

CRAYKE CASTLE

The hill, around which the village of Crayke is built, and upon whose summit lie Church and Castle, is some 400 feet high at its apex; the area on which both buildings stand is twenty feet lower. The ground falls steeply on the western side, and only a little less so to the north, and the top of the hill gives a commanding view in all directions. Crayke was originally on the main road from York, via Coxwold, to Northallerton, passing through the Forest of Galtres on the plain below. The direct road link with Easingwold was not made until the middle of the XIXth century.

Crayke, and three miles round it, was given to St. Cuthbert by King Egfrid (d. 685) in the VIIth century so that he and his successors should have a resting place when going to and from York. St. Cuthbert is said to have founded a monastery in Crayke and certainly, remains, which were unearthed when the village reservoir was built, and when a tennis court was made at the nearby Hall, provide some evidence for this. An anchorite, named Etha, lived somewhere on the site, and, it is said, died happily in 767. In 882 when the monks of Lindisfarne fled south to escape the Norsemen, carrying with them the Saint's remains, they are reputed to have stayed in Crayke for four months before they were able to return with the Saint's body to Durham. At some time, perhaps in the XIth or XIIth century, a hospital (the Hospital of St. Mary de Pratis) was also founded in Crayke, which suggests that there may have been some form of establishment around the Castle.

The parish was part of Co. Durham until the XIXth century. In 1832 it was united to Yorkshire for parliamentary purposes, and in 1844 became part of the North Riding for all purposes.

It is said that when Crayke was part of Durham, its inhabitants would run up bills in Easingwold; they could only be sued in the Durham courts, so restitution was expensive. The village inn - the Durham Ox - is the only obvious link with Crayke's past to be seen today.

The Bishops of Durham - who inherited Crayke - had a residence on the hill top from early times. No Bishop who was used to border warfare could fail to use such a site, and the thickness of the Castle walls shews that their builders had not forgotten the dangers which menaced them in Northumberland and Durham.

The original Castle was built on the very top of the hill, probably in the XIIth century. Bishop Pudsey supped there in 1195 on his way from Durham; he was taken ill in the night but managed to ride on to Howden, where he died. King John visited Crayke several times between 1209-1211, and Henry III was there in December 1227. Edward I visited the Castle in August 1292, Edward II in October 1316, and Edward III in April 1333.

All that remains of this original castle are the foundations of one wall, the outline of a hearth and the lower walls of what was once a five storied tower at the Castle's south west corner. When Leland visited Crayke in the early years of the XVIth century, he noted "There remaineth at this tyme smaull shew of any Castel that hath been there. There is a Haul with other offices and a great stable voltid with stone, of a meatly aunoyent building. The great squar tower, that is thereby, as in the toppe of the hill, and supplement of loggings, is very fair and was erected totally by Neville, bishop of Duresme."

The 'Haul' to which Leland refers is the building now called Crayke Castle - it was more a fortified manor house than a castle. It is a stone rectangular building, measuring externally 70' 9" by 28' 4" and dates from the early years of the XVth century. It is four stories high, and the walls are set back slightly at each stage. Its height is 48 ft. from the ground to the top of the battlements which run round the roof. The four square turrets also embattled are chimneys, although the one at the eastern end may have been a look-out post at the top of a spiral staircase. The walls are five feet thick on the ground floor, decreasing to 4' at the top, and are pierced by square headed windows, symmetrically placed on the front, or south side.

This building is often referred to as the Great Chamber, meaning the main hall, which originally took up the whole of the first floor. Here, presumably, the Bishop ate and held court, seated in front of the large fire place at the

western end. A garderobe or privy was let into the western wall, and these are repeated on each floor. A further massive fireplace, midway down the south wall, heated the rest of the Great Chamber. It was entered through a pointed arch at the east end of the north side of the Castle; this is now blocked up. A second similar archway gave entrance to the floor above and the two were probably connected by a wooden staircase. The entrance to the ground floor was by a smaller archway on the east side, now partly blocked to form a window. The ground floor, like the first floor, was originally one apartment.

The Castle was built into the side of the hill, adjoining, but below, the original Castle on the site. Between the two a kitchen and larder were built above a vaulted undercroft between the years 1441 and 1450. The undercroft, designed as a storehouse, was 45'10" long and 19'6" wide, and was below ground level on the northern side; a spiral staircase led from its north west corner to the kitchen above. Another doorway led into the basement of the five storied tower (which may well be the 'squer tower' which Leland ascribed to Bishop Neville). The kitchen, of which nothing remains, was 22' x 20', and it led, presumably, straight into the Great Chamber.

The Clerk of Works' account for the years 1441-2 still exists (in the Durham Archives). It mentions that 900 freestones were quarried at Brandsby and Yearsley and carted to Crayke by the tenants at 6d. a load. The two quarrymen, Thomas Del Stable and Thomas Pipes, were paid 6/8d. for every 100 stones worked. The two masons, Nicholas and Richard Wirrel, were each paid 2/8d. a week. There were four labourers, helping the masons, and they were paid 3d. or 4d. a day. Masons' marks can be seen on many walls in the Castle.

To the north east of the Castle, lie the remains of the 'New Tower', a second set of buildings, L-shaped, and originally three stories high, with a hall, great chamber and offices. It was probably built in the second half of the XVth century, although some parts of it are evidently older. Why this second complete set of buildings was put up, and whether it was linked to the earlier buildings, is not known. A ground plan of the New Tower was drawn up between 1566 and 1570, and shews that the building was entered from the western side through a porch some 13' wide and 12' long (parts of this are still intact). A passage about 15' long ran eastwards, with doorways from it leading into the hall (29' x 27' externally) to the north, and the chamber (42' x 33' externally) to the east. The walls were five feet thick, and staircases led to the upper and lower rooms. All that now remains of the New Tower are the walls of the porch, and part of the passage, and the stairway to the lower rooms, which were probably vaults or storehouses. One of these is intact (below the porch) and part of the ceiling of two others is still standing. It seems likely that the masonry of the ceilings was tidied up, perhaps at the end of the XIXth century, foreshortening the original structure. (Some of this collapsed after the winter of 1965.) At the end of the northward running vault is a garderobe or privy.

There must almost certainly have been a chapel in the Castle buildings, but its site is not known. An altar stone is described in 1870 as being 'in the basement' of the Castle; three of the five incised crosses remain, the other two having been destroyed when the corners of the stone were knocked off - presumably to make it fit into one of the window alcoves, perhaps as a cold slab in a larder. The only window in which it would have fitted is the ground floor one on the east side which formed the original entrance. This stone was taken to the Church in the 1920s, and restored as an altar in 1965.

The flat summit of the hill was probably surrounded by a wall entered by a gatehouse near the site of the present gate. Some of the stones in the rockery round the foot of the large sycamore tree just inside the gateway may have come from there. Between the Castle and the Church stood a barn, 48' x 24', thatched and weatherboarded, and probably built at the beginning of the XVI century. Nothing remains of it now, but it was clearly in a good state of repair at the time of Leland's visit. The Castle then stood in the centre of a park seven miles in circumference. It was well stocked with oak and other timber, and contained a saltery, or deer trap 140 feet long. This saltery was granted by Henry III in 1229. There are references to the grant of trees, to the appointment of keepers and of course to poaching, throughout the XIIIth to XVIIth centuries. Another report in 1647 refers to the tenancies of the various fields having changed hands so often without permission of the Bishop that no-one was sure which was freehold and which was not: it was suggested that this had been done deliberately.

The gradual decay of the older buildings between 1450 and 1510 was probably because of the Wars of the Roses and the unsettled state of the country. Leland noted that the roof of the Great Chamber (the present Castle) was "in sore decay, and ye tymber rotten in meny places". The walls of the kitchen were "cracked ... redy to fall, under propped wt. staves and proppes". The five storey tower was "in good reparacion", but only the walls of the old castle remained, and the gatehouse roof had rotted away.

The dissolution of the monasteries, between 1536 and 1539 probably hastened the disintegration of the Castle and New Tower. In 1587 Bishop Barnes was compelled to lease the Manor of Crayke for eighty years to Queen Elizabeth, who granted it, the same year, to Sir Francis Walsingham, her Secretary of State.

During the Great Rebellion (1642-1648) Royalist troops held the Castle for King Charles. At that time, the Castle had no water supply, and the soldiers had to fetch it from the well lower down the hill. It is probable that the Scots at one time attacked the Castle on behalf of Cromwell; two cannonballs were found nearby, but they were probably fired from the Castle, not at it. In 1646, and again in 1647, the House of Commons ordered that Crayke Castle should be rendered untenable and no garrison maintained in it. Other Yorkshire castles that came under the same order were Helmsley, Knaresborough, Cawood, Middleham, Bolton, Wressle and Skipton. In 1647-8, almost exactly a year before King Charles' martyrdom, a survey of the Castle was carried out by Edward Colston, Frederick Faber and John Duncalf. This is now kept in the Durham Archives. They write:-

"The houses or castles upon the demesnes are built of hewed freestones, very strong, and stand distant each from other 18 yards and the same are built castle manner and stand upon a very high hill which looketh far into the county adjacent. One is called by the name of the Castle and the other the Brewhouse, both of which are very much ruined by soldiers quartered there since these unhappy differences.

"Memorandum that the housing belonging to Crayke are in great delapidation and will decay daily unless some speedy course be taken for the repair thereof."

They noted that the barns, two stables, cart shed and hogs styas were in good order; "other buildings there are none".

In 1648, the Puritan Parliament confiscated many Church properties and sold them. The Manor of Crayke was one of these and it was sold to Sir William Allanson, "a stiff fanatic" and successful draper, who at the time was a prosperous M.P. for York. Ironically, when he was Lord Mayor of York in 1633 he entertained King Charles I, who not only knighted him, but also became godfather to his son, who was, appropriately, christened Charles. He also bought the Deanery in York at about the same time, where he died in 1656. He did not live in Crayke Castle, but he left it and the lordship of the manor to his son Charles, who certainly lived there, and probably carried out some restoration of the Great Chamber. He also seems to have dismantled much of the now ruinous New Tower, which brought strong complaints from Bishop Cosin, to whom the Manor of Crayke was returned at the Reformation in 1660. Charles Allanson was still living there in 1664-5 and probably the See of Durham did not take it over fully until 1667, the year in which the eighty year lease to the Crown expired. Thereafter successive Bishops of Durham let the Manor to various people who sometimes sublet it, and from 1688 until 1827, the head lessees seem to have been the Thompson family.

Very little is known of the history of the Castle and the New Tower for the next 300 years. The northern rooms in the New Tower, with a vaulted roof, was still standing in 1780 when Hutchinson wrote his 'History of the County Palatine of Durham'; he also mentions that the Castle was used as a farmhouse. Traces of corn were found recently under the floor of the Great Chamber, suggesting that it may have been used as a granary. The vaulted undercroft was used as a cattle shed and it seems likely from the appearance of the fireplace, that the main groundfloor room was used as the farmhouse kitchen; it had an earth floor until the middle of the last century. At some time a XVIIIth century internal staircase from the ground to the first floor was put in, and Georgian type doors fitted to the rooms created by subdividing the two floors. The floor above was reached through the original arched entrance on the north side. Access to the

top floor would probably have been by ladder, unless there was a spiral staircase in what is now one of the chimneys and is of later construction.

Early XIXth century guidebooks also refer to the Castle being used as a farmhouse, and describe it as a picturesque ruin, worth a visit, with spectacular views. But in 1827 a private Act of Parliament enabled Bishop Van Mildert to sell the Manor to Richard John Thompson. He sold it in turn in the 1840s to William Waite of Holgate, York, whose son, Captain Waite, inherited it and made it his home. He may well have installed the interior staircase and Georgian doors and the chimneypiece, which bears the Arms of the City of York. He sold it in 1890 to Stephen Cliff who carried out extensive restorations and used the Castle as a shooting lodge; his own home (Wyndham Hall) a XVIIth century house on the Crayke-Brandsby road) became Crayke Manor.

During these restorations a staircase was made internally between the first and second floors, and this was linked by a tall landing to the original arched entrance to the third floor. A wing was built out to the north east beyond the landing, to provide a billiard room. An internal staircase was also built to the top floor, making subtle use of existing windows and light. The vaulted undercroft was subdivided into pantry, larder and wine store, and a passage driven through to the ground floor of the Castle. Water supply was still a problem, and a windmill was used to pump water to a cistern in the grounds. It was then pumped by hand to a cistern above the new wing. The Castle was linked to the main water supply between the wars.

In 1941, the Castle became a hostel for the Women's Land Army, and an ablutions block was put up on the site of Bishop Neville's kitchen. It was pulled down in 1960.

The Castle remained in the hands of the Cliff family until 1959, although they did not live there. It was bought in that year by Mr. and Mrs. T.M. Higham.

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Much of the information in this paper was kindly given by the Librarian of Durham University and the Cathedral Archivist. Other details have been taken from the Victorian County history, and Canon Raine's paper on the Castle, published in 1869/70.