

Ancient mansion was home of township's rectors

By George C. Miller

ONE of Blackburn's most interesting links with the past was Audley Hall, demolished in June, 1888, the first of many such ruthlessly trodden down in the march of progress — or what is supposed to represent that equivocal word. From time immemorial this ancient edifice was the mansion of the rectors of the township, being one of two separate estates vested in the church,

the other being Brookhouse.

The hall stood immediately to the east of the old town, on a site now covered by Edith Street. It was originally embosomed in lofty trees, with its main approach bordered by an avenue of limes. For some years before its

demolition it was in a ruinous state, roofless but with some remains or large mullioned windows with transoms, as may be seen in the illustration. There is a photograph in existence, showing it as it was at that time but I am unaware of its present location. Much of the

old stone and timber was used to erect a porch at St. Anne's Rectory.

The tenure of the hall may be traced back with some certainty to 1166, when Henry de Blackburn held both church and manor.

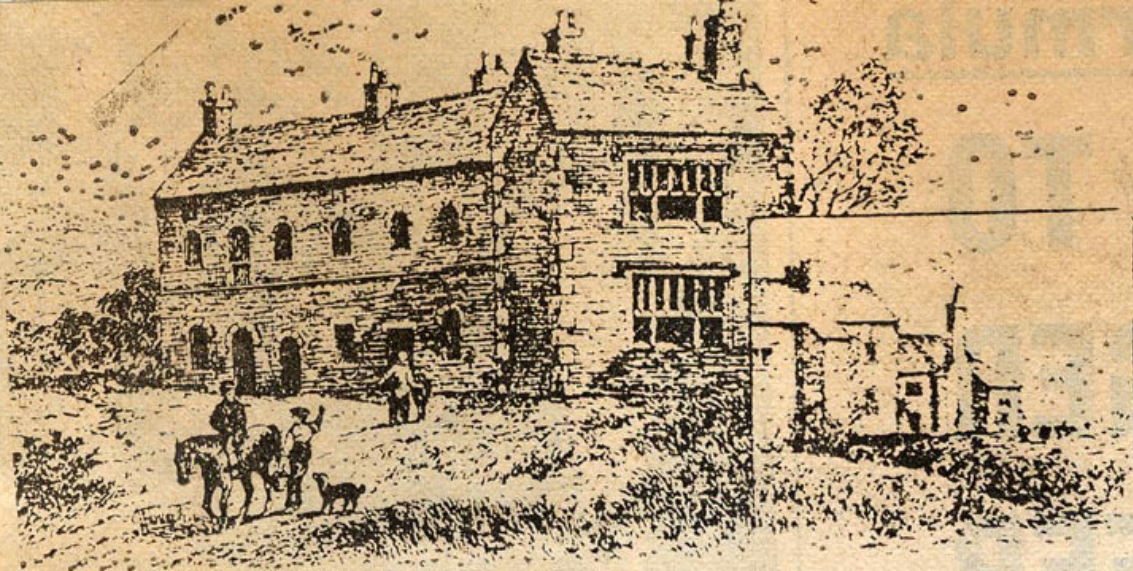
According to Peter Whittle in his book "Blackburn as it is" (1851) a nunnery once existed on this spot but unfortunately we have no other proof but his word, and that is not always reliable.

Be this as it may, however, the fact remains that Audley Hall holds a high place in Blackburn annals.

STREET NAMES

Among its tenants we may include Sir Thomas Talbot, who died there in 1558. Those were lawless times and it is on record that during a raid on the hall by Roger Rishton of Ponthalgh he met his death at the hands of that sturdy knight, who had his own methods of dealing with such marauders.

"As Roger Rishton lay there helpless (says the chronicler) Thomas Talbot said: 'Now I will be sure and I will give unto Rishton my mark,' striking him with such force that his dagger



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broke. Then, showing his dagger to his servants, he said, 'I have sped him. Look, I have broken my dagger in his brain and if my dagger had not been broken I would have struck the priest that held me,' and with these furious words he departed."

About the middle of the 18th century the Derbyshires were tenants of Audley Hall. They intermarried with the Nightingales and between them they held the farm until it was abandoned.

Included in the estate were Audley Higher Barn, Fish Field, Great and Little Maudsley, Smallding's Farm, Snape Fields, Cicely Hole Farm and Town Green, most of which have been preserved in local street names.

The first modern property to be erected on the estate was at Copy Nook, about 1849, when Henry Shaw the brewer built Audley House.

Two other residences were built nearby soon afterwards and occupied by Richard Shackleton, corn miller and head of an old

Quaker family, and W. Ashburn, cotton manufacturer, respectively.

Of the lesser farmsteads, Critchley's or Higher Barn stood near the site of Oxford Street chapel; Whitaker's or Smallding's stood near a wooden turn-bridge on the site of the existing Audley Bridge, and Pometret's or Cicely Hole stood on the slope of the hill above the Railway Station, which is itself built on the farm land, in a field known as Stony Butts.

HEMMED IN

It is mentioned in an old manuscript account book for the rectory lands from 1746 to 1793. Here are a few typical entries:

"Nov. 4th, 1757. Pd. Jhon Shorrocks, farmer of Blackburn tythes, one year's rent for Cicely Hole Barn, for 1576 ... 50s.

Nov. 15th, 1759. Pd. Thomas Croft, joiner, for two days work at Cicely Hole Barn, 12d. per day ... 2s.

Oct. 11th, 1784. Pd. William Marsden and Jeremiah Grime, each two days get-

ting stone in Haudley Delph, for repairing the house and roof at Cicely Hole at 18d. ... 6s."

Cicely Hole farm survived long after Audley Hall and Higher Barn had disappeared. Cut off from the estate by the canal at "twenty steps," and wedged precariously between canal and railway, it was still shown on the Ordnance Survey map of 1933.

Before its final destruction, that little farmstead had seen some amazing changes.

Once lonely and isolated on the breezy hillside, with St Mary's well in one of its adjoining fields, it was doomed to be hemmed in, first by the Leeds and Liverpool Canal, finally completed in 1816; then by the railway, opened in 1846 and lastly, almost overnight, by the mushroom growth of the Industrial Era, with its ever-encroaching factories and foundries, while to the south and east, the serried ranks of working-class houses marshalled their brick battalions upon the ancient glebe land in ominous array.