

“**A**nd often up and down my sons were toss'd, For me to joy and weep their gain and loss....Make war upon themselves; blood against blood” So laments Cecily Neville, the ‘White Queen’, mother of the Wars of the Roses in Shakespeare’s great tragedy, Richard III. A machiavellian matriarch, she was born in the year of the great Agincourt victory and lived to see her great-grandson, ‘the Tudor upstart’ Henry VII crowned. Visitors to the magnificent Raby Castle in County Durham may stand in the chamber where Cecily was born. It is now bedecked, unexpectedly with boy scout paraphernalia, thanks to a more recent owner being close to Baden-Powell, but the atmosphere of the mediaeval wimple and scheming remains. The grey-stoned seat of the great Neville dynasty from the 14th century until they were disgraced by Elizabeth I for their part in the ‘Rising of the North’ was founded where the old Roman road crossed the River Tees and the views remain undiminished. Later the castle passed into the hands of the Vane family, being acquired for a vast sum by Sir Henry Vane the Elder, advisor to the ill fated Charles I. Sir Henry established a political lineage that culminated in the immensely powerful William Vane, 1st Duke of Cleveland, who voted for the abolition of slavery in 1807 and whose elegant effigy in repose can be seen in the local church today. The duke also had the castle masterfully captured by JMW Turner. Raby remains a gloriously intact narrative of English decoration. Successive generations of Vanes employed the most dazzling architects of the day including James Paine in the 1750s; John Carr in the 1780s and, the great Gothic revivalist, William Burn in the 1840s. The family were devoted to public service (and fox-hunting) but were not given to showmanship hence the castle remaining something of a sleeping enigma over the centuries. Its secret rooms remained untarnished and largely shrouded in chalk-white dust cloths as generations inhabited various towers and wings. Raby is now the home of Harry and Kate, Lord and Lady Barnard, a jewel of largely unsung heroism along the stately home trail, under Kate’s energetic and discerning eye, the castle is alive once again. Passionate about reviving the burnished crown of the North that is their inheritance, she and Harry are establishing the estate as a thriving destination for all generations. Visitors follow an illustrious line of footsteps including the Prince Regent who came to view the important

Oriental ceramics, such as the patterned pagodas collected by the family in the specially designed ‘Chinese Salon.’ Other porcelain curiosities include a superb set of giant Meissen birds modeled in 1730 by Johan Joachim Kändler for the Japanese Palace at Dresden. Besides the ornate staterooms, two Pandora’s Box suites that have been mostly veiled for the last century are being slowly restored by Kate and a skilled set of curators and conservationists. In the West Range of the castle, the Hunter’s Gallery, a distinguished set of mid-18th century rooms are noble to their very bones. Down a curving arched corridor are found creaking doors into Pre-Strawberry Hill Rococo Gothic wonders, yielding treasures such as a Georgian four poster bed, standing almost in solitude in the shuttered shadows of the Alcove Room. Framed by fluted Tuscan columns, its hand-painted Orientalist hangings, dancing with dragonflies, delicate fritillaries and swooping birds of paradise, nearly as vivid as the day they were hung. The feeling is almost of a refined doll’s house being opened to the sunlight. Every surface glows with decorative high notes, from gilded Greek keystone borders and honeycomb embossed paper with a pink, gold and green frieze to a leviathan marble fireplace festooned with colored grapes, a Satyr’s head and delicate flowers. A gilded chais lounge, frozen in its glazed chintz, stands atop a needlework carpet reputed to have been stitched by Grace FitzRoy, Countess of Darlington, a granddaughter of the ‘Merry Monarch’ Charles II. One of the past chatelaines whose contributions to this astonishing ‘palace fortress’ are being once again appreciated by their contemporary counterparts. The ephemera of sporting Edwardians is strewn through another series of interiors, the Duke’s Rooms. One can almost smell the pipes and wet galoshes in the warren of rooms lined with gold-tooled leather and woodwork painted a dark moss-green. Once the haven of Harry’s grandfather, Christopher, 10th Baron Barnard, a horticulturalist, Master of the Zetland Hunt and the aforementioned Scout enthusiast, modesty, coziness and gentlemanly pursuits are the markers of a time long vanished, layers of lives devoted to estate husbandry and unassailable manners.

Here in a secret corner of England, history is a living and breathing creature—with its power and atmosphere intact. Walk through its castellated gatehouse and be drawn in—Raby awaits you.

A Glorious Past

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