

Hetton-le-Hole Herald

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Summary

This article, Part 1 of 2, looks at some of the large impressive houses which lie close to Hetton-le-Hole. The two existing Halls have been extensively modified over the years but remain as a testament to fine building works. Robert Shout of Helmsley, who built Elemore Hall was for many years in the eighteenth century Bridge Surveyor for North Yorkshire and responsible for the building of a number of fine bridges, many of which are still standing

The Halls of Hetton– 1. Elemore

Elemore Hall is one of three major houses which are or have been located close to Hetton-le-Hole. Of the other two, Eppleton Hall and Hetton Hall only the former still exists since Hetton Hall was demolished in 1923.

Elemore Hall is the larger of the two remaining houses and is located approximately two miles south west of the town of Hetton. The present

house stands on the site of an ancient manor house built around 1550. This manor probably built in the Elizabethan style of the day was much smaller than the present house. The manor in which Elemore stands was originally owned by the Priory of Finchale but following the Dissolution of the Monasteries, brought about by Henry the Eighth, it was sold in 1553 to Bertram Anderson, mayor, sheriff and MP for Newcastle-upon-Tyne who was responsible for the building of the first manor house. The manor was known as Little Haswell and included the declining villages of Little and Low Haswell which in reality were not much more than hamlets, set in a rural environment.



The characteristic 'E' shape of Elemore Hall

The original house was either E or U shaped with wings protruding from a frontal building. Upon the death of Bertram Anderson in 1571, according to the inventory for the house, the building consisted of a hall, two parlours, kitchen, pastrie, buttry, mylke house, work house and barn. By 1578 it went by the name of Elimoure Hall. By 1605 the inventory for the house showed that it had been enlarged to over 20 rooms and was rich enough to support the local Pittington St. Lawrence church.

At some point, early in the 17th century, the Manor of Little Haswell was sold by the grandson of Bertram Anderson, Sir Henry Anderson, for £4600 to William Hall, another merchant from Newcastle upon Tyne. His son, Sir Alexander Hall, left the estate to his five sisters (one third) and to his cousin the Rev. Nicholas Hall (two thirds). The split will, meant that the family were forced into a series of legal agreements which probably was not in the best interests regarding the structure of the house. There were inevitably divisions of property ownership and parts of the house had differing ownership.

In 1669 it was known that Thomas Hall held the middle and south parts, while his father's inventory lists a hall and two parlours with chambers above. Also the house was described as having "the north part together with a chamber over the kitchen and the

slaughterhouse under it". Ingress and egress was via a north door leading down the staires under the sellars of Thomas Hall. It appears that the main hearth tax being paid at that time was set over to Mr Thomas Hall who was responsible for seven hearths.



Main entrance Elemore Hall

Some aspects of the original manor house have been incorporated in the present building and renovations which took place during 1978-1979 revealed some of the old structures including stone facings and door heads as well as lintels in the basement. Large square beams originating from the first house have also been located within the present structure and bear no relation to the most recent house.

Nicholas Hall who held two thirds of the estate passed on the estate by marriage to Thomas Conyers, who was MP for Durham City from 1702 until 1722. Around about 1700 the heiress of the estate married George Baker, whose family came from Crook

Hall near Lanchester. George Baker was also MP for Durham City at that time. They had a son, also called George Baker, and he inherited the estate and manor in 1723 and it was he, who around 1750 decided to build a new property on the site of the older manor house.

George was a "bit of a lad" with a predilection for dressing, dancing and enjoying himself. A frequent and noted gambler in his early life it looked as if much of his fortune would be lost. He failed in his younger life in respect of his education since following an education at Eton College he came down from Cambridge in 1743 without a degree. Fortunately for him his guardians, who had looked after him since the death of his mother when he was just two years of age, protected the estate that he had inherited, which included not only the Elemore estate but also Crook Hall at Lanchester, a share in Biddick Colliery, as well as alum quarries and mines on the cliffs at Boulby on the North Yorkshire coast. Additionally he owned three manors in Northumberland and Westmorland as well as a grange estate at Wingate in County Durham.

The original Elizabethan house was stone-built and doubtless in need of renovation and the guardians of George Baker ensured that by 1746 he was in total ownership of the Elemore estate having bought out the

heirs of the five sisters who owned one third of the estate during the 1640s. By 1748 George was close to marriage and a decision was made to improve the house. A nearby brick kiln was producing thousands of bricks each year in order to construct a walled garden which was finally completed in 1749. Clay from the bricks came from land where a brick pond was formed on the north side of the garden while coal from nearby Kepier Pit was used to fire the kilns.

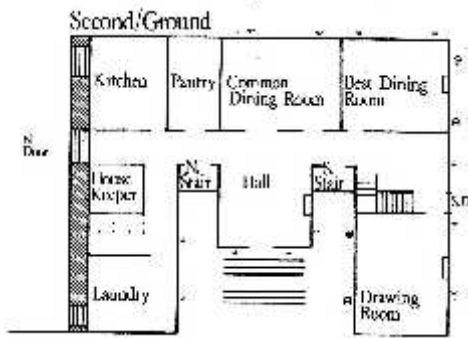
On May 27th, 1749 George Baker was married to Judith Routh, a beautiful and knowledgeable young lady from a well-appointed family living at Dinsdale near to Darlington in County Durham. It seems likely that the marriage produced some stability for the financial affairs of the extravagant George. Around this time an architect/mason **Robert Shout** (1702-74) of Helmsley was engaged to draw up plans for a new house and to get the structure underway as soon as possible. Following the marriage George and Judith moved to live in the Deanery at



South side entrance Elemore Hall

Chester-le-Street for a period of three years before moving back to Elemore with a young daughter, to a transformed Elemore Hall.

The new house followed the “E” shaped plan of the original house. Being a more imposing structure it had three storeys with a seven bayed entrance front with a grand three bayed central block and two flanking single bay wings. It was a brick mansion built in the Palladian style following the fashion of the times. The speed in which the building had been built meant that much of the original structure was incorporated particularly behind the new brick facades. Old chimneys were pulled down, windows walled up and a stone plinth enclosed the old basement which formed the base for the new brick building. Sandstone from the quarries at Penshaw formed the basis for quoins, door and window cases and

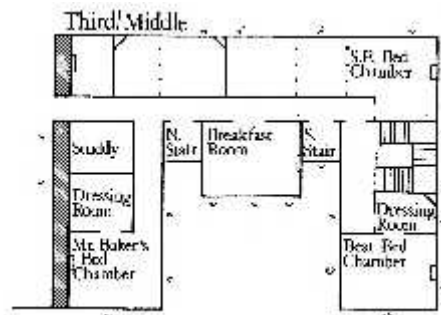


Elemore Hall, Ground floor plan

pediments. It is likely that the lime-

stone mortar came from the quarries along the road at Pittington.

The new house faced west with the central block having two balustrated flights of steps. A date of 1750 was formed close to the halved arms of



Elemore Hall Third /Middle floor plan

both the Baker and Routh families. On the south side the five bayed wall had a centrally placed doorway with a Gibbs surround which supported the Palladian symmetry of the period. The east front had eight bays facing the original formal gardens.

The building was all but complete by 1850, quite an achievement, and at a cost of just £451. 12s. 8d., according to Shout's accounts. The whole building was topped off with a Westmorland slate roof laid over a massive roof structure by mid 1751, along with glazing for the large number of windows. The bill for plumbing came in during March 1752 and this included the roofing lead, lead flashing and down-

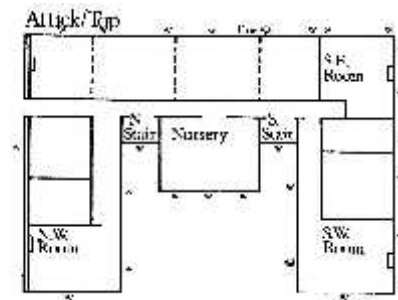
comers. Wooden gutters completed the roof work.

A large volume of the costs related to the costs of timber. In the construction process many different woods were used including oake boarding, firr balks, deal planks, oak balks, red-wood deal and mast timber for scaffolding. Timber was used for roofing, ceiling joists, sashes, stouthing, wall frames, partitions, staircases, door-cases, doors, shutters, windows and floor joists.

The family were in residence at Elemore by May 1752 even though much of the internal work was still incomplete. Much of the work was down to the master joiner Bryan Fenwick engaged by Shout back in 1749 and still not able to complete all of his responsibilities four years later. Much of this work involved making doors, shelves cupboards, tables and other furniture before other fittings such as locks, hinges etc were attached. The ceilings in certain parts of the house were having their plasterwork attached, under the direction of Guiseppe Cortese, a noted Italian craftsman of the age. For some years previously he had been famous for his stucco work and had completed a number of contracts in the north country including Hardwick Park at Sedgfield, Newburgh Priory close to Wakefield, Studley Royal near Ripon and Burton Constable in Yorkshire. Fenwick's workers were responsible for

making many of the moulds shaping the cornices and ribs in the rooms and other individual plasterwork features .

Restorations to the house which took place during 1978/9 uncovered much of the infill work done before rooms



Elemore Hall Top/Attic floor plan

were plastered with a thick layer of rough plaster made of sand and slaked-lime mix to which animal hair was added to give it the desired toughness. Although many of the bills indicate the materials used and their origins, little is known where the sand, lime or plaster originated; probably the convenient local quarries adjacent to the house provided these necessary raw materials. It is known however that 302 stones of animal hair were provided by a local butcher and tanner Thomas Clemment.

In 1979 during renovations a series of plaster wall panels were discovered in the drawing room on each side of the venetian window and above the door. Many of the ceilings were left blank,

however some were painted. Occasionally ceilings were started then left for a lengthy period to be completed some years afterwards. Paintings included Cupid and Psyche in an oval frame complete with outer paintings of flowers, masks and musical instruments decorated the new dining room. Neptune, in a cloud formed the centrepiece for the Great Staircase. It seems likely that the great staircase ceiling and most of the grand dining room were completed in 1752



Baker crest Elemore Hall

whereas the decoration on the drawing room ceiling was not completed until the winter of 1756/7

By 1752 the carpenters and joiners were working on the outbuildings and a new stable as well as a brewhouse, pig sties and a small house in the new garden for the servants quarters.

George Baker did not implement all of the features on his original estate plan although a brick built walled garden was completed in December 1749.

This feature no longer exists as it was demolished on safety grounds in the 1950s. There is evidence to suggest that the Coldwell Burn (at some time called the Coalford Beck) was dammed to create a small lake or pond. This feature lasted until the 1920s at which point it was drained. Beyond the house garden there were shrubbery walks and there is evidence that terrace walks and a carriage drive may have been developed along the west sloping escarpment. The gardens were upgraded with little regard to cost ensuring its seasonal beauty. William Joyce, a nurseryman from Gateshead provided vegetables, flowers, fruit trees, shrubs and bushes as well as seeds. He also provided in addition 160 limes, 1000 elms and 1000 hornbeams.

The whole construction project cost in the region of £3,000, a sum which may at the time have been equivalent to George Baker's annual income. This figure is equivalent to £180,000 in today's currency. Nevertheless it was



Rear of Building

judged to be a comfortable house rather than one which was imposing or noteworthy as many others throughout the north were judged. The family also visited London and Bath on a number of occasions, to carry out shopping duties and mix with the landed gentry of the day. It cost the family around about £20 to pay for the servants they took with them at the time and bearing in mind that this was about the same that a coal hewer received as an annual salary, they must have had a comfortable stay in the capital and elsewhere.

Judith and George had a daughter Elizabeth, born shortly after the marriage and a son again called George. This George inherited the Elemore estate in 1774 following the death of father George. After the death of her husband on the 15th May 1774 Judith, who had always shown an interest in the running costs of the household, continued in this vein and took an increasing interest in the income and expenditure of the estate as a whole.

In 1781 the total income from rents, livestock sales, and estate profits came to £3422 and this yielded a profit of £173 after all expenses had been covered. As income and expenditure continued to grow over the next three years by 1784 the income was £3432 and the profit was £211. After the death of George in 1774 the family inherited the debts of George senior, a figure which was around £6000.



The clock tower and buildings on the left are a more recent addition

Judith managed this set of circumstances well and continued to keep a close eye over the next 20 years or more, even after the marriage of her son George in 1787.

George on the other hand had no great interest or aptitude for family finances, spending large sums of money to maintain a full stable of horses. Judith kept full and precise account books until her death in 1810 at an age in excess of 80 years. Notes in these books show how frugal she really was, not wasting a single ha'penny of the money attributable to the estate.

Young George was recognised as a very good horseman and he was a keen follower of the hounds. He lived the life of a country squire to the full. It is said that he once met the Durham historian Robert Surtees and asked, "I wonder, Mr Surtees why you should spend so much money and time over a

history of Durham?" Surtees replied by saying "I wonder, Mr. Baker, why you spend so much money and time in following a pack of hounds and a poor hare."

During this time when George was alive greater wealth came to the family with the opening of the Elemore colliery, a short distance along the Easington Lane road from the house itself. Established in 1825 on land leased from the Baker family the colliery was opened by the Hetton Coal Company. The two shafts for the mine were named George and Isabella after members of the Baker family. During this period the dimensions of luxury living by the Baker family were evident in the comforts, leisure and entertainment they enjoyed. They spent much of their time at provincial race courses with George continuing to ride his own horses in many races

George Baker passed away in 1837 and his daughter Isabella became heir. He was the last in the line of Bakers of Elemore Hall and noted the fact with an inscription on his headstone, namely,

" Here lies the last of the George Bakers of Elemore Hall, and although he may not be the last George Baker, he will be succeeded by no-one of more gentlemanly sport who will live longer in the hearts of the poor and unfortunate to whom he was constant benefactor and the kindest friend."

It is perhaps interesting to note that the aforementioned Judith Routh's mother was a member of the Milbanke family of Halnaby, Yorkshire. It is often stated that the most important member of this family Anna Isabella Milbanke was in fact born at Elemore in 1792, later to become the wife of the poet Lord Byron. However other sources say that she was born in London; nevertheless there was a connection through marriage to the Baker family.

In 1844 Isabella, heiress to the Elemore estate, married the son of her aunt and first cousin, Henry Tower. When he inherited the estate he changed his name to Henry Baker Baker. He became High Sheriff of Durham in 1854. He and his ancestors lived at Elemore Hall until the 1930s.

In 1947 the hall and estate was sold to Durham County Council and the building still in reasonable order, was taken over by the local education authority as a day and residential special school. It still serves this purpose today.



A view from the front of house