

A History of Earlham Hall

Home to the UEA Law School



Earlham Hall in 1819

Origins

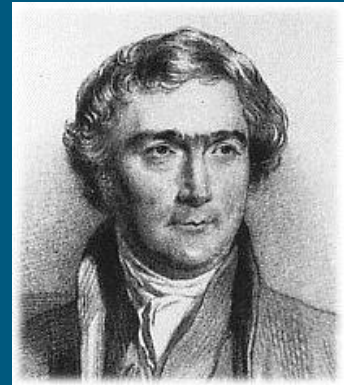
Earlham Hall is built on the south edge of a deserted medieval village (Erlham). The original building was constructed in around 1578, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, but was rebuilt by Thomas Houghton at the start of the English Civil War in 1642. Norwich, like much of East Anglia, was a stronghold for the Parliamentarians (or 'Roundheads'), who eventually defeated the armies of King Charles I, executing the monarch and leading to the brief period of an English republic or commonwealth.



Elizabeth Fry

During the mid 1600s, the region was also embroiled in religious conflict, which included odd superstitions and witch hunts. When renovation work was recently carried out to Earlham Hall, one of the walls painstakingly dismantled and restored, revealed a brick scored with a pentangle and the numerals '666'. It is thought this may have been a protective curse added by the mason to ward off evil.

By the 1760s Earlham Hall had come into the hands of the Bacon family and was significantly altered and extended. In 1761, Mrs Bacon noted, *"The worke men are hear but nothing quit done"* – a complaint no doubt familiar to many undertaking building work today. In that same year, the building was nearly burnt to the ground, during a period of civil unrest in Norwich, brought on by a slump in the city's textile industry and the soaring price of bread. Earlham Hall became associated with politics, through Edward Bacon's work to alleviate the social unrest of the time and by the fact that his father, Waller Bacon, had twice been a Member of Parliament for Norwich.



Joseph John Gurney

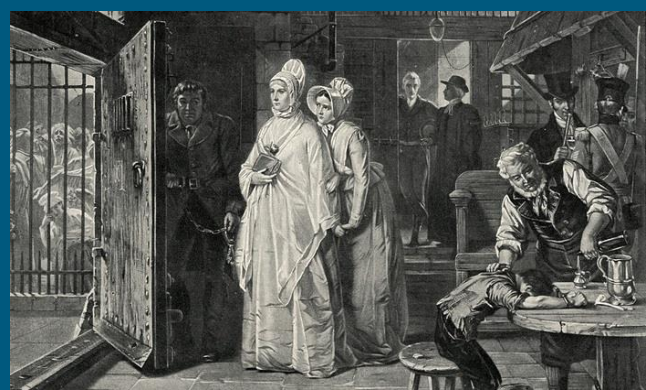
From 1786, the Bacon family leased Earlham Hall to the Gurneys, who were descendants of one of the noblemen who accompanied William the Conqueror, in the Norman conquest of England in 1066. When they moved into Earlham Hall, they were a family of Quakers; a conservative Christian group who were known for their dedication to God, plain dress and abstinence from alcohol and dancing. Despite these conservative beliefs, the Quakers were also forward-looking reformers, who believed in equality and opposed war. The Gurney family helped to change the world – especially through Elizabeth Fry (*née* Gurney) and her brother Joseph John Gurney, who was born at Earlham Hall.



Earlham Hall during Elizabeth Fry's Childhood

Prison Conditions and Social Reform

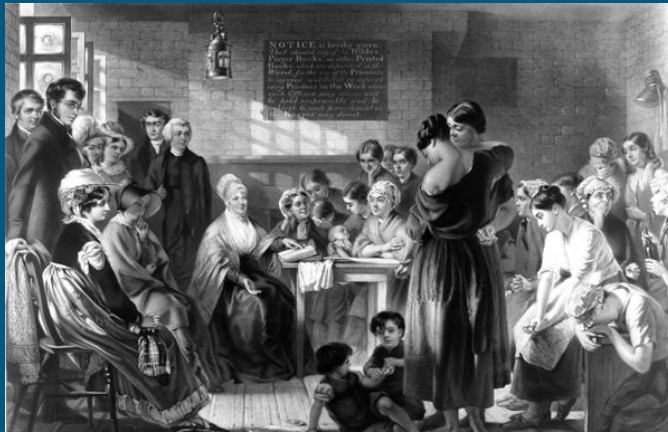
Elizabeth Fry became a social campaigner at only the age of 18, taking an interest in the poor by distributing old clothes, visiting the sick and starting a Sunday School for local children in Earlham Hall. In 1813, she visited Newgate Prison in London and was appalled by the conditions she found. Prisons at the time were more akin to dungeons. Inmates had to sell their hair in exchange for food and to pay the wardens' salaries (there was virtually no government funding). She was particularly moved by the plight of women prisoners, who often lived in the prison with their children in awful circumstances and with virtually no prospects for improvement.



Fry inspecting prison conditions

In the years that followed, Elizabeth and her supporters provided prisoners with food, clothing, education and skills that they could use in the future. At the time, many female prisoners were transported to colonies in Australia and elsewhere. Elizabeth made almost every aspect of their transportation more humane. She persuaded the Governor of Newgate prison to stop the

humiliation of moving prisoners in open carriages, which left them exposed to being attacked by the crowds they passed. She ensured they and their children had a fair share of food on transport ships.



Teaching prisoners in Newgate Prison

She even provided the women with the materials and skills needed to make quilts, so they would have something to sell when they arrived at their destination and a skill they could use to make a living. She helped start a movement opposed to transportation and the practice was abandoned by Britain in 1837.

Elizabeth never discriminated between different groups of people in need of help. At the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), a group of French prisoners of war held at Newgate prison presented her

with a model of a French ship, to express their gratitude for the assistance and kindness she had showed them. She was known as the 'Angel of Prisons'.

Elizabeth Fry and her brother visited prisons all over Britain, to gather evidence of the horrible conditions and bring them to the attention of



A 1952 German Stamp

Members of Parliament. Supported by a network of friends and relatives, their campaigning resulted in reforms such as the Gaols Act 1823, which provided salaries for prison wardens, put female wardens in charge of female prisoners and banned the use of irons. They also campaigned to end capital punishment, but with little success.



Fry depicted on Bank of England £5 (2001-2016)

Elizabeth is best known for reforming prison conditions. In recognition of this, her image was depicted on the Bank of England £5 note between 2001-2016. She was also one of the earliest female social campaigners, giving great inspiration to generations of women who followed her, including Florence Nightingale and the women's suffragette movements in Britain, the US and elsewhere.

While Elizabeth Fry did much of her campaigning from London, Earlham Hall remained a cherished family home and location for discussion of important social issues. Guests hosted at the Hall included the great anti-slavery politicians, William Wilberforce and Thomas Fowell Buxton (who married one of Elizabeth and Joseph's sisters), and influential writer, Amelia Opie. These visitors would walk the grounds of Earlham Hall discussing the anti-slavery movement. Indeed, one of the garden paths is named 'Wilberforce Way'.



Thomas Fowell Buxton

Joseph John Gurney was particularly active in this area and contributed to a movement that successfully abolished slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833 – almost two decades before the issue would spark the US Civil War. Joseph travelled to the United States, where he visited other Quakers opposed to slavery, and observed the violence surrounding the practice. During one of these visits, he became an early supporter of Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana – naming it after Earlham Hall. It was also during one of these trips that he met his third wife, Eliza Kirkbride, who it is said wreaked “appalling vandalism” to the décor of Earlham Hall.

Banking

The Gurney family originally made their fortune through the wool trade, which was very significant in Norwich at the time. The city’s cathedral was built with stone used as ballast on the return journeys of ships transporting wool to mainland Europe. From the late 1700s, they started adding banking transactions to their business and established Gurney’s Bank in 1770. It was a success and became renowned for its honesty, reliability and fair dealings.



Gurney's Bank building, Norwich



The Bank managed to maintain this reputation despite a scandal concerning a discounting house run by a different part of the Gurney family. In 1866, Overend, Gurney & Company collapsed, with liabilities amounting to £11 million (an enormous sum for the time), however, the

resources of Gurney’s Bank of Norwich were never in question.

In 1896 Gurney’s bank merged with others to form Barclays and Co, although the name Gurney continued to appear on the bank’s materials for some years. Today, Barclays is one of the largest banks in the world, with assets totalling around \$1,490 billion.

Modern History

By 1900 Earlham Hall had ceased being politically and commercially significant, but continued being a family home, with around 13 live-in servants. Life in the building at the time was captured by Percy Lubbock’s award-winning memoir, *Earlham* (1922). In it he describes the place during his childhood visits to his grandmother, Laura Pearse (wife to Joseph John Gurney’s nephew). Lubbock recounts how the horse-drawn pump in the yard (which is



Inside Earlham Hall c.1900

still intact today), created a “measured thumping and thudding” each morning.

In 1912, the Gurneys moved out of the building and the Franks (owners of the building and descendants of the Bacons), sold it to Norwich City Council, along with its 356 acres of farmland, park and gardens. In the years that followed, the building was used as accommodation for nurses and in June 1942 provided maternity beds when the city’s hospital was bombed. In the 1950s it was also used as an Elementary School.



Aerial picture of the former Earham Estate, 1946

Thanks to the shrewd purchase of the estate by the city, in 1961 it was able to donate 160 acres of the former estate to the newly planned University of East Anglia. This included leasing Earham Hall to provide the Vice-Chancellor with administrative offices. Other



Assembly when the building was used as a School c.1958

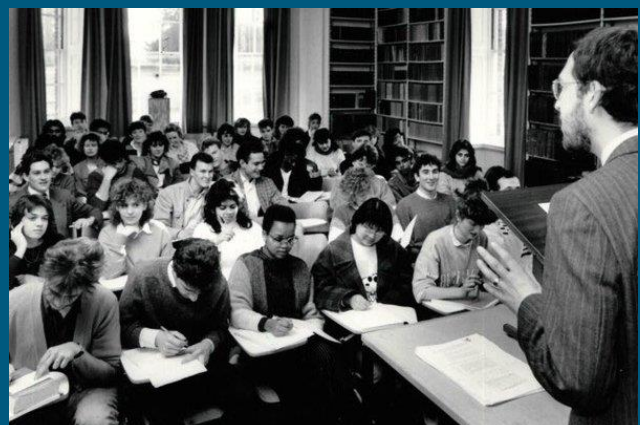
parts of the Earham estate were used for housing as the city expanded.

Earham Hall housed the original university library and continued to be home to the Vice-Chancellor and the UEA administration until 1975. It later became the home of the UEA Law School and has been ever since.

In June 2010, the Hall, outbuildings, and the grounds to the east were purchased by the University of East Anglia. Between 2010 and 2014, a major £8 million renovation project was carried out, which included careful restoration and improved access and work facilities.



Students hand in a Petition to the VC's Office at Earham Hall in 1971



A Law Lecture at Earham Hall in 1980

The following year, Earlham Park hosted BBC Radio 1's 'Big Weekend' – a 2-day music festival. It included performances by Muse, Foo Fighters and Taylor Swift, many of whom used rooms in the Law School to prepare for their gigs. Taylor Swift left her refrigerator behind – It is currently being used by the School's postgraduate research students.



BBC Radio 1's Big Weekend, 2015

In 2017, the building was expanded through the careful restoration and conversion of the

Stables block. This was done in part thanks to the generosity of Law School alumni and includes a dedicated space for student pro bono activity. Further development of the remaining outbuildings is also planned.



Renovation work in 2012

With echoes of the building's historical importance, its current inhabitants grapple with the social issues of today, through the research and study of law. Public protest, free speech and the failings of the criminal justice system, are among the many topics studied and debated by academics and students within the School. The building also continues to be of commercial significance. The School specialises in a number of notable commercial law areas of study, such as Arbitration and Competition. Finally, the building continues to make a difference to people's lives, through the excellent work of the Law Clinic, in which students provide free legal advice to those who would not otherwise be able to access it, in partnership with local law firms.



The 'Stables Block' conversion, opened in 2017

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