

North West Spirit Seekers

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Smithills Hall, Bolton

There has been a building on this site since the 13th Century. The oldest part of the building dates from 1335, it was then extended in the fifteenth century and again in Victorian times. It is now a Grade 1 listed building. The major families associated with the hall were the Radcliffes, the Bartons and the Ainsworths. Little is written about the first two families although we know that Radcliffes fought at Agincourt and in the War of the Roses - on the Lancastrian side. The Bartons supported Bolton as a Parliamentarian town in the time of the civil war. In 1335 William Radcliffe bought the Manor from the Hulton family, in turn his son, grandson and great-grandson, all called Sir Ralph Radcliffe inherited the estate. The third Sir Ralph had only one child, a daughter Johanna who married into the Barton family, therefore the estate passed to her cousin, another Ralph Radcliffe. He died leaving a 12 year old daughter Cecilia, so Johanna married Cecilia off to her son John. Therefore in 1485 the estate passed to The Barton Family.

Through marriage the estate passed to the Bellasyse family in 1659 but they had other possessions and didn't really need this estate so it entered a period of relative decline (Princess Diana was a descendant of this family). The estate was sold in 1721 and then sold again in 1723 this time to Joseph Byrom. Smithills wasn't the Byrom's main concern (they lived at Kersall Cell, Salford) and they rented out parts of the building.

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In 1801 Richard Ainsworth bought Smithills. The Ainsworths were successful bleachers, a family made wealthy by the Industrial Revolution. Richard's son Peter inherited the hall in 1833 and built a grand southwest wing. Richard Henry Ainsworth inherited the estate in 1870 and employed the architect George Davey who remodelled the 16th Century parts of the house and added further wings. Nigel Ainsworth inherited the hall in 1926 and it was he who sold it to the County Borough of Bolton for £70,000 in 1938. The oldest part of the house was opened as a museum in 1963 and the rest was used as a residential home and day centre.

In the Great Hall energy is felt, particularly by far door, a strong, cold breeze, whooshes past people and blows tablecloths. Many people have had their bottom pinched and been touched particularly whilst on the stairs between the Bower and Solar rooms. A lady in 17th Century Dress has also been seen on these stairs, while many have smelt burning wood in the Bower Room. The spirit of a small boy with long dark curly hair has been felt in the solar room, perhaps called Tommy. People in the withdrawing room have seen people walking past the window outside - possibly Royalist Soldiers. In the Church, a Grey lady has been seen sitting in the front pew, a figure has been seen kneeling at the altar and orbs and strange lights have been caught on camera. George Marsh, a local curate, was tried in the Green Room for being a protestant, he was then taken to Lancaster and then on to Chester where he was burnt at the Stake.

At the bottom to the staircase up to his room is a footprint left in the flagstone. It is said that George stamped his foot here in outrage after his trial to leave a mark as a declaration of his faith. The footprint looks as though it is facing the wrong way. This is said to be because previous owners removed it, however, after they did this they experienced such extreme paranormal activity that they put it back - but the wrong way round. People experience the feeling of extreme unease and many won't even enter the room saying it has a malevolent atmosphere.