

# The Royal County Hotel

**Marriott**  
DURHAM ROYAL COUNTY

*The Royal County Hotel is situated in Old Elvet. This was part of the ancient Borough of Elvet granted to the monks of the monastery by Bishop William of St. Calais in 1091, allowing them to build and lease 40 merchants houses and tradesmen's shops. The revenue from this helped in the upkeep of running the monastery. The derivation of Elvet is thought to come from the Saxon Period meaning "Swan Island" or Swan River.*

*A close inspection of the front of the hotel shows that it is in fact a series of Town Houses linked together. It is believed that they originate from 1630. One house was inhabited by Lady Mary Radclyffe who was a member of the Derwentwater family at Dilston and her half-sister was Lady Mary Tudor, natural daughter of King Charles II. Her nephew James was executed after the 1716 rebellion and it is reputed that his brother Charles lived in the house before his arrest for treason in the 1745 rebellion.*

*In another house lived Elizabeth Bowes, aunt of the Earl of Strathmore's wife, Mary Eleanor Bowes, who had inherited the vast properties of the Bowes Family. In compliance with the will of her father, when she married her husband was to take up the family name, so John Lyon, Earl of Strathmore assumed the name of Bowes by permission of an Act of Parliament. From the joining of these families was to come the late Queen Mother. Elizabeth Bowes owned this house from 1758, after which it was passed to Lord Strathmore and it remained in the family well into the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Prior to its incorporation into the Royal County Hotel it was known as the Dunelm Hotel.*

*Adjoining the Royal County Hotel was the Waterloo Hotel which was demolished in 1971 to make way for the New Elvet Bridge. This Hotel was a Coaching Inn and the London to Edinburgh Royal Mail Coach stopped here as did the regular Newcastle Coach.*

*Many famous personages have stayed at the Royal County even before it was a Hotel. In 1650 Oliver Cromwell stayed on his way to the Battle of Dunbar. Local legend also tells that King Charles I hid on the premises before his arrest for treason. In more recent times King Edward VII was a guest and it was then that the dignity of the Royal was added to what had been just The County Hotel. Until 1943 his picture was prominently displayed in the main hall.*

*At the rear of the Hotel was the site chosen by John Wesley for the first Wesleyan Chapel in Durham. This was linked to Old Elvet by Chapel Passage which would, if still in existence, run across the hotel car park. Unfortunately the chapel has since been demolished but the elegant former Masonic Hall, built in 1809 still stands next to the chapel site just a few hundred yards from the Hotel.*

*In July of each year is held the Durham Miners Gala or "The Big Meeting". This has been held for well over 100 years. In it's hey day in the 1950's - 1960's when County Durham was a major coal producer, this would attract 250,000 people to the city. The miners and their families, led by Brass Bands, parade along Old Elvet with their Lodge Banners to the Racecourse to the speeches from their leaders. This is usually followed by a fun fair and picnic if the weather is kind. A fine view point to witness this event is the balcony at the front of The Royal County Hotel where many leading politicians have gathered over the years to inspect the proceedings.*

*From its small beginnings, The Royal County Hotel has expanded over the years – the middle block added in 1972 and the newer Riverside wing completed in 1989 incorporating a leisure club and standing proud on the banks of the River Wear. Previously a Swallow Hotel, the company was acquired by Whitbread PLC in 1999 where a £1 million pound refurbishment programme took place and the hotel was renamed as The Durham Marriott Hotel Royal County. Sold back to Marriott International in 2005, the Hotel continues to thrive with a further £3 million pound investment in 2007 and 2008.*

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