



THE GILPIN CREST

DRIVERS PASSING THROUGH Houghton-le-Spring can't help but have noticed the newly erected signs on the A690, welcoming visitors to the "ancient town of Houghton-le-Spring". The sign at Houghton Cut replaced an old one which snapped in half in 2008 (for a while only 'HOUGH' was visible). Another has been placed near to Rainton Bridge. Both of the new signs feature the boar and oak tree from the family crest of Bernard Gilpin.

Reverend Bernard Gilpin, the Apostle of the North and Father of the Poor, is Houghton's most well-known Rector. At around the time of the signing of the Magna Carter (1215 AD), Gilpin's ancestors resided in Kentmere Hall, Westmorland (Cumbria), a long way away from Bernard's arrival in Houghton in 1558.

Richard De Gilpin, who was also known as Richard the Rider, achieved prominence for slaying the 'Wild Boar of Westmoreland', a ferocious porcine which was terrorising local villages and ravaging the land with its tusks.

The Baron of Kendal rewarded Gilpin's bravery and gave him land in and around Kentmere. King John granted Gilpin a coat of arms, which featured the sable (black furred) boar and a crescent moon, on a gold background. Research suggests that the oak tree, which pierces the boar on modern crests, was not part of the original Coat of Arms.



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The Wild Boar Hotel near Windermere is thought to have been built on the site where the beast was killed. The Gilpin crest has now been adopted by Houghton and can be found in a variety of places including:

- Logo for the old Houghton Urban District Council
- Logo for the Rotary Club of Houghton-le-Spring
- Logo for Houghton-le-Spring Golf Club
- Logo for the Gilpin Press, Pottery Yard
- Houghton RUFC noticeboard (boar only)
- Logo for H-L-S Bowling Club
- Bernard Gilpin Primary School logo (tree only)
- Engraved on lamp posts throughout Houghton's Broadway
- Centrepiece illumination during Houghton Feast
- Group badge for 1st Houghton (St Michael's) Scout Group
- Embedded in the linoleum floor of HUDC Office (the Old Rectory) and carved in wood inside the Council Chamber
- On the Houghton Feast flag which was unveiled at Houghton Feast 1999 from the top of St Michael's Church
- Inspiration for the name of the new J.D. Wetherspoon pub, the Wild Boar
- Logo for Houghton-le-Spring Heritage Society



Parts of the Gilpin crest were even incorporated into the civic arms for Sunderland Metropolitan Council, when Houghton became a part of Sunderland upon the reformation of local government in 1974 (the design was subsequently changed in 1992 when Sunderland became a City).



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Houghtonian, Joan Lambton, is the proud owner of a hand-made fired clay version of the Gilpin crest, but has recently discovered that her crest is not as unique as expected, even though her own mother had made it! While in the Gilpin Press printers, she noticed a similar crest mounted on the wall.

"I did not know John had one until I spotted it a few months ago, and asked in amazement how he came by it. He said it had come with the building! He had never had it down and was amazed when I told him to get it down and look on the back, as I just knew Mam's trademark would be there. Very obediently he immediately did as I said, and the trademark was there! Mam must have made it for an officer in Houghton Urban District Council who had let her have a letterhead with the crest on. The printers before John did a lot of Council work so we deduced that it had been passed on to them and that is how John got it."

Joan has since discovered that three versions of the crest were fired – her own, the one in Gilpin Press, and a third which her mother used to possess but is now missing.

A fine example of the crest can be found engraved upon the west side of Bernard Gilpin's tomb, located in the south transept of St Michael's Church. The version on the tomb, which could date from Gilpin's death in 1583, features a slightly portly boar upon an ornate shield. This crest was sketched in detail by the famed artist Samuel Grim in around 1780; and luckily so, as the engraving is now in a damaged condition.

Paul Lanagan

PAUL LANAGAN BA HONS
LOCAL HISTORIAN
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