

The Transformation of Heslington Hall and Heslington in the 1850s

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Introduction

York is a nineteenth-century city. That it appears medieval is because, unlike the Georgians who put modern fronts on older buildings, the Victorians built new buildings that looked like old ones. In the period immediately before the Victorians, the style might be classical - in 1830 the Yorkshire Philosophical Society built a Greek temple for its museum - but the Victorians turned increasingly to historic English styles and the distinction between 'restoration' and 'reconstruction' became increasingly blurred.

So at Heslington we have a fine Victorian gentleman's residence, heavily restored – that is, largely reconstructed – in 1854, and then again altered and refurbished in 1903 to look even more truly Elizabethan, by that master of the art, Walter Brierley. In this article I am concerned with the 1850s, a decade which saw not only the transformation of the Hall, but also the rebuilding of the church and the school and the enclosure of the common fields. It was also the decade that saw the end of the direct line of the Yarburgh family.

The Yarburghs of Heslington

Heslington Hall had been built in the mid-1560s for Sir Thomas Eynns, secretary to the Council of the North which met in the King's Manor. It is said – as of so many other houses of the period – that it was constructed so that the Queen might stay there should she wish when visiting this part of her Kingdom, hence a splendid suite of rooms to the north end of the hall, which became the drawing room and the library, with a long gallery beyond in the projecting north wing, 108 feet long.

In 1601 the house was sold to the Heskeths, a Lancashire family, and then in 1708 it passed to the Yarburghs through the marriage of Anne Hesketh to James Yarburgh. This family were originally from Yarborough, near Grimsby, but the branch which married into the Heskeths lived on their estates at Snaith, south of Selby. When Snaith Hall burnt down Heslington Hall became the family's principal residence.

James had a daughter, Henrietta Maria, who married the aged playwright turned architect, Sir John Vanbrugh, and also five sons, four of whom succeeded in turn to the estate - only the last, Charles (who had the distinction of taking for his second wife his deceased wife's sister - a practice frowned upon but not yet made illegal) had offspring to succeed him on his death in 1789. His elder son, by his first wife, was Henry, who died in 1825 and the younger, by his second wife, was Major Nicholas Edmund Yarburgh of the 2nd West York Regiment of Militia, who died in 1852. With him the direct Yarburgh line came to an end and the inheritance passed to his nephew through Charles Yarburgh's third and long-deceased child, Sarah.(1)

The Greames of Sewerby

Sarah Yarburgh married John Greame of Sewerby near Bridlington and they had two children: a daughter, Alicia Maria; and a son, aptly named Yarburgh, who was born in 1785, the year of his mother's death, probably in or shortly after childbirth. The loss of their mother in such circumstances was to have a profound effect on the two children as it strengthened their sense of filial and sibling piety with important consequences for both Sewerby and, subsequently, Heslington after Yarburgh Greame had inherited it from his uncle, Nicholas, in 1852.(2)

Heslington in the 1850s

Heslington was a rather backward estate village in the 1850s. Heslington Hall was described as 'a remarkably fine specimen of the age of Elizabeth, having remained with little alteration';(3) and the church was described as 'a small, mean building'.(4) The hand of improvement was scarcely apparent. Although there had been some enclosure, largely of in-fields, in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and the copyhold common was enclosed in 1762, the great open fields amounting to nearly 600 acres remained under the open ridge and furrow system.(5)

Inconveniently, the village lay in two parishes - Heslington St Paul and Heslington St Lawrence - the church for the latter lying outside the village near Walmgate Bar. The boundary awkwardly meandered between the houses, and the strips in the open fields were allocated in a patchwork to one or other of the parishes, leaving the church in Heslington St Paul and

the Hall in Heslington St Lawrence - with the result that the Yarburgh family vault was in old St Lawrence's church outside Walmgate and not conveniently across the road from the Hall in the little church dedicated to St Peter and St Paul.(6)

The most important improvement to be recorded before the 1850s was the village school, a small two-roomed cottage with a gallery, built on land given by Henry Yarburgh in 1795. In the same year, which coincidentally was a year of famine and civil unrest, he rebuilt the Hesketh Almshouses, moving them from land to the north of the Hall on the road to York to land to the west of the Hall on the road to Fulford. The main improvements to the Hall in the eighteenth century had been the landscaping of the formal gardens, laid out originally in the time of James Yarburgh in the early eighteenth century.

The bulk of the land in and around the village was owned by the Yarburghs following a policy of buying up land and consolidating holdings throughout the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, culminating in 1851 in the purchase of land held by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners as successors to the Prebend of Ampleforth, the owner of the tithe. Most of the land was let out on annual copyhold leases.(7)

Yarburgh Greame (1785-1856)

When Yarburgh Greame inherited Heslington he was already in his late sixties and unmarried, yet he set about making a transformation of the Hall and village as great as any between the building of the Hall and its further transformation by the University in the early 1960s. To understand why, we have to go to Sewerby which he had inherited from his father, John Greame, in 1841. Here he had already shown himself to be a builder, an improver, and a man of piety and benevolence. He was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, a Deputy Lieutenant of the County and served as High Sheriff in 1848-1849.

He was also a man who knew his own mind. Sewerby House had been built by an earlier John Greame between 1714-1720 and had received additions in 1807-1808 and a stable block in 1820, but in 1848 Yarburgh Greame called in the Hull architect, H. F. Lockwood, and undertook an extensive improvement, raising the height of the bow-fronted wings to the hall from two storeys to three, redoing the main façade including a new stone cornice and pediment with the family coat of arms, building a conservatory attached to the east wing and a balustrade in front of the house, and adding a neo-classical gateway to the stable yard as

well as erecting an impressive gatehouse at the head of the village street.(8)

Above all, he and Alicia rebuilt the church in memory of their father and gratitude to their step-mother. It was a small but elaborate building in the neo-Norman style, described by a contemporary as displaying ‘the most profuse and elegant workmanship that can well be imagined, and must have cost a very large sum of money’, with a profusion of stained glass, a tiled floor, and carved oak pews. The architect was none less than George Gilbert Scott. The style, though, was not Scott’s choice, for he by the late 1840s had moved on to the ‘correct’ Middle-English style made fashionable by Pugin.(9)

The rebuilding of Heslington Hall

When Yarburgh Greame inherited Heslington, changing his surname to Yarburgh in accordance with the Yarburgh will, he became, rather clumsily, Yarburgh Yarburgh. Heslington must have presented a challenge to him and he lost little time planning the reconstruction of the Hall and village, dragging it into the nineteenth century. If he did not turn to Gilbert Scott who had already experienced quite enough of Yarburgh’s architectural ‘fads’ at Sewerby, that at least spared Heslington the rebuilding of the Hall in the style of St Pancras station hotel!

Instead he turned to the builder of Euston station, Philip Charles Hardwick. The whole of the south wing (the one nearest the village) was demolished and the north wing including the Long Gallery was taken down to basement level. The Hall itself consisted of a central entrance with the Great Hall proper (described as greatly resembling the hall of a college with a fine Elizabethan plaster ceiling) to the right and a dining room to the left with bedrooms over.

There were two staircase towers at each end of the main range on the west (garden) front. Yarburgh’s private apartments were in a suite of rooms at the south end of the main range, with bedrooms over (further extended in 1878), and the drawing room and library were at the north end, again with bedrooms over. The rebuilding required the addition of a new west front between the staircase towers with a projecting central wing containing a billiard room on the ground floor and a bedroom over, as well as new north and south wings, and new roofs, chimneys and parapets. The staircase towers were raised one storey in height and capped with short pyramid-like spires. At the last minute Yarburgh altered the specification for the roof from tiles to Lakeland slate, at an additional expense of £64-15-0 – all sums of money should be multiplied by at least 100 to get a modern equivalent.

Some of this rebuilding was justified. There was rot in some of the roof timbers and the plumbing certainly needed modernising. Despite the drastic nature of the rebuilding, though, an attempt was made to restore what was not demolished. The long gallery ceiling, which was taken down, was to be 'restored in all respects'. The panelling stripped from the hall was to be reused. The main doorway in the centre of the east front with its pillars and pediment was copied and the original moved to the walled garden where it still survives, much eroded.

The Elizabethan ceiling of the great hall was to be repaired and redecorated but was otherwise left untouched. Around this sixteenth-century shell was reconstructed a modern residence with 109 rooms – just what the elderly bachelor ordered. The total cost was £15,165-4-2 - about a million and a half at current prices. The work was started in August 1853 and completed in April 1855.⁽¹⁰⁾ Yarburgh died, after a painful illness, on 26 January 1856.⁽¹¹⁾

The enclosure of Heslington's open fields

So, how was all this paid for? Part of the money in the short term undoubtedly came from the 1,400 acres of the Sewerby estate which had been enclosed in 1811; but in the longer term it was to be the Heslington estate, over twice that size, which was to support the Yarburgh expenditure once the commons had been enclosed. The process of enclosure under the General Enclosure Act of 1836 was begun in 1854 with the expectation that the value of the tenancies would be greatly increased once the separate strips were consolidated and farm fields created.

The costs and benefits alike fell largely on Yarburgh and his heirs: the cost was £925 in all for enclosing a total of 677 acres of which 574 were held by Yarburgh. When the process was completed in 1858 in the course of a few days between 23 September and 8 October, leases were granted to 15 farmers yielding a total rental of over £1,350 a year. And this was from only the newly enclosed land. The total acreage of the property left by Yarburgh in Heslington and adjoining parishes was over five times that amount.⁽¹²⁾

Enclosure not only transformed the field system of Heslington but also its roads. Before enclosure, there had been the main street of the village, known as Town Street, from which ran a back alley called School Lane to the school house at the end of Garth Ends Road which ran parallel to Town Street until it petered out at the school into a footpath. This path in turn

led to a lane from the village to the York–Hull turnpike which ran along the easterly end of the open fields (now the Hull Road). Other roads led to York and Fulford, terminating rather than crossing on the corner by the Hall at the top end of Town Street.

Yarburgh had plans for diverting the York road directly to the Fulford road to the north of the bridle path known as Spring Lane, and then pushing the Fulford Road southwards into the top of the village and further away from the hall. Thus there would have been no through road cutting the Hall off from the church and the whole environs of the hall would have been more rural.

In the end, the existing York road remained, as it does today, between the hall and the church, and the Fulford road was straightened and realigned by only a few feet, with new stables for the hall being built in 1856 across the road from the south end of the hall where Yarburgh had his own apartments. Whether this arrangement would have survived had Yarburgh lived we cannot be sure. The cross roads outside the hall now became more clearly a cross roads and the lane to the turnpike was remade across the former open fields and was now called Field Lane.

A new road completed the link from Garth Ends Road and the school to Field Lane and the church, called New School House Road, and a new road was built from Field Lane to the north-east of the church through the Gravel Field past the windmill and known initially as Mill Field Road (later known as Windmill Lane). So Heslington acquired its modern road pattern.⁽¹³⁾

Alicia Maria Lloyd

Alicia Maria was Yarburgh's older sister and appears to have been a woman who shared much of his outlook and interests. She was a near neighbour of her brother in York, having married George Lloyd of Stockton Hall, by whom she had four sons, George John Lloyd who was to take the name Yarburgh and inherit Heslington following the deaths of Alicia's brother and husband in 1856 and 1857 respectively; Yarburgh Gamaliel Lloyd, who entered the Church, was vicar of Dunston in Lincolnshire and was to take the additional name of Greame when he inherited Sewerby on the death of his mother in 1867; Henry, who became vicar of Yarborough in Lincolnshire; and Edward who was drowned in a famous accident to a chain-ferry while hunting at Newby Hall in 1869. There was also a daughter, Alicia Maria like her mother.⁽¹⁴⁾

Alicia Maria was a wealthy woman in her own right as owner of Sewerby after Yarburgh's death, and her husband was also wealthy, coming from a family of successful merchants who had first made money in business in the Manchester and Leeds areas, so she resolved to fulfil her brother's plans for Heslington, with a new church and a new school. Already Yarburgh had left in his will the interest on £2,000 to be divided between the schoolmasters at Heslington and Sewerby; and the interest on a further £1,000 which was to go at Christmas to the poor of Heslington, Sewerby and Bridlington.

The church was to be built by Alicia entirely at her own expense in Yarburgh's memory, much as they had built Sewerby in memory of their father and step-mother. The York architects, J B and W Atkinson were chosen. The old plain church with its nave, chancel and tower was demolished in 1857 and the new, enlarged church to seat 110 people, with nave, chancel, tower and tall spire was opened with a dedication to St Paul in October 1858 at a cost of £3,500.⁽¹⁵⁾ Built in the fourteenth-century style it retained nothing of the old building except the wall plaques and two bells. The inscription on the west wall of the tower reads: 'This church rebuilt and enlarged 1858 by George and Alicia Maria Lloyd of Stockton Hall'.

At this time the incumbent curate of St Paul's, Joseph Crosby, was also rector of St Crux in the city and lived in St Saviourgate. He said morning and afternoon service alternately at St Crux and Heslington and celebrated the Holy Communion four times a year. This was probably enough for half of what was only a small village, with a total population in 1851 of 494 (of whom 228 lived in Heslington St Paul). At the census of worship in 1851, a suspiciously rounded 100 adults and 48 children were present in church with almost as many meeting in the evening in three dissenting chapels.⁽¹⁶⁾

At the same time as she was rebuilding the church, Alicia Maria also started work on a new school opposite the old school in what is now called School Lane. As with the church, she bore the entire cost of £1,500, making her total outlay in memory of her brother £5,000 or perhaps half a million at present-day prices. The inscription over the door reads: 'This school was projected by the late lamented Yarburgh Yarburgh Esq^re and erected by his sister and her husband George and Alicia Maria Lloyd as an affectionate tribute to his memory 1856'.

The later history

Alicia's son, George John (now) Yarburgh was associated with his mother's building work as well as beneficiary of his uncle's rebuilding of Heslington Hall and his enclosure of the open fields. He was an active resident landlord taking a personal interest in the affairs of the village until his death in 1875. In 1870 he was a churchwarden. Following the rebuilding of the church in 1858 he arranged for the transfer of land to extend the churchyard, and when the Heslington St Lawrence part of St Lawrence's parish was united to Heslington St Paul in 1869 and the need for a resident incumbent was felt, he gave a large mid-eighteenth century house (now More House) in Heslington Lane, valued at £1,200, to be the vicarage.⁽¹⁷⁾

He was succeeded by his son-in-law, George William Bateson, who adopted the Yarburgh name as George William Bateson de Yarburgh, altering it to de Yarburgh-Bateson in 1892 having become second Baron Deramore eighteen months earlier.⁽¹⁸⁾

The connection and the name lived on, not least in the eastern corner of the churchyard where the family was buried following the union of the two halves of the parish. They are present also in the two public houses in the village - the Bay Horse, renamed in the early 1840s after Nicholas Yarburgh's horse, the Charles XII, won the 1839 St Leger; and the Fox, renamed by 1855 as the Yarburgh Arms, later the de Yarburgh Arms and belatedly, in 1967, the Deramore Arms.⁽¹⁹⁾

The names Yarburgh, Lloyd, Bateson and Deramore also survive in the street names of new housing in the village, and they are present on the charitable inscriptions on the walls not only of the 1795 school house and almshouses, but also on the almshouses at the bottom of the village, built by the third Lord Deramore in memory of his first wife in 1903; the extension to the school built with the proceeds from the sale of Yarburgh Yarburgh's charity stock in 1907, and the renovation of the almshouses in Heslington Lane by the sixth Lord Deramore in 1968.

The Batesons continued to live at the Hall until the Second World War when they moved out to the Manor House at the bottom of the village. This was an early eighteenth-century farm house, originally built for the prebendal estate of Ampleforth and bought by Nicholas Yarburgh in 1851. They remained there until 1968.⁽²⁰⁾

Conclusion

If members of the Philosophical Society had come to Heslington Hall to celebrate Christmas a hundred and fifty years ago they would have been in for a great disappointment. The house would have been deserted except for masons, plasterers, joiners, plumbers and ironworkers. They would have found large parts of the Hall demolished, including the Long Gallery, and the roofs would have been off. Walls would have been missing, excavations would have exposed old footings and old walls to be retained would have been being underpinned. New footings and masonry might have promised a new billiard room affording a view over the eighteenth-century ornamental garden, though there were also plans for enlarging the formal water garden to make a more naturalistic pond. They might also have been able to see where the drawing room on the north-west corner was being extended and given a larger bay.⁽²¹⁾

If they had then returned two years later, they would have found the scene transformed but would also have found the man responsible for it all in the last stages of his final painful illness. But what Yarburgh Yarburgh had achieved, both in the last years of his life and posthumously through the loving work of his sister Alicia Maria, was to reshape the Hall and village and make Heslington what it was to be until the coming of the university just over a century later. The character of the village has always been dependent on the owner of the Hall, but even so, despite the new institutional and non-residential use to which the Hall was put in the 1960s, much of what can be seen today still remains the creation of the energy, enthusiasm and expenditure of Yarburgh Yarburgh of Sewerby and Heslington, and his sister, Alicia Maria Lloyd, of Stockton Hall.

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