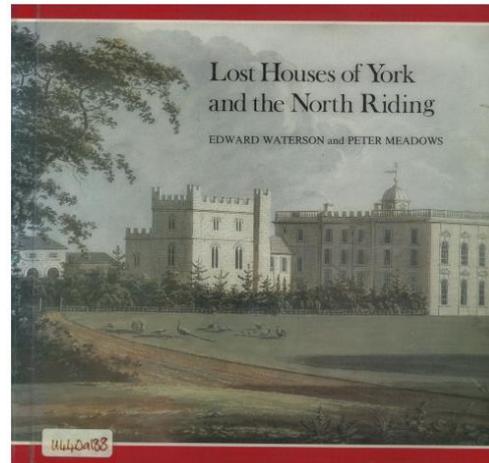
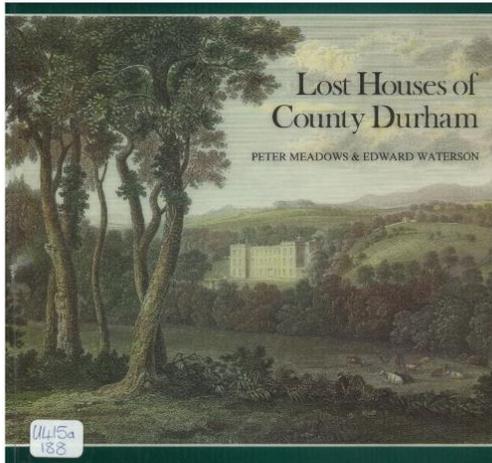


Lost Houses of County Durham by **Peter Meadows** and **Edward Waterson** (1993)

Lost Houses of York and the North Riding by **Edward Waterson** and **Peter Meadows** (1990)



Do you remember the beautiful Gothic Red Hall or Medieval Cockerton Hall sadly demolished in 1964? If so, have you ever wondered about their history? In *Lost Houses of County Durham* the authors seek out the development of Red Hall and other grand houses in the Co Durham area. Peeking into the past we are shown the history and beauty of their architecture but also of their sad demise.

The most obvious question perhaps, is *why* the houses described and illustrated (about 75 in each book), came to be lost. The authors argue that County Durham was special in the way its landowners ‘tolerated, encouraged and actively invested’ in the local industry – predominantly coal-mining – conducted on their land: they received royalties... they could build more opulent houses. Unfortunately there was also danger to their properties from subsidence and often, as the industry thrived, the original houses were swamped by its proximity and their owners inclined to move away. More generally there is an inevitability that the costs of upkeep and repairs, the dislocation of families, requisitions in wars and loss of heirs all tend to result in decline.

Each entry concludes with, as it were, the death of the house, which would be cumulatively rather melancholy if it were not for the intriguing details brought to light. Fires were very often the prelude to demolition, as in, ‘became a night club and was burnt down in mysterious circumstances’. One suffered ‘worm infestation’. One was subject to a sinister invasion: ‘Semi-detached houses advanced up the drive’. Rather touchingly, what finally remained is catalogued too – it’s most often the stable block, or outbuildings, in one case, just

the stone ha-ha, or, pitifully, ‘a few railings’. Stonework was broken up for road-building, lead stolen from the roof. It is at least some consolation that notable interiors are fairly regularly salvaged, cannibalised in other buildings.

**BLACKWELL HILL,
Darlington**

Situated on the banks of the Tees near Blackwell Hill, Blackwell Hill was a conventional Gothic villa, of red brick with stone dressings, designed c.1870 by C. G. Hoskins of Darlington for Eliza Barclay, widow of Robert Barclay, and sister of John Church Backhouse. It was later the home of Edward (1840-1911) and Rachel Backhouse Maunsey, later of G. M. Hartoway, and finally John Neasham. It was demolished c.1972 for Farr Holme houses.



Blackwell Hill (Darlington Centre for Local Studies)

**BRANKSOME HALL,
Darlington**

To the north-west of Darlington, Branksome Hall was a conventional Victorian villa, originally called Westfield and built for Robert Tensdale. It was bought in 1852 by John Kitching, a railway engineer and director, and doubled in size by the addition of a large wing in 17th century style, with a rather wide central bay window of two storeys and dormers capped with triangular and segmental pediments. The name Branksome was inspired by a poem by Sir Walter Scott. Kitching had a notable collection of furniture, paintings, porcelain and statuary. He died in 1935 and his seven surviving bachelor sons lived at Branksome until 1955. In that year they sold the estate of 230 acres to Darlington Council. The estate was developed for housing for the disabled and elderly, and the Hall was demolished in 1978 for housing.



Branksome Hall (Evening Dispatch, April 1933)

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The earlier York and the North Riding book does not have a map of properties like the one that is included in the later County Durham one but included is Clervaulx Castle at Croft, designed by Ignatious Bonomi, Railway Architect. The more rural character of the Yorkshire environs is stressed and the illustrations of this area benefit from a sketchbook of 200 Yorkshire Houses by one Samuel Beck (1696-1779). As a rule the earliest photographs date from around the 1860s. To give a taster, Rounton Grange at East Rounton is described as ‘the most original North Riding house of the late nineteenth century’. William Morris and Sir Edward Burne-Jones designed the decorative scheme of the dining room. The house is oddly tall in the photograph, and the text explains that the owners did not want to chop down nearby trees – so the architects built up rather than out.

The County Durham book includes several Great Houses with Darlington connections. There are many pictures of interiors at Neasham Hall; we learn that as well as Red Hall at Haughton-le-Skerne, there was also Blue Hall and White Hall; Blackwells Hall and Hill make an appearance, as well as the Bishop’s Manor House, Lady Sophia Fry’s Woodburn and the Peases’s Woodside. Interesting nuggets abound: Branksome Hall was named after a poem by Walter Scott; Halnaby Hall, South of Darlington, was the scene of Lord Byron’s disastrous honeymoon in 1815. Whitworth Hall near Spennymoor was the home of ‘Bonnie Bobby Shafto’.

These books resurrect buildings that were once pronounced ‘deserted, derelict and beyond repair.’ Along with great photography both are a must read for all those fascinated by the history of buildings in our local area, who love looking at old photographs and have a passion for architecture too.