

The Calverley Family



Credit: Wallington, The Trevelyan Collection (National Trust)

Left: Portrait of Henry Calverley.

Below: The Calverley family's coat of arms featured a horned owl. This is still visible on the decorative drainpipes at Esholt Hall, where the Calverley family made their home after leaving Calverley Old Hall in the 17th century.



The paintings are believed to be some of the most important of their kind nationally. They are created in the 'Grotesque' style, inspired by ancient painted frescoes from Emperor Nero's hidden palace in Rome, discovered in the late-15th century. This style of painting eventually found its way into the houses of the elite in England, becoming a fashionable way of demonstrating a family's wealth and educated status.

The Calverley family moved to West Yorkshire from Scotland in the 12th century. They were originally called Scot, but changed their name to Calverley, taking on the name of the area that they now called home.

Initially, the family lived elsewhere in the village, before building a new home on the current site around 1320. This date is based on cutting edge timber-dating techniques, as a few timbers of this earliest hall house survive embedded in later walls. This first-floor hall formed the beginnings of Calverley Old Hall as we know it today.

Family prosperity and the development of Calverley Old Hall

As major landowners in the area, the Calverley family increased their wealth over time, charging rents on their land, farming and using the natural resources of the land to make money.

In the 15th century, it is clear that the family continued to prosper. They expanded their home by adding a much larger Great Hall and a private chapel.

Once these were added, the original first-floor hall was adapted to become a solar, quarters kept for the family's own private use.

Look at the carved stone in front of you depicting Calverley Old Hall. The Solar Block (previously the first-floor hall house) is in the centre with the Chapel on the left and Great Hall to the right.

SIR WILLIAM CALVERLEY AND THE PAINTED CHAMBER

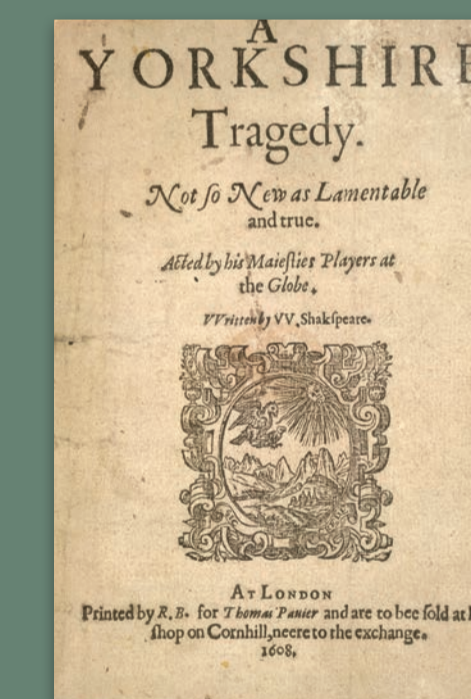
Nowhere is the family's show of wealth and status more evident than in the Painted Chamber. This block of the building was added in the early-16th century. Originally timber-framed, it was likely the location of an earlier staircase which was adapted to become a kitchen with a chamber above. A new floor was quickly added in the mid-16th century and the chamber above embellished with this highly decorative scheme of paintings. Given its date, it is likely that the chamber was commissioned by Sir William Calverley, who had further improved the family's status when he was made Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1549. This position gave the family control over law and order in Yorkshire, a large and important area of the country.



A small section of the 16th-century painted scheme. One small section here is particularly well-preserved and shows how bright it might all have looked when first painted.

SIR WALTER AND THE DECLINE OF FAMILY FORTUNES

By the early 17th century, the family's fortunes had begun to decline. As a devoted Catholic family in a now Protestant country, the Calverleys continued to receive fines for refusing to give up their faith. Then in 1605, tragedy struck. With large amounts of debt hanging over the family, from both previous fines and gambling, Walter Calverley murdered his two eldest children and attempted to kill his wife, whom he accused of being unfaithful. The events became a national scandal and even the subject of a play, *A Yorkshire Tragedy* (above). Walter's surviving young son



Henry (pictured above left as an adult) inherited the failing estate after his father refused to plead in court and was pressed to death in York. Further fines were imposed on the Calverley family during the Civil War, due to the family's support for the Royalist cause in Parliamentary Leeds.

In 1665, Henry's son Walter married wealthy heiress Frances Thompson of Esholt, and they moved to Esholt Hall to establish a new family home. The family did not return to live at Calverley Old Hall, which was divided into a series of smaller, tenanted dwellings, before eventually being sold in 1754 to Thomas Thornhill of Fixby.



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