NORTHUMBRIA

20 YEARS
1997-2017
of MG Northumbria Car Shows

Heritage Run 2017

Sponsored by Henson Motor Group Newcastle MG

Countryside, Coast and Castles

Route map and a historic overview of Northumberland castles during the run.

Steve Miller mobile. 07976523602

Please note, todays run is 110 miles from start to finish. The distance from the start to Berwick upon Tweed is 56 miles. The journey to the half way point is mostly A roads.

We would prefer for early arrivals to start at 10am. All cars must leave the start no later than 11am. Your journey should take 1 hour and 15 minutes. This will allow you 1 hour in Berwick to explore as you chose and 1 hour for lunch. Please allow one hour to walk the ramparts from start to finish. Slight gradient at the start, 2 miles distance, easy under foot, all paved or tarmac.

Please make sure you leave Berwick no later than 2.15pm. The second leg is a mixture of A and B roads. This should allow some time for you to stop on the way during the second leg if you chose to do so. The award ceremony will take place at the finish between 4pm and 4.30pm.

Depending on numbers for lunch bookings, lunch at the Queens Head will be in two sittings. First sitting at 12 noon. Earlier starters can take the walk around the ramparts from 11am to noon. The second sitting at 1pm. Later starters can take the walk around the walls from midday to 1pm.

Suggested time table.

Heighleygate Garden Centre opens at 9.30 am

BBQ breakfast from 9.30am to 11am.

Cars starting to leave from 10am to 11am.

Arriving in Berwick to explore 11.15am through to 12.15pm.

Lunch at Queens Head from 12 noon and 1.30pm.

Those of you who are dining at the Queens Head Hotel, could we ask that you turn up for your meal from 12 noon to 12.30. There are 30 sitting at the same time and the hotel staff feel they can serve you better if you turn up within that 30 minute window.
Please mention that you are with MGN and you will be directed to the top restaurant.

Last cars to leave at 2.15pm.

At finish, Woodhorn Collery museum narrow gauge railway closes at 3.30. Trains every 15 minutes.

Awards 4pm for 4.30pm.

Close 5pm.

Key;
NSP = No Sign Post.
SP = Sign Post
TJ = T Junction

Zero odometer
0.0 exit left at Heighlygate Garden Centre A697
13.0 exit left SP Thrunton Woods. (Potholes)
15.5 keep right
16.3 TJ turn left A697
41.6 Coldstream roundabout 2nd exit SP Berwick A698
46.7 turn left SP Norham
47.6 TJ turn left. NSP
48.2 turn right SP Norham Castle

Norham Castle

For 450 years Norham Castle, first built in the 12th century, was one of the great English strongholds along the river Tweed, a barrier against the Scots. The Scots besieged it nine times, capturing it on four occasions. The remains of the impressive great tower still reveal signs of many building phases between the 12th and 16th centuries.

Norham's founder was Ranulph Flambard, Bishop of Durham from 1099 until 1128. In the medieval period the Bishops of Durham enjoyed near-kingly powers, in return for enforcing order along the English–Scottish border. The region could be wild and lawless, and sometimes erupted into open conflict. In wartime Norham's English garrison defended the Tweed fords, an easy crossing point into England. Together with the nearby castles of Berwick and Wark, Norham was an essential part of the defences of the eastern border.
The importance of Norham was illustrated when Henry II ordered Hugh du Puiset, who became Bishop of Durham in 1153, to rebuild the castle. This Bishop Puiset did on a grand scale, erecting the great tower on the site of Flambard's original two-storey hall to provide high-status accommodation.

Between 1208 and 1212 King John also spent large sums on the castle. Its strength was demonstrated in 1215 when Alexander II of Scotland besieged Norham for 40 days, but failed to take it. Peace between England and Scotland was signed at Norham in 1219, and lasted along the border for most of the 13th century.
The most noteworthy event in Norham's history took place in May 1291, when Bishop Anthony Beck entertained Edward I (r.1272–1307) and his advisers at the castle while the king arbitrated between 13 competitors for the Scottish throne (a process known as the Great Cause).

Judgment was made in favour of John Baliol in 1292 at Berwick Castle, and three days later Baliol paid homage to Edward in the hall at Norham.

Edward I's subsequent claims of overlordship over Scotland precipitated prolonged warfare in the borders. The Scots besieged Norham unsuccessfully in 1318, 1319 and 1322, and eventually took it in 1327, but it was restored to the bishop the following year.

Thereafter Norham benefited from a period of relative peace, before it was besieged by James IV of Scotland in 1497 in support of Perkin Warbeck, a pretender to the English throne. The castle resisted attack for two weeks before an English army relieved it.

Much more significant damage was done in 1513 when James IV invaded with a large army, and this time captured Norham after a short siege. In less than three weeks Norham was restored to the Bishop of Durham after the English defeated the Scots at the Battle of Flodden nearby. But the ferocious Scots bombardment had resulted in great damage.

Such was Norham's importance that rebuilding began almost immediately, this time to transform the castle into a powerful artillery fortress. English military engineers made alterations so that the garrison could return fire with great force from covered positions. They rebuilt the wall to the outer ward, encasing its lower courses in earth to provide strength and absorb incoming shot, constructed gun towers and incorporated arched gun positions.

The castle was maintained for most of the century, but in 1596 Elizabeth I refused to spend any money on it, and after the union of the English and Scots crowns in 1605 it slowly fell to decay. The ruins then passed through many hands until 1923, when they were placed in the care of the state.

51.1 turn left NSP A698
53.8 roundabout 2nd exit
54.3 roundabout 1st exit
54.7 roundabout 2nd exit
54.9 roundabout straight on. Over Royal Tweed Bridge
55.6 roundabout 2nd exit
Approaching the Town hall and then passing on your left immediately turn right at..
55.8 continue right Down Hide Hill passing the King Arms Hotel on your left.
55.9 straight on toward archway. Passing Queens Head Hotel on your right.
Through archway turn right into carpark. Backdrop of Old Bridge

Around the walls walk including L.S. Lowry view points
Approx 1 ½ miles

Berwick upon Tweed

BERWICK : TOWN ON THE SCOTTISH BORDER

On the mainland five miles north of Holy Island, is the mouth of the River Tweed and the most historic town of Berwick Upon Tweed. The most northerly town in England, perhaps no other town in North East England has had a more eventful history than Berwick. There is no doubt that Berwick upon Tweed can claim the distinction of being the Border Town, as it has changed hands between England and Scotland thirteen times. Its history is inextricably tied up with the struggle for the Anglo Scottish frontier. An old legend is said to explain the fascinating history of Berwick;

“During the temptation while the Evil one was showing to the Holy one all the kingdoms of the earth he kept Berwick hidden beneath his thumb, wishing to reserve it as his own little nook”

Berwick with an English name meaning `Corn Farm’ began as a small settlement in the Anglo-Saxon Kingdom of Northumbria, in which it remained until the Battle of Carham of 1018 when it was taken by the Scots. From then on Berwick became a hotly disputed territory. In 1174 Berwick was retaken by England in a ransom following the failure of a raid into Northumberland by the Scottish king, William the Lion.

Above: An old postcard showing Berwick

The town returned to the northern side of the border in the reign of Richard I (1189-1199), who sold it to obtain money for the Crusades. At the beginning of the following century Berwick returned once more to England, after Richard’s brother, King John sacked the town, but Berwick continued to change hands until 1482 when the town finally became part of England within which it still (technically) remains.

BERWICK : ENGLISH OR SCOTTISH ?

Today the visitor to Berwick can be forgiven for believing it to be a Scottish town, as after all it stands on the northern bank of the River Tweed, an entirely Scottish river and it does seem to have a rather Scottish appearance. Berwick is also the name of a large Scottish Burgh and the old county of Berwickshire (of which Berwick was not part !) was in Scotland. Furthermore Berwick, is a little bit more closer to the Scottish capital of Edinburgh, than to the North East’s regional centre of Newcastle upon Tyne.

The belief that Berwick is Scottish is also reinforced by the fact that most of the commercial banks in the town are Scottish and that the local football team plays in the Scottish league. Dialect also leads to the belief that Berwick is Scottish as to most Englishmen the local `Tweedside’ accent spoken in Berwick sounds Scottish, although most Scots would recognise the Northumbrian influence.

The Scottish claim for Berwick is certainly strong but the English influence upon the area is also very significant. Berwick as already stated began as an English or at least an Anglo-Saxon settlement, in the Kingdom of Northumbria and although for four hundred years it regularly changed hands between England and Scotland it has remained in the former part of the United Kingdom for the past five centuries. Berwick’s policeman and laws are therefore English, and its most senior councillor is an English mayor not a provost as in the Scottish system of local government. Until recently Berwick town also has an important status, as the administrative centre for the Northumberland County District of Berwick upon Tweed, which included the Farne islands, Lindisfarne and the very Northumbrian villages of Wooler, Bamburgh and Belford.

INDEPENDENT TOWN, PROSPEROUS PAST

It is hardly surprising that given Berwick's curious Anglo Scottish location, the local residents tend to regard themselves as independent `Tweedsiders' or `Berwickers' rather than English or Scottish. In fact until the Reform Act of 1885 Berwick did have a considerable degree of independence with the status of a `Free Burgh' meaning that it had to be mentioned separately in Acts of Parliament.

Berwick's status was such that even the Crimean War had to be declared in the name of Great Britain, Ireland and Berwick Upon Tweed. Strangely after this war, when the peace treaty was signed Berwick's name was omitted and for many years the town was said to be technically still at war with the Russians.
It is hard to believe that a town with such a turbulent history as Berwick was once one of the most prosperous merchant towns in Britain and was worth to Scotland an annual customs value of £2,190, which was equivalent to about one quarter of the customs of the whole of England. In the thirteenth century the wealthy town was described as; "So populous and of such commercial importance that it might rightly be called another Alexandria, whose riches were the sea and the water its walls"

BERWICK : TOWN WALLS, BUILDINGS AND BRIDGES

In the fourteenth century Berwick became a real walled town when King Edward I fortified it against Scottish attack. His defensive walls supplemented the stronghold of Berwick Castle which stood on the site of the present railway station. Some of the town walls can still be seen today, dating mainly from the later Elizabethan period. They are among the finest of their kind in Europe.

Berwick is one of the most picturesque towns on the region's coast, mainly because of its attractive red roofed houses, pinkish grey Georgian buildings and the fine seventeenth century bridge, which spans the River Tweed. Most notable of the town's buildings are the spired town hall of 1754 and the Berwick parish church, called Holy Trinity which is one of only a few built in England in Cromwellian times. For an historic parish church it is unusual, in that it has no steeple, tower or church bell. Instead a bell in the Town Hall is used to summon people to the church services at Holy Trinity. It is no wonder that many visitors to Berwick mistake the Town Hall for the parish church.

The River Tweed at Berwick is almost as well known as the Tyne at Newcastle for its bridges. There are three here namely; Old Bridge, the Royal Tweed Bridge, and the Royal Border Bridge. The Royal Tweed is the most recent, built in 1925 it carries the old A1 through the town, although the more modern road now bypasses the town to the west. The Royal Border Bridge is an impressive nineteenth century railway viaduct. Opened by Queen Victoria in 1850, it was built by Robert Stephenson, creating an important rail link between London and Edinburgh.

The `Old Bridge', also known as `Berwick Bridge' dates from 1611. It is a fine red sandstone structure with fourteen arches. Until the nineteenth century it was the main crossing point of the Tweed at Berwick, but did not as might be expected link Northumberland to Scotland. It in fact linked the Norhamshire district of the County Palatine of Durham to the county burgh of Berwick upon Tweed. County boundaries are a little more logical today.

A POEM ABOUT BERWICK

"Berwick is an ancient town
A church without a steeple
A pretty girl at every door
And very generous people."
OR ?
"A bridge without a middle arch
A church without a steeple
A midden heap in every street
And damned conceited people."

The less complimentary verse is attributed to Robbie Burns;

If you do decide to take a walk on the towns ramparts it is advisable to join at the Sandgate, this is the arch you passed through to the carpark, on the town side there are steps on your right as you re- enter the town. At the top, proceed to your left and take the town walls in an anti-clockwork direction this should bring you back to the carpark. See map enclosed. Average walking time should be 1 hour.

Lunch is at the Queens Head Hotel. Sittings are from noon onwards. This is situated on your left as you re-enter the town through Sandgate arch.

You should consider leaving the town after your lunch no later than 2.15pm. This will allow you sufficient time to arrive at the finish in time for the awards at 4pm/4.30pm

Exit carpark through arch.
56.1 TJ turn left. Proceed over old bridge.
56.6 TJ turn left
57.1 second exit on roundabout.
58.6 first exit on roundabout. SP A1 south Newcastle.
During this stretch of the A1, just after the speed camera, on your left you should see Holy Island (Lindisfarne)

Lindisfarne – also known as Holy Island – is one of the most important centres of early English Christianity. Irish monks settled here in AD 635 and the monastery became the centre of a major saint's cult celebrating its bishop, Cuthbert. The masterpiece now known as the Lindisfarne Gospels was created here in the early 8th century. The ruins now visible are those of a 12th-century priory, which claimed direct descent from the early monastery.

Early Christianity in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria

Lindisfarne is intimately connected with the history of Christianity in Britain. In 635 the Northumbrian king, Oswald (reigned 634–42), summoned an Irish monk named Aidan from Iona – the island-monastery off the south-west coast of what is now Scotland – to be bishop of his kingdom. Oswald granted Aidan and his companions the small tidal island of Lindisfarne on which to found a monastery.

Following the general collapse of Roman military rule in the early 5th century, Britain had fragmented into numerous small kingdoms, many ruled by Anglo-Saxon warlords. By the 7th century Oswald's Northumbrian kingdom dominated Britain. Northumbria consisted of two parts: Deira, centred on the old Roman city of York, and Bernicia further north. Oswald's accession in 634 focused Northumbrian power in Bernicia, around the royal palaces at Yeavering, Mælmin (Milfield) and Bamburgh.

Oswald's gift of Lindisfarne, 6 miles up the coast from Bamburgh, to the monks from Iona enabled them to establish a monastery and a bishopric in the political heart of the Northumbrian kingdom. The ultimate success of the monks' mission, together with the long-term wealth of their monastery, was founded on their proximity to the royal dynasty of Bernicia.

Aerial view of Lindisfarne Priory from the north-east. Just offshore is St Cuthbert's Isle

St Cuthbert at Lindisfarne

Sometime in the 670s a monk named Cuthbert joined the monastery at Lindisfarne. He eventually became Lindisfarne's greatest monk-bishop, and the most important saint in northern England in the Middle Ages.

As prior of Lindisfarne, Cuthbert reformed the monks' way of life to conform to the religious practices of Rome rather than Ireland. This caused bitterness, and he decided to retire and live as a hermit. He lived at first on an island (now called St Cuthbert's Isle) just offshore, but later moved across the sea to the more remote island of Inner Farne.

On the insistence of the king, however, Cuthbert was made a bishop in 685. His new duties brought him back into the world of kings and nobles, but he acquired a considerable reputation as a pastor, seer and healer.

Cuthbert died on 20 March 687 and was buried in a stone coffin inside the main church on Lindisfarne. Eleven years later the monks opened his tomb. To their delight they discovered that Cuthbert's body had not decayed, but was 'incorrupt' – a sure sign, they argued, of his purity and saintliness.[1] His remains were elevated to a coffin-shrine at ground level, and this marked the beginnings of the cult of St Cuthbert, which was to alter the course of Lindisfarne's history.

Miracles were soon reported at St Cuthbert's shrine and Lindisfarne was quickly established as the major pilgrimage centre in Northumbria. As a result, the monastery grew in power and wealth, attracting grants of land from kings and nobles as well as gifts of money and precious objects.
The cult of St Cuthbert also consolidated the monastery's reputation as a centre of Christian learning. One of the results was the production in about 710–25 of the masterpiece of early medieval art known today as the Lindisfarne Gospels.[2]

The Vikings

On 8 June 793 Lindisfarne suffered a devastating raid by Viking pirates – their first significant attack in Western Europe. The raid caused horror across the continent. Alcuin, a York scholar working at the court of King Charlemagne in Francia, wrote to the Northumbrian king and the bishop of Lindisfarne:
Pagans have desecrated God's sanctuary, shed the blood of saints around the altar, laid waste the house of our hope and trampled the bodies of saints like dung in the streets … What assurance can the churches of Britain have, if St Cuthbert and so great a company of saints do not defend their own?[3]

The raid was physically and psychologically devastating: one of England's holiest shrines had been attacked by pagans, and St Cuthbert had not intervened to stop them.

In response to the threat of Viking raids, the documentary sources say that the Lindisfarne monks retreated inland to Norham during the 830s and that in 875 the decision was made to leave Lindisfarne for good.[4] After seven years of wandering, the community – carrying St Cuthbert's coffin and the treasures of Lindisfarne – settled at Chester-le-Street, building a church in the middle of the old Roman fort.

A Christian community survived at Lindisfarne, however. At least 23 carved stones found here date from the late 8th to the late 10th centuries, showing that the Christian burial ground remained in use throughout the period of instability when Viking armies ravaged Anglo-Saxon Northumbria.

In 995 St Cuthbert's relics were moved again and eventually enshrined at Durham, where they remain. The prosperity of the Durham monastic community was based on its ability to attract pilgrims to the shrine.

Re-foundation after the Norman Conquest

In 1069–70 the Durham monks returned briefly to Lindisfarne with St Cuthbert's relics to escape the 'harrying of the North' by the armies of William the Conqueror, which sought to suppress northern resistance to the Norman Conquest.

This brief return prefigured the establishment of a permanent cell, or outpost, of the Durham community on Lindisfarne. Its purpose was to reaffirm the link between Anglo-Norman Durham and Anglo-Saxon Lindisfarne, and to establish the right of the Norman monks of Durham to be the guardians of St Cuthbert's legacy.

The precise date of the foundation of the new cell on Lindisfarne is uncertain, but by 1122 a Durham monk called Edward was active there.[5] The earliest surviving reference to a full-scale community of monks is in a document dated 1172.[6]

The church, which was built by about 1150, contained a cenotaph (an empty tomb) marking the spot where, according to tradition, Cuthbert's body had been buried. Although his relics were by then in Durham, the place of his primary shrine on Lindisfarne was still a sacred spot which attracted pilgrims.

Initially there were probably only a few monks here, with numbers rising to about ten during the 13th century. Lindisfarne was staffed by monks from Durham, with each monk staying for two or three years before returning to the mother-house.

Border Warfare

During the 12th century the Scottish kings had been major benefactors of the Benedictine monks at Lindisfarne, but after Edward I's invasion of Scotland in 1296, the borders were transformed from a region of relative peace and prosperity into a war zone. This inevitably affected Lindisfarne.

The monks were obliged to fortify the priory but worried that they did not have the means to prevent it from falling into enemy hands. In 1385 they petitioned Richard II to dismantle the fortifications because they could not afford to pay for a garrison of soldiers to man them.[7]

Despite the insecurities caused by border warfare, life at Lindisfarne was comfortable for the monks who remained. Extensive building work gave the community more privacy than before, and suggests that the monks were looked after by many servants.

HISTORY OF LINDISFARNE CASTLE

Sited atop the volcanic mound known as Beblowe Craig, Lindisfarne Castle is one of the most distinct and picturesque features of the Island and can be seen for many miles around.

Literally built from the ruins of the suppressed Priory, Lindisfarne Castle was constructed to protect the militarisation of the small harbour beneath its guns. Not completed until the 1570s, it became largely redundant

with the Union of the Crowns in 1603 and saw no action other than being briefly taken by a couple of Jacobite rebel.

Following the re-establishment of the Priory on Lindisfarne in the twelfth century, it evaded significant political engagement until the Wars of Scottish Independence erupted in 1296. The monks of Lindisfarne were obliged to fortify their site but, mindful of the cost of keeping a garrison coupled with the risk of making Lindisfarne a direct target of English or Scottish attacks, in 1385 they successfully petitioned Richard II for permission to dismantle the defences and become a demilitarised area. It remained so until the sixteenth century.

In 1536 Henry VIII broke with the Roman Catholic Church and in doing so he prompted France (along with Scotland due to their 'auld alliance') and Spain to consider invasion. The following year he suppressed the Priory which instantly gave him access and control over the small but strategically important Lindisfarne harbour; the most northerly natural harbour on the East coast. The remains of the Priory were utilised as a Supply Base for the Tudor Navy whilst building materials were robbed from the structure to construct a fortified platform.

In 1549 an artillery position was installed on Beblowe Crag; this was the fore-runner of the present castle and was periodically upgraded with the final building phase being in the 1570s which created the substantive fort. Garrisoned by soldiers from Berwick-upon-Tweed it was consistently under-funded and was never fully completed especially after the Union of the Crowns in 1603 made it largely redundant. It did however see one brief period of action during the 1715 Jacobite Rising; it was briefly captured and occupied by a couple of rebels who held it for a day before fleeing from a military force dispatched from Berwick to evict them.

Edward Hudson (founder of Country Life magazine) negotiated its purchase from the Crown and in 1902 Sir Edwin Lutyens (the well-known architect) began the conversion to create the Edwardian country house you see today. The Walled Garden (originally the Fort's vegetable garden but re-designed by Gertrude Jekyll in 1911 as part of the conversion) lies to the north of the castle some 500m away. Her plans were recreated by the National Trust and planted for the 2003 season.

During 2017 the National Trust regret that they have been forced to close the castle to enable vital restoration work to take place. It is currently planned to reopen during April 2018. The Gertrude Jekyll Garden, the Lime Kilns and the shop remain open.

70.3 turn left SP Budle Bay
70.7 TJ turn right

Bamburgh Castle

Spanning nine acres of land on its rocky plateau high above the Northumberland coastline Bamburgh is one of the largest inhabited castles in the country.

Bamburgh's written history begins in the times of the Anglo-Saxons with one chronicler citing Bamburgh as probably the most important place in all of England. But even before this there were people living here, there is archaeological evidence that as early as 10,000 BC there were people here. There are Bronze Age (2,400 -700BC) burials nearby and pottery sherds dating to the Iron Age (700 BC – 43AD). With little evidence of their occupation only the name Din Guayrdi gives us a hint that Romans were sometime between 43AD and 410AD.

It was during the early medieval period between 411AD and 1066AD that Bamburgh grew in stature and importance. With the arrival of the Saxons, the creation of an important Christian site and the coming and going of the saints Oswald, Aidan and Cuthbert, it was a pivotal time. Following this period we saw the arrival of the Normans and the construction of our Great Tower, the culmination of the Wars of the Roses with the siege of 1464. The arrival of the Foster family, gifted the ruins by James 1 with the subsequent acquisition by Lord Crewe and the formation of the Crewe Trustees. A resurgence in stature as under the guidance of John Sharpe the castle became a leading surgery and dispensary for the poor and sick.

Finally the castle passed into the hands of the First Lord Armstrong, with the intention of creating a respite home he passed away before its restoration was complete and became the Armstrong family home. It is still owned by the Armstrong Family who opened it up to visitors in the mid 1900's and remains to this day an icon of the North East of England.

78.2 second exit on roundabout
78.2 first exit on roundabout B1340
81.4 turn left B1340
On the left you should be able to see the ruins of Dunstanburgh Castle

Dunstanburgh Castle

One of the most atmospheric and inspiring castles in England, Dunstanburgh Castle was built in the second decade of the 14th century by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, the wealthiest nobleman in England. Earl Thomas was later executed for his role in the barons' rebellion against Edward II, but the castle was extensively modernised in the 1380s under John of Gaunt. It played a role as a Lancastrian stronghold in the Wars of the Roses, but fell into disrepair at the end of the Middle Ages, and its ever more ruinous silhouette inspired many artists, including JMW Turner. Recent research has radically altered our perceptions of both the extent of the castle and the nature of its surrounding landscape in the Middle Ages.

The name Dunstanburgh – which translates as 'the fort' (burgh) 'of the town' (dun) 'by the rock' (stan) – was certainly in existence in the second decade of the 14th century, when the castle was first built. As at other places such as Edinburgh or Scarborough, it could suggest that occupation of the site began much earlier.

The archaeological record gives us hints of this. During clearance works by the Ministry of Works in the 1920s and 1930s, shards of prehistoric and Roman pottery, Iron Age millstones, a Roman brooch and hearths of the 1st century BC and 2nd century AD were found on the site.

In 2003, English Heritage archaeologists confirmed that the headland on which the castle stands had indeed been occupied during the Iron Age and early Roman periods.[1] Observation and surveying near the castle's south curtain wall revealed that the ridge-and-furrow field system, which pre-dated the stone wall, cut into an earlier earth bank, now visible as the edge of the dry ditch along the south side.

The archaeologists interpreted the bank as the remains of the rampart of an Iron Age promontory fort. This had been abandoned centuries before Thomas of Lancaster chose the site for his castle, but the earthworks may have remained visible as a reminder to local people of earlier occupation.

Dunstanburgh Castle was begun in 1313 on the orders of Thomas, Earl of Lancaster (d. 1322), lord of the barony of Embleton in which the site lay.

From his father, the king's younger brother Edmund 'Crouchback' (1245–96), Thomas had inherited one of the largest and richest aristocratic estates in England, with substantial holdings in the north Midlands and Yorkshire. The Embleton barony was geographically far removed from his centre of power.

Just before he inherited, war broke out between England and Scotland. But although the border lay dangerously close, only 25 miles north, Thomas seems to have been less concerned with border security than with his own protection.

This was particularly the case after April 1312, when he and other earls led an army against Edward II (1307–27) and the king's favourite and alleged lover, Piers Gaveston. The king escaped by sea, but the earls captured Gaveston at Scarborough. During his journey to London under arrest, they summarily executed him in Warwickshire, on Lancaster's land.

Edward II had good cause to seek revenge for his favourite's death, and although he issued a formal pardon to those who had risen against Gaveston, it was soon afterwards that Thomas began preparations for a new castle on his northernmost estate.

A surviving account for the first year's work on the castle, though damaged, shows the scope of the works in the year beginning spring 1313, including the excavation of a ditch on the castle's western side and the construction of a great gatehouse.[2]
No later building accounts from this period have survived, but it seems likely that the castle was finished or at least operational by March 1319, when Robert of Binchester was appointed as the first constable.[3] Even Scottish incursions after their victory at Bannockburn in June 1314, and catastrophic famines in 1315–17, do not seem to have halted building works.

In August 1319 Earl Thomas passed through Dunstanburgh en route to the siege of Berwick, almost certainly the only time that he ever saw his new castle.

In 1321 and 1322, Thomas again led military action against the forces of Edward II and his new favourites, the father and son Hugh Despenser.

When it became apparent that this campaign would fail, Thomas and his adherents planned to retreat to Dunstanburgh, as the safest and most remote stronghold in his possession. But a royalist army intercepted and defeated them at Boroughbridge, Yorkshire, on 16 March 1322, and captured Thomas.

After a humiliating trial, Lancaster was beheaded at his own castle at Pontefract. The king took Dunstanburgh Castle into his own hands, garrisoning it with 40 foot soldiers and 40 hobelars (lightly armed cavalry).

Dunstanburgh Castle was probably completed soon afterwards. The name Lilburn Tower suggests that it was John de Lilburn, joint constable between 1322 and 1323, who finished building the tower overlooking Embleton beach and Gull Crag. By April 1326, the castle had been returned to Earl Thomas's younger brother Henry (d. 1345), who succeeded him as Earl of Lancaster.

The second quarter of the 14th century was a period of particular tension in the border area, especially after the accession in 1341 of David II to the Scottish throne. His capture at the battle of Neville's Cross in October 1346 brought little respite: an account from the early 1350s records that Dunstanburgh Castle had served as a refuge for people and their goods during a Scottish raid.[4] This probably refers to the population of Embleton and other local townships – the castle's enclosure was certainly large enough to house such a population.

The same account contains some of the earliest details of the castle's buildings, including a barn and a hall and chamber for the constable, almost certainly the building whose remains can still be seen beside the Constable's Tower.

Edward III's fourth son, John of Gaunt (1340–99), inherited Dunstanburgh Castle in 1362 as part of the Duchy of Lancaster, by right of his marriage to Blanche, Henry of Lancaster's granddaughter.

He did little to the castle until 1380, when a visit to the Scottish marches, of which he was now lieutenant, convinced him of the shortcomings of the defences there. Over three years, he made several important changes to the castle's layout.

Gaunt's first work was a wall or 'mantlet' 6.5 metres high and 1.3 metres thick, creating a courtyard on the north side of the great gatehouse, which contained his own apartments. The mantlet, built by John Lewyn, the most celebrated builder of his age in the north, served to separate this area from the rest of the castle.[5]

Much more radical work followed the Peasants' Revolt of June 1381, in which Gaunt had narrowly avoided being attacked, and which increased his sensitivity over security. The mason Henry Holme strengthened the mantlet with a new tower and gateway, tightly controlling access into the lord's enclosure from the body of the castle. Within the enclosure he also built six 'houses' or service buildings.

Finally, in 1383 a new entrance was made on the castle's western flank, complete with barbicans and a drawbridge. The carriageway of the great gatehouse was probably blocked at this time, and John of Gaunt's gate became the castle's main entrance. In later documents, the former gatehouse was re-named 'donjon', the lord's tower – in modern parlance, the castle keep.

In 1399, John of Gaunt's son claimed the throne as Henry IV (r. 1399–1415), and the Duchy of Lancaster was annexed to the Crown.

Numerous accounts survive from the reign of Henry VI (1422–61), showing that various buildings in the castle were repaired, furnished or rebuilt during this time. They reveal, for example, that the king's hall and great chamber (and presumably the earl's apartments in the 14th century) lay on the top floor of the former great gatehouse.[6]

The accounts also show that the castle functioned as part of the wider barony of Embleton. Many entries concern estate buildings outside the castle, including mills, a dovecote, and the 'house of pleas', the predecessor of the moot hall of 1586 that still stands in the village.

The military history of Dunstanburgh Castle during the Wars of the Roses in the 15th century (fought between the houses of York and Lancaster for possession of the English throne) was eventful.

The joint constable of Dunstanburgh, Sir Ralph Percy (1425–64), had Lancastrian sympathies, and held the castle for Henry VI even after the Yorkist victory at Towton in March 1461. After a brief submission to the Yorkists later in the year, he declared again for Lancaster in 1462 in support of Queen Margaret of Anjou (1430–82), who had landed at Bamburgh with a French army.

The Yorkist commanders, the Earls of Warwick and Worcester, then besieged Dunstanburgh again; the writer Sir Thomas Malory fought under their command. Even though Percy capitulated on Christmas Eve 1362, it was only in June 1464 that the Yorkists secured the castle for good.

In the late 15th and 16th centuries, Dunstanburgh Castle was in decline. Too large and expensive to maintain, its decaying walls provided a tempting source of stone for other buildings, while its strategic weakness – lying too far from the Scottish border, and too distant from the main road – was all too apparent.

Surveys in 1538 and 1543[7] highlighted the deterioration. The curtain walls were in poor repair, the lead roofs of some buildings were partly missing, and only the gatehouse was deemed habitable. It was presumably in this building that the widow Alice Craster took up residence in 1594, using the castle as the centre of a farming estate. Ten years later – a year after the union of the English and Scottish crowns sealed the castle's redundancy in national affairs – James I sold Dunstanburgh into private ownership. In 1605 it passed to Sir Ralph Grey, owner of nearby Howick Hall.

In the 17th century Dunstanburgh reverted to arable land. Francis Place's sketch, made in 1678, shows harvest under way in the fields west of the castle, and in 1695 '240 Winchester bushels of corn' and several cartloads of hay were harvested inside the castle walls.[8]

Place's sketch also reveals the ruinous state of the buildings by the 1670s. Not surprisingly, later artists including JMW Turner found great appeal in the dramatic appearance of the ruins, particularly against the background of a storm at sea.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries the ruins changed hands several times. In 1869 Samuel Eyres of Leeds purchased Dunstanburgh from the Earl of Tankerville, and in the early 20th century it passed to Sir Arthur Sutherland, who struggled to pay for maintenance.

In 1929 the ruins passed into the guardianship of the Office of Works, on behalf of the freeholder, the National Trust, which continues to manage the adjacent stretches of coastline.

During the Second World War, Dunstanburgh found itself in the middle of a potential site for German invasion. The capitulation and occupation of Norway in the summer of 1940 raised fears of an amphibious assault against north-east England.

Dunstanburgh was incorporated into a new system of defences, concentrated along the coast itself and in the gap between the castle and the rocky outcrop to the south-west, the likely place for German tanks to break out from the beach-head. They included pill-boxes, other gun emplacements, anti-tank trenches and a minefield. The castle itself functioned as an observation post for a small detachment of the Royal Armoured Corps.

91.1 turn left B1339
93.3 TJ turn right
93.7 first exit on roundabout A1068 (straight on)
94.1 second exit on roundabout A1068 (straight on)

Walkworth Castle history

Although the village of Warkworth, Northumberland dates back to at least the 8th century, the first castle was not built until sometime in 11th century, after the Norman Conquest. This was a motte and bailey structure of timber construction. A stone wall was built around the site in the mid-12th century and the castle was given to Roger FitzRichard, 1st Baron Warkworth.

When the Anglo-Scottish wars began in 1296 the castle was garrisoned by troops. Records show that in 1319 a garrison of twenty-four soldiers and staff held the castle. Half of the cost was paid by the King who later became owner of the castle.

By the mid-13th century, the castle was described by Matthew Paris as “a noble castle”.

The descendants of FitzRichard encountered financial problems, including the cost of the upkeep of the castle, and ownership reverted to the Crown in 1332. It was next granted to Henry de Percy, Lord of Alnwick. Harry Hotspur lived here. Under the Percy’s, additional building work took place, including the fourteenth century keep.

In the rebellion of 1403, the castle fell to the King’s cannon, suffering damage to the curtain wall. The castle was forfeited to the Crown, in whose ownership it remained until Henry V restored it to the Percy family. It was again forfeited to the King, during the Wars of the Roses and passed briefly into the hands of John Neville (brother of Warwick the Kingmaker) but again returned to the Percy’s in 1470.

The Percy's sided against Elizabeth I in the Rising of the North, an uprising of the northern earls, which began in 1569. Thomas Percy, 7th Earl of Northumberland was executed in 1572 and the castle was pillaged by royal servants. The castle fell into long-term disrepair, being further damaged by the Parliamentary forces that were garrisoned there in 1648 and then used as a source of building materials for other houses in the later 17th century.

The castle remained a ruin until the mid-nineteenth century, when the third Duke of Northumberland undertook some preservation work and the fourth Duke excavated some of the older parts of the castle and re-roofed other areas.

In 1922 the 8th Duke of Northumberland handed the castle over to the Office of Works which had been made accountable for the guardianship of ancient monuments. The Office of Works was in due course supplanted by English Heritage who now own the castle.

97.8 turn left A1068
99.6 second exit on roundabout
99.8 second exit on roundabout
104.7 second exit on roundabout A1068
105.3 first exit on roundabout A1068
107.7 second exit on roundabout A1068
108.6 first exit on roundabout A189
109.8 turn right into Queen Elizabeth II Park, Brewers Fayre.

Please note: narrow gauge railway to your left, closes at 3.30pm. Trains run every 15 minutes to the Woodhorn Mine Museum and back to the lake carpark.