

Hylton The manor of Hylton, presented to the Hilton family soon after the conquest, was their main residence from the 12th century until 1750. A baronial house or tower is supposed to have been built in 1072 by Henry Hilton, and the present castle, perhaps close to its predecessor, has been dated to the 1390s. The nearby mid-12th century chapel of St Catherine enabled Hylton manor to become a separate chapelry within Monkwearmouth parish.ⁱ

Hylton was the most important crossing point on the lower reaches of the Wear, controlled on either side of the river by the lord of Hylton. A ferry carrying horses, carriages and oxen crossed the river at a narrow, deep and treacherous point there, by 1322. Close by, a little downstream, the water could be forded by means of the ancient Bridge or Brigg Stones. Cattle and horses and carts are reported as crossing the Wear at Hylton at low tide, early in the 19th century. The riverbank here was richly wooded, with 'a beautiful growth of oak, ash, elm and other forest trees'. At the lower end of Hylton in 1448 were fisheries in the Wear, below a place called Burgh Knoll in the east woods.ⁱⁱ

We can conjecture that at this focal point for north-south travel were facilities for medieval travellers: maybe an inn, certainly riverside dwellings and a ferryman's house. Two routes led north from here across Hylton manor. North-west to Newcastle, a road crossed uninclosed meadow land called Wood Leazes, then through woods and across the south moor. Crossing an agricultural track (later Washington Road), it continued north to the township boundary at Hylton Bridge. The other road north went to Boldon, turning east along the riverbank on the present Ferryboat Lane, as far as Hylton Place. From there, the road or roads passed across open fields and parkland towards Hylton Castle and the main medieval settlement. The exact line of this road was lost during inclosure of farmland in the 1740s.ⁱⁱⁱ

The landscape here, particularly around the site of Hylton's medieval village, was altered radically by limestone quarrying, and later overwhelmed by intensive house-building, obscuring traces of an older village centre. So how can we be certain that there was ever a village at all? By the time the whole estate was offered for sale in 1750, the land had been divided into scattered farmsteads and many of the newly inclosed fields renamed, so that locating the tofts, crofts and bondlands mentioned in medieval deeds is very difficult. Close to the castle had been buildings, tithe barn and orchards belonging to the lord, 140 a. of arable land which was demesne – the lord's own – and 26 a. of meadow which was also his. Much of the demesne lay north-east of the castle, some of it at Milnesyd, presumably next to the windmill north of the castle. Placing the tenants' farms is harder, though Stiklaw (Stickley hill, east of the demesne) and Castelway (road to the castle) can be guessed.^{iv}

Yet there is enough evidence to locate Hylton village. The 80-acre open field through which ran an agricultural track which is now the main Washington road, was named Townend. So this is where the settlement ended, north-west of the castle. There are also two references in the 1750s to the 'town green'. One makes clear that the green and 'the Firbank' – then a wooded area, now called by a modern name of Bunny Hill – lay within the grounds of the Town's North Farm. The medieval settlement had contracted into two farmsteads, Town's North and Town End. So the village had been about 500m. from the baron's house, east of the present Hylton Lane.^v

Medieval Hylton was not, then, abandoned, nor was the land ever left uncultivated. Perhaps the village was eclipsed by the riverside hamlets below, where there were many more travellers. The medieval village by the castle perhaps survived into the 18th century, and withered when farming was reorganised rather than because of a population crisis. After the manor's fields and moors were inclosed, and agriculture focused upon scattered farmsteads, the village served little purpose. Most trace it was afterwards lost to limestone quarrying.^{vi}

ⁱ *Origins*, 62-9; DRO, Introductory notes to D/St; Hutchinson, *History and Antiquities*, 640; DCM, Misc. Ch. 6221; BL, Add 930 f. 124b.

ⁱⁱ Northumb. RO, ZMI/B62/1; Hydro. Office, L3224; DCM, Misc. Ch. 6223c Reg.I.i ff.40r, 126r; NEIMME, 3410/Wat/3/108/1; 3410/Wat/4/19, p. 5; Potts, *Sunderland*, 63-4; Surtees, *History and Antiquities*, ii, 24-5; *Origins*, 44, 167, 172; 'Hylton Ford', *Proc. Soc. Antiq. Newc.* NS iv (1889-90), 230-1.

ⁱⁱⁱ **Cross ref** to Hylton plan; DRO, D/X 1351, Monkwearmouth proofs, 137, citing Dur Curs Rec (3) no 121 (22) (23) (24); 1st ed OS; NEIMME, 3410/Wat/29/43; 3410/Wat/3/108/1.

^{iv} T&WHER, 14; DRO, D/X 1351, Monkwearmouth proofs, 143, citing Nicholas, *Proc. of P.C.* (Rec. Com.) i, 246; DCM, Priory Register III, f.131v-132r . **cross ref plan**

^v NEIMME, 3410/Wat/4/19; 3410/Wat/29/43; 3410/Wat/3/108/1; DRO, D/St/C2/6/1, letter of Thomas Roper, 6 Jan. 1758; OS; T&WHER, 14.

^{vi} See Roberts, *Green Villages*, 4, 20-1.