

## VII

### The Castle of Ralph Fourth Baron Neville at Raby

*Malcolm Hislop*

WHEN John Leland visited Raby Castle in County Durham during the early sixteenth century he found it to be “the largest castel of logginges in al the north cuntrey”.<sup>1</sup> Whilst it is now difficult to verify this statement it was certainly true that since the last decade of the fourteenth century Raby had been one of the most extensive private residences in the north of England and that its domestic accommodation equalled that of any castle within the region. This is only to be expected of the principal castle of the Nevilles, one of the two most powerful baronial families in the north who like the Percies were closely associated with the defence of the borders. Nevertheless, unlike its Percy counterparts of Alnwick and Warkworth, Raby is comparatively little known today notwithstanding the fact that it is equally well preserved. Despite some eighteenth century demolition and important eighteenth and nineteenth century improvement programmes which have obscured or mutilated substantial parts of the medieval fabric, the castle is still, more than anything else, that which resulted from the building activities of three successive Neville lords between 1280 and 1388, during which a late thirteenth or early fourteenth century manor house was transformed into a castle.

The only contemporary documentary reference to the construction of this complex is a licence of 10 May 1378 granted by Thomas Hatfield, bishop of Durham, to John Fifth Baron Neville of Raby, whereby the latter was given permission to make a castle of his manor of Raby and to embattle and crenellate all the towers, houses and walls of the same.<sup>2</sup> This document gives a misleading impression of the castle's chronology, for the architectural evi-

dence suggests that it marked not the beginning of the conversion from a previously undefended manor house, but the enlargement and strengthening of a castle that had been in existence for over twenty years.

The fourteenth century extent of Raby can best be appreciated by reference to the reconstructed plan of the castle c. 1760 (fig. 1) which shows a conglomeration of ten towers and connecting ranges of buildings grouped around two courtyards, all within an outer ward contained by a curtain wall. By this date some demolition of the medieval work had occurred, notably a solar tower at the west end of the hall range, and a range linking this tower to Bulmer's Tower.<sup>3</sup> This area and the area immediately to the north, where there might have been further medieval buildings, were redeveloped in the nineteenth century, and are no longer available for examination. Nevertheless, by the mid-eighteenth century the castle had received no substantial additions since its completion c. 1390, so that the results of the medieval builders are readily discernible.

First impressions are of a rather haphazard arrangement of buildings for although in essence Raby belongs to the quadrangular school of castle building, the incorporation of earlier schemes and later additions have lessened the architectural impact of the plan. The east side of the main courtyard is bounded by the hall range and a southern range links this to a western entrance range containing a roughly central gateway (the Neville Gateway) and two rectangular corner towers (Joan's Tower and the Watch Tower). The fourth side of the quadrangle was partially enclosed by an L-shaped tower (the Keep), one of a cluster of buildings (including the Kitchen Tower) at the

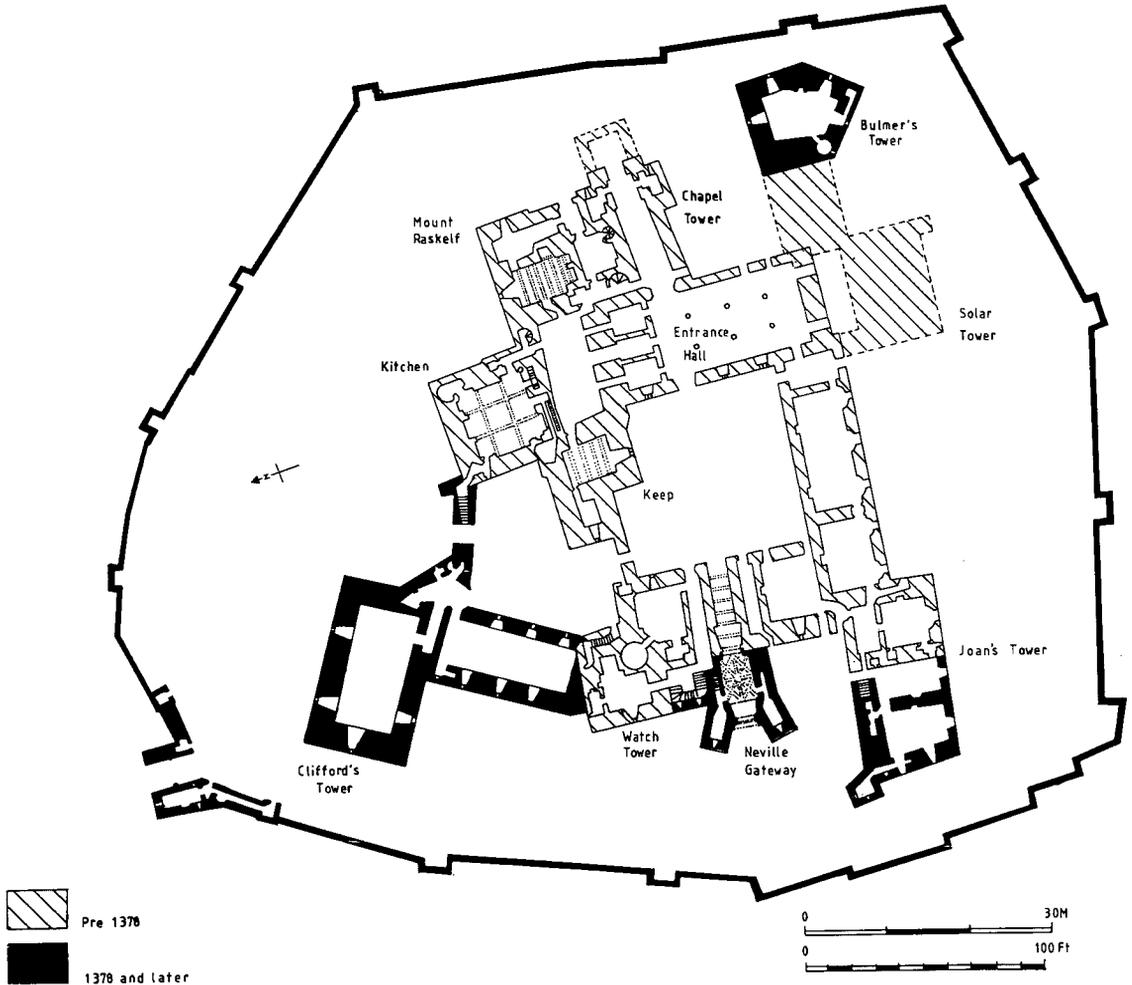


Fig. 1 Raby Castle c. 1760

lower (north) end of the hall range. These are connected to an eastern gatehouse known as the Chapel Tower which gives direct access to the hall range. Immediately north of this enclosure is a second, irregularly shaped courtyard, at the northern apex of which is a massive rectangular tower (Clifford's Tower); this is balanced at the opposite corner of the castle by the pentagonal Bulmer's Tower.

#### *The Castle of John Fifth Baron Neville*

The key to the chronology of the castle is the Neville Gateway which is closely dated by its heraldry to between 1381 and 1388,<sup>4</sup> so that it can safely be assumed to have been erected under the licence of 1378. Now the Reverend J. F. Hodgson pointed out that the tower was built in front of an earlier gateway which pierces the west range so that an unusually long gate passage has resulted, the two phases of which are clearly differentiated by their vaulting styles.<sup>5</sup> The tunnel vaulting of the earlier



Fig. 2 Raby: the Neville Gateway

gate passage supported as it is by massive transverse ribs (a style encountered elsewhere in the castle), is in direct contrast to the more delicate quadripartite vaulting of the Neville Gateway with its moulded ribs springing from slender colonettes with crenellated caps.

Before the addition of the Neville Gateway, the western entrance does not appear to have been very heavily defended: some protection was afforded by two rectangular corner towers (the Watch Tower and Joan's Tower) from which the defenders would have been able to enfilade the entrance. The two towers were rendered obsolete in this respect by the construction of the new gatehouse which projected far beyond them. The design of the Neville Gateway reduced the importance of such a scheme, for its entrance was protected not only by gates and a portcullis but also by projecting

corner turrets and a machicolated gallery. Nevertheless its construction appears to have been accompanied by a correspondingly large extension to Joan's Tower so that the latter projected beyond the new entrance to the same degree that it had projected beyond the old, and gave more effective command of the southern approach to the gateway than it had done in the past.<sup>6</sup> Certain other works can be associated with the licence of 1378: the curtain wall between the Watch Tower and the Neville Gateway was brought forward, flush with the face of the former. A three-storey rectangular building (the north-west range) was added to the north side of the Watch Tower; this is terminated to the north by Clifford's Tower, and a section of curtain wall (the north curtain) links Clifford's Tower to the earlier Kitchen Tower at the north end of the hall range so that a second courtyard is enclosed immediately north of the main one. Clifford's Tower is of similar proportions to the extended Joan's Tower and acts as an effective counterbalance at the opposite end of a greatly enlarged west front. It effectively assumed a former defensive function of the Watch Tower, that is to dominate the northern approach to the entrance, and at the same time it guarded access to the castle from the outer gatehouse. The windows of Clifford's Tower and the adjoining north-west range are square-headed with trefoil cusping and sunken spandrels. The form matches that of the niches containing the mourners on John Lord Neville's tomb of c. 1375;<sup>7</sup> these niches are in two tiers, an arrangement that is reproduced exactly in some of the Raby windows. This window type was reproduced all over the castle c. 1901-6 but Clifford's Tower and the north-west range contain medieval examples, and this supports the view that these buildings were part of John Lord Neville's improvements.

Two other elements of the castle can be tentatively assigned to the same phase as these additions to the west front. One of these is Bulmer's Tower at the south-east corner of the inner complex. The two southern faces of the tower each have a panel carved with the letter "b", the symbol of the Bulmer family, ances-

tors of the Nevilles. This insignia was used by John Lord Neville as his seal,<sup>8</sup> and the medieval details that do survive are not inconsistent with a late fourteenth century date. The same is probably true of the outer curtain: the parapets of both the turrets flanking the outer gatehouse, and the buttress turret at the junction of the north curtain and the Kitchen Tower share an unusual design in that they are machicolated to the sides but flush with the fronts of the turrets. This technique was also employed at the castles of Brancepeth and Witton probably during the 1390s.<sup>9</sup> Also the turrets of the outer gatehouse are linked by a machicolated gallery in the same manner as those of the Neville Gateway. The disposition of the outer enceinte is clearly related to those of Bulmer's Tower, Joan's Tower and Clifford's Tower which project forward from the body of the inner complex to dominate access between the various sections of the outer ward. Thus, in a military sense, the outer curtain may be considered as part of the additions authorized under the licence of 1378.

#### *The Castle of Ralph Fourth Baron Neville*

The Neville Gateway provides a terminus post quem for the earlier castle of which the west range forms part. The oldest portion of this castle now forms the basis of the Entrance Hall which occupies the ground storey of the two-storey hall range. The details are now entirely eighteenth century or later but Hodgson dated the structure from the tracery of formerly existing windows.<sup>10</sup> These windows resembled the existing ones in being of two trefoil-headed lights with Geometrical tracery, probably of c. 1280–c. 1300 (cf. York and Southwell chapter houses, Acton Burnell and Stokesay castle halls), so that the building must be attributed to Ralph, Third Baron Neville (1280–1331).

The initial fortification of this house in stone resulted in a castle of unmistakable albeit somewhat irregular quadrangular form. Whether this was planned from the outset is open to question for the singular plan of the buildings associated with the hall range suggest

at least one other architectural scheme. The northern end of the range is enclosed by a massive bulwark containing three towers: the Kitchen Tower, the Keep, and Mount Raskelf which rises from the north-east block. The Kitchen Tower projects boldly from the centre of this complex: there is little doubt that in spite of its domestic function this structure could be readily adapted to conduct an aggressive defence. There are windows around the three sides of the tower, high up above the floor of the kitchen. The embrasures of these windows are linked by a mural passage reached from a staircase in the south wall. The sills are stepped down towards the kitchen, terminating approximately 10 ft (3.05 m) above the floor, at which level a wooden gallery might have been erected for the benefit of the defenders in the event of an attack. From the side window embrasures the defenders would have been able to enfilade the faces of the Keep and the north-east block which would themselves have provided positions from which to protect the sides of the Kitchen Tower. The north-east block is attached to the Chapel Tower<sup>11</sup> so that the north and north-east sides of the hall range are protected by a continuous defencework.

This arrangement was to some extent balanced at the south end of the hall range by two or possibly more buildings including a solar tower and the building which linked this to Bulmer's Tower.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that we have here the remains of an abortive attempt to convert the hall into a massive tower house by encapsulating it in a defensive ring of towers and connecting buildings. This was not the only fourteenth century hall conversion in the north where the incorporation of the original house is evident: Haughton and Featherstone, both in Northumberland are examples.<sup>13</sup> None, however, was on such an ambitious scale as Raby and the final adoption of the quadrangular form was perhaps more appropriate to Neville's accommodation requirements.

The dating of this early castle is based partly upon the details of the chapel which occupies the first floor of the Chapel Tower, and partly upon the windows of the Barons' Hall on the first floor of the hall range. The details of the



Fig. 3 *Raby: the Baron's Hall, west windows*

chapel are entirely decorated in character and have marked affinities with those of the south aisle of the church of St. Mary at Staindrop (approximately one mile to the south of Raby). The trefoil-headed niches, broad segmental hoods and panelled spandrels of the Staindrop sedilia are paralleled in the Raby chapel by the south-east squint and western arcade. The windows of both buildings have near identical reticulated tracery, and the porch of the south aisle has tunnel-vaulting supported on massive ribs, a technique that was employed in the west range and north-east block at Raby. The Staindrop south aisle was built to accommodate three chantries for which Ralph, Fourth Baron Neville, obtained a licence in 1343.<sup>14</sup>

A date in the 1340s for the chapel is supported by the design of the window traceries of the adjoining Barons' Hall. The raising of the hall range to create the Barons' Hall appears to have been part of the defensive embellishments to the manor house. It seems to be stratigraphically later than the Chapel Tower<sup>15</sup> and this relationship is consistent with the

details of the side windows which contain some of the earliest Perpendicular tracery in the county, the design of which suggests a knowledge of the chapter house windows of 1350–3 at Windsor Castle (fig. 4). Therefore there is reason to surmise that the construction of the first stone castle at Raby was in progress during the 1340s and 1350s.

Such a date is supported by the historical background. Very shortly after succeeding to the see of Durham in 1346 Bishop Hatfield began a refurbishment of Durham Castle in which the castle hall was extended and re-roofed and the great tower rebuilt.<sup>16</sup> Both the works at Durham and those at Raby should be considered as part of an increase in castle building engendered by the renewal of Scottish raids into the border counties following the outbreak of the Hundred Years War in 1337. In Northumberland castles were erected under licence at Ford (1338),<sup>17</sup> Etal (1341),<sup>18</sup> Bothal (1343),<sup>19</sup> Chillingham (1344),<sup>20</sup> and Haggerstone (1344).<sup>21</sup> Substantial additions were also made at Alwick (inner gateway) by Henry de



Fig. 4 Windsor Castle: Dean's Cloister chapter house window, 1350–53

Percy,<sup>22</sup> and probably at Prudhoe (outer barbican) by Gilbert de Umfraville, earl of Angus.<sup>23</sup> That Raby and Durham should be thought of as southern outliers of this group seems justified when one is reminded of the events of 1346. In this year the Scottish army under the leadership of David Bruce advanced to within sight of Durham before suffering defeat on 17 October at Neville's Cross. Ralph Lord Neville played an important role in the battle and the subsequent harrying of the Scots.<sup>24</sup> The psychological impact of this Scottish penetration in which Durham itself was threatened may have been the catalyst that prompted the incoming bishop of Durham to strengthen his defences and Ralph Lord Neville to fortify his manor house and turn it into a castle.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Lucy Toulmin-Smith (ed.), *The Itinerary of John Leland in or about the Years 1535 to 1543*, 5 vols. (London, 1907–10), 1, 75.

<sup>2</sup> The licence is printed in *32nd Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records* (London, 1870), appendix 1, p. 292.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. J. F. Hodgson, "Raby. In Three Chapters", *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland*, 3 (1880–5) and 4 (1890–5), 3, 158–63.

<sup>4</sup> The three shields above the entrance arch are each surrounded by the Garter. They are emblazoned as follows: 1) a saltire. John Lord Neville between 1369 when he became a Knight of the Garter, and 1388 when he died. 2) The cross of St. George. Insignia of the Order of the Garter. 3) A cross paty. Elizabeth Latimer, heiress of Sir William Latimer; she married John Lord Neville in 1381. Thus the gatehouse can be dated to between 1381 and 1388.

<sup>5</sup> Hodgson, "Raby", 3, 168–9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> For the date of the Neville tomb see Christopher Wilson, "The Neville Screen", *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions for 1977 (1980), p. 98.

<sup>8</sup> Hodgson, "Raby", p. 167.

<sup>9</sup> Malcolm J. B. Hislop, *John Lewyn and the Architecture of the Northern Counties 1360–1400* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Nottingham, 1989), pp. 54–7).

<sup>10</sup> Hodgson, "Raby", pp. 131–3.

<sup>11</sup> The Chapel Tower was itself protected by a barbican: Hodgson, "Raby", 3, 141.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 158–63.

<sup>13</sup> For Haughton see W. D. Simpson, "Haughton Castle", *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 4th ser., 29 (1951), 118–34. For Featherstone refer to J. C. Hodgson, *History of Northumberland*, 7 vols. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 1820–58), pt. 2, 3, 356–7.

<sup>14</sup> Printed by J. F. Hodgson in "Staindrop Church", *Transactions of the Architectural and Archaeological Society of Durham and Northumberland*, 3 (1880–5), pp. 90–2n.

<sup>15</sup> Hislop, *John Lewyn*, p. 18.

<sup>16</sup> VCH County Durham, 3 (1928), 22 & 74; *Historiae Dunelmensis Scriptores Tres*, ed. James Raine (Surtees Society 9, 1839), p. 138.

<sup>17</sup> CPR, 1338–40, p. 114.

<sup>18</sup> CPR, 1340–3, p. 179.

<sup>19</sup> CPR, 1343–5, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> CPR, 1343–5, p. 191.

<sup>21</sup> CPR, 1343–5, p. 479.

<sup>22</sup> The inner gatehouse bears the Royal Arms of after 1340 (Quarterly, one and four, a seme of lilies; two and three, three leopards) and has affinities with the gatehouse at Bothal Castle (1343) in having polygonal flanking turrets.

<sup>23</sup> Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England:*

*Northumberland* (Harmondsworth, 1957), p. 279.

<sup>24</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*.

#### Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Dr. Christopher Wilson for permission to reproduce the photograph of the Windsor Castle chapter house window (fig 4).

