

## A short-lived education venture at Alverley Hall



Located on gently rising ground at the northern edge of Wadworth Parish and accessed by a tree lined avenue from Springwell Lane, Alverley Hall became a residential training centre in 1919 run by the West Riding County Council, the first of its kind in the country. Courses lasting 12 weeks were aimed at young women aged 17 and upwards who lived on farms, small holdings or

in rural areas. For example, the Summer School from 10 May to 1 August 1919 dealt with farm cookery, dressmaking, renovating and cleaning, care of health, butter-making, gardening, poultry keeping, together with some physical training, games and 'useful reading'. For West Riding residents the course cost £10/10/-, others were charged £12/12/-. Payment could be made in instalments. Another similar course ran from 23 September. Each course could accommodate about 30 students.

Facilities at Alverley Hall made it suitable for these courses. The Hall had a kitchen garden, an orchard, poultry houses, a dairy and a piggery. A new laundry was created out of a converted hen house. The Hall's interior had been partially adapted as a convalescent home for 30 injured ex-soldiers with dormitories and furniture brought from a military hospital. The West Riding War Pension Committee had taken the Hall over in 1917 but was disappointed when, at the last minute in March 1919, the Pension Ministry decided not to proceed with the Alverley Hall convalescent scheme, instead sending discharged disabled soldiers to seaside venues for their recuperation. (Some 500 ex-servicemen from the West Riding were sent to the seaside to recuperate in 1919.) Running the Hall was quickly transferred to the WRCC's Education Committee which saw short courses for young women as a way of fitting in with family demands on their time and as a way of progressing to further education if desired. (The rapid change of use also helped to justify ratepayers' outlay approaching £2,000 for work done on the Hall and equipment acquired.) There was a mixture of permanent and visiting staff. Miss Meadows, former head of Denby Dale Auxiliary Hospital was matron, while Miss Boyd was the superintendent in charge of most of the indoor work. Several tutors visited from Leeds University including Mr A G Ruston who taught book-keeping and accounts, Mr A S Galt who lectured on gardening and Mr F W Parton who gave lessons on poultry keeping. Miss Turner from Doncaster High School was in charge of physical drill.

The WRCC's training courses at Alverley Hall came to an abrupt end. Just days before another short course was due to begin in September 1921, the Education Committee decided to close the residential training centre. This was the result of a letter from the Board of Education believed to advocate the need for economy. Prospective students were left in the lurch having incurred expenses to prepare themselves for the course and having very little time to look elsewhere for a similar course.

Alverley Hall was built c.1770 by Samuel Dixon of Loversall then considerably enlarged from the 1790s by Bryan William Darwin Cooke who also improved the grounds. Edward Miller described the Hall as 'an agreeable and comfortable residence' in 1804. Hunter in 1828 said the Hall was 'one of the

best and most agreeable residences in the neighbourhood'. During the 19th Century the Cookes, the Egertons from 1885 then the Ellises in the 1890s took part in a range of activities typical of prosperous land owners including hosting meetings of the Fitzwilliam Hunt. By 1903 the Hall was available to let unfurnished. It had an entrance hall, dining, drawing and morning rooms, 10 bed and dressing rooms, servants' bedrooms and ample domestic offices, stabling for 8 horses, carriage house and gardener's lodge all set in 17 acres of grounds. The Hall and estate were offered for sale by auction the following year but withdrawn when the bidding only reached £4000. In the *Yorkshire Post* 3 January 1905 there was an announcement to say that Mr and Mrs Reginald Thompson and family had left Hollings Hall, Esholt, and were taking up residence at Alverley Hall, Doncaster. The Thompson family and five servants were still at Alverley Hall at the time of the 1911 Census. The Thompsons then moved to Loftus Hill Knaresborough. After the Hall was no longer needed by the WRCC, in 1926 it was divided into flats, initially to house miners (and their families) who worked at Yorkshire Main Colliery. During the Second World War the Hall and its immediate area were used as a training ground by A.R.P. personnel. Lack of repairs, subsidence and vandalism saw the Hall fall into disrepair with only a few crumbling walls of the Hall remaining near the derelict out-buildings in 1980. By 1984 there was nothing left of the Hall.

*Sources for this item include the Sheffield Daily Telegraph 28 April 1903, issues of the Yorkshire Post, 24 February 1904, 15 March 1919, 26 April 1919, 9 July 1919, 19 July 1919, 14 September 1921, The Doncaster Gazette 11 July 1919, Doncaster Free Press 13 December 1984 and The Star 19 September 1996. The map dating from 1854 is from Doncaster Local Studies Library's collection.*