

Bearland House

Suggested Tour

Start outside

- Explain the meaning of Bearland
- Describe the Fire Station
- Give the history of Bearland House
- The restoration of Bearland House

Move inside

- Point out the restored features
- On the stairway point out the gardens
- Story of Catherine haunting the house
- From the landing, point out the other buildings which can be seen

Bearland

There are several theories as to the origins of the name Bearland, which is the part of Gloucester to the south of Westgate Street, bounded by the eastern channel of the Severn and the Docks. The only notable buildings in the area are Bearland House, the Police Station and the Prison.

The most likely hypothesis is that it is a corruption of Bare Land, literally land with no buildings or cultivation, surrounding Gloucester Castle that would give the defending garrison a clear field of fire against would-be attackers.

Another suggestion is that this was the area where Bear Baiting took place and where the bears were kept and fed.

It also features in a Gloucestershire nursery rhyme:

Before the town of Gloucester went spreading far and wide,
all sorts of savage animals roamed over the countryside;
and grandmother will tell you how once a big black bear
came running down into the town and carried off the Mayor.

In case this thing might happen to any future Mayors,
folk set aside a piece of land exclusively for bears;
they said "now that is THEIR land where no-one else may play",
and so they called it Bearland and do so to this day.

The Fire Station

Opened in 1913 for the new city fire brigade. It was the centre of fire control operations until 1956 when it moved to Eastern Avenue.

Gloucester was mainly built of timber and suffered a series of devastating fires in the late 12th and early 13th centuries. In 1223 a fire consumed the whole of the west side

of Northgate Street and both sides of Westgate Street down almost to the St Peter's Abbey.

In 1648, the first mechanical fire engine was bought for £30 from a company in London. This plus more brick-built buildings prevented a repeat of the earlier bad fires.

In the 19th century more fire engines were provided by various insurance companies for private horse-drawn brigades which attended fires at buildings which were appropriately marked.

In 1912, these were disbanded and the new city fire brigade formed.

Bearland House

Built in the 1740s by William Jones, a lawyer, who was a descendant of John Jones MP for the Gloucester 1604-11 and 3 times Mayor of Gloucester in 1597, 1618 and 1625.

William Jones died in 1758 with considerable debts, and his eldest son William, a wine merchant, left Bearland House in 1761 and was declared bankrupt in 1766.

The house was sold in 1764 to Samuel Hayward JP, Sheriff of the County. He bought up surrounding properties and land, and by his death in 1790 owned the whole of the land bounded by Longsmith Street, Ladybellgate Street, Commercial Road and Barbican Road.

It was inherited by Hayward's daughter Catherine whose white-clad figure is reported to have been seen on many occasions standing on the staircase looking out at what were the gardens.

It was used as a militia depot in 1856, then leased to a Richard Burlton between 1860 and 1869., then Henry Mousell in 1870. The land adjoining Commercial Road was developed as the Post and Telegraph Office. The Bearland Estate was sold to the Corporation in 1899 who built the City Electricity Works in 1900.

In 1904, the house was occupied by "The Girls Endowed School" – subsequently The Girl High School which moved to Denmark Road in 1909. It subsequently was occupied by solicitors, then became the Post Office Telephone Office in 1918.

The Restoration

In 1978, Bearland House was purchased by Preece Payne architectural practice and renovated. Having lain empty for seven years, it had considerable dry and wet rot and the rear wall was falling out. The first job was to make the building structurally sound and a large portion of the rear elevation was rebuilt. The front courtyard was stripped of tarmac and restored to the period style with paving slabs and chippings. The ornamental railings were taken down and restored to their original condition. The front elevation was cleaned and washed.

The original glass was removed from the windows, the frames and sashes restored to working order and the glass replaced.

Inside the house, the main staircase had been seriously vandalised and many balusters were missing. Replicas were turned, carved and fitted. Many original doors had had hatches cut in them, and new panelled doors were made and fitted. The oak panelling in the hall was removed, cleaned, adjusted and refitted.

The magnificent carved oak arch in the hall was taken down and the numerous coats of paint removed and restored to its original condition.

Once installed, all the oak was French polished to classic colours and tones.

The building is regarded as the finest Georgian town house in Gloucester.

It is now used by a bespoke shirt-maker.