

The Laurels, Reeth (DL11 6TX) – History & Overview

The Laurels is a substantial Grade II listed Georgian property, believed to date from the late 18th century, with later 19th-century alterations. It occupies a prominent position in the centre of Reeth, one of the principal villages in Swaledale in the Yorkshire Dales National Park.

Origins and Early Use

The house was built as a hotel, at a time when Swaledale was a thriving and prosperous area, driven largely by the lead mining industry. During the 18th and 19th centuries, lead mining brought significant wealth into the dale, with Reeth acting as a key service and market hub supporting both industry and agriculture.

The scale, layout, and features of The Laurels reflect its original use as a hospitality property, serving visitors drawn to the area for business and leisure. Evidence of this remains today, most notably the original room numbers still present on the top floor doors.

This use is consistent with the wider history of the area. Just outside Reeth at Fremington, Draycott Hall was the home of the families who owned and managed many of the Swaledale lead mines, with associated mine offices and records based nearby. This reflects the level of organisation and economic activity that supported the village at the time.

There were also repeated attempts to improve access into the dale during this period. Plans were put forward to extend the railway from Richmond up to Reeth in the late 19th century, with further proposals in the early 20th century. Although these schemes gained approval, they were never completed, leaving Swaledale without a direct railway connection.

Local historical references suggest that The Laurels continued to attract visitors well into the 19th and early 20th centuries. Records held by the Swaledale Museum refer to families returning to the area for holidays, and there are references to guests enjoying time on the lawn outside the property, reinforcing its longstanding role as a place of hospitality.

Development and Changes Over Time

Like many substantial Dales properties, The Laurels has evolved over time.

The main house retains its Georgian proportions and structure, with later changes reflecting different periods of use. The ground floor includes rooms that were historically used for communal purposes, including what is now the lounge, which previously operated as a tea room for guests and visitors.

A key addition is the single-storey accommodation, believed to have been added over 100 years ago. This part of the building originally functioned as a self-contained residence,

with its own external door to the roadside. Internally, the layout still shows where this entrance and porch once were.

This section was later incorporated into the main house by previous owners, who had lived at the property for approximately 40 years. They used the space to accommodate an elderly relative, creating a more integrated living arrangement.

The title deeds refer to this as “The Pink House”, reflecting a period when the exterior was painted pink. This characterful detail has since been covered by later rendering, which forms part of the current finish.

Setting and Surroundings

The Laurels has always held a prominent position within the village and reflects the way Reeth has evolved over time.

Originally, The Laurels sat at the edge of the village, but as Reeth has grown, the village has gradually expanded around it.

There is photographic evidence held at the Swaledale Museum of “The Laurels Garage”, showing that the garage was purpose-built to service early motor vehicles and has always fulfilled that role. The outbuildings and sheds associated with neighbouring properties also reflect historic village life, with some previously used as slaughterhouses supporting local butchers.

Reeth itself was historically a busy and fully functioning commercial village, rather than primarily residential. Many properties were occupied by business owners, with a wide range of trades operating within the village.

The terrace row to the south of The Laurels is known to have housed a range of businesses, including a printer, stationer, grocer, and butcher, demonstrating how self-sufficient the village once was.

Around the Green, which remains the focal point of the village, there have long been three public houses, alongside a variety of other businesses. Part of what is now the Black Bull, identifiable by its bay window, was previously a milliner’s shop, and other premises included grocers and hardware stores.

At its peak, Reeth was a thriving market village, with regular trading activity on the Green. Alongside this commercial life came a lively social scene, with busy pubs and a strong sense of community, reflecting the character of a working Dales village during its most active period.

The land opposite The Laurels has remained unchanged, preserving its open aspect and contributing to the setting that the property still enjoys today.

Why People Come to Reeth and Swaledale

Reeth sits at the heart of Swaledale and is a well-known stopping point on major long-distance routes, including the Coast-to-Coast and the Inn Way. For many walkers, Swaledale is a welcome change after the more challenging Lake District sections, offering quieter landscapes and a more relaxed pace while still delivering outstanding scenery.

The area is particularly attractive because it is less commercial and less crowded than the Lakes, while still offering excellent access to outdoor activities. The extensive network of tracks and bridleways makes it suitable not only for walking, but also for cycling, horse riding and trail running, supporting a wide range of visitors.

A key advantage of Reeth as a base is its accessibility for linear walking routes. A regular bus service runs between Richmond and Keld six days a week, allowing walkers to complete sections of routes such as the Coast-to-Coast, the Corpse Way (Keld to Grinton) and other local walks without the need for a second vehicle.

Swaledale has a strong reputation for outdoor events, including running races, cycling sportives and trail bike events throughout the year. It is also home to Ard Rock, the UK's largest mountain bike festival, which draws significant visitor numbers annually.

The area is also regularly used for Duke of Edinburgh expeditions, reflecting both the quality of the landscape and its relative remoteness.

Reeth remains a lively and well-supported village, benefiting from:

A range of shops, bakeries, cafés and local amenities

A popular ice cream parlour attracting day visitors

A medical centre, veterinary practice, and garage with tyre services

A tourist information centre, library and business hub at Hudson House

A weekly produce market each Friday

Ongoing local investment, including plans for the reopening of the village petrol station

Beyond the village centre, there is also a growing arts and craft community, including:

Lacey's artisan dairy, producing cheese and ice cream and offering popular weekend cheese-making workshops

Swaledale Thai Cookery School, running well-attended cooking experiences

These activities are particularly popular with visitors and are frequently used as gift experiences and leisure activities, adding to the area's appeal beyond traditional walking tourism.

The Memorial Hall hosts regular events, and the village sits within easy reach of destinations such as the Tan Hill Inn, the highest pub in England, approximately 10 miles away.

There are several established annual highlights, including:

Swaledale Festival (starting at May Spring Bank and running for two weeks)

Reeth Show (August Bank Holiday Monday)

Muker Show (early September)

The village Green is central to daily life, hosting markets, community gatherings, bonfire celebrations and New Year's Day events.

Reeth attracts a broad mix of visitors, including walkers, cyclists, event participants, leisure visitors and repeat guests who return year after year, all supported by its strong infrastructure and variety of things to see and do.

The village Green is central to daily life, hosting a weekly Friday produce market and a wide range of community events, from seasonal celebrations to bonfire night and New Year's Day fireworks.

Recent Use and Modern Living

More recently, The Laurels has been used as both a private residence and a bed and breakfast, demonstrating its continued suitability for hospitality alongside family living.

The property naturally supports this dual use, with generous bedrooms, multiple reception spaces, and the ability to accommodate guests while maintaining private living space.

B&B Performance and Potential

The Laurels has been successfully operated as a three-bedroom bed and breakfast, with all guest rooms benefiting from en-suite facilities and zip-and-link beds, allowing flexible configurations.

The business has consistently performed well, with:

Full occupancy most weekends

Regular repeat bookings

Coast-to-Coast guests often booking up to a year in advance

Strong relationships with local walking providers

Two rooms have been dog-friendly, and the property has been particularly popular for group bookings and wedding parties.

The Laurels has built a strong reputation, achieving consistent 5-star Tripadvisor reviews, and continues to receive booking enquiries despite trading having ceased.

Ownership and Stewardship

At the point of purchase, the property required significant improvement, and a programme of works has been carried out to bring it to its current standard while retaining its character.

The property was acquired with a self-contained two-bedroom flat already formed within the top floor, providing additional flexibility for independent accommodation or income.

During ownership, The Laurels has been successfully run as a part-time B&B alongside full-time employment, demonstrating both its flexibility and commercial viability.

The decision to sell reflects a change in lifestyle and priorities, with work commitments regularly taking the current owner away from the area.

It is a house that benefits from being lived in and enjoyed day to day, something that current commitments no longer allow.

Improvements and Investment

Since 2011, work has been undertaken, including:

Installation of en-suite bathrooms

Replacement main and kitchen roof coverings

Repair and re-roofing of garages and outbuildings

Renovation and draught-proofing of original sash windows

Installation of a new boiler and oil tank

Reinstatement of 'Tea Room' door in the private lounge

Replacement kitchen and private bathroom

Lining of chimneys, allowing safe use of log burners and open fires within the main house, and the open fire within the top floor flat

The self-contained top floor flat, known as “Sky High”, is fully independent and benefits from its own character features. It has previously been used as separate accommodation and offers clear potential for continued use as a rental or guest space, although it would now benefit from refurbishment.

Layout Flexibility

The Laurels offers a highly flexible layout, capable of supporting a range of uses.

The top floor provides a self-contained two-bedroom flat, which was in place at the time of purchase. This offers:

Independent accommodation for multi-generational living

Potential for long-term or holiday rental income

Additional private space separate from the main house

The single-storey accommodation also provides further flexibility. While currently incorporated into the main house, it can be used independently if required and would lend itself to a variety of uses, including:

Separate business space (e.g. office, studio, treatment rooms)

Additional guest accommodation

Potential for alternative uses such as a small café or similar (subject to any necessary consents)

The property has been successfully operated as a B&B with private owner accommodation, but could equally function as:

A multi-generational home

A combined home and business

A large single private residence

This level of adaptability is a key feature of The Laurels and allows future owners to tailor the property to suit their own needs.

Parking and Practicalities

A notable feature of The Laurels is its generous parking, with space for approximately six vehicles, all able to arrive and leave independently.

Additional features include:

Main garage for vehicle storage

Secondary garage for cycles, motorbikes or guest use

Shed and wood store

This level of parking is rare in Reeth and a clear advantage.

A Property with Continuity

What sets The Laurels apart is the continuity of its use. From its origins as a hotel during Swaledale's industrial peak, through periods of private ownership, to its successful use as a B&B, it has consistently been a property that brings people together.

Its size, history and flexibility provide a rare opportunity for a new owner to continue its story—whether as a home, a business, or both.