

Old Hawkhill

Part 1 - Ownership of Hawkhill

Much of the north of England has been shaped by years and years of strife and warfare. From Anglo-Saxon and Viking times it had always been difficult for rulers in the south of England to maintain law and order in the north. The north-east was particularly difficult to control and there were many uprisings against the king's authority. In 1067, after paying homage to William the Conqueror, Copsig was made Earl of Northumbria but after ruling for a mere five weeks was captured and burnt to death by his enemies. Only after many punishment raids and laying waste to much of the north was order finally restored.

Although these raids ensured that the north-east of England became loyal to the king, it was not the end of violence and danger in the region. This time, however, the armies came from the north. The border between England and Scotland was a matter of dispute and many raids and skirmishes took place throughout the medieval period; the borders remained a difficult and violent place to live. The Norman kings gave important Barons and their families estates across Northumberland and Durham and many castles were built to provide protection against both hostile locals and raids from Scotland. Norham Castle, on the River Tweed, had been built in 1121; other examples included Wark, Alnwick and Morpeth.

Despite the frequent warfare, for most people life was dominated by living and working on the land. The landowners kept some of their land for their own farms, but most was given to followers to farm in return for their help in times of war and contributions of money and food. Most people's houses would have been simple, wooden structures. These small buildings were easy to build, which was important as they were often destroyed during Scottish raids.

During the 14th century life in the north-east had been badly affected by the Black Death; in 1379 almost the entire population of Newton, in the Tyne Valley, died of the plague¹. This came after a series of famines between 1315 and 1317, as well as many epidemics among animals in the 1320s. There were also changes in the climate. The weather became rainier and colder making farming in many areas much harder. As a consequence, many settlements shrank in size while others were completely deserted.

The now abandoned settlement of Hawkhill sat on the north bank of the river Aln about 3 miles downstream from Alnwick. From the early 14th century its history had been closely tied with the Grey family who owned various estates in Northumberland. Sir Thomas Grey is recorded as being heavily involved in the Scottish Wars of Independence and suffered

¹ Other places affected include Alnwick (1543 & 1590), Denwick (1665), Lesbury (1665), Berwick-on-Tweed (1568 & 1597)

significantly in the defeat of the English at Bannockburn where he was captured. For his services he had been knighted in 1301, granted 108 acres of lands at 'Howyk'², and made Constable of Norham Castle from 1319 to 1331. He died in 1344.

His son, Thomas Grey had also fought against the Scots and, in consideration of his good service, was made warden of the manor of Middleton in Coquetdale. In 1345 he was appointed Constable of Norham Castle and acquired a great deal of additional land; it is said that he 'he left his estate much better than he found it' and was most likely the builder of Heaton Castle. He died in 1369.

His son, the third generation of Thomas's, born in 1359 at Heaton Castle, Norham, was a collector of taxes for the government and when he died in 1400 records show that his estate³ included '*Hawkhill, the manor, of the same barony by knight service, annual value 10 marks.*'

In 1848, Samuel Lewis wrote⁴ '*Hawkhill, a township in the parish of Lesbury, S. division of Bambrough ward, N. division of Northumberland, 3 miles (E. by S.) from Alnwick; containing 75 inhabitants. It comprises 693 acres of land mostly in tillage, exclusively of about 20 acres of plantations and roads; and, with the exception of a few acres, is bounded on the south and west sides by the river Aln. The township is intersected from east to west by the Alnmouth and Hexham road, which divides it into two parts, the southern being of a dry soil, and the northern in nearly equal portions dry and wet; the surface of both divisions is undulated.*'. Yet only seven years later Whellan⁵ writes that '*Hawkhill . . . consists of one farm in the occupancy of Mr Thomas Crisp*' .

Records reveal that mixed farming was the general rule on the greater Howick Estate, grain crops and turnips being grown, and cattle and sheep reared. Much attention was paid to cattle feeding and fattening on the farms near Howick, and the grazing on Howick grass parks was let by auction every year. Most of the farms were leased for 21 years or a lesser term, sometimes from year to year, but a good tenant might remain much longer than was specified in his original lease. Little mercy was shown to those who fell seriously into arrears of rent: their crops, stock and implements were put up for sale. There is little doubt that the Earls Grey themselves always took a close interest in estate business. But that was not their only interest.

For many years, the Howick Estate had been closely associated with the Grey family. In 1667, John Grey of Acton⁶ had inherited the estate from his elder brother. The estate then passed down through his son, John Grey, to his grandson, Henry Grey (1691-1749); both

² As recorded in the Patent Rolls 1232–1509: these are Royal Letters Patent granting lands, titles, offices or emoluments to a subject.

³ See entry 433 in Inquisitions Post Mortem, Henry IV, Entries 400-446 - <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/inquis-post-mortem/vol18/pp125-144>

⁴ Extract from: A Topographical Dictionary of England comprising the several counties, cities, boroughs, corporate and market towns, parishes, and townships..... 7th Edition, by Samuel Lewis, London, 1848.

⁵ William Whellan & Co., History of Northumberland, 1855

⁶ Acton near Felton, Northumberland, is another deserted village.

John and Henry had been born at Howick. As members of the aristocracy and sitting in the House of Lords, the family had long been involved in governance and matters of state. As statesmen, diplomats and legislators, they had long sought parliamentary reform in order to reduce the power of the Monarchy which, at this time, held near absolute executive powers. In 1745, four years before his death, Henry had been created 1st Baronet Grey of Howick.

Henry's son, Charles (1729-1807) did not expect to inherit his father's titles so, with financial assistance from his father, purchased a commission and had a distinguished military career. He served in the Seven Years War, the American Wars of Independence and the French Revolutionary wars. He returned to England in 1794, was raised to the peerage as Baron Grey of Howick in 1801 and five years later was created Earl Grey.



Standing atop his monument in Newcastle city centre, Henry's grandson, Charles (1764-1845), is probably the best-known member of the family. He was a leading Whig politician becoming an MP at the age of 22 later serving as First Lord of the Admiralty and Foreign Secretary before becoming Prime Minister in 1830. He had long been a supporter of reform and steered through parliament many notable measures. These included: the Great Reform Bill of 1832, the first major step towards modern parliamentary democracy; the Factory Act of 1833 which gave more protection to children at work; the reform of the Poor Law; and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. Scholars rank him highly among British prime ministers, averting much civil strife and enabling Victorian progress.

Earl Grey tea, created to suit the water from the well at Howick, was served by Lady Grey in London when entertaining as a political hostess. It proved so popular that she was asked if it could be sold to others. Sadly the Greys, being unbusinesslike, failed to register the trade mark. As a result they have never received a penny in royalties.

Henry, 3rd Earl Grey (1802-1894), was another active and reforming Whig politician and for a time was Secretary of State for the Colonies in the 1840s. He was the first minister to proclaim that the colonies were to be governed for their own benefit, not for the mother country, and to accord them self-government so far as was possible.

Albert, 4th Earl Grey, was Queen Victoria's first Private Secretary and a great believer in the British Empire. As an MP he was a tireless advocate of cooperation between consumers and producers, industrial profit sharing, proportional representation, church reform and temperance, establishing the Public House Trust, a network of public houses that sold non-alcoholic beverages. In 1904 he became the governor general of Canada. Although unwise investments in South Africa had left Grey little money or wealth, his

appointment was made possible by the generosity of his wife's aunt. However, a seasoned diplomat⁷ at that time commented ' . . . *I doubt Albert's level-headedness . . . an enormous amount of harm may be done here by his impetuous action & want of judgement*'

Despite their considerable landed property the Greys were never rich. Their lands were heavily encumbered with thousands of pounds of debts and interest payments incurred by their predecessors' political activities. These had been an annual drain on the estate which did not make huge profits. In 1870, faced with a mortgage of £200,000 and other encumbrances, the 3rd Earl Grey sold several properties for £82,000 which enabled him to discharge several debts other than the "terrible" mortgage. Although this mortgage was subsequently reduced, other debts were still being incurred and in 1906 the total of mortgages and loans stood at £283,586. By 1916 the 4th Earl Grey was in daily terror of the interest rate rising by half a percent and soon after his death in 1917 parts of the estate were sold, and subsequent sales considerably reduced the size of the once extensive estate. The 4th Earl Grey had owned 17,600 acres; the 5th Earl who died in 1963 owned about 3,000 acres.

In 1872, possibly in connection with these dire financial affairs, letters between Earl Grey and William Woodman, a solicitor from Morpeth, record the exchange of Hawkhill Farm (owned by Earl Grey) for Low Stead Farm in the neighbouring parish of Longhoughton and owned by the Duke of Northumberland, thus consolidating the Percy's holdings in Northumberland.

Part 2 - Developments at Hawkhill

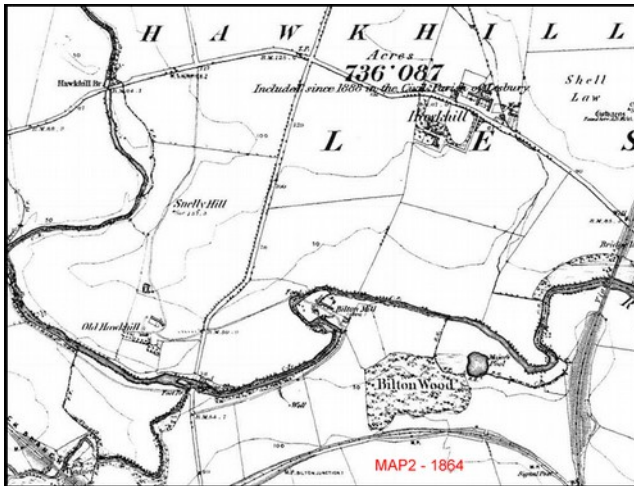


Maps of 1749 and 1864 show that the original Hawkhill settlement by the river had been superseded by a new and larger settlement established on the road from Alnwick to Alnmouth. Why?

During the 18th and 19th centuries the domestic political agenda was increasingly becoming more liberal, with moves towards political and social reform, the widening of the franchise, and the Agricultural and Industrial revolutions.

The Agricultural Revolution (1750 - 1880) was a period during which not only was agriculture transformed but there were also unprecedented demographic and social changes. The early statistician Gregory King estimated the population of England and Wales at 5½ million in 1700. By the first census in 1801 it was 9 million and by 1851 almost 18 million.

⁷ The previous governor general of Canada, his brother-in-law the Earl of Minto.



This increase in population brought with it several problems. Before 1800 Britain had been a largely rural economy marked by poverty especially where there were no industries to keep wages competitive. The process of 'enclosure' meant that agricultural holdings and common lands became consolidated in the hands of the wealthy whilst the poor were driven off the land. The tied cottage system, developed to house labourers on short annual contracts, now

meant that there was no longer permanence in either employment or housing for the rural worker. Instead of secure employment, many labourers now became migrants in their quest for work, often in the rapidly growing larger towns and cities.

In these towns and cities living conditions were poor; consequently cholera epidemics were frequent, life expectancy was low and death rates were high. Following epidemics in 1831-32 and 1848-49, Alnwick ratepayers wrote to the General Board of Health requesting that a Superintending Inspector report on the conditions in the whole union⁸ of Alnwick and make necessary recommendations. Robert Rawlinson, the Superintending Inspector, ended his report⁹ by writing extensively about the use of earthenware 'drain-tiles' to conduct '*all liquid, solid, and semisolid refuse to some common outlet or reservoir*' and concludes by stating '*Drain-tiles have of late been extensively made and used in the district by the Duke of Northumberland, by Earl Grey, and also by others of the local landed proprietors.*'

A further problem was how to provide food for all these people using only the same amount of agricultural land as before. One solution was to improve the methods of drainage and thereby increase crop-yield. This was not a new idea. Deep trenching, with bundles of sticks, stones, shells or gravel laid at the bottom of the trench, and then the earth replaced on top, had long been used as a drainage method; such drains, however, did not last long and needed frequent re-laying.

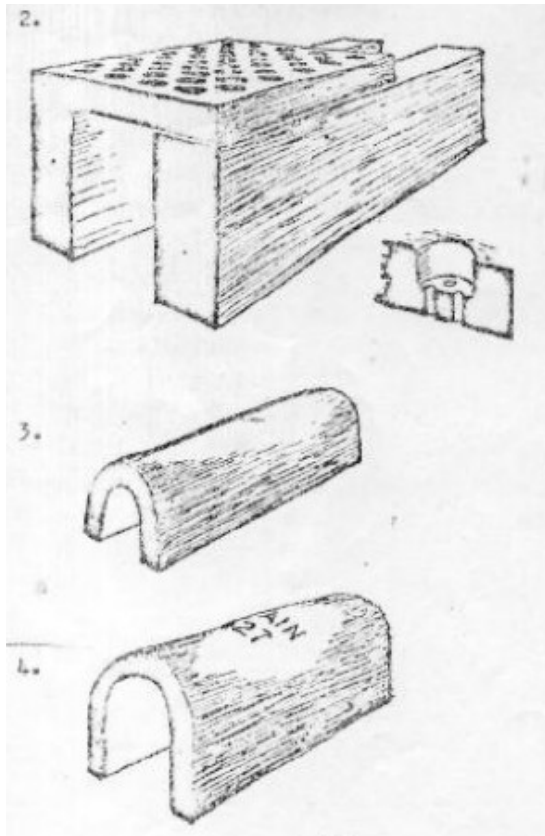
Towards the end of the eighteenth century a few landowners began to employ more effective types of drainage using tiles¹⁰ or drain bricks to replace the faggots and stones. One method was to cut a small, rectangular channel at the base of the trench, and put a roofing tile over it. Another was to lay two hollowed-out bricks face to face so that the hollow formed a pipe. A later improvement was to turn over the edges of a roof-tile into a horseshoe shape before firing; this was either laid directly on the floor of the trench or on a base plate. It is this original use of roof tiles for drainage purposes which gave later land drains their name: tile-pipes.

⁸ The 'Alnwick Poor Law Union' had been formed in 1836 and included 62 townships in Northumberland from Embleton in the north to Amble in the south.

⁹ Preliminary Inquiry into the Sewerage, Drainage, Supply of Water and Sanitary Condition of Alnwick & Canongate. HMSO London, 1850

¹⁰ Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries; Land Drainage and Water Supply Division, about 1854

A statute of 1826 showed the importance the government placed on the laying of hollow drainage systems - if they were to be used solely for the purpose of draining wet and



marshy land and were legibly stamped with the word DRAIN, they were exempt from the duty normally paid on tiles and tile-pipes.

The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century methods of tile manufacture were expensive and only rich landowners could afford them. Early tile-pipes were shaped by hand around a drum. It was not until the mid-nineteenth century, when the extrusion method of machine-making tile-pipes was invented, that hollow drainage by tile-pipe came within the reach of most farmers. Thomas Scragg patented a cheaper method of making tile-pipes in 1845; by 1849 a writer in the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England could describe a machine for making drain tiles operated by one man and three boys, who could turn out nearly 11,000 tiles of 1" bore in ten hours.

Once cheap tile-pipes became available they were widely used. At first pipes of small 1" bore were tried. The theory was that the water would be channelled through these so fast it would prevent silting. In fact the result was the opposite: the pipes were so narrow they silted up. A large bore pipe - first of 2" later of 3" or more - came into use, and drainage systems using these pipes were then laid up to the 1890s. This marked the beginning of a period of agricultural depression and until the outbreak of World War II the manufacture of these tile-pipes gradually ceased.

Can these developments be seen at Hawkhill?

Estate records of the Earls Grey of Howick, held at Durham University Library¹¹ (Archives and Special Collections), show that work on the development of Hawkhill Tile Works was begun in 1844 when payments were made to John Martin for digging, levelling of ground, and removing soil. In the same year timber, roofing felt, tar and pitch was bought, contracts for the building of sheds, fire houses, pug mill, and shuttering sheds were signed, and masons & bricklayers were employed to build two kilns. In addition to the tile works offices, workers cottages and a manager's house were also built costing £337, £373 and £639 respectively.

In 1844 John Martin went to Benenden, Kent, *'for the purpose of learning the making of drain-tiles by machine and other matters connected with it'*. In December 1845, Joel Martin signed an agreement with Earl Grey to manufacture a specified number of drain pipes of various sizes (eg 600,000 pipes at 2" diameter) and to supply them to Earl Grey at fixed

¹¹ Consisting mainly of financial documents and some limited correspondence concerning disputes.

prices. This agreement also states that Joel Martin should occupy the cottage and garden rent free.

An undated but very detailed handwritten document suggests that two kilns and a drying shed were to be built on the principles established and patented by F W Etheredge. It is not possible to ascertain if these were the original kilns but by 1849 letters were being exchanged between Earl Grey and John Ridgeway¹² concerning the performance of the kilns at Hawkhill Tile Works. Earl Grey argued that the kilns did not perform as efficiently as expected and used too much coal. Ridgeway replied '*I find, as I have often found, that when you rely on others for information you are almost always to be deceived.*'

George Scott, a steam engine manufacturer, supplied the works with an 'improved' Hatchers Tile Machine. Correspondence shows that this machine '*worked so ill that it couldn't be made to answer until Hatcher had been brought down to examine it*'. Work to repair the machine lasted ten days and was undertaken by William Stewart of Fenkle Street, Alnwick.

Despite these problems, tiles and pipes were successfully produced at Hawkhill; in 1846 over 100,000 pipes and tiles of varying sizes were made although by 1858 this had fallen to 90,000 pipes. There are no records showing activity at the Tile Works after 1859.

Records held by Northumberland Estates show that in 1863 Hawkhill Farm was leased to Thomas Crisp and his son Lowry Calvert Crisp for a term of 20 years. A copy of this lease¹³ describes the property as being a 'farmhold' of '685 acres' and 'known by the name Hawkhill and Hawkhill Tile Works'. This is the only mention of the Tile Works at Hawkhill on documents held by the Northumberland Estates Archives and suggests that the tile works were no longer in operation in 1863 and that the buildings had become part of the extensive¹⁴ Hawkhill farmstead.



The transformation which brought about Hawkhill Business Park took place between 2003 and 2005. These images show the tile works as they are today. The chimney for the kiln is clearly visible.



¹² John Ridgeway was the owners of the Cauldon Pottery Works, Staffordshire, with over 500 employees.

¹³ Northumberland Estates, Alnwick Castle Archive, Sy: D.III.16.m

¹⁴ The Ordnance Survey Name Book for Northumberland (c1864) describes Hawkhill as being an 'extensive farmstead with the usual outhouses and gardens attached'.

References

Part 1 - Ownership

These notes have been produced with reference to British History Online, which maintains many indexes about the Greys, and indexes to the estate's archives which are held by Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections.

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<https://www.scottishbrickhistory.co.uk/evolution-of-the-land-drainage-tile/>

<https://bleatings.blogspot.com/2006/03/history-of-field-drainage.html>

<https://intriguing-history.com/the-agricultural-revolution/>

Additional research

- Estate records of the Earls Grey and Lords Howick held at Durham University Library Archives & Special Collections Catalogue - research undertaken by Catherine Meades.
- Northumberland Estates Archives - research undertaken by Andrew Jack.