
Hilton Castle

In the fall of 1615, John Davenport left Oxford. His uncle had decided to no longer fund his studies, other members of the family were not willing to support him, and he needed to earn a living. It was not unusual for someone to take leave from the university to make money. But what made Davenport's decision challenging was that, though he wished to find a preaching position, he was only eighteen years of age, and thus not old enough to be ordained. With the intervention of friends, he was able to obtain a position as chaplain at Hilton Castle, near Monkwearmouth, outside Sunderland, in County Durham.

The Hilton family was one of the ancient baronial families of the Palatinate of Durham, and Hilton Castle had been their seat since at least the twelfth century. The castle commanded a crossing of the River Wear a few miles west of where it flowed into the sea. Close to the mouth of the river was the site of the monastery of Wearmouth, which had been established in the seventh century as one of the northern outposts of Christianity, famous for its association with the Venerable Bede, the author of the medieval *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, who entered the monastic life there. Hilton Castle was part of the parish that centered on the monastic church, St. Peter's, although the Hiltons had a small chapel adjacent to the castle for family devotions.¹

Following the dissolution of the monasteries, the Hilton family acquired the advowson for the parish of St. Peter's, giving them the right to appoint the parish priest and to collect tithes. Although they profited from the Reformation, the family was not sympathetic to all of the new religious directions being pursued by Henry VIII. In 1536, Sir Thomas Hilton was one