



Fig. 1. BENWELL TOWER FROM THE S.W.

VII.—BENWELL TOWER, NEWCASTLE.

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The modern 'Benwell tower,' erected on the site of an ancient one, is situated at the east end of Benwell village, roughly 500 yards south of the line of the Roman Wall, at a point two miles west of Newcastle cathedral church. The building stands on a sloping eminence about 330 feet above the level of the river Tyne and three quarters of a mile distant from it. Although now marred by numerous industrial works erected during the past century, the view of the wooded landscape of the northern slopes of the opposite county of Durham and of the valley of the Derwent, is still a refreshing and beautiful one.

By the kindness of the Rev. Canon Crawhall, D.S.O., we have, to-night, the pleasure of examining six excellent water-colour drawings of it by the well-known local artist J. W. Carmichael. The drawings were made in 1831, previous to the demolition of the buildings by Canon Crawhall's great-uncle, Mr. Thomas Crawhall, who then erected a modern mansion, which, with additions, became in 1881, by the generosity of the late Mr. J. W. Pease, the residence of the bishops of Newcastle. Satisfactory reproductions of the drawings cannot, unfortunately, be made by photography. I have, therefore, made outline sketches of the buildings only, forming parts of three of the drawings.

The tower has not been previously illustrated, and is not mentioned in the lists of castles and fortalices compiled in 1415 and 1541, although it certainly existed previous to the suppression of Tynemouth priory. The drawings, therefore, form a valuable record as they indicate three periods of construction. Firstly, in

point of date was a plain oblong medieval tower three storeys in height without offsets or projections, surmounted by a simple embattled parapet. It was larger than the vicar's pele at Corbridge, it approximated in size that of Cocklaw tower, and outwardly resembled both. No contemporary windows are indicated, they doubtless occupied the position of the later inserted windows delineated on the east elevation. Nor is the position of an entrance door evident, although it may be inferred that this feature occurred at the south-west angle and communicated with the later manor house. Two small windows appear at the west end of the south wall, and may indicate the position of earlier ones, if so, possibly they lighted a newel stair at the south-west angle, or a mural one in the west wall.

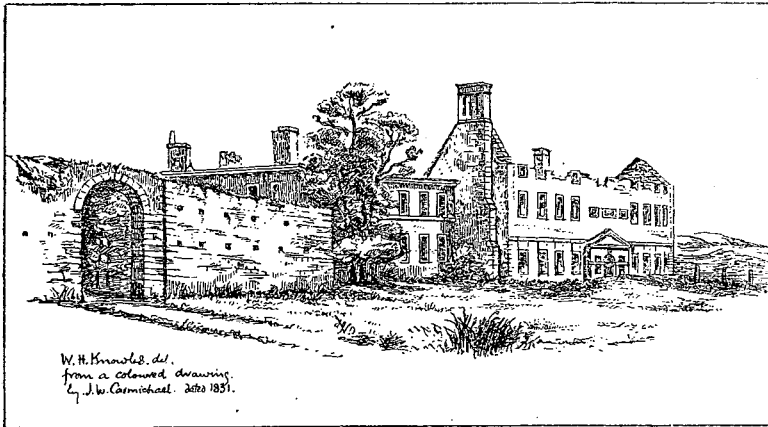


Fig. 2. BENWELL TOWER FROM THE N.W.

The second building period occurred in late medieval times and included the erection, at the south-west angle of the tower, of a gabled residence with projecting chimney stacks with weathered offsets. At this time, or previously, the whole was enclosed by a courtyard or forebuilding.

The third period of construction, about the middle of the eighteenth century, included the incorporation of the manor-house and comprised a long three-storied building running north and south to the west of the tower, and considerable domestic offices to the north of it.

The evidence of the suggested periods will be observed by reference to the illustrations. The item of chief interest is the tower seen in the middle of the east elevation fig. 1. The three-light windows with an arched centre opening are insertions of the



Fig 3. WEST SIDE, OLD BENWELL TOWER.

eighteenth century. The second period of construction is evident in the north gable wall fig. 2, whereon is an external chimney stack; it formed part of the manor-house united with the tower, see plan fig. 4 and fig. 5, a reproduction of a sketch which I think is certainly an attempt to represent the medieval tower and manor-house. It occurs in a household book of the Shaftos, wherein are surveys made before and after 1700. The gateway and walling to be associated with the period is shewn in the foreground of fig. 2.

The third period, of eighteenth century workmanship, comprised the long, narrow three-storied building running north and south. The central feature of the principal position of the west elevation fig. 3, is a round arched doorway with square side lights below a moulded pediment (see also plan, fig. 5) on either side of the entrance are four square headed windows with flat projecting jambs, head and sill, repeated on each floor and diminishing in

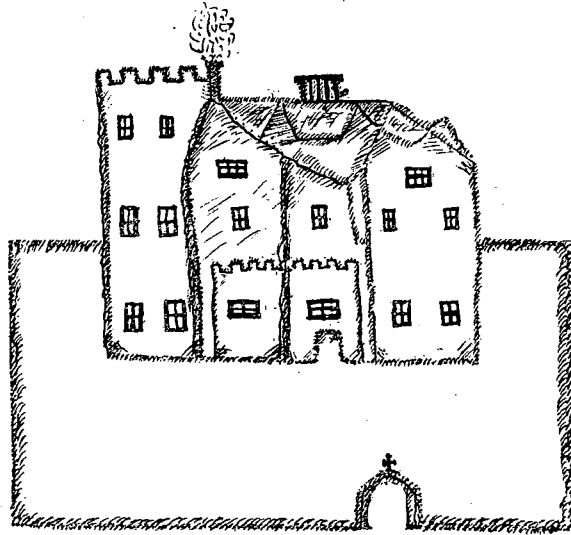


Fig. 4. SKETCH IN MR. SHAFTO'S BOOK.
The medieval Tower and Manor house.

height as they ascend. At the south end was a circular bay window under a pedimented gable, much flatter it will be observed than the medieval gable at the north end. A lower and plainer annexe occurs at the extreme north end with windows of similar design. On the east elevation fig. 1, is an entrance door opposite that on the west side, the other features being the windows inserted in the tower, in an attempt, as at Chipchase castle, to make the elevation uniform with the last building period.

The third period work was of the middle of the eighteenth century, when James Paine, an eminent architect, was engaged on Gosforth hall, Axwell park, Bywell hall and other works in the north. The design before us is not in the grand style of the man-

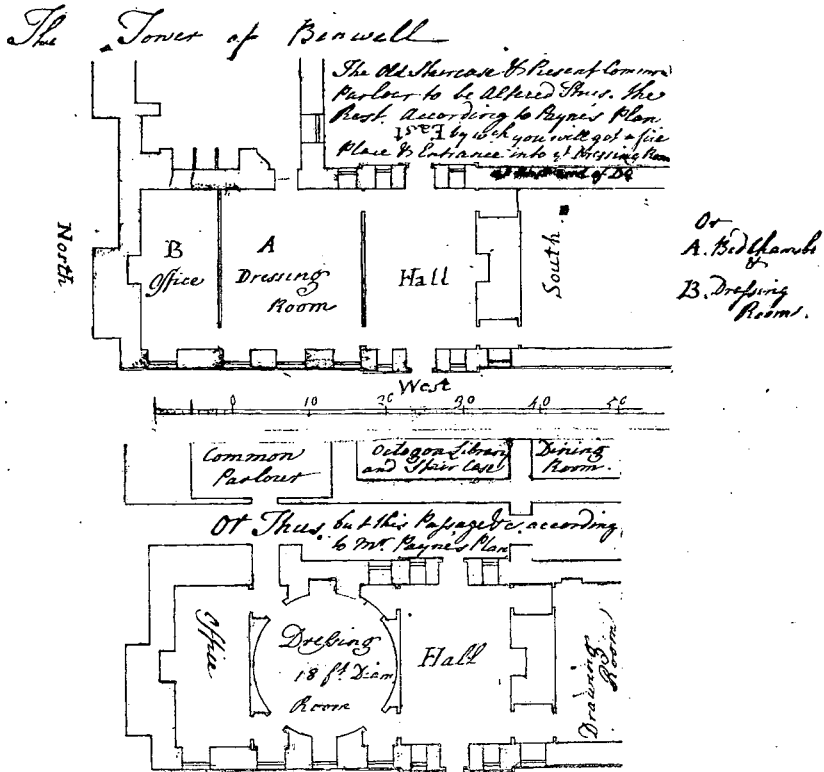


Fig. 5. OLD PLANS FROM MR. SHAFTO'S BOOK.

sions mentioned, but having regard to the minor importance of Benwell it is possible that he may have been engaged thereon. The suggestion is advanced with confidence, inasmuch as in the Shafto household book already mentioned (now in the possession

of Mr. W. W. Gibson), there occur some criticisms and sketches of projected works, fig. 5. The plan on which they are based is most certainly that of the buildings shewn in figs. 1, 2 and 3, and the written comments are to alternative schemes by Mr. Paine; but whether the remarks are to be regarded as to an older or a contemporary plan then under consideration, either or both of which may have been by Paine, is not now easy to determine.

Because the existing buildings so nearly resemble in plan those destroyed in 1831, the writer, by kind permission of the bishop, made inspection but failed to find any old work. All that can be said is that the position and extent of the present drawing-room and inner hall correspond with the similar room demolished in 1831, and that the new and old towers occupy the same site. The domestic buildings to the north approximate in appearance to the destroyed buildings, but the window dressings are not old, they may be of reused material.

An account of the buildings without reference to the known history of the manor of Benwell would seem incomplete. The following notes sufficiently indicate the succession and ownership. Of the companions of the conqueror was Hugh de Bolbec, a Norman knight on whom Henry I conferred the barony of Bolbec formed largely of the extensive lands which had previously belonged to the official earldom of Northumberland. Included among the numerous manors embraced in the barony was that of Benwell.¹

Hugh de Bolbec II, sheriff of Northumberland, 1221-1236, who died about 1262, was survived by four daughters. The barony thus becoming extinct in the male line² was divided among the co-heiresses, one of whom Maud or Matilda, the fourth daughter, married, as second husband, Hugh Delaval, who died without issue.

¹ *New County Hist. of Northd.*

² *Inq.* 25 Oct., 46 Hen. III (1262).

Of the barons who resisted king John at the signing of Magna Charta was Gilbert Delaval, who held the barony of Callerton in 1166 by two knights' fees as his ancestors had done.³ His eldest son, Sir Eustace Delaval, died childless, whereupon his second son, Sir Henry succeeded to the barony; he was enfeoffed of half of the Bolbec manor of Benwell, and was a man of considerable property and engaged in important offices under the crown. Associated with Sir Henry in 1340 was Robert de Wycestre. It is stated that they held together half of Benwell of Hugh de Bolbec.⁴ Sir Henry was succeeded by Sir Hugh Delaval, knight, who held for life a third of the Bolbec inheritance and granted a manor-house at Benwell to Hexham priory. Following him was Sir Robert Delaval, knight, born 5 Aug., 1259, whose third son, Sir William Delaval junior, inherited Benwell under entail made by his father in 1349. His, Sir William's, son William, held a fourth part of Benwell in 1375, and another son, John or George, was enfeoffed of one-third of Benwell by his father's trustees and held the same in 1366 being then a minor.

A John de Whitchester, lord of half of the manor of Benwell, married before 1388, Alice, sister and heir of Sir Henry Delaval, knight (who was born at Seaton Delaval 12 Jan., 1343-4 and was grandson and heir of Sir Robert), and succeeded to Seaton Delaval about 1388. John de Whitchester's son William, who died 1407-8, aged 34 years was twice married, and was succeeded by a son, Sir William de Whitchester, knight, and a daughter Elizabeth, who married before 1424 Sir John Burcester; and was heir to her half-brother, from whose widow she recovered lands in Benwell in 1424. Dame Elizabeth Burcester succeeded under the entail of 1349 to the Delaval moiety of Benwell on the death of her kinsman, John Delaval, in 1455, and sold for 100*l.* to Robert de Rhodes, who appears to have resided at Benwell until his death

³ N.C.H. IX, 141..

⁴ *Testa de Neville.*

in 1473. Soon after acquiring the place Rhodes conveyed the whole manor to Tynemouth priory of which he was a benefactor. The prior retained possession until the suppression of the monastery in 1539. When the monks surrendered they were liberally rewarded, and Robert Blakeney, the last prior, received a pension of 8*l.* and was allowed by the crown on a payment of 23*s.* 4*d.* annual rent, to occupy at Benwell, his own manor-house, tower, garden, and a couple of meadows of three acres each.

Wallis the historian,⁵ writing in 1769 on what authority does not appear, says that Robert Shafto of Little Bavington had lands in Benwell, 10 Elizabeth [1568]. No doubt such was the case, but the manor remained with the crown until 1628, when it passed to the Ditchfields from whom it was purchased by the Shaftoes.

In a roll of accounts of rents and profits arising out of the former possessions of the monastery of Tynemouth, dated 20 Q. Elizabeth [1578] is recorded sixteen tenements at Benwell 15*l.*, a water-mill there 20*s.*, a salmon fishery within the water of Tyne at Benwell 5*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*, mines of coal in the fields of Benwell 73*l.* 6*s.* 8*d.*, a stone quarry there 20*s.*, in the tenure of Todderick and others 20*s.*

In Surtees's *History of Durham*⁶ is a pedigree of the Shaftoes, the first of whom to occupy Benwell tower is Robert, an alderman, who married Jane Anderson in 1624. He was the son of Robert Shafto, sheriff of Northumberland in 1607, who was the oldest surviving son of Ninian Shafto by his marriage with Anne, daughter of Henry Brandling.

Several generations of Shaftoes bearing the same christian name continued in possession. Robert Shafto the younger, born in 1626 succeeded; he married secondly Mary, daughter of Sir Henry Forster of Ingelby manor, co. York. Their son, Robert, born in 1663, married Dorothy, the fourth daughter of Sir Thomas

⁵ *Northd.*, II, 174.

⁶ III, 294.

Heselrigge of Nosely, co. Leicester and was high sheriff of Northumberland in 1696. He was succeeded by Robert, who had married Mary the daughter of Ralph Jenison of Elswick, and was high sheriff in 1718. Yet another Robert, son of the last, is described as of Benwell and Wrattling park, co. Cambridge. He also was high sheriff in 1754. He died at Wrattling park 18 June, 1780 and was buried there. His wife was Camilla, daughter and co-heir of Thomas Allen of the Flatts, Chester-le-Street. To them was born a son, Robert, on 23 April, 1760, who was baptized at St. John's church and died unmarried, 30 Aug., 1781, also Camilla, sole daughter and, at length, heir of her brother. She also was baptized at St. John's church, 14 Feb., 1756, and was married there 23 Sept., 1784 to Hugh, otherwise William Adair of Benwell, a captain in the 25th regiment of foot at the time.

Mrs. Adair about 1777 sold Benwell to the notorius Andrew Robinson Bowes, the cruel husband of the young and wealthy countess of Strathmore.⁷ The sum paid was 24,000*l.* and was apparently regarded by some critics as a poor investment. Not of such opinion, however, was Philip Gorst of Staindrop who wrote Mr. Bowes, 'The purchase of the Benwell estate does not strike me as the undertaking of a madman. On the contrary, I look upon it as a judicious, well-concerted scheme, and highly conducive to your interest in Newcastle.' That the price was not excessive would appear from the fact that the estate sold in 1811 for 65,000*l.* Until the last quarter of the eighteenth century there stood a chapel to the south of the mansion-house which was removed because it impeded the view therefrom. It is spoken of as the domestic chapel of the priors of Tynemouth, and in 1663 was destitute.⁸ At the time 'the gleeb was worth 12*li* or

⁷ George Bowes, Streatlam and Gibside, M.P. for the county of Durham, left 600,000*l.* and an only daughter Mary Eleanor, who married John Lyons, 9th earl of Strathmore and afterwards, unfortunately, A. R. Stoney Bowes—Sykes, *Local Records*, II, 386.

⁸ Survey of churches, *temp.* Charles II (1663), *Arch. Ael.* 2 ser. xvii, 247.

14*li*, which Mr. Shaftoe holdes for 40*li*. per annum. The vicar of Newcastle would gladly recover it to the church if he knew how, and belongs to himselfe.' In 1680 the chapel was opened by Mr. Shafto and devoted by him to the good of the people of the village, when Mr. Dalgarnier occurs as the minister. At the period and until the demolition of the chapel, its services were supplied by the curate of St. John's church. Apparently the chapel remained in use until the advent of Stoney Bowes, as the Rev. Thos. Randal, who was vicar of Ellingham (1768-1775), mentions it, as 'a private chapel with parochial uses—services on Sundays, and burials.'⁹

⁹ *Proc. Soc. Ant. Newc.*, 3 ser. ix, 55.



'STENG CROSS' BASE, and 'WINTER'S STOB,' near ELSDON.