, the second option is unlikely to uncover significant archaeological

remains, and would in any case presumably be covered, as before, by a condition that requires an appropriate level of investigation. As indicated at the start of this report, there are no grounds for supposing that medieval or later settlement remains would be uncovered on the proposed development site. Similarly, the domestic chapel within the medieval hall did not have burial rights attached to it, and there is therefore no reason to suppose that there are contemporary human burials in the vicinity of the medieval hall.

Finally, the present proposal includes an enhancement, in the form of interpretation of the heritage asset for the benefit of the public, which would mitigate the impact of the proposal as envisaged in Historic England's advice note (Historic England 2017, 14, para 38). Liversedge Hall is not immediately visible from public highways because it is screened by recent housing. Most of Liversedge's residents will be unaware of the Hall's existence, let alone of the importance of its site as the location of the home of the Nevilles, who were prominent in nationally significant events during the 15th and 16th centuries. As part of the current development proposal, a blue plaque highlighting the Hall's historical significance would be affixed to a wall adjacent to the public highway, to enhance public awareness of the heritage asset and its role as a residence of one of the main northern actors in the Wars of the Roses. The positioning and wording of the plaque would be as agreed with Kirklees planning officers.

31 October 2019

Figures



Figure 1 Extract from the Ordnance Survey first edition Six Inch map, surveyed 1847-51



Figure 2 Extract from the Ordnance Survey Six Inch map, revised 1889-92

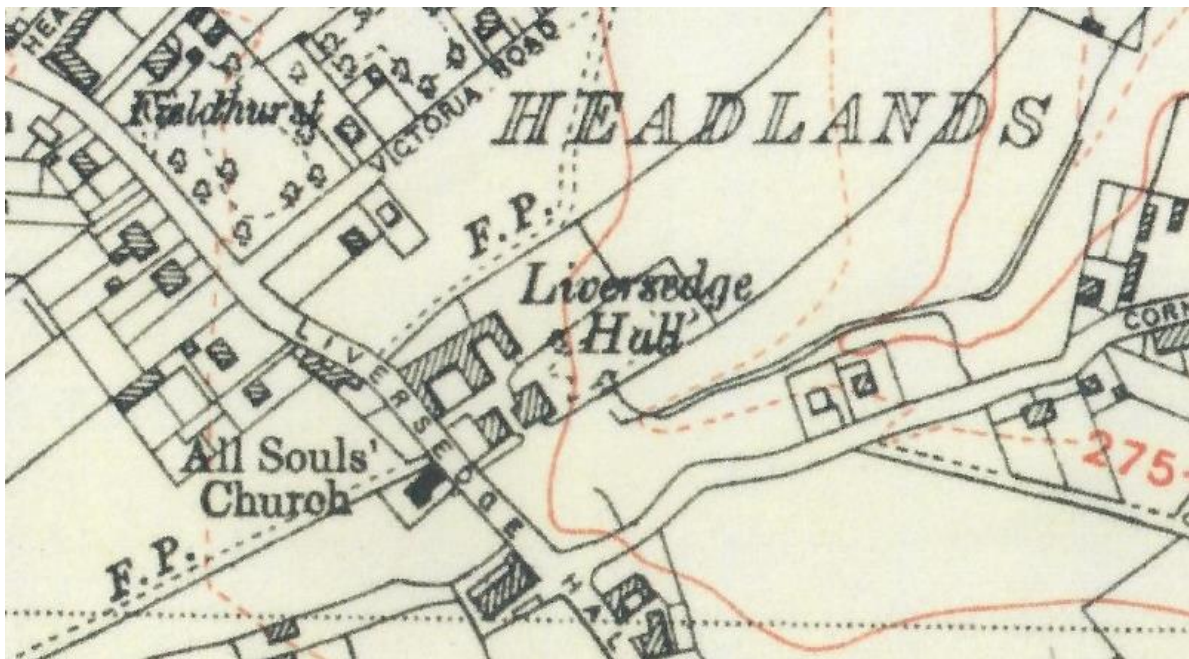


Figure 3 Extract from the Ordnance Survey Six Inch map, revised 1948



Figure 4 View of heritage asset from the south, behind houses on Cornmill Lane



Figure 5 View from east side of heritage asset eastwards



Figure 6 View of heritage asset, looking westwards from nearest house to east



Figure 7 View of heritage asset, looking westwards from proposed development

Bibliography and abbreviations

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WYHER West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record, curated by the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service, Gildersome

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Jason Dodds of the West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service for access to records in the West Yorkshire Historic Environment Record.