

CROW NEST

THE HISTORY

EARLY HISTORY

The origin of the name 'Crow Nest' and the early history of the site of Dewsbury Museum are now, unfortunately, lost. It is believed that a house and estate existed in 1571, when it was owned by a family named Bedford, but there is no real evidence of this and we know nothing definite about the site before the 18th Century.



The Parish Church today

It is likely that the Bedfords owned and lived at Crow Nest in the 17th and early 18th Centuries but very little is known about the family. Several items of the old parish church plate were inscribed 'The gift of Thomas Bedford, Esquire, to the Church of Dewsbury, 1735' and when he died, in 1743, he left £500 as an endowment for a charity school so he was clearly a man of means.

After his death, Crow Nest seems to have passed out of the family's hands and into those of a Mr Samuel Burroughs who was probably not resident, being "one of the Masters of the High Court of Chancery". After this, it was occupied by a Benjamin Walker from 1754 until he died in 1764, and then a Thomas Walker until 1791, when he also died. It is unclear who owned the property at this time - the Walkers may have been leasing it. By 1793, however, it was owned by Richard Milnes 'a malster, dealer and chapman' who went bankrupt in 1798. The house and grounds were sold to John Hague, a Dublin Merchant, and Thomas Hague of Sandal Magna, near Wakefield. John Hague was living at Crow Nest by the end October 1798.

THE HAGUES



The Hagues outside Crow Nest Mansion c1850

The Hagues lived through and contributed much to an exciting period of Dewsbury's history. The Crow Nest Estate included seventy acres of farmland but it is unlikely that John Hague senior farmed this himself. What we know of him suggests he was more a businessman than a farmer and he probably leased the land to neighbouring farmers. In 1811, he bought the Dewsbury mills Estate, one mile to the south west of

Dewsbury, for £33,750. It included the Mill house, land, mill buildings,

machinery and some stocks of wool and yarn. He then formed a partnership with his son (another John) and a nephew, Thomas Cook. The financial capital for this project was £15,000 - £10,000 from John Hague, £2,000 from his son and £3,000 from Thomas Cook. In 1824, John Wormald of Gomersal joined the partnership and it became Hagues, Cook & Wormald, with a £20,000 capital base. When the Hagues withdrew their interest at the end of the 1850s, it became Thos. Cook, Son & Wormald and later, Wormald & Walker Ltd. For fifty years, therefore, the Hagues led one of Dewsbury's major textile firms, during a period of substantial growth.

Hague was also a partner with Cook in the bank of Hagues, Cook and Company. This was established in Dewsbury in 1818 and later opened branches in Bradford and Wakefield. In 1836, it was taken over by the Mirfield & Huddersfield District Bank and, subsequently, the West Riding Union Banking Company was formed, of which Hague was a Director, and briefly, in 1855, Chairman. There used to be a portrait of John Hague, together with a £5 note issued by the company in the 1820s, in Martin's Bank, in the town.



John Hague Junior

John Hague junior was a Justice of the Peace for over 30 years, a Deputy-Lieutenant of the West Riding and a trustee of the Daw Green Charity School. In 1838, in his capacity as an ex-officio member of the Board of Guardians of the Poor Law, he was one of those who acted against the Chartists and was, as a result, subjected to both verbal and physical abuse by rioting townsmen. He died in 1867 (aged 77) and was buried at St John's Church, Dewsbury Moor. After his death, the estate passed to his widow and, then, to a relative - Mr Thomas Hague Cook - who died in 1877. His son, Mr Thomas Reginald Cook, sold the property to Dewsbury Corporation in 1893, when it was converted into a park.

THE MANSION AND PARK

At first glance, the house appears to date from the early 19th Century but there are, in fact, many earlier features. The stone mullioned windows at the side and rear probably date from the late 16th or early 17th Century. It is not clear whether these are in their original positions but it does seem likely that the main part of the building, at ground and first floor level, dates from this earlier time.





When viewed from the lawn, the front of the house shows two distinct phases of building. The ground and first floor seem to be of about 1710; this is confirmed by an illustration of the house on a map from the 1760s. At second floor level, it originally had three dormer windows and a hipped roof. It was quite common in the 18th Century to put a new facade on an existing building, retaining

the older part behind it.

At some point in the early 19th Century, probably in the 1820s, the Hagues rebuilt the upper storey and roof, adding a central pediment. They also added the wings at either end of the front elevation. It was remodelled internally at the same time, creating a house in keeping with the status of a man who was an important local industrialist and a Justice of the Peace.

When the corporation took over the estate, in 1893, the house was simply used as a depot for the park. But, soon afterwards, a group of local people persuaded the Corporation to create a small museum. Some minor alterations to the building were made, such as introducing the stained-glass windows but, generally, the conversion consisted of little more than bringing in display cases. The first two rooms were opened in 1896, displaying Egyptian and Ethnographic artefacts, as well as natural history specimens, many of which came from other museums as a donation or on loan.



Crow Nest Park

Outside, most of the hedges on the estate were removed and tree belts were planted at strategic points. William Cox designed the park, carefully combining his own creations, such as the ornamental lake and the bandstand, with existing features like the Temple (an 18th Century summerhouse) and the Vine House. The result is the park we know today.

THE TOWN

Dewsbury was a relatively small town when the Hagues came to live at Crow Nest. The population had been increasing steadily in the second half of the 18th Century but, by 1800, it still had a population of only 4,500, most of whom worked in the woollen cloth-making trades.



Union Street Dewsbury
Late 19th/early 20th Century

In 1740, a market charter had been obtained for the town by the Duke of Leeds and, in the 1760s, the Calder Navigation was extended 'opening a direct communication from the town to the eastern and western oceans, and to the principal towns in the north of England.' The Calder had always been very important to the town, providing water power for the fulling mills which served to finish the cloth produced in the town and the surrounding districts. From the 1760s, it was also an

important transport link.

By the beginning of the 19th Century, Dewsbury had already established a reputation for making blankets. But it was the invention of shoddy (the use of fibres from rags to produce new cloth) in 1813 that really influenced the development of the town. The use of shoddy meant that Dewsbury could produce cheap cloth that was to be so much in demand throughout the century for a growing working-class population as well as for expanding overseas trade.

By 1822, Dewsbury was said to 'boast many expansive manufacturing establishments of blankets, woollen cloths and carpets; and the population as well as the wealth of the town is rapidly on the increase.' A number of improvements were made to the town between 1820 and 1860. New roads were built - to Leeds in 1821 and to Bradford in 1833. The town was first lit by gas in 1829, a Cloth and Blanket Hall built in 1836 and a Court House in 1845. The rapidly rising population was reflected in the building of new houses and churches in the suburbs.



Bradford Road, Dewsbury
Late 19th/early 20th Century

A further boost to growth was given by the opening of the first central railway station in 1848. Finally, all of this was recognised by the granting of a royal charter of incorporation in 1862. By the end of the 1860s, there were nearly 25,000 people in the town, which, by now, could be described as 'a flourishing and populous market town'.