

Raby castle

Raby Castle stands within a vast park to the north of Staindrop. Despite the alterations inevitable in a castle that has become a stately home, Raby ranks among the finest of later medieval fortified mansions. It reflects the aspirations of the Neville family, who became the most powerful of the Bishop of Durham's vassals. Ralph, Lord Neville, commanded the English forces at the Battle of Neville's Cross and probably started building here. His son John obtained a license to crenellate in 1378, but the castle was probably nearly complete by then.

The irregular layout suggests a piecemeal development around an older residential core. On the east side of the courtyard is a hall range, with a small tower - the original pele - attached to it. This was built up into a pentagonal enclosure surrounded by residential ranges. Massive, oblong flanking towers project at regular intervals. Clifford's Tower is the largest of them, placed at the northwest apex. Next comes the Kitchen Tower at the northeast corner.

The east front was peculiar because its towers project deeply from the back of the hall range. There was thus a deep recess between Mount Raskelf, an adjunct of the Kitchen Tower, and the Chapel Tower in the middle of the east front. However, an eighteenth-century block has filled the recess. The same has happened to the void between Chapel Tower and Bulmer's Tower. The latter once stood curiously isolated from the rest of the castle and was therefore presumably a tower house.

Two campaigns in particular affected the appearance of the castle. In 1782, John Carr drove a carriageway through the Chapel Tower and heightened the lower hall at the expense of the great hall and chapel above. The second was the rebuilding of the south range and the extension of the great hall in the 1840s.