

LONGHIRST. OUR PROUD HISTORY.



THE LAWSONS

Longhirst Hall was built for the Lawson family who had lived in and around Longhirst for at least 300 years before they commissioned the building. The Lawsons were an old Northumbrian family, whose family tree can be traced back to the 1600s. In 1824 William Lawson commissioned a local architect called John Dobson to design Longhirst Hall. It was finally completed in 1828 and it was here that he, his wife Hester and their six children would live for the next sixty years. William Lawson led a long life and went on to become High Sherriff of Northumberland. He died at the age of 81, he is buried in Bothal church yard.

JOHN DOBSON – THE ARCHITECT

John Dobson the architect who Lawson commissioned to design Longhirst Hall was born in 1787 at his parents home “The Pineapple Inn” in Chirton near North Shields. He committed himself to an architectural apprenticeship with David Stephenson who was at the time the leading architect of the North East. After Dobson completed his apprenticeship he set up a practice on Tyneside and went on to design a wide variety of outstanding pieces of architecture in the 40 years which followed. Among these were The Newcastle Central Station, The Royal Arcade, Grey Street, St Thomas Church in Newcastle and the Jail Courthouse in Morpeth. He also designed a number of country mansions some of the best known being Beaufront Castle, Mitford Hall, and Lilburn Tower, all in Northumberland.

The foundation stone of Longhirst Hall was laid in June 1823. The sandstone used throughout the hall came from a quarry less than a mile away to the southwest. It is an exquisite honey coloured stone still bearing the veins and watermarks of the time it was formed many millions of years ago. Some of these single sandstone blocks are immense, weighing as much as eight tons yet they fit together so tight that joints can hardly be seen. Longhirst Hall was one of Dobson’s earliest country houses. The winding drive, the trees, gardens, lakes and the grounds are all Dobson’s creation – all made to blend harmoniously – the result a magnificent country house in a perfect setting.

THE JOICEYS

In 1887 Longhirst Hall and the estate that went with it was sold to James Joicey for £53,000. It comprised 4,000 acres, two villages, a mine, 13 farms plus the magnificent Hall itself set in its own grounds of 20 acres.

James Joicey was then 41 years old and had already shown himself to be a brilliant businessman. In twenty years he had risen from being a mere clerk in the family mining business to being in total control of it. He moved into the prestigious mansion of Longhirst Hall that was to be his country home for the next 20 years and a family home for the next 50.

James Joicey had five children - James Arthur and Hugh by his first wife Elizabeth who died when only twenty five years old and Sydney, Drever and Margo by his second wife Marguerite. They all grew up at Longhirst and were part of the community. Captain Sydney Joicey’s name is the first on the village war memorial. Other little reminders also exist; in a quiet corner of the Hall grounds just over the wall from the Church lychgate and hidden under the trees are the tiny stones which they Joiceys erected over the graves of their dogs.

W S SANDERSON AND HENRY MOORE

In 1936 when James Arthur Joicey (junior) left Longhirst a well known figure in Morpeth named W S Sanderson bought the Hall and its estate. By reputation Sanderson was an asset stripper. It is said that had he kept the estate he would have felled trees, sold the timber, sold off individually the estate houses and removed anything of value from the Hall. Happily for Longhirst this did not happen and he sold the Hall again to Henry Moore owner of a well known chain of shops called Moores.

The future of the Hall was uncertain and the Second World War intervened and the army requisitioned the Hall. The officers were billeted in the Hall and the other ranks in the huts in the grounds. Shortly after the war ended, the Hall was acquired by the Home Office and converted into an Approved School.

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LONGHIRST APPROVED SCHOOL

Children between the ages of 8 and 15 who had been convicted before the courts of criminal offences were sent to Longhirst. Most of these children were from deprived homes so Longhirst Hall, a stately home set among magnificent parkland in the country where there were lots of potential for sports, was no punishment for them. They were used to dirty homes in crowded cities. They were also given a uniform on arrival so they had better clothes than they had ever known before. It is not surprising that on being released and sent back to their slum homes they quickly committed crimes to ensure that they were promptly returned to Longhirst.

In the 1970's the concept of social work changed radically, due to the Children's and Young Persons Act of 1969. This Act brought an end to the system of Approved Schools and brought in a system of "Community Homes" for children who were subject to care orders. Longhirst Hall became a Community Home with Education in 1973 however in 1982 the County Council concluded that the maintenance of Longhirst Hall could not be justified and Longhirst Hall's years as a school came to an end. In 1992 Longhirst Hall was empty and sliding slowly into decay.

LONGHIRST HOTEL, TRAINING AND CONFERENCE CENTRE

In 1991 Stephen Cowell put forward a proposal on behalf of Northumberland Training & Enterprise Council (NTEC) to re-develop the Longhirst estate as a Hotel and Conference Centre and University Business School. Extensive sports facilities were also developed. Planning Permission was obtained and work started in 1992. The Hall was fully opened in September 1994. In 2000 Stephen Cowell led a management buy out and the estate has been privately owned by the Longhirst Group since then.

Now fully restored and extended Longhirst Hall is operated as a luxury hotel, training and conference centre. Longhirst has a huge number of facilities to offer and is Northumberland's most popular destination for weddings, leisure breaks, sporting weekends and conferences.

Its history is not forgotten and many of its conference rooms continue to be named after prior owners and occupiers; The Lawson, The Dobson, The Joicey, The Sanderson, The Moore, The Stephenson and The Hester Clark Rooms. The Collingwood Bar is named after local

hero Lord Collingwood who fought alongside Nelson at the Battle of Trafalgar, and who when not at sea, resided at Collingwood House in nearby Morpeth.

THE LONGHIRST GHOST

Most old country houses have their Ghosts and Longhirst is no exception. Many people in and around Longhirst claim to have seen this apparition. Local man Edwin Grieve confirms that the Longhirst ghost was often mentioned in the nearby village of Linton in this childhood. The story of the below encounter was featured in the Morpeth Herald in 1929.

A Morpeth miner called Christopher McCulloch who was 27 years old at the time was walking along the leafy lane on the way to Linton Colliery where he worked.

He had travelled from Morpeth to Linton for six years and always made the journey via Longhirst. He travelled on his bike although always dismounted and walked where the gradient alongside Longhirst Parish Church was steep.

On the crest of the brow there is a road to Pegswood and facing the junction is an arched gateway leading to the Church. It was out of this gateway, shortly after 3.00 am on a clear night when the moon was visible, that a vision in white crossed his path and disappeared into the wall bordering one side of the road. The vision is described as a woman in white, her flowing robes completely enveloping her. She glided noiselessly in front of his bike, so close he could have touched her and then disappeared into a wall at the side of the road.

Visions similar to this have been seen at exactly the same spot over the years since then. The arched gateway from which the white lady appeared is a lynchgate and bears the inscription "Until the day breaks and the shadows flee away".

**Call Longhirst on us
01670 795 000**

Longhirst | Morpeth | Northumberland | NE61 3LL
enquiries@longhirst.co.uk | www.longhirst.co.uk