

# REVEALED: the area's first 'water hotel'

The first 'water hotel' around Matlock was not the huge building that is now the County Council headquarters - but one that became St Elphin's School in Darley Dale. *Ann Hall and Steven Schmidt* report.



Darley Dale Hydropathic Establishment, South Entrance, 1889. *Courtesy of Historic England Archive (7995).*

**T**HE elegant neo-gothic Victorian structure that serves as the centre-point of the St Elphin's Park Retirement Community in Darley Dale is an iconic remnant of a fascinating 240-year history: it features two grand houses, two hydropathy institutes and several very prominent Derbyshire families. The house was built between 1877 and 1881 by a wealthy tradesman named William James Roberts. The external fabric of the house has changed only slightly since that time. In 1888, the house was sold and expanded to accommodate the Darley Dale Hydropathic Establishment, which opened

in 1891 and eventually sported a nine-hole, 'championship-level' golf course! The 'hydro' was a going concern until 1903/1904, when the property was sold again and became St Elphin's School, the school having physically moved from Warrington, Cheshire, to Darley Dale. The school operated until 2005, when the buildings and grounds were purchased by what is now Audley Group for the development of the present-day retirement

community. The house was substantially and sensitively renovated internally and reopened in 2012. But what about the history of the first house? Examination of land tax assessments, census data and tithe maps have revealed that a substantial Georgian structure - known variously as The Grove, Darley Grove or The Grove Estate - was owned by eleven different individuals from circa 1759 to 1877, most of whom resided at the property.

All except two of the owners were connected to historically wealthy families or were 'self-made men'. One of the owners was related to John Smedley Jr. of Matlock Bank Hydropathy Establishment fame, and two of the three tenants known to have lived at Grove Estate were related to Sir Richard Arkwright.

The first registered proprietor was the Rev John Wood of Edensor, officially recorded as beginning in 1778. Although conjectural,

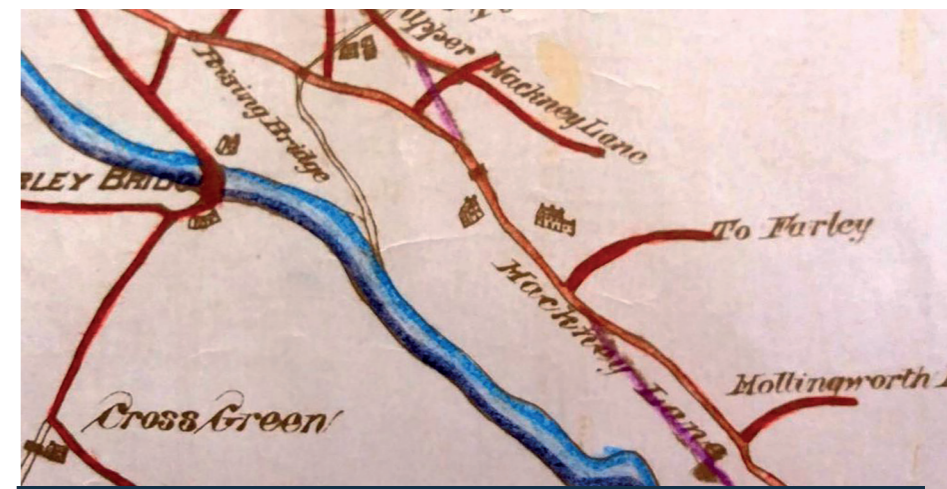
he may have in fact owned the substantial building featured on a map (circa 1759) from that year onward, recognised as the first house on Grove Estate. Elements of Georgian architecture were added to this first structure around 1780, quite possibly by an associate of Wood's named John Pickford of Derby. Wood, chaplain to the Duke of Devonshire, was an absentee landlord and rented the property out from at least 1778 until it was sold by his estate in 1796.

Robert Mason was the second proprietor of Grove Estate and lived in the house from 1797 to 1809. From 1809 to 1818, the property was owned by a Mr Oldham. He never lived there and rented it to two famous local people: Charles Hurt (from 1809 to 1812) and Charles Arkwright (1813 to 1818). Charles Hurt was from a prominent Derbyshire family - the rich Hurts of Alderwasley Hall. His mother Susannah was the daughter of Sir Richard Arkwright. Charles Arkwright's father was the very wealthy banking mogul, Richard Arkwright II. For about 10 years, therefore, the two successive tenants at Grove Estate were Sir Richard Arkwright's grandchildren.

The next proprietor was the Rev John Gisborne. He occupied the house from 1818 until 1835. Gisborne came from a

prestigious and somewhat wealthy local family and was known for the poetry he wrote while living in Darley Dale.

It has been postulated that the first house on Grove Estate was built for a John Alsop in 1820. However, it is now known that a house existed on the estate long before this and the only Alsop to ever have owned and/or lived in the property was John Alsop III - from 1836 to 1848. Previous generations of his family were rich lead merchants and



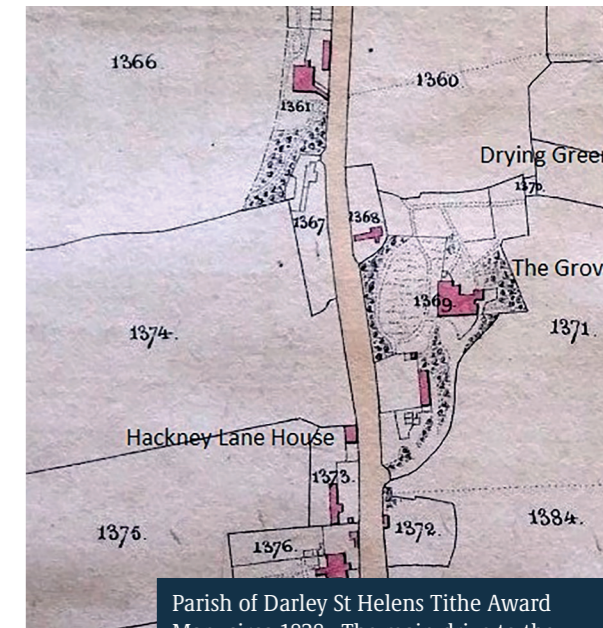
Depiction of the first Grove Estate house, circa 1759, on a map of Hackney Lane (now A6) junction with the road marked 'To Farley', which is now Grove Lane. DRO D1053 Z/P1.

mill owners based in Lea, and his grandfather, John Alsop I, was clerk to Peter Nightingale in the late 1700s. His father, John Alsop II, married Hannah Smedley in 1807, John Smedley Jr's aunt and, hence, the Smedley family connection. In 1848, John III and family left the property and emigrated to Australia.

Grove Estate was then sold to Antoine Rischaneck, MD, a physician and practising hydropathist (water doctor), trained

in what was called the Priessnitz method of 'cold water treatment'. The house became the first hydropathy institute in this part of Derbyshire (before Matlock Bank) and only the second in England to offer both treatment and accommodation in a single establishment. The first was the larger hydro-hotel called Ben Rhydding, in Ilkley, Yorkshire. However, Rischaneck's hydro-hotel was short-lived: it operated

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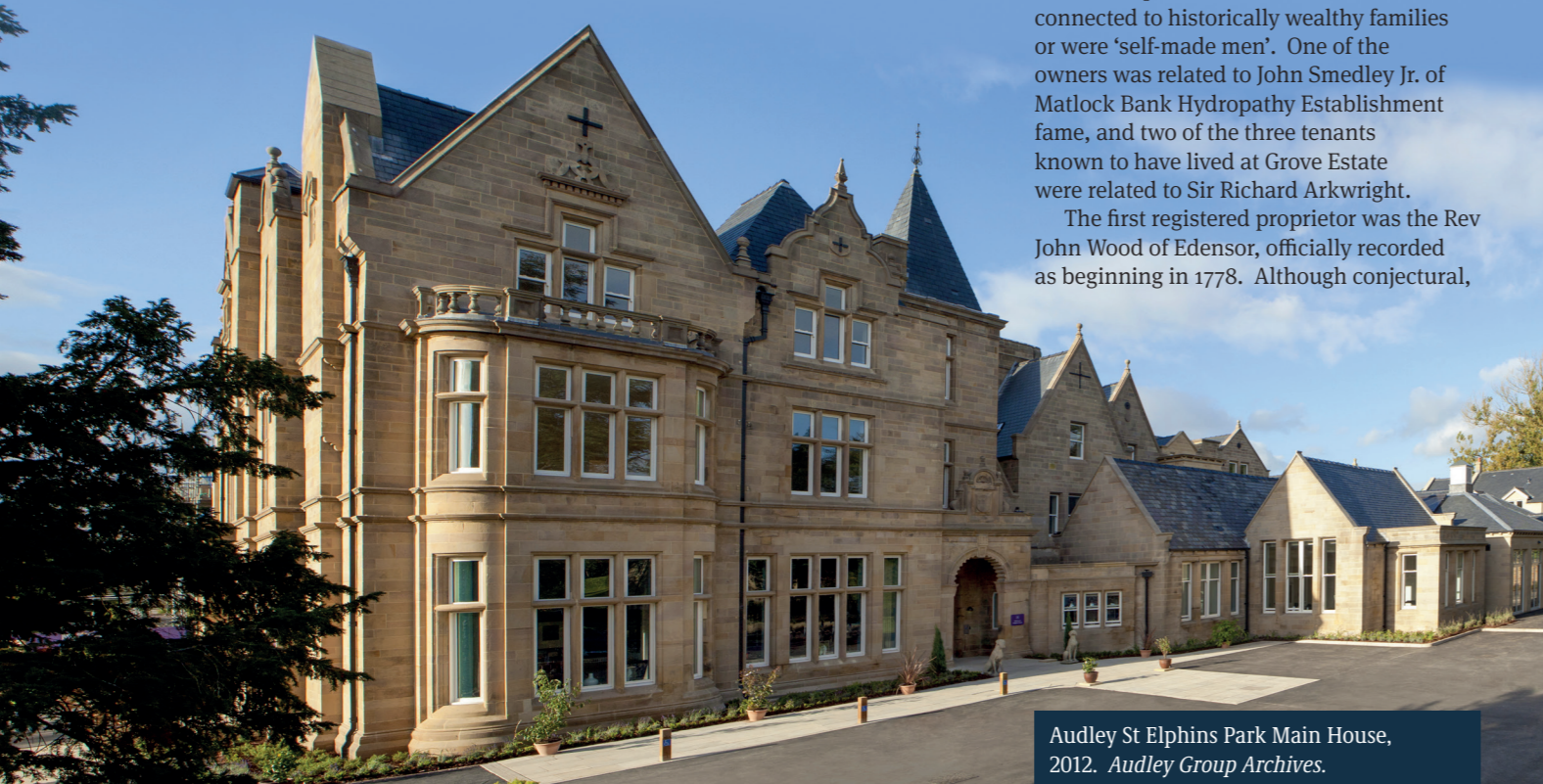


Parish of Darley St Helens Tithe Award Map, circa 1838. The main drive to the house is clearly shown. The building half-way up the drive is the stables, later converted to a chapel for St Elphin's School. The entranceway Lodge was built sometime after 1877. DRO D1978/A/P1/22/1.

from 1848 to 1851 and, in 1852, the property was sold to the Rev William Hiley Bathurst. Rischaneck then returned to work in Ilkley.

Bathurst owned and lived with his family at Grove Estate until 1863. He was Rector to a parish in Yorkshire for over three decades and a noted author of many psalms and hymns, written before his move to Darley Dale. Bathurst was a member of a prominent and wealthy Gloucester family, and upon inheriting the family estate, removed himself from Derbyshire to his family seat. Rev Bathurst sold Grove Estate to Robert Keith Pringle from Scotland in 1863. Pringle had spent many years in India working for the East India Company Civil Service and serving as Chief Secretary to the Government of Bombay.

Once established in Darley Dale, Pringle assumed the position of Justice of the Peace, carrying on his interest



Audley St Elphins Park Main House, 2012. *Audley Group Archives.*



The Georgian house known as The Grove as advertised by auctioneer George Marsden in May 1876. It was demolished in 1877. DRO D216/ES/1/3/11.

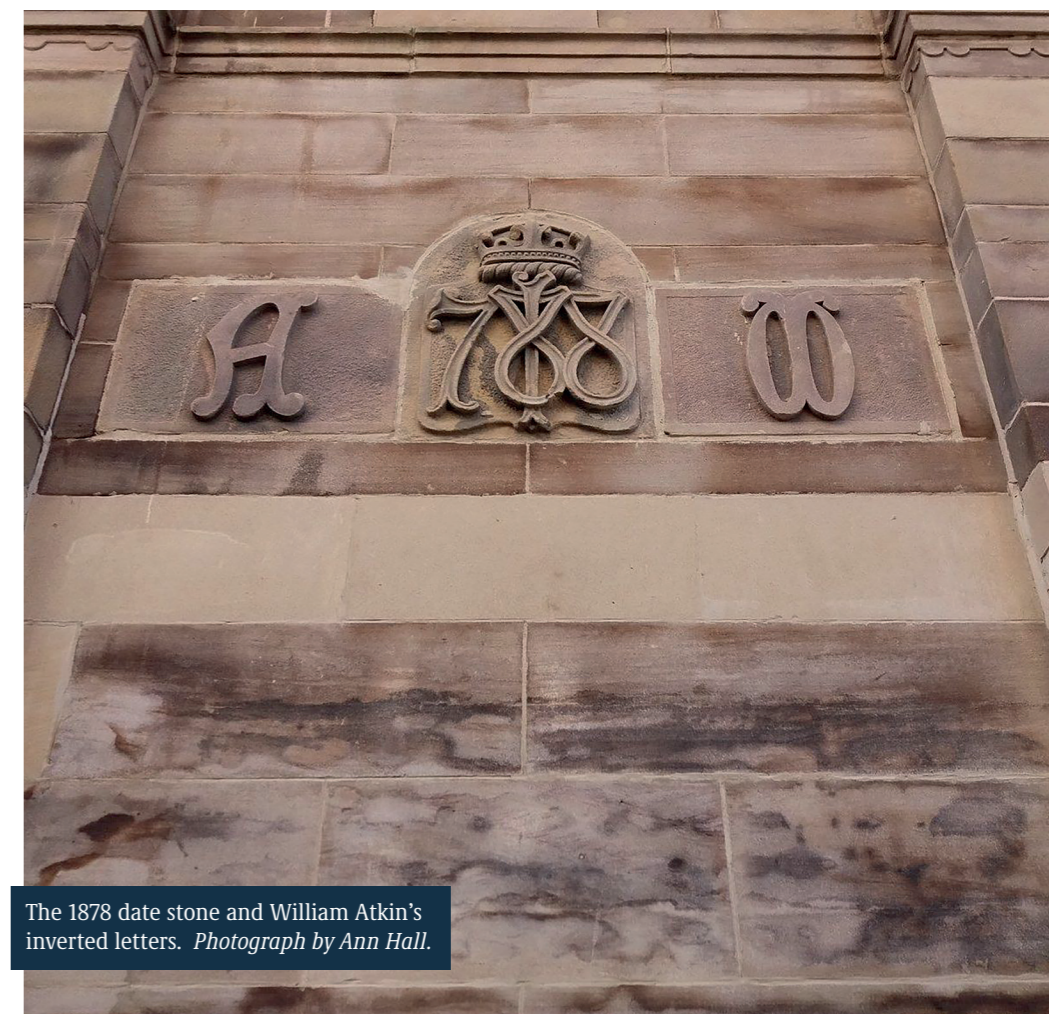


Main House front lobby following renovation, 2012. Courtesy of Audley Group archives.

A second marker can be found on the back wall of the existing 'Orangery Restaurant'. The date stone is carved with an embellished '1878' and is most likely a foundation stone from the second house, subsequently moved during one of the many renovations. The stone-carved letters on either side of the date stone are somewhat confusing. They appear to be the initials of William Atkins, the person who bought the house in 1888. The letters are transposed for some reason – perhaps another accident of renovation?

The illustrious 240-year history of the Grove Estate is shared up and down part of the old lane known as Hackney – now the A6. There are no less than five other grand houses on either side of The Grove – all within a half-mile. They were built and occupied by the 'great and the good' of the time, allowing them to escape the industry of Victorian Britain and enjoy the beautiful countryside that Darley Dale provided.

*Editor's Note:* Ann Hall is a local historian and Steven Schmidt is a volunteer researcher with the John Smedley Archive Charitable Trust. The authors would like to thank Derbyshire Records Office (DRO), Historic England Archive and Audley Group for their kind contributions. ■



The 1878 date stone and William Atkin's inverted letters. Photograph by Ann Hall.



Note the 'W and R' carved into the centre of the stairwell newel post. Photograph by Ann Hall.

in 'civic duties'. He was known for his rather ostentatious lifestyle: Pringle, his wife, seven children and four extended family members were looked after by a governess, nurse, butler and five other servants. Grove Estate was evidently in the hands of another very wealthy man!

The Pringle family retired to Cheltenham in 1876 and Grove Estate was sold again, this time to John Brook Greaves, a solicitor and money lender from Sheffield. However, financial ills beset Mr Greaves and he sold the property in 1877 to William James Roberts.

Roberts was born on a farm in Darley Dale in 1806. He married in the 1830s, moved to Manchester and proceeded to amass a small fortune in the brewing industry. Family difficulties must have beset him in the 1840s and it is thought that he became estranged from his wife, based on census records of the time. In the 1860s, William Roberts is recorded as living in Didsbury, near one of his daughters. He purchased Grove Estate in 1877, proceeded to demolish the grand Georgian structure, and finished building his new house

on the same site sometime in 1881.

While Roberts was the owner of Grove Estate and the new house established there, it is thought that he may have been a part-time resident and used it as his 'Derbyshire country house'. However, the daughter who lived in Didsbury took up residence just across the road at Normanhurst (Hackney

Lane House) after the death of her husband in 1882. This may have given William Roberts motivation to take up a more permanent residency at his new house.

Roberts died in 1888 and Grove Estate was sold to William Atkins that same year. William Robert's daughter died in 1891, whereupon Normanhurst was purchased by Sir Arthur

Stanley Marsden-Smedley, another relative of the famous Smedley family of Matlock Bank Hydro and Lea Mills factory fame. There was certainly no shortage of the rich and famous up and down Hackney Lane!

William Roberts 'left his mark' on the second house, still visible today. For example, the newel posts on the main staircase we have pictured feature a distinctive 'W and R', part of the old decorative motif.

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