

V.—A RECORD OF STAMFORDHAM.

BY F. AUSTIN CHILD.

Three reasons might be assigned for recording some features of Stamfordham, (1) the subject is attractive; (2) the impulse to record places of historical or architectural merit has been quickened by the danger of their destruction by air attack; and (3) in the period of reconstruction after the war, good, traditional examples of planning for small communities should be available for reference if any attempt is to be made to preserve the amenities of the countryside. For historical information in the notes which follow the writer freely acknowledges his indebtedness to the authors of *Northumberland County History*, volume XII.

The drawing here presented (plate v) is an attempt to record two features of Stamfordham which have hitherto received little attention. One of these is the plan, characterized by a suggestion of urbanity on the north side of the green and a less formal grouping and alignment on the south side. The other feature is the long row of contiguous buildings forming the north side of the green where the feeling of urbanity in plan is accentuated in the elevation. Stamfordham is a village large enough to be a centre for the surrounding rural area and was, in former years, a small market town. It claimed the latter status, apart from other reasons, because of its situation. It stands on the left bank of the river Pont midway between the source near Little Whittington and the village of Ponteland where the course of the river is diverted northwards to its confluence with the Blyth. This stretch of the valley is wide, with gently sloping sides, and formerly supported a scattered population devoted almost entirely to agriculture. The floor of the

valley is well timbered and has good pasturage. The lower slopes are clean, wind swept, arable land, but the upper slopes of the watershed to the west above the 600 feet contour, are rough sheep walks and rock outcrops. Stamfordham is the natural focus of a network of roads and byways traversing the area. The nearest large market towns are Newcastle upon Tyne, Morpeth and Hexham, each about twelve miles distant.

Considered as a small town, its size was commensurate with the available means of access, the area of the district and the population which it served. The development of railways did not entirely destroy its local importance, for even to-day the nearest railway is almost six miles away. But, whilst the railway failed to reach Stamfordham, motor transport, aided by improved road surfaces, succeeded, and with quick and convenient transport its significance as a local marketing centre has rapidly diminished. To-day, its former activities almost atrophied, it retains its physical features as a memento of its earlier importance. The village is situated on a pleasant southerly slope descending to the little How Burn, which here joins the Pont. On the south side of the river is the hamlet of Hawkwell, while three-quarters of a mile to the north, on a ridge of no great altitude but of considerable prominence in the landscape, is the hamlet of Heugh. Stamfordham is in the township of Heugh. Until the mid-nineteenth century the ecclesiastical parish occupied 18,179 acres, but 8,913 acres were taken in 1846 to form the new parish of Matfen, leaving Stamfordham with 9,266 acres.

The layout of the village is arranged round a green roughly rectangular in shape. The north-south road passes the eastern end of the village, and the east-west road crosses the green diagonally from south-east to north-west. From these routes roadways and paths cross the green quite informally to give convenient access to the buildings surrounding it. No attempt has been made to level the open space which follows the natural contour of the ground.

The higher level is therefore on the north side, and difference in level is accentuated by variation in the grade of the ground, which is steeper on the north side of the through road than it is on the south. Sense of enclosure round the green is by no means complete. It is realized on the north side and partially on the south. The west side, however, is occupied by detached buildings informally arranged, and these require the presence of trees to obtain a feeling of cohesion and closure at this end of the green. There were formerly a considerable number of trees here, but most of them have now disappeared. No attempt has been made to enclose the east end of the village, which is open to the fields beyond. Indeed the green is so extensive, one side so much higher than the other, and, moreover, the surrounding buildings so domestic in scale that one is more conscious of spaciousness and affinity with the outlying country than of deliberate spatial enclosure.

The north side of the green is bounded by buildings which display a degree of urbanity unusual in such a rural setting and, indeed, present a unique street picture. They form a continuous line without break from one end to the other. The frontage is straight on plan and, whilst individual structures are diverse in character, size and materials, collectively the row has a unity which dominates the village. It will be observed on the drawing that the roofs of the buildings contribute in no small measure to the unifying effect. The tranquil skyline formed by roof ridges gradually builds up from each end towards a centre where the doctor's house, higher than its neighbours, gracefully and naturally assumes the rôle of focal point in the street. All the roofs conform in type, but the materials used in covering them are slates, stone slates and pantiles according to circumstances. Variations in colour and texture are thus introduced without disturbing the effect of repose which results from the use of long, simple roof lines. Some of the buildings have external walls of warm, plum-coloured bricks, some are built of local stone and others are plastered

and colour-washed. In accordance with eighteenth-century tradition individual interest and distinction in each house is retained but subordinated to the total effect of unity and harmony in the row. Respect for this tradition is clearly evident in the restrained elevation of the Presbyterian church built upon its present site near the east end of the street in 1860.

The buildings on the south side of the green are less formally disposed. The continuity is broken and the frontage line is not straight in plan. There is less diversity in materials, and the appearance of this side of the village is rural in character. On the green are three detached buildings. The Bay Horse Inn occupies a good tactical position for market-day activities in the south-west angle. Near the centre the small, square building, with arched openings on all sides, known as the Market Cross, was erected by Sir Edward Swinburne in 1735. At the east end is the rather severe looking lock-up or pound which expresses admirably the purpose for which it was formerly used. The communal water supply was concentrated at the stone fountain placed on the north side of the main road crossing the green. Here it was convenient not only for the villagers but also for watering animals using the road or grazing the common land. Many of the houses are now provided with a piped water supply.

The church and vicarage stand in the extreme south-west angle of the village, the former conspicuous on a small eminence. It has been fully described elsewhere.¹ The vicarage lies immediately south of the church in a large, walled garden. It is an interesting building, typically Northumbrian in character. The oldest remaining part appears to date from the seventeenth century; considerable additions and alterations were made in 1762 by Doctor Dockwray, and there is some evidence that further alterations on the north side of the house were carried out by John Dobson about 1834.

¹ *N.C.H.*, vol. xii.

The school is a detached building at the north-east angle of the village. A free Grammar school, endowed by Sir Thomas Widdrington of Cheeseburn Grange in 1663, admitted both boys and girls. In 1829 it was the subject of enquiry by the Charity Commissioners, who reported unfavourably not only on the administration, but also on the condition of the endowment premises, which then consisted of the school house, a house with garden and outbuildings for the master, together with a farm of seventy-six acres at Heugh. There is a note suggesting that John Dobson was employed on the school in 1832, perhaps as a result of the commissioners' enquiry. What improvement, if any, was made is not known, but in 1879 the present building was erected as a public elementary school.

In 1721 Heugh township contained 2,152 acres, and in that year arbitrators were appointed to make an award of the common land. The award was published in 1725. Amongst other things they ordered that the village green be enjoyed in common by the vicars and schoolmasters of Stamfordham and "by the inhabitants of such houses as are or shall be built upon the said town green." They further ordered that all tolls and other rights and royalties arising from any fairs or markets to be kept at Stamfordham be paid to Sir John Swinburne and Balliol College in proportion to the number of their respective farms in the township. With such encouragement and by the enclosure of so much of the common land, the establishment of a market could not long be delayed. But not until 1732 was the first weekly cattle market held, and in the same year the first annual summer fair took place. It is significant, too, that many of the houses now facing the green appear to have been built during the period of change and innovation in Stamfordham in the first three decades of the eighteenth century.

After an interval of two hundred years new features are being added to the village. A few years before the war suburban villas were built on land at the east end, and dur-

STAMFORDHAM in the county of NORTHUMBERLAND



Hexham Abbey



Balliol College



Swinburne



Normanville

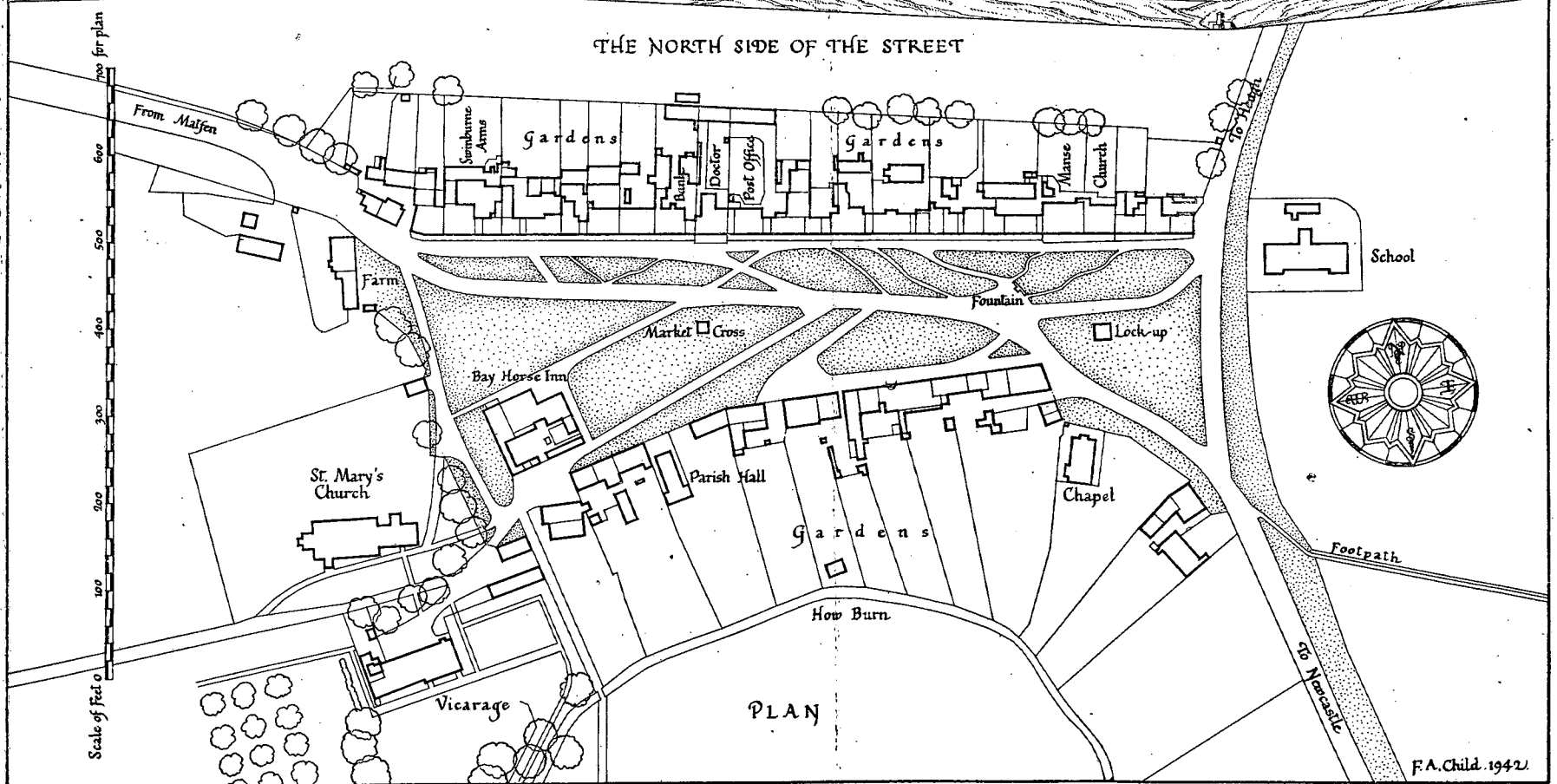


Widdrington

Scale of Feet 0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400 for elevations



THE NORTH SIDE OF THE STREET



PLAN

1917

1. The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the war. It is a very interesting and detailed account of the events of the year.

2. The second part of the report deals with the financial situation of the country. It shows that the government has been able to maintain a budget surplus throughout the year, which is a very good sign.

3. The third part of the report deals with the social and economic conditions of the country. It shows that the standard of living has improved since the beginning of the year, and that the economy is beginning to recover from the effects of the war.

4. The fourth part of the report deals with the foreign relations of the country. It shows that the government has been able to maintain friendly relations with all the major powers, and that it has been able to secure the support of the United States.

5. The fifth part of the report deals with the military situation of the country. It shows that the army has been retrained and re-equipped, and that it is now in a position to meet any emergency.

6. The sixth part of the report deals with the naval situation of the country. It shows that the navy has been strengthened, and that it is now able to protect the coast and the sea lanes.

7. The seventh part of the report deals with the air force of the country. It shows that the air force has been built up, and that it is now a powerful fighting force.

8. The eighth part of the report deals with the education of the country. It shows that the government has been able to maintain a high standard of education, and that it has been able to provide for the needs of all the people.

9. The ninth part of the report deals with the health of the country. It shows that the government has been able to maintain a high standard of health, and that it has been able to provide for the needs of all the people.

10. The tenth part of the report deals with the general progress of the country. It shows that the country has made great progress since the beginning of the year, and that it is now in a position to meet any emergency.

ing the last three years buildings of war-time standard have been erected on land south of the school. With one exception the recent additions do not even attempt to follow reasonable traditional lines.

The shields of arms illustrated on the drawing (plate v) are those of present and former landowners in the district.

HEXHAM ABBEY—azure a saltire argent.

BALLIOL COLLEGE—azure a lion rampant argent crowned or
—Galloway, impaling gules an orle argent—Baliol.

SWINBURNE—per fess gules and argent three cinquefoils
countercoloured.

NORMANVILLE—argent on a fess doubly cotised gules three
fleurs-de-lis argent.

WIDDRINGTON—quarterly argent and gules a baston sable.