



If you have anything to add to today's Echo Memories:

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125TH ANNIVERSARY MIDDLETON HALL RETIREMENT VILLAGE



Middleton Hall: was this the door that George Stephenson knocked at on May 30, 1822? Picture: SARAH CALDECOTT



Middleton Hall in its early days with the Georgian farmhouse on the left and one of the wings built around 1900 on the right

From a private asylum to a model of independent living

IN ITS 125 years, Middleton Hall has witnessed immense changes in the way Britain looks after its people, and its role has evolved enormously.

This week, its residents on the outskirts of Darlington have been celebrating the anniversary of its founding in 1900 when a Georgian farmhouse was converted into a visionary alternative to forbidding Victorian asylums.

Nowadays, Middleton Hall's model of independent living for older people in country surroundings with all mod-cons on hand – from wifi to a Jacuzzi or an art studio – is a far cry from what even its enlightened founders could have imagined 125 years ago.

And the splendid estate of today's retirement village, with apartments and bungalows built around ponds and among mature trees, is a far cry from the luxurious property that a

This week, residents of a retirement village have been celebrating their 125th anniversary – but their pioneering history goes back much further, to the birth of the railways

railway-rich rector created 200 years ago.

HE WAS the Reverend William Addison, from a Darlington family of teachers and clerics, who became rector of Middleton St George in 1798 and married Mary Fountaine of Leeds in 1800.

Mary came with money, and William adopted her surname in order to acquire it, sometimes calling himself Addison Fountaine and at other times Fountaine Addison, as the mood took him.

Mary suffered ill health, and

for years the rector was away from his parish as she was confined to their house in Bath.

But in 1814, the parish registers show that he had returned to his duties of hatches, matches and despatches. Mary had apparently passed away and, newly wealthy, he bought Forster Field Farm where he built a “handsome mansion house upon his own estate within the parish”.

That mansion house, from about 1820, is now at the heart of Middleton Hall.

The rector, with his second

wife Lucy and their growing family, employed three labourers, a gardener and a milkmaid.

William was a real Georgian country rector, hunting foxes with hounds, chasing hares with his greyhounds, even catching birds with his nets.

Then, on May 30, 1822, George Stephenson knocked on his front door – possibly the door that can still be seen at the hall.

He told William he would like to build his steam railway across the farmland and offered William compensation and shares in the Stockton &

Darlington Railway.

This made Mr Addison Fountaine (or Mr Fountaine Addison) even richer, so he bought up four more farms, one of which included the deserted medieval village of West Hartburn. In doing so he became the largest landowner in the district, owning more than even the legendary Squire Cocks, after whom ‘Fighting Cocks’ is named.

THE rector died in 1837, and for the rest of the 19th Century, Middleton Hall had a variety of well-to-do owners. In the 1850s, Michael Darling used it as a school with 24 scholars, aged between five and 15, boarding with him; in the 1870s iron merchant and shipowner Charles Mueller made it his home.

Mueller had been born in Prussia, had three children with his Scottish wife, and they had three servants – a cook, a

MIDDLETON HALL, MIDDLETON ST. GEORGE, Co. DURHAM.

PRIVATE ASYLUM FOR THE CARE AND TREATMENT
OF LADIES AND GENTLEMEN.

THE HOUSE, which stands amid well-wooded grounds, in a healthy and pleasant country in the valley of the Tees, has been recently erected from plans approved by the Commissioners in Lunacy, and embodies all the latest improvements in the construction of Homes for the Nervous and Mentally Afflicted. The building is **fire-proof**, and lighted throughout by electricity, and the heating is aided by a system of steam pipes.

Private sitting rooms and special attendants are provided if required. Voluntary Boarders, not under certificates, can be received.

Terms to be had on application to—
P. C. SMITH, L.R.C.P. & S.E., L.F.P.S.G., the Resident Licensee.

An advert from before the First World War when Middleton Hall first opened as a ‘private asylum’

housemaid and a laundress – plus a Prussian governess. The hall was now the epitome of a wealthy Victorian country home.

In 1890, Middleton Hall became the home of Mary Barningham, the only child of ironmaster William Barningham – the most hated man in Darlington and probably the wealthiest. She had just won the Great Darlington Will Case, which had kept the town in gossip for months, to get her hands on a sizeable chunk of his £40m fortune.

She was only resident for five years. The new purchasers in 1895 were two Newcastle doctors, William Garbutt and Robert Smith, who had a new use for in mind for the hall.

They disliked the way Victorian England treated the mentally ill, drugging them up then locking them out of sight in a brick asylum. They wished to treat patients with more dignity and kindness – particularly patients who could pay.

They employed a Newcastle

Mary's money buys her a place in the hall's history

WHEN Mary Barningham won the equivalent of £15m today at the end of the Great Darlington Will Case which had kept the town agog for months, she invested in property: in 1890, she bought the Georgian farmhouse of Middleton Hall.

Her father was William Barningham, a restless, violent drunkard who survived assassination attempts to brilliantly build a £40m fortune. Mary was his only child and the apple of his eye.

He came from Arkengarthdale and made his money by buying discarded old rails and re-rolling them in his ironworks on Albert Hill before selling them back to the railways.

His works was in a vast iron and glass crystal palace which he dismantled after it had hosted the Manchester Art Treasures Exhibition and brought in pieces to Darlington, where, in 1872 alone, he produced 80,000 tons of finished iron and employed 2,000 men and boys (Darlington's male population was about 15,000). This was the largest ironworks in the north.

His workers, mainly Irish immigrants, hated the brutal conditions of his workplace. They assaulted him with bricks and on one occasion, at a meeting of the Iron and Steel Dressers Union in

the Dolphin Hotel in the Market Place, straws were drawn to see who would shoot him.

The puddler who drew the short straw, though, didn't have the courage to pull the trigger.

Instead, Barningham made a killing in 1872, selling shares in his business for £275,000 (£27m in today's values according to the Bank of England's inflation calculator). The following year it made £80,000 profit but then recession hit and it collapsed, never to make money again.

It didn't harm Barningham. He had bought an ironstone mine near Guisborough, a steamship and a large foundry at Pendleton in Manchester, where he also had a substantial home. He also owned estates at Masham, Staffordshire and one of 600 acres near Paris.

Plus he invested in his daughter, sending her to Paris for her education where she became fluent in French, Italian and Spanish.

Yet he came to detest her mother, Margaret, and they lived separately for many years. When Mary stood up for her, he wrote her out of his will.

Barningham died in 1882, leaving his £400,000 fortune to his nephews. Mary challenged the will, and The Northern Echo reported the case in great detail



Ironmaster William Barningham: with his fortune, his daughter, Mary, bought Middleton Hall in 1890

over five days – how Barningham went on two-day benders in the King's Head Hotel before beating Margaret.

Mary was awarded £150,000 which she seems to have spent on Middleton Hall while preparing Gatherley Castle, near Catterick – its curious lodge houses could be seen on the A1 until its recent widening.

She moved there in 1895, selling the hall to the doctors who converted it into an institution which began business 125 years ago.



**Middleton Hall trustee Jeremy Walford
Picture: SARAH CALDECOTT**

architect, John William Dyson, to knock down part of the Georgian farmhouse and replace it with two wings of rooms on either side of the main entrance where George Stephenson may once have knocked. The wings were to be south-facing towards the Cleveland Hills to catch the sun, with a doctor living on site in the original farmhouse.

They incorporated their company on April 23, 1900 – 125 years ago on Wednesday – with six shareholders.

Three were doctors and two were clergymen, Rev Arthur Shafto of Brancepeth and Rev William Fawcett of Mainsforth Hall.

It was a ‘residence for mental invalids’, but the presence of the doctors and the men of the cloth suggests that it was more than just a money-making exercise.

For instance, in the 1930s Dr Mervyn Archdale became Middleton's resident physician. He had been the superintendent

at Cherry Knowle Hospital, the Sunderland Borough Asylum, and brought new caring methods and approaches to bear.

For a while he took care of less severely ill patients in a satellite institution in Almorah Hall, a magnificent-looking Victorian Gothic mansion in Middleton St George.

Then, in the 1950s, Dr Robin Steavenson became Middleton Hall's lead doctor.

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