

The History of Lightcliffe House.

This large house was just off Smith House Lane and what is now Windsor Walk.



The current OS map shows the site of the house.

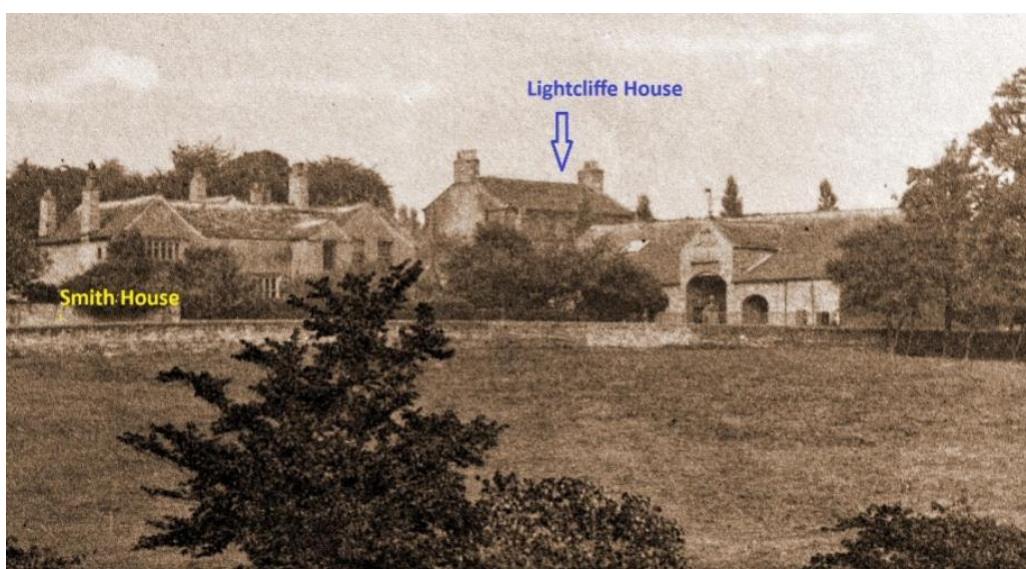
The house was badly damaged by fire and demolished sometime in the 1960s or early 1970s.



The house is recorded on maps, from an outline on the Myers 1833 map through to more recent OS maps. The footprint shows no material change over the years.



A view of Smith House² with Lightcliffe House in the background giving an idea of its height.



This photo is dated 1908.

In 1836, Ann Walker of Cliffe Hill purchased a large piece of land of about 100 acres from Sir Joseph Radcliffe. The land stretched from Wakefield Road in the north, Stoney Lane in the east, Hoyle House Beck to the south and Clifton Beck on the far side of the Bradford Road to the east.¹ The only property of note that was not in the sale was Smith House itself.

Looking at the agreement, Lightcliffe House or Farm is not named but the fields Back Field, Royd and Ing are named as is the tenant, Ham Rhodes.

In 1845, Samuel Washington, as land agent for Ann Walker, collected £31 per annum in rent from Ham Rhodes for Lightcliffe House. This indicates Walker ownership of the house at that time.

In the 1867 Crow Nest sale, Lightcliffe House was advertised as a large dwelling, gardens, outbuildings and yards & land. The owner would have rights to Pew 4 at St Matthew's Church. This was Lot 144, however it did not sell.

At the time it was tenanted by Hamburg born Friedrich Emil Schlesinger who had married Sophia Tolson of Bradford in 1864. He was a silk merchant. Two of their children were born in Lightcliffe in 1867 and 1869 before the family moved back to Eccleshill, Bradford.

In 1871, it was tenanted by a Baldwin family headed by Sarah Baldwin née Crowther, a widow, with daughters Clara Jane and Mary Ellen Baldwin, two sons William Crowther and Henry Clifford Baldwin together with 2 pupil boarders – Fanny Tankard and Ellen (I can't make out the surname – Simpkin?) Sarah was a schoolmistress and William a clerk.

1871 census

112	Lightcliffe House	1	Sarah Baldwin	Head	Widow	52	Schoolmistress	Thornton	"
			Clara Jane	Daughter	"	21		Daythorpe	"
			Mary Ellen	"	"	22		"	"
			William	Son	"	17	Clerk	"	"
			Henry	"	"	9		"	"
			Fanny Tankard	Pupil	"	11		Bradford	"
			Ellen Simpkin	"	"	15		Todds	"

Lightcliffe House has not been found on the 1881 census.

In the 1890 sale (Lot 37), again Lightcliffe House did not reach its reserve of £725. At some stage after the 1867 sale, adjoining land was added to the property. Probably 3 acres of fields named as Lower and Upper Royd, Royd Ing and Back Field at the time of the 1890 sale.

In 1891, the census shows the house to be occupied by William Taylor, aged 55 years, an Iron, Steel and Wire Merchant. His wife, a Londoner, Alice Jane, aged 46 years and their son, Charles, who at 20 was an assistant to his father. Anne Haines was a domestic servant for the family.

248	Lightcliffe House	1	William Taylor	Head	M	55	Iron, Steel & Wire Merchant	X	At Beasley	
			Alice Jane	Wife	M	46			London	
			Charles	Son	M	20	Assistant to Father	X	Canoe Bolton	
			Anne Haines	Servant	F	18	Domestic Servant		Worcester	Harrogate
249	Little Smith	1	Joseph Smith	Head	M	57	Wire Worker	X	York	Overton
			Martha	Wife	M	54			do	do

1891 census

The following information regarding those living as owners or tenants from 1900 to 1941 was supplied by Derrick Habergam to Calderdale Companion.

George Henry Elliott and his wife, Martha, were living in Lightcliffe House in 1900 and 1904. He was an architect. There were 3 sons, one of whom died in 1904. (The 1891 Census has them living in Lower German House and by 1901 in Lightcliffe House.)

Sometime after 1904 but by 1908, Ernest Bacon Osborn (1870–1941) and family were living in the house. By 1911, he was managing director of Baldwin & Walker Ltd. The company was based at Ladyship Mills and West Croft Mills (Kings Cross, Halifax, roughly where Tesco now stands).

During WW1, he served with the 2nd W. R. Brigade as a Captain, then a Major, and finally a Lieutenant Colonel, with the Royal Field Artillery. He retired his commission in 1921.

He had married Margaret Helen Cowie in 1907 and they had three children. Denis (1908–1982), Perdita who died in infancy (1910) and Nancy Ernestine (1914–1982). Denis served in the Army as a 2nd Lieutenant. He was a worsted spinner.

Ernest Bacon Osborn's sister, Emily Maud (1874-1962), married Richard Arthur Augustus Bottomley (1870-1929). They and their three children were living in Lightcliffe House, though he is referred to as 'of Hellewell Syke, Lightcliffe'. Richard reached the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the West Yorkshire Regiment and was mentioned in dispatches.

Of immediate local interest, another sibling of Ernest Osborn was Bernard Outram Osborn who lived at Knowle House (1911), possibly Stoneyhurst and Lydgate House (until 1947).

The *Halifax Evening Courier* reported on 8th October 1947 that T. F. Firth and Sons, Ltd of Clifton Mills, Bailiffe Bridge had bought Lightcliffe House including 4½ acres of land, orchard and tennis court for use as a hostel for European volunteer workers. The company already had a similar facility for its Heckmondwyke mills.

In 1950 Firth's football team, playing in amber and black, played their home matches at their Lightcliffe House ground which lay on the eastern side of the house. The firm's archery club also practised there.

In 1955, the company was advertising for a Cook-housekeeper at the house. It is described as a residence for a small number of male staff employees. The accommodation is described as a pleasant separate living quarters. There was a part-time assistant to the housekeeper. The housekeeper for several years was Mrs Doris Speak who retired in November 1969 after 13 years service. She was presented with a handbag and wristwatch by members of the firm who had lived there.

In May 1969, in the *Huddersfield Daily Examiner*, Firths were indicating that they had no immediate plans of building on the land alongside the house though the Brighouse Council Housing committee had a minute recording the granting of outline planning permission for residential development. This report suggested that the hostel had been used as a hostel for women and girls and then, more latterly, as a residential home for managerial and design staff.

A year later, in June 1970, Firths were selling the derelict property. This suggests that during the previous 12 months the house had gone from being habitable to being derelict. I'm still looking for evidence of the fire that severely damaged the house. I have not found any reference in the *Brighouse Echo*.

A Moravian connection?

John Parkinson, writing in the *Brighouse Echo*, in 1950 mentions in a description of a walk from Bailiffe Bridge to Lightcliffe, the house as the first home of the settlers of Moravians into England.

This was unexpected in that I'd thought that the Moravians had been provided with a large property in Smith House itself. John and Elizabeth Holmes welcomed a group of Moravians, a protestant Christian movement facing persecution in their native Bohemia, to our area in 1742.

Some stayed at Smith House and others went to what became known as German House (also known as New House though this must not be confused with the other New House by St Matthew's Church) on the corner of Wakefield Road and Victoria Road (where Calvert's plumbers had their business for many years). The original information comes from articles written by J Horsfall Turner and James Parker and subsequently quoted in a Halifax Antiquarian Society transaction of 1924. The sources define the property made available to them in two ways, one as a large 3 storey house alongside Smith House and the other as the Malt House. Turner implies that this accommodation had been demolished.

Could Lightcliffe House have originally been built as a malt house before 1742? It is certainly large enough and has similarities to the late C17 malt house on the Kirklees Estate. The only photograph that I've seen makes it difficult to assess the building in more detail.

It does seem quite likely that Lightcliffe House was the original accommodation for the Moravian congregation being suitable as school, place of worship and housing. The two photographs do show a physical connection to the outbuildings of Smith House which could imply that the building was built as part of Smith House and made available to the Moravians.

The use of New House/German House appears to have been for single men (brothers) from 1742 with single sisters using Ox Heys (Lower Ox Heys Farm) from 1745. Despite the move to Fulneck, New House was being used as a school from 1748 to 1755. There was a Lower German House which was renamed as Ladywell (north side of Wakefield Road towards Holme House). I've found no details of this. Perhaps it was used briefly by the Moravians and, perhaps, it was renamed during WW1 as anything with a real or perceived connection with Germany was to be avoided.

Sources:

Newspaper articles by J Horsfall Turner, Calderdale Central Library

The History of Brighouse, Rastrick and Hipperholme: J Horsfall Turner

Illustrated Rambles from Hipperholme to Tong: James Parker

Halifax Antiquarian Society Transactions:

1924, 263, The Moravian Brethren in Lightcliffe and their house: H Hinchcliffe

2015, 956, Religious Minorities in Calderdale: J A Hargreaves

Brighouse & District Heritage Newseum: Chris Helme, together with additional information.

Malcolm Bull's Calderdale Companion.

¹ Ann Walker's Acquisitions and Investments. *www.lightcliffchurchyard.org.uk > About the Churchyard > People of Interest*

<https://www.lightcliffchurchyard.org.uk/attachments/article/137/Ann%20Walker%E2%80%99s%20acquisitions%20and%20investments.%201825%20to%201847%20updated%20Nov%202023.pdf>

² The History of Smith House:

<https://www.lightcliffechurchyard.org.uk/attachments/article/184/The%20History%20of%20Smith%20House.pdf>

Thanks: as always to Dorothy Barker for a lot of additional research.

Ian Philp, April 2025

If anyone remembers the fire at Lightcliffe House, please make contact.

Our email address is lightcliffechurchyard@gmail.com

Update: Dave Lister has found two photos of the house, one for the front and the other the rear.



If you pass Smith House you can see a chimney stack with 3 pots to the rear right of the coach house. This matches the chimney at the left of this photo. Evidence that Lightcliffe House was



originally part of Smith House.

