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TWO CASTLES BY WILLIAM NEWTON

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William Newton (1730–98), architect, of Newcastle upon Tyne, is best known for his classical designs, with a growing number of country houses, churches and public buildings credited to him. These include the Assembly Rooms and St Ann’s Chapel in Newcastle and country houses at Backworth, Howick, and Dissington in Northumberland. Newton also executed several buildings in the Gothick style of the eighteenth century. This article will examine the interrelated designs of two of his buildings, The Castle at Castle Eden in County Durham, and Kielder Castle in Northumberland.

The dominant architectural style in eighteenth century Britain was classical. Ayres has suggested that classical designs were used to demonstrate patrons’ political, cultural and philosophical union with the ethos of ancient Rome.¹ The view of eighteenth century – Augustan – Britons as the heirs of Rome was given archaeological support through the publication of such works as John Horsley’s *Britannia Romana* in 1732 and Drake’s *Eboracum* in 1736.² For the gentlemen of the North of England, ancient Rome was often at the end of their gardens in the form of Hadrian’s Wall and its outpost forts along the Stanegate and Dere Street, ensuring easy acceptance of the classical heritage.³

How did the Gothick style and the illusion of the castle architecture fit with these Roman aspirations? Gothick was seen as an appropriate style for additions to mediaeval buildings, and it may be that a Gothick design demonstrated the patrons’ desire to be seen as the inheritors of the ideals of the Magna Carta,⁴ as

well as portraying their families as a long-standing feature of country life (which many of the newly-enriched land-owners were not⁵). In the north of England, a landscape studded with genuine mediaeval castles, Gothick also recalled the role of the landed gentlemen as defenders of the nation against Scottish incursions – an analogy unlikely to be lost on those who had so recently witnessed the Jacobite rebellions. Many houses with Gothick

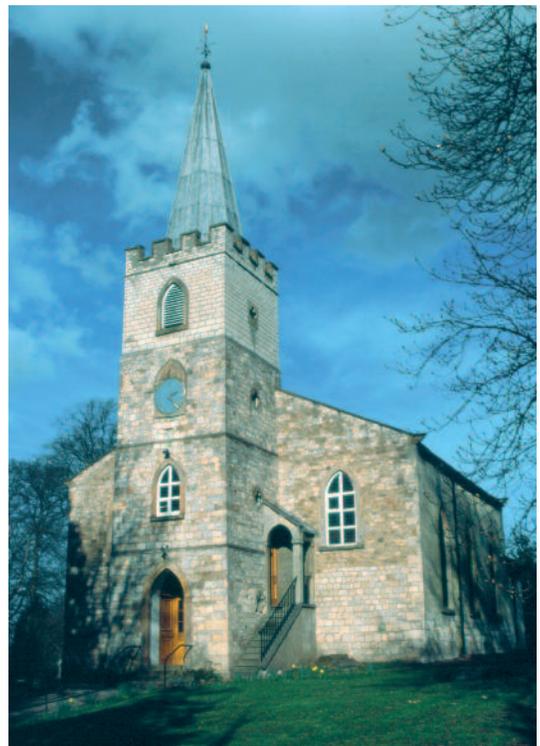


Fig. 1. Castle Eden church, County Durham.



Fig. 2. The Castle, Castle Eden: east façade.

exteriors had classical interiors, a layering of tastes that allowed patrons to subscribe to all of these allusions.

William Newton's first building in Gothick style was at Castle Eden, 5 miles south east of the City of Durham. The estate, described as 'waste and unenclosed',⁶ was bought by the Newcastle merchant Rowland Burdon (1724–86) in 1758. Burdon began to improve the estate, but the first building to be reconstructed was not his house but the parish church of St James, rebuilt in 1764 (Fig. 1). Pevsner believed that the tower might be that of the mediaeval church re-cased in eighteenth century Gothick garb.⁷ As it stands today it is the eighteenth century idea of mediaeval that prevails. The tower has Gothick battlements and quatrefoils. A contemporary description records that the rebuilding commenced April 30th 1764 and was completed August 31st 1765.⁸ The church was expanded by Burdon's son, also called Rowland

Burdon (1756–1838), with the additions of aisles. It is likely that around 1764 Rowland Burdon the elder commissioned William Newton to prepare designs for a new country house on the estate, as there was 'not a vestige remaining of the mansion house'.⁹

The Burdons' house, called The Castle (Fig. 2), is a large three storey building with symmetrical Gothick facades on the south, east and west elevations, constructed of white Hesleden limestone. The north elevation, facing the service courtyard and largely obscured by later buildings, is of brown rubble. A nineteenth century concrete and glass palmhouse was built across the ground floor façade of the west (entrance) front. The east and west elevations are each of seven bays, the central three projecting as full height canted bay windows. The Castle has been dated to the later part of the eighteenth century, but there has been some suggestion that its Gothick appearance may be a later re-casing of a classical style house.¹⁰



Fig. 3. The Orangery, Gibside, County Durham.



Fig. 4. Dissington Hall, Northumberland.



Fig. 5 The Castle, Castle Eden: The first and second floor columns of the staircase hall.

In fact the Gothick guise, essential for a location called Castle Eden, is only skin-deep. The Castle may have battlements and arched hood-moulds over the windows, but it is essentially a classical house. Eschewing the asymmetry of Walpole's Strawberry Hill, the public facades of The Castle are symmetrical, even employing false window openings to preserve the balanced appearance.¹¹ The exterior has several features common to Newton's classical designs, including horizontal bands connecting the bottoms of windows and between ground and first floors. The canted bays in the centre of the main elevations at The Castle are repeated in several of Newton's designs. He designed a lakeside Gothick building with this feature for the Wallington estate of Sir Walter Blackett c.1765.¹² A canted bay is used on the Orangery at Gibside, exploiting the fine view along the valley of the River Derwent (Fig. 3). The east end of the ballroom at the

Newcastle Assembly Rooms, built by Newton 1774–76, ends in a canted bay, rounded on the interior to form an apse, but clearly three-sided on the exterior. Kielder Castle, built for the Duke of Northumberland from 1772–75, originally featured a full-height canted bay overlooking the rugged moorland of the Kielder Burn. The house built for Joseph Forster at Newton-by-the-Sea, Northumberland, also has a canted bay. Finally it is used at Dissington Hall (Fig. 4), though one of Newton's designs for this house had a curved bow, more fashionable by the 1790s.¹³ It may be that in this instance the canted bay appealed more to Edward Collingwood, Newton's ageing client. Indeed Giles Worsley suggested that it was an architectural feature of the 1760s, the period when William Newton established himself as an architect.¹⁴

Inside The Castle, the screens of columns to the staircase at first and second floors (Fig. 5) provide

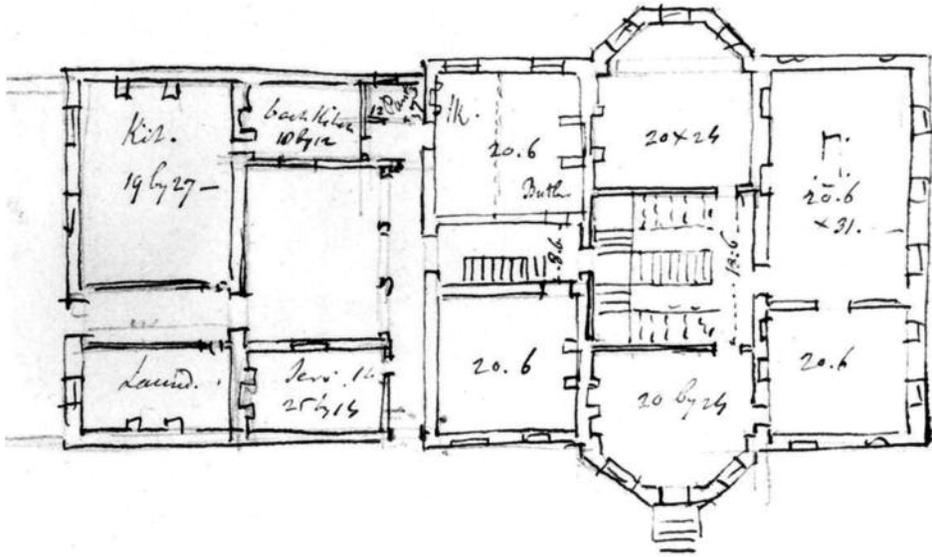


Fig. 6. Plan of The Castle drawn by Sir John Soane during his visit on 6 October 1780.
By courtesy of the Trustees of Sir John Soane's Museum.

another link with the ground and first floor columns of the Dissington Hall staircase. The original imperial staircase of The Castle was removed in the nineteenth century, a first floor inserted across the void and the entrance hall and dining room enlarged, but the form of the original staircase is confirmed by no less an authority than Sir John Soane. Soane visited The Castle on 5–6 October 1780 to see his Grand Tour companion Rowland Burdon the younger and drew the plan of The Castle in his notebook (Fig. 6).¹⁵ The imperial staircases in Newton's work at Dissington and Hesleyside in Northumberland survive to remind us how The Castle might have appeared.¹⁶ Newton's design for Backworth Hall, Northumberland, built for Ralph William Grey (the brother-in-law of the younger Rowland Burdon) from 1778–80, also included an imperial staircase.

Soane's notebook provides further evidence that the current house dates to before 1780.¹⁷ As well as drawing the ground plan of the existing house,

Soane noted room dimensions and positions of doorways and fireplaces. Apart from the alterations caused by the removal of the imperial staircase, Soane's dimensions match those of the house today. He also drew the elevation and plan of the entrance porch, which forms the ground floor of the three-storey canted bay in the centre of the west elevation, carefully including the details of the horizontal bands on the façade and the hood moulds over the doorway and side windows, confirming that these are original features and not later additions. Soane designed niches and lamps to light the staircase of The Castle, but his plan and elevation for a new classical style house at Castle Eden and alternative designs for Gothick and classical style stables were not executed.¹⁸

The stylistic details of the current house point to William Newton as the designer of The Castle, and this is supported by other evidence. Newton had already produced a building at Castle Eden for Rowland Burdon the elder, namely the church of

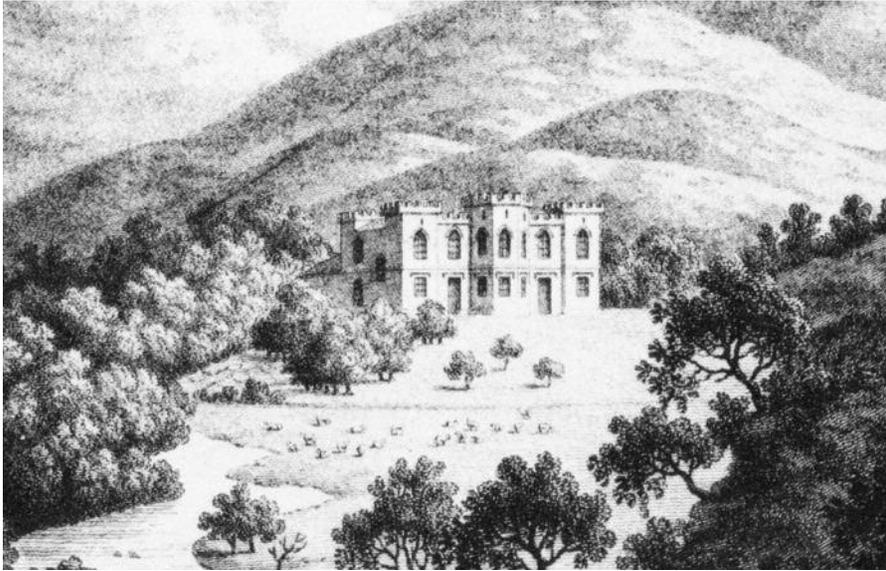


Fig. 7. Beilby's 1779 view of Kielder Castle, Northumberland, showing the full height bay window.

1764. Burdon was a businessman who derived his wealth from commerce in Newcastle, where Newton dominated public building work from 1760 until his death in 1798. Indeed, one of Newton's obituaries specifically mentions that his 'abilities as an architect will be acknowledged so long as Castle Eden, Howick Hall and the Assembly Rooms of this town shall remain', so Newton's contemporaries were in no doubt that he designed The Castle.¹⁹

New evidence also points to Newton's authorship of The Castle. This is a folio of designs for Castle Eden attributed to William Newton, dating from c.1765, at Sotheran's of Piccadilly. These show what must have been his initial design for Burdon's house, a five by four bay, two-storey house in Gothick style, with an asymmetrically placed entrance and attached L-shaped service wing extending to the north. It may be that Burdon desired a grander design than this, but details from this draft help to confirm Newton's responsibility for the present house, particularly the corner turrets.

Another of Newton's castellated designs provides further support for his authorship at Castle Eden. Kielder Castle in Northumberland was built as a shooting lodge for the Duke of Northumberland and completed in 1775. It is often claimed that Kielder Castle was designed by the Duke, but details of the completed Castle Eden house and the designs at Sotheran's are so close to those at Kielder Castle as to cast serious doubt on this claim. Newton was paid for building Kielder Castle, including thirteen visits, and it is likely that he was the designer.²⁰

As originally built, Kielder Castle was symmetrical. The south front was animated by a full height canted bay, like those Newton employed at Castle Eden, Gibside Orangery and Dissington Hall. Although Kielder Castle's canted bay was removed in the nineteenth century, it is clearly shown in the earliest plan and elevation of Kielder Castle and in a 1779 print by William Beilby (Fig. 7).²¹ The surviving wings of Newton's building (Fig. 8) show the same combination of arched hood-moulds over the first



Fig. 8. Kielder Castle, Northumberland: surviving wing of 1775 building.
Note similar pattern of window mouldings, plinth and floor band to
Castle Eden design below.

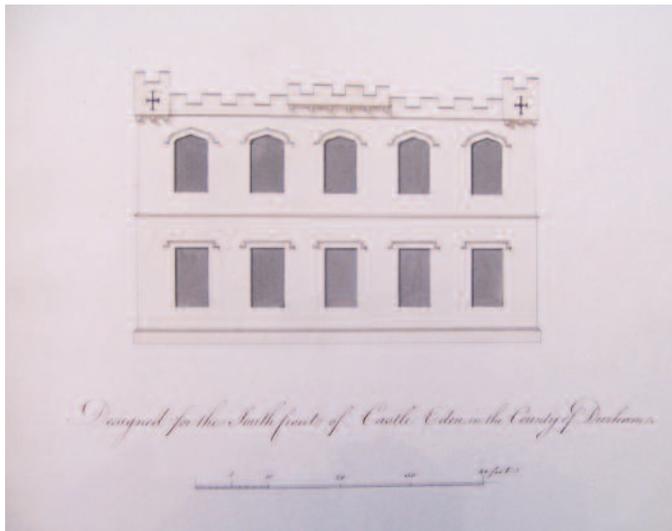


Fig. 9. Sotheran's folio of Castle Eden designs: south front.
By courtesy of Sotheran's of Piccadilly.

floor and straight hood-moulds over those on the ground floor as the Castle Eden designs at Sotheran's (Fig. 9).

The documentary and stylistic evidence presented here suggests that William Newton of Newcastle designed The Castle at Castle Eden for Rowland Burdon the elder, probably around 1775, and that the house was complete and inhabited by the time of Sir John Soane's visit in October 1780. The Castle must be counted among the growing number of buildings created by William Newton in the counties of Northumberland and Durham and confirms his ability to adapt his designs to the classical and Gothick forms favoured by the fashion-conscious North Eastern elite.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Mr Anthony Gillman for his permission to view and photograph the interior of The Castle, Castle Eden; to His Grace the Duke of Northumberland for permission to view material in the Archives of Alnwick Castle and to Mr Christopher Hunwick for assistance in tracing archival material; to the Trustees of the Sir John Soane Museum for permission to reproduce Soane's plan of The Castle in 1780; to Mr Michael Brown for permission to view documentary evidence at Dissington Hall; to Mr Jonathan Clark of Sotheran's of Piccadilly for permission to use Fig. 9 from the designs for Castle Eden attributed to William Newton; and to the staff of the Sir John Soane Museum Library and Durham Record Office for their assistance.

NOTES

- 1 Ayres, P. *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- 2 Horsley, John *Britannia Romana, or the Antiquities of Roman Britain*, 1732. Drake, Francis *Eboracum: or the history and antiquities of the city of York*, 1736.
- 3 The course of the Roman Wall through Newcastle and its environs was described in Bourne, H. *The history of Newcastle upon Tyne: or, the ancient and present state of that town*. 1736, pp. 3–4.
- 4 Ayres, P. *Classical Culture and the Idea of Rome in Eighteenth Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 4.
- 5 Though the Percies of Alnwick Castle and several Northumberland gentry families such as the Middletons of Belsay Castle and the Reeds of Chipchase Castle had no need for illusion as their houses incorporated mediaeval towers.
- 6 'Rowland Burdon', *North Country Lore and Legend*, May 1888, p.201.
- 7 Pevsner, N. *The Buildings of England: County Durham*. 2nd edition, revised by Elizabeth Williamson. London: Penguin Books, 1985, p.122.
- 8 Durham Record Office, EP/CE1 *Note on the rebuilding of Castle Eden church by Rev. John Todd*.
- 9 'Rowland Burdon', *North Country Lore and Legend*, May 1888, p.201.
- 10 Tees Archaeology *Castle Eden*. Available at : http://www.teesarchaeology.com/projects/aerial_photography/gallery/index312.html (Accessed: 31 October 2007); District of Easington *Castle Eden Conservation Area Character Appraisal*, 2007, p.17. Available at http://www.easington.gov.uk/images/Castle%20Eden%20Appraisal_tcm4-11890.pdf (Accessed: 22 December 2007). English Heritage *Images of England*. Available at: <http://www.imagesofengland.org.uk> (Accessed: 31 October 2007) 'possibly altered and given Gothick details by Sir John Soane c.1780'. Whittaker, N. and Clark, U. (*Historic architecture of County Durham*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Oriel, 1971) claimed that Castle Eden was 'rebuilt about 1820 by Rowland Burdon, possibly with the advice of Sir John Soane', which would be remarkable as Burdon had been bankrupted by the failure of the Newcastle Bank in 1806.
- 11 Also used by Newton on the east front at Dissington Hall, where the interior walls were covered by library bookcases.

- 12 Northumberland Record Office ZWN/I/74 *Designs for estate buildings at Wallington*.
- 13 The folio of Newton's designs is preserved at Dissington Hall. The author is grateful to Mr Michael Brown for permission to view this evidence.
- 14 Worsley, G. *Classical architecture in Britain: the heroic age*. London: published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1995.
- 15 Sir John Soane Museum. Volume 80 *Downhill Notebook*, 27 July to 2 September, facing page 20, for the sketches of The Castle plan and details of the entrance. The imperial staircase had been removed before 1896 when plans were made of The Castle (DRO D/CE 214 Plans of alterations to The Castle, Castle Eden by H.T. Gradon of Durham and Hicks and Charlewood of Newcastle, 1896). It might have been removed when F.R. Hicks added the palm-house in 1863. Following the removal of the central staircase, the secondary staircase was used to connect the floors of the house. Mr Gillman, the previous owner, added an elegant curving staircase from the entrance hall to the first floor.
- 16 One can only imagine the spectacular three-storey top-lit and columned staircase hall that must have comprised the centre of The Castle before the imperial staircase was removed and the first floor inserted across the space.
- 17 Sir John Soane Museum. Volume 80 *Downhill Notebook*, 27 July to 2 September, facing page 20.
- 18 Sir John Soane Museum. Vol. 42 121 CASTLE EDEN (Co. Durham) Plans and elevations: *Castle Eden Oct 7 1780*. Soane's designs for Gothick stables are very different from the details of The Castle and the new house in the classical style was to feature a graceful bow not a canted bay.
- 19 *Sixth Annual Report of the Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne*, 1799. William Newton was one of the founders of this august institution.
- 20 Alnwick Castle Northumberland MSS: MS 746 *Kielder Castle Game Book*. The building accounts, plan and elevation are reproduced in Long, B. *Kielder Castle*. Kielder: Long Pack Craft Centre.
- 21 Beilby's view is reproduced in Watts, W. *The Seats of the Nobility and Gentry in a Collection of the most interesting and Picturesque Views*. London: Garland Publishing, 1982, plate LVIII.