

# Feature

## FEATURES

Last breath of  
a lost leviathan  
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**ROYAL PRISON:** Bolton Castle, right, and above, Walburn Hall, from which Mary Queen of Scots fled



**ESCAPEE:** Actress Samantha Morton as Mary, Queen of Scots, who attempted to escape her exile by fleeing from Walburn Hall, near Richmond

# Prisoner with silver spoons

The tale of Mary Queen of Scots and her dramatic bid for freedom in Wensleydale fired the imagination of writer Ken Hayton. Sadly, he died before it could be published, but it's being launched by his family next week. **Sharon Griffiths** reports

**K**EN Hayton grew up with romantic stories of Mary Queen of Scots. Not surprising, as she was once apparently a guest in his family's home.

Mary Queen of Scots was held prisoner for some time at Castle Bolton, in Wensleydale. Ken's mother's family lived at Walburn Hall, near Richmond, where the exiled queen once stayed on a hunting party, with dramatic consequences.

Legend has it that it was from here that Mary made a dramatic bid for freedom – escaping from her room through its narrow mullioned windows onto a waiting horse and galloping off into the night – only to be recaptured near Leyburn after her pursuers found her shawl.

So it's little wonder that when Ken took up writing in retirement, he used the family story as the basis for a novel. The story of a young Dales boy who becomes a lawyer and caught up in the struggle between Mary Queen of Scots and her cousin Queen Elizabeth was a finalist in The Northern Echo novel writing competition in 2007.

Sadly, Ken died before the book, *A Queen Too Many*, could be published, but asked his wife Gill and daughter Alison to prepare it for publication. "The idea for the book started way

back in 1961," says Gill, who now lives in Scarborough. "When Ken and I were engaged, he took me to Walburn Hall to meet the family and I was shown Mary's Room with its panelling and narrow window."

Walburn Hall, a castellated farmhouse in an isolated setting, is pretty much all that remains of a deserted medieval village – which also inspired part of the story.

For many years the family lived in Richmond and the Haytons' daughter Alison, now Professor of Renaissance Drama at the University of Lancaster, remembers: "We were always up in the Dales. Castle Bolton was, still is, one of my favourite places."

The novel also features the great feud between the Robinson family and the Metcalfes of Nappa Hall. One of the less illustrious Metcalfes, Sir Thomas, reneged on a debt to the Robinsons and the unpleasantness escalated into the Siege of Raydale alongside Semerwater in 1618, when the militia were called out from York and a man was killed.

The research is so thorough that it's impossible to see the joins where history ends and fiction begins. The hero, though a Robinson, is an invention. "We had such fun researching this book, before Ken became ill," says Gill.

The hero trains as a lawyer in Durham – so we see the rebel Catholic supporters bursting into the cathedral and overturning the altar, dashing the Bible to the floor. One of Gill Hayton's ancestors, The Forest Lawyer of Knaresborough, inspired the hero's career helping Dales farmers.

Ken spent his working life as a dentist in Richmond and Scarborough. After he retired, he gained an Open University degree in the arts and rediscovered writing, and had already published one novel. When Ken died, the book was finished but not tidied up.

"I didn't write another word of it," says Alison. "It's all as dad wrote it, but I copy edited and checked it and got it ready for publication."

At the same time, Alison gained



**FAMILY AFFAIR:** Writer Ken Hayton, his wife Gill and daughter Alison

yet another link with Mary Queen of Scots when a collection of letters from the Hesketh family relating to the queen's imprisonment was given to the University of Lancaster and Alison transcribed them.

"There was a lot of information about the conditions that Mary Queen of Scots insisted on during her imprisonment. She was determined to uphold the standards of queenship. For instance, she insisted that she had a cloth of state to sit under and that she had to have a certain number of silver spoons, as befitted her position.

"All this insistence on grandeur and then you think she had to take most of her clothes off to squeeze through the window at Walburn Hall.

"It's the wonderful small details that really bring it all alive. Those in charge of her ruled that on no account should laundresses be allowed to carry letters, so every time the poor laundresses came in and out with clean or dirty laundry, it all had to be searched."

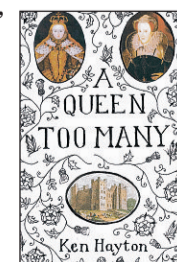
Following further research, Alison

has now prepared a talk on these letters, which she will be giving at the launch of her father's book next week. "My academic research, dad's book, the family stories, all seem to have come together, which is very good, very satisfying," she says.

The cover, featuring pictures of the two queens and of Bolton Castle against a background inspired by Elizabethan blackwork, was designed by Gill.

"This book meant so much to dad," says Alison. "He wanted so much for it to be published, that it's a wonderful thing to be able to do it for him."

■ **A Queen Too Many** by Ken Hayton (Paragon, £8.99) will be launched at the Falls Motel, Aysgarth, on Tuesday June 14 at 1.15pm, when Alison will be giving a talk on Mary Queen of Scots and her imprisonment.



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