

ART. I.—*Kirkoswald Castle*. By MICHAEL W. TAYLOR, M.D., Penrith.

Read at Kirkoswald, June 10th, 1874.

THE village of Kirkoswald, or rather the town, for in the reign of King John it had the grant of a market, derives its name from the famous Oswald, King of Northumbria, the redoubtable propagandist and champion of Christianity in the north in the seventh century, to whom the church is dedicated. Though now lonesome and decayed, in the middle ages and before the Reformation, this place was probably of some vitality, and considerable population; it was the market and rendezvous of the occupiers of an important portion of the fertile vale, through which the Eden flows, and of the numerous fellside villages which skirt the base of the Pennine range; to the church was attached a collegiate establishment of twelve secular priests; whilst the safety of the town was secured, and its prosperity sustained, by the neighbouring fortress, the frequent residence of a powerful family.

It will be no part of my business to dilate on the pedigree or history of the ancient possessors of this manor; inasmuch as, amongst other reasons, we hope on a subsequent occasion to have some points of genealogical interest, with reference to the Morvilles and Multons, dealt with by a much more competent authority on such subjects, our excellent member Mr. Jackson, of St. Bees; my particular concern is to give as complete and precise a description as I can, of the castle, its plan, and present condition.

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The castle of Kirkoswald is said, on the authority of Dr. Todd,* to have been originally founded about the year 1201, by Randolph Engayne; but he adds, it was then much inferior in size and magnificence, and "far short of that beauty and state, which it had afterwards by his successors." By the marriage of Ada, granddaughter of this Randolph Engayne, it passed to Simon Morville; and Sir Hugh de Morville, in the 2nd of King John, obtained licence to fortify the castle, and inclose the park. †

There seems to have been a mistake made by Denton, (whose MSS. have been followed by the compilers of our county histories,) in the identification of this Hugh Morville lord of Burgh, and Kirkoswald, with his more notorious namesake, one of the murderers of Thomas-à-Becket. Mr. Hodgson Hind, in a paper read at a meeting of the Archæological Institute in Carlisle in 1859, traced the error to the *Chronicon Cumbriæ*, and shewed that Becket's assassin was Hugh, lord of Westmorland and Knaresburgh at the same time that Burgh was possessed by Simon, the grandfather of his namesake, who held Kirkoswald in the 2nd of King John.

The possessions of the Morvilles descended to the Multons, by whom, in the time of Edward II., this castle was further enlarged and fortified. In the seventh year of Edward II, the castle and manor of Kirkoswald, the barony of Gilsland, and other vast estates, were transferred by the marriage of Margaret, daughter and heiress of Thomas de Multon, to Ralph, baron of Dacre, of Dacre Castle.

It was during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, whilst held by the powerful family of the Dacres, that the castle rose to its full pride and magnificence, and about the year 1500, after having been occupied by their family

* "Jefferson Leath Ward" p. 274. The date here is an error: A.D. 1201, was the 2nd of King John: the period of Randolph Engayne was 100 years before the date stated.

† The park inclosed a varied and undulating tract extending from the broad and rapid waters of the Eden, over Viol Moor towards the eastern fells, and up the Raven Beck, to the hamlet still called Park Head:—a domain which is now divided into five or six considerable fertile farms.

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for eight generations, it received its last improvements from the famous Thomas Lord Dacre, "who encompassed it with a large ditch for better security, and beautified it at great expense."

The power of the Dacres of Gilsland and Kirkoswald culminated during the long reign of forty years of this Thomas the Sixth. He succeeded in the 1st of Henry VII. (1485), and died in the 17th of Henry VIII, (1525). Hot, impetuous, and ambitious, he began his career by following the example set one hundred and seventy years before, by his ancestor, Ralph of Dacre Castle, who stole from Warwick Castle the daughter and heiress of the Multons. It was this Thomas, who carried off by stealth, in the dead of night, at Brougham Castle, from the guardianship of the Cliffords, the young and wealthy heiress, Elizabeth of Greystoke, by marriage with whom the Barony of Greystoke became united to that of Gillesland and Kirkoswald. This Thomas was distinguished also in war: Lord Surrey gave him command of the reserve on Flodden Side;—

"Lord Dacre with his horsemen light,
Shall be in rearward of the fight;
And succour those that need it most."

Marmion.

and staunchly did his Cumbrian knights and men-at-arms, and border pricklers repel the onslaught of the hot-blooded highland kernes of Huntly and Argyle, and bore their sway with fell intent at the close of the day, to the terrible breaking of the Scottish power on that fatal field.

When Lord Warden of the Western Marches, to which appointment he was promoted by Henry VIII., Thomas Lord Dacre frequently resided at Kirkoswald, and dated despatches from thence. He was a diplomatist also; to him Henry entrusted much of the management of Scottish affairs, and the conduct of the intrigues with the factions which rent that kingdom after the battle of Flodden.

On the division of the vast possessions of the Dacres into the two branches, known as the Dacres of the North, and the Dacres of the South, the castle of Kirkoswald fell
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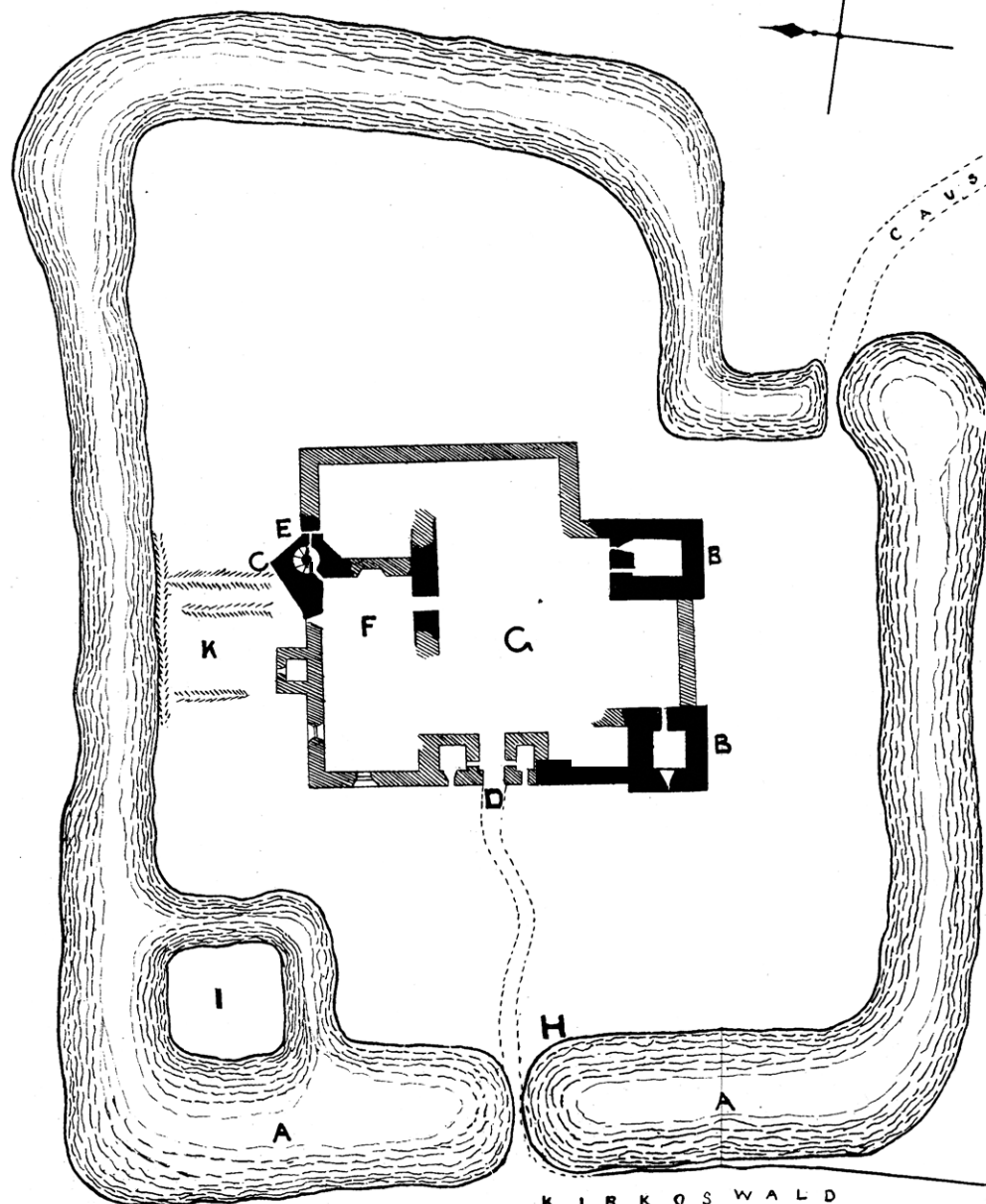
to the latter branch, which very shortly terminated in the Fiennes and Lennards: the last of whom, marrying a natural daughter of Charles II. by the duchess of Cleveland, was created earl of Sussex, and died in 1715, leaving two daughters. The property was exposed for sale, and bought by the Musgraves, in whose possession it now is.

It was during the period of the rapid decacy of this race, and of the impoverishment and non-residency of these latter Dacres of the South, that this castle fell from its high estate, and the work of displenishment and spoliation began.

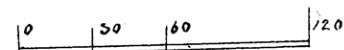
The process of dismantling was in operation between the years 1604 and 1624. First probably, from its value, the lead would be stripped off the roof; and the trappings of the hall, the painted glass casements, and wood carvings, and panneling would follow fast. Some movable chattels went to Lowther Hall, some glass to Corby and to Wetherall Church; Belted Will Howard enriched his castle of Naworth largely from here. The curious genealogical tree of the Dacre family, with armorial bearings, and inscriptions round them in painted glass, was transferred to the chapel at Naworth; this, and the curious pannelled ceiling with the pictures of the kings, referred to by Sandford, were destroyed at the fire at Naworth in 1844. In the library, in Belted Will's tower, may still be seen a strong, massive, beautifully moulded, and characteristic fourteenth-century wooden pannelled roof. This, as was pointed out by Mr. J. H. Parker, at the visit in 1859 of the Archæological Institute, was not originally intended for its present situation, as it does not fit the cornice of the room. In all probability it was one of the spoils of Kirkoswald Castle.

In the year 1688, when Mr. Thomas Denton wrote, he described the castle as being a bare shell or heap of stones. I have before me the plate published by the Bucks, in 1739, which shews some walls standing in the north-east, which are now gone; otherwise, the rest of the castle is
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KIRKOSWALD CASTLE



- A MOAT
- B VAULTED TOWERS
- C STAIRCASE TOWER
- D SITE OF GATEWAY
- E POSTERN GATE
- F HALL
- G COURT YARD
- H OUTER GATE AND
DRAW BRIDGE
- I OUT WORK
- K FOUNDATIONS OF WALLS



CAUSEWAY FROM KIRKOSWALD

represented as being almost as ruinous as at present. In point of fact, the excellency of the facing stones has proved fatal to its existence, for the walls have been blasted, and ruthlessly thrown down, and the stones stripped off; it has actually formed a quarry of excellent ashlar, to be taken when needed, as may be seen by the mason's marks on some of the buildings in the village of Kirkoswald. The demolition of the walls has been so extensive, and the foundations are so much overthrown by debris, that it is difficult to form an entire plan of the wards and chambers of the castle. However, from the insight afforded by the three existing towers, from the fragments of outside and partition walls visible, or traceable, in their foundations, and by the help of Buck's view, I have constructed a ground plan which will give an idea, at all events, of the extent, and general arrangement of the building.

The site, which is on slightly rising ground, about a quarter of a mile to the south-east of the village, presents no natural advantages as a defensive position. The approach is by an ancient causeway, which runs parallel with, and close to the counterscarp of the moat, on its western border. The moat encompasses a level area of about one and three-quarter acres, nearly in the centre of which stands the fortress.

As may be seen on the plan, the fosse is of a rectangular figure, exactly following the contour of the castle, and surrounding it on every side. In one direction, it is 380 feet long, in the other 300 feet; inside measurements. It has an average width of 30 or 40 feet, and might have had a depth of from 12 to 18 feet; it was supplied with water by a brook from the ponds in the park above, and when filled, must have proved a very formidable obstacle to any assailants. At the western angle of the moat, there is an additional work of defence, of great interest and importance; it is a rectangular mound, an outwork or ravelin lying within the moat, and provided with a ditch of its own. It is nearly square, the dimensions are 45 feet by 40 feet; it
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is on the same level as the inner inclosure, and the sides presented to the exterior, are nearly flush with the lines of scarp of the main ditch. The function of this earth-work has been to flank the main entrance and drawbridge, which probably were placed where the gap now is, about the middle of the western side. There remain no traces of buildings of gatehouse, or of gatehouse towers, or of barbican, and there may have been none, except the timber apparatus for the drawbridge—there has been no masonry along the edge of the moat, the defence has been by wooden stockading.

The plan of the castle seems to have been quadrangular, forming a square of about 150 feet, yet not regular nor complete, seeing that the eastern line re-enters at an angle, at the southern corner, leaving there a rectangular recess.

Two towers, of which a good deal still remains, though plundered of their facing stones, cap the angles on the south face. They are nearly of the same size and pattern, and nearly square, 35 by 30 feet; they are about 50 feet apart, and set on nearly flush with the curtain wall which has connected them. They have had a basement, and a first and second floor. The basement in each consists of a vaulted chamber, entered from the ward, at the court level, by a narrow doorway with a pointed arch, and plainly chamfered; each is lighted with a single square-headed loop. In the interior these chambers are well preserved, the roofs are low, barrel-vaulted; the arches and walls are of goodly worked chisselled stones, exhibiting a great variety of mason marks. The tower, which caps the eastern angle, measures inside 16 feet by 15 feet, with its doorway and loop, both on the north side, opening into the ward: the chamber in the opposite tower, is 19 feet by 13 feet, with its loophole opposite to the doorway, and presenting to the exterior of the castle. The upper stories shew nothing but ruined walls, but they seem to have had some round-headed window openings. These towers are probably part of the original castle of the date of Edward II.

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The adjoining ward was probably occupied by the lower class of apartments, kitchen, storehouses, and accommodation for the household retainers.

On turning to the north side of the *enceinte*, there stands a tall slender tower, which constitutes the main feature of the ruins, tolerably entire, with its well laid ashlar, of the red sandstone of the country, excellently preserved. It is 65 feet high, and with its battlements, which are now gone, it would have been 3 feet higher. It is four-sided, and nearly square, at least the sides facing to the exterior are each about $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet at the base, just above the massive plinth, on which it is founded; half-way up, there is a course of masonry, forming a string course, and there is another a little distance below the parapet. The openings to the outside, are of the nature of loops, and small square-headed windows, without decoration or mouldings. The tower is set on diagonally, or diamond wise, against the wall of the *enceinte*, with rather more than half of it projecting buttress-like, beyond the wall.

This tower has been constructed solely with the object of carrying the winding staircase, which has given access to three stories of upper apartments. The three square-headed doorways placed one above another, seen on one interior face, have each communicated with a mural gallery or corridor in the thickness of the cross and partition walls, of which a fragment remains, 11 feet thick. The fourth small doorway above led to the roof and the battlements.

At the foot of the tower, there are two doorways entering upon the staircase, one triangular-headed on one face of the tower presenting to the court; and the principal one with a good pointed arch, leading from a straight passage through the thickness of the outer wall, which is here 8 feet 3 inches thick. The inlet and outlet to this passage, are by two pointed-arched, and chamfered doorways, one directed to an inner apartment, the other having been in use as a postern to the moat and outer buildings. This side of the quadrangle has contained the range of the
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principal apartments of the castle, the hall and chapel, and dining room, and on the upper stories suites of rooms for the lord and his chief guests. The great hall, which we are led to suppose was 100 feet in length, probably extended along the eastern face of the castle, with the dais at its northern end; and adjoining the dais, the chapel.

This hall, if we rely on history and tradition, cannot have been exceeded in baronial magnificence, and in the splendour of its internal decorations, by any existing in our counties in the sixteenth century. We may consider the hall, and the buildings connected with it, and the staircase tower, to have constituted the additions made to the castle about the year 1500.

Sandford, who visited this place about 1610, says in his MSS., "this great castle of Kirkoswald, was once the fairest fabrick that ever eyes looked upon. The hall I have seen 100 feet long; and the great portraiture of King Brute lying in the end of the roof of this hall, and of all his succeeding successors kings of England, portraicted to the waist, their visage, hats, feathers, garbs, and habits, in the roof of this hall; now translated to Naword Castle, where they are placed in the roof of the hall, and at the end thereof. This castle was the ancient palace of the Lord Multon, marrying the lord Vaux's, heir, lord of Naworth and Gilsland; and afterwards of the late lords Dacre; and now come by lineal descent to the tresgallant the earls of Sussex; with the lands adjoining, and many brave parks and villages belonging thereto." Speaking further he says; "in this grand castle, I was some sixty years agoe, when there was many fair toures, and chambers, and chapels; and in the east end, on one behinde the altar, there was a crucifix in the window, with the portrait of Christ; and the manner how he was crucified thereupon; and a substantial subsibdy yeoman man ther asket me what picture that was, and I told him, the picture of Christ crucified; and he said that he never knew so much of Christ's crucifying and his dolorous death and sufferings and pashion."

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Let us now turn to the western face, or front of the *enceinte*. Amid the hillocks, and hollows, and heaps of grass-grown rubbish, that encumber this side of the ruin, it is possible to indicate the site of the gateway as having consisted, of an outer and inner gate, flanked with turrets, or tower-like buttresses. It was usual in the outer bailey, outside of the walls, to have the stabling, out-offices, and inferior apartments—the site of these may be traced, in the foundations of main walls and partitions, covered by the turf, extending from the northern boundary of the castle to the scarp of the moat.

It is possible, that the road of approach to the castle gate, from the drawbridge and the moat, was sunken below the level of the ground, in the manner of a trench or covered way, so as to shelter the advance or retreat of the defenders: the depression in the ground suggests the idea.

The tradition of a subterranean passage, existing from the castle to the church, is supported by Dr. Todd; I have nothing positive to affirm about this, either in one way or other. A similar tradition is attached to several feudal strongholds in this country; it is commonly believed that an underground way extended from Penrith Castle to Dockray Hall in the centre of the town—from Hornby Hall in Brougham parish, Westmorland, to St. Ninian's church;—at Holme Cultram;—at Naworth Castle, and at other places.

To sum up what can be told of the antiquity of Kirkoswald Castle, I would say—there is no part of it, to which an earlier date can be assigned than the beginning of the fourteenth century. The inceptive work of Randolph Engain has been of no account,—the Norman has left no mark here—there is no single massive keep nor citadel,—the invariable characteristic of the strong Norman fortress, and which we find abiding almost in its pristine strength, when the adjacent buildings of a subsequent date, are mouldering in ruins.

The two original towers afford the key to its design

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and proportions, as a small Edwardian castle, that is, a quadrangular mural enclosure, with projecting towers capping the angles.

The alterations and additions in Henry VII. reign, would modify much the military character of the place, from that of a fortress dependant for its defence on its loopholed bastions, turrets, and battlements, and strong walls and ramparts. A material change in the type of the castles, and new-built residences, was being produced about this period, in consequence of the generally more peaceful and civilized state of England. In these buildings, defence became a secondary consideration; whilst the number and convenience of the domestic apartments were much increased; instead of being spread about the inclosure, they were built in blocks, or gathered together in a palatial pile, with large and decorated window openings, and flush with or extending beyond the original walls.

But having been divested of the protecting wall of *enceinte*, there arose the necessity for an outer defence of the castle, for security against surprise, and to extend to a safer distance any attack by the use of gunpowder, or from the rude matchlocks, or dubious ordnance of the period.

Accordingly we find the moat extensively used about later castles, and manor houses, even in the time of Elizabeth, and later, a species of defensive obstacle which has received its perfect consummation, as a part of the system of modern permanent fortification; so that about the year 1500, Sir Thomas Dacre "encompassed it with a large ditch for better security;" which is the splendid moat, which you now see so perfectly preserved.

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