

EXPLORE HEADINGLEY

Haley's Hotel and Bedford House a historical snapshot

Haley's Hotel on Shire Oak Road began life as a pair of handsome semi-detached villas, called 'Ballamona' (on the right as you face the front) and 'Ravenstone' (on the left). They were built in 1887, in grand neo-Tudor style with turrets and half-timbering and a central door to the frontage, giving the effect of one imposing house. They were designed as gentlemen's residences by the distinguished Leeds architect **George Corson**, who was involved in developing the newly created Shire Oak Road in the 1880s. George Corson was Leeds' premier architect, responsible for the Central Library building ('the municipal palace' as it was called), with its spectacular Tiled Hall, the magnificent Grand Theatre, and numerous distinguished houses, offices, and commercial buildings around Leeds. The two houses on Shire Oak Road remained in his ownership until the early 1900s, and were home to a series of high-status tenants, mostly wealthy Leeds businessmen, and for a time George Corson lived there himself. They continued as separate residences until the 1950s when the two houses were combined into one and converted into a hotel, initially known as the Hartrigg Hotel. In 1990 the name was changed to Haley's.

Next door, under the same management, is the **Bedford House Guest House**, another distinguished house, Grade II listed building. Bedford House is one of a pair of semi-detached houses, again designed to look like one large house, built in 1893 in elegant Queen Anne style by the architect **Francis Bedford** (of the highly-regarded partnership of Bedford and Kitson). The land had been bought by his father James Bedford, owner of the Wood & Bedford Dyeworks at Kirkstall, for speculative development. This pair of houses was known originally as 1 and 2 Shire Oak Dene. Bedford designed each house to have a different interior layout, but both had two spacious reception rooms and a wide panelled hall with a fireplace, instead of the more usual narrow passage. Great care was taken over the quality of the building: they were built of specially commissioned bricks, thinner than usual, and roofed with thick green slates, and on completion were specially featured in the architectural journals *The Builder* and *The Architect*.

Shire Oak Road was developed in the 1870s/80s over fields which were originally part of the manor farm of Headingley: this land is at the ancient heart of the original village, which was named in Domesday Book. Nearby once stood an enormous, venerable oak tree, said to be a thousand years old and traditionally the focus for all the surrounding area, a gathering place since Saxon times, called the 'Shire Oak' or 'Skyrack'. The old oak collapsed in 1941, but gave its name to local landmarks including two of the pubs, and this road. Close by, just along the road, was the manor house, Headingley Hall. The Hall is still there, though rebuilt and much altered over the centuries. All around stretched the fields of its farm, along to the wooded Ridge. The old manor farmhouse and barn can still be seen opposite the hotel, now converted into cottages ('Corson Court').

All this land and most of the village belonged originally to the Norman de Lacy family, then from the fourteenth century to Kirkstall Abbey, but later fell into the hands of the Brudenell family, Earls of Cardigan. By the mid nineteenth century the seventh Earl was Lord of the Manor. He was notorious as the leader of the disastrous 'Charge of the Light Brigade' in the Crimean War, and also for various scandals and scrapes which proved deeply expensive. Although a very wealthy man, with huge estates, by the time he died in 1868 he was heavily in debt and his trustees were forced to sell his Headingley property. A plan was prepared for a new road, Shire Oak Road, leading off the old carriage road to the Hall, with large villa plots mapped out along it to be offered for sale. The Cardigan trustees imposed building restrictions on the land which meant that only quality housing with large gardens could be built, and trees would be preserved. Over the following years this part of Headingley became known as Leeds' premier suburb, and is now a designated conservation area.

A walk along Shire Oak Road is well worth while, as many of its original fine houses remain and it still retains its peaceful, leafy atmosphere, unspoilt by through traffic. On leaving the hotel, first look behind to see the castellated stone walls and tall ornate chimneys of Headingley Castle, a mansion built in 1841 in grandiose Gothic style for a wealthy Leeds corn merchant. Then turn right along the road and you will come to a house called 'Arncliffe' (1893), designed by Francis Bedford for his brother James, Lord Mayor of Leeds in 1914: it is in Arts and Crafts style, brick with tall chimneys, like a small Tudor manor house - unfortunately it is now divided into flats, and its once fine gardens and fairy-tale summerhouse are left neglected. Opposite, the handsome house 'Red Hill' can be glimpsed, also designed by Bedford and Kitson and regarded as one of their finest Arts and Crafts houses, richly gabled and tile-hung.

Walk back towards the main road, and you will pass other grand villas from the 1870s/80s (with some modern infill) until you came to the old manor farmhouse and barn opposite the hotel, now converted as Corson Court – when it was a private house in the 1940s and 50s it was owned by a well-known concert soprano, Mme. Lilian Stiles-Allen, and the young Julie Andrews used to stay there for singing lessons. Further along on the right is Headingley Hall, on the site of the medieval manor house (marked by a blue plaque), and opposite is the splendid red-brick vicarage built in 1887 for the Vicar of the newly-rebuilt St Michael's Church (now the offices of the Leeds and Yorkshire Housing Association). Turn left at the corner into the main road and you will see a faded plaque set in the wall marking the place where the ancient Shire Oak used to stand, originally on the village green: a new oak tree was planted in 1956 to mark the spot and is flourishing in the corner by the wall. This is the heart of the old village of Headingley, where the two pubs and the church face each other - now a vibrant, bustling social centre and a world away from the peace and quiet of Haley's!

Eveleigh Bradford

Local Historian, May 2014

For photographs of the area, visit the [Historic Wood Lane](#) gallery.