



Thornbridge Outdoors - A Brief History

There is evidence of land ownership and a subsequent dwelling on the site dating back to the times of William the Conqueror. At this time it was known as 'Thorne Breach' (the clearing in the thorn woods).

The last five owners over three centuries have had the most influence on Thornbridge as we see it today:

In 1896, George Marples bought Thornbridge Hall and lived there for approx 30 years. As well as making significant modifications and enlargements to the house, he built gatehouses, glasshouses, water gardens, a stable block and installed central heating, electricity and built his own private waiting rooms for the local railway station (Great Longstone).

The archway and adjoining buildings (known as Woodlands) which is the now the entrance to Thornbridge Outdoors was built by George Marples as his private access to the railway station. Woodlands was built to provide waiting rooms for Marples and his guests, recreation facilities for his servants and the end two cottages housed some of his staff. Note how the driveway from the Archway continues directly across the road to Thornbridge Hall. Other features of note are George Marple's Coat of Arms carved in stone over the archway and the tying rings for carriage horses underneath.

Marples also had The Farm built for his gamekeeper. Dog kennels and pheasant hatcheries were attached to the round house. (There is a replica of the Farm roundhouse as a dovecote in the grounds of the Riverside Hotel in Ashford in the Water where Marple's lady friend and, later his fiancée, Dorothy Green lived. He left his estate to her). Marples died in 1929 and Thornbridge Hall was bought by Charles Boot (Sheffield Entrepreneur who built several estates in Sheffield - many with local Derbyshire names). Boot's contributions to the Hall and the gardens include fireplaces, chandeliers, columns, and statuary - most of which were bought from stately homes about to be demolished (eg Derwent Hall (now under the reservoirs at Bamford), Harlaxton Hall, Clumber and from Pinewood Studios where Boot was a director

During the last war, some of the accommodation at Thornbridge was taken over by Birkdale Preparatory School. The younger pupils and the headmaster and his wife took over the Farm (roundhouse) whilst the other staff and pupils took over the stables.

In 1945, following Boot's death, Sheffield City Council bought Thornbridge Hall and it became a Teacher Training College for women from 1948 -1975. The winter gardens at the Hall were demolished and extra bedrooms, bathrooms, toilets and a large dining room were constructed. The three red brick classrooms (now the Camp / Recreation room and Stores buildings) were built.

The first 60 students commenced their studies in 1948 with a Principal and 7 teaching staff. Wyedale Lodge was built in 1965 to provide extra lecture / tutorial space which became necessary as student numbers increased to a peak of 240 with 24 academic staff in 1968 / 69.

Between 1969 - 1971 student numbers declined and Thornbridge Hall College merged with Totley Hall College, Sheffield. The final teacher training class was held in the Wyedale Science room (now the camp building) in December 1975.

From 1975 - 1997, still owned by Sheffield City Council, the Hall became a Multi-Purpose Education Centre, providing residential experience for Sheffield children. The Lodge and The Farm were converted to accommodate residential groups and the science room was converted into toilets, showers, a kitchen and dining room for the campers. The Main Hall and the stables were also used as residential accommodation for pupils providing approximately 160 bed spaces in total and camping facilities for up to 40.

In 1997, Sheffield City Council sold Thornbridge Hall and the formal gardens to the Hunt family, but still retained ownership of the 55 acre 'Wyedale' site (what we know today as Thornbridge Outdoors previously known as Thornbridge Education Centre).

In 2002, the present owners, the Harrison Family, bought Thornbridge Hall. They have carried out extensive work both internally and externally with the aim of restoring the Hall and gardens to their former glory

In 2003, Thornbridge Education Centre became Thornbridge Outdoors. Whilst continuing to provide residential / outdoor and environmental experience for Sheffield children, it has now become much more than an 'Education Centre',