

ELMET(E) HALL

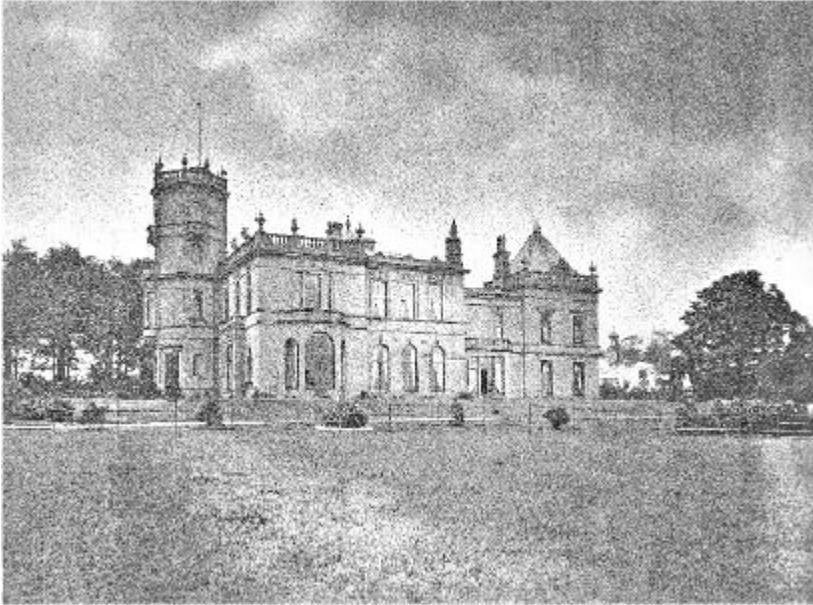
© By Anthony Silson

Elmet(e) Hall is an impressive building that stands on elevated ground slightly to the east of Roundhay Park. From the front of the hall there are wide-ranging views over many parts of south Leeds. The hall has an interesting history that gained formal recognition in 2008 when a blue plaque was mounted on the hall's western wing.

Stages in the growth of Elmet Hall

Three main stages of growth are evident in the contemporary hall (Figure 1). Nearly a third of the hall is a concrete, steel and glass extension erected by Rushbond shortly after buying Elmet Hall in 2005. A narrow part of this extension replaces part of a nineteenth century addition. Rushbond also renovated the existing Elmet Hall and converted its interior into offices. For its work, Rushbond won The Leeds Architecture Award, 2007. In that year, Rushbond sold the eastern half of the hall (including the new extension) to GETEC and the western half to M.J. Hester.

The impressive frontage of Elmet Hall is built of dressed sandstone (Plates 1 and 2). Its western half dates from a major phase of building in 1865 (Figure 1). This extension was commissioned by a locomotive builder called James Kitson who, in 1864, with his eldest son Frederick William, bought an estate that included a mansion called Roundhay Lodge. James Kitson occupied this Roundhay Lodge but re-named it Elmet Hall and gave the name Roundhay Lodge to another mansion, previously un-named, located on Elmet(e) Lane. Above the entrance to Kitson's two-storey west facing wing, a two storey tower with a flagstaff on the top was constructed (Plate 1). A northern extension of buff brick had been made by December 1885. This extension was probably added about the same time as the western extension when James was still an active man. John Dobson and Charles Chorley were the architects commissioned by Kitson to design the 1865 extension.



**Plate 1. Elmet Hall in 1900.
(The Thoresby Society collection)**



Plate 2. Elmet Hall in 2009. (Margaret Plows)

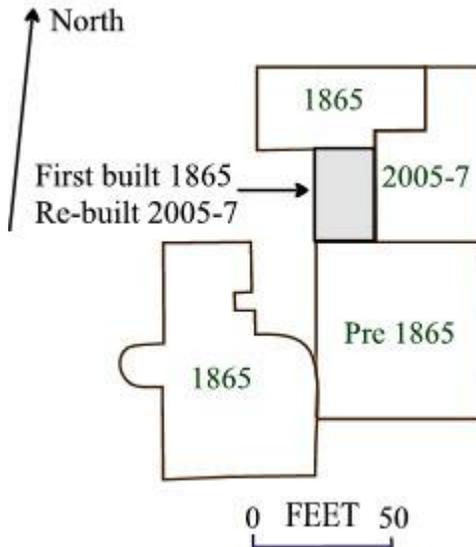


Figure 1. Stages in the growth of Elmet Hall.

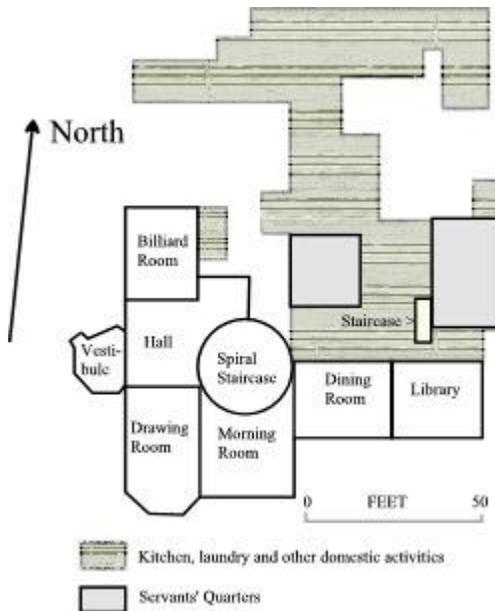


Figure 2. The ground floor plan of Elmet Hall in 1900.

Prior to his move to Roundhay Lodge, James Kitson was a tenant in the western half of a large hall, now known as Little Woodhouse Hall. This building seems to have provided Kitson with sound accommodation placed within a middle class area. But Little Woodhouse was near the centre of Leeds whereas Roundhay Lodge was set in parkland near to countryside. This difference probably brought Kitson to Roundhay. However, the trigger for his move must have been Leeds Corporation's purchase of Little Woodhouse Hall. Beresford gives the year of this purchase as 1864; the Kitsons bought Roundhay Lodge on 29th December 1864.

Elmet Hall's western extension includes a spectacular spiral staircase lit naturally by a stained glass dome (Plates 3 and 4). These features were copied, but on a slightly grander scale, from a spiral staircase and dome that can still be seen in Little Woodhouse Hall. Whether the spiral staircase at Elmet Hall was part of James Kitson's western wing or whether a younger son, John Hawthorn Kitson, added it to the western wing is uncertain. But the feature existed by 1900.

The south-eastern corner of Elmet Hall pre-dates 1865 and is part of the original Roundhay Lodge (Figure 1). It was from this old core that James Kitson had extensions made to the west and to the north. This is supported by Morkill who stated Kitson 'built round' Roundhay Lodge. Other evidence also supports the continued existence of part of the pre-1865 Roundhay Lodge. Fieldwork reveals a discordant join between the dining room and the morning room of 1900 and a discordant join between the dining room and library of 1900 just below the roof (Figure 2). Newsam and Gott's 1885 map clearly shows Elmet Hall then had a western part, a northern part and an eastern part. If all this were not enough, overlaying the Ordnance Survey 1:10560 maps for 1847 and 1891 shows that the eastern part of Elmet Hall in 1891 exactly corresponds with the western part of Roundhay Lodge in 1847. Evidently the eastern part of Roundhay Lodge was demolished, but the western part of Roundhay Lodge was retained. Kitson probably increased the height of the roof on the former library,

and added a balustrade and statue. A report by AOC Archaeology not only finds the south-eastern plan pre-dates 1865, but states many of the contemporary rooms are part of the pre-1865 house. As an example the report considers the 1900 library had been the pre-1865 dining room.

Thus the evidence shows that the south-eastern corner can be dated back to 1847. This corner was occupied by part of a long building in 1803. Between 1806 and 1825 and again between 1825 and 1847 this building was altered, though apparently without total demolition. Consequently, it is uncertain how much of the pre-1847 building survives.

Ownership and usage

The 1803 building was owned by a Quaker named Samuel Elam. He died in 1811 leaving the property to his cousin Robert Elam and three other devisees. The joint occupiers in 1815 were Thomas Nicholson, who was then engaged in building Roundhay Park Mansion, and Robert Elam. In 1821, Robert Elam and two others sold the still unnamed property to Stephen Nicholson and William Williams Brown a banker. At that time Stephen Nicholson had a London address but from 1833 he occupied Roundhay Park Mansion.

William Nicholson Nicholson inherited Roundhay Lodge in 1858 and, in turn, along with John Whittaker, a partner in Brown's Bank, conveyed Roundhay Lodge to James and Frederick Kitson. The latter never occupied the hall. James Kitson died in 1885. Ownership of the hall was then vested in a trust, with John Hawthorn Kitson holding the title until his death in 1899. As Elmet Hall had been so recently and expensively created, Hawthorn Kitson made only limited changes to the exterior. After Hawthorn's death, three trustees held Elmet Hall until 1920. In itself this would inhibit change, but after about 1905 only one of the trustees at any given time actually lived in Elmet Hall so interest in altering the hall was diminished.

In 1919, Jessie Kitson who was Hawthorn's widow and the only trustee then occupying the hall, moved to Allerton House. So

Jessie, Robert Kitson and Ethel Phelps (nee Kitson) placed the hall on the market. It was bought in 1920 by a financier called Bertram Redman. Throughout his brief ownership, he had a London address. He probably demolished the tower as it was removed between 1919 and 1923. But his ownership was too short and probably his funds too low (for the hall was sold by himself, two banks and a stockbroker) to make any major extensions. Sir Edwin Airey bought Elmet Hall in 1922. His interest was not in the hall itself but lay in building between five and seven hundred houses on the estate. Certain Leeds councillors believed his plan would spoil the setting of Roundhay Park. So in 1923, he offered to sell the estate to Leeds Corporation, but this offer was rejected. However, in 1926 the estate was conveyed to Leeds Corporation.

The Corporation did not know how to use the hall so it remained unoccupied until the 1950s, except for a period during the Second World War when soldiers were billeted there. Finally, it was decided that the hall would become Elmete Hall School for the deaf. Pupils attended the school from January 1957, though the official opening was delayed for four years. As the hall itself was to be a hostel, the exterior of Elmet Hall remained basically unchanged apart from repairs and small extensions. These extensions were recently demolished by Rushbond. For a period, the hall was named Hammond Hall Hostel. Although Elmet Hall ceased to be a school about 1987, it continued to have an educational function until about 1993. It then lay unoccupied becoming ever more run-down until Leeds City Council sold it to Rushbond in 2005.

The hall was made a Grade II listed building in 1996. This constrained Rushbond's 2005-7 development, which, apart from the new extension focused upon renovation. The tower was not replaced; otherwise the exterior of the western and eastern wings closely resembles the building created from Roundhay Lodge by James Kitson in 1865 (Plates 1 and 2).

Please note: Elmet Hall is **not** open to the public.



Plate 3. Dome (Margaret Plows)



Plate 4. Staircase (Margaret Plows)

Acknowledgements

First and foremost to staff of GETEC and M.J. Hester, for so kindly showing three of us round Elmet Hall in 2008.

I must also thank S. Burt, D. Fairhead, N. Hurworth, F. Matthews, G. Meredith, P. Meredith, M. Mitchell, M. Plows and T. Plows for their interest and assistance.

Selected references

Kitson H. Documents and letters. MSXVIII. Thoresby Society.

Kitson R.H. Sketchbooks and papers, 1873-1947. Leeds University Library Special Collections MS. 1652.

Sale of Elmet Hall brochure, 1900. Thoresby Society.

ET 226 303; GD 642 727; HL 250 238; YH 654 737; 30 678 380; 98 961 348; 57 1168 411; 57 1170 412; 80 548 220; 125 147 140.

West Riding Register of Deeds.

City of Leeds Education Committee Annual Reports, 1952-57. City of

Leeds Elmete Hall School Official Opening Programme, 2-5-1961.

Elmete Hall, Elmete Lane, Roundhay. AOC Archaeology Project 20036. West Yorkshire Archaeology Advisory Service Report No. 1575.

Yorkshire Evening Post, 1-5-1923; 17-5-1935. Yorkshire Post, 8-5-1923.

A wide range of maps including Taylor, Roundhay Park, 1803; Taylor, Roundhay Turnpike Road, 1806; Taylor, Roundhay, 1810; Thorpe, Roundhay, 1822; Taylor, Roundhay¹⁸²⁵; Thorpe, Roundhay, 1849; Eastwood and Middleton Roundhay, 1871; Eddison Roundhay, 1871; Ordnance Survey Maps of Roundhay, 1847, 1891, 1906, 1933, 1952, 1969, 1993. Beresford M. East End, West End. Publications of the Thoresby Society, 1988.

Burt S. An Illustrated History of Roundhay Park, n/d. Hurworth N.R.

Thomas and Elizabeth Nicholson, The Quaker Founders of Roundhay Park, 2005.

Morkill J.W. The Manor and Park of Roundhay. Richard Jackson, 1893.

Newiss J. The Mysteries of Roundhay Park. Yorkshire Archaeological Society Local History Bulletin No 39 Summer 1998.