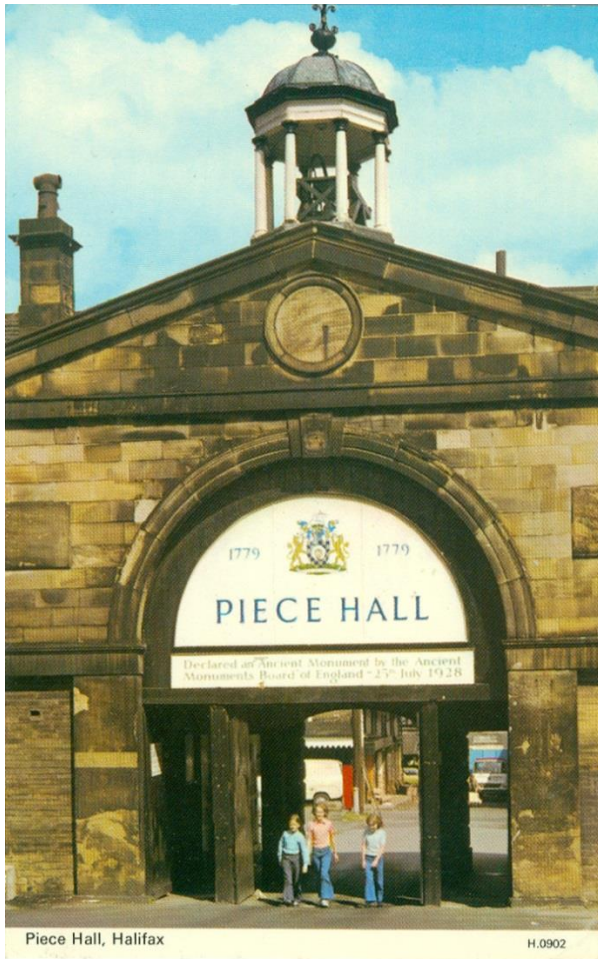




Family History Tourism – Episode 2

The Halifax Piece Hall

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Family History Tourism – Episode 2. Halifax Piece Hall

One of the intriguing pieces of information in Edmund Cockshutt (1763-1825) of Ball Grove's Will is the reference to one of the elements in his estate - "*½ of a stand and space in Halifax Piece Hall*".

The Halifax Piece Hall is now a Grade I listed building in Halifax, West Yorkshire. It was built in 1779 as a cloth hall for handloom weavers to sell the woollen cloth "pieces" they had produced. It featured 315 separate rooms arranged around a central open courtyard. As factories started up in the early nineteenth century the trade in handwoven wool declined and around 1815 the rules were changed to allow the sale of cotton goods. Edmund Cockshutt's estate appears to have included a share in one of the trading rooms in the Halifax Piece Hall which would have been an important extension of the family woollen and cotton manufacturing businesses.



It seems likely that Edmund Cockshutt would have previously held a share in a trading room in the Colne Piece Hall (later Cloth Hall) which was built in 1775 for the storage and sale of worsted and woollen materials. As the woollen trade in Colne declined, replaced by the cotton industry and damaged by competition from nearby Halifax, the Cloth Hall became redundant as a textile centre and closed in about 1807.



The Colne Piece Hall before it was demolished

So on our recent visit to the UK, the Halifax Piece Hall was put on our itinerary.

We left York early in the morning on 29 August 2018 and travelled south-west along the A64, M1 and M62, arriving in Halifax about an hour later, in time for breakfast. We parked in Market Street and after breakfast in a nearby café, approached the Piece Hall via the Westgate.

The approach is not particularly inspiring and it is not until we went through the arched gate that we got a real appreciation of the building.





— The first sight of the huge Halifax Piece Hall courtyard is quite stunning. The elegance and size of the four-sided colonnade is somehow out of place in modern Yorkshire and more likely to be the style of renaissance buildings one might find in Rome or Florence.

The Hall was extensively renovated and reopened in 1976 and was visited by Her Majesty The Queen in 2004.

Today it is used as offices and shops and an open-air venue for civic events and public entertainments.

After a good look around, we visited the Public Library which adjoins the Hall in what was the site of what is known as the Square Church site with its impressive spire as seen in our photographs on the previous page and below.

The aerial photograph below of the Piece Hall and the Halifax Central Library under reconstruction together with the following history, provide an explanation of the unusual association between the Piece Hall and the adjacent church spire.



History of the Square church site

The history of the **Square church** and Square chapel is closely linked. They were both the vision of two men, Titus Knight (its first Minister) and James Kershaw (its founder).

Titus Knight was a pastor of a chapel formed from two cottages in Chapel Fold. However, after 9 years the congregation outgrew the premises. Kershaw, a local merchant and member of the congregation planned, with Knight, to build the Square chapel. The Chapel was licensed as a place of worship in January 1772. The congregation grew and Sunday schools were established. By 1850, the Chapel was so popular that people were turned away due to a lack of space.

In 1852, the land next to the chapel yard was bought. A new chapel was built and the old chapel was refurbished for use by the schools. The Crossley brothers were heavily involved with the new building. Sir Francis Crossley paid the £1,500 cost of the tower and spire.

The **Square church** was built to the design of a young London architect, Joseph James, in the decorated Gothic style. At the time of building was taller than any other building in Halifax. The new church was dedicated for worship on 15th July 1857.

Under the ministry of Rev. Enoch Mellor, the church attracted the largest congregation in Halifax. However, as congregations dwindled over the years, it was closed for worship in 1969.

On 3rd January 1971, the roof and interior of **Square church** were destroyed by fire. Later that year, the Environment Secretary gave permission for the building to be demolished. This was with the exception of the tower and spire. Much heated local debate followed and demolition finally took place in December 1976. It is now the Halifax Central library and Archive, preserving and conserving over 150 years of history.

Our visit to the Piece Hall and the adjoining library provided us with the opportunity of searching the West Yorkshire Archives for information about the Cockshutts involvement in the Piece Hall.

The following extract from the Archives provides further information about how the Piece Hall operated.

A Cloth Hall existed in Halifax as far back as 1572, and in the 17th century there was a "Linen Hall" near Cheapside. Prior to the Industrial Revolution cloth was produced by the "piece", and many skilful handloom weavers lived and worked in the area around Halifax. The Town's wool merchants grew wealthy trading in "pieces" and decided to build a cloth hall, like their counterparts in other Yorkshire towns, to show off their prosperity and status. The Piece Hall, designed by Thomas Bradley, Engineer to the Calder and Hebble Navigation, was opened on land called Talbot Close on 1 January 1779 and cost over £12,000. 315 rented merchants' rooms, nestled among the Italian style colonnaded galleries, originally surrounded the cobbled courtyard and lawns (on which sheep were allowed to graze). The Piece Hall was originally open for business for just two hours on a Saturday morning and there were severe penalties for anyone who traded after the bell had rung to mark the end of business.

There are several references to Cockshutts in the documents held in the archives related to the Piece Hall and it appears that Edmund Cockshutt "the Elder" (1729-1821) was involved in the Piece Hall from its early operations. It seems likely that his son, Edmund Cockshutt "of Ball Grove" (1753-1825) was also involved. The records show that an "Edward" (sic) Cockshutt was appointed a member of the Management Committee of the Piece Hall in 1794 and his name is among those present in minutes of meetings of the Committee in 1810.

The cost of renting a booth at the piece hall varied considerably in the period between the hall's opening in 1779 and 1821, the year Edmund Cockshutt died, and it is therefore not clear how valuable this asset was in his Estate. At the peak of the Hall's role in the wool trade in the late 18th century, booths were in great demand and would have been valuable; however by 1821 the Hall's original role had become largely redundant due to the rise of the Cotton industry. By the 1840's the Hall was no longer used as a "piece hall" and by 1871 it had become a fruit and vegetable market.

It seems likely that the Cockshutt families' involvement in the Halifax Piece Hall reflected the nature of their milling business at the time. The properties listed in Edmund Cockshutt's will were primarily in the wool business and the mills at Bough Gap and Ball Grove were originally "fulling mills".

Fulling involves two processes, scouring and milling (thickening). Originally, fulling was carried out by the pounding of the woollen cloth with a club, or the fuller's feet or hands. From the medieval period, however, fulling was often carried out in a water mill, followed by stretching the cloth on great frames known as tenters. It was these woollen cloth pieces that were traded at the Piece Hall.

As the industrial revolution accelerated in the early 1800's, many of the fulling mills were converted to cotton mills and as a result, the Halifax Piece Hall became redundant.

After an hour long stroll around the colonnades, we visited the new Halifax Central Library that is now accessible through the Piece Hall building.

The next two hours was spent searching the archives with the help of the Archives Librarian for references to the Cockshutts. The Piece Hall records are indexed but not digitised so a thorough search would take many hours, however several traces were located in the short time available to us.

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Halifax Piece Hall - Off the Record

The Piece Hall flourished for three and a half decades, but as the Industrial Revolution gained pace, the cottage weaver became redundant as merchants and mill owners traded directly. By the early 1830s fewer than 200 of the 315 rooms were occupied. In 1836 market day was changed to Wednesday but it proved unpopular. From 1841-1890 it was used for the famous Halifax Sunday School Jubilees or Sings. In 1868 the Piece Hall was given to Halifax Corporation and from 1871 to the early 1970s it served as home to Halifax's Wholesale Fruit and Vegetable Market. In 1928 it became a scheduled ancient monument, and in 1972 a Grade One Listed Building. The Piece Hall survived a plan to replace it with a new town centre car park, and in 1976 the restored Piece Hall was re-opened as a unique visitor attraction.

Source List dated July 2015

Records Held by WYAS Calderdale

<i>Catalogue Reference</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>Description</i>
FW:12/1	1774	Deeds relating to acquisition by Trustees of land on which the Piece Hall was built
FW:12/3	1774-1778	Subscription receipts for erecting the Piece Hall
DW:A/16	1774-1778	Receipts relating to subscriptions for erection of Halifax Piece Hall
DW:A/17	1778	List of rooms at Halifax Piece Hall, with name of subscriber
FW:12/4	1774-1865	Miscellaneous rental receipts, notices, assignment of rooms, abstracts of title to rooms, etc
MISC:3/72/1-2	1775	20th century transcript of proposal and agreement for building the Piece Hall
RP/3:406	1775	Letter to Robert Parker, Halifax, attorney, relating to Commissioners' order for the Piece Hall
HAS/B:22/12/2	1775	Memoranda (transcript) entitled "An estimate of the Manufacturers' Hall by Samuel and John Hope"
MISC:2/39	1775	Building estimates of Samuel and John Hope
RP:2115	1775	Articles of agreement between manufacturers about a room in the Piece Hall "now actually erecting"
WYC:1682	1778-1868	Halifax Piece Hall, Management Committee Book. Containing minutes of the Piece Hall Management Committee and rules of the Piece Hall.
HAS/B:36/4/3	1779	Cuttings book including documents for opening of Halifax Piece Hall (Manufacturer's Hall) 1779
MISC:84/7	1780-1782	Record of Bills of Exchange of Farrar Brothers of Globe Mills, Halifax

http://archiveswiki.wyjs.org.uk/index.php?title=Halifax_Piece_Hall

29/07/2015

Our morning visit to this wonderful site was certainly worthwhile and gave us a glimpse in to the business interests of my five times great grandfather, Edmund Cockshutt "the Elder" and his son Edmund Cockshutt of Ball Grove.

By lunchtime we were again driving, heading west towards Preston.