

**Becca Hall**  
**Aberford, Leeds, West Yorkshire**

**By Tony Malins**



In 1958 Becca Hall was purchased by the CEGB (Central Electricity Generating Board) to house its new Leeds Area Control room. It remained operational for some 40 years until it was closed in 1997. The original Hall, control buildings and surrounding land were put up for sale by National Grid around 2000.

Becca Hall is a country residence located in Aberford, Leeds, West Yorkshire. It is situated on Becca Lane within the old Gascoigne Estate. The

house is a Grade II listed building. It is located some three miles east of Leeds and accessed from the A64, close to the A1 junction.

The house was built in 1783 for William Markham, the son of William Markham, Archbishop of York and the private secretary to Warren Hastings. It descended in the Markham family for several generations until it was sold in 1894 by Ronald Markham to Arthur Thomas Schreiber, who lived there until his death in 1902. His widow remained at the Hall until her own death in 1907, when it was sold to a Bradford wool magnate Frederick James Lund, who lived there until 1922. It was then sold to Thomas Percy Fawcett, a maltster from Castleford, whose family owned the house until 1949, when it was bought by the Thompson family.



In 1958, it was bought by the Central Electricity Generating Board for its secluded position to build a new Control Centre for the North-East Region. The new Control Centre was constructed strong enough to survive not only direct blasts from conventional weapons, but lie just outside of the effective destructive range of a contemporary one megaton weapon if used on Leeds City.

Protection from fall-out was the primary concern at Becca hall. This took the form of a free standing reinforced concrete building, linked to Becca Hall at ground and first floor levels. When complete in the early 1960's it was designated as a standby to National Control should the National Control Centre in London need to be evacuated. By the mid 1970's the complex was expanded to three control rooms. Area control (the original), East Coast and West Yorkshire District Control rooms.



Following the privatisation of the UK electricity industry in 1990/91, ownership of the property passed to the National Grid Company. It continued its function as the Leeds Grid Control Centre until its operational closure in 1997. After being relinquished by the National Grid Company the house passed through the hands of a series of would-be developers with various plans, all of which came to nothing.

During 2000, Becca Hall was used to measure background levels of air pollution. The site's rural nature places it 1.2 miles (2 km) due west from the A1 and over 3.5 miles (6 km) due east from the edge of the Leeds urban boundary, and so was ideal for that purpose. The only pollutant recorded was ground-level ozone, compared to levels of SO<sub>2</sub>, NO<sub>2</sub>, and PMs at a site next to the A1.



An application for planning permission to develop the building for use as a training centre was refused in September 2004, on the grounds that the development would be unsustainable and would affect local use of the area due to parking requirements. During this period, it was however sometimes used for social functions.



In 2011 the Hall was placed on the market again and this time was bought by Lara Grylls, the sister of Bear Grylls, and her husband James Fawcett, great-grandson of its previous owner in the 1920s to be returned to a domestic residence. The couple demolished the extension that had been added by the CEGB to the back of the building (dubbed by them "the tumour"), which had included office buildings, control centres, bunkers and a tower, amounting to four times the size of the original Hall in all. The demolition process turned out to be self-financing, due to the value of the electrical scrap that was recovered, and even generated a small surplus, which paid for the reinstatement of period windows and chimneys.

References: - Wikipedia and other Internet sites

Researched and written by Tony Malins

April 2017