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CULTURE

Holbeck Hall Hotel

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Scarborough's 4 Star Holbeck Hall Hotel

George Alderson Smith was born in Leeds on 6 March 1834, he was the second son of *John Smith*, a banker, and *Ann Catherine Jane Metcalfe*. On leaving school he was articled to be a solicitor's clerk, and eventually, briefly, going into partnership with an attorneys and solicitors practice in Leeds. This lasted until 1859 when the partnership was dissolved. George after this turned to manufacturing worsted goods.

On the 1st of August 1860 he married *Helen Alder*, at Christ Church in Hull. Helen was the daughter of *John Alder* who was a corn merchant. Helen died giving birth to their 6th child, about ten years later.

In 1879, George Alderson Smith retired and constructed *Wheatcroft House* despite being alerted to the risk that it could fall into the sea. This was due to the cliff consisting of glacial till¹ which is sandy, silty clay resting on a low cliff of the Middle Jurassic Scalby Formation². The Scalby Formation comprises the Scalby Mudstone and the Moor Grit better known as sandstone. He reportedly stated that he was not concerned as long as the structure remained intact during his own lifetime.

¹<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Till>

²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scalby_Formation

Although now retired his retirement was not as relaxed as many would think it to be as over the next few years he became involved with the Grand Hotel Company, became chairman of the South Cliff Tramway Company and a director of Scarborough Spa Company. He also became a JP and Deputy Lieutenant for the North Riding of Yorkshire.

On January 31st 1931, aged 96, George died at his home at Wheatcroft Cliff. The estate was sold after his death to the Laughton family. The actor [Charles Laughton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Laughton)³ was part of this family. The Laughton family already owned a number of high class hotels in Scarborough, some of these are the Victoria Hotel, the Pavilion Hotel, and the Royal.

Upon acquiring Wheatcroft Cliff House they chose to rename it *Holbeck Hall* which operated until World war II, when the hotel shut its doors. As the war came to an end the hotel got a new lease on life as a place to resettle returning prisoners of war. The Laughton family owned Holbeck Hall until 1988 when the hotel was sold and acquired by the English Rose group. The hotel became Scarborough's only 4 star hotel.

The Events Of 1993

Fast forward to 1993. The house was still thriving as a 4 star hotel although all this would soon change.

6 weeks before the events that took place cracks were seen in the tarmac footpath which ran across the cliffs. A decision was made to fill in the cracks to stop water seeping into the cliffs, although just before the collapse of the cliff the cracks reopened forcing Scarborough's council to close the footpaths that ran below the hotel. At this point it had been noted that a small part of the lavish hotel gardens appeared to be suffering from minor movement. The hotel gardens span 70 meters between the cliff edge and the hotel itself.

As guests settled in on the night of 3rd of June they were unaware of the events that would unfold. The next morning around 6AM as guests woke to the view of the lavish garden and ocean, they saw that a whole 55 meters of the hotel's beautiful 70 meter lawn and garden had disappeared! This led to the immediate evacuation of the hotel.

The hotel that had been stood on the cliff top for many years was now being lost due to the collapse of the cliff. This event was widely covered by news outlets and on one 6PM news bulletin as *Richard Whiteley* stood at the entrance to Holbeck Hall waiting to give a update on events unfolding when the hotel's chimney collapsed.

Watch: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_rFH1ZFM40Y

By the evening of the 5th of June the entire west wing of the hotel had slipped down the cliff. The hotel took along with it many valuable pieces of art and other valuable items that been left there over the years. What remained of the hotel was bulldozed.

Today looking at where the hotel once stood all that can be seen is the gradual slope of the cliff that was reshaped to help prevent further collapse. The collapse itself was likely due to:

- A rainfall of 140 mm in the two months before the slide took place.
- Issues related to the drainage of the slope.
- Pore water pressure build up in the slope.
- Geology.

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4xaJ3RDgn08>

³https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Laughton