

St Anthony's House: a lost mansion near Newcastle upon Tyne

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SUMMARY

This article highlights two surveys in this Society's collections at Northumberland Archives that illustrate the appearance of a demolished mansion called St Anthony's House, which formerly stood close to the River Tyne to the east of Newcastle. St Anthony's House is compared with other mansions on Tyneside. Further details of the interior and contents of the house in the eighteenth century were revealed in Wills held in the Special Collections of Durham University Library.

POSITION

BEFORE NINETEENTH-CENTURY INDUSTRIALISATION, agriculture occupied much of the area adjacent to the banks of the River Tyne to the east of Newcastle. Villages, including Byker and Walker, were distinct from one another and from Newcastle itself, and were surrounded by farms and some residences of wealthier families. One of the riverside estates, now long gone, was that of St Anthony's House, south-west of the village of Walker. St Anthony's House and its gardens occupied a gently sloping area of land where the River Tyne made a broad southerly curve, so that the windows of the mansion gave views along the river to the west, south and east. The house would have been a prominent feature on the shore for river travellers. The rural splendour of earlier days was noted by commentators, particularly when contrasting the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century view with what one writer called the 'pitchy river of hell' (Palmer 1851, ix) created by nineteenth-century industrialisation: 'The rich and renowned river Tyne ebbing and flowing in such a proportionable distance from the house, that neither the water is convenient to it nor does it want the convenience of water ... St Anthony's could indeed boast of beautifully green and well-wooded slopes' (Palmer 1851, viii).

THE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY HOUSE

St Anthony's House was built around 1620 by Dame Dorothy Lawson, the widow of Roger Lawson of Heaton. She was a leading recusant, and St Anthony's was chosen as it was more private than Heaton and close to where it was believed that 'in Catholick times' a picture of St Anthony 'was placed in a tree near the River Tyne for the comfort of seamen' (Palmer 1851, vii; Charleton 1885, 343-5). The lady maintained a Catholic chapel in her house. With Hebburn Hall, the seat of another recusant, Sir Robert Hodgson, on the other side of the river, a powerful Catholic presence existed close to the leading port of the region. Dame Dorothy practised her religion in open defiance of the law, and the Corporation of Newcastle was unwilling to act against her; some of the Corporation may have secretly sympathised with her beliefs, or they may have been concerned that taking action against her would provoke public unrest in a time of religious uncertainty. The extent of her influence was demonstrated at her

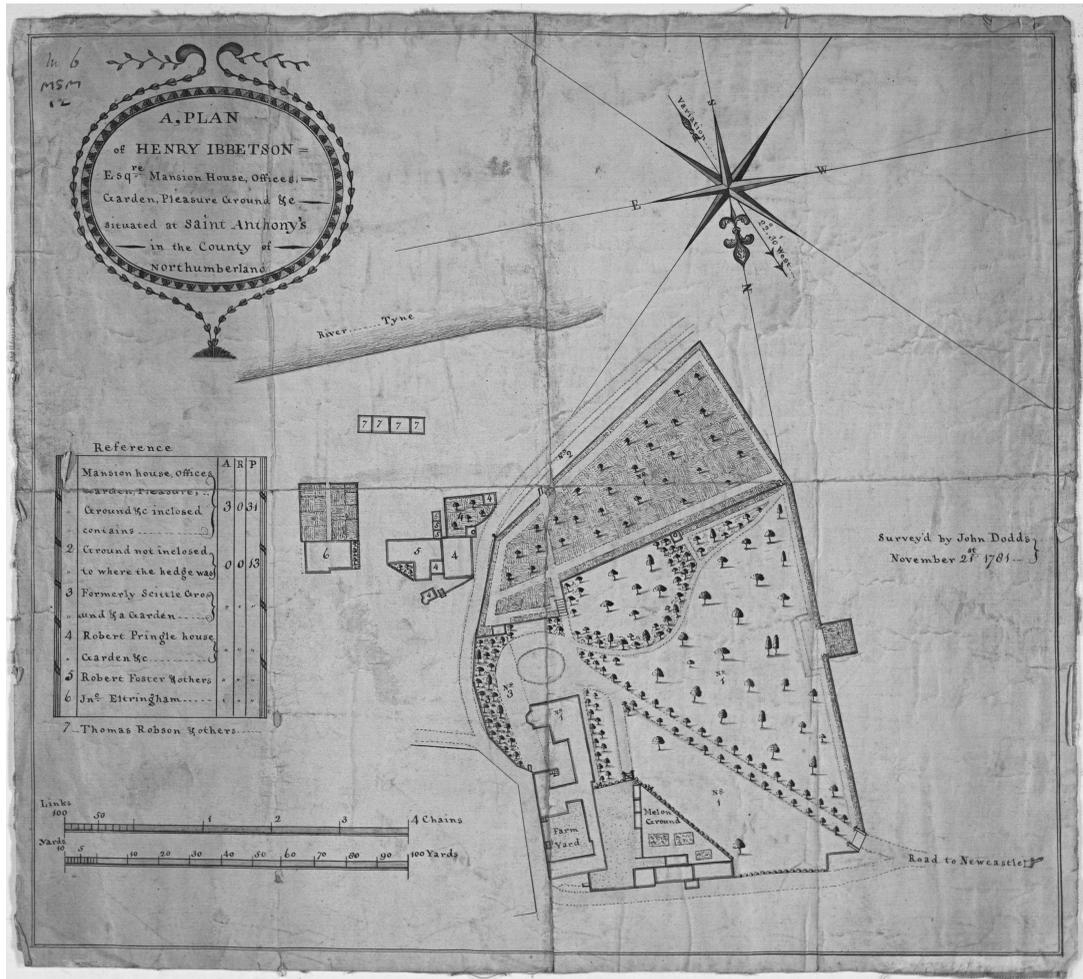


Fig. 1 A Plan of Henry Ibbetson, Esq^r Mansion House, Garden, Pleasure Ground, Etc Situated at St Anthony's in the County of Northumberland. Survey'd By John Dodds November 21st 1781 (Northumberland Archives, SANT/PLA/3/1/2/3). Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. NOTE: North is at the bottom of the image.

funeral in April 1632, when her body was carried in state along the river to Newcastle and buried with full Catholic ceremonies in the Protestant church of All Saints. The magistrates and alderman, legally bound to oppose such an event, were instead feasting at a funeral banquet in her honour. After her death, her son Roger, who was married to the daughter of Sir Robert Hodgson, sold the houses in Heaton and St Anthony's (Betham 1802, 382).

Dame Dorothy's mansion was described as 'a seat most commodious for pleasure' (Charleton 1885, 343). However, but little is known of its appearance and it was burnt in 1644 by Royalist troops to prevent its use as a strongpoint by the Scottish army besieging Newcastle (Dodds 1930, 262). After the Civil War, St Anthony's House was owned by William Bonner and then by his son, Thomas Bonner. Their descendant, Anne Bonner, married

Thomas Leven in 1734, and their combined estates included land at St Anthony's, Byker, Jarrow and in the city of Durham (Purdue 1999, 90). Leven passed St Anthony's to Mrs Grace Ibbetson, daughter of Mrs Sarah Morton (nee Bonner) and by 1781 it was owned by Henry Ibbetson, gentleman. Henry's father was Sir Henry Ibbetson, bart., of Denton Hall, Yorkshire, but his eldest brother James had inherited the baronetcy and the Denton estate on their father's death, (Burke 1836, 355–6).

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY HOUSE

It seems likely that the damage done in the Civil War had been made good and that a new south range had been added before 1781, when two surveys of the estate were made, one of them by John Dodds.¹ The illustrations provide details of the estate, enclosed by a wall outlined in red, the gardens and the mansion. The first survey drawing (SANT/PLA/3/1/2/3) showed the house in outline (as an E-shaped group of buildings) and illustrated the landscape of the estate in detail (fig. 1). At the north end was a range of buildings around a farm yard, with a road on the east, which led down to the southwest, to a ferry landing at the riverside to the south-east of the house. A melon-ground lay to the north-west of the house. This was close to the farmyard and the northern section of the house where the kitchen may have been located. Melons were grown in England from the sixteenth century, often in hothouses to ensure appropriate conditions, though they could be grown in the open in hot-beds and under bell glasses, and this may have occurred at St Anthony's. Books such as John Abercrombie's gardening manual, *Every Man His Own Gardener* (which ran to fifteen editions between 1707 to 1797) provided detailed instructions on how to tend to the fruits each month. The growing of melons at other northern gardens can be attested by the derogatory remarks on 'Capability' Brown's origins as the 'peasant slave from the melon ground' (Shields 2006, 174).

On the west side of the house, a tree-lined drive led north-west from a turning circle for carriages in front of the south range of the house, bisected the gardens and left the estate through tall gate-piers to join the road between Newcastle and Walker. The gardens lay to the west and south of the mansion. To the south was a lower terrace, reached from the turning circle by a flight of steps. This was enclosed by the wall of the upper garden and a wall to the south against the road to the river. The survey showed rows of trees and rougher grass here; this may have been an orchard. The garden above this, to the west of the house, appeared to be lawn (suggested by faint green shading), interspersed with trees and bushes, a miniature version of the naturalistic landscapes popularised by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, rather than a formal garden appropriate to the seventeenth-century house. Some vestige of earlier formal arrangements remained however. Opposite the mansion, the western wall of the estate was extended outwards to enclose a square platform, possibly a viewing area from which people strolling around the paths within the estate walls could pause to admire the western façade of the house, and even the view of the river beyond. South of this, sited against the wall between this garden and the southern terrace, was tiny circular feature. It was sited at the central point of the wall and may have been a statue on a pedestal. An irregular polygonal area numbered 'No. 3', between the house and the east wall of the estate, was described as 'Formerly Scittle Ground & a Garden'. Skittles (or Ninepins), and related games such as quoits, were popular leisure activities in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but declined in popularity in favour of bowls. They also attracted gambling and drinking, leading

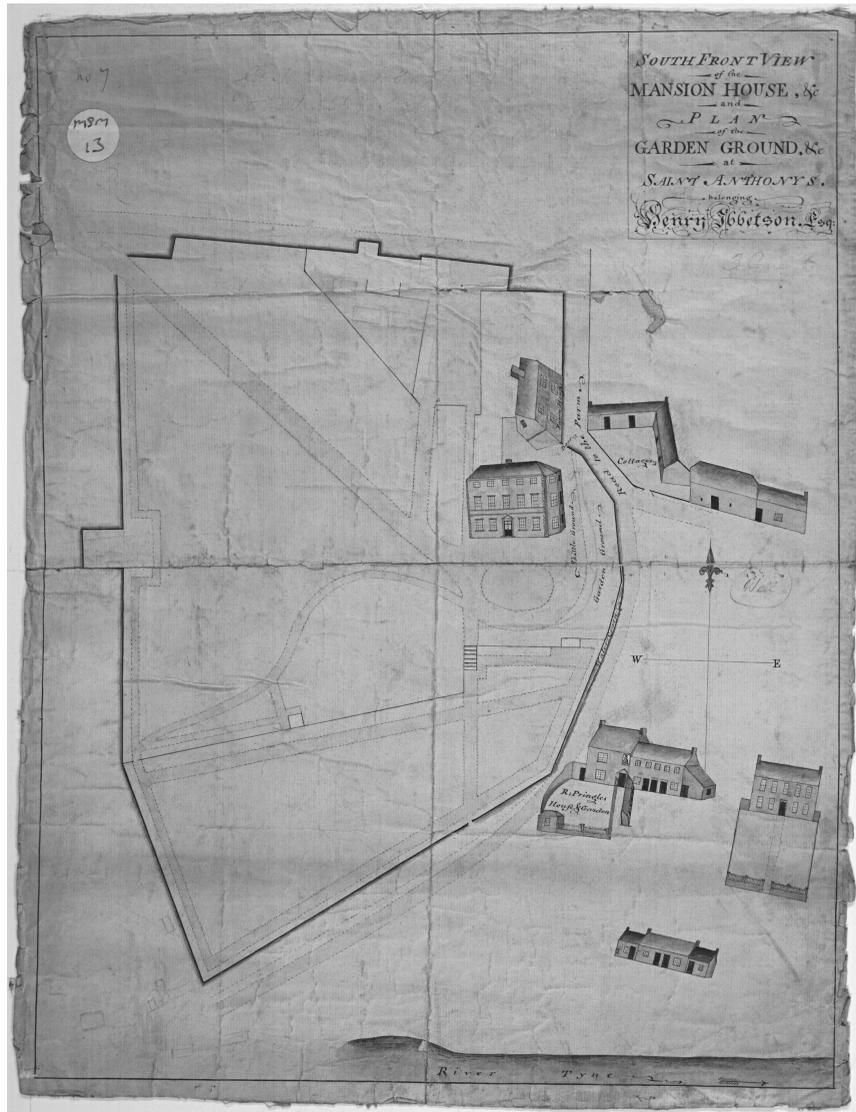


Fig. 2 South Front View of the Mansion House, Etc and Plan of the Garden Ground Etc at St Anthony's Belonging Henry Ibbetson Esq (c. 1781, Northumberland Archives, SANT/PLA/3/1/2/4). Reproduced by kind permission of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne. NOTE: North is at the top of the image.

to legal sanctions; Strutt and Hone (1867, 274) noted that in 1780 the magistrates in London ordered the levelling of all skittles grounds there. The 1781 survey showed that at St Anthony's this former leisure area had been encroached upon by the canted bay window on the east of the house, and that the area against the boundary wall was densely planted with a border that followed the curve of the turning circle.

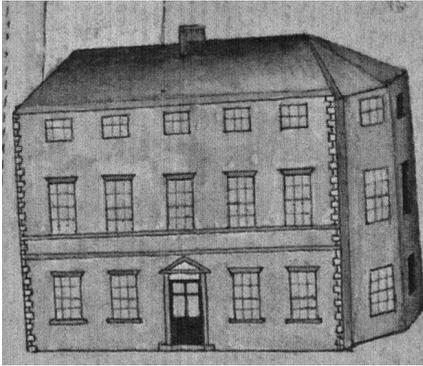


Fig. 3 Detail of the Mansion House shown in fig. 2.

The west façade of the house was screened by two rows of trees planted close by. It is curious that the carriage drive from the Newcastle road was laid out through the estate, rather than creating an entry from the lane to the river on the east which would have preserved more of the garden. The topography may have favoured the adopted route, which with its tree-lined avenue and close planting would allow the sunnier south entrance front to burst into the visitor's view, a picturesque effect admired at the time.

A second plan of St Anthony's estate (SANT/PLA/3/1/2/4) is unsigned and it is unclear if this is also by Dodds, as the handwriting differed from the other plan (fig. 2). It shows the outline of the house, the walls of the estate and some detail of the garden. More importantly, it provides a view of the south elevation of the mansion, and the elevations of properties to the east of the estate. Although illustrations on surveys can be generalised rather than real, the level of detail shown for the mansion and the neighbouring houses and farms suggests that the surveyor tried to provide an accurate picture of the buildings. Colour was used to distinguish building materials: red for brick walls, grey for stone walls and for quoins and sill bands, and blue for slate roofs. The outlines of garden paths within the estate replicated those shown in the Dodds plan, whilst window positions and boundary walls and railings on the other properties seem to have been recorded in some detail. The upper right-hand window of Robert Pringle's house was occupied by a black-haired, red-clothed figure wearing a yellow hat, possibly a crown or a halo if it was a picture of St Anthony. The symmetrical house on the right of Pringle's has a sundial mounted off-centre below the first floor central window. These details imply that the plan was not generalised and thus this may be the only known view of the south elevation of St Anthony's House.

Whatever emphasis there may have been on the western side of the house when the garden platform was built, by 1781 the southern range had been rebuilt to a more regular eighteenth-century appearance, with a five bay, three-storey brick façade and the canted bay on the eastern side (fig. 3). The carriage drive came to the south elevation, the only one shown in either of the surveys, demonstrating that this was the principal face of the house by the 1781. It had sills and floor bands, quoins, and wedge-shaped lintels, all of which were probably of stone. The central door had a pediment and (probably) columns. The most interesting feature of the design was the east elevation of this southern range, which had a full height canted bay window to provide views along the river. Unlike the south elevation and much of the house, this canted bay window was made of stone, signified by the grey colouring rather than the red brick of the adjacent walls. The south range stepped back behind this eastern canted bay

window, with a staircase tower in the angle between the south range and the long western range. A nineteenth-century photograph of the house from the north east showed that the staircase tower had two serliana windows (Davidson 2008, 81). Serliana or Venetian windows were derived from the designs of the Italian architect Sebastiano Serlio (1475–1554) and had a taller central window with an arched head and a vertical rectangular window on each side. They first appeared in English architecture in the seventeenth century, initially in churches and in country houses from the beginning of the eighteenth century (pers. comm. Richard Hewlings, 2014). Between the drawing of Dodds' plan and the taking of the photograph, the angle between the staircase tower and the canted bay was filled in with a plain block, also featuring a serliana window. This may have been reused from the east wall of the staircase tower. That this block was an addition was shown by the survival of the former quoins between it and the canted bay.

The appearance of the house in the second plan had several features in common with other elite houses in the eighteenth-century North East. The brick construction, stone bands and window lintels, and doorcases with pediments and columns were features of urban houses such as those in Charlotte Square and on Dean Street in Newcastle, and at large houses close to St Anthony's, including Wallsend Hall, The Red House, and The Grange at Wallsend (Richardson 1923, 72, 87, 96). Although Wallsend Hall was built of brick, like St Anthony's House it had stone a stone-built canted bay window. In both houses, the bay provided views of the landscape, that at St Anthony's was positioned to view traffic on the river to the east and to receive the sun in the morning, but it gave no view of the gardens that lay to the west of the mansion.

The architect of St Anthony's House is not known. It may have been designed by John Carr of York (1723–1807), who designed the Ibbetsons' hereditary home, Denton Hall, near Ilkley, Yorkshire, and who also designed Chesters, near Hexham, and made alterations to Raby Castle, Durham, between 1768 and 1780 (Wragg 2000; Rowan 1972). However, even Carr's smaller houses often have some external decoration, such as half-balusters beneath windows and decorative architraves and keystones to the windows, whilst St Anthony's House was plain. The appearance of St Anthony's House recalls buildings in Newcastle and Northumberland by William Newton of Newcastle (1730–98) and he may have had a hand in the design of St Anthony's House (Colvin 2008, 744–6; Wills, 2007). Canted bay windows featured in several houses by Carr and Newton (for example Dissington Hall, Northumberland, of 1794–7).

Another candidate is John Dodds himself, for he was an architect as well as a surveyor, though little is known of his work. He designed alterations to Chipchase Castle, Northumberland, in 1784 (Nares 1956, 1365) and unexecuted plans for Lambton Castle, Durham, in 1788 (Colvin 2008, 324). He applied, unsuccessfully, for the contract to remodel the interior of St Nicholas's Church (now the cathedral) in Newcastle in 1783, writing letters of complaint to the *Newcastle Courant* in March 1785 about the quality of the work undertaken by William Newton and David Stephenson who were employed there. With Stephenson he contradicted Newton's proposals to save much of the medieval church of All Hallows, Newcastle, both declaring that 'the stone of the ground arches ... decayed, the stone in several windows decayed, the walls rotten, and the lime lost its cement, and become almost dust. If one part is taken down, the rest will follow' (Sopwith 1826, 20–1). This assertion was undermined somewhat when it was necessary to use explosives — twice — to loosen the grip of this dust on the medieval masonry and one of the men involved in the demolition was killed. Stephenson

won the commission to design the new All Saints Church, but never designed another one, whilst Newton was involved in the rebuilding of a further four churches. Dodds designed a new tower and replacement building for Christ Church, North Shields, in 1786–8. He also designed and built All Saints Church in Gosforth in 1799, just before his death in 1801.

Henry Ibbetson died in 1825, but his Will, written in 1790, gives a small insight into the interior of St Anthony's House.² He left the house to his wife in her lifetime, to be divided after her death between their two daughters. The eldest daughter was to receive a clock and her father's portrait. He also mentioned a print room, probably decorated with examples of the many illustrations from local and national printers showing landscapes (or even scurrilous cartoons), as may be seen today at Newby Hall in North Yorkshire and elsewhere. Clearly Ibbetson had a considerable collection, his elder daughter inherited a large cabinet containing prints, whilst the younger daughter received a smaller cabinet also containing prints.

NINETEENTH-CENTURY DECLINE

Despite the social position of the Ibbetsons, within twenty years their house was in decline. By 1827 it was the residence of William Fryer esquire, known only as a subscriber to Mackenzie's *History of Newcastle* (1827, I, vii). By 1858 St Anthony's had ceased to be a private house and had become an inn named the Ellison Arms, as shown on the first Ordnance Survey map. In place of the fine position chosen by Dame Dorothy Lawson, the map shows that the area was now blighted by growing industrialism, with a lead works, a pottery and a chemical works pressing upon the grounds of the house. Other chemical works existed across the river. The Ellison Arms was but one of many public houses serving the workers from these industries. The problems affecting the area were illustrated by Fordyce (1866, 342) who noted an affray there between Orangemen and Catholics on 30 May 1858, in which an Irishman named John Cain was killed. By 1890, the former farmyard at the north end of the site had disappeared beneath the Newcastle and Tynemouth Riverside Branch railway. The remains of St Anthony's House survived into the 1930s, but by the 1950s all trace had gone and allotment gardens occupied the site. The site is now part of Walker Riverside Park.

NOTES

¹ Northumberland Archives: SANT/PLA/3/1/2/3, 'A Plan of Henry Ibbetson, Esqre Mansion House, Garden, Pleasure Ground, Etc Situated at St Anthony's in the County of Northumberland. Survey'd By John Dodds November 21st 1781'; and SANT/PLA/3/1/2/4, 'South Front View of the Mansion House, Etc and Plan of the Garden Ground Etc at St Anthony's Belonging Henry Ibbetson Esq.'

² Durham University Library Archives and Special Collections, Durham Probate Records: pre-1858 original wills and inventories GB-0033-DPR1/1/1825/I1/1-2, 'Will of Henry Ibbetson of St Anthony's, in the parish of All Saints, Newcastle upon Tyne', dated 9 September 1790 and undated codicil.

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