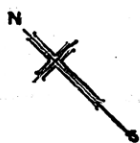
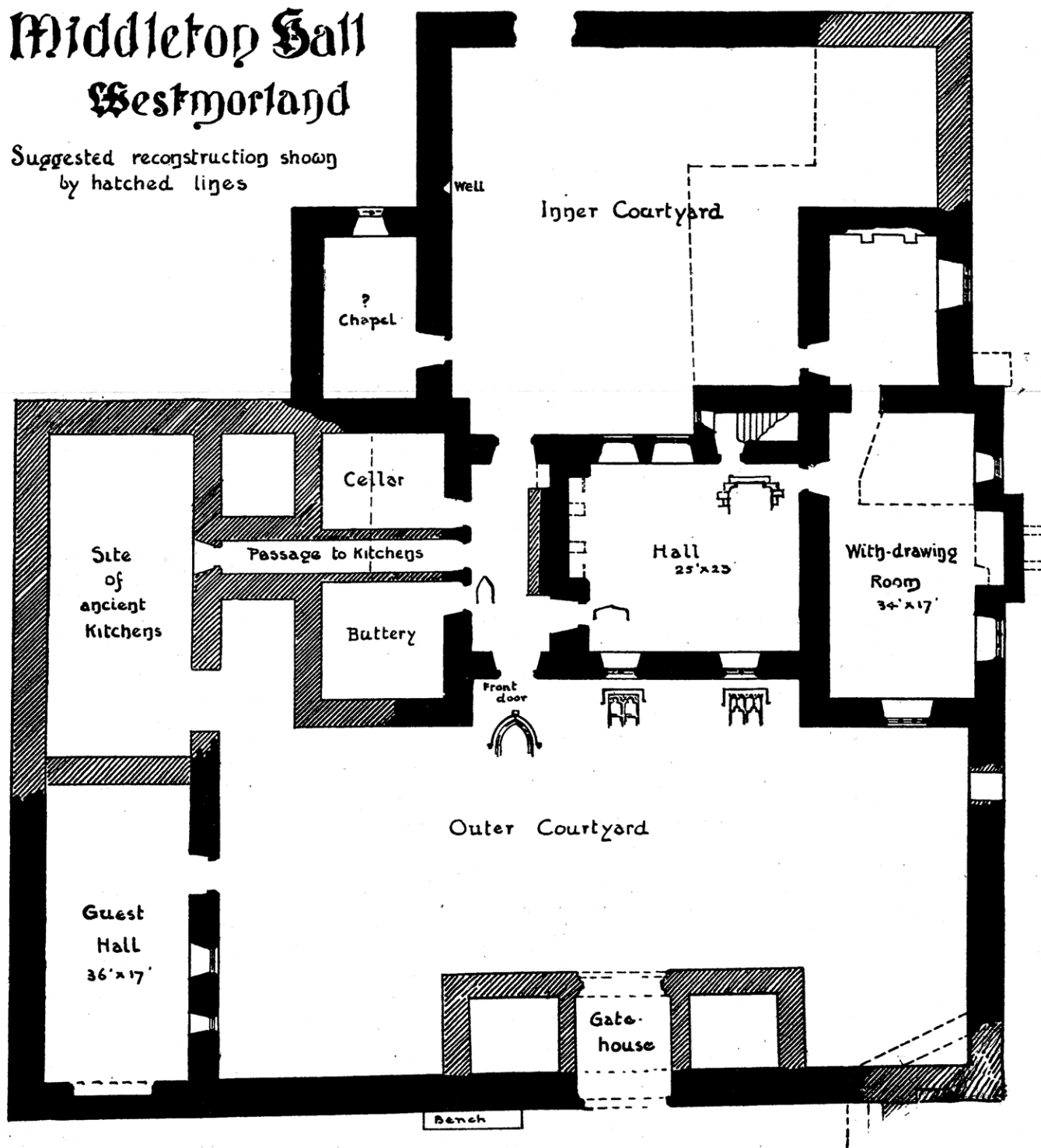


Middletop Hall Westmorland

Suggested reconstruction shown
by hatched lines



Scale of feet
0 5 10 15 20 25 30

John P. Carver
4. ix. 1911

ART. X.—*Middleton Hall, Westmorland.* By JOHN F. CURWEN, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

Read at the site, September 7th, 1911.

THE manor of Middleton was conveyed in 1279 by Richard de Preston to Henry de Kennet and Euphemia, his wife, whose posterity probably assumed the name of their manor. (Fines, 7 Edward I.) For within two generations we find that a certain Thomas de Middleton was settled here and that the direct male line continued for ten more generations. John Middleton, the lord in the troublous times of the Civil Wars, suffered both in person and property ; three of his sons were slain fighting in the Royal cause and his lands were greatly diminished. His grandson was in possession when Sir Daniel Fleming wrote his description in 1671, but within the year the line ended in his two daughters, Bridget and Mary. The property was then sold to a certain Benjamin Middleton, of no relationship, who afterwards sold it to a Dr. Adam Askew, with whose descendants it continued until early in the nineteenth century.

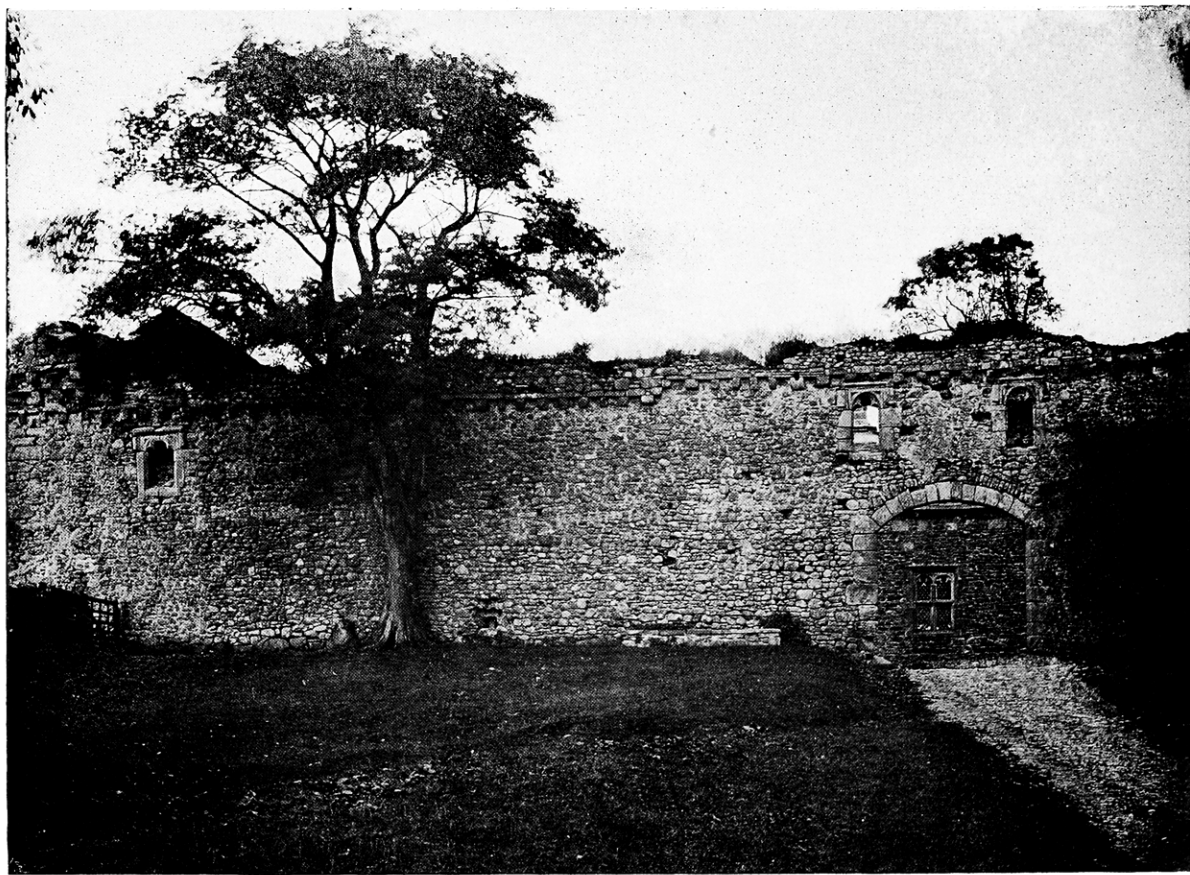
As Thomas de Middleton settled here in the reign of Edward III. (1327-1377) we are left to surmise that there must have been an earlier abode of the type of a fourteenth century tower. The present structure, however, dates from the fifteenth century and it is interesting to notice that it has not been erected around the pele, as was the custom, but started afresh on an entirely new plan—a central hall with wings at either end and the hollow spaces between them made into courtyards protected by high embattled walls. Such were the manor houses of the fifteenth century, and although less defensive they cer-

tainly were more adapted to the rapidly growing desire for family convenience and hospitality.

The curtain surrounding the southern courtyard here we find to be 4 feet 6 inches thick, built of good limestone without any plinth, offset or buttress. The rampart walk was some 18 feet above the level of the court and the closely arranged series of unhewn corbel stones, still existing, supported a crenellated parapet. In like manner a portion of the curtain surrounding the northern courtyard remains standing. It is not so high as that protecting this court ; the corbelling is smaller, but it has clearly carried a crenellated rampart.

The extent of the frontage is about 40 yards, in the centre of which stands the gatehouse, with a stone bench beside it whereon those who awaited the opening of the gate could rest. The gate is 11 feet wide, rebatted for heavy doors, and architecturally it is interesting to notice that while the jambs are chamfered, the arched head is square. Within, some of the jamb stones project, showing the position of the passage walls ; whilst without, the line of corbel-stones is raised, showing the full width of the guard-house above. Two windows remain, each of a single light, trefoiled and cusped beneath square drip-stones ; also a fireplace, the flue from which slopes outward to run up the battlements and thus avoid the rampart walk. Between it and the adjoining window can be seen an outlet for draining the walk, coming out through one of the corbel stones.

When one considers that this gatehouse must have had a certain depth it is surprising to realize how very narrow the courtyard must have been and how dark and cheerless the outlook from the hall windows. Yet it is this very sunless feeling, where comfort was sacrificed to protection, and the fairly original condition of the buildings, which make Middleton such an interesting specimen of the old-time manor-house.



MIDDLETON HALL: CURTAIN WALL AND GATEWAY.
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MIDDLETON HALL ENTRANCE.

High up over the entrance to the hall are four ashlar stones, the two centre ones of which bear in incised characters the conjoined initials J.M. for the John Middleton of Royalist days, and the date 1607; but clearly these stones are insertions and misleading regarding the age of the building. The door beneath is of the fifteenth century, with its pointed arch--moulded and furnished with a head-bossed dripstone and surmounted by a shield bearing the almost defaced saltire. It leads into a passage that passes right through the house to the courtyard at the back, and naturally we find it at the lower end of the hall, forming the "screens."

To the left there are three original doorways with pointed arches, plainly chamfered, that led to the demolished kitchens and to the butteries, which are now in ruins. We are unaccustomed to this triple arrangement in the north, as it resembles more the plan adopted in colleges and the manor houses of the south, but we know from these that the centre door led into a narrow passage between the buttery and cellar, to an ample kitchen beyond. Mr. Winster, of the local inn, says that he well remembers it and that it would be some 56 years since it was pulled down to make room for the new barn.

Between this kitchen and the front curtain there is a large guest hall measuring some 36 feet by 17 feet, which is now used as a stable, but the wide open fireplace can still be discovered in the end wall, and we are told that before Mr. Askew sold the property he had all the oak panelling removed from the walls and sent to Conishead Priory. Above were sleeping chambers and a beautiful fifteenth century window still remains, piercing the front curtain. The block had probably a flat pitched roof, as the exterior line of corbels, on the north-west side, suggests that the battlemented rampart continued around to join the curtain protecting the northern court.

On returning to the entrance we shall find, on the right-

hand side of the passage, an elliptic-headed door doubly planked in oak, which leads into the hall. This apartment measures 25 feet by 23 feet; it is of one story, but whether or no it was ever open to the roof, as some writers say, is very questionable. The ancient fire-place has been partially built up but the chamfer of its 13-feet arch span can easily be traced beside the doorway. The two perpendicular windows on either side as well as the elliptic-headed door are clearly of the sixteenth century and therefore insertions. I can give no history of this restoration but it is reasonable to suppose that they were inserted by John Middleton about the year 1542, when he erected the oak panelling and otherwise transformed the building. Why he made the windows of different size and pattern is a wonder. On the outside a stone shield is raised on one of the mullions but the heraldic device has weathered away. Machel in his MSS. (vol. ii., p. 241) refers to some considerably defaced carved shields, displaying the Middleton arms and their alliances, as existing in the hall when he visited the place in 1691, but these have long since disappeared. The hall furniture is represented by two oak tables of the sixteenth century, one $9\frac{1}{2}$ feet long by 3 feet wide and the other 9 feet by $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide.

At the back of the hall there are two shoulder-headed doorways of Carnarvon form and another upstairs—but whence came they? It is a form of arch peculiarly distinctive of the fourteenth century, for where it has been copied in fifteenth century work, as at Isel Hall, we invariably find it debased by an endeavour to make the opening wider. But this is not the case here. Moreover, if the architect builder could form those delightful fifteenth century doorways to be seen in the entrance passage, what object would he have in perpetuating an obsolete form so inharmonious with the rest of his work? Therefore, unless we are prepared to say, considering also the windows,



MIDDLETON HALL: EAST SIDE.
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that the whole building has been made up from a job-lot of details, I must ask you to consider whether we have not here some most interesting remnants bespeaking the pre-existence of an earlier tower. Demolished, we can conceive of the rubble stones being worked in again for the new building, but may we not also conceive that these, the only dressed stones about the ruin, being too shapely for such a purpose were re-erected in their new surroundings?

One of these doorways leads into the withdrawing room, a long low-ceiled apartment, 34 feet by 17 feet, with a wide ingle nook. In later days it has been divided by a partition, when the walls of the southern half were covered with Tudor panelling enriched with scroll carving in the frieze. The inscription over the door, VENTVRVM . EXHOR-ESCO . DIEM . (I dread the coming day) is clearly the afterwork of some rude ignorant hand. Although it embodies the moral sentiment so generally expressed between the years 1650 and 1700, yet the letters are incised, a custom which did not come into vogue until the beginning of the eighteenth century. The mantelpiece in this room is obviously faked out of a bedstead head and erected so carelessly that the initials and date, J.M. 1670, read upside down.

The other shoulder-headed doorway from the hall leads to a much worn stone staircase communicating with the rooms above. The centre apartment is furnished with a Tudor arched fireplace, the spandrels being filled with two shields, one displaying the arms of Middleton, viz. :—argent, a saltire engrailed, sable, and the other Middleton impaling Tunstall of Thurland, viz. :—sable, three combs, argent. John Middleton married Anne Tunstall and was living in 1542; that is, about the time when the military aspect of the house would be transformed, the walls panelled with oak and the whole place modernized for greater comfort.

Behind the house there is a good-sized fish pond, and that other usual appendage, common to almost every manor house, the deer park, was destroyed in the year 1640, during the Civil Wars.
