

# Auckland Castle

## History

Eight hundred years ago the See of Durham, the most powerful Diocese in the North, established Auckland Castle as a hunting lodge for the Prince Bishop. Then virtually monarchs in their own kingdom, the Prince Bishops held military, economic and political power, in addition to their ecclesiastical authority.

Auckland Castle, placed above the Rivers Wear and Gaunless and some ten miles south west of Durham, was no mere country residence. Not for nothing did the town that grew around it take its name from the resident of the Castle. Over hundreds of years, the Castle was expanded until, in 1832, it became the official residence of the Bishop.

## State Rooms

### The Gentlemen's Hall

Believed to be the oldest part of the earlier fortified house, originally linked the Servants' Hall and Kitchen with the 12<sup>th</sup> century Great Banqueting Hall (now the Chapel). It was again Bishop Shute Barrington and his architect who in the 18<sup>th</sup> century radically altered this area and so united the disparate architectural styles of the several buildings. The ornate (and false) ceiling of the Entrance Hall, for instance, hides the original massive oak beams. Its elegance is echoed in the slender but imperial double-return staircase, branching to right and left, with which James Wyatt replaced an original inner wall at the far end of the Hall. This staircase and the Hall were re-carpeted in the last decade of the twentieth century. The carpet's fretwork pattern echoes that in the windows (based on Cosin's coat of arms) and the St. Cuthbert's cross was introduced as a local motif. The Turnbull coat of arms appears at its corners. The slim pillars which support the false ceiling and the balusters of the staircase are in the form of quadruple columns which echo the heavier marble and sandstone columns of the Chapel. The right-hand curve of the staircases rises to a large Gothic picture window, through which the dramatic and strategic position of the Castle above the Wear Valley is apparent. From here we enter the Ante-Room.

### The Ante-Room

Before the erection of the dividing wall between them, this Ante-Room and the State Room beyond together comprised the one large 'Common Room' built by Bishop Anthony Beck in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century. Wyatt's 18<sup>th</sup> century improvements included his creation of this elegant Ante-Room, octagonal and high-vaulted, with a false ceiling of delicate colouring and ornate plaster-work. It would have been used as a waiting room for those seeking audience with Bishop. Appropriate to this room, though of a later century, are the two pastel / chalk drawings by George Richmond, perhaps best known for his famous sketch of Charlotte Bronte. These two delicate portraits are of Montague Villiers, bishop here for only one year in 1860, and his wife.

The view from the window of the Ante-Room is of the Scotland wing running westwards. Used by Bishop Skirlaw as an ambulatory in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, its dungeons later incarcerated cross-border prisoners (hence its name of 'Scotland'). Here too is the Castle's kitchen garden, it's north side flanked by a double wall which once contained hot water pipes, to propagate the growth of peaches and other exotica not normally grown so far north.

Finally, the high double doors of oak with their intricately laced Gothic panels and fine brass handles depicting pineapples, which faced us as we entered the Ante-Room, are the appropriate entrance to the gracious and imposing State Room – the Throne Room which lies beyond.



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## The Throne Room

Gracious and well-proportioned as it is, this room is also imposing. It was meant to impress. For immediately upon entering it, one is facing as its far end the Bishop's Throne set against an ornate plaster screen depicting the arms of the Diocese in mid-blue, gold and silver, impaled with those of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Bishop Barrington, supported by a crook and a sword, and surmounted by a bishop's mitre rising from a ducal coronet. The coronet signifies the status of this northern Bishopric, and Durham is the only Diocese to have such ornaments to its arms. The sword and the crosier indicate that the Bishop's power extended beyond the Church, in securing and administering the secular law. The Throne itself emphasises this, being very clearly a chair of state, wide, heavy and ornately carved. Around the walls of this room hang portraits of some of the successive bishops who have occupied this See, the styles of the paintings as various as the bishops themselves. In sheer scale the dominating portraits are probably those of Barrington and Van Mildert, both of whom enjoyed the grandeur of Prince Bishops. But from a much more recent – and very different – era there are impressive portraits of Bishop Michael Ramsey, Bishop David Jenkins and Bishop Michael Turnbull.

The two hundred year old tinted windows (again by James Wyatt) are of very pale green and pink glass – 'to make the ladies appear less pale in the bright sunlight'. They overlook the gardens, with, beyond, the rectangular bowling green. Opposite the windows stand two carved gilt marble top side-tables, which came originally from the tomb of Thomas a Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. They were brought to Auckland by Bishop Trevor.

The door on the right of the Bishop's Throne leads into the next State Room, the Long Dining Room.

## The Long Dining Room

At this point we enter that part of the Castle added in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, some four hundred years after the original foundation. This Long Dining Room has much the same impressive proportions as the Throne Room it adjoins. Originally the work of Bishops Ruthall and Tunstall in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it has been considerably modified by later bishops. Bishop Trevr in 1760 was responsible for the fine moulded ceiling, with his coat of arms colourfully decorating its centre. Bishop Barrington was to modernise and move the beautiful oriel window overlooking the garden, along with the other first floor windows. The windows to the south look towards the triple-arched entrance to the Castle and Chapel, and across the wooded valley of the Park to the Durham Road. Furnishings in this room included three side-tables designed by James Wyatt.

## The King Charles Dining Room

Of the same period as the Long Dining room, this room; originally built as a State Bedroom during Bishop Tunstall's episcopacy, takes its name from its most famous visitor, Charles I, whose bedroom it was when he rested here on his journeys to and from Scotland. His last call at the Castle, so the sad tale goes, was on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1647, as a prisoner on his way to London, his subsequent trial, and execution. But his guards were unable to gain access to the Castle, finding it locked up, since, (as a sympathetic chronicler, Raine, was later to record) 'there was then no Bishop of Durham to extend to him the rights to homage or hospitality, or comfort him in his afflictions. Bishop Morton had been driven...from a home ennobled by his munificence, and consecrated by his piety; and his Castle was in the hands of those who soon afterwards murdered their King.'

So the King perforce spent the night in the nearby public house of one Christopher Dobson, in Silver Street by the Market Place. There is a tradition, recorded by the 19<sup>th</sup> century local historian Matthew Richley, that 'whilst the King was a Auckland, a lady by the name of Wren, of Binchester, found him in the inn, in a sort of guard room, surrounded by soldier, who were smoking tobacco, the smell of which he held in abomination, and she being a great royalist, and an admirer of the King, spiritedly broke every pipe she could reach in her approach to her fallen sovereign, the King thanking her, and saying she had done more than he durst have done.'

The contrast with King Charles's usual bedroom in Auckland could hardly be greater. Now used occasionally as an official drawing room (and available also for public use) the room has a rococo ceiling, rather freer in design than that of the Long Dining Room. As its centre a fine sunburst panel is surrounded by flowers, and in each corner a griffin resting on an archer's cap, from the family arms of Bishop Trevor. The marble fireplace is in the style of Grinling Gibbons, with a delightful scene of two children with a bird's nest in the upper arch. There are also further paintings of note here, all acquired, like those of de Zurbaran, by Bishop Trevor. They include the four Evangelists painted on wood, attributed to Artus Wolfaerts; a Judgement of Solomon, attributed to the Circle of Giorgione; and a copy of Paolo Veronese's Wedding Feast at Cana in Galilee, probably by Vincenzo Danini from the Venetian School, 18<sup>th</sup> century.

