

Bartons of Smithills Hall, Lancashire



Smithills Hall - Bolton, Lancashire, England

Inherited by the Barton Family



Smithills Hall is a Grade I listed manor house, and a scheduled monument in Smithills, Bolton, Greater Manchester, Lancashire, England.

It stands on the slopes of the West Pennine Moors above Bolton at a height of 500 feet (152 metres), five kilometres north-west of the town centre.

It occupies a defensive site near the Astley and Raveden Brooks.

One of the oldest manor houses in the north west of England, its oldest parts, including the great hall, date from the 15th century and it has been since been altered and extended particularly the west part. Parts of it were moated.

*The property is owned by **Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council** and open to the public.*

How did the Barton family inherit Smithills Hall?

The brief, but **complex** outline of the transfer of ownership of Smithills Hall from the Radcliffe Family to the Barton Family is listed below:

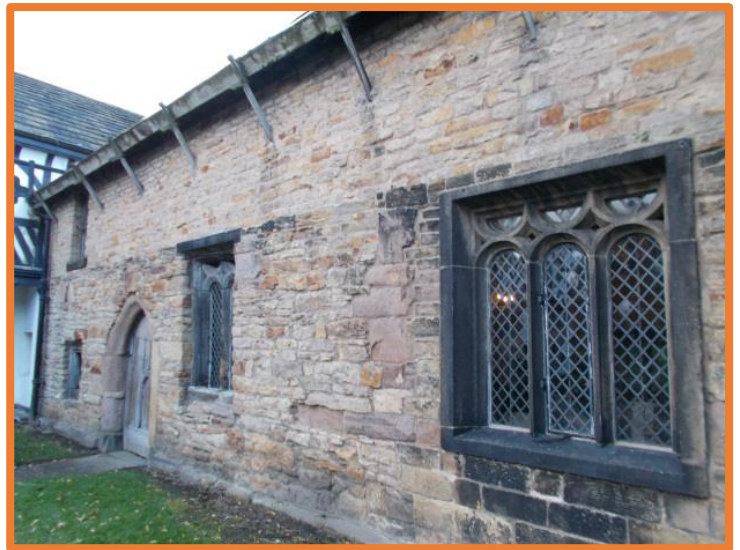
- The **Radcliffe family** build the Medieval Hall.
- The **Barton family** had acquired extensive landholdings throughout Nottinghamshire, especially through the wool merchant **JOHN BARTON (1425–1491)** “Staple of Calais”
- **Ralph Barton** (1450-1506) (*son of the above John Barton*) was to acquire further extensive Lancashire estates through his marriage to **JOHANNA RADCLIFFE (1452-1487)**, the only child of Sir Ralph Radcliffe of Smithills who controlled the estates of the **Radcliffes** of ‘Smithills’, Lancashire.
- **John “of Smithills” Barton** (1470-1517) (*son of the above Ralph Barton and Johanna Radcliffe*) further consolidated the Barton/Radcliffe relationship by marrying his mother’s **cousin CECELIA (Cecily) RADCLIFFE (1473 – 1506)** who finally became the heiress of ‘Smithills’, Lancashire, when it was passed on from her father, another **Ralph Radcliffe of Tyngrave**.
- **Andrew Barton** (1498-1549) (*son of the above John Barton and Cecelia Radcliffe*) was the person responsible for extensive renovations to Smithills Hall.

The following story is extracted from the 'Lancashire Past' Website

Smithills Hall, Bolton

LANCASHIRE PAST - Lancashire History Website and Blog

The **Radcliffe family** build the Medieval Hall. In 1335 William de Radcliffe acquired the manor of Smithills. During the early years there would only have been the medieval Great Hall on the site, which still exists there today. It is a large rectangular stone building and in here the family and servants would take their meals and sleep. The Radcliffes were a powerful Lancashire family, with members acting as Sheriffs, Justices of the Peace and 'Knights of the Shire' throughout the 1400s.



Smithills Medieval Great Hall

Their ancestral home was in the old centre of Radcliffe near Bury, and can still be seen at the ruins of **Radcliffe Tower**.

Radcliffe Tower

Ancestral Home of the Radcliffe Family

Radcliffe, Manchester, England

**(Cecily Radcliffe and Johanna Radcliffe
married into the Barton family)**



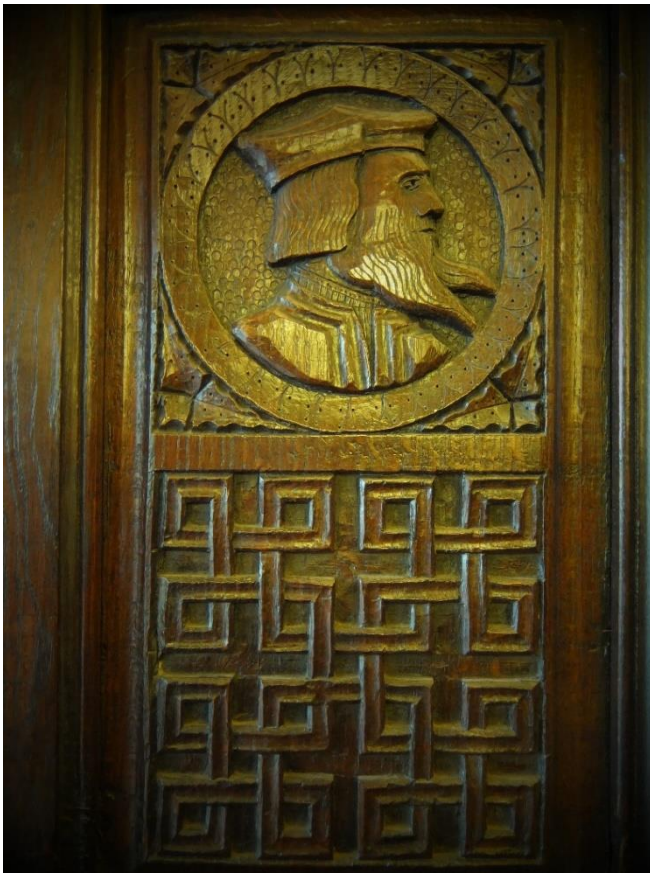
The Barton family at Smithills

Johanna Radcliffe was the among the last of the Radcliffe family to own the hall and she married into the Bartons, bringing their family to Smithills.

Cecelia Radcliffe, the final heiress of Smithills, and a cousin of Johanna Radcliffe, was to marry Johanna's son and this marriage was to complete the transfer of ownership from the Radcliffe Family to the Barton Family.

Johanna Radcliffe's grandson Andrew Barton significantly remodelled the hall when he came into his inheritance and his father's successful woollen business. Today we can see one of the real gems he had constructed the large withdrawing room. It features **oak wood panelling containing small carved portraits of the Barton family, all facing their spouses**. Visitors can see Andrew Barton and his wife Agnes in the carvings. He can be recognised by his large forked beard while she has a flower and a linked hearts design beneath her portrait.

Andrew also had carvings of his initials 'AB' and a 'rebus' put into the panelling. This is a pun on his name and shows a piece of timber (a '**bar**') across a barrel (called in the Tudor times a '**tun**'), so Bar-tun or Barton.



Wood Panel Carvings of Andrew Barton and his wife Agnes Barton (nee Stanley) – Smithills, Lancashire



Smithills Hall Tudor East wing

Robert Barton, the son of Andrew and Agnes Barton, inherited the Smithills estate and he is remembered for his role in a dramatic piece of local history and folklore.

In 1554, Queen Mary Tudor's reign had led to an upswing in religious persecution. A preacher, Reverent George Marsh, was active in the area and some considered his views heretical. Robert as a ***Justice of the Peace*** was ordered to have Marsh arrested and brought to Smithills.

He questioned Marsh before sending him over to the Earl of Derby who was the Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire. It is claimed that when Marsh was being led out from being questioned by Robert, he stamped his foot leaving a footprint in the stone floor. Local folklore has it that a footprint shape can still be seen today at the entrance to the Withdrawing Room. The first written record of this account was in 1787, more than 200 years after it supposedly happened.

Marsh was sent to stand trial at Chester.

It didn't end well for him as he paid the ultimate price for his beliefs, one of many people during the religiously turbulent Tudor period.



The Belasyes and the Byroms

When the male Barton line was no more Smithills passed by marriage to the Belasye family from Thirsk. They did not spend much time there, so the hall was let out to tenants and entered a general decline.

The medieval Great Hall was used as a brewery and many of the other rooms were used for weaving.

Finally in 1723 the hall was sold again and bought by Joseph Byrom, a Manchester Merchant.



The Byrom's home was **Kersal Cell** in Salford, a building which still stands today. Joseph took the neglected hall at Smithills and built an extension to the west wing. The hall stayed with the Byroms for a couple of generations, and the last one to own it was Eleanor Byrom. She preferred to live at Kersal Cell and so let it out to tenants.

Once again parts were used for weaving, including the Great Hall and Joseph's extension became a farmhouse. Eleanor sold it in 1801 to a father and son of the Ainsworth family who were wealthy Haliwell bleachers. As they both owned very large properties nearby, they treated it as a grand house for their descendants to live in.

The Ainsworths at Smithills

Peter Ainsworth was the first of the family to live full time at Smithills. He had no passion for the bleaching business that had made his father and grandfather so wealthy, and instead concentrated on running the farms, quarry and coal mines of the Smithills estate.

Following the 1832 reform act, towns that had no representation in Parliament got MPs for the first time. Peter was elected as a liberal MP for Bolton, where he did much to bring attention to the plight of the many poor people in the town. He emphasised the fact that many could not afford enough to eat, nor had sheets or even beds.

Under his ownership, Smithills once again underwent a period of construction and the Victorian extension we can see today – a dining room, library and guest bedrooms, belong to this time. Mock timbers added to the buildings to make them look of a similar age to earlier parts.

Smithills Hall Victorian additions

In 1870 Richard Henry Ainsworth inherited the hall along with nearby **Moss Bank House**. He was known locally as the Colonel, an honorary rank he held from his involvement with the Duke of Lancaster's Own Yeomanry. His cousin Annabel, a frequent visitor to the hall, described him as "good, solid, Lancashire Squire... an English gentleman of the old school". In 1896 the good squire tried to prevent public access to the local moorlands as he wanted to use the land for his grouse, partridge and pheasant shoots. A number of 'mass trespasses' took place- one had 10,000 locals turn up. But it was to no avail, as a Justice of the Peace the Colonel knew the law and made sure that many of the leaders were prosecuted. The moors remained closed to the locals for many years to come.



He derived much of his income from his ownership of the Ainsworth Bleachworks. For details of his dealings with his workers, and his resistance to improvements of their conditions within the factory.

His wife Isabella was known for her evangelical faith. She ran a bible class for women and a Sunday school for local children. The Ainsworths also employed a chaplain who cousin Annabel said practically ruled the house, dismissing servants he took a dislike too. Annabel hated him and in her memoirs noted that he had an enormous hold on the Colonel and his wife. The Smithills Chapel services were only full when the pair were in residence – few members of staff or tenants attended when they were away.

On the Colonel's death at age 87 the estate passed to his nephew Nigel Victor Combe, who took the Ainsworth name. At first Nigel continued the restoration of the hall, but by the 1920s he was falling on hard times as his shares in the bleaching business were returning little revenue. In 1931 he decided to close Smithills and the contents of the house were sold at public auction. Soon after Bolton Corporation bought the hall and many people petitioned for it to become a museum, but this did not happen until 1963. The older part was used as a museum and the newer Victorian section was converted first to a retirement home and then later to a day care centre.

Smithills Hall entrance

In the 1990s Bolton Council did extensive restoration both inside and out and for the first time opened up the Victorian part of the house for all to see. Visitors today can enjoy all of the house including the highlights of the Great Medieval Hall of the Radcliffe family and the Barton's stunning Tudor panelled Withdrawing Room. The Colonel and Mrs Ainsworth's Victorian rooms are also well worth seeing, the latter decorated in the style of William Morris and his Arts and Craft style associates.



Today the estate, gardens and hall are all open to visitors, and are free to visit. What once was the preserve of rich and privileged families, is now available for everyone to enjoy.

- ❖ There are a number of **[YouTube videos](#)** on the internet featuring **[Smithills Hall](#)**
- ❖ **[Most Haunted S06E21 – Smithills Hall](#)** (*gives a great overview with drama and intrigue!!*)

The Barton families of Smithills Hall

RALPH BARTON (1450-1486) and JOHANNA RADCLIFFE (1452-1487)

Ralph Barton, the eldest son John ‘*Staple of Calais*’ Barton and Isabella Gernon was born c1450 at Holme, Nottinghamshire, England.

Ralph’s father John Barton was a wool merchant based at Calais, France, but had later settled at Holme, where he established his home and where c1485, he prepared for his death by rebuilding the chancel and added a south chapel to house his tomb at St Giles Church at Holme.

After the death of John Barton in 1491, his son Ralph succeeded him, taking ownership of his vast estates.

*Extract from John Barton’s will: “Also that **Ralph** my son may have all my lands and tenement meadows feedings and pastures wheresoever they shall be in the Kingdom of England except as before excepted. To hold to the said **Ralph** and the heirs male of his body lawfully begotten.”*

A younger brother, Robert, entered Shelford Priory to become a monk.

Ralph and his brother Thomas do not seem to have got on well together, as their father left particular injunctions in his will as to their falling out. Both sons were executors, but if they could not keep the peace Ralph was to wind up the English estate, while Thomas did the like in France, and this was actually done.

The **marriage** between Ralph Barton and Johanna Radcliffe took place c1480. [*Friends of Smithills Hall – Research*].

The bride **Johanna Radcliffe** was the only child of **Sir Ralph Radcliffe III**.

Sir Ralph Radcliffe III had extensive estates, owning land in:

- ✓ **Much Hoole** – village and civil parish in the borough of South Ribble, Lancashire
- ✓ **Croston** - village and civil parish in Lancashire, England between Chorley and Southport and is next to the River Yarrow.
- ✓ **Leyland** - a town in the South Ribble borough, in the county of Lancashire, England. It is approximately 10 km south of the city of Preston.
- ✓ **Ulnes Walton**, a village and civil parish of the Borough of Chorley in Lancashire, England.
- ✓ **Tingrave (Tynggrave)** - Cecily Radcliffe was known as “Cecily of Tynggrave” Radcliffe (later Barton)
- ✓ **Edgworth** - a small village within the borough of Blackburn with Darwen, Lancashire, England. It is north east of North Turton between Broadhead Brook on the west and Quarlton Brook in the south east.
- ✓ **Turton** - historical area in the North West of England. It is divided between the ceremonial counties of Lancashire and Greater Manchester.
The Turton area is located north of Bolton and south of Blackburn. The area historically formed a township in the ancient parish of Bolton le Moors.
- ✓ **Halliwell** - predominantly a residential area of Bolton, Greater Manchester, England. Halliwell lies about 3km to the north west of Bolton town centre and is bounded by Tonge Moor to the east and Heaton to the south west. **Smithills Hall** to the north is within the ancient township.
- ✓ **Edgburdene** - unknown!
- ✓ **Sharples** - a suburb of Bolton, was a township of the civil and ecclesiastical parish of Bolton le Moors in the Salford hundred of Lancashire, England. It lays 4km north of Bolton.

- ✓ **Hardwood** - a suburb to the north-northeast of Bolton, Greater Manchester, bordering Bury in North West England. Harwood is also part of the historic county of Lancashire.

- ✓ **Blackburn** - a town in Lancashire, England, north of the West Pennine Moors on the southern edge of the Ribble Valley, 14km east of Preston and 33km NNW of Manchester. Always a textile town, Blackburn became the “weaving capital of the world” during the Industrial Revolution when the Leeds and Liverpool Canal unloaded a constant stream of raw cotton.

Ralph Radcliffe III died in 1460.

There seemed to be some extensive manouvering regarding the estates!

Family of Ralph Barton and Johanna (nee Radcliffe)

Ralph Barton died in 1486 in Lancashire England aged c36 years

JOHN 'of Smithills' BARTON (1470-1528) and CECILY RADCLIFFE (1473-1506)

John and Cecily (nee Radcliffe) Barton

Smithills Hall (wood panelling)

Smithills, Lancashire, England



JOHN 'of Smithills' BARTON was born c1470 - 1475 at Smithills Hall, Smithills near Bolton, Lancashire, his parents Ralph Barton and mother Johanna (nee Radcliffe).

John Barton's birth date varies as either c1470 or c1475 depending upon the various website.



Prior to the birth of John Barton and during his early years, a series of events brought about changes to the ownership and control of the Radcliffe family estates, including Smithills Hall.

- In 1432, Ralph Radcliffe III succeeded his father Ralph Radcliffe II, who died 18 September 1432. He owned land in Much Hoole, Croston, Leyland, Ulnes Walton, Tinglegrave, Edgworth, Turton, Halliwell, Egburdene, Sharples, Harwood, Bolton and Blackburn.
- Ralph Radcliffe III was cited in the 'Inquisition' post mortem aged 29 hence he was born in 1403, and died in 1460.
- Sir Ralph Radcliffe's only child Johanna Radcliffe was married to Ralph Barton of Holmeby-Newark.
- The Estate however, passed to her cousin Ralph Radcliffe of Tinglegrave in Eccleston.
- In 1485 Ralph Radcliffe of Tinglegrave died leaving an only daughter Cecilia Radcliffe as heiress (12 years of age).
- Johanna Barton (nee Radcliffe) arranged, through Cecilia's Guardians, Lord Derby and his son Lord Strange, for her son John Barton to marry the young 12 year old Cecilia Radcliffe.

The marriage of John Barton (son of Ralph and Johanna [nee Radcliffe] Barton) and Cecelia Radcliffe (daughter of Ralph Radcliffe of Tingrave in Ecclestone) took place at Smithills Hall on 6 October 1486.

The young John Barton (probably c16 years of age) had married the heiress of Smithills Hall), their descendants down the generations being the obvious proud owners of one of England's most historic manors which continued until the 18th century.

Family of John and Cecelia Barton:

Cecelia Barton (nee Radcliffe), after raising her family was to die at the very young age of approximately 33 years in 1506 at Smithills, Lancashire.

John Barton, a widower, having made a settlement of his manors and lands in 1415, and seen his son Andrew married to Agnes, daughter of Sir William Stanley of Hooton, renounced the world, and in July 1516 entered the monastery of the **Observant Friars at Richmond in Surrey** and was there professed.

An extract from his son Andrew Barton's will: Barton's father also married a Radcliffe, who was his cousin, but after her death he entered the house of Observant Franciscans at Richmond, Surrey, in July 1516.

The choice of order may well have been significant. The Observants, the Carthusians and the Bridgettines were the three religious orders which 'in different ways and tempers, opposed the designs of the King'.

Richmond was in close touch with the Carthusians of Sheen and the Bridgettines of Syon.

There is some evidence of a Lancashire circle connected with these houses, although the link might more properly be expressed as service or relationship to the earls of Derby— the 2nd Earl, for example, was buried at Syon.

Andrew Barton (his son) was distantly related to the earls of Derby through his marriage to a Stanley of Hooton. His cousin and friend Thurstan Tyldesley had a brother at Sheen, as did William Bromley and Thomas Fleetwood. Bromley also had a sister at Syon and Alexander Barlow, the 3rd Earl of Derby's brother-in-law, was to have a daughter there. Moreover, Sir Robert Rochester, who became chancellor of the duchy of Lancaster on Mary's accession, was the brother of the Carthusian martyr John Rochester and was himself much associated with that order.

John Barton was among the surviving Observants listed in 1534: he and William Craforth were then in Kent 'at the pleasure of 'the archbishop of Canterbury.' [Note: other sources indicate he died in 1528]

John Barton entered the **Friar Observants** during the reign of King Henry VIII, who became King of England in 1509.

THE HOUSE OF THE FRIARS OBSERVANT OF RICHMOND

Henry VII. in 1499 founded six English houses for Friars Observant, of which Richmond was one. These friars were a reformed branch of the great Franciscan order, instituted about 1400 by St. Bernadine of Sienna.

After Henry VIII. had been several years on the throne, he wrote more than once to Pope Leo X. in favour of the Observants, especially those of Greenwich and Richmond, declaring his deep and devoted affection for them, and saying that it was impossible to adequately describe their zeal night and day to win sinners back to God, and that they presented the very ideal of Christian poverty, sincerity and charity. Henry on several occasions gave special alms to the Richmond friars, who possessed no property save the site of their house, although they were often remembered in wills.



John Barton **died in 1528**, just **before** the enormous upheaval in the Catholic Church in England.
Cordial relation between the King and members of the various religious orders were, including the Friars Observant, about to change!

Henry VIII (28 June 1491 – 28 January 1547) was King of England from 1509 until his death in 1547. Henry is best known for his six marriages, in particular his efforts to have his first marriage (to Catherine of Aragon) annulled. His disagreement with the Pope on the question of such an annulment led Henry to initiate the English Reformation, separating the Church of England from papal authority. He appointed himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England and dissolved convents and monasteries, for which he was excommunicated.

The **Dissolution of the Monasteries**, sometimes referred to as the **Suppression of the Monasteries**, was the set of administrative and legal processes between 1536 and 1541 by which Henry VIII disbanded monasteries, priories, convents and friaries in England, Wales and Ireland, appropriated their income, disposed of their assets, and provided for their former personnel and functions. Although the policy was originally envisaged as increasing the regular income of the Crown, much former monastic property was sold off to fund Henry's military campaigns in the 1540s.

Family of John Barton and Cecelia (nee Radcliffe)

