

Alkrington Crypt

An investigation of remains

January 2016



V2 January 2020 (update to floor plan based on memories of J Hilton)

Middleton Archaeological Society

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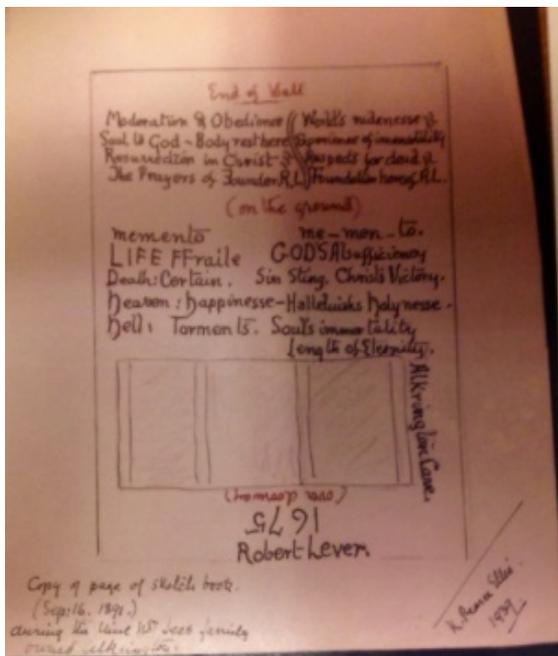
Robert Lever's Crypt in Alkington Woods, Middleton.

Map reference (SD867054).

In 1675 Robert Lever built a family crypt some 200M Northwest of his home at Alkington Hall. The crypt was never used; Robert and his family were interred at St Leonard's Church in nearby Middleton. The walls and lower half of the crypt lie partially covered with soil and undergrowth in what is now Alkington Woods Nature Reserve. A later hall was built by Roberts's grandson Darcy Lever in 1736 and is currently a Grade II* listed building converted into residential accommodation.

This paper records the details of the crypt together with some documentary history of Robert Lever

The Crypt



The best documentary evidence of the crypt comes from a sketch book belonging to the Lees family who purchased the hall and estate in 1884 . A page of the sketch book was copied by a descendant of Robert Lever, Kate Pearce Ellis in 1939 and forwarded to Middleton library.

Some of the inscriptions from inside the crypt were removed following vandalism in the 1960's and were built into a nearby garden wall*14 Woodfield Drive for safe keeping. The wording of the wall inscription corresponds with the Kate Pearce Ellis sketch. A photograph of the broken date stone confirms the 1675 date.

There were three coffin shaped holes on the floor of the crypt possibly for Robert Lever, his wife Anne (nee Mosley) and perhaps John who was born about

the time of construction.

Surviving wall inscription with Lever Quartering 2.1M x 0.32M



End of Wall Inscription

<p>Moderation and Obedience</p> <p>Soul to God: Body rest here</p> <p>Resurrection in Christ</p> <p>The Prayers of Founder R.L.</p>		<p>Worlds Rudeness</p> <p>Experience of mortality</p> <p>Respects for dead</p> <p>Foundation hereof R.L.</p>
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Floor of Crypt

<p>Memento</p> <p>LIFE Fraile</p> <p>Death: Certain</p> <p>Heaven : Happiness</p> <p>Hell : Torments</p>	<p>Mo-men-to</p> <p>GOD'S Alsufficiency</p> <p>Sin Sting. Christ's Victory</p> <p>Halleluiabs Holynesse</p> <p>Soul's immortality</p> <p>Length of Eternity</p>
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Alkrington Cave

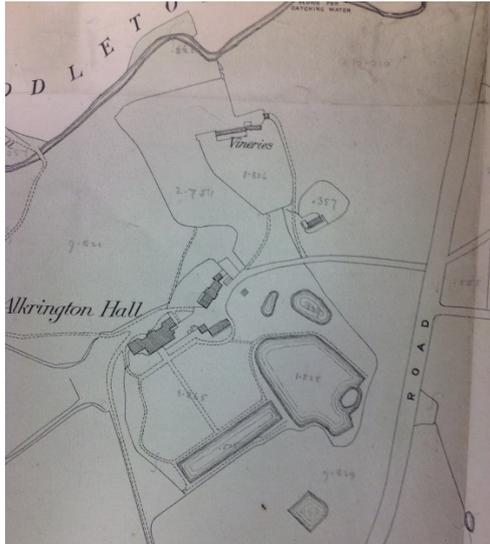
Lintel over doorway



MAS Investigation

A short archaeological investigation of the crypt was undertaken by Middleton Archaeological Society in January 2016.

The location is on the edge of a slope leading away from the Hall and at the top of a valley with a steep drop towards the estates North West border, the river Irk. The area is now densely wooded but would have possibly been an attractive viewpoint in the 17th century. The area is known as Kitchen Wood and there are signs of nearby machine brick foundations identified on the 1891 OS map as the Vineries.



A tree was growing out from the centre of the crypt. This and a large amount of undergrowth were kindly removed by the Alkington Park ranger and a team of local green volunteers. The roof of the crypt was no longer present and the structure had been back filled with soil and rubble for protection. A damaged modern iron gate is fitted over a staircase on the eastern aspect of the structure.

A local resident remembers her father lowering her through the gap in the gate to look around the crypt in the 1960s. At some time after this the roof collapsed and there was considerable vandalism of the structure with the inscriptions being smashed and thrown down the adjacent valley.

It appears the crypt was an underground brick construction with a stone staircase leading to a lintel doorway at the Southwest corner. The roof would have been suspended slightly above ground level. Some slots were identified at the top of the internal walls possibly to support beams for the roof.

The walls of the crypt were of hand-made brick typically 230 x 115 x 60mm. The bricks were three deep and jointed with lime mortar of 15-25mm thickness. There was no recognisable bonding pattern.

MAS did not have the resources to remove the deposited soil and rubble from inside the crypt so it is unclear of its depth or layout. However, based upon the Lees family sketch, the possible location of the pits for the coffins and the carvings have been marked in dotted lines on the plan. (it has been

assumed that the corpses would have been facing east in accordance with Christian tradition at the time)

There were no finds to support the dating of the crypt. The size of the bricks suggest they were fired between 1571 and 1769 *Hammond, M. *Bricks and Brickmaking*. Shire Library. 2012. Page 30. The estate has abundant clay deposits as well as a colliery and brickworks identified in the early 1800's suggesting the bricks were most likely locally made.

The dimensions of the top of the crypt were recorded and a plan is shown in appendix two. Following the investigation of the crypts remains, the wall inscription was located. It has been built into a rear garden wall at 14 Woodfield Drive and the home owners kindly allowed MAS to record it.

Photographs taking during 2016 investigation



Robert Lever

The 2 sons of Robert Lever of Darcy Lever purchased the Alkrington Estate from the Legh family in 1627. Robert Lever, his first son, was a clothier in London, and died unmarried about 1642; John Lever, another son, was 'of Alkrington,' and died in 1645, being buried at Middleton.

John's eldest son Robert (who commissioned the Alkrington crypt) was born in 1623 and married Anne the daughter and heir of Nicholas Mosley of Collyhurst. In 1681 the possessions of Robert Lever were recorded and amongst the large collection of land and estates held was the Manor and township of Alkrington together with its water mill.

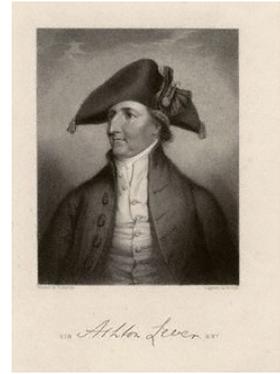
Roberts's two sons, Robert (B 1672) and John (B 1675) went to Brasenose College, Oxford and qualified in Law. They both became barristers at Greys Inn but Robert sadly was 'stript and murdered' at Highgate in 1699*. Robert was experiencing the 'frailty of life' and 'experience of mortality' that was carved in the Alkrington Crypt. He died in 1710 reaching the remarkable age of 87 having previously gained permission from the bishop to eat meat during lent due to his age and bodily infirmities* Gastrell Notita ii p109. Robert was interred at Middleton Church and it remains unclear why he built the crypt for three at Alkrington at about the time of his second son's birth.

John Lever, who had achieved an M.A. at the early age 15, married Francis Foley of Prestwood, Buckinghamshire and returned north to take the manor at Collyhurst Hall which the family had inherited through his mother Anne Mosley. John died in 1718 aged 43, and was succeeded by his son Sir Darcy Lever. Darcy was appointed high sheriff of Lancashire in 1736, and was later knighted. He married Dorothy, a daughter and coheir of the Rev. William Ashton, rector of Prestwich. He rebuilt Alkrington Hall in 1736 to a design by Giacomo Leoni.



Sir Darcy Lever's eldest son, Sir Ashton Lever (B 1729), was also made high sheriff in 1771, and knighted in 1778, He collected a large museum of curiosities, which was exhibited at Alkrington Hall. Wishing at length to dispose of it, he obtained an Act of Parliament authorizing him to do so by a lottery, and in 1785 the drawing took place. The winner afterwards exhibited the collection in London, and it was not dispersed until 1806. Ashton died in 1788 without issue.

Sir Ashton was succeeded by his brother the Rev. John Lever, who left several children. The younger son, John, settled at Alkrington, and died in 1834, aged sixty-two. The estate then passed to his nephew Dorning Rasbotham, who in 1844 sold it to John Lees and his brothers of Clark's Field near Oldham for £57,550.



The estate was offered at public auction by the Lees family in 1896. It consisted of the Hall and park, 13 farms, 17 cottages, a working colliery and brick works. It was spread over 712 acres of land. The 20th century heralded the development of Alkrington Garden Village over much of the farmland. However Alkrington hall was converted into flats and remains in its prominent position overlooking the park which is now a nature reserve and woodland.





Appendix

The Quartering of Robert Lever based upon the 1675 crypt carving

LEVER; Argent two bendlets sable, one engrailed



LEVER; Sable three boar's heads coupéd argent



LEVER; Argent a chevron between three bucks trippant sable



LEVER Crest: On a trumpet nowed a cock with wings expanded

Ar. a bend gobonée gu. and sa.
LEVER (Arlington, co. Lancaster). Ar. two bends sa. the under one engr. *Crest*—On a trumpet, lying fenceways, a cock ppr.
LEVER (Lever, co. Lancaster). Ar. two bends, one plain, the other engr. sa. a crescent gu. *Crest*—On a trumpet nowed a cock with wings expanded. (Another crest—A hare ppr.)
LEVER (Lancashire). Ar. two bends engr. az.
LEVER (Lancashire). Ar. a chev. betw. three bucks trippant sa.
LEVER (Lancashire). Ar. a chev. gu. betw. three harts trippant sa.
LEVER (Lancashire). Ar. a chev. betw. three hares sa.
LEVER. Sa. three boars' heads coupéd az.
LEVER. Ar. two bends engr. sa. (Another, gu.)
LEVER. Sa. three boars' heads coupéd or.
LEVERAGE. Ar. a chev. betw. three matchlocks sa. *Crest*—A leopard's head cabossed ppr.
LEVERETT (Great Chelsea, 1692). Ar. a chev. betw. three leverets courant sa.
LEVERETT. Gyronny of eight or and sa. over all an eagle volant gu.
LEVERICK. Erms. on a fesse engr. sa. three mullets pierced or.
LEVERINGTON. Gu. (another, az.) three hares in pale

Ground level plan of the Alkrington Crypt

