

A TOWN GROWS UP. (STOCKTON 1568 - 1668)

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Four hundred years ago Stockton was a rather different place to what it is to-day. Those parts of the town now occupied by terrace and trim "semi-detached" were the town fields and only the immediate vicinity of the High Street and the West Row was occupied. The houses were of a primitive wattle and daub construction. The residence of the Bishop of Durham was in stone. From the watershed on approximately the line of the present Northallerton - Newcastle railway several small ditches or "watercourses" as they were then described led down to the Tees. These seem to have determined the siting of the side roads leading from the High Street viz. Yarm Lane to the moat, Little Brown Street to Black Bull Lane (now built over), Ramsgate to?? (now built over), Dovecot Street into Finkle Street, and Regent Street across Thistle Green. Sanitation was primitive and no doubt practical use was made of these watercourses for disposing of some of it, but who are we to criticise when we have created the open sewer which once was the lovely Tees.

The first Elizabeth of England ascended the throne in 1558 and it is usually assumed that a sigh of relief swept the country at the ending of the reign of Bloody Mary, but this was not necessarily so in "the lands beyond the Trent" as they were described from Westminster. New ideas permeated the area slowly, and the Northerner clung to his old allegiances and faiths. In 1560 pressure was brought to bear in Durham by Elizabeth and this resulted in the election to the See of Durham, of its first Protestant Bishop, James Pilkington. He had been in exile during the reign of Mary because of his opinions. In the country a plot was hatched to marry Mary Queen of Scots, to the Duke of Norfolk, and support was given to the scheme by Milords of Northumberland and Westmorland, Percy and Neville. The general bungling, nationally, of this ill-fated venture is no concern of this article except in so far as it effects local people. Prayer Books were burned in Durham Cathedral in 1559 and Mass was celebrated there. By November the people of Stockton had risen against the new ideas. Soon the rebellion collapsed, Neville escaped abroad and Percy was executed at York.

As a deterrent for the future the Earl of Essex and Sir George Bowes, martial of the army, put to death without regular trial random members of the insurgents as well as their leaders. ~~Sixty~~ Sixty-five people were executed at Durham, Sir George Bowes made the macabre boast that in that tract of country between Newcastle and Wetherby there was scarce a town or village which had not ~~seen~~ seen the gallows.

Mr Barry Harrison, our Secretary, has recently been in London and has turned up two P.R.O.s E137/133/1 and C66/1066. He has kindly given me access to his copies. The first of these shows that on 1st April 1570 nineteen Stockton men were fined a total of £13/17/0d. for their part in "the late rebellion in the north parts." Here are

the details. The spacing is mine and is not in the original.

William Harte	£5	Anthony Swainston	5/-
William Wapes	20/-	Anthony Bambridge	5/-
Roland Burdon	20/-	Anthony Harperley	5/-
Edmond Fowler	16/-	Thomas Burdon	5/-
Henry Fowler	13/4	Thomas Dixson	5/-
William Fletham	13/4	Henry Bell	5/-
Raufe Wright	13/4		
John Fowler	13/4	Richard Cleburne	6/8
Richard Harperley	16/-	Christopher Higinton	5/-
John Osborne	5/-	Anthony Kaye	5/-

On 25th April 1570 we note "Pardons for all treasons, rebellion and other offences committed between November 1st 1569 and January 1570. On report of their penitence for their part in the rebellion in the north, testified before the Queen's Commission." Ominously three names are missing, those of Messrs. Cleburne, Higinton and Kaye. Were they not penitent, or did not Sir George Bowes give them time for penitence? It is my belief that they were summarily executed, and further evidence in favour of that conclusion will be given later.

Bishop Pilkington now followed the custom of his catholic predecessors and claimed for himself the forfeited estates, both great and small, within the Palatinate. Elizabeth took a very poor view of this and did not yield to his demand, the Bishop's power was curbed, and the forfeiture went to the Crown. In the "list of the borough-holders taken from a plan of the borough in the time of Queen Elizabeth" (vide Brewster) the names of the above unhappy trio are missing. They could have been copy-holders and therefore not mentioned, but it is significant to note that six dwelling-houses appear designated "The Queen's Majesty" and the family names of all the others do appear with the solitary exception of Thomas Dixson, and even then Brewster's No. 31 Thomas.... could have been Dixson.

Stockton men learned two things from the rebellion (1) The Bishop remained supreme in most matters but in the absolute extremity, when in conflict with the Crown, within the Diocese, his wings had been severely clipped. They were to try to take advantage of this fact at a later date. (2) There was a paramount need for loyalty to the Crown, though this was to lead them into further tribulations in the time of Charles 1.

With settled central government Stockton faced more prosperous times. Even in 1569 Sir George Bowes had been able to declare that "the best country for corn" lay around Stockton (vide Victoria County Histories, Durham Vol 3). In 1602 on the petition of the Mayor, Nicholas Fleatham, and burgesses, Bishop Matthew, in residence at Stockton Castle, granted a renewal of the market charter originally obtained from Bishop Bec 1310 and which had been allowed to lapse, due no doubt to the general recession of the previous century. The date was June 4th 1602, just one year prior to the end of the reign of Elizabeth 1.

Between 1604 and 1624, according to Ralph Davis in his book "The Rise of the English Shipping Industry" about one hundred English ships entered the Baltic each year, double the number sent there in the 1560s. In 1620 the people of Stockton in the person of their Mayor, Roland Wetherell, tried to bring some of these trading ships into the town, presumably without first seeking the Bishop's permission, and maybe on the misunderstanding that his powers had waned even further than in Elizabeth's reign. They were forced to contest the right of "anchorage and plankage" with Bishop Neale (Neile) but to their chagrin he had a decree in the Durham Court of Chancery granted in his favour. It was maintained and proved that these dues were paid in the time of Henry VI, and that there was a staith in the outer court of the castle (which was then in being though ruinous) which staith had only gone to decay "within a few years past." Bishop Neale, on winning his case, granted a lease to "Rowland Wetherilt" of the anchorage, plankage etc, of the port of Stockton, and the metage of coal and grain there. It would appear that this lease was to the Mayor as representative of the burgesses and not as a private individual. The port must have developed for in 1635 when the unpopular Ship-Money Tax was levied Stockton, Hartlepool and Sunderland were charged with providing "one ship of two hundred tons for the service of the state, manned with eighty men and double equipage etc., at an expense of £1,850 levied on the whole county."

The following two entries re shipping appear in the Stockton Parish Register for the year 1637 (verbatim):-

William Barr and Roger Stansgrove two of Robert Lampton's seamen sitting on the side of his vessel called (Lampton's Folly) fell backwards over into the river and were both drowned and were buried at Stockton the twenty day of July."

Rowland Coats of Stockton by falling from the flag of the ship down through the hatches being bruised and crushed died and was buried the... twentieth day of June."

Bad times were to come again to Stockton. In 1640 General Lesley, Earl of Calender and his Scots, crossed the Tyne at Newburn and invaded Durham. On August 29th 1640 Bishop Morton learned of the advance and knowing of the strong feeling against bishops in the Covenanting army, fled the city of Durham and took refuge in his castle at Stockton almost immediately to abandon it. The castle and town of Stockton remained in the King's hands for on October 26th 1640 the eighth article of the Treaty of Ripon stipulated "that the River of Tees shall be the bounds of both armies, excepting always the town and castle of Stockton...."

The Scots withdrew from the area and by May 1641 Dr. Morton was back in his "Durham-House". On April 4th 1642 an order of the House of Commons was issued for paying "unto Sir Henry Anderson, Knight, and to the Mayor of Stockton for the time being, the sum of £ 7-2-8 to be distributed to the several inhabitants of Stockton, in discharge of

part of the billet-money due to the several inhabitants for the billeting of his majesty's army." The Statement "part of the billet-money" can only tell a fraction of the melancholy story. The common fields must have been neglected when threatened by an enemy and the people must have lived on very short commons. To add to the general malaise the King raised his standard at Nottingham on August 20th 1642. The town, as in 1640 but unlike 1659, remained loyal to the Crown. Shipping was virtually cut off but the plague reached the town from rats on the occasional ship in the river for it was certainly raging in Stockton before it spread to the surrounding countryside as the following extracts from the Parish Registers of Stockton and Norton show. The year of the "Great sickness" was said to be 1644 in Durham. Presumably the ill-fed inhabitants of Stockton fell an easy prey to its ravages.

"Buryalls" at Stockton

1642	19	1645	27	1648	36
1643	52	1646	15	1649	19
1644	28	1647	28	1650	16

Twenty eight people died in the months of August September and October alone of the year 1643, the peak being in September. Another minor outbreak occurred in 1647/48.

Norton

1642	17	1645	23	1648	16
1643	22	1646	15	1649	14
1644	20	1647	30	1650	19

The epidemic in Stockton in 1643 is reflected at Norton, not so sharply and just a little delayed. The peak of the 1647/48 outbreak was in December 1648 at Norton, slightly in advance of that at Stockton. An interesting little legend was passed on to me by my father when I was young. It was that these plague victims were not buried in the churchyard but were interred at a spot outside the town by the moat, which communal grave is now within Holy Trinity Church Yard, being marked by a circle of trees. These are still to be seen but whether there is one iota of truth in the legend I just do not know.

In the middle of January 1644 snow fell continuously over all England for at least a week. This must have been a bitter time for the town with food and fuel short, though it is just possible that the weather helped to contain the sickness. Mud and floods followed and then as a climax to all the troubles the Scots crossed the border again. By April 8th they were within two miles of Durham. Towards the south York surrendered to the Forces of the Parliament, and finally Marston Moor saw the end of Royalists hopes on July 2nd 1644. Small wonder is it that with all hope gone the weakened and debilitated town was occupied by the Earl of Calender in August 1644, and from then on was garrisoned by the Scots. They continued to hold Stockton Castle until

in 1646 they were bought off by the English Parliament.

On February 26th 1647 Stockton Castle was made untenable. On July 13th 1647 by Order in Parliament the castle was to be totally destroyed though this action was not finally accomplished until 1651. On March 24th 1648 the Castle and Manor of Stockton were sold to William Underwood and James Nelthorpe. Thus by 1648 the Bishop of Durham was absent from his demesne in Stockton, his power over the inhabitants was broken and that demesne, to all intents and purposes, had ceased to exist. One of the lucrative properties of the Bishop had always been his monopoly in the grinding of corn at his watermill at Norton and he had refused to licence any other mill as is shown by the following extracts from the survey of the Manor of Stockton, taken at the time of its sale. "That there is one water corn milne called Norton milne, which we are informed the tenants of the several townepps within the said manr. (save only Carlton) are tyed to grind all their corne..... other milnes we know of none within the said manr. belonging to the Bpp."

With the Bishop safely tucked out of the way, the burgesses of Stockton lost no time in erecting their first windmill on the site I knew as a boy as "Tommy Wren's". It has now become the estate of Wren-mill. I can as yet give no firm date for its erection; it was not there in 1648 but was in operation by the time of the enclosure award originally published 5th November 1659. A second mill was erected, its location not yet determined with any degree of certainty, but it may have been on the site of the present Thompson Street Gas Works. The millers can be named as Nicholas Fleatham and John Metcalf. The mill at Mount Pleasant was probably erected some years later - it was not there in 1659.

The settled years of the Commonwealth saw great advances in the well-being, commerce and agriculture of the people of Stockton. With the Restoration of 1660 it was wisely decided to leave well alone.

The enclosure award was confirmed in Durham in 1662. On April 24th 1666 Bishop Cosin granted to the town the last of its market charters.

An article on the enclosure award with a map of the Stockton fields circa 1660 showing field names, place names etc. will be published in the Bulletin in the near future, as soon as the practical problem of the printing, with our limited resources, of a worthwhile and clear map has been solved.
