

Yorkshire Curiosities

Wainhouse's Folly Chimney

by Duncan and Trevor Smith

“WAINHOUSE Tower”, “Column” or “Folly”, dating from 1871, is probably the strangest structure in West Yorkshire and, at 275 feet, is certainly one of the highest. It is to be found brooding on a hillside overlooking Halifax close to the A646 south-west of the town centre (Ordnance Survey Landranger Sheet 104 : SE 078/240). On a blustery day we paid a visit and gazed up through the drizzle wondering about its history.

It was originally planned as a chimney to carry away smoke and fumes, by means of a connecting flue, from J.E. Wainhouse's Washer Lane dyeworks down in the valley. This was necessary due to the Smoke Abatement Act of 1870, which attempted to reduce air pollution.

Work began on the brick-built chimney which was to be surrounded by a spiral staircase and the whole enclosed in a fine stone casing. However, it remained unfinished when the by now wealthy Wainhouse sold the dyeworks to his manager. The latter neither required nor wished to complete the chimney and so Wainhouse decided to employ a new architect to finish the structure as a prospect tower and observatory.

Like other buildings which Wainhouse was involved with, from



the humblest (e.g. Wainhouse Terrace) to the grandest, he insisted on ornate decoration. On this occasion he positively covered the chimney in Gothic ornament. At the top was built a balconied lantern so ornate that there was scarcely room for a telescope. The parapet was too high for Wainhouse to peer over (he was not a tall man!) and he withheld payment until his architect lowered it!

A local name for the chimney is “Spite Tower”, which harks back to a dispute between Wainhouse and a rival who had a great dislike of chimneys. It is also said that Wainhouse used the chimney to overlook his rival's property.

After Wainhouse's death the bottom six feet of the tower took on the inglorious function of hen-house! Then in the Second World War the army used it as an observation tower. Today it belongs to Calderdale borough and is open on certain days – but remember that a 400-step staircase awaits you!

This article has been adapted from the book South and West Yorkshire Curiosities, by Duncan and Trevor Smith. (Dovecote Press).