

ART. XXV.—*Piel Castle*. By WILLIAM HARRISON, Barrow-in-Furness.

*Read at Piel Castle, August 17th, 1877.*

THE spot upon which we stand, with its grand sea approach, naturally suggests to us the question whether its history dates back to times more ancient than belong to the ruin we have to treat of to-day. I am bound to confess that there are no authentic records beyond the fourteenth century, but it is the rôle of the archæologist occasionally to launch into conjecture. Looking at the evidence of Roman military stations and roads in the district, as well as the Roman road along the ridge of hills known as High Street, we are warranted in concluding that that warlike nation did not content themselves with one or two isolated inroads upon Furness and the fells, but established and maintained a force of soldiers for over two hundred years close by. Looking at the tedious land travel from the south of England, and to the familiarity with ships possessed by the Romans, is it very far fetched to conjecture that their reinforcing or relieving troops reached the district by the water-gate at Piel, and that, could we transport ourselves to that time and stand on this cliff, we might have seen, instead of peaceful ships with the flags of our mercantile marine or yacht clubs flying, galleys full of mail-clad warriors sailing in beneath the eagles and the proud legend *Senatus Populusque Romanus*?

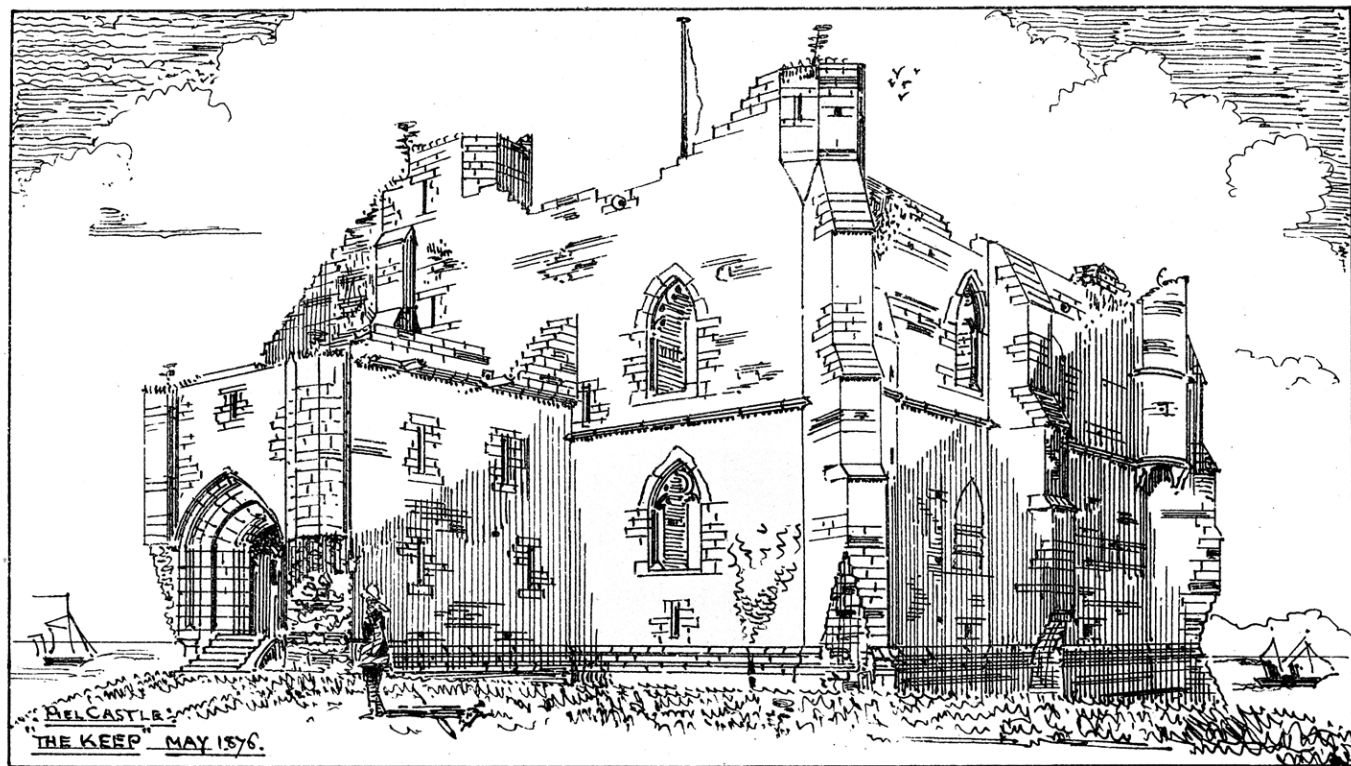
Be that, however, as it may, it is my duty to treat of Piel as it is, a ruined castle (in very good preservation) of the fourteenth century, and most likely of the date of 1327. This is fixed thus. It was, undoubtedly, an outpost from the Abbey of Furness, because we know from the grants of Stephen and others that the whole of the promontory became

became and remained theirs from the year 1100 to the dissolution by Henry VIII., and therefore there could have been no independent baron of a position proportionate to the size of the Castle, or history would have mentioned his name. The Abbey of Furness is well known to be of four distinct ages of architecture, of which the latest is the vaulted room at the south end. Its mouldings, plinths, and other sandstone enrichments correspond with those of Piel Castle, and also the shape of the windows; the style of the architecture is invariably found a correct indication of the age of all castles and monastic remains. This supposition is also consistent from another point of view. The first duty of the monks, after being inducted to their domain, would naturally be the erection of their church, the chapter house, refectory, and cloister, and finally the numerous outbuildings which are still extant. These home cares having been attended to, their energies would then be bestowed upon consolidating their power in that lordly possession over which their pious founder had given them sway. Thus they built Dalton Castle, where the Abbot held his manorial court. The harbour of Piel would also attract their attention. It was the water-gate by which their foes could enter, it was the port through which their imports of foreign food and wine could most easily find admission. The monks were, too, the owners of wreckage, and no doubt whatever revenue could accrue from customs or fishery was theirs by right of their grant. A stronghold here would serve too for a fastness to which they could remove their title deeds and charters, their church plate and secular wealth, and in time of extreme danger might take refuge themselves. This is necessary to recollect when we consider the great strength of what was merely an outpost.

One word as to the topography of the island. It is proved from the recent creeping out of the southern end of Walney adjoining, that a very great change has taken place

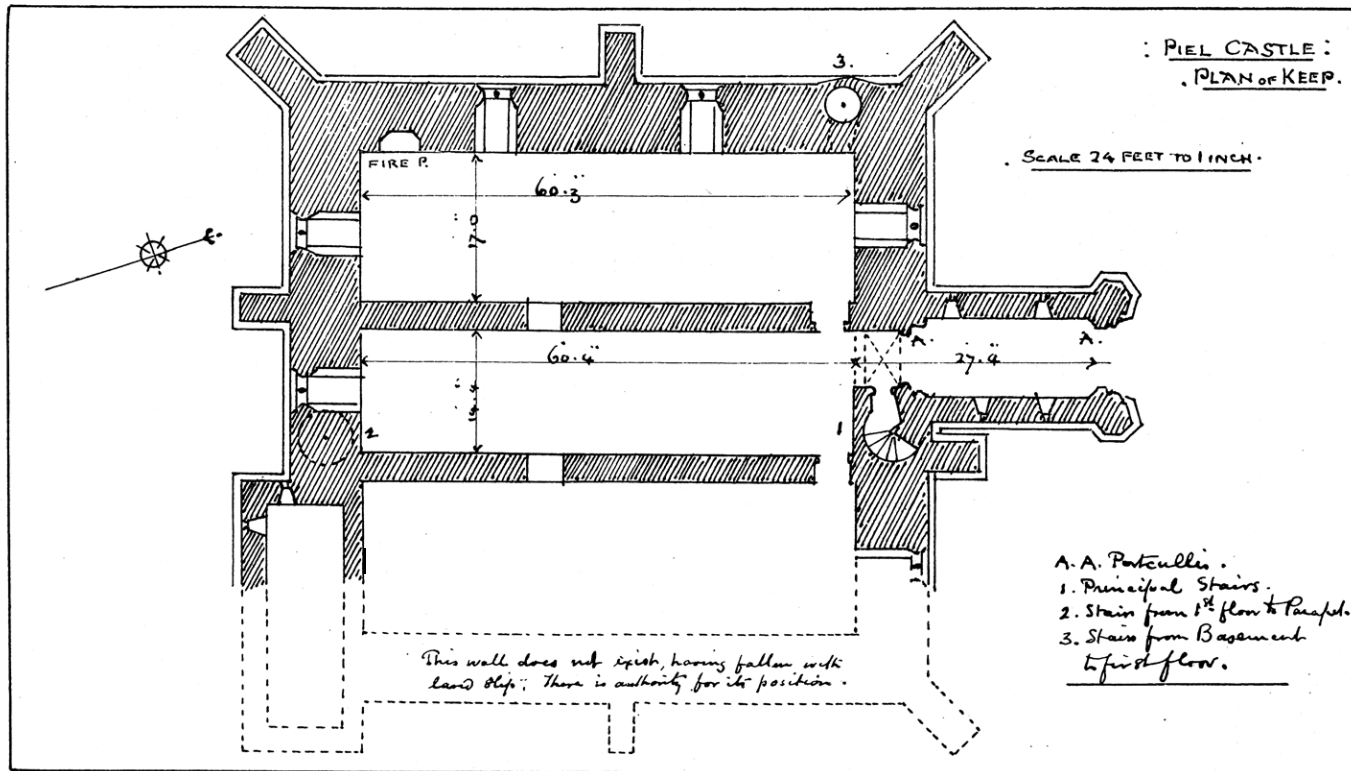
place since 1230, and I am inclined to think that at that date the island terminated about Southend farm, where the solid marl ends, and it is not impossible that Piel joined on without the intermediate strait. Bass Pool and Piel Castle, therefore, stood in the fair way into the harbour, alike a friendly beacon to guide friends in, and a grim fortress to keep foes aloof.

The main characteristics of Norman baronial castles are followed in the design of Piel Castle; it consists of keep, inner and outer baileys. Probably the first entrance was on the side of the New Inn, and I will suppose you standing there, and outside the farthest ditch, which is 20 feet deep and 30 feet wide at the top. At first sight it would appear that this ditch was as usual intended to offer a water barrier outside the walls. This can hardly be so if the formation of the ground outside has undergone no change, because the level at the north-east tower is so much the highest that before it was submerged the north-west angle of the moat must have been overflowing. And yet there have been found both in this and the inner ditch, as well as in a garden just outside the western wall, clear indications of clay puddle laid so as to show that water in considerable quantities was stored, and this could hardly have been for any other purpose. Looking, however, at the ease with which each end of the ditch could have been drained to the sea by besiegers, I am forced to express my belief that, if a wet ditch at all, it must have only been at the north-western tower, and tailed out a short distance either way. The outer entrance has entirely disappeared. In the position where it might have been, on the north wall, are some apparent traces of an inside footing, which might be worth following up, but I confess to a difficulty in the entire absence of the bridge or causeway over the moat. The north-east tower has lost its sea side; it is 14 feet square, and of two stories; it has a wooden floor; and this description will apply nearly



PIEL CASTLE :  
PLAN OF KEEP.

SCALE 24 FEET TO 1 INCH.



nearly to all the outside towers. It has a singular projection into the courtyard, hard by a buttress, which I cannot explain.

Close adjoining, observe, what was undoubtedly the chapel, in which you have an opportunity, through recent excavations, of observing the foundations of the altar and its two steps, together with the bottom of a quatre-foil window, some window tracery, and some small portions of glass and lead from the south window. The drain for the water, used in cleaning the holy vessels, is seen beneath. The chapel is about 34 feet by 15 feet, and could not have held more than half the garrison at one time. At the extreme eastern corner of the chapel notice a buttress bottom, where, in sandstone quoins, you will see the fillet appearing under the plinth, as contrasted with the underneath feather-edge finish of the adjoining string-course of the wall, showing a different and, probably, much more recent style; and, again, the quantities of shells in the mortar, as compared with the very slight admixture in the old part. I am in doubt again about a buttress at the same point, with its top finish quite distinct, and which must have inevitably blocked up a loop hole in the second story. Journeying now west, along the wall, you will see that the ascent to the battlements was by narrow flights of steps let into the wall. The upper floor of the turret was reached from the rampart level, and again another stair lead to the roof, protected by a slight parapet wall. This and most of the ramparts are curved, some outwards and some inwards. The north-western tower seems to have been built by itself; headstones have been left to tie in with the line of the walls afterwards, and these ties not having sufficiently broken joint, and the mortar having set before the adjoining wall was built, the new never adhered and easily broke off. Each tower is apparently open on the upper floor to one of the ramparts.

The walls are about eight feet thick, and, in addition  
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to the raised battlements, which may have been pierced for firing or not, afforded ample space for the beat of the sentries. The sandstone copings, which, doubtless, surmounted the walls, have probably assisted in the farms of the neighbourhood, as they would be easily dislodged, for we find they were favourite missiles to fling on the heads of besiegers who ventured too close to the walls. The wall connecting the two western towers has disappeared. The south-western tower is similar to the others.

On leaving it, is seen the last piece of the fortifications of the outer bailey. It leaves the tower diagonally and points in the direction of the corresponding tower on the inner line; this clearly proves the little alteration in the foreshore here, and the connection between the walls of the inner and outer baileys. Recurring to my remarks on a similar appearance at the west, and connecting the two, they are to my mind especially valuable as justifying us in filling up, exactly as we should expect, the remainder of the enclosure seawards with one wall, a very few feet beyond the present cliff.

Crossing the court, we reach the second causeway, the moat, and barbican of the inner bailey. On entering, the socket is visible at the bottom on the right of the doorway, into which was set a shoe to receive the pin of the beam on which swung the drawbridge. The chains from its out-end passed through two of the oilet holes looking out of the second story. Just inside is the groove in which worked the grating or portcullis, its usual position, just showing its teeth on a level with the springing of the doorway.

There may or may not have been an inner ordinary door. In the floor above, lately boarded over, is a fire-place with its flue carried up the wall, and curiously turned out to its front. There is also in the corner one of the five garderobes remaining; in this case probably combined with a loophole. Many of these loopholes appear, by-the-by, all round the corner towers, so placed that there is no corner where

where a foe could find secure lodgement even if he gained the inside of the walls.

The southern tower of the inner bailey was about 10 feet by 20, and reduced in thickness in the upper story; the return tower is an irregular pentagon, and its lower floor has no light; it was probably used as a place of temporary confinement; and last the eastern tower, on the extreme verge of the cliffs, shows how curiously the builders of this time contrived small passages. This terminates our tour of the fortifications of the outer and inner baileys. Foes would first have to force the outer, then the inner bailey, and would then find themselves in front of the donjon or keep. The entrance of the outer bailey looks north, and that of the inner west.

The keep has an outer portcullis, then a chamber and a second portcullis within, passing under which you have above one of the few instances of vaulting in the whole castle; it is resorted to in two floors to carry the great thickness of the wall. You are now undoubtedly in the guard chamber on the middle story of the building. Had the block been entire, you would have had a room beneath and one above; also three rooms on each side. That immediately underneath, the guard room, would appear to have been reached by a staircase which has disappeared, and was probably a prison and an arm store.

I am doubtful how to distribute the other rooms. Naturally we look to the staircases, and find the main one ascends from the left of the entrance within the guard-room. It is seven feet wide, and, ere ruthless hands had robbed it of its windows, was very handsome. This commanded the top floor, and also the battlements, and a passage ran in the thickness of the wall to the room above the entrance chamber, from which a narrow stair again conducted to the leads of this part. Notice in this passage the contrivance for giving light to the west of the entrance. The second staircase is out of the west chamber to the  
third



third story, missing the second, and again there is a small one from the third story to the ramparts. There is a fireplace in each floor of the west block or wing. I conjecture that the ground floor of this west part was the governor's stores and cellar; the second floor devoted to himself and any guests of his own grade; the first floor to soldiers; and the basement to the left is, of course, now impossible to describe. On this theory, the soldiers on guard would command every one entering. They could mount to the room over the porch or its leads, and to the main battlements. The governor, on entering or leaving his apartments by the grand staircase, would be self contained. He was provided with a private stair to the lookout, and, as before mentioned, to the basement, but only one part of it. I have tried to appropriate first one side and then the top floor to the men, keeping the governor below; but on examining the doors from one block to the other and the stairs, I find awkward difficulties in every way but that I suggest.

The three basements, for I speak of the fallen one as if perfect, have occupied an area of 76 feet by 80 feet, and the total height has been 45 feet. There were two centre and four corner turrets beautifully vaulted, or corbelled out from the wall. The slits in the wall of the basement are so slight that they could have only served for ventilation, not light. The windows of the chamber above have been handsome, with a centre mullion and a quatre-foil above; they are all as nearly as possible alike, and remains of the tracery appear still. In the deep recesses have been seats. The whole of the floors have been of board, and the roofs of lead. A curious flue may be seen from the fire-place in the basement of the western block, and two garderobes. Observe the sandstone ashlar to the staircase leading from the third floor of the battlements. It is repeated several times in the building. For narrow walls, the round cobbles did not permit sufficient strength, and square  
ashlar

ashlar was substituted. If you ascend by the ladder to the corner turret, you will be repaid by the careful work visible in the dressing of the sandstone in the only piece of the battlements remaining—and be enabled to form a very good idea of the effect of the turrets. At the extreme south-east of the keep will be noticed a basement wall 11 feet thick, in which, at the level of the second floor is constructed a narrow chamber which was evidently reached through the room which has succumbed to the waves. Above is a splendid instance of good corbelling out to increase the size of the rooms above. The floors here do not correspond in level with those of the main part of the building. To the second, a few steps must have led down from governor's floor, and access to the third is by his staircase. I should be inclined to call the lower the state prison, the small one above, the private chapel, and the upper, which has been luxuriously lighted, either a guest-room or a ladies' chamber. Outside the building are noble buttresses, enriched with sandstone lavishly, and, could we replace the robbed quoins, the torn down parapets and turrets, and, more important still, reproduce the delicate tracery of the windows, the castle would have been massively grand. It only remains to notice the fallen portions. West's second edition contains a woodcut with this standing. W. Gelderd, who kept the Walney lighthouse ten years before the battle of Waterloo, used to describe it, and I believe it fell in 1820. One block weighs 150 tons, and is proof that we, with our skill, cannot rival the building art of the fourteenth century.

I may say that at the restoration, this castle, with manors, was given to the Duke of Albemarle by Charles II.; through him it has passed by descent to the Duke of Buccleuch. His Grace some time ago gave instructions that the grand staircase and battlements should be restored, and the whole of the walls covered with cement to arrest further decay. How faithfully his wishes have been

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carried

carried out by the zeal of his representative Mr. Wadham, advised by Mr. John Harrison as architect, you now see, and I cannot conclude without asking you to join with me in thanking the Duke for the preservation of this fine ruin, not only for the sake of Barrow, but of all antiquaries.

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On the conclusion of Major Harrison's very interesting description, some discussion took place; great interest was excited by a curious carving over the gateway to the inner court, representing a female figure in a contorted attitude, with a human head in its hands. Various guesses were hazarded, but Mr. Lees has since conjectured, with great probability, that it is Salome dancing before Herod with the head of John the Baptist, a common subject in mediæval MSS., pictures, &c.

The reparations effected by order of the Duke of Buccleuch were highly approved, and Mr. Wadham, his representative, explained the method that had been adopted, of having no plans or drawings, but of getting the best workmen that could be got, and setting them to imitate the old work before their eyes, wherever it was necessary to replace decaying stone work. Major Harrison was heartily thanked for his interesting descriptive paper, and, in reply to Mr. Jackson of St. Bees, said that he had no doubt the Barrow Naturalists' Field Club, for whom he originally read the paper, would be glad to afford the Cumberland and Westmorland Society the opportunity of publishing it in connection with their proceedings. A cordial vote of thanks was accorded to the Duke of Buccleuch for the great interest he had taken in the preservation of the ruin, and for the great liberality he had displayed in its restoration. Mr. Wadham suitably replied.

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