

Crow Nest Mansion part 1

If Crow Nest mansion (pictured below) in Lightcliffe near Halifax, Yorkshire, had survived as a family home until the mid-20th century, it may have been a prime target for the National Trust. A sweeping drive through 80 acres of parkland led to a substantial classic Georgian house. However, it ceased to be a home from 1917 and was finally gone by 1958. This article is an accumulation of information rather than being a piece of original research.



The early information about Crow Nest comes mainly from the writings of J Horsfall Turner. He was a local historian who wrote books, newspaper articles and made contributions to the transactions of Halifax Antiquarian Society. In such an article in 1908 he wrote that there was, in 1592, a John Booth of 'over Crow Nest' in Lightcliffe undertaking a transaction with John Hoile of Hoile House. Hoyle House is close to the Crow Nest estate. In the article, John Cowper of Dean House, Shelf was either the owner or a tenant of Crow Nest in 1627. Five years later, Mr Ainsworth, curate in Lightcliffe, was living there. At one stage there was a brass plaque in Halifax Church with an inscription to the memory of James Mitchell, late of Crow Nest, and his children dated 1679. There is further evidence that James Mitchell was at Crow Nest two years before his death. Horsfall Turner quotes Oliver Heywood claiming that a John Mitchell of Crow Nest 'stole away Abraham Walker's daughter of Walterclough' and married her in February 1683. He died four years later.

In an assessment for the Overseers in 1692, Abraham Walker paid 11shillings for Crow Nest. He was buried in St Matthew's Churchyard in 1722 and his wife, Mary, in 1733. The grave is unmarked. In a similar assessment in 1769, Mr (William) Walker paid £27 for Crow Nest and other properties in the Lightcliffe Quarter. From this period, Horsfall Turner implies that the ownership was in the hands of the Walker family.

There is no description of what form the house took whether it was timber framed and then stone encased. A reasonable assumption would be that William Walker (1713-1786) and his son also William Walker (1749-1809) planned to replace the house, with the mansion that is known, in the period leading up to 1775. William Walker was said to have sailed to the Baltic to select timbers to be used in the rebuilding of the mansions, Crow Nest and Cliff Hill, as well as building the then new St Matthew's Church. It would have been brought from Hull, via the Aire & Calder Navigation to Brighouse and thence by wagon to Lightcliffe.

The architect was Thomas Bradley; his plans can be found further down in the article. He worked on many projects in Halifax including Square Chapel and the Piece Hall. From 1792 he acted as superintendent surveyor on the Calder and Hebble Navigation Company. John Edwards' Pye Nest House was designed by John Carr and Crow Nest was said to be a replica. This could explain why some sources, including Horsfall Turner, suggest that John Carr was the architect. You can see the similarity in the images below between Pye Nest House (top) and Crow Nest (bottom).



There are also suggestions that Carr designed extensions. However, there is no evidence that the house was extended after its construction around 1775. The architect's drawings for the main building seem unchanged in the following 100 years.

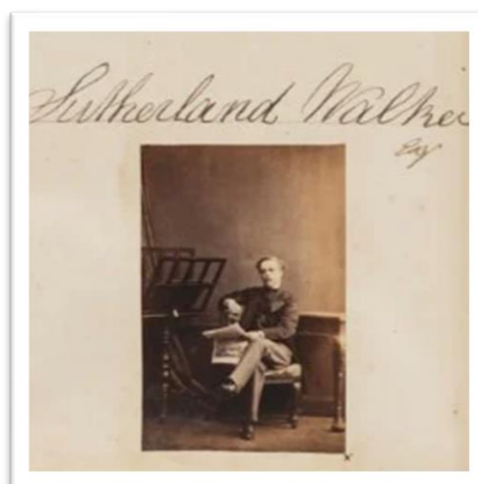
Bachelor William Walker lived in the house until his death in 1809. His brother, John, and family then moved in. John and his wife Mary both died in 1823. His son John Walker junior inherited the estate. At this point he and his sisters Elizabeth and Ann, lived in the house. Elizabeth married George Mackay Sutherland in 1828 and moved to Scotland. John married Fanny Penfold in the summer of 1829 and Ann moved to Lidgate House shortly afterwards. For more information about the Walkers, visit the following webpage and then scroll down. <https://www.lightcliffechurchyard.org.uk/about-churchyard/people-of-interest>

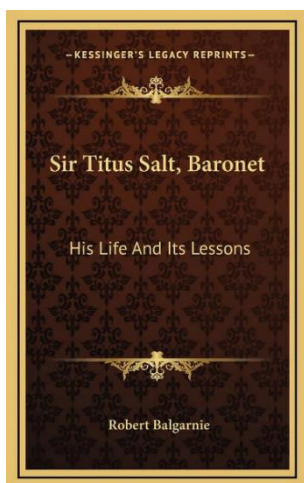
John Walker junior died on his honeymoon in 1830 without an heir. Elizabeth and Ann inherited and the estate was split with Elizabeth Sutherland taking ownership of Crow Nest. The Sutherlands would have used Crow Nest as a base when visiting although they lived in Scotland. From 1831 to 1844, Samuel Washington, who was Ann Walker's land agent and also involved with George Mackay Sutherland was living with his family at Crow Nest. It seems likely that they would have been using the coach house or gardener's house rather than the mansion itself. [The family of Samuel Washington.pdf](#)

After Elizabeth Sutherland died in 1844, George Mackay Sutherland who had the responsibility for his sister-in-law, Ann Walker, used Shibden Hall as his residence. This meant that he no longer had need of Crow Nest and the property was tenanted by Titus Salt from 1844 to 1858 according to the Saltaire Collection information.

At the time Titus Salt's mill was in Bradford and there was no railway, so he travelled daily by carriage. When the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway Company opened its line from Halifax to Bradford, the new Lightcliffe Station would have made the journey much easier. Titus Salt was a leading textile manufacturer, innovator, politician and philanthropist. He was Mayor of Bradford in 1848/49 and from 1848 to 1850 a Liberal MP.

After the death of George Mackay Sutherland in 1847, the only son Evan Charles Sutherland inherited his parents' estate which included Crow Nest. When his aunt, Ann Walker, died in 1854 he also inherited her estate with the condition that he added Walker to his surname. Evan Charles Sutherland Walker lived at Cliffe Hill until 1858.

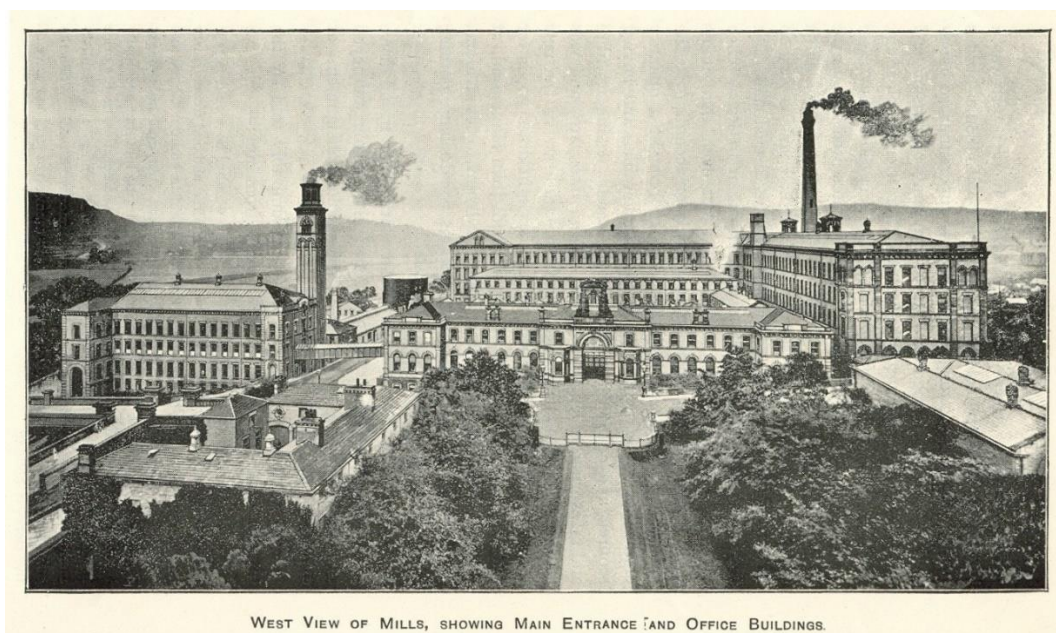




In Rev. R. Balfour's book '*Sir Titus Salt Baronet, his life and its lessons*', the author recounts a dinner, in late 1851 or early 1852, at Crow Nest. Titus Salt's guests were Mr Fairburn, a Manchester mill engineer and Mr Lockwood, his architect. They were discussing the new mill complex to be built on the Aire and needed a name. 'Saltaire' was the conclusion.

Incidentally there had been some thought about developing a mill in Brighouse but this fell through.

In 1853, Salt had celebrated the opening of his mill at Saltaire and his 50th birthday with a banquet in the great combing shed. Over 3,500 attended including many of his work people.



Three years later, in 1856, Titus Salt celebrated his 53rd birthday at Crow Nest by entertaining his workpeople and friends. It was estimated that over 3,000 people attended, many coming by train from Saltaire to Bradford and on to Lightcliffe station. Visitors walked down the tree lined coach road, passed a herd of llamas, alpacas and Angora goats. This must have been astonishing to many folk from Bradford. They had handled the fibres but had never seen the animals. After touring the gardens, greenhouses and conservatories, there were games and finally the feast in a 'monster' marquee. An enormous amount of food was provided 1,380lbs of beef, 1,300lbs ham, 520lbs tongues and pies, 580lbs plum bread, 3,000 currant cakes, and a similar number of plain cakes, 1080lbs of bread, 600lbs of current bread, 200lbs of butter, tea, sugar, 42 gallons of cream and a great quantity of celery. Mr & Mrs Salt passed round the tables to great applause. In the evening, Titus Salt was presented with an enormous bust made of Carrara marble. James Parker's *Illustrated Rambles from Hipperholme to Tong* written around 1904 thought that it was Salt's 50th which has caused some confusion.

Salt's lease was terminated by Sutherland Walker, and he went to live in Methley Hall, southeast of Leeds. His departure was greeted with regret. Friends and neighbours presented him with an Imperial Bible, bound in style, with massive gold clasps. The inscription implies that he had been at Crow Nest since 1841 though other evidence suggests 1844. His biography suggests that he had an understanding with the Sutherlands that his tenancy was fairly permanent and that he had an expectation to be able to purchase the mansion.



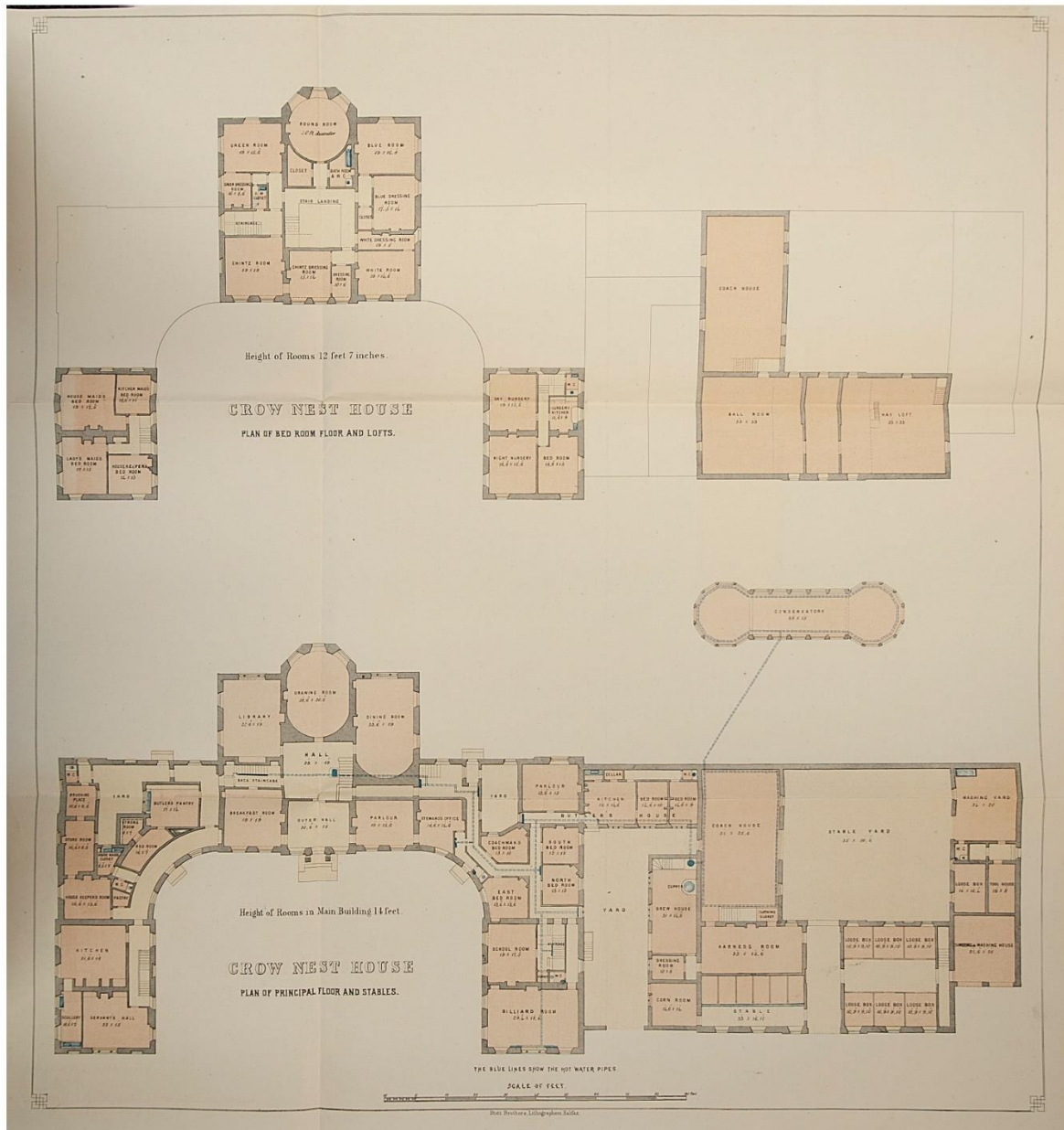
Evan Charles Sutherland Walker (pictured above) married Alice Sophia Tudor in February 1859. His address was given as Crow Nest. The same address was given at the birth of some of their children. During this period, he bought properties in the immediate area, fully funded a school - today's Lightcliffe Primary School - and made improvements to the old St. Matthew's Church. He also made improvements to Crow Nest mansion itself as will be explained later.

Then, quite suddenly, he decided to move back to Scotland buying Skibo Castle and selling a significant amount of property in Hipperholme and Lightcliffe. In 1867 he put his Lightcliffe estate up for sale as well as other parts of his inheritance. That sale is well documented in terms of the detail of the 280 lots, the bidding and who bought what, including what did not sell in, [The sale of the Walker estate 1860 to 1890 update Dec2023.pdf](#)

The 1867 sale brochure included the illustration of the house, seen here from the south and a map.



It also included a floor plan. This plan, used for the sale, is an original engraving by the architect Thomas Bradley published in 1801. A blue line has been added to show the hot water pipes which were added in Sutherland Walker's time. A conservatory is shown but this is much smaller than those described in the sales catalogue. It was added in the period between 1858 and 1867.



In the catalogue the house is described in detail.

'The mansion of Crow Nest is finally situated on the slope of a hill amongst plantations and shrubberies and possesses all the features and adjuncts of a gentlemen's establish and on a large scale.

The internal accommodation comprises entrance and inner halls, dining room 33 feet by 19 feet, drawing room 28 feet by 20 feet, library 25 feet by 19 feet, breakfast room 19 feet by 19 feet, morning room 19 feet by 15 feet and billiard room 29 feet by 18 feet, schoolrooms, nurseries, steward's office and numerous excellent bedrooms.

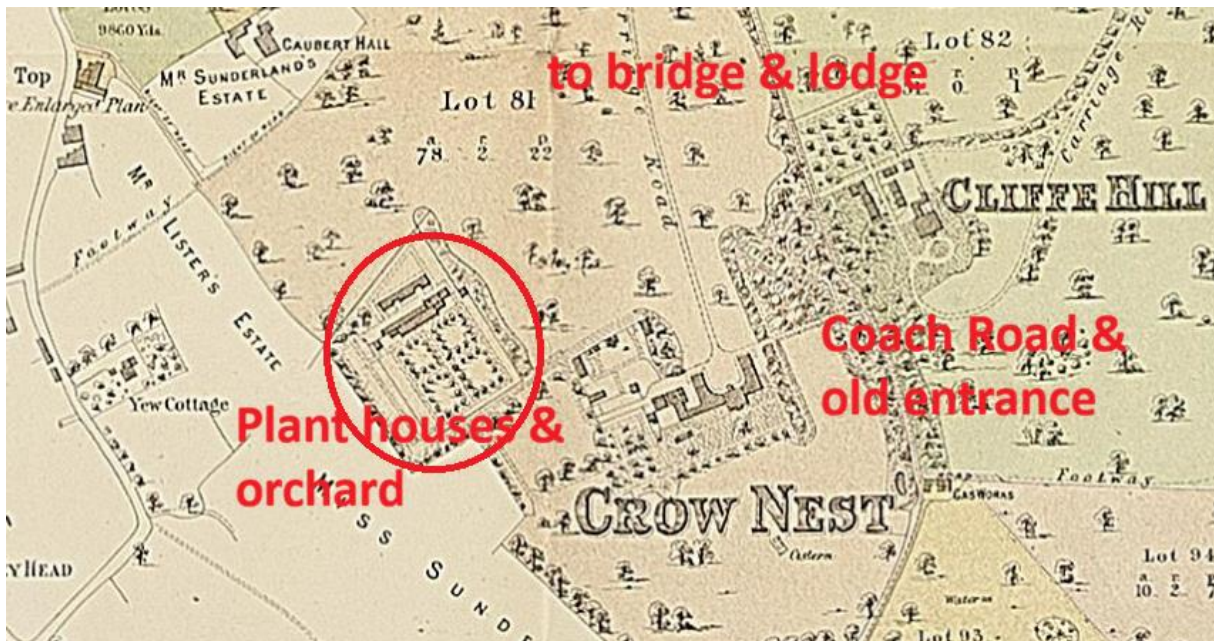
The domestic arrangements comprise Butler's pantry, Housekeeper's rooms, good kitchen, servants' hall, servants' bedrooms and attics, an extensive cellarage fitted up for dairies, washing and cooking and the mansion is heated throughout by Ormson's hot water Apparatus.

The stables are commodious and well arranged, comprise stabling for 13 horses and extensive coach houses, hay lofts and harness room. In the grounds are coachman's house of three rooms, standing for 11 cows, piggeries, hen houses, icehouse and cart and other sheds.

Gas and hot and cold water are laid throughout the mansion, stables and yards.

The gardens extend to about 3 acres and the shrubberies and ornamental walks to about 3 acres; and in the grounds are a rabbit warren and pheasantry surrounded by a stone wall and wire fence 12 feet high; and there are also three ornamental fishponds. The kitchen garden extends to about two acres and contains a Camellia house 22 feet long, a Peach house 36 feet long, 1st vinery 36 feet long, stove 41 feet long, 2nd vinery 36 feet long, fernery 18 feet long, 3rd vinery 36 feet long, heath house 22 feet long, geranium house 32 feet long, melon house 27 feet long, cucumber house 27 feet long and orchid house 32 feet long. It comprises also fruit rooms, mushroom house, storerooms, boiler house, potting sheds, root house and a good gardener's house of four rooms. The houses are newly erected part of the glass and timber being by Ormson's of London and they are heated by two of his boilers, one of which is in reserve. The vineries and peach houses are fully stocked with choice vines and trees. The orchard comprises about two acres and both it and the gardens are filled with fine young apple, pear, cherry, plum and Kent cobnut trees.

The mansion is about 10 minutes' walk from the Lightcliffe station and approached by an entrance lodge and a carriage drive about half a mile in length'.



Lot 81 included the mansion, 78 acres of named fields and pews, number 1 & number 7, in St. Matthew's Church, Lightcliffe which Evan's great grandfather William Walker had built.



The original pew brasses for the pews No. 1 & 7 with Evan's great grandfather's name, *Mr. W. Walker Crownest* on them.

At the time of the sale, the occupants of some of the properties were said to be the vendor, Evan Charles Sutherland Walker, Samuel Pickles and Joseph Cordingley.

The reserve on Crow Nest mansion had been put at £50,000 but this was not reached. Bidding had started at £15,000 but the lot was removed at £26,000. In fact, at a later private sale, Titus Salt who had been a tenant some years before, bought it for £28,000 and that included three other substantial fields and the gasworks which supplied the mansion, Cliffe Hill, Smith House and Hoyle House. Either a bargain or a very optimistic reserve.

Over time the major change to the property was the addition of greenhouses and conservatories. The original house plan had only a small conservatory. It is clear from the detailed descriptions in the sales brochure and from many photographs that there were extensive conservatories and greenhouses built on the south side of the house. However, there is a difficulty here. The sale document mentions numerous specialist plant houses but does not mention conservatories as such. The plan of the house has no indication of extensive conservatories on the south side. Yet, the southwestern elevation clearly shows a large-glazed complex.



Assuming that there were conservatories on the south side of the house at the time of the 1867 sale, it looks as though they were altered and extended after Titus Salt purchased the property.

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Continued in Crow Nest Mansion part 2