

The Hilton's of Hilton Castle

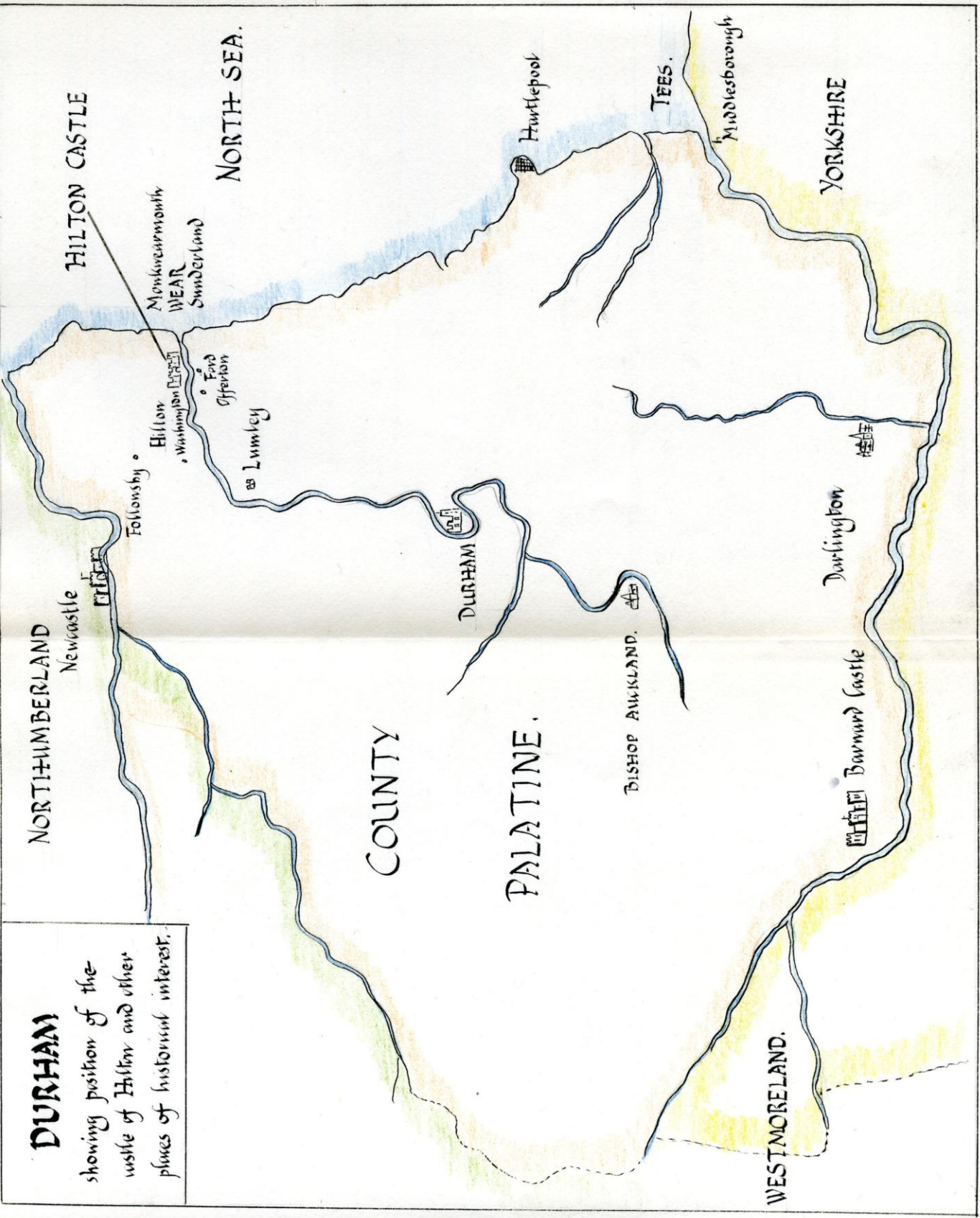


Introduction

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showing position of the
castle of Hiltun and other
places of historical interest.



About three miles west of the very busy port and industrial town of Sunderland, on what was once a lonely bank of the River Wear, in the County of Durham, stands the remains of a castle once the home of the Hilton family who were extremely powerful in the County Palatine of Durham. All that remains of the castle is a stately gatehouse of stone, which has been acquired for the nation by the National Trust. Once, no doubt, it stood among extensive forests in which roamed wild boar, numerous in the County of Durham before the countryside in many parts of the County was ravaged as a result of the Industrial Revolution and the demand for coal to drive the machines of the new Industrial Age. Hilton Castle has seen many changes take place about its ancient walls. It has been witness of the rise and fall of the Hilton family, the rise and fall of wooden shipbuilding on the Wear – within one of its walls were built the famous tea clippers which raced to the Far East, the most famous being the mighty “Torrens” – and it has witnessed the rise of Sunderland as the largest shipbuilding port in the world. It has seen the transformation of County Durham from pleasant, agricultural county to a grim, smoky industrial workshop. In ancient times all that would be visible from the battlements of Hilton Castle would be dense forest traversed only by wild animals and perhaps monks hurrying to and from the monasteries of Jarrow and Monkwearmouth along tracks known only to them and men of the forests.

A little way up stream was the thriving Abbey of Finchale undoubtedly the most important monastic remains in County Durham and rivalling Fountains Abbey and others in national importance. The Abbey was founded in 1196 by St. Godric, a Saint famous for his extreme asceticism. Only a few miles away the Venerable Bede spent a lifetime of study in the monastery of Monkwearmouth. Travel, in Bede’s time was a very risky business. As well as wild animals there were brigands who lived in the forests, and the Vikings, in their long ships were beginning to strike terror into the inhabitants of the coast by their swift plundering raids, although it was to be a very long time before they came to England to settle.

About fourteen miles from the mouth of the Wear, in a loop of the river, and on a precipitous rock stands the castle and cathedral of Durham – ‘half church of God, half castle against the Scots’, as Sir Walter Scott described it. From here the powerful Bishops ruled their County Palatine through the great families of the County, one of the greatest being the Hilton family.

Scattered around Hilton Castle, some visible, were also the homes of the other great families of the Palatine – the Lumleys, Percys, Washingtons, Balliols, Bruces and so on. Their arms graced the walls of Hilton Castle, but most of the families, like the Hiltons, are extinct.

What a transformation the County of Durham has undergone since those days of Bede, Vikings and lawlessness. From the battlements of Hilton Castle one can see a patchwork of carefully cultivated fields: the forests have been felled by early settlers and more recently and more extensively by the wooden shipbuilders. Collieries, chemical works, streets, shipyards, papermills, foundries all scar the landscape. Lands that once echoed of the shouts of attacking Scots and defending English, and of hunting parties chasing the wild boar, now echoes to the sound of factory buzzers and escaping steam. The river in which swam salmon is now polluted by the excrement of industry. The monasteries of Jarrow and Monkwearmouth have disappeared, although the Anglo-Saxon church of St. Peter’s still remains, one of the oldest churches in Britain. Finchale Abbey is a National Trust ruin, Lumley Castle houses students and Washington Hall (the home of the ancestors of George Washington) has been saved from ruin by the intervention of the National Trust. Only Durham City with its Castle and Cathedral retains much of its splendour, almost untouched by the ravaging hand of industry. The walls of Hilton Castle are scaffolded and undergoing repairs by the Ministry of Works. Within these walls have been heard the sounds of joy and sorrow; they have shaken with dance and echoed back the sound of men in battle. The castle rose in lawless times – the times of harrying, burning, fighting – time when might was right and in times when the news travelled slowly over districts roadless, and abounding in the dangers of roving outlaws and wild animals. What a story the old place has to tell! Every stone is a biography, every alteration or addition the result of anxious planning and supposed necessity. Traditions abound about it and legends are connected with it. Those ancestors of ours, those men who built these castles have gone but these castles remain as a memorial to them. The old stone tower of Hilton stands, grim and grey, with the age of nearly a thousand years upon it. We can build magnificent houses, schools, factories and so on but we cannot, no matter what our wealth or talent, replace these ancient buildings. They are part of the heritage of this ancient land of ours and it is our duty to care for them and pass them on to future generations. But if we only looked upon them

as picturesque, quaint old buildings, they would be of little use. It is as memorials and reminders of our ancestors that they must be treasured. History is concerned with people and if these old buildings throw some light on people long since dead, then they are invaluable to the historian. The title of this work is, "The Hiltons of Hilton Castle"; they were real people who laughed, sorrowed, suffered, hunted, fought and died. All that remains of this once powerful family is the castle, and documents scattered all over the county. In writing about history the aim must be to try and bring those ancestors to life by studying their creations which are left to us; their buildings, writings, clothes and so on. The study of these objects is then a means to an end and not an end in itself. Too many people who call themselves local historians forget this: if their research is not aimed at finding out how people lived, it is not history.

This attempt to build up the story of the Hilton family must be based upon the history of the castle as that, along with scattered evidence, is all that remains to remind us of them. As far as possible the connections between the Hiltons and the County Palatine of Durham, will be shown. Unfortunately, the family is now extinct and it is very difficult to find original material. Family records have completely disappeared. Being a separate regality, Durham is not included in the Domesday Survey, and the earliest record is the Boldon Book, which is compiled by Bishop Pudsey in 1183 AD. It is really a northern Domesday Book, being a survey of North Country Manors belonging to the Bishop of Durham. It is of great value to the historian. Later there is survey of the County made by order of Bishop Hatfield who ruled as Bishop from 1345 to 1381. Another source of information is Halmote Rolls commenced in 1345, which contains a record of the holders of Bishop's lands. The other sources of evidence must be the Castle itself and the writings of historians who wrote at the time when the Hilton family was still in possession of the family seat at Hilton.

The Hiltons of Hilton Castle

Chapter One

**The Family History showing
connection with County Palatine**

The origin of the Hilton family is wrapped in mystery. The name, Hilton, is of course, Anglo Saxon in origin. Place names fall into two groups: the first group merely consists of simple roots e.g. Chester, which means 'camp'. The second group consists of compound words in which the first part is either personal or descriptive e.g. Middleton which means 'middle village'. So the simple root is preceded by a descriptive or personal word. An example of the latter in Durham is Edmundbyers or 'Edmunds village' Hilton appears, quite obviously, to fall into the second group, with a descriptive epithet. But first let us examine the essential root 'ton'. It is a root which appears again and again in English place names. When the Anglo Saxons arrived in England they planted settlers in fertile districts. By the margins of meandering rivers which had already been named by the Celts (the Wear, for example), the Saxon families located themselves: the forest growth was cleared and a portion was enclosed or guarded with the twigs of the wood. Hence 'tine' or 'tun' as it became occurs regularly in Anglo Saxon names. The termination came not only to mean the 'tines' or twigs alone, nor yet the hedges, but the whole enclosure or estate, was the tun or ton of some person. No traces of a ton or village have been found at Hilton but this is to be expected as the dwellings would be of wood. The first part of the word – the descriptive epithet – appears to be hill, this making the whole word mean 'the village on the hill'. But in the study of place names, it will be found that there are many names, which, as they appear quite obvious, lead the unwary astray. Surtees that reliable historian accepts 'the village on the hill' version, but there is a Saxon word 'heltun' which means 'low and sequestered'. Thus there are two possible interpretations of Hilton, which are blatantly contradictory; one meaning high ground, and the other low. There is no evidence to support either. So much for the name.

Legendary Evidence

There is no uniformity in the accounts of the origin of the Hilton family by historians of Durham County. Hutchinson, a prominent historian writes, "Three hundred years before the conquest, even in the time of King Athelstan, one of the Saxon monarchs, the family of Hilton was settled in" England in great reputation". This account is based upon no evidence existing today; perhaps the historian was in possession of evidence which has since been lost or destroyed. He says the family was established in "great reputation", which points to the formation of the family at a far earlier date.

There are many traditions accounting for the origin of the Hilton family. These may possess a grain of truth, as sometimes supposed legendary history is proved later to be very near the truth. The "legends" of King Arthur are now being proved by archaeology to be surprisingly accurate when for so long his very existence has been doubted by prominent historians. The earliest of these Hilton legends gives some northern rover as the founder of this line. Under the form of one of Odin's ravens, a rover from the north "wooed and won a Saxon maid, with all her lands and tower". There is a poem in Durham which gives this legend:-

"Tis innocence and youth that makes
In Edith's fancy such mistakes;
But that maiden kisses, that holy power,
O'er planet and
The elfish spell hath lost its charms
And the Danish knight is in Edith's arms;
And Harold, at his bride's request'
His barbarous god's foreswore –
Freya and Woden and Balder and Thor
And Jarrow, with taper burning bright
Hails her gallant proselyte"

Doubtful as the legend may be, the last baron recognised the raven as his badge, and had wooden ravens placed over the east and west entrances to the castle. The founder may have been one of the fierce Vikings, who, in the days of King Beorhtric, settled upon the coasts of Northumbria. Or he may have come across the sea in the ships of rough Swend, Forkbeard, or King Sweyn of Denmark, and Olaf

of Norway, whose followers poured into England in 993AD, and again in 1003 AD, to avenge the massacre of their countrymen on St Brice's Eve, 1002.

The origin of the family is too remote ever to be cleared up, but it is certain that the Hilton family were a powerful, well established family in Durham from very early times. The first authentic evidence is in 1157AD. There is evidence that in this year Romanus-de-Hilton made an agreement with Absolum, Prior of Durham, that he should have an officiating chaplain in his chapel at Hilton. Beyond this facts do not go. But it is obvious from this scanty evidence that by 1157AD the Hilton family was well established in Durham.

What of the locality before this time? The history of the locality for sometime before the death of the Venerable Bede is very clear. He, of course, lived for most of his life at the monastery at Jarrow which is about 5 miles from Hilton Castle. If the Hilton family had existed during Bede's lifetime, I am sure that there would be a mention of them somewhere in Bede's writings. But there is no mention of them, so that the pre-Bede legends can, quite reasonably, be dismissed as pure fiction.

After the death of Bede in 735 AD there is nothing known of the locality near the mouth of the river for about 400 years. According to Bede, in 674 AD, Benedict Biscop, on his return from Rome, imported two cloaks of silk, wonderfully wrought, and in exchange for these he obtained from King Aldfrid three hides of land, near the bank on south bank of the Wear (this perhaps is the site of Sunderland). The monastery of Wearmouth was built and Biscop was the first Abbot. After him came Easterwin, then Sigfrid, Ceolfrid and Huaethbert the fifth Abbot, who was probably alive at the death of Bede. For 130 years after this there are no records of the locality; a darkness descends on the locality with the death of the greatest historian. This illustrates how important Bede is to our knowledge of the England of his time – and before.

In 867 AD the Danes landed in considerable force on the banks of the Humber. They spread in all directions and penetrated to York, which they burnt. They reached the Tyne, "devastating the country as they went". This devastation doubtless included the monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow, the main seats of learning in England and famous throughout Christian Europe.

Two centuries later Malcolm of Scotland overran the whole of Northumbria, bore away from the mouth of the Wear, Edgar Atheling and Margaret, his sister whom he made his wife – the St. Margaret of Scotland – and burnt a church on the banks of the Wear. Whether this was the restored monastery of Wearmouth cannot be determined. Then in 1072 AD. Aldwin, Elwy and Reinfried, monks of Thercia, settled in Muncaster, on the banks of the Tyne. At the request of Walcher, the Bishop of Durham, they moved from Muncaster to Jarrow, where they found the church of Biscop in ruins. They made a building of logs and lived in huts near this new church of Jarrow. Reinfried left Jarrow for Whitby, and Aldwin and some followers moved north and settled at Melrose. Apparently Malcolm, King of Scotland, viewed these new settlers with displeasure, and threatened to kill them if they remained. Bishop Walcher also urged them to return, but the valiant monks defied Malcolm and remained for some time at Melrose. It was not until Walcher threatened to excommunicate them that they consented to move. They settled on the banks of the Wear, amid the ruins of the monastery of Biscop at Wearmouth. A scene of extreme desolation presented itself to the wandering monks. They, however, set to work, and soon the walls were repaired and the building re-roofed. In twelve months the monastery was completely re-built and once more it was a place of worship as in the days of Benedict before the ravaging Vikings descended upon it. Bishop Walcher granted to the monastery the tithes of South Wearmouth. William, his successor, gave them the vill of Southwick. In 1083AD. he moved the monks to Durham, and made the monastery of Wearmouth a cell dependant upon St. Cuthbert, at Durham. The centre of religion and learning was moving from the Wearmouth and Jarrow of Bede to the more recently founded church at Durham or Dunholm to give it its Saxon name. It was the attempt of French speaking Normans to pronounce the Saxon Dunholm that changed the name to Durham, so no doubt, many students of place names will have been misled by the name Durham.

In 1157 AD then, it is that Romanus-de-Hilton makes an agreement with the Prior of Durham concerning the license of his chaplain at Hilton. Alexander, the successor to the Romanus confirmed the agreement made with the Prior. Romanus therefore is the first holder of Hilton and in 1157AD the date, at which he made the agreement with the Prior, is the earliest on which to build anything certain. As I have already said, the Hilton family was probably founded at a very early date, and probably there

has been a home of the Hiltons, where the castle now stands, from very early times, but attractive as the stories of the foundation of the family, legends unsupported by facts must be taken for what they are worth, and it is natural that so ancient a family as the Hiltons should have collected the usual crop of unsupported tradition. The job of the historian is to try to find the kernel of truth that exists in these legends.

The locality of Hilton then, is of great historical interest nationally as well as locally, and the Hiltons have close connections with the locality. There are now no remains of the monastery of Wearmouth. Only the Saxon Church of St. Peters Monkwearmouth remains as a reminder of the past greatness of the locality. Similarly at Jarrow, the monastery has disappeared and only the Saxon Church of St. Pauls remains. It is impossible to dissociate the two names, Jarrow and Monkwearmouth. As they have definite connections with the Hiltons, and are of such great historical interest. I will briefly show their importance both locally and nationally. St. Peters Church is all that remains of the monastery of Wearmouth, and in the church is an ancient stone monument which is thought to have to have been erected to commemorate the Baron William of Hilton. (I will discuss this monument in a later chapter) In their earliest origin, in the ups and downs of their long existence, and almost if not quite, in their present conditions, the sister churches have met with almost identical experiences. Their foundations were laid within the short period of ten years; they have risen and decayed and revived (more than once) almost simultaneously. They have shared together honour and neglect, wealth and poverty. Always, as was the desire of their great founder, Jarrow and Wearmouth have been one. Planted together, long ago as outposts of religious culture brought from abroad to the mouths of the Tyne and the Wear, the churches of St. Peters, Monkwearmouth (the modern name for Wearmouth) and St. Pauls Jarrow, are now the religious centres of populous, industrialised districts. The churches where Bede worshipped are still places of worship. In Jarrow and Monkwearmouth are to be found the earliest form of English ecclesiastical architecture Monkwearmouth saw the birth and Jarrow the death of the patriarch of English historians. He spent practically the whole of his life in the united convent of St. Peter and St. Paul. I have described how Benedict Biscop built the church of St. Peters, of which the western wall and porch still remain. The house at Wearmouth grew and prospered a home of arts, science and religion. There Bede began to acquire his wonderful knowledge, and John the Chanter founded his great school of music. Seven years after its foundation (681) expansion was necessary, and a new grant of land was obtained, this time at Jarrow, on the south bank of the Tyne. Soon after this event, Biscop departed on his last visit to Rome. He was absent three years during which time both houses suffered heavily from the plague. At Jarrow nearly the whole convent was wiped out. At that time only Ceolfrid, in charge of the monastery, and a small boy (probably Bede) were left to chant the daily services. Only a few stones of the great church of Jarrow remain, but a smaller church built and consecrated before the larger one, now forms the chancel of Jarrow church today.

A period of great prosperity followed at Wearmouth and Jarrow until the death of Bede in 735, after which a period of darkness descended upon Northumbria, broken here and there by the light of Danish invasions. Yet the churches of Wearmouth and Jarrow lasted on, sacked, burned and desolated but not totally destroyed. Perhaps when the monasteries were being sacked the foundation of the Hilton family was being laid by some Danish warrior.

As I have already said, the period of darkness that followed the great days of the twin- monasteries, has left us with little history of the locality. The situations of the two churches would be against them during these insecure times. The raiders would look for some place that offered promise of pillage, and the rich land between the two monasteries would be left well cultivated by the monks. To a pagan race there would be no religious scruples to prevent them from sacking the monasteries. However it was not until 866 that Hingwar and Hubba burned the monastery at Wearmouth. Again in the year 875 the fleet of Halfdene was in the Tyne and probably destroyed the monastery at Jarrow. About this time began the journeyings of the remains of St. Cuthbert, and the flight from Lindisfarne.

The triumph of King Alfred is a well known part of our national history; the growing strength of recovering Christianity did the rest. The invaders became settlers, and have left this part of their history in the names of their new homes. This is especially true of Lincolnshire, but north of the Tees the English population simply retained land they had never ceased to occupy. Danish place-names in County Durham are few and far between, and certainly if a Danish warrior settled in Hilton he took the Saxon name as his family name.

The churches of Wearmouth and Jarrow were apparently not left in their desolated condition and they carried on their existence, though they had lost much of the importance they had in Bede's time. They were certainly in use at the time of the Conquest. The resettling of the monasteries by Aldwin, Ealfwin and Reinfred has already been described up to the agreement with the Prior of Durham concerning the licence of a chapel at Hilton.

Round these two monasteries then, all the light and learning of England revolved, and not only of England, but the whole of Europe. The Venerable Bede, undoubtedly the greatest son of the locality is remembered (if anything besides his historical work is needed) by various memorials the most outstanding being the outstanding being a handsome stone cross at Roker, Sunderland, within one mile of his birthplace.

Extracts from letter printed in Rundall's M.SS. and found in possession of the last Baron Hilton.

There are now before me some papers relating to the antiquity of your family, the genealogy of your ancestors and their transactions in peace and war.....

To wit –

- that 300 years before the conquest, in the reign of Athelstone, the family of Hiltons settled in England, as appears by the inscription at Hartlepool. -
- that upon your coming over of the Conqueror, Lancelot de Hilton and his two sons joined him and espoused his cause –
- that Lancelot was soon after slain at Faversham, Kent –
- that to his eldest son, Henry, the king gave a large tract of land on the River Wear, not far from Wearmouth, as a reward for his own and his sons valour –
- that Henry Hilton built Hilton Castle in 1072 –
- that in the reign of Edward III John Hilton, who sent four of his sons to the wars in France, under the Black Prince, was first created Baron of Hilton Castle for the defence of it against the Scots –
- that this peerage continued in the family seven generations, until it was forfeited on account of some unguarded words, of which the Bishop of Durham gave information to the court, which William, the seventh and last Baron, spoke against the queen and her favourite De La Poole –

In Carters "Honor Redwinns" it is stated that Adam Hilton "gave in 924, in the reign of Athelstone, to the monastery at Hartlepool, a pix or crucifix, which weighed 25oz. in silver and caused his arms to be engraven upon it". Unfortunately the crucifix does not now exist.

Extract from Randall's M.SS.

- that in the process of time Lancelot grandson of the aforesaid William was restored to his castle and part of his estate.
- This is an historical sketch of what I have gathered from these papers, but I must not forget to observe you further –
- That in your pedigree I met several names remarkable for their learning and piety, but almost innumerable named for their valour and martial deeds. The truth is, sir, that war seemed to have been the genius and pleasure and recreation of your ancestors. Nor do I know of any family that has been so lavish of its blood in its country's cause as yours. For ever since the Conquest I have remarked of the Hiltons, one as I have said was slain at Faversham; one in Normandy; one at Metz in France, three in the Holy Wars under Richard I; three in battle at Bordeaux under the Black Prince, one at Agincourt, two at Berwick against the Scots, two at the battle of St. Albans, five at Market Bosworth, four at Flodden, besides more my papers do not extend to –

I am, sir & &

Chelsea, January 14th, 1740

But too much space cannot be devoted to the immediate locality of Hilton Castle, although it may throw some light on the possible origin of the family. We must consider later material concerning the foundation and history of the family.

A letter was found in the possession of the last Baron John and was written just before his death (printed in Randall's mss. The historian Hutchinson accepts the evidence in this letter and copies it almost word for word in his History of Durham County. Unfortunately none of the documents referred to now exist. The evidence now remaining contradicts this letter. There is no trace of earlier buildings at Hilton than 1376, yet the writer claims that the castle was built soon after the Conquest. The evidence of the heraldic display points to the first ten years of the 15th century as the period of construction. What is more, the unusually un-military site of the castle (on the side of a hill) does not point to early Norman construction. The Norman building may, however, have been completely destroyed. The letter dates the settlement of the family in England to the reign of Athelstone and Adam, the first of the name, gave the silver crucifix to the monastery at Hartlepool, in 924. This story can be verified when the crucifix, suitably inscribed, is found by some ardent antiquarian. The whole content of the letter appears rather doubtful but I give it for what it is worth.

There is a tradition, almost certainly mythical, connected with the badge of the Hiltons. On the east side of the castle may be seen, carved in stone, above the Moses Head crest, the Hilton badge. (photograph) It consists of a roebuck, couchant, collared, chained and coroneted. The tradition is that the Hiltons, after the battle of Hastings, predicting how useless it would be to defy the Conqueror, decided to submit to William. So the father and son travelled south to meet the king. They presented him with a roebuck from their estates in the north. It was chained to show that they were not free, collared to show that they were under the yoke and crowned to show that they were still noble and had not lost all their freedom. This tradition has however nothing but the usual badge to support it.

County Palatine.

Before we can follow clearly the fortunes of the Hilton family it is necessary to examine and study the unusual position of the County Palatine of Durham, in England, and the position of the Hiltons as Barons of the Bishopric. The nucleus of the later Palatinate was already in being in 905 when Bishop Ealdhun of Chester-le-Street began to build his new cathedral on the rock at Durham, but the wealth that came to St Cuthbert's see expressed the veneration felt through out the North for a local saint of such eminence. In the Danelaw then, beyond the Tees, came to exist a group of liberties within which all types of pleas and forfeitures belonged to St. Cuthbert's Church. This is the nucleus, which existed before the Norman Conquest, of the County Palatine of Durham. William the Conqueror, with typical foresight, was to make use of these privileges.

The goal which the Danes pursued, at least for many years, was battle, murder and plunder; but the aim of the Norman's was conquest, law and peace. In order to obtain them in a land torn with internal strife an utter ruthlessness was necessary which included much cruelty. The people of England, especially in the North, where they were fiercest and most barbarous, had to be shown that those who lived by the sword must die by the sword, and with them their innocent dependants. After his triumph in the South, William hoped to form an Anglo-Norman state with little difficulty, but he did not take into account the bitter resistance of the barbarous English of Northumbria. They infuriated him so much that he administered savage reprisals which darkened his fame. He meant to give those savages a lesson, before they could appreciate the blessings of peace. He meant to show that one man on the throne was master and would brook no interference from high or low. Therefore, Robert de Comines, the Norman was sent to keep an eye on the northern earls, and was slain in Durham; the Conqueror's punishment was swift and terrible. "I fell upon the English of the North like a roaring lion", said the king and his words were very true. "Between York and Durham he left no house standing and no human being alive that his horsemen could search out" (Trevelyan "History of England"). And hardly had the king's men withdrawn than the Scots, like a pack of wolves, invaded from the West, marched down the valley of the Tees and burned Wearmouth, and probably any building that existed at Hilton at that time. But the men of the North were not tamed yet and another rebellion, led by Waltheof, an English Nobleman who had been made Earl of Northumbria by William, was easily suppressed and Waltheof was executed Winchester. Walcher, the first Norman Bishop of Durham, was also made Earl

of Northumbria. He, however, was murdered at Gateshead, by a mob, infuriated by the murder of a popular English nobleman. For this new outrage the king's vengeance was swift and merciless. An army led by Odo, the military Bishop of Bayeux, again ravaged the North, killing both innocent and guilty.

This last severe lesson made the Northumbrian people (those that were left) realise that they were being ruled by a very determined man and they began to settle down. William, being the great statesman he was, grasped the importance to the Crown of the peculiar privileges which had gathered round the tomb of St. Cuthbert. He therefore encouraged and legalised them giving them his personal approval and thus he deliberately laid the Norman foundation of the County Palatine, which was to serve for so long as England's buffer against the Scots – "half church of God, half castle against the Scots."

It is easy to realise why records of pre-Norman days in Northumbria are so difficult to find – or are non-existent. While the South was settling down under – or alongside – the Normans the North, especially beyond the Tees, was being laid waste, first by Normans and then by Scots.

William then was quick to see the advantages of having a quasi-independent power on the outskirts of England which would act as a protection against the Scots, and which would be unlikely to develop into a rival to the Crown, because of the constant menace of raiding Scots and because the privileges of this independent state, being derived from its sanctity, required that the ruler should be a spiritual one. No baron could govern the Patrimony of St. Cuthbert, as the County Palatine was once called. The monks were the natural guardians of St. Cuthbert's shrine, and the Bishop was the natural head of the monks. The King of England had nothing to fear from a bishop whose appointment he could control and who could have no legal heirs. William and his successors thought it was an ideal arrangement, and history has shown them to be right. Never, throughout the whole long rule of these 'ecclesiastical potentates' did any one of the haughty and powerful Prince Bishops cause any more than temporary annoyance to the English Crown. William then confirmed all the gifts of his Anglo-Saxon predecessors and with great foresight decided to continue their policy.

In the reign of William II Bishop William de St. Calais became not only the spiritual head of the Church of Durham but also the supreme political ruler of all the territory with the Bishopric. His power within the Bishopric was as absolute as that of the king's in the rest of the country. The king's writ did not apply in the Bishop's domain. The Bishop had his own judges, his own council and courts, his own army, his own vassals and even his own mint. He created his own Barons, known as 'Barons of the Bishopric', the first being the Prior of Durham and second came the Barons of Hilton. There were however at this time greater families than the Hiltons in Durham but they were Barons of the realm and included the Bruces and Balliols, names everyone in England knows. But the importance of the Hiltons within the County must have been great if they were the first Barons of the Bishopric.

The Bishop of Durham continued to hold this absolute power until the advent of the Tutors, who were determined to destroy the last remnants of feudal splendour and govern themselves. The reformation gave them this opportunity. The Council of the North practically deprived the Bishop of his independence and the seizure by Elizabeth, of the land of the Neville's, for treason, was a loss to his pocket as well as a denial of his rights. The political power of the Bishop dwindled from this day but he still remained a Count Palatine and a very rich man. He remained so until the peculiar privileges of the Palatinate were taken over by the Crown in 1830. Now a Socialist County Council rules in the place of the 'ecclesiastical potentates'.

Reminders of the past greatness of the Prince Bishops still exist. To this day the mitre of the Bishop of Durham is circled with a coronet. His arms alone are crossed with a sword as well as a staff and, with the Bishops of London and Winchester – the two capitals of England; he takes precedence over all other Bishops. At the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II the Bishop of Durham had the honoured position at her right hand throughout the ceremony, a reminder of the former power of the Prince Bishops of Durham.

Barons of the Bishopric

I have mentioned that the Bishop had his own Barons known as Barons of the Bishopric. These Barons owed the Bishop Homage and fealty as temporal head of the province. In 1197 the number of Barons

of the Bishopric is recorded as ten, but this is a larger number than is usually given. The normal number given is four – The Prior of Durham, Hiltons of Hilton Castle, Bulmer of Brancepeth, and Conyers of Sockbourne, in that order. The term "Barons of the Bishopric" appears at first to have been simply a title of honour and to have carried "no sense of military or territorial power". Those mighty Barons, Neville, Bruce and Balliol, laid no claim to the distinction, for they were peers of the realm, and a Baron of England was of more importance than a Baron of the Bishopric. Added to the four names given, in another list is given the families of Surtees, Hansard (no relation to the parliamentary reporter), Lumley and Fitz Marmaduke, while another list adds the names of Escolland. The numbers must have varied from time to time as one family died out and another was added, but the families mentioned are the oldest and the Hilton family is probably the most ancient.

It is very interesting to note that the most recent of Durham historians, Sir Timothy Eden (County Series 'Durham' Vol. I – pub. 1952) repeats the evidence of the letter I have shown. He says, "Although they never reached any position of eminence in the country, it is almost an understatement to say that they were lavish of their blood in their country's cause. They poured it out like water. Before the reign of Richard I according to an ancient manuscript, three Hiltons had already been killed in battle in France or England; four more were killed in the Crusades, three fighting for the Black Prince, one at Agincourt, two against the Scots, seven in the Wars of the Roses, and four at the battle of Flodden. If it be true, this warrior record is probably unique in English history. The 'ancient manuscript' referred to is, no doubt, the letter shown. Unfortunately, as I have said, there is no evidence to support this letter. I can't dismiss it as fiction but I do regard it with suspicion. It claims that the Barons of Hilton were peers of the realm from the reign of Edward III for seven generations until the reign of Queen Elizabeth. As far as I can discover there is no evidence to support this claim either. It should be pointed out however, in support of the evidence of the manuscript, that the position of Durham as a buffer state against the Scots, and the continual state of war between the Scots and the Barons of the Bishopric, increases the likelihood of a large number of Hiltons being killed in battles with the Scots. As leading Barons of the Bishopric they must have figured prominently in any warfare. The eastern plain of Durham in which Hilton lies (map p1) was ravaged many times by marauding Scottish armies and although the many castles (Durham, Lumley, Lambton, Hilton etc.) did not fall the surrounding countryside was plundered.

We have seen then that during the Middle Ages, and, in a restricted sense, up to the 19th Century, the County of Durham was withdrawn from the ordinary administration of the Kingdom, and was governed by its Bishops with an unusual amount of independence. There existed in Durham a tiny feudal England, which survived into the Tudor period, with its own Barons, first after the Prior of Durham, being the Hiltons of Hilton Castle.

The Hiltons in The County Palatine.

I have no intention of discussing the births and deaths of the lives of everyone of the Hilton family. To do so would take up too much space and would be of little interest. The family tree is attached and gives the direct descent of the Hiltons as far as possible. Apparently if we are to believe the manuscript I have quoted, and traditions, the more illustrious of the Hiltons either lived at a time back to which records do not go, or records of their deed in later ages have been lost. I will deal now with those for whom there are authentic records, and who were notable in some way (not necessarily good) in the Bishopric.

Romanus already mentioned in connection with the Prior of Durham and his chaplain at Hilton, appears in the Reign of Henry II. The castle building reign of Stephen was just over, and the country around the home of Romanus must have been in a very unsettled state. In 1136 David of Scotland overran the whole of the north of England. He burned the castles at Alnwick and Newcastle and met Stephen near the castle at Durham, when he was fought off by the promise of the earldom of Northumberland. In 1138 he renewed the war on the pretence of Stephen breaking his promise. His soldiers devastated Northumberland and Durham committing in the process, the most horrible crimes. Quarter was given to none except young and beautiful women who were taken as slaves to Scotland. The fury of these Scottish raids, so enraged the Northern nobles that an army was collected at Northallerton. Their standard was a crucifix attached to a high pole, and fixed to the framework of a wagon. They met David and his army near Northallerton and in the famous "Battle of the Standard" the Scots were

defeated, 12,000 of them, it is said being slain. This was indeed revenge for the Northern Englishmen who had suffered so much at the hands of the semi-barbarous Scots. It has already been shown that the Hilton family must have been well established by this date therefore it is quite possible that the two Hiltons mentioned as being killed before the time of Richard I, against the Scots, were killed in this great battle. This is entirely supposition however.

Since the landing of William, castles were springing up all over the country, in the Norman tradition. In the reign of Stephen the castles of the clergy and nobility were mercenary soldiers, who plundered indiscriminately. The country was in a disorganised state, land was untilled and farming tools were rusting. The mercenaries murdered, pillaged, enslaved; the castles were the homes of these licensed robbers and the peasantry could do nothing. They defied all law and justice, from the security of their great moated fortresses. In 1154 Henry succeeded to the throne and immediately dismissed the mercenaries and ordered all newly built castles to be demolished. It was at this time that Romanus made his application to the Prior of Durham for a chaplain to officiate in his chapel at Hilton. The name of Romanus also appears about the same time as a witness to a deed between Bishop Pudsey and Andrew Bulmer, and in 1166, in a return of Bishop Pudsey, he held three knights fees in 'ancient feoffment', so that it is obvious that Romanus was of some importance, and not the first of his line. Romanus, who appears to have been more religious than warlike, lived to the passing of the Constitution of Howendon' in 1164 and to see the issue of the quarrel between the king of England and Becket, and to know of the exile and eventual murder of Becket.

The name of Alexander appears in 1171 and he is given the title of "Baron of the Bishopric". He appears as witness in a deed of John the Archdeacon and Germanus, the Prior of Durham.

The Barons of Hilton for the next 150 years or so seem to have been more churchmen than soldiers. Robert succeeded to the title in 1321 and he appears

To have spent his time looking after the temporal comfort of his chaplains. During this time, the Barons of the country took up arms against Gareton the favourite of the king. Their armies marched from York to Newcastle to seize the king and his favourite. They, however, escaped to Tynemouth and thence to Scarborough. Bannockburn had been fought and lost. Lancaster and the Barons had formed an alliance with the Scots against Edward and had been defeated at Boroughbridge, and Edward himself had been deposed and murdered in Berkeley Castle in Gloucester. During these stirring times no mention is made of Robert, Baron of Hilton, except in Church matters. His son, Alexander, however, seems to have been more warlike. He joined the standard of Edward III and was probably present at the defeat of the Scots at Halidon Hill in 1333, for he held a command under Lord Neville in the Scottish Wars. Edward III summoned 'Alexander Baron of Hilton' to Parliament as a Baron of the Bishopric in 1332 and 1333. He died in 1362.

After Baron Alexander died in 1361 he was followed by his son Robert, who was born in 1349 and died in 1376. He married Eleanor, daughter and heiress of the house of Felton, who brought with her considerable property, and whose arms still remain on the front of the castle (Chapter on heraldry).

The next Baron, William was born in 1356. He was probably the builder of the present gatehouse, and in 1417 (for some unknown reason) he had to pledge with the Prior of Durham for 58 shillings, a basin and a ewer of silver. It would appear then that the family was not well off at this period. We find that for the battle of Flodden 'Master William Hilton Esq.' Had to borrow his own armour from 'the Reverend Father in God, Thomas Prior of Duresme' (the spelling of Durham at this time is very interesting; it appears to be in the mid-stages of its metamorphosis from the Anglo-Saxon Dunholm to the present spelling). William had presumably pledged his armour to the convent for money. So the young squire went forth with a 'banner, a standard and the rote armour of the full and whole arms of the Hiltons', under his promise to give them back to the monastery, 'his busyness at the making of these presents conveniently doon'. This is a novel and modest way in which to refer to one's intention of 'going to the front' and taking part in what was to be one of the greatest battles in English history. The Hilton family were then definitely represented at this great battle, though whether four of them were killed in it, as claimed by the manuscript quoted, is doubtful.

The same document, referring to the piety of the Hiltons appears to have overlooked the relationships between the Hilton family and the Fell of Wearmouth (now dependent on Durham). The agreement at Alexander in 1157 with prior Germanus, that the Hiltons should attend the mother church of Wearmouth (St. Peters) on great festivals, and that the large arms should be presented to the mother

church, does not appear to have worked smoothly. The history of the Fell of Wearmouth from the time when Bishop Williams removed the monks to Durham, to the dissolution of the monastery, is scarcely more than a history of grievances and squabbles between the Master of Wearmouth and the Barons of Hilton. In the time of Robert, the Master of Wearmouth makes a complaint that the chaplains of Hilton kept back for their own use the Easter oblations, and he also states that this practice has been going on for more than a century and a half, which suggests that it must have become a tradition for the Hiltons not to pay the Easter oblations. The Master of Wearmouth must have been in financial trouble or had some private grudge against the Hiltons to break such an old tradition. But there were more points of disagreement than this. The chaplain is also accused of keeping back the tithe of land in his own occupation, refusing to give up the tithes of Elias Fitzpatrick and John de Auckland, and refusing to hand over the tithes of the fisheries of Burnmouth and Edendene and the tithe of Hilton Mill. He also put into his own pocket the profits of the sale of holy water to the villages of North Hilton and Newton (the site of which has been lost). The chaplain at Hilton (no doubt with the backing of the Baron) must have been making a good living out of his holy office and I think this illustrates the position of the clergy in England during the Middle Ages. "Like priest, like people", and we find that as the priest refused to pay his debts so others refused to pay theirs. Adam of Fulwell (now a district of Sunderland), Thomas Wywood and others, are accused of retaining the tithes of Croketayre fishery (no trace of this name now).

But shocking as was the behaviour of the priest and his flock, the behaviour of the Baron and his servants was worse. The Master of Wearmouth sadly complains of the conduct of the servants of William, son of the Baron, and especially of one John Potts, a notorious offender and apparently a colourful character. He is accused of stealing corn from the Fell of Wearmouth and putting his horse in a hayfield not belonging to him. He also assaulted the keeper of the church, because having appeared on Palm Sunday for the purpose of being shriven, the keeper had refused. John Potts was apparently fighting his master's battles for on informing the Baron of the refusal; the Baron went to the church and also assaulted the keeper. "He therewith also laid hands on him and pulled his hood against his neck (presumably in an effort to strangle him), for which deed the keeper and his fellows must not abide in the place and withdrew themselves, leaving God's service undone, to the great displeasure of God and of the Holy Church, and especially to the said Prior and his monks". Pious Hilton indeed! Whether the matters were settled is not known, but the dissolution was soon to put an end to such complaints. The incidents related may seem rather unimportant to include in a history of the Hiltons, but history is concerned with people, and such incidents, so quaintly recorded, jump the gap of the centuries and connect us with those Mediaeval Englishmen, more effectively than any amount of study of ancient castles or political history can.

The Baron William who borrowed his armour from the Prior of Durham was succeeded by his son – Thomas in 1537. The quarrel between Henry and the Pope had been going on some time when Sir Thomas came to the estate. In 1534 the Church of England was separated from the Church of Rome. The refusal of the Pope to grant a divorce from Catherine was the final match which lighted up a series of grievances which Henry and his people had. But they were followed by other, far more serious ones. The policy of Henry in suppressing and spoiling the monasteries, in exacting from the clergy submission, which gave the King alone power to summon fornication and other measures, greatly offended both clergy and deity. A religious rebellion the "Pilgrimage of Grace" broke out in South, Lincolnshire in 1536. All who took part in this revolt took an oath that their only desire was to drive away bad counsellors from the king, to restore the Church, and to suppress heresy. The rising failed for want of a competent leader, but a second rising which took place in the Northern Counties and which numbered 40,000 men was more formidable. It was led by Aske, a gentleman from Howden, in Yorkshire. He was joined by Lord D'Arcy, Sir Robt. Constable, Sir Christopher Danby, Sir Thomas Hilton and many others. The Baron of Hilton was still then a powerful Baron if he was mentioned as one of the protagonists. They marched southwards headed by the monks who carried a sacred banner, on which were displayed the five names. York, Doncaster and Hull were taken. The monasteries on the journey were restored as far as possible and the leaders sent their requests to the king by the hands of the Duke of Norfolk, and Sir Thomas Hilton was one of the Barons deputed to wait upon the Duke on his return from his interview with the king. Sir Thomas was afterwards required to make a return of all in the bishopric whose lands or profits were upwards of £40 a year. In the reign of Philip and Mary, Sir Thomas was governor of Tynemouth Castle. He died without issue though married four times and his

brother William succeeded to the estates. His son William succeeded his father and for this support of the Queen during the rebellion of the Earls he was knighted in 1570. He sent the Queen 50 pounds on her privy seal.

Sir William died in 1600 and was succeeded by his son Thomas who was in turn succeeded by his son Henry, who more than anyone else brought about the ruin of the family. He was 'of most melancholy disposition' and by a will, which is rather unusual he left his entire estate to the Lord Mayor and Corporation of London on condition that they should pay 28 pounds annually to thirty eight parishes he named, for 99 years. After 99 years the estate was to go to the heir at-law. Finally Henry desired burial in St. Paul's Cathedral. Why he should make this unusual will is unknown. One can only assume that he was eccentric, but there is no doubt that he ruined the Hilton family.

This 'melancholy Baron' died in 1640 and his brother John succeeded to the encumbered estate in 1642. He took an active part in the Civil War and served in the Royal army under the Marquis of Newcastle. The will of the late Baron had reduced the Hilton possessions to little more than a name; but the Baron was a stout Royalist and what little he had, he staked in the cause of the king. In the struggle between the royal army and that of the Scots on the border the probability is that the Hilton estates suffered, from both sides. This must have especially been so in the fight on Boldon Hill, between Royalists forces and the Scots, in 1645. The Scots seized Newcastle, crossed the Wear at a bridge near Lumley and entered Sunderland on March 4th 1645. The natural enemy was yet again ravaging the County Palatine, this time with some support from English Parliamentarians. The Marquis of Newcastle drew up his forces on Boldon Hills, overlooking Hilton Castle, the Scots facing him. There was however, no fighting. The Marquis withdrew to Durham and the Scots, wanting quarters and forage moved toward Durham, but finding the country stripped of cattle and provisions moved back and quartered near Shields. The Royal troops returned and drew up on the high ground above Hilton and the Scots faced them all day on heights nearer the sea. A distant cannonade between the two armies ensured, parties of musketry attempting to drive each other from hedges. It was in these skirmishes that the men were killed whose skeletons were found, about 18 inches below the surface, during work on a housing estate in 1949, near a field known as the "Battlefield". There is little doubt that the "Battlefield" was the scene of the engagement, and these men were given a shallow burial on the site of the engagement. Whether they were Royalists or Parliamentarians is not known. Another reminder of these days is cannon, now in a local park, dredged from the River Wear and said to be a cannon of the Scottish army of occupation. However, there was no definite result and the Marquis retired again towards Durham. Both armies then, passed over the Hilton estates and the country was laid bare, the estates, no doubt, suffering considerably. The castle appears to have remained untouched, so the Scots must have doubted their ability to capture it.

The close of the Civil War brought distress to those who were on the losing side, and among these who had given up all for the king was the Baron of Hilton, who was included amongst the number of malignants. That the Hiltons acquitted themselves well in battle, despite the alienation of their property, may be seen from the following letter, dated 1647:-

"Henry Ewbank. Permit the baron of Hilton and his sonnes to pass with 18 horse from Wearmouth to Hartlepool, in such sort as their quality, they have given their honours to make no attempt on the Parliament soldiers, for which this shall be their good warrant.

"Francis Wrenn"

John, the eldest son, succeeded to the headship of the family in 1665. The absurd will of the "melancholy Baron" and the Civil War had torn the estate to pieces. His father had risked all the little left to them in the cause of the Royalist Party. The defeat of the King, and their being classed as malignants, left in the Baron's possession little more than an ancient or honourable name. After the restoration, the estates were restored to the family, but restored with the conditions – laid upon them by the will of Henry, so that the heir found himself unable to comply with the bequest of the will. The conditions of the restoration were that the claims of the will should be satisfied. This was too much for the estate, and an Act of Parliament was obtained to the effect that the payments should be reduced by one third. John then, in view of the fact that he was a staunch Cavalier, had had an almost hopeless task in his attempt to recover the estate. But he managed to restore the estates to the family, as I

have shown. He certainly deserves praise for the way in which he economised, and lived to win back to the ancient name some of the power which had been wantonly destroyed by the will of the "melancholy Baron".

Henry succeeded his brother John in 1688 and some evidence exists which might throw some light on the impoverished state of the Hiltons. In 1685, at the general muster of Captain Conyer's troop at Belrus Head, near Durham, in the list of deficiencies it is stated that Hilton's men needed "buffle coats". At any rate, Henry's will, in 1688 showed that the family fortune was very small.

Henry's son John succeeded to the estate, but died intestate in 1712, and was succeeded by his second son John, the last Baron. John was born in 1699 and died in 1739 and was buried in the chapel at Hilton. John, who was unmarried, left the estate to his nephew, Sir Richard Musgrave of Hayton Castle, on condition that he took the name of Hilton, with the castle and estate. It appears to be at this point that Hilton becomes Hylton, and is not used again in connection with the Durham estates.

Sir Richard found he had succeeded to an encumbered estate, and obtained an Act of Parliament allowing him to dispose of the estate and in 1750 the property was put up for sale. The manor of Hilton was sold to Mrs Bowes, widow of Sir George Bowes of Streatham and Gibside, through whom it passed to the Earl of Strathmore. The fate of the Castle will be shown in the chapter on the Castle.

For twenty generation the Hiltons made the castle their home and for 600 years (at least) they held nearly all the land that could be seen from the castle. The castle had now been acquired for the nation by the Ministry of Works and the estates are in numerous hands. The locality, in which at one time their family was all powerful, the Hiltons are now almost unknown. In the village of Hylton very few people have visited the castle and very few know anything of the history of the family. Only the legend of the Cauld Lad (Chapter 3) is well known and that in numerous forms. Apparently the dead bodies of the Barons were not allowed to rest for about 1880. The vault beneath the chapel was broken into by some men and boys. Five coffins were found and were broken open and the bones scattered in all directions. Nothing now remains in the vault and no one knows anything about any remains. Nothing now remains of the wealth and power of the Hilton family, but the memory of their greatness. They are almost forgotten but there probably will be a revival when the castle is opened to the public and a guide book of the castle and brief history of the Hiltons is produced. People who did not know of the existence of the Hiltons will be living in new council houses, built on what were once the states of the Hiltons, in sight of the ancient castle.

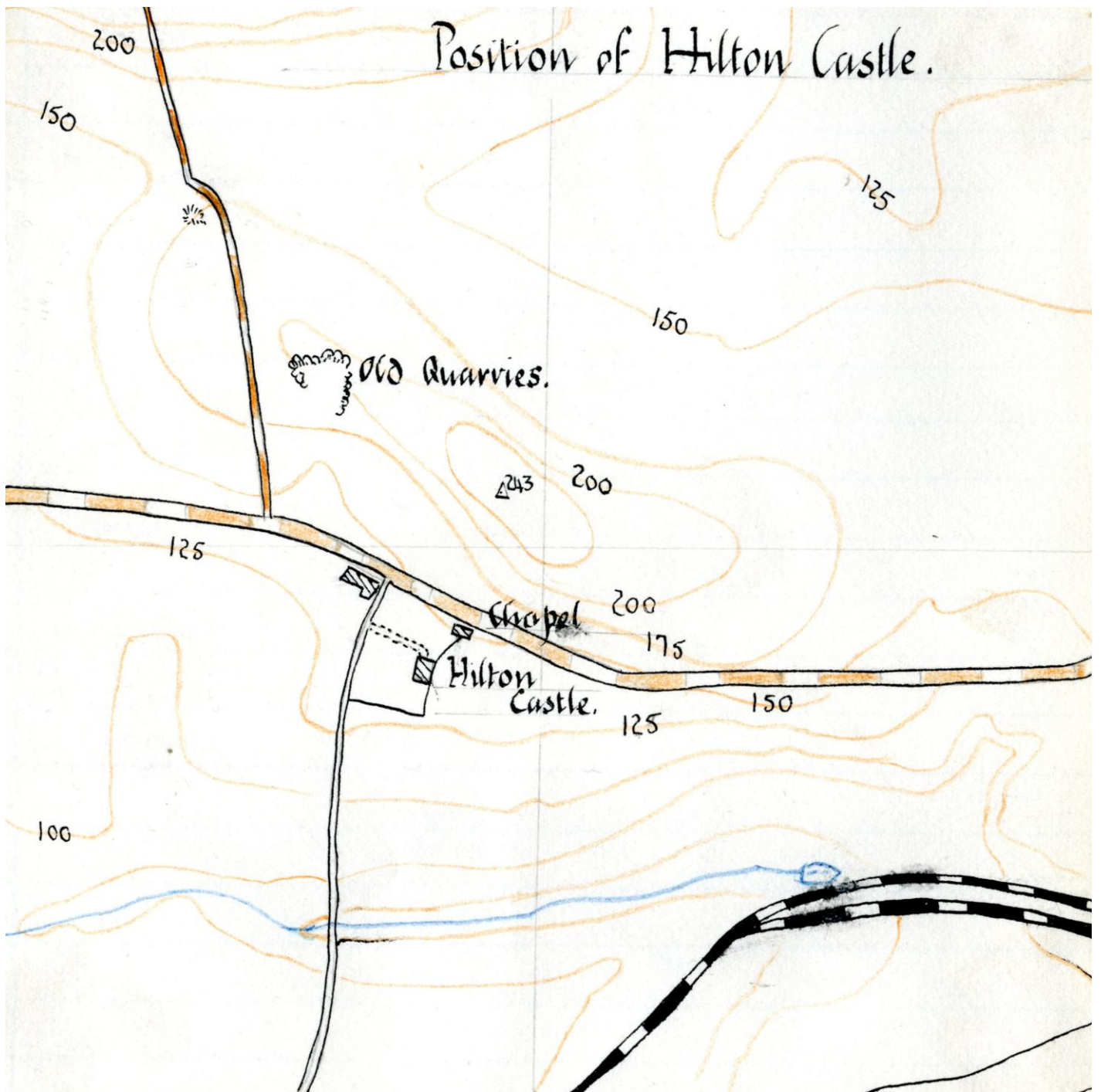
The Hiltons of Hilton Castle



Chapter Three

The Castle itself-

Position of Hilton Castle.



The Gatehouse, perhaps one of the most interesting remains of medieval military architecture is all that remains of the castle of the Hilton family. The origin of the gatehouse is certainly known. It was built by William of Hilton, who succeeded to the title in 1376 and died in 1435, and there is no trace of any earlier in or near the gatehouse. The evidence of the heraldic display on the west front points to the first ten years of the fifteenth century as the period of construction.

The unusually unmilitary position of the present gatehouse is a cause of speculation. One would have expected it to have been erected on the highest ground in the vicinity as the castle at Durham was, and which dominates the countryside. But immediately to the north of the gatehouse is a hill which rises to over 200 feet while the gatehouse is just above the 100 feet contour. What is more, there is no trace of defences on the high ground. The only defensive system in the area is the gatehouse and any defensive walls that may have surrounded it. An enemy situated on the hill above the castle would certainly cause the defenders of the castle much trouble. Perhaps the summit of the hill was too small on which to build an extensive defensive system, and the builder considered that the advantages to be in building a larger, well defended castle on lower ground outweighed those to be gained from building a smaller, but far more prominent, castle on higher ground. Certainly the castle cannot be seen from the north, the direction from which the traditional enemy – the Scots – would come.

The gatehouse was only one, and probably the latest, of a number of manorial buildings, of which it is the sole survivor except for the now ruinous chapel of St Katherine.

These manorial buildings were probably of timber, as any Saxon buildings would almost certainly be, and may have formed a quadrangle to the east of the gatehouse. I can only guess the extent of the castle, in the centuries following the Norman invasion, from existing evidence which has been largely obliterated by Barons of Hilton and, more drastically, by the alterations of later owners. A large timber gatehouse may have stood on the site of the existing structure, and have been demolished by William and rebuilt in stone as the first step in the rebuilding of the whole group of manorial buildings.

A large cobbled courtyard discovered to the west of the gatehouse about 1870 gave rise to the theory that the buildings had been grouped around this but this was more probably a forecourt such as commonly exists in front of mansions, especially in the 17th and eighteenth centuries. The earliest evidence as to the extent of the manorial buildings is an inquisition made in 1435, on the death of Baron William, which states:-

"There are in the same Manor, a hall, four chambers, a chapel, two barns, a kitchen, a house constructed of stone called a gatehouse."

This suggests that all but the gatehouse were of wood. In 1559 the four chambers are described as Great Chamber, Green Chamber, Middle Chamber, New Chamber, Gallery, Wardrobe, and Cellar within the parlour and parlour chamber over the hall door, low chequer. The kitchen is amplified as kitchen, larder, brewing vessels, and the gatehouse is described as a tower. Up to the third quarter of the sixteenth century Hilton was frequently referred to as Manor, and the gatehouse as tower or gatehouse, not as castle, but a settlement dated 1583 refers to the 'castle and manor of Hilton'. This description then apparently came into common use. There is no licence to crenellate on the Episcopal rolls, and this may be due to the fact that the tower was built in defiance of the Bishop: about this time the power of the palatine to grant licences for 'building embattling and machicolating' castles was in question. Baron William wisely took advantage of any indecision and built his tower. It is interesting to note that building licences were required even in the Middle Ages, but there were far less 'officials' in those days to detect any unlicensed building, and Baron William took advantage of this to build his tower. It is impossible to say exactly when the timber constructions disappeared but the Gatehouse retained its original appearance until 1705, when a whole series of drastic alterations was commenced, which was in many respects, to spoil the buildings original splendour.

In 1705 the then Baron, John Hilton, made many additions and alterations. The gatehouse was probably used, before the demolition of the other buildings, only in case of danger (e.g. in 1644 when the Scots were at the door) or for the lodging of troops, as the inventory of 1644 shows it to be unfurnished at that time. But Baron John must have decided that the gatehouse could be converted into a fine mansion. Times were by now more settled and the conversion of the gatehouse from a place of defence to a mansion begins. John added a classical north wing, part of which can be seen on the print attached (Billings View 1817), inserted a doorway with the Hilton- Musgrave arms over, at the point where the

Billing View (1817)



new wing joined the old front, and pierced the west front of the gatehouse with pedimented classical windows (also to be seen on Billings View). The last Baron, another John added the South Wing (part of which is also to be seen in Billings View) to match his father's work, and blocked and removed the carved architrave of the Hilton – Musgrave door in the North Wing. The last Baron also made considerable alterations to the interior, making a large two storied saloon over the entrance and covering the stone vaulting of the passage, or entrance hall, with stucco-ornamentation. The days of the Hiltons were drawing to a close; John died without a male heir in 1746 and the estate passed to his nephew, Sir Richard Musgrave, who took the name and arms of Hilton but never lived in the castle.

On his death in 1755 without male issue, the castle and estate were sold to the Bowes family, but is not known whether they occupied the castle. So the castle, which for generations had been the home of the 'hoary Hiltons' passed into new hands. Further occupants are only interesting to the study because of alterations and additions they may have made to the castle.

The first, Simon Temple, leased it from the Bowes family when it was approaching a state of ruin and made it "not only habitable but furnished it in the first style of elegance..... A great proportion of the garden and pleasure grounds were cultivated and laid out in the most beautiful manner, and the chapel ornamented and again opened for public worship. But that gentleman unfortunately failed in his commercial speculations before he had completed his intended improvements; the whole has now the appearance or being in an unfinished state." This was written by the historian Garbutt in. It was probably Temple who built the Gothic porch and balcony on the West front. (Billings View).

In 1819 a certain Thomas Wade lived in the castle and later part of it was occupied by Mr McLaren, a farmer. It is interesting that I discovered in a cemetery at Lawnswood, Leeds the grave of Sir John McLaren KBE 'born at Hilton Castle, Co Durham 1850', who must have been a son of the farmer mentioned.

William Briggs of Sunderland purchased the castle and adjoining land in 1863 and carried out a most disastrous reconstruction. Besides demolishing the North and South wings, substituting pseudo-gothic windows, and inserting a Gothic doorway with battlemented balcony in place of the last Baron's entrance, Briggs entirely gutted the interior and transformed it into the likeness of a late Victorian villa. A comparison of the recent photograph and Billings view gives some idea of the unfortunate change in appearance of the castle. Briggs, no doubt, thought his new additions and alterations were in best taste. Now we don't think so and attack him for demolishing so much that was of historical and architectural value and substituting graceless features. But possibly without the repair work of Briggs, and his attempts to make the castle a comfortable villa, it might now be a hopeless ruin, so we will not criticise him too harshly.

After the death of William Briggs, the castle was occupied by his son Col. C.J. Briggs; it then fell into the hands of Wearmouth Coal Company and subsequently, like so many famous buildings, into the hands of the National Coal Board. It was vested in 1950 to the Ministry of Works, who have since appointed a full-time custodian, and replaced the stolen lead of the roof with roofing felt thus making the castle waterproof. Exploratory work and first-aid repairs are also in progress, but not many workmen can be spared for such work and progress is slow.

West Front



Buildings as they exist today.

West front.

This side is divided by four projecting turrets of square section, one at each corner, and a pair on either side of the entrance, which is the centre of the block. This entrance was, at one time, the west end of a paved or, more probably, a cobbled and vaulted passage leading directly to the courtyard which probably existed to the east of the gatehouse, and would almost certainly have been closed by a massive door, or a pair of doors, at either end. It was probably a passage suitable for horsemen, cattle and small vehicles, but this cannot be proved as the entrance was masked, in the eighteenth century by a Gothic porch and balcony (Billings' View), so giving the passage the character of an entrance lobby and stair hall. The floor level was also raised, four steps being constructed at the west end. Recent excavations have revealed that an original staircase went a few feet under the present floor level, thereby proving that the passage was high enough originally to afford passage for horsemen.

Most of the ornamentation of the West front is concentrated in the space between the pair of central turrets; originally the whole of the heraldic display, except three shields on either turret, was in this section, but probably during Brigg's alterations, the arms of the Hiltons were moved from immediately above the west entrance to the face of the turret south of the entrance (comparison of Billings' view and photograph). Above the Hilton arms in their original position was a two light Gothic window (Bucks view); this was blocked by the last Baron when he built the porch and balcony referred to previously. Its space is now occupied by windows of the Briggs period. Above this are three rows of stone shields with heraldic devices of a number of families associated with the Hiltons in some way. The second shield from the left in the third row bears the arms of Washington – two bars with three mullets in chief. The Washington family, ancestors of the first president of the U.S.A, were neighbours of the Hiltons. Washington Hall, their home in Washington village, has been taken over by the National Trust. I will be studying more closely the heraldry, in a later chapter.

Over the three rows of shields is "a banner and flagstaff beneath an arcade of canopies, bearing France and England quarterly". Above this is what was once (Billings' view) a richly decorated arch spanning the space between the turrets. This decoration has fallen unfortunately (photograph opp. p. 40) and apparently there are few examples of such an arch in England. The arch supports an embattled parapet, concealing in this central bay the machicolations which run round the entire block between the turrets and which can be seen on the photograph. Resting on the parapet there was an imposing sculptured group – a knight in combat with a two headed dragon. Only fragments can now be seen. This sculpture is said to be connected with the legend of the Lambton Worm made famous in a Durham song: Lambton Hill the supposed home of the legend is only a few miles further up the Wear from Hilton Castle.

On all four turrets are octagonal battlemented parapets which being larger than the turrets, project forward on corbels on each of the four sides of the turrets, the spaces between parapet and turret being left open as machicolations. This is one of the most unusual features of the castle and the builder has certainly allowed plenty of scope for dropping stones or pouring boiling liquids on any attackers.

The corbels of the main parapets are grotesquely carved with human heads and monsters, and the turrets are ornamented with carved human figures, mostly nude. On the four turrets and both bartizans were originally stone figures, about half life size. Perhaps these were placed there so that any attackers, at a distance, would mistake them for sentries. However, only four survive (photograph) and they are hardly recognizable.

It is the West front that is the most well known. It faces on to a courtyard, as I have already shown and undoubtedly has been the front entrance in all alterations. One can imagine the huge gate being opened for the return of the Baron from hunting expeditions or from English or foreign wars. Though this 'front door' would be crowded the cattle and local inhabitants in times of trouble, most probably caused by raiding Scots or even brigands from the wild country of Northumberland and Durham.

The Battlements



East Front.

The East front is not so interesting as the West front. There are no projecting turrets, but at each corner a circular bartizan is corbelled out, the same height as the turrets on the West front. In the centre is a rectangular projection rising one storey higher than the rest of the building, and forming a sort of tower.

Some unusual sculptuers are on this tower. At first floor height is a psendo- Gothic three light window, and above this is carved the crest of the Hiltons, a horned Moses head in profile. This is in quite good condition. Above this is the arms of Hilton with helmet and mantling and again higher is a carving of the Hilton roebuck, collared with coronet and chain. (photoghaphs opp.).

The North, South, and East sides of the projecting tower have battlements which appear to have been machicolated, as the corbels can be seen, but the battlements do not rest upon them, having been set back to the line of the wall. The walls between the tower and the bartizans have machicolated battlements, but those of the bartizans themselves are not machicolated. It is rather curious that the corbels should exist supporting nothing. One can only guess that a later baron for some reason, set back the battlements, and left the corbels, or the original builder changed his mind during building.

East Front



South Front

This front is of little interest. It is dominated by a large bay window added by Briggs in 1863, but on either side are two of the original windows. The view from this side is undoubtedly the best. It looks across ground sloping towards the River Wear, and across the river is the 'high ground above Hilton' where the skirmishes of the Civil War period took place.

Interior

The interior is in much the same form as it assumed as a result of the alterations by Briggs, although of course years of exposure to the elements, and destructive humans, have reduced it to a sorry state. Floor boards are rotten and plaster is hanging from the ceilings. Indeed it is a dangerous task to find one's way safely among the upper storey rooms. It will be some years before the building can be considered safe enough to allow the public inside. Skilled workmen are busy inside as well as outside the building but progress is very slow.

I do not intend to describe what is now a largely Victorian interior. It is of little interest to historian or architect but there are certain features which have escaped destruction.

From the passage way I have described, the original newel staircase leads up at the South East end, which is blocked at the East end by the temporary brick wall, cutting the 18th and later Century offices which will, I hope, be demolished eventually revealing the original East wall of the castle. The newel staircase rises to the leads. Until recently the entrance to the original newel staircase was blocked, only about 2 feet 6 inches of the entrance showing above the present floor level. But, as I have already shown, recent excavations have revealed the whole entrance, showing that the floor has been raised over 4 feet. This lends weight to the supposition that this hall was once a passage through the tower into the main courtyard of a wooden structure to the east of the tower.

The first floor reveals no trace of antiquity being occupied entirely by bedrooms and dressing rooms. The newel staircase was the only access from the first floor to the two northern rooms on the second floor. There are traces of original work on the second floor: in the window recess of the second bedroom from the northwest corner there is a passage leading northwards to the thickness of the west wall. This is terminated by a blocked stone doorway with a pointed arch. What this was it is impossible to say; it is the only trace of what might have been that essential for any ancient castle of note – a secret passage.

The leads fortunately retain much of the appearance described by Billings in 1846. "The crowning glory of Hilton is the view of the bartizans and battlements from the leads. Nothing at all approaching its rich and sumptuous picturesqueness is to be found in the Northern counties. Figures of men at arms, prepared with stones to hurl against assailants, and armed with various weapons of offence, cluster thickly on turret and parapet, while conspicuous in their midst, and immediately above the great gates of entrance, are gigantic effigies of the knightly slayer of the 'Lambton Worm' and its writhing enemy. Altogether the effect is as magnificent as unique, and vividly carries the mind back to the stirring times of the Middle Ages, when the old Lords of Hilton, chiefest among the Barons of the Bishoprick, were in their full pride and plenitude of power." Billings tends to allow his imagination too much scope. The men at arms are hardly 'prepared with stones to hurl against assailants,' and they do not 'cluster thickly on turret and parapet,' but allowing for his too free imagination and grandiose prose, he captures some of the effect of the leads. It is there, more than anywhere else in the castle that one can span the centuries and picture those 'horary Hiltons.' For although there are dangers in imagining past scenes, one misses the thrill and enjoyment of history if one merely treats it unimaginatively. It is concerned with real people not blocks of stone. All but five of the stone figures are gone, but the view of the bartizans and battlements from the leads is still 'the crowning glory of Hilton.' On all four sides are shallow stone troughs slanting outwards and corresponding with the breaches in the machicolations, upon which boiling oil or water would be poured to discourage attackers, and below each of the corner turrets or bartizans is a small chamber in which, no doubt, braziers would be kept burning to heat the fluid. One can imagine the consternation and 'pain' the attackers felt when, half way up their siege ladders, they were deluged with boiling oil or water. Many Scots no doubt received a needy wash in this way and if the Baron of Hilton was accused of using ungentlemanly methods of warfare, he could claim his methods were in the interest of common hygiene.

Crest



The upper storeys of the turrets and bartizans and the roof of the Wardens room are reached by narrow stone stairways, and the Warden's room itself, the top storey of the eastern tower, retains its original stone fireplace and oak ceiling with moulded beams and rafters. The stairway to the roof of the Warden's room forms a shelter over the top of the newel stairway, where it comes onto the leads.

This brief study of the castle, along with the photographs and prints, is not living history but is useful in many ways, as much can be found out about customs, ways of life, military methods and so on from such historical remains. After all, our knowledge of pre-historic peoples is largely dependant upon study of their buildings (huts, barrows, religious centres). The danger is of course, as I have already pointed out, in letting the study of ancient buildings be an end in itself when it is actually a means to an end—the study of our ancestors. There is no one more boring than the ardent local antiquarian who can describe in minute detail every architectural feature of an ancient building yet has little idea of the real historical significance of the building.

Chapel



Chapel

Before going on to the heraldry I will study briefly the chapel at Hilton (photograph) . It has never been used since about 1812 and is now roofless and in ruins. It is this chapel for which, in 1172, Alexander made an agreement with the Prior of Durham concerning the provision of a chaplain,. Fifteen years before that, as already has been described, Romanus had obtained permission to have his own private chaplain.

The chapel is dedicated to St. Katherine but before 1322 there was a chantry "within the Castle of Hilton" dedicated to St. Mary .In or before 1370 there were three priests in constant attendance.The revenues of the chapel seems to have been confined to the personal offerings of the family, except on high festivals when they were given to the mother church of Monkwearmouth.

The chapel has been the burial place of many of the Hiltons. In 1558 Sir Thomas states in his will, "I bequeath my body to be buried in ye midst of my chapelle of Hilton, whereas my grandfather lieth buried" The grandfather mentioned was William who is supposed to have built the castle. The last baron was buried in the chapel in 1746.

The Chapel today

The lower part of the West wall may be of 12th Century workmanship and may have been part of the first chapel on the site, (this is not certain and would require an expert to verify it). The whole building standing on rising ground to the north of the castle is in a sorry state.The chapel, apart from that mentioned, contains no feature of earlier date than 1500, and consists of a chancel, roofless but in a reasonable state of preservation, north and south transepts, and a short windowless nave. Even in 1728 (from Buck's plate) the nave was roofless though the transepts were still covered. Buck's view also shows a turret in the angle of the nave and south transept, suggesting a newel staircase. The transepts which appear to have been two storied were probably used as galleries for the Lords of Hilton, such as are common in old churches. An outstanding example is the Abbey church at Whitby. It is also likely that the chapel served a double purpose, the chancel and transepts being reserved for the Hiltons and the nave for the parishioners in general. It might be a good idea if the whole chapel was repaired and opened for public worship; perhaps diminishing congregations in the church would be attracted to a place of worship with such ancient historical interest.

At the east end of the chapel is the burial vault of the Hiltons. There are no remains in it. The exterior of the chapel is ornamental with heraldic shields, five on the west front and two on each of the transepts. The chapel is certainly in a very sorry state and a considerable programme confronts the Ministry of Works.

Repairs to both castle and chapel have been undertaken in the "nick of time", for in a few years, without repairs, both buildings would have been beyond repair. Removal of all Victorian additions to the castle would add greatly to its grandeur for while the exuberance of our Victorian ancestors may have been ideal for building and maintaining our Empire, it revealed itself disastrously in architecture. Especially desirable in the castle is the reduction to its original level of the through passage, beneath which may exist the original cobbled pavement. There are, I think, great possibilities for the castle, especially in what is becoming an urban area, for people in such areas tend to become divorced from their history. On Sundays they might find time from the varied amusements of the modern age, to consider, through such buildings as Hilton castle, the story of our ancestors.

Reminders of the Hilton family.

The Hilton family is now almost forgotten in Durham, but during my research I came across a few remainders in sculpture, of their past greatness. I will describe them briefly.

The Hilton Monument

Mention has already been made of St Peter's Church, Monkwearmouth. In this Anglo-Saxon Church is a monument generally understood to have been erected in memory of William, Baron of Hilton, the supposed builder of Hilton Castle, who died in 1435. It is a canopy tomb having a four centred arch of the Tudor period. There are four shields on the tomb, only one of which displays heraldic emblems – two bars and 6 amulets, quarterly, this being the combined arms of Hilton and Vipont: Azure, two bars argent, for Hilton: six amulet (three, two, one) for Vipont.

The figure is that of a mail clad knight with hands on the breast in the attitude of devotion, and the head is on a cushion. There are mutilated portions of what may have mourners. The face is almost entirely obliterated and the legs have been amputated just below the thighs.

Recently an architect, J Hall FRIBA inspected the monument and from various evidence came to the conclusion that the date of the figure is much earlier than that of the canopy tomb. He came to the conclusion that the figure was probably executed between 1360 and 1387. In further support of this there is a similar figure on a table tomb at Swyne, Yorkshire, dated 1370. It is interesting to note that the Swyne family was a branch of the Hiltons of Hilton. It is probable that a hundred years separates the date of the canopy tomb from that of the figure. It also appears therefore that the figure was created 50 years before the death of William, so can hardly have been erected in his memory.

The newspaper article opposite is very interesting. Few people can have known the origin of the crest shown. The hotel is situated at Hylton Ferry which is almost certainly the ferry that would be used by the Hiltons to get to the south bank of the Wear. No doubt the Baron would refresh himself at the original inn while waiting for the ferry. The ferry which can now merely convey passengers was until the end of the 19th century a horse ferry also. As there is no bridge at Hylton, in the realms of water transport, Hylton has taken a step backwards. It is fairly certain that the Romans had a bridge at or near Hylton so over the ages the means of crossing the river are deteriorating, which is rather unusual. The reasons for this are connected with the rise of Sunderland as a shipbuilding port and the decline of Hylton. In the middle of the 19th century there were over one hundred ships (wooden) on stocks at Hylton. Now there is not one ship of any kind being built. I mention this in passing, although it has little connection with the story of the Hiltons. The story of the decline of Hylton and the rise of Sunderland has not been told but would make a fascinating story.

Hylton Crest



People of an inquiring turn of mind who pass the Golden Lion Hotel at South may wonder about the origin of the doorway.

Coun. Theo Nicholson, of Sunderland Antiquarian Society, says the crest was given by Baron Hilton when the building was erected early in the 18th Century to commemorate the wedding of his son, John, with, Dorothy, the daughter of the Musgrave family. The crest was preserved when the building was rebuilt in 1912.

Originally built in 1705 the inn is situated in Lion Square, about 30 yards from Hylton Ferry Landing. Mr Thomas Bellamy is the manager. At about the time the crest was presented Baron Hilton built the north wing to Hilton Castle and decorated it with a crest.

Hylton Ferry today



Ferryboat Fording, South Hylton.



The Hiltons of Hilton Castle



Chapter Four

Heraldry

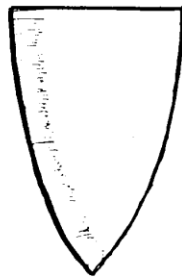


fig 1

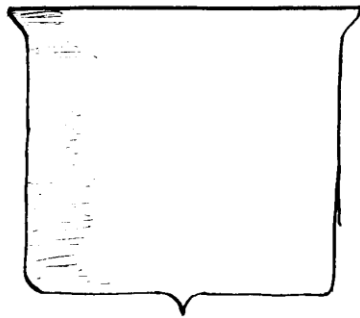


fig 2

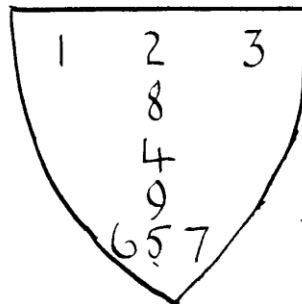


fig 3.

- | | | | |
|----|----------------|----|---------------|
| 1. | Dexter Chief | 5. | Middle Base |
| 2. | Middle Chief | 6. | Dexter Base |
| 3. | Sinister Chief | 7. | Sinister Base |
| 4. | The Fess point | 8. | Honour point |
| 9. | Nombril point | | |

The great heraldic display on the walls of Hilton Castle has a story to tell. It tells of great northern families that were in some way connected to the Barons of Hilton. The great houses of Percy, Lumley, and Grey of Northumberland are all represented by their arms, displayed on the walls of Hilton Castle.

Heraldry is, of course, extremely ancient, but it was not until the 11th century that heraldry began to develop into the popular and well organised science it became. It has its origin in the militarism of the feudal ages and received a tremendous impetus from its connections with the Crusades. It obtained our exclusive and hereditary character which it has kept, even though today one comes across bus companies with their heraldic devices. I am not going into the history of the development of heraldry: it is a specialised study. However, to understand the significance of the heraldic display on the walls of Hilton Castle, a brief study of the elementary rules of facts of the science of heraldry, is necessary. Broadly speaking, the term heraldry includes everything connected with the duty of the herald, but I am only concerned with the section which deals with armorial bearings.

The shield is the most important part of an armorial composition and there are various types of shields from the kite shaped shield (fig 1) to the Tudor shield (fig 2)

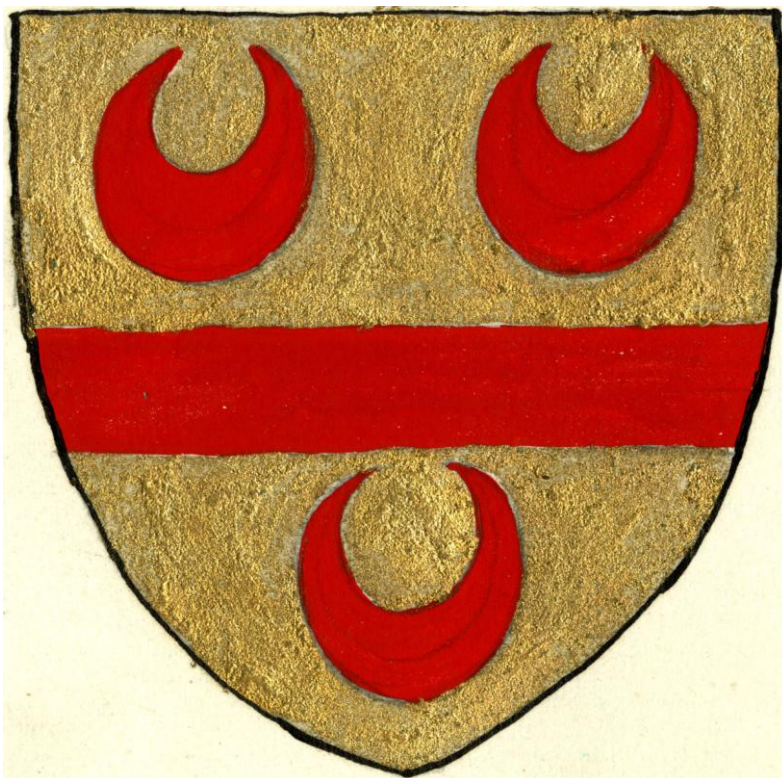
The shield is divided into a number of parts (fig 3). It should be borne in mind that the left hand side of the shield, as we view it (or as an opponent would view it) is called the "dexter" and the right hand side is called the "sinister". Therefore when an armorial description says "three lions looking "sinister" it is not referring to the expression of the lions but the way they are facing.

The shield is tinctured, and during the reign of the Stuarts a system was introduced for conventionally expressing the tincture by certain marks and lines so that they could be engraved or drawn where it was inconvenient to show them. The tinctures most frequently used are two metals, four colours and two furs shown conventionally as follows

Fitz Randolph



Boynton



Ov (gold) – plain white field – black dots.

Argent (silver) – plain white field.

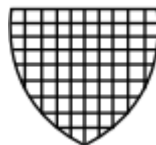
Goules (veo) – parallel lines drawn 'in porle' (perpendicularly)



Azure (blue) – parallel lines drawn 'in fess' (horizontally)



Sable (black) – lines crossing each other 'in porle' and 'in fess'

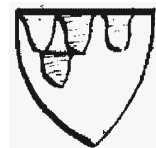


Vert (green) – Original lines from Dexter chief to sinister base



Ermine – black spots upon and argent field

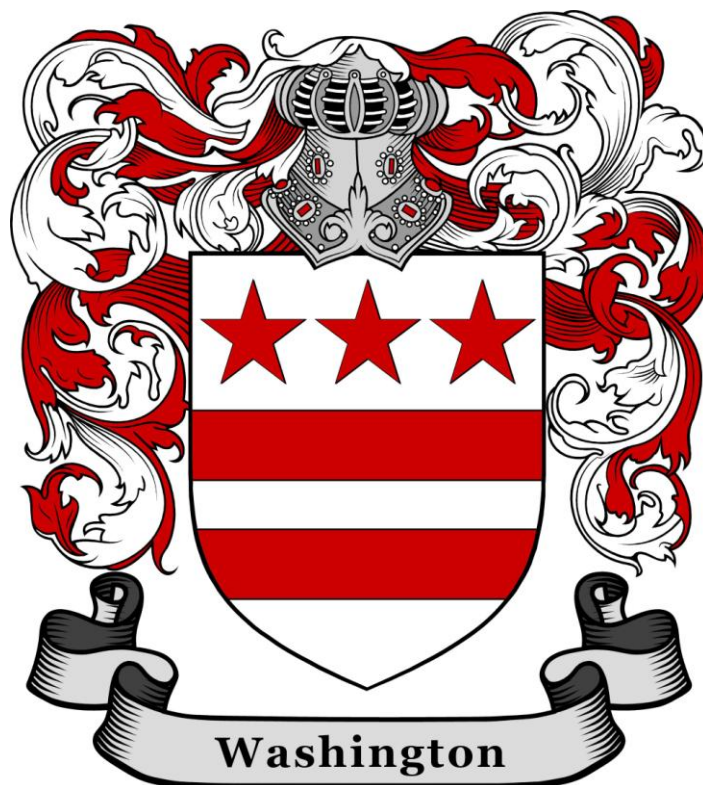
Van – supposed to represent the skins of small animals of alternate colours arranged as shown



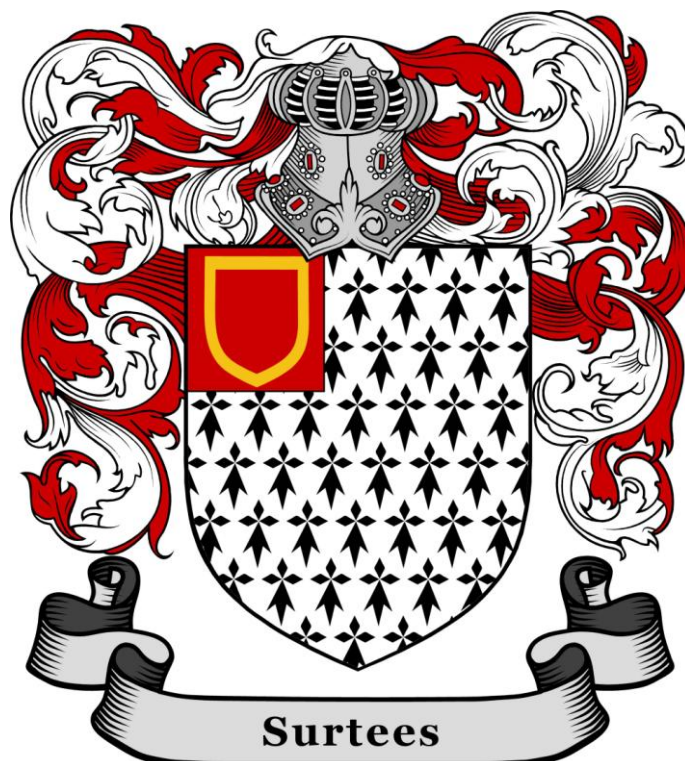
Charges

I will describe in greater detail, the charges as I come to them displayed on the walls of the castle. The main charges are as follows and cover all examples on the walls of Hilton Castle.

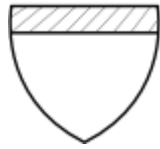
Washington



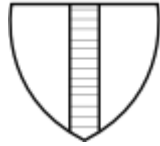
Surtees



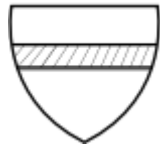
The Chief



The pole



The fess



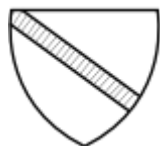
Diminutive – the bar 1/3 of the shield (as in Hylton shield)



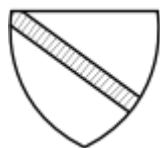
The chevron



The bend



Bend sinister

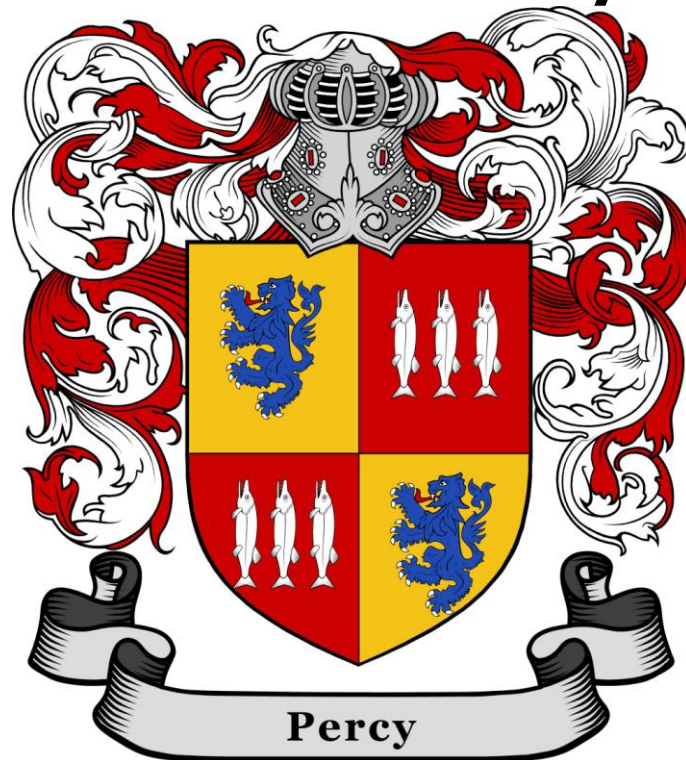


Greek cross

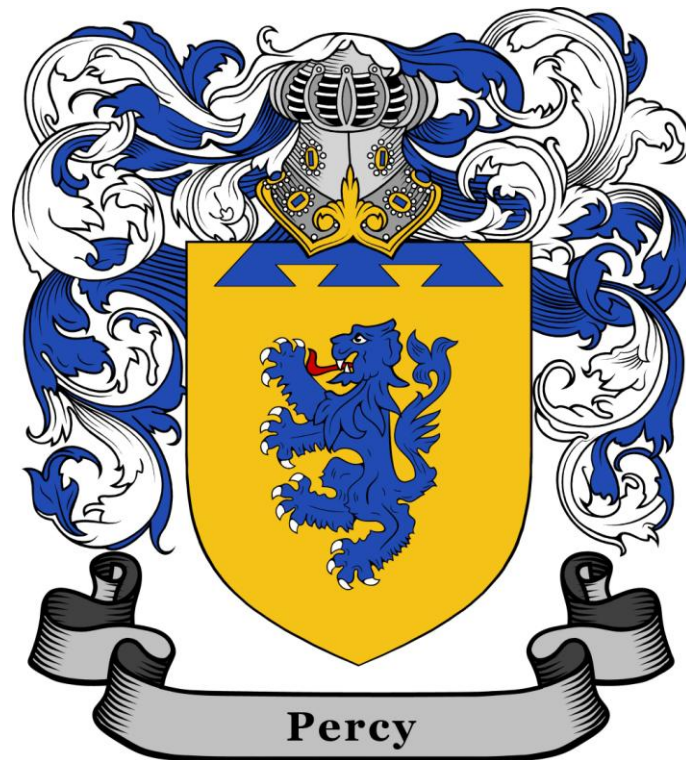


With this very brief survey in mind, I will now describe the shields on the walls of the castle as shown on the photograph, and earlier prints.

Percy and Lorraine or Percy and Lucies



Eldest son of house of Percy



The East front does not have a very spectacular display. The arms of Hilton in their original form without any quartering is displayed – the bars azure.

Above the coat is the crest, already described. Over the crest is the badge of Hilton – roebuck, couchant, collared, chained and coroneted. The tradition connected with this unusual badge has been related in the chapter on the family history.

It is on the west front that there is the greatest heraldic display. The shields are of different sizes and scattered irregularly on the wall. In nearly every case the arms are those of families in some way connected with the Hiltons, through marriage, tenure, military service, or some other way.

In the centre of the west front, under the once richly carved and overhanging arch is the modern banner of France and England quartered. The banner is attached to a flagstaff. Beneath the banner are three rows of shields. On Billing's view the first row contains four shields but as the photograph shows two of these are now missing. The two missing shields can be seen to the south of the central doorway (or one of them at least as the other is obliterated). Reading from the left then following is a description of the shields and, as far as I have been able to discover, the families represented by the shields.

1st Row

1. Lion rampant, quartering three Lucies or pikes. (I am taking it for granted that the method of quartering is familiar to the reader). Lucie is an old heraldic name for a pike. This shield is either Percy (lion rampant) and Loraine or Percy and Lucies. The idea of this "heraldic pun" is apparently quite common in heraldry. We will come across it again in the shield of the Bowes family.
A lion rampant, differenced by a label of three points. This is the eldest son of the house of Percy (a Label or File denotes eldest son of the family. Other sons "difference" the family coat of arms by various lacy marks –crescent for the second son, mullet for third son and so on).

In the second row are:-

1. Lion rampant – Percy or Fawcett of Boldon.
2. Two bars quartering three amulets. The two bars is the Hilton coat-of-arms and amulets usually denote the fifth son. This is probably Hilton of Swyne although it could be Hilton and Lascelles or Hilton and Vipont. Many families use the same devices which is misleading.
3. A fess between three popinjays – Lumley of Lumley Castle (a few miles from Hilton).
4. Lion rampant with engrailed border () border. This is Grey of Northumberland who held lands of the Hiltons.
5. Quarterly or bend, charged with three escallops (kind of shell). Erne of Witton or Maroley.

In the third row are:-

1. In chief, dancette (now nearly obliterated). Fitz - Randolph.
2. Two bars with three mullets in chief – This is Washington the family which George Washington was a member. It is interesting to note the similarity between the ancient coat-of-arms and the modern American national flag which is based on "stars and stripes" or "mullets and bars" in heraldic terms. Whether the American flag is based on this ancient coat-of-arms is a matter of conjecture: the point is certainly a very interesting one.
3. A fess between three crescents. Perhaps Boynton or Withers.
4. Three water bougets or manches – Lilburn.

On the right hand buttress are:-

1. A lion rampant.
2. Two lions passant bordered with tressure. Felton
3. Three herons looking sinister. I don't know for certain what family this belongs to but the Herons (a family owned land at Usworth which came into the Hilton Estates so it is probably that family that is represented.

On the right hand buttress are:-

1. Ermine, with orle in dexter point. This is the shield of Surtees, the family to which the Durham historian of that name belonged.
2. Ermine – three bow strings. Bowes family connected to the Hiltons by marriage and tenure. To the South of the central doorway are what were once apparently the arms of Hilton, wrapping the flagstaff. The arms have now been obliterated but the rest remains.

The heraldic display then, at Hylton Castle gives a glimpse into the past when the privileged families whose arms are shown, were all powerful in the County of Palatine of Durham. Most of the families are now extinct and the lines of Gray appropriately end this section.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave
Awaits like the inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.



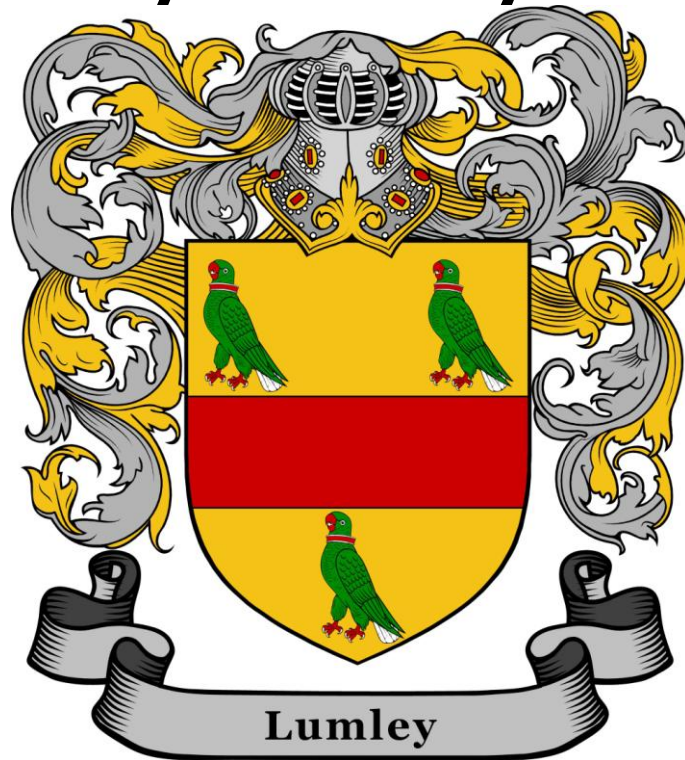
1. Percy of Fawcett of Boldon



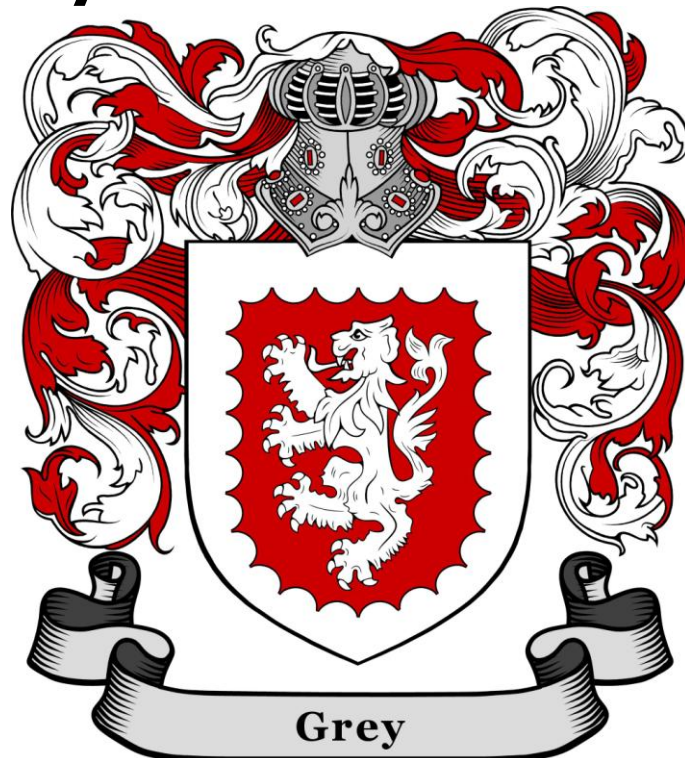
2. Hilton of Swyne



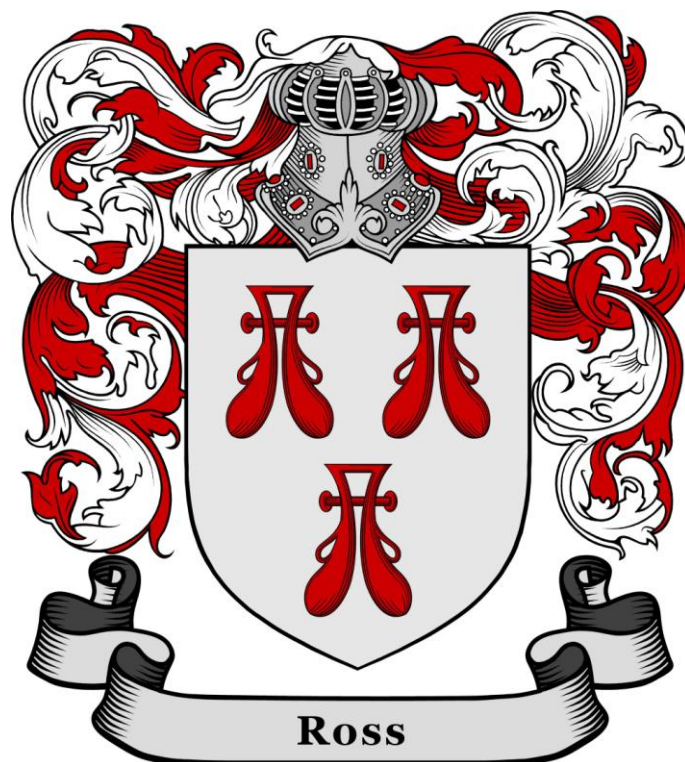
**3. A fess between three popinjays
Lumley of Lumley Castle**



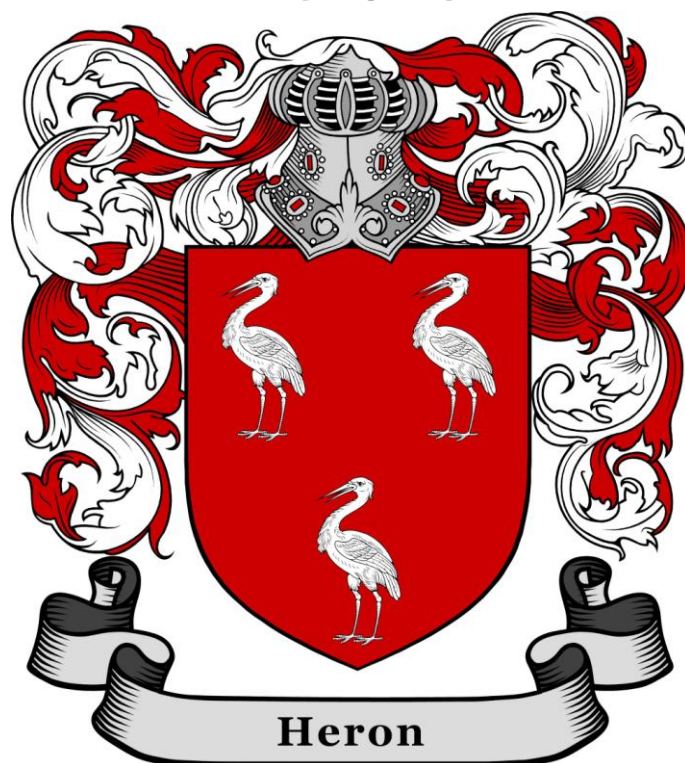
**4. Lion rampant with engrailed border
Grey of Northumberland**



Ross or Lilburn



Hérons



The Hilton's of Hilton Castle



Chapter five

Legends

It is to be expected that a family so ancient and renowned as the Hiltons should collect, throughout the centuries, a number of legends concerning ghosts, brownies and banshees. The Hiltons are very fortunate in that they possessed all three. The study of English folklore and legend is a fascinating one and I will devote some space to a study of the legends connected with the Hiltons.

Hilton Castle is not, of course, alone in being associated with such spirits. Most old houses have their "ghost". In the popular superstitions of Scotland, good natured and invisible spirits were attached to farm houses and other country dwellings, and while the household was asleep did many tasks around the house – churning and threshing, and so on. These curious spirits were called "brownies".

The most eminent spirit of Hilton Castle is, apparently of brownie origin and it is interesting to note that the legend of "Cauld Lad o' Hilton" is often supposed to be a Scottish legend. In fact when an attempt is made to write the old Durham dialect it is easily confused with a Scots dialect e.g.

"The Cauld Lad o' Hilton will do nae mair good".
This line could certainly be mistaken for a Scottish dialect.

The story of the Cauld Lad o' Hilton is well known in the North of England. His history, however, seems to be a little mixed and he has the qualities of a genuine ghost as well as those of a brownie. He is certainly of good brownie stock and his pranks, as such, are confined to the orthodoxy of such a spirit. Brownies always lodge themselves somewhere among the angles and turrets of old buildings, by day, and during the night confine themselves to the kitchen or halls doing some task they feel will please the owners of the building. They can ride horses, milk cows, thrash corn and annoy lazy servants, but it is a characteristic of all they do that it should benefit the household, and any attempt to reward them by any present of money or clothing (especially green) causes them to disappear forever. They occasionally play mischievous tricks, but they are never vicious and dislike being seen. All these characteristics are present in the "Cauld Lad". He was rarely seen, but often heard doing his work or playing his pranks in the great hall or kitchen, after the servants had retired for the night. If they had left the kitchen clean and orderly, the "Cauld Lad", annoyed at having his work done, would throw all the utensils about the kitchen.

The meaning of the word "cauld" is not known definitely. Most people in Durham would say it meant "cold". This is quite understandable as in Durham dialect "cold" is pronounced "cauld". There are, however, other possible meanings of "cauld". The brownie appears to have been confused with the ghost of the castle. The apparition of an unfortunate boy who was killed by one of the Barons was often seen, sometimes with his head under his arm, a characteristic of a more notable ghost. The ghost was therefore called "cowed" or "cauld". There is a belief in the village of Hylton today that "cauld" has originated from the fact that the ghost was preceded by a cold, damp wind. Any of these versions is possible though those associated with cold seem most genuine.

The "Cauld Lad" made his home in the castle for many years but eventually some servants, annoyed by his pranks, determined to get rid of him, by presenting him with a green cloak and hood. While the cloak and hood were being made the brownie could be heard singing.

"Wores me! Wores me!
The acorn is not yet fallen from the tree
That's to grow the wood
That's to make the cradle
That's to rock the bairn
That's to lay me"

The cloak and hood were finished and laid before the fire in the great kitchen. The brownie arrived on the stroke of midnight and tried on the cloak and hood, crying bitterly as he did so, and as the first cock crowed, he wrapped the cloak around him, moving slowly and weeping and crying as he went.

"Here's a cloak and here's a hood"
The "Cauld Lad o' Hilton will do nae mair good".

and so he left the Castle forever. Most brownie stories have a similar ending. Some clothes were left out for a brownie at Glenlevon in Berwickshire, and the sprite said in an offended voice -

"Give Brownie coat, give Brownie sark
Ye'se, get nae mair o' Brownie work"

A Brownie called Hob at Sturfit Hall in Yorkshire exclaimed under similar circumstances.

"Ha! A carp or a hood!
Hob'll never do more good."

There are many other examples in the North of England.

Well, the Cauld Lad was never seen again but for years afterwards, especially on dark, windy nights, there would be heard the mournful wailing farewell of the banished brownie -

"Here's a cloak and here's a hood
The Cauld Lad 'o' Hilton will do nae mair good."

The ghost and brownie have, over the years, become confused with each other so that they are now inseparable. No person in the village of Hylton tells a story which tallies with another, which serves to illustrate how legends grow.

Whatever may have been the origin of the ghost of Hilton, it is certain that a boy called Roger Skelton was killed by one of the Hilton family in July 1609. An inquest was held at Hilton and it appears that one of the Hiltons accidentally struck the boy with a scythe causing his death. A free pardon to the Baron of Hilton for the manslaughter on the rolls of Bishop James in 1609.

The Baron of Hilton is famous for being the last gentleman to keep a domestic fool. Several stories are told concerning him. Once the Baron had entered his barge at Barons Quay (there is still a quay by that name on the river) and being in a hurry to reach Sunderland, he told the fool to pull harder. The fool replied "Pull yourself; you are older than I am and it's best to kill the owd uns off first".

It is remarkable that no story has been invented to account for the extraordinary crest of the family - Moses' Head. But nowhere can I find any information about this unusual crest.

One of the most famous legends in the North of England is that of the Lambton Worm, and as I have already shown, the almost unrecognisable sculpture group on the West Front is said to represent the knight (Lord Lambton according to the famous song) slaying the gigantic worm. The hill round which the worm is said to have wrapped itself is visible from Hilton Castle (Penshaw Hill).

In the words of the old saga -

"He crawled away an' lapped he's tail
Ten times round Penshaw Hill".

But in the words of the same song Lord Lambton slew the worm.

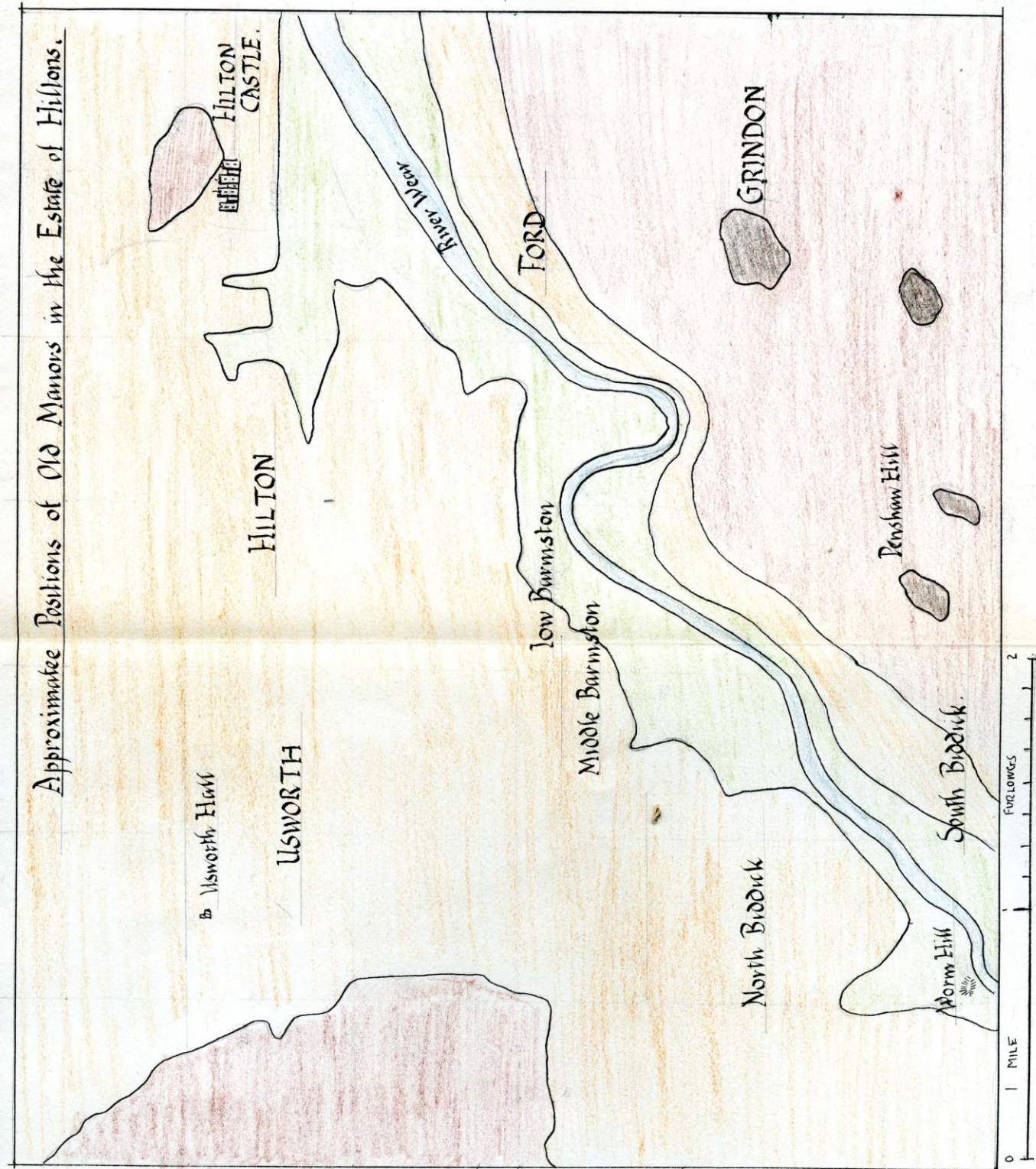
"The news of this myest awful worm,
An his queer gannins on
Soon crossed the seas, got te the ears
Or brave and bold Sir John.
So hyem he came un' caught the beast
An' cut 'im in two halves,
An' that senn stopped he's eatin' bairns
An' sheep an' lambs an' calves."

Such, in the dialect of the district (or as near as possible in writing) is the Legend of the Lambton Worm, said to be commemorated in stone on Hilton Castle.

The Estates

Chapter Six

Approximate Positions of Old Manors in the Estate of Hiltons.



There is no doubt that the estates of the Hilton's were at one time very extensive, but the evidence remaining of the extent is very slender. As there was no Domesday Survey in Durham, the main sources of information are Bishop Hatfield's Survey of 1380 and the Boldon Book. The monthly chronicles also are a source of information.

At one time the estates included the manors of Barmston, Biddick, Honecroft, Ford, Grindon, Follonsby, Hilton, and Great Usworth in Durham County; Alston Moor in Northumberland and Cumberland; Carnoby and Wharram Percy in Yorkshire and other lands of the Percy family in Northumberland.

I show a map which I have drawn up on the slender evidence and on typographical and place name evidence. I have no details of boundaries and therefore I can only give the approximate positions of the ancient manors. Let us now have a look at the evidence about the old manors. Firstly - Barmston: In 1322 Baron Robert gave to his chaplain, wax and honey of the wild bees, in his park of 90 acres at Barmston.

In 1669 John Hilton granted the manor for £2,750 to George Lilburn of Sunderland (a famous Durham character) and Will Carr of Newcastle. The estate remained in the Lilburn family until after 1700, from whom it was bought by the Wharton's. As I have shown in the chapter on Heraldry, the arms of the Lilburn family are displayed on Hilton Castle, no doubt because of their ownership of the manor of Barmston.

In Bishop Hatfield's Survey (1380) it is stated that the manor of North Biddick was held by Sir William Hilton under the ancient tenure of the Boldon Book, which was one-sixth of a knight's service. From this time it remained in the hands of the Hiltons until, as one of the consequences of the incredible will of the "melancholy" Baron Henry, it was sold to Carrs of Forkew.

According to Bishop Hatfield's Survey William de Hilton held two thirds of the will of Great Usworth. The estate remained in the hands of the Hiltons until 1750. Much of the ancient manor is now probably the site of Usworth aerodrome and the village itself no longer exists.

The manor of Follonsby is not mentioned in Boldon Book or Bishop Hatfield's Survey. In 1560 Sir Thomas Hilton held it at 1/40th or knight's fee so it was not very valuable. It remained in the hands of the Hiltons until the final dispersion of property in 1750.

The manor of Hilton became, on the death of the last Baron, the property of Sir Richard Musgrove who sold it to Mr. Bowes (as I have already shown). In what was probably the ancient manor is now situated the colliery village of Castletown, a product of the industrial revolution and of no historical importance.

After the dissolution, the manor of Monkwearmouth which had belonged to the cell at Monkwearmouth was obtained by the Hiltons, so the last round in the struggle between the Hiltons and the cell at Monkwearmouth was now by the Hiltons. It remained in the hands of the Hiltons until 1750.

The manor Ford also called Le Ford was in 1529 valued at half a knight's fee. In this manor, now the name of the Parish, which has approximately the same boundaries as the ancient manor, is the village of South Hylton, once the centre of a thriving wooden shipbuilding industry, but which has steadily declined since the turn of the century. With the post-war expansion of the suburbs of Sunderland, South Hylton has ceased to be a country village and, as a village community it has ceased to exist. The modern amusements found in Sunderland draw the young people there and the social centre of South Hylton is no longer the village church, but the commercial amusements of Sunderland. This same story is repeated all over England, and the village life our grandfathers knew is gone; the results can be seen in the gangs of youths hanging round cinemas, dance halls and billiard halls of our towns. They have never learned to make their own amusements. But this is a digression from the main topic.

The site of the manor of Honecroft has been lost. It is always joined in name with the manors of Ford and Grindon so was probably on the South bank of the wear. It was held by the Hiltons by knights' service from the Bishop of Durham. In 1608 Honecroft was included in a grant of the manors of

Barnes and Hamildon To Emmerson and Fordall. Since then the site has been lost, and although it is only 350 years since the transfer was made there is nothing to mark the site of the ancient manor.

In 1322 Thomas de Hilton granted to his chaplain, a toft and croft in Grindon. It was held by the Hiltons, with Ford and Homecroft at one half a knight's fee. In 1600 Thomas Hilton held in Grindon 200 acres of land, 40 acres of pasture, 10 acres of meadow, 30 acres of wood and 100 acres of moorland. I do not know when the manor passed from the Hiltons but it is not mentioned in the will of the "melancholy" Baron.

Farnton or Farrington, in Northumberland was, apparently in ancient times, part of the possessions of the Monastery at Hexham. I do not know when the Hiltons gained it but they sold it in 1610 to Peppers of Heasby

In addition to the above Manors, the Hiltons held considerable property in Yorkshire, Wiltshire and Northumberland but I am not really concerned with this property.



A reminder of wooden shipbuilding



The deserted river today

CONCLUSION:

This account of the Hiltons of Hilton Castle and their position in County Durham is unavoidably sketchy and incomplete. There is, I feel, scope for more research into the subject, especially now that Hilton Castle is surrounded by housing estates, and is being repaired, and eventually opened to the public. People who have seen little more than shops and cinemas will have this castle and its grounds on their doorsteps; they will want to know who lived there and what they did and perhaps that will be the beginning of an interest in the story of our ancestors. There is no better way of rousing an interest in history than through features of local historical interest.

Perhaps some more documents will come to light which will tell us more of the doubtful history of the Hiltons. Although I doubt the authenticity of the story of the numerous Hiltons killed in many famous battles, I would be delighted if evidence were found which verified it. Perhaps evidence will be found which will solve the mystery of the origin of the Hiltons, the loss of the site of the Manor of Homecroft, and numerous other points.

Book List:

Surtees "History of Durham"

"Memorials of old Durham" – Leighton.

"History of County Durham" – J.R. Boyles.

"History of Sunderland" – Garbutt.

"Ae

Carters "Honor Redwinns"

"Antiquities of Durham" – Billing.

"Durham in the County Series" – Sir Timothy Eden.

"County Palatine of Durham" – Lapsley.

"History of Durham" – Fordyce.

"History of the County Palatine of Durham" – Hutchinson.

"Durham Place Names".

"Antiquities of Sunderland" – Sunderland Antiquarian Society.

"Baldon Book" (copy of original)

"Bishop Hatfield's Survey" – (copy of original)

"North Country Life in the 18th Century – N.E." – Hughes.

"Heraldry for Amateurs" – Milbourne.

"English Legends" – Bett.

"Folklore and Superstition"

"Folk Tales of the North Country" – Grise