

DEPARTURE WAS A DEADLY BLUFF TO TRAP AN ENEMY

AUDLEY HALL was undoubtedly one of Blackburn's most picturesque relics of antiquity. Originally a timber-framed erection designed on the lines of a manor house, with buildings grouped around three sides of a large courtyard and some traces of a defensive moat, its tenure can be traced back with some certainty to 1166, just a hundred years after the Norman Conquest, when Henry de Blackburn held both church and manor.

The hall stood immediately east of the site of Audley Hall mills, with its main approach bordered by an avenue of limes, the homestead itself being completely embosomed in trees. The limpid Audley brook meandered through its

SOME HISTORIC CAMEOS

No. 6 The Ambush

By **GEORGE
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fertile lawns and terraces. Indeed its very name derives from its rural surroundings, its original spelling being Ealdley, meaning old meadow.

For some time before its ultimate demolition in June, 1883, the hall was in a ruinous state, the roof having fallen in, although there were still the remains of some large mullioned windows when Charles Haworth made his well-known drawing.

ILL-OMENED

Audley Hall has figured largely in the annals of Blackburn. For some time it was held by the ffaringtons of Worden, and among its later tenants we may include that rough-hewn knight, Sir Thomas Talbot, who died there in 1558.

He came of a turbulent and ill-omened family, for it was Sir Edmund Talbot who earned the unenviable notoriety of betraying the weak-minded Henry VI after his defeat at Hexham in 1464.

For their share in his downfall, the wretched king prophesied that there would be nine generations of Talbots, a wise man and a fool alternately, after which the line would fail entirely.

The Talbots were Yorkists, claiming the manor of Rishton when their fortunes were in the ascendant but retreating into exile and leaving the land to its original owners, the de Rishtons, when victory inclined to Lancaster.

Hence the family inherited a long and deadly feud, which persisted long after the coming of peace. In 1557 Sir Thomas, who had the reputation of being a hardy and resolute soldier, had long enjoyed possession, but only because of his known prowess as a warrior.

On the border of his estate he knew only too well that the lawless and turbulent Roger Rishton of Ponthalgh was merely awaiting a favourable moment to strike. Now a sudden summons from Queen Mary for him to muster his men-at-arms and march into Scotland presented his enemy with just the opportunity he needed.

Within a few days he must be gone, leaving his only daughter Anne. It was a situation that called for a desperate remedy and yet kept him within the law.

INSPIRATION

A tall and burly man of middle age, his weather-beaten face and bearded chin half-concealed by his morion helmet, he paced to and fro within the courtyard of the Rectory, concentrating on the issue with the quick alert mind of a trained soldier. How to dispose of his opponent within the law? Then the inspiration came; he had it, and he slapped his thigh joyously at its simplicity.

Two days later, with all the martial panoply at his disposal, with flags flying and drums beating, he clattered through the streets of Blackburn, proclaiming his destination and enrolling recruits at the market cross.

Then, with a final fanfare, he took the road to Lancaster and the land of the Scots. But late that night he detached a dozen men from his squadron, put the rest in country billets and returned

by devious ways to Audley Hall under cover of darkness.

Early next morning, armed to the teeth, and with faces blackened to avoid recognition, Roger Rishton and his retainers marched stealthily through the tiny hamlet of Copy Nook to recapture what he claimed as his own.

With the party rode a priest, for Roger had matrimonial designs for the unfortunate Anne Talbot, and meant to contract an alliance on the spot. But fate had determined otherwise.

The party were brought to a sudden halt by the sound of a trumpet, to find confronting them a squadron of trained troopers, headed by Sir Thomas in person. The grim old campaigner had anticipated his enemy's reactions only too well.

RETREAT

The encounter was short and bloody. Roger fell, desperately wounded and was dragged into a neighbouring cottage for safety, while the survivors of his band of marauders beat a hasty retreat. The rest of the story can be given in the words of a contemporary chronicler.

"As Roger Rishton lay there helpless, Thomas Talbot said: 'Now I will be sure and I will give unto Rishton my mark,' striking him with such force that the dagger broke. Sir Thomas Talbot, shewing his dagger to his servants, said, 'I have sped him; look, I have broke my dagger in his brain, and if my dagger had not been broken I would have struck the priest that held me.' And with these furious words he departed."

So much for justice in those stern, unruly times. Yet although Sir Thomas saved Audley Hall for his daughter (who subsequently married William ffarington of Worden and resided at the hall for some years), Sir Thomas Talbot could not evade his destiny.

Within twelve months, worn out with wounds and hardship, the doughty knight returned home from Scotland to die, his body being interred in the chapel of Blackburn Parish church. And with him the male line became extinct.