

ART. XIII. – *Newbiggin Hall*. By MERRILYN SAWREY-COOKSON.

Read at the site, July 8th, 1977.

NEWBIGGIN Hall has already been the subject of three articles in *Transactions*,¹ so it would seem that there is little that one can say about its history that is not already known. Canon C. M. Lowther Bouch proved fairly conclusively that the tower known as Jerusalem was built shortly after the battle of Towton in 1461 as a refuge for the Crackanthorpe family while the East or *pele* tower was in ruins;² the pele tower, built on the site and using the foundations of an earlier one, was dated from the will (of 1501) of Thomas Langton, bishop of Winchester,³ (in which he leaves forty marks to John Crackanthorpe “towards the building of his house”; the central block containing the old dining hall (to which the inscription of 1533, now placed on the pele tower, refers) was attributed to Christopher Crackanthorpe (son or grandson of the John Crackanthorpe above);⁴ and the building of the west tower, by *his* son Henry (which was rebuilt in 1844), was assigned to the second half of the sixteenth century.⁵

However, during the last few years, fresh evidence has appeared, suggesting an exact date for Henry Crackanthorpe’s west tower, and illuminating the building’s history in the eighteenth century.

Dr M. W. Taylor stated, in *Old Manorial Halls of Westmorland and Cumberland*,⁶ that the new tower of 1844 had been built on the same lines as the previous one, and that the external features had been retained; but it seems that he was unaware of the existence of a series of drawings⁷ made before the rebuilding of 1844, which show that the architect Anthony Salvin had, in fact, considerably altered the proportions of the west tower, and that its original appearance was very different to that of the present tower. The drawings of the previous building show that the only openings on the south side of the tower were a great arched doorway (which presumably led to the screens passage, since the old dining hall would be on its right) and one window, probably of a later date; this suggests that even as late as the sixteenth century defensive considerations were taken into account. Mr David Crackanthorpe (to whom I am indebted for this information) believes that the west tower of Henry Crackanthorpe also replaced an earlier one; an oak strong box in his possession was unearthed in the foundations during the rebuilding in 1844, and it appears to be of a much earlier date than the sixteenth century.

A sketch made from the north west, showing a massive chimney on this side of the house, demonstrates how necessary the rebuilding in 1844 must have been.⁸ During the eighteenth century this part had been allowed to fall into disrepair, and the end wall had begun to collapse. James Crackanthorpe, the last of the male line, had died in 1753, leaving all his estates to his wife, Ann.⁹ Less than three months after his death Ann Crackanthorpe had let the west tower and dining hall to two farmers, and returned to her native County Durham.¹⁰ In 1760 a further lease was drawn up, for twenty-one years; and in 1790 she died, having enjoyed the Crackanthorpe estates for nearly forty years.

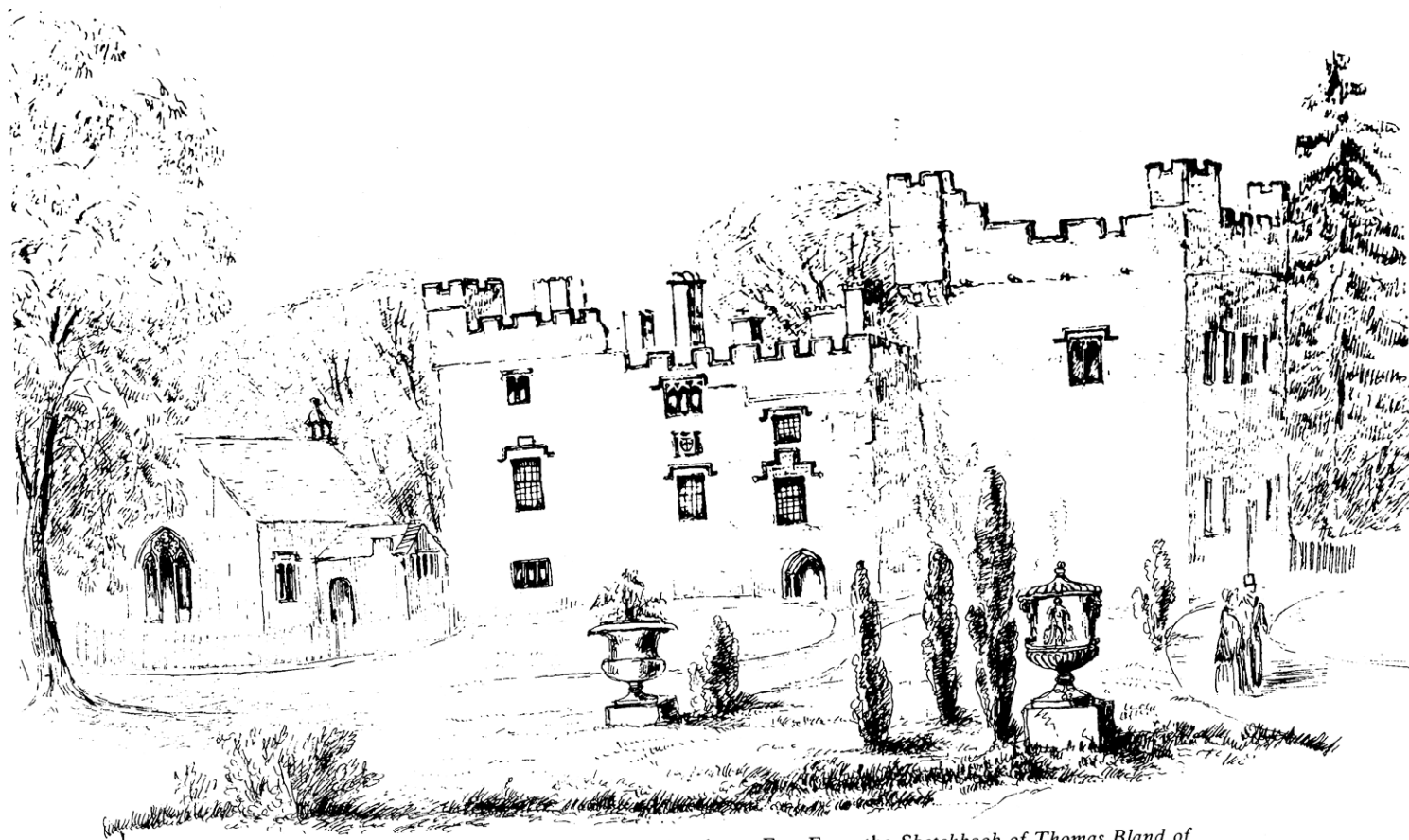


FIG. 1. — Newbiggin Hall Seat of Wm. Crackanthorpe Esq. From the *Sketchbook of Thomas Bland of Reagill 1799-1865*.



PLATE I. — Newbiggin Hall from the same view, showing the West tower rebuilt by Anthony Salvin.

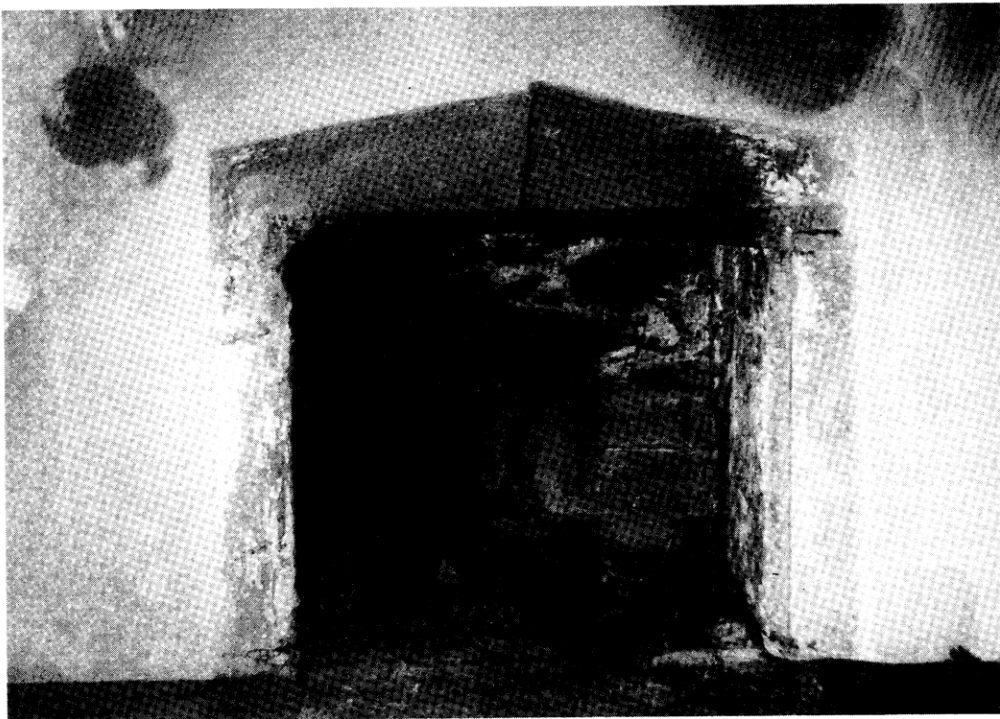


PLATE II. — Sandstone fireplace in Jerusalem tower, probably c. 1461.



FIG. 2. – Part of Newbiggin Hall taken down 15 May 1844.

When Christopher Crackanthorpe Cookson¹¹ inherited the property in 1792, he immediately embarked on a programme of rebuilding and repairing the house that Ann Crackanthorpe had neglected. During the next seven years until his death in 1799, he built or rebuilt nearly every farmhouse and building on the estate, he erected the coach house and cart house in 1794, the walled garden in 1795, the poultry house and piggery in 1796, and in the same year on 29th August he began the rebuilding of the central hall, which continued until October 1797.¹² The day after the restoration had begun some painted beams, inscribed in verse, were found on the ceiling of the old dining hall. The verses were copied out and begin:

“Ih Henry Crakanthorpe of this new beygyng – this worke began
in the xi yere of ellezabethe our quen –
and in the yere of our lorde gode
one thousand fyve houndreth thre score and nine.”¹³

A panel in the wainscot over the fireplace was inscribed:

“Anno Domini 1581”

The painted beams were discovered for a second time during the restoration in 1844, when the verses were again copied out;¹⁴ but their present position has not yet been identified.

Two recent discoveries have been made during the present restoration of the house. In 1973 sections of carved oak, which appear to date from the early sixteenth century, were found under the floor in the central block. Joined together, the sections form two friezes, (although some sections are missing,) carved with the arms of Crackanthorpe, supported

by unicorns and mermen, and bearing the initials I C.¹⁵ The carving and border of the friezes resemble that of the oak mantelpiece in the hall of the pele tower; and the initials are the same as those above the stone fireplace at the opposite end of the hall, which is inscribed:

“I C. (Arms of Crackanthorpe) Ad° Mdxli iii” (i.e. 1544)

In 1977 a large sandstone fireplace with two-centred arch, was uncovered behind a nineteenth-century one in the upper room in the Jerusalem tower, and it appears to have been the original fireplace of the tower; that is to say, it dates from about 1461.

Obviously, much else besides this remains to be discovered before one can entirely reconstruct the history of the house, and perhaps later on it may be possible to identify some of the rooms mentioned in the 1754 lease (see note 10) and also the inventories of Richard Crackanthorpe (1661) and Christopher Crackanthorpe (1669).¹⁶

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Miss Sheila MacPherson, of the Kendal Record Office, for arranging the exhibition of material quoted in this paper; to Mr B. C. Jones, of the Carlisle Record Office, for allowing me to use the illustration from *The Sketchbook of Thomas Bland*, (and to Mr Wilkinson, of the Cumbria County Library, who drew my attention to it); to Mr R.S. Boumphrey for his interpretation of the initials and heraldic beasts carved on the oak frieze; and above all, to my husband's kinsman, Mr David Crackanthorpe, who so patiently answered all my questions, and who first encouraged my interest in the history of his ancestral home.

Notes and References

- ¹ (i) Dr M. W. Taylor (CW1, xii, 33-41), reprinted in his *Old Manorial Halls* (ES, viii, 1892, 147-154); (ii) J. H. Martindale (CW2, xxii, 158-161); (iii) Rev. C. M. L. Bouch (CW2, liv, 140-3). For plan of the Hall see CW1, xii, 37.
- ² CW2, liv, 142.
- ³ CW2, xxvi, 164.
- ⁴ CW2, liv, 140, 142.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.
- ⁶ ES, viii, 1892, 147-54.
- ⁷ From *The Sketchbook of Thomas Bland*, of Reagill, (1799-1865); Tullie House, Carlisle.
- ⁸ I am grateful to Mr David Crackanthorpe for this illustration of the house from the north west. The part which was taken down is shown to the right of the two-storied central block.
- ⁹ The dau. of George Vane, of Long Newton, Co. Durham. James's will, dated 16 September 1753, was proved by her at York, 5 June 1754.
- ¹⁰ In 1754 she let to John Dobson and Robert Wilson for 7 years, part of the Hall “that is to say the Old Kitchen lately occupied by Joseph Slack, Four Rooms in two Stories over the said Kitchen, one old Wainscotted Room over the Dining Room, One Dark room adjoining the Milkhouse, One Arched Room adjoining the old Kitchen, and also part of a cellar on the Low Side of the passage through the Hall”. (Crackanthorpe papers, Kendal Record Office).
- ¹¹ The eldest surviving son of Dorothy (James Crackanthorpe's sister) and William Cookson, of Penrith.
- ¹² Accounts of Thomas & Robert Gowling, stonemasons, for 1794-7. (Crackanthorpe MSS, Kendal Record Office)
- ¹³ “Henry Crackanthorpe (ob. 1 May 1593) of Newbiggin began this work 11 Eliz. A.D. 1569”. Recorded 30 August 1796. (Crackanthorpe MSS)
- ¹⁴ Crackanthorpe MSS.
- ¹⁵ Probably John Crackanthorpe, beneficiary of Thomas Langton's will.
- ¹⁶ D/1662 and D/1669 Carlisle Record Office. (These inventories describe a green chamber, a white chamber and a yellow chamber).

