



**S**OME declared that it was sacrilege. Others said it was the only option. In the late 1960s one of the oldest gentleman's houses in England was demolished. Had it been restored and standing today, it would arguably have been one of the nation's premier heritage attractions.

Bolton Hall, in the attractive and ancient village of Bolton-by-Bowland, dated from 1334.

It was inherited by Mrs Assunta Bosonnet and the decision to destroy the hall, with its turrets, chimneys and arched windows, was preceded by furious debate within the family and the village.

The building, however, was riddled with dry rot and permission to pull it down was given in 1958.

Today, rising from the ashes, is a prestigious new housing development. Diggers are back on site as the estate faces its most major upheaval since Bolton Hall came down.

The extensive stables, home to the gentry's horses and animals for centuries past, are being renovated and redesigned to form a unique, prestige residential complex.

Mrs Bosonnet, who had to take that momentous decision almost four decades ago, recalled: "I hated having to do anything like that. Thieves had stolen lead off the roof, bedroom floors were unsafe and the hall was riddled with dry rot. It was a horrible decision."

Faced with estimates of £30,000 to put the hall into good repair and death duties which led to her selling half of her 2,000 acres inheritance, she steeled herself against her critics and took a number of crucial decisions to ensure the continuity of the estate.

Even then it remained her dream that, one day, she or one of her children would rebuild on the site.

Today that dream has been realised, although not quite in the way in which Mrs Bosonnet perhaps envisaged all those years ago. The site of the once stately home and local landmark, Bolton Hall, overlooks the conversion of the coach houses and stables.

The first property to be completed, Garden Cottage, was Mrs Bosonnet's home and also home to her son, Christopher, whose imagination has led to "King Henry's Mews"

## by Vivien Meath

— as the development is now named.

Around 1870, when the estate was in the ownership of Mrs Bosonnet's grandfather, Doncaster coal owner Major M. N. Wright, staff totalled 100 and the stables were home to some 70 horses.

Despite the passage of time, the estate has not been neglected and today retains much of its grandeur. The walled well, said to have been dug for the use of Henry VI, who took refuge in the hall for 12 months after the battle of Hexham in 1464, is now a listed building — albeit almost in the back garden of one of the newly-created properties!

Legend has it that it never goes dry.

The gardens, once renowned nationwide, are a shadow of their former glory, although by today's standards they are still quite spectacular. Anyone who has visited the lost gardens of Heligan, now a major tourist attraction in Cornwall, would immediately see the potential in the grounds of Bolton Hall. Dutchman Tim Smit, whose imagination and total devotion to the Cornish restoration project resulted in one of the most visited gardens in the country, would certainly have cause for celebration if he ventured here.

Pheasants and rabbits abound in the remaining woodland and the ancient fernery has been semi-restored, albeit to a shadow of its former self. Green-fingered visionaries would undoubtedly derive much pleasure from strolling around the site of the long-since-demolished heated orchard houses, the orangery, the vineries, tropical house and the palm house.

The hall was for many years the home of the Pudsay family — hence Pudsay's Leap, a local landmark bathed in folklore.

Once famous for its hunting and shooting, Bolton Hall is now set to become the site of one of Lancashire's most unusual and visionary developments.