

# MMT NEWS

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*Fig. 1: Shotley Chapel and the Hopper Mausoleum. (Copyright: RCHME)*

## HUMFREY HOPPER of BLACK HEDLEY, HIS BUILDINGS & HIS MAUSOLEUM

Windswept and isolated, the small chapel of St Andrew, Shotley, stands high up on the summit of Grey Mare Hill in Northumberland. It is a simple building, the kind of chapel which might have been built anywhere in the north of England to serve a scattered rural community. By contrast the Hopper mausoleum is an extraordinary structure, unlike any other funerary monument in this country. Capped with a lantern crowned with pinnacles it towers over the chapel nearby. (Fig. 1)

Who, you wonder, would build so lavish a tomb in this remote

place? The answer is Humfrey Hopper, but which Humfrey was that? There were several Humfreys among the Hoppers who lived at Black Hedley in the 17th and 18th centuries. The plaque on the south face of the mausoleum states that it was "Erected by Humfrey Hopper of Black Hedley, in memory of his wife Jane Hodgson, who died February 29th, 1752, aged 77." But as the plaque was put there in the second half of the 19th century the information is open to doubt. This, combined with the untutored classical style of the architecture, has led historians to suggest that the monument pre-dates the 18th century

and was actually built by an earlier Humfrey Hopper living at Black Hedley in 1663.

In an attempt to solve the mystery I have examined some printed sources of local history and visited the buildings where the family lived. Much of the historical information contained in this article has been drawn from the 6th volume of John Crawford Hodgson's *History of Northumberland* printed in 1902. From this I learned that there were Hoppers living in the district of Shotley Low Quarter from at least as early as 1570. At this date one Percival Hopper was a 'free tenant' paying 5s 0d



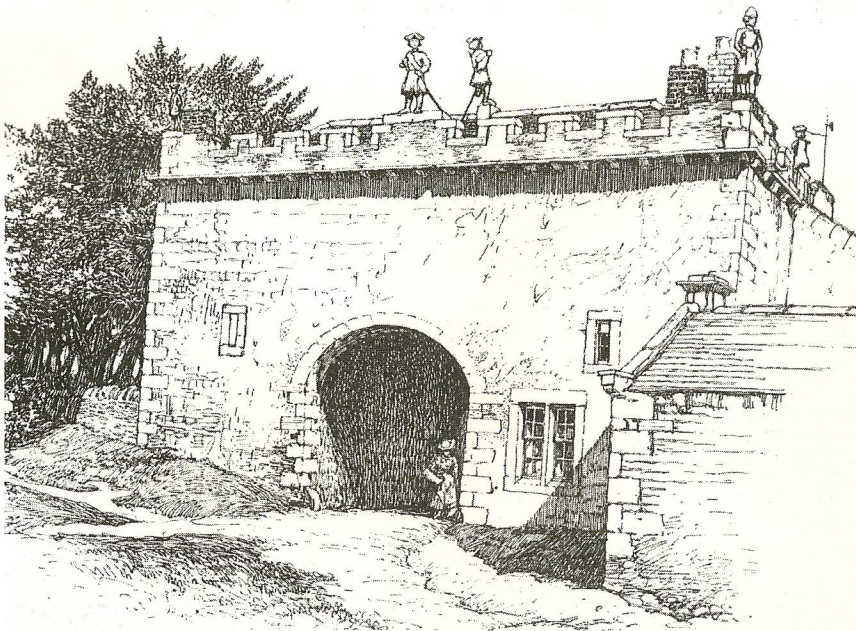


Fig. 2: Humfrey Hopper's 'Port' at Greenhead (from Hodgson)

a year for half a tenement of 'Blackeyad land' (Black Hedley) while the other half was held by John Swynburne. Black Hedley lies about two miles to the south of Shotley chapel.

The picture of the Hoppers that emerges in the 17th century is of a family whose members lived close to each other, probably in



Fig. 3: Statue at Shotley Hall

houses grouped round the farmyard at Black Hedley. Three of the four grandsons of Percival Hopper, Cuthbert, John and Thomas, are described as being 'of Black Hedley'. In this period the family is gradually increasing its land holdings; in 1632/3 the aforementioned Thomas purchased some land in Shotleyfield, an area to the north-east of Black Hedley, and in 1668/9, Humfrey Hopper, a great grandson of Percival, bought further land in the same district. Even so, this Humfrey was still paying rent for half the tenement of Black Hedley, the other half remaining in the hands of the Swynburne family. It does not seem likely that this Humfrey Hopper was in a position to build his family so grand a monument as the one in the churchyard at Shotley.

More research would be needed to establish precisely why his grandson, the next Humfrey Hopper (1677-1760), was so

much wealthier than his immediate forbears. As the only male descendant of his generation, he inherited both his father's and his uncle's land. They died in 1679 and 1696 respectively and so, by the age of 19, Humfrey could call himself a man of property. The family papers show, moreover, that he also

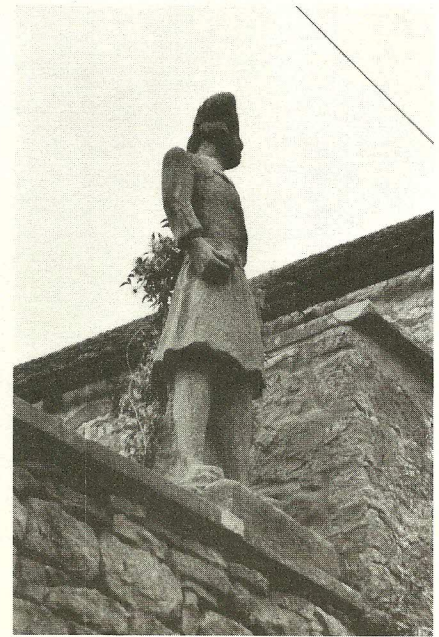


Fig. 4: Statue at Black Hedley

owned lands at Barnard Castle and Rookhope in County Durham. He married twice. On the first occasion he was only sixteen for his first son, Thomas, was baptised at Shotley church on April 1694. The identity of this wife is not known, but perhaps she brought Humfrey land as her dowry. It is likely that she died in childbirth as, three years after the birth of his first son, Humfrey made a second marriage, this time to Jane Hodgson of Alwent near Staindrop in County Durham. Alwent Hall is about five miles from Barnard Castle so perhaps Humfrey's land in that area came from her.





Fig. 5: *The Hopper Mausoleum today (railings reinstated by the Churches Conservation Trust)*

In the 18th century, the second Humfrey Hopper clearly had the resources to embark on a series of building projects. At this time he built a substantial house at Black Hedley approached from two directions by avenues of trees. It was linked to the adjacent farm buildings by a high wall with an arched entrance hiding the farmyard from view. In the *History of Shotley Spa* written in 1841, the Rev John Ryan described Black Hedley as "...a noble rural mansion...a good specimen of the princely farm-houses of the olden times". No doubt the illusion of ancient

grandeur was just the impression Humfrey wished to create. According to Ryan the building "was surmounted with small cannon [and] a number of mili-

tary figures, which seem prepared either for fighting or play". There is now no sign of these though there is a large stone statue on the farmyard wall.

Humfrey also built a massive 'port' at the end of the avenue that led from the tiny hamlet of Greenhead to his house. Here again the building was surmounted by military figures but these were considerably larger than the ones at Black Hedley. (Fig. 2) The gatehouse was demolished in 1964 but two of the statues are said to have been placed on the gate piers at the entrance of Shotley Hall near Shotley Bridge. The surviving figure (the other one has been taken down) is dressed like a Roman soldier with a helmet, breast-plate and chain-mail jerkin, but his warlike appearance is belied by the cornucopia leaning against the back of his legs. (Fig. 3) The Black Hedley statue, on the other hand, does appear to be wearing contemporary military dress and resembles the soldier that once stood on the right hand side of the gatehouse battlements. (Fig. 4)



Fig. 6: *A pair of figures reclining on the cornice, south side*

