



Introduction

The following short history of Hill Top, Quarrington, is presented in five sections:

1. The house
2. The farm
3. Farmers and other occupiers
4. Owners
5. The coal royalty

This account is still work in progress. So there are not a few statements that are qualified by a “possibly”, a “probably” or a “perhaps”. While this is to be regretted, it is felt preferable to present what information has, so far, been collected, than to keep it buried and potentially lost for ever from public scrutiny. It is hoped that the account will be updated if, or when, new research evidence comes to light.

Before it was combined with that of Cassop, to form the parish of Cassop-cum-Quarrington, Quarrington township mostly comprise that area north-west of Coxhoe and south-east of Shincliffe that is today known as Bowburn – or, more recently, as Bowburn and Park Hill, the latter now being south of the A1 motorway and commonly regarded as a separate settlement.

Hill Top was one of four farms that were centred round the hamlet of Old Quarrington – known locally to most people in the 20th century, erroneously, as “Heugh Hall” (this in fact being the name of the farm north west of there). That hamlet was, in Saxon times, the capital of a much larger “Querringdonshire”. (But that is another story...)

1. The House

Hill Top house was originally, it is to be presumed, the farm house of Hill Top farm. This was one of four adjoining farms that were closely linked with each other for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, in terms of the farmers who worked them. The others were Heugh Hall farm, Quarrington farm (referred to in this essay as “[Old] Quarrington farm”, for the avoidance of confusion, and Quarrington Grange farm. (See map, below.¹)

However, although the freehold of all four farms was owned by the Bishop of Durham (later, the Ecclesiastical Commission), the leaseholder of the other three was, from early in the 19th century at least (and quite probably before that), different from that of Hill Top.

Part of it, today, is now included in Old Quarrington quarry, while the rest is now part of a larger combined farming complex. However, for original reasons unknown, Hill Top has its own unique history.

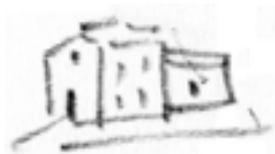
¹ For a map showing the boundaries of all local farms in the 19th century, see the main page on this website about “Farms”. The map here shows only those mentioned here.



Hill Top farm is no. 9 (with mauve outline) on this map. No. 8 (green) is Heugh Hall farm and nos. 15 (yellow) & 16 (blue) are, respectively, [Old] Quarrington and Quarrington Grange farms.

From the middle of the 19th century onwards, the working of Hill Top farm was closely linked with that of Quarrington or Quarrington Grange farms, or both. In the late 19th century, Hill Top house itself was the residence of the farmer of Quarrington Grange farm, which lay some way to the south. In the early-to-mid-20th century, Hill Top was farmed separately again, albeit by close relatives of the neighbouring farmers. Then it first housed farm servants and then fell into disuse. (More is said about the house's occupants below.)

It is interesting, however, to speculate about what happened to the house just before those years.

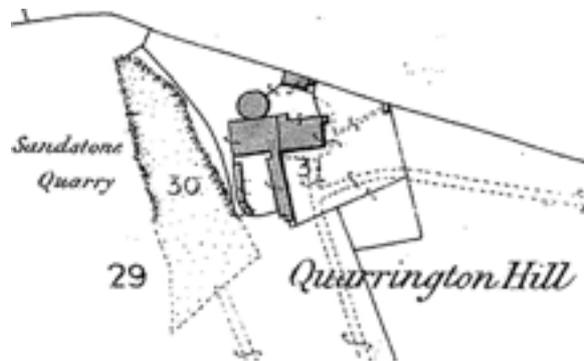


No photographs or drawings of the most recent Hill Top house, believed to have been built around 1840, are known to exist. But this was not the first one. The previous one is the subject of the above simple sketch, copied from a 1835 valuation plan of which more is said below. This was presumably the building whose layout is shown on the 1839 Tithe Plan (below).



Hill Top farm buildings on the Quarrington township Tithe map (1839)

However the layout of the house and adjoining structures on early Ordnance Survey maps show it as a much larger building – or perhaps one of a group of buildings – with a quite different layout. The first OS map, surveyed in 1857, suggests that Hill Top house had probably been replaced since 1839 and certainly since the Tithe Plan was surveyed². It was at about this time that the farm had acquired a new “owner”.



Hill Top farm buildings on the 1st Ordnance Survey map (1857)

More is said about owners and occupiers below. But the significance of the man who acquired the Hill Top farm lease in or just before 1839 is that he was not a farmer or farm landlord, but a coal owner.

Robert Rayson was listed in the Tithe Apportionment in 1839 as the farm’s “owner” (i.e. leaseholder, from the Bishop), but not its occupier. That was the farmer, William Story – although his occupation was of the farm, not necessarily of the house. (See below.)

Significantly, this was at exactly the time that new coal mines were being developed in the Quarrington and Coxhoe townships, as battles were fought to establish new railways and port outlets for the London coal market.

Rayson (abt 1783-1849), a Stockton land agent, was a shareholder in the Durham County Coal Company (DCCC) and the Clarence Railway, both of which interests attracted him to Quarrington. Like many of his colleagues (and rivals) in those companies, he also joined others in colliery-owning business partnerships. With Thomas Allison Tennant (abt 1787-1840) and Ralph Park Philipson (1799-1879), Rayson acquired the lease of the coal royalties beneath Hill Top and the other Old Quarrington farms. (See §5, below.) They sunk a new colliery at Old Quarrington in 1840 which was usually known as “Heugh Hall colliery” (confusingly, because it was not on Heugh Hall farm) but also, sometimes, as “Hill Top colliery”.³

² The Tithe map of Quarrington is, however, not reliable as a means of dating structures. Although surveyed by George Young Wall, of Durham, in 1839 (according to the title inscribed on the map itself), it fails to show some colliery and wagonway features known, from other sources, to have existed by then. The farmhouse and other farm buildings shown on the 1857 OS map may, therefore, have already been built (or commenced to be built) before 1839.

³ The original Heugh Hall colliery is presumed to have been on Heugh Hall farm, downhill and west of the later site at Old Quarrington (OQ). William Hedley acquired this and the nearby Crowtrees colliery in 1824 and is believed to have sunk a new “Heugh Hall” colliery at OQ in about 1833 – just as he sunk a new “Crowtrees” colliery near Quarrington Hill.

Rayson and partners began to sink a further new “Heugh Hall” colliery at OQ in 1840. A Bishop’s agent’s report in 1848 said there had been no output from this in 1840 but that it had commenced production in 1841.

More about these collieries can be found elsewhere on this website. See “An old collieries walk”.

Two other large houses were built in Quarrington township at about the same time as the new Hill Top house. Both were built by new colliery owners, to house their agents or viewers (i.e. managers). The other two were, firstly, Clarence Villa (now a pub and restaurant), which was built for Nicholas Wood⁴, of the Hetton Coal company, who (with partners) is presumed to have owned the new Clarence Hetton colliery, at Coxhoe, and, secondly, West Hetton Lodge, which was built for the owners of West Hetton colliery – probably when these were Charles Barrett⁵ and partners. (West Hetton Lodge was demolished in the 1960s.)

Ownership of these and the other nearby collieries changed rapidly, however, during the 1830s and '40s. So, as the dates of construction of these big houses is not known with any certainty, the precise situation is unclear. What does seem certain is that Clarence Villa and West Hetton Lodge were built to house local colliery agents or viewers. It seems very possible that the same was so of Hill Top house, even though there is less evidence to substantiate this.

The suggestion is that the new house at Hill Top was built to house Rayson & co.'s colliery official. Like Clarence Villa and West Hetton Lodge, it was built of stone and appears to have been an impressive structure.

Only its ruined remains survived into the 1950s and these were largely removed in the 1980s.

It is possible that the substantial dry stone wall that once surrounded the entire Hill Top farm was built at this time. Such walls are not common on farms in this area and it is tempting to think this one was built for prestige, rather than to enclose stock. Much of this wall is still standing but more lies beneath an easily discernible mound.



*Part of stone wall on the western boundary of Hill Top
(next to the bridleway between Heugh Hall farm and Old Quarrington)*

⁴ Nicholas Wood (1795-1865) was one of the most noteworthy mining engineers of the 19th century, being Lord Ravensworth's agent and viewer of Killingworth colliery till he moved to Hetton Hall in 1844, and the first president of the North of England Institute of Mining Engineers when it was founded in 1852.

He owned numerous coal mining interests himself, either as an individual or a partner, and as Manager of the Hetton Coal Co. It is presumed that West Hetton and Clarence Hetton derived their names from this Hetton company.

⁵ Bank manager and entrepreneur Charles Barrett (1798-1884) et al. were important figures in the Durham County Coal Co. (DCCC), a joint stock company that was formed in 1836 and bought several collieries (possibly "at inflated prices") from its own directors. No less than nine men had interests in both the DCCC and the Clarence Railway – directors Charles Barrett, John Blackett, Capt. James Keith Forbes, Henry Garrett Key, Joshua Milne, William Morris (or Morrice), Robert Rayson and Follitt Scott Stokes, and Company Solicitor, Ralph Ward Jackson.

More can be found about the DCCC and the Clarence Railway elsewhere on this website.

2. The Farm

Hill Top farm⁶ contained eight main fields, totalling about 71 acres, above and just north of Old Quarrington. Its field boundaries, as shown on the 1839 tithe map, were much the same then as they were till hedges were removed in the 1990s. The farm stretched from alongside the bridleway between Heugh Hall farmstead and Old Quarrington, to the west, to near the top of Red Briars bank (the road between Cassop Moor and Quarrington Hill) in the east.

Its northern boundary was along the crest of the hill spur that leads to the “heugh” (including what is known locally as “Big Wood”) that overlooks Heugh Hall farm and the new A688 link road. (That spur separates Cassop vale from Quarrington vale.)

The farm’s southern boundary was alongside today’s Old Quarrington quarry service road and the north western edge (today) of the quarry itself.



Hill Top farm’s location is shown above on the first (1857) Ordnance Survey map, superimposed on a satellite view from about 2010 AD. Significantly, the brighter green shading was taken, not from a map of the farm itself, but from one of coal royalties, drawn in 1840⁷. Though the farm and the royalty beneath it were at that time both owned by the Bishop of Durham, they were, throughout the 19th century, leased quite separately from the farms and royalties in the surrounding area: Hill Top was an “island”.

Interestingly, Hill Top house is labelled on this 1857 OS map as “Quarrington Hill”, though the map also used that name for the new colliery village which had by then been built further to the east, to house the workforces of Crowtrees and South Kelloe collieries.⁸

The map below shows the boundaries of the farm in 1839, on a 2013 satellite view – which shows signs of hedgerows that were removed in the 1930s.

⁶ NB: Hill Top farm should not be confused with Cassop Hill [Top] farm, which is behind Cassop School.

⁷ “Plan of Crowtrees & Quarrington Royalties...”, 1847 [location of original unknown; plan copied from R. Walton’s copy 10/5/2008]. The same royalty boundary is shown on a “Sketch shewing the Way-leaves requested... by the owners of the Crowtrees [etc.] Collieries”, 1840 [Durham University Library: CCB MP/132 (7435)].

⁸ At least two children of George Dixon Menzies (see below), born at Hill Top house in the 1840s, gave their birthplace as “Quarrington Hill” in later censuses. This was not Quarrington Hill village but Hill Top house, as is made clear by their places of birth given in other censuses and baptism records. See footnote 22.



Hill Top farm seems to have been leased to **Thomas Paxton** before 1794, when a 21-year lease was renewed to **Anthony Dobson**, of Hunter House, near Seaton Carew, Durham.⁹ This was updated in 1808 but a plan & valuation for the lease's renewal in 1815, for £92 p.a., still showed it to be leased to Dobson and in his occupation. The farm was at that time 63 acres in size.¹⁰

A plan of the surrounding Heugh Hall and Quarrington farms, prepared on 23 September 1796 but modified on 26 January 1835, showed Hill Top farm as an "island" surrounded by that estate, marking it as "Mr. Anthony Dobson's Ground".¹¹

The surrounding two farms were shown on that document as occupied by **John Story**¹² and **Roger Lee**. Land to the west and north of them (i.e. Cassop Grange farm), was labelled "Dr. Bewick". "Captain Metcalfe's grounds" were to the east (Cassop vale); "Coxhoe Ground" was to the south-east, and "ground belonging to Mr. Isaac Hopper" (Quarrington Grange farm) was to the south-west.

Only a few days later, a plan and valuation of the Heugh Hall and Quarrington estate, dated 4 February 1835, showed the Hill Top labelled as "Mr. **Thomas Peacock**".

This slightly later plan shows Heugh Hall and Quarrington as occupied by **William Story** and **William Lee**¹³, but the leaseholder, from the Bishop, was clearly the late **Robert Hopper Williamson**

⁹ Durham Record Office: 321789 12/14: 21-year lease to Thomas Paxton, to be renewed to Anthony Dobson, of Hunter House, near Seaton, prepared by Arthur Mowbray and dated 14 March 1794, updated by D. Turner, 4 April 1808.

¹⁰ Durham Record Office: 321789 7/12: Plan & Valuation of Estate in Quarrington, held by lease for 21 years to Anthony Dobson, of Hunter House, near Seaton. The valuation was done by Thomas Davison and dated 4 March 1815. The plan shows eight fields, half of them under grass, two growing oats, one turnips and one "seed". Four cottages and a small garth in the Old Quarrington hamlet were also included in the lease, but were held by assignment to Jonathan Walton and occupied by John Atkinson and others.

¹¹ Durham Record Office: 321789 11/14: Plan of estate containing 667a 1r 18p (previously 531 and a half acres), occupied by John Story (previously John Lumsden) and Roger Lee (previously Joseph Richmond), worth £375 (previously £255 p.a.).

¹² John Story's surname was spelt "Storey" in this document, and so was that of his son, William, in the Tithe Apportionments four years later – see below. That spelling was quite often used in early documents. The spelling used by later generations, "Story", is used throughout this short history.

¹³ William Story (1797-1869), son of John Story (1764-1844), was the son-in-law of Roger Lee (abt 1761-1834), having married his eldest daughter, Mary, in 1825. William & Mary's eldest son, Roger Story (1830-1911), farmed Heugh Hall till he died. Then it was farmed by Roger's son James (abt 1880-1947) and then James' son, Harry (1922-2010), who retired in about 1993.

William Lee (1798-1856) was the son of Roger Lee (died 1834) and therefore William Story's brother-in-law. He was still farming Heugh Hall in 1851 but it was taken over, after he died, by his nephew, Roger Story.

(see below) – whose death was the occasion for the new plan and valuation being produced. Story and Lee were presumably Hopper Williamson's tenants.

This suggests that Peacock was also the Bishop's lessee of Hill top farm, and that Dobson was the occupier, Peacock's tenant. The former may have been the **Rev. Thomas Peacock**, the Perpetual Curate of Denton, near Aycliffe, Co. Durham.

Meanwhile, it is quite clear that Story and Lee were not, in 1835, farming Hill Top farm, but that it was a separate enterprise.¹⁴

Only four years later, in 1839, however, the Tithe Plan and Apportionment showed the "owner" (i.e. leaseholder, from the Bishop) of the 71.16-acre Hill Top farm as **Robert Rayson** but its occupier as William Story¹⁵. As has already been observed¹⁶, Rayson was a coal owner. More is also said about him when owners and coal royalties are discussed, below¹⁷, but it should be noted here that Story was also shown in the Tithe Apportionment as the occupier (i.e. sub-lessee and farmer) of the 387.74-acre [Old] Quarrington farm. These two farms appear, therefore, to have been combined at that date.

[Old] Quarrington farm was owned [leased] by **Rev. Robert Hopper Williamson**, son of the RHW who died in 1835¹⁸, about whom more is also said below. He was also the leaseholder of Heugh Hall farm, which was now separately farmed by [and sub-let to] William Lee.¹⁹ But he appears never to have leased the Hill Top "island".

For several decades after that, Hill Top house was occupied by the Menzies family, starting with **George Dixon Menzies**, whose eldest daughter, Sarah, married William Story's son Roger in 1861. Between them, the latter's children and grandchildren continued to farm all three farms till the 1940s; then two of them ([Old] Quarrington and Heugh Hall) till about 1960, and finally just Heugh Hall till about 1993.²⁰

¹⁴ Nor were these two farming the quite separate Quarrington Grange farm, shown on the above map as no. 16. This was between the road up to Old Quarrington (to the north), the Durham-Stockton road (now the B6291) at Park Hill (west) and Four Mile Beck (south). At that time this was farmed by Anthony Harrison. The latter was not related to the Storys – although his widow did marry William Story's brother, James Story, a Coxhoe butcher, in 1860. It was probably after Harrison died that Quarrington Grange farm came to be farmed by one of the Story family – William's son-in-law, George Dixon Menzies, of whom more is said below.

¹⁵ William Story's surname was spelt "Storey" in the Tithe Apportionments. See footnote 6, above.

¹⁶ See page 3.

¹⁷ See pages 12 and 14.

¹⁸ The first Robert Hopper Williamson (1735-1835) was Recorder of Newcastle. His son, the Rev. Robert Hopper Williamson, the Rector of Hurworth, was an extensive land and coal royalty owner / leaseholder.

¹⁹ In the 1841 Census, William Lee is listed as farmer at Heugh Hall, William Story at Quarrington (presumably [Old] Quarrington farm) and Anthony Harrison at Quarrington (presumably Quarrington Grange farm). The same was so in 1851, except that the address of the latter two was given as "Old Quarrington", not just "Quarrington", and acreages farmed were recorded – respectively, 297, 380 and 300.

²⁰ See footnote 7, above.

3. Farmers and other occupiers

As reported above, the first known occupier²¹ of Hill Top farm – and, presumably, an early Hill Top house – was **Anthony Dobson**, of Seaton Carew. He appears to have been working the farm in 1794 and, still, in 1815. The Dobson family continued to farm in Seaton Carew afterwards.

There may have been at least one other Dobson farming nearby. **Henry Dobson** was the Bishop's lessee of Standalone farm, at Tursdale, till 1814²², when the lease was renewed to Thomas Egglestone, its occupier. In a plan and evaluation of that farm in 1801, Henry Dobson's address was given as Whitwell House, which was presumably his own home farm.²³

There were Dobson households in this area throughout the 19th century. However none were born in Quarrington, or in Seaton, and it is supposed that, though possibly related, they were not of the same immediate family.²⁴

Although William Story was listed in the 1839 Tithe Apportionment as occupying Hill Top farm, it is highly unlikely that he lived in Hill Top house. He was surely working the farm. But he was also working [Old] Quarrington farm and there is no reason to suppose that he moved temporarily out of its farmhouse.

This is the period during which it has been suggested, above, that a new Hill Top house was built to house the new Heugh Hall colliery's viewer [manager], employed by Robert Rayson and partners.

From the early 1840s, Hill Top house was the home of **George Dixon Menzies** (abt 1813-1887) and his family. His eldest daughter, Sarah, was born in 1839 at Greatham, Durham, but the family of three (with GDM's wife, Margaret) were living at Quarrington at the time of the 1841 census. No exact address is given, however, for this or any of the other 14 households at "Quarrington" – i.e. Old Quarrington.

The family had probably only just moved to this area, as theirs is the 134th household listed on the census return for the township. It appears after over eighty households at Quarrington Hill. The other households listed as at [Old] "Quarrington" were nos. 36 to 49.²⁵

They probably moved straight to Hill Top and were certainly there by May 1843, when the address of GDM and his wife was given as "Quarrington Hill Top House" at the baptism of their second daughter, Margaret.²⁶

²¹ Note that it is not 100% certain that Anthony Dobson lived here, as "occupants" referred to in some documents have been found to name people who did not actually reside at the relevant properties but sub-let to AN Other. See, for instance, comments about William Story, below.

No alternative name has so far been found, however, of a residing occupant of Hill Top at the start of the 19th century.

²² Durham Record Office: 321789 8/14 & 9/14: Lease to Henry Dobson to be renewed to Thomas Egglestone... [of] small farm [called Standagainst all] of 64.5 acres, dated 15 March 1814.

²³ Durham Record Office: 321789 10/14: Plan & valuation of estate in Quarrington leased to Henry Dobson, of Whitwell House, dated 23 February 1801.

²⁴ See also footnote 21, above.

²⁵ Note: These are my own numberings: they are not numbered in the original.

²⁶ In September 1841, at the baptism of their first son, Henry, it was given as "Quarrington Hill". This probably also referred to Hill Top but is ambiguous. The birthplace of all subsequent [surviving] children (six more daughters and three more sons) was clearly given as some variant or another of "Quarrington Hill Top" or "Hill Top House", censuses or birth registrations.

What is less certain, however, is whether George Dixon Menzies was the principal tenant of Hill Top House at the very start of that decade, i.e. when he first moved to live here from Greatham. For he was described as “Agricultural Labourer” in the 1841 census, and as “Labourer” in that year and in May 1843, at the baptisms of his second and third children, at St. Helen’s Church, Kelloe.

In section 1 of this essay, above, it was suggested that Hill Top house might have been recently re-built, just before this time, because the farm (and the coal royalty below it) had been acquired by Robert Rayson, coal owner, to house the manager of his new “Heugh Hall” colliery. If that is correct, then one should expect its occupant in 1841 to be such a manager, not an agricultural labourer.

Of the fourteen households in the 1841 census with an address of, simply, “Quarrington”, which is taken to mean “Old Quarrington”, there is only one that fits that expectation. This was that of **Jacob Graham**, aged 45, who was living there with four others, Mary & George Graham (both aged about 20, probably his son and daughter-in-law) and two daughters, Jane (15) and Susan (13). He was described as Colliery Viewer [i.e. manager]. The description of his daughter[-in-law?] Mary as “Colliery Overman” was clearly supposed to be attached to his son, George.

Ten years later, Jacob Graham was living at Lanchester, Durham, with his unmarried daughter, Jane. He was described in the 1851 census as Colliery Agent. In 1861, he was living at Consett, Conside and Knitsley, Durham, with a servant, Ann Robinson. He was then described as Inspector of Delves Colliery. He died early in 1862.

His son George also became a Colliery Agent. In 1851, when he was described as such in that year’s census, he was a widower, living at Copley Lodge, Lynesack & Softley, with his sister, Sarah Graham. She later married a farmer in that area.

These subsequent details by no means prove that Jacob Graham was employed as viewer of Robert Rayson & partners’ Heugh Hall colliery, still less that he was living at Hill Top house in 1841. But they certainly make it no less likely.

Meanwhile, if the Menzies family was indeed also living at Hill Top house in 1841, then it must presumably have been as sub-tenants of Jacob Graham. GDM was presumably working on the farm on behalf of William Story who, as we have seen, was now working both Hill Top and [Old] Quarrington farm.

By July 1847, however, the family of George Dixon Menzies must have taken over as the principal occupants of Hill Top house. They continued as such for forty years or more after that. In that month, at the baptism of his fourth daughter, Isabella, GDM was no longer described as “Labourer” but as “Husbandman”. That description was used again in the 1851 census, while he was a “Farmer” at the baptisms of his second son, James, in 1849, and in subsequent censuses and baptism records.

The Menzies’ address was explicitly given as Hill Top house in the 1851 to 1881 censuses.²⁷ In those years, GDM was described successively as Husbandman; Farm Bailiff; Farmer of 356 acres, employing 5 labourers, and Farmer of 380 acres, employing 2 men. The rest of his twelve

²⁷ In the 1851, 1861, 1871 and 1881 censuses, the address was given, respectively, as Hill Top house; Quarrington Hill Top farm House; Quarrington Hill Top, and Hill Top farm.

[surviving] children were all born there²⁸. So the family probably lived there till George Dixon Menzies died in 1887.

However, despite being primarily a farmer, GDM also took on some colliery responsibilities. For, in the 1858 Kelly's Directory, he was described as "land agent" and in the same year he was described in a confirmation of mortgage document as "of Quarrington Colliery, agent"²⁹. The colliery referred to was surely the Heugh Hall Colliery that had been sunk at Old Quarrington, in 1840, to work coal in the Hill Top royalty.

More is said of this below. However it should be noted that this colliery was sold by Robert Rayson and his Durham County Coal Co. associates to West Hartlepool's Ralph Ward Jackson and others. These owned it and other nearby collieries from 1846 till 1866, when they were bought by James Morrison & Co.

By the time of the 1873 Kelly's Directory, the manager of Heugh Hall colliery was William [Henry] Wood, of West Hetton Lodge. Whatever role GDM may have had when the colliery was part of the West Hartlepool empire, that appears not to have continued after James Morrison & Co. took over. His main employment by then was just farming again. It was as "farmer" that Kelly's Directory described him in 1873 and 1878 (and also in 1890, though he had died in 1887!)

356 acres and then 380 acres, the area farmed by Menzies at the times of the 1871 and 1881 censuses, is far more than the acreage of Hill Top farm on its own. Presumably Hill Top and Quarrington Grange farms were at that time combined, though they may have been the subjects of different leaseholds – i.e. Menzies was the tenant of more than one of the Bishop's lessees.

Kelly's Directory did not give the name of George Dixon Menzies's farm in 1873 and 1878, just giving his address as Quarrington. However it gave it as Quarrington Grange in the 1890 Directory (after his death) and he may have moved to the Quarrington Grange farmhouse before he died. It appears that Hill Top house was not occupied by members of the Menzies family for some years after that.

In the 1891 census, **Henry Consett**, Agricultural Labourer, and his family were listed as living at Quarrington Hill Top³⁰. So the Menzies family had definitely moved from there by then. In 1901, **George Thompson**, Agricultural Labourer, and his family, were the only people with that address.

By 1906, however, however, it was again the address of a farmer (as opposed to an agricultural labourer) and his family. This was **James William Laing** (1868-1959) who, with his wife, Annie, and two children, were living there in 1911. Another child had died there five years earlier, according to a gravestone inscription³¹. Annie Laing (abt 1859-1924) was the seventh daughter (out of twelve children) of George Dixon Menzies. I.e., James William Laing was GDM's son-in-law.

²⁸ The birthplace of eight of the children, born between 1847 and 1864, was given as "Quarrington Hill Top" in the 1871 census. In the baptismal records of at least four of his children, at St. Helen's Church, Kelloe, between 1843 and 1851, GDM and his wife were said to be of "Quarrington Hill Top" or "Quarrington Hill Top House".

²⁹ Durham Record Office: D/X 624/10

³⁰ So possibly was the next household listed, that of Nixon Plant, Joiner. No address was actually given for the Plant family, which may, instead, have been living at Cold Knuckles.

³¹ Inscription on St. Paul's gravestone: "In loving memory of George beloved son of James & Annie LAING of Hill Top farm who d. 5 Oct 1906 aged 12yrs. Also of the above Annie LAING who d. 14 Dec 1924 aged 66yrs. Also of James Wm LAING who d. 8 Nov 1959 aged 91yrs. Also James dear husband of Margaret Ethel who d. 7 Nov 1967 aged 70yrs."

The Laings continued to live at Hill Top till at least 1939, when their son, **James Laing** (abt 1897-1967), and his wife, Margaret Ethel (née Murray) (1899-1976), were still registered to vote at Hill Top farm. This is still referred to by some older local residents as having been “Laing’s Farm”.

Other members of George Dixon Menzies’ family also remained local. Children and grandchildren of his eldest daughter, Sarah (abt 1840-1917, married to Roger Story), farmed Heugh Hall farm till the 1990s and [Old] Quarrington farm (including Hill Top) till the 1950s.³²

GDM’s eldest surviving son and heir was **James Menzies** (abt 1850-1941), who initially farmed The Sands farm, near Sedgfield³³. In 1891, he was described in the census as Auctioneer & Valuer but he was still living at Sedgfield (at Rectory Row). By 1901, aged 51, he was the Inspector of Nuisances (i.e. Sanitary Inspector), employed by Durham Rural District Council. He then lived at Wood View, Shincliffe, but by 1911 had moved to Avenue House – one of the two large semi-detached houses at the southern end of the old main road into High Shincliffe from Bowburn. He had quite a reputation locally, being remembered in Bowburn for riding round on his horse and demanding action in an authoritative manner. He retired to East Close farm, Sedgfield, and died in 1941.

In the 1891 Census, four years after GDM died, the address of his youngest son, **George Menzies** (1861-1931), was given as “Heugh Hall” and he was described as Farmer. Despite the address, however, he was clearly now working Quarrington Grange farm.³⁴ That was his address in the 1890 edition of Kelly’s Directory, while his brother-in-law, Roger Story, was listed as the farmer [and assistant overseer] at “Heugh Hall farm”, while **Thomas Milburn** was at “Quarrington Hill top”. Milburn was described as “bailiff to **Arkless Lockey**”. (See §4, below.) It is clear, therefore, that the “Heugh Hall” in George Menzies’ Census 1891 address was being used as the local name for the hamlet of Old Quarrington – as it continued to be for over a century after that – and did not actually refer to Heugh Hall farm.

George Menzies (GM) was again described as Farmer in the 1901 Census, when his address was given as Old Quarrington. However he was by then training race horses. For in that year’s census his household comprised not just himself, his wife, his nephew Sydney (brother James’ son) and a General Servant Domestic; it also included four “Grooms in Training Stables”.

Sydney Menzies had also been in the household at the time of the 1891 Census, when he was aged 11. Four years later, on 15 February 1895, at the first race meeting at Shincliffe Racecourse, when 5,543 people paid an admission charge of 1/- and another 1,500 had pre-subscribed, young Sydney won the 3 o’clock race on his uncle’s horse, Lambton. George Menzies had horses in four or five of the races on that day – though it is not clear from the Durham Advertiser’s account, from which this information is taken, whether he owned all these or was just their trainer. It was probably the latter.

³² See footnote 13.

³³ Durham Records Office: D/Br/D2950

³⁴ In 1909, the address of George Menzies, farmer, was given in the British Phone Book as Quarrington Grange. (He had one of only six telephone lines connected to Coxhoe Post Office. His number was Coxhoe 5. The others were Coxhoe Post Office [Coxhoe 1]; Thomas Sanderson, builder, of Linden villa [Coxhoe 2]; J. Wood, J. P., of Coxhoe Hall [Coxhoe 3]; Dr. W. Oliver, also of Linden villa [Coxhoe 4]; Steetley Lime Co., Lime Basic Mfrs [Coxhoe 6], and Cornforth & Coxhoe Cooperative Soc. Ltd., Co-op Stores, Coxhoe [Coxhoe 7].

George Menzies was listed as Farmer at Quarrington Grange farm in Kelly’s Directory in 1910, 1914, 1921 and 1925. He was there in 1917, when a stack fire there was reported in the Durham County Advertiser (22 June 1917, p2).

GM was later a shareholder in the Durham Grandstand Company. This had been established in 1867 and it first held race meetings on Durham Racecourse. However its last one there was in 1887, after Durham University refused to renew its lease. Racing at Shincliffe probably ended in 1914.³⁵

By 1911 George Menzies, now aged 49, was described as Farmer & Race Horse Trainer in that year's census. His address was just given as Old Quarrington. He had had no children, by either his first wife, Julia, or his second one, Ida Mary (then aged 46). But his household included another of his brother James' sons, also named **George Menzies** (30, described as Bailiff [Farm]). There were also a cook, a coachman, two general servants, and eight grooms.

According to Robin Walton³⁶, Menzies at one time had "about 20 race-horses and stable boys". All the latter were made redundant, he says, when the stables closed with the outbreak of World War I in 1914. However Harry Story (1922-2010), who later farmed Heugh Hall farm, has said he remembered the stables still being there when he was a boy, in the 1930s³⁷. (Many of the stable buildings are still there today, having been converted into residential accommodation towards the end of the 20th century. They had stood unoccupied for several years before that.)

The second wife of race horse trainer George Menzies, Ida Mary, died in 1922 and his unmarried niece, Margaret Story, became his housekeeper. This was first at Old Quarrington, in the former farmhouse of Quarrington farm [now called Holme Farm House], and then at Cow Close in Coxhoe. He died on 16 May 1931, aged 69.

George Menzies presumably retired from farming soon after his wife died. For "Holme Farm House" (as it was later called) was not part of Quarrington Grange but of [Old] Quarrington farm – aka Roger Story's farm.

Thomas Milburn Oliver (1876-1955) came from Sherburn to farm Quarrington Grange from the 1920s onwards. He was listed in Kelly's Directory in 1929, 1934 and 1938. He died in 1955 but by then had already been succeeded by his son, **Alfred Edmund Oliver** (1898-1966).

The Oliver family, however, did not work the former Hill Top farm. Their farm was owned and leased from the Ecclesiastical Commission. (Alf Oliver bought it in 1957.)

The Story family continued to work Heugh Hall farm (Harry Story), [Old] Quarrington farm (Roger Story) and Hill Top farm (Jimmy Laing). The last of these was combined with Old Quarrington after Jimmy Laing retired. The Storys were tenants of Dorman Long & Co., successors to Bell Brothers Ltd, owners of Bowburn Colliery, and then, from 1947, the National Coal Board.

David and Anne Johnson bought and then farmed Quarrington Grange, [Old] Quarrington and most of Hill Top farms in 1982. The combined farm was acquired by their sons, Philip David Johnson and Andrew Richard Maddison Johnson, in 1994, and they farm it to this day (2016).

Hill Top house was in ruins by the 1950s and most of these were removed in the 1980s, although some can still be seen on the skyline.

³⁵ For more about Shincliffe Racecourse, see this website's section on "Sport".

³⁶ Robin Walton (1986), "A History of Coxhoe", Coxhoe: Coronation Press, page 78.

³⁷ Conversation between Harry Story and Mike Syer, 4 March 2007.

4. Owners

As we have seen, all the farms in Quarrington, including the four being considered in this article – Heugh Hall, [Old] Quarrington and Quarrington Grange, as well as Hill Top – were still owned by the **Bishop of Durham** at the start of the 19th century.

The first of these, Hill Top, the main subject of this article, was being leased from the Bishop:

- before 1794 and in 1815, by **Anthony Dobson**, of Hunter House, near Seaton Carew, Durham;
- in 1835, by **Thomas Peacock** (probably the Rev. Mr. Thomas Peacock, Curate of Denton, Co. Durham), and
- in 1839, possibly, by **Robert Rayson**.

At the last of these dates, as observed in §1 of this essay, the tithe map showed the “landowner”³⁸ of Hill Top as Robert Rayson, the coal owner.

However, the farm seems most likely to have been leased directly from the Bishop (and then the Ecclesiastical Commission) to **Henry Blanshard** and sub-let by him to a succession of colliery operators, including Rayson in 1839. Before Rayson, the sub-lessee will have been William Hedley. And when the DCCC collapsed and the West Hartlepool empire acquired all the collieries in this district, Ralph Ward Jackson and John Robson presumably acquired the Hill Top farm sub-lease – not the full lease from the Ecclesiastical Commission.

It is not at present known whether Blanshard’s heir (his grandson, **Col. Richard P. Davis**) continued to be the main leaseholder of Hill Top until its freehold was sold, some time before 1894. However, if he did so, he appears not to have been its purchaser.

As we have seen, Thomas Milburn, whose address was given as “Quarrington Hill top” in the 1890 edition of Kelly’s Directory, was described there as “bailiff to Arkless Lockey”. The latter may only have been Hill Top’s leaseholder, at that time, having perhaps acquired the lease from Henry Blanshard’s heir. But he clearly bought the freehold of the farm from the Ecclesiastical Commission before 1894, when Whellan’s Durham Book listed him as one of the principal landowners in the parish.³⁹

Arkless Lockey (abt 1847-1908) was Roger Story’s brother-in-law (being the husband of his sister Margaret): he was another of William Story’s sons-in-law. (Roger Story, as mentioned above, was married to George Dixon Menzies’ eldest daughter, Sarah.) By 1891, Lockey was a farmer and butcher, of Coundon, but he was born and bred at Blackgate, Coxhoe. In 1901, he was a farmer in Mainsforth.

Lockey died in 1908 and his widow, Margaret (née Story), sold Hill Top farm to Bell Brothers Ltd., owners of the new Bowburn Colliery.

Bell Brothers Ltd agreed to buy “Quarrington Hill Top farm” (as it was then called) from Mrs. Lockey on 12 October 1915⁴⁰. (The purchase was completed on 23 November 1915, for £2,950.) Two years earlier, they had agreed to buy the surrounding [Old] Quarrington and Heugh Hall farms from W. Hopper Williamson. (See below.)

³⁸ The term “landowner” was used in the Tithe Apportionments to refer to leaseholders, as in this case, as well as to freeholders.

³⁹ Whellan’s Directory, 1894, page 259.

⁴⁰ The details in this paragraph and elsewhere about Bell Brothers Ltd’s purchases were obtained from the minute books of Bell Brothers Ltd, which are held in Middlesbrough Library, and from Charges Registers on relevant title deeds, at the Land Registry.

Bell Brothers' successors, Dorman Long & Co. and then the National Coal Board, continued to own Hill Top farm until the NCB sold the eastern half to Steetley Dolomite (Quarries) Ltd, in 1958. The western half was bought by David and Anne Johnson in 1982, when they also acquired Quarrington Grange and [Old] Quarrington farms. The combined farm passed to their sons, Philip David Johnson and Andrew Richard Maddison Johnson, in 1994.

As for [Old] Quarrington and Heugh Hall farms, they were first leased (from the Bishop of Durham and then the Ecclesiastical Commission) and then owned by the **Rev. Robert Hopper Williamson** and his heirs. His grandson, William Hopper Williamson, sold them to Bell Brothers Ltd, the owners of the 20th century Bowburn colliery, on 8 July 1913.

It has not yet been established when the Williamson family bought these farms from the Church. Whellans' 1855 Directory names the principal landowners in Quarrington as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners (the successors of the Bishop of Durham) but does not mention Hopper Williamson. It does so, however, in the 1894 edition. So Williamson was still leasing the farms at the earlier date but then bought the freehold between 1855 and 1894, although a conveyance of the freehold has not yet been traced.

Despite selling some of its farms, however, the Ecclesiastical Commission retained the freehold of all the coal royalties. (See §5, below.)

Harry Story was still the tenant of Heugh Hall farm, from the National Coal Board and its successors, till he retired near the end of the 20th century. The freehold of Heugh Hall farm was bought by the current occupants, Stephen & Diane Kemp, from British Coal Corporation / the Coal Authority, in 1996.

5. The Royalty

At the start of the 19th century, the freehold ownership of both Hill Top farm and the mineral royalties beneath it still belonged to the **Bishop of Durham** (later the Ecclesiastical Commission)—as did the surrounding [Old] Quarrington and Heugh Hall farms (in which Hill Top appears as an “island”) and, indeed, all the other farms and royalties in Quarrington township.

It is not at present known how or why this royalty “island” came to be delineated and leased separately from the larger royalties around it. Could its origins have been linked with the somewhat mysterious stone boundary wall round the farm on the surface? Or perhaps it was simply because it was beneath a hill top, making workable seams that much deeper from the surface. Or perhaps it was something to do with the Hett Whin Dyke running across its middle, from roughly East-North-East to West-South-West⁴¹, or with other geological difficulties.



An 1847 Plan of Crowtrees & Quarrington royalties shows the Hill Top royalty as an island, with the Hett Whin Dyke across its length⁴²

⁴¹ NEIMME: NRO 3410/ZB/19, Report and Lease Book, contains a report regarding the Renewal of Lease of Coalmines to Henry Blanshard, written on 21 October 1848. It includes a description of Hill Top Royalty as follows: “This is a Tract of Coal of about 72 acres insulated or entirely surrounded by the Heugh Hall Royalty. Both 5/4 and Main Coal Seams exist in this Tract; the former at the depth of 40 fathoms and the latter at 49 f[atho]ms. “The Whin Dyke of this District passes through this Royalty, and is otherwise very much intersected with Dykes. “The greatest portion of the Five Quarter seam has been worked, there being left not more than 10 acres of whole coal, and about 8 acres of Pillars, average height 3 feet 4 inches. “In the Main Coal there appears to be about 37 acres of whole coal, and about 10 acres of Pillars yet to work, average height 3 feet 10 inches. The extent of workings at present is about 13 scores or 18 chaldrons per day, and at this rate of working there would be from 14 to 16 Years’ Coal to work, But the Certain Rent is £400 per annum for 400 acres, and if worked at this rate would only give 10 years coal to work. This coal is let on the following Terms to Messrs. Royston [i.e. Robert Rayson] & Co. viz. Certain Rent £400 per annum for 400 Tons, and Tentel Rent on overworkings 20s per ton. Ten 432 Bolls, Rent paid on the workings deducting 1/6th for Small and Colliery Consumption.”

⁴² Plan of Crowtrees & Quarrington Royalties the Fire Clay and Ironstone demised to T. E. Tennant, Robert Rayson and R. P. Phillipson, Lessees of Crowtrees Colliery, dated 1847. [Copied from copy owned by Robin Walton; original source unknown.]
It is noted that the title of this plan does not refer to a COAL royalty. However the plan’s details all relate to coal mining and it is supposed that the same gentlemen [sub-] leased the coal, with the same royalty boundaries.

The Hett Whin Dyke is a band of igneous rock that crosses the entire coalfield, making the cindered coal along its line unusable, as house coal, and other rock harder to penetrate with underground roadways. (House coal was the main use of coal till the mid-19th century, and the two seams that are nearest to the surface in Quarrington, namely the Five Quarter and the Main Coal seams, produced particularly good house coal.)

Neither is it at present known whether there is any significance in the farm's boundaries corresponding with those of the coal royalty beneath it. Both were leased (by the Bishop), neither having been "privatised" by royal or episcopal favour in earlier times. And both were sub-let by the leaseholder – to farmers, in the case of the land, and coal mine operators, in the case of the royalty.

No evidence has yet been found identifying the royalty's leaseholder before 1840. It is possible that it was **John Burdon**, in the 18th century, and then his heirs by entail, **the Misses Hale** of Guisborough, before they sold their Durham coal interests to **Henry Blanshard**, in 1827. These certainly included their freehold royalty in Coxhoe and their leased royalty elsewhere in Quarrington. They quite possibly included the leasehold of this Hill Top royalty as well.

This is not the place to go into detail about Blanshard and his Clarence Railway interests, nor those of the other entrepreneurial coal owners that made Quarrington and Coxhoe a centre of fierce commercial rivalries (and of personal fortune and ruin) in the early-mid 19th century. Although a full history of those significant years is still to be written, more can be found about them elsewhere on this website.⁴³

Blanshard was named as the Hill Top royalty leaseholder on maps drawn in 1840⁴⁴ and in 1847⁴⁵, and again in a 1848 report⁴⁶ by the Bishop's agent on the state of all Blanshard's local royalty leases, prior to their proposed renewal. (These contained the Bishop Middleham, Cornforth, Clarence Hetton, West Hetton & Bowburn and Heugh Hall collieries.) That report, and at least one other⁴⁷, made it clear that the Hill Top Royalty was worked from Heugh Hall colliery, whose main shaft was on the adjacent [Old] Quarrington farm – not on Hill Top farm itself.

Heugh Hall colliery closed in the late 1870s or early 1880s. It is not known whether coal beneath Hill Top farm, as opposed to the surrounding farms, was worked till the end. To the extent that it was, then that part of the royalty will presumably have been leased either directly from the Ecclesiastical Commission or from its lessee. Nor is it known whether the latter continued to be the heirs of Henry Blanshard throughout that time.

⁴³ See, for instance, "An old collieries walk", under "Early coal mining in the Bowburn area".

⁴⁴ "Sketch shewing the Way-leaves requested... by the owners of the Crowtrees [etc.] Collieries", 1840 [Durham Univeristy Library: CCB MP/132 (7435)].

⁴⁵ The 1847 "Plan of Crowtrees & Quarrington Royalties...", which is shown on page 14, simply has the name "Blanshard" on this Hill Top royalty. This did not mean, however, that he owned the freehold. There was simply not enough space to write "Hill Top Leasehold under the Lord Bishop of Durham to Mr. Blanshard".

⁴⁶ Report and Lease Book, in the North East Institute of Mechanical & Mining Engineers Library, Newcastle upon Tyne (NEIMME). NRO 3410/ZB/19 includes one on the "Renewal of Lease of Coalmines in The Townships of Bishop Middleham, Sedgfield, Cornforth and part of Quarrington: Extract from Report and Lease Book", dated Oct 21 1848. It was reported there that no rent was paid to the Bishop in respect of the "Hill Top Royalty" during year-ending 1 Nov 1841, the first year of a 7-year lease. This 1848 renewal was to Henry Blanshard.

⁴⁷ Ibid. NRO 3410/ZB/1 includes a report regarding the Renewal of a Life in Quarrington Lease, dated July 26 1850.

I do not yet know for certain that Rayson et al. did not lease the other royalties worked by the Crowtrees and Heugh Hall collieries directly from the Bishop, after William Hedley disposed of them. However it seems most likely that these coal owners all sub-leased from Blanshard and his heirs – even when those collieries ceased to operate after the late 1870s.

From about 1913, when the company acquired Hill Top farm itself, the lessee of the Hill Top royalty was presumably Bell Brothers Ltd, owners of Bowburn Colliery, and their successors. These were Dorman Long & Co, from 1923 until the coal mining industry was nationalised in 1947.

Despite selling some of its farms, the Ecclesiastical Commission retained the freehold of all the coal royalties in Quarrington until 1938, when they were nationalised and their ownership passed to the Coal Commission. (The privately-owned royalties in Coxhoe and Cornforth, as elsewhere, were of course also nationalised at that time.)

Conclusion

The above short history of Hill Top, Quarrington, has attempted to trace the history of Hill Top house itself, the farm which was worked around that, its farmers and other occupiers, its owners and the coal royalty beneath the farm.

I have tried to explain why it is believed that Hill Top house was once a grander building than many other farmhouses. I have listed the various farmers and others who lived here and/or worked the farm, whether as a distinct farm or as part of a larger enterprise, and also who owned the freehold or leasehold the farm itself and of the coal royalty beneath it. And I have tried to show how many of these people were connected, by family or commercial interests, to others.

This account is still work in progress. So several statements have been qualified by a “possibly”, a “probably” or a “perhaps”. While this is to be regretted, it was felt preferable to present what information has, so far, been collected and to make it available. It is hoped that the account will be updated if and when further research evidence provides clearer details on those matters that are at present uncertain.

Mike Syer
15th March 2016