

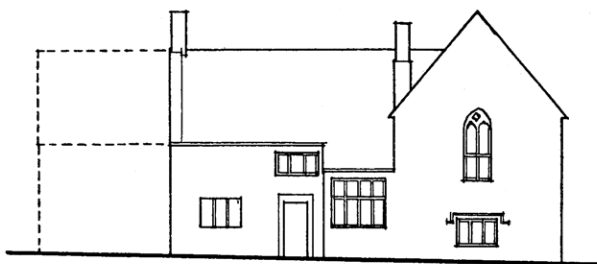
ART. VIII.—*Three medieval manor-houses of North Westmorland.* By R. W. BRUNSKILL, M.A., A.R.I.B.A.

*Read at the sites, July 12th and 13th, 1955.*

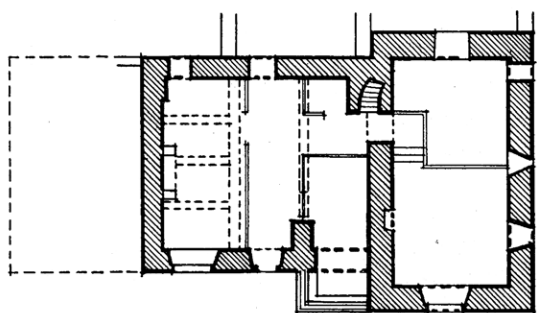
THE three houses here described — Kirkby Thore, Ormside and Gaythorn Halls — are examples typical in many respects of the manor-houses of North Westmorland in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries respectively. Together they illustrate the change in the minds of the owners of such houses, from the requirements of defence to the indulgence of comfort and the promptings of fashion. Each was of a miniature grandeur, distinguishing it from the surrounding farm-houses which were built in such flimsy materials that no contemporary examples have survived, as the dwelling of someone of importance locally. Although dissimilar in size, they were the houses of local gentry of comparable importance, thus illustrating the improvements of spatial standards during the three centuries; and in addition to increase in size each one illustrates an improvement in convenience, the last, Gaythorn Hall, approaching modern standards of comfort.

Each house will be described under the headings of location, plan development, staircases, walls, roofs, windows and decoration. The significance of the location of a *large house* (as distinct from a *small house* or *cottage*) may be seen on plotting the examples of such houses of medieval date on a map of the Eden Valley. Examples tend to form three groups: those marking the fringe of Inglewood forest<sup>1</sup> and concentrating on the barrier between the forest and the comparatively rich upper Eden Valley; those lying close to the banks of the Eden and

<sup>1</sup> Only one, with the distinctive name of Hutton-in-the-Forest, lies in Inglewood itself.



elevation



presumed  
service end

hall unit

bower end



14th. century

5 0 5 15 ft.

# KIRKBY THORE HALL

its principal tributaries; and those following the 1,000 ft. contour line. The other headings enable comparisons to be made between the three houses.

### I. KIRKBY THORE HALL.

Kirkby Thore hall<sup>2</sup> is something of a problem house. In location, staircase, walls, roof, windows and decoration it conforms to the general run of 14th century manor-houses in North Westmorland, but its plan-development differs in two important respects from the usual.

It is about half a mile from the Eden and thus falls into the second group of locations of medieval large houses. It stands in a certain isolation, being 500 yards from the parish church and a similar distance from the chief concentration of houses in the village; it is not so isolated as Gaythorn Hall, but more so than Ormside Hall.

The house has passed through several stages of plan-development during its life, but the original plan can be distinguished from subsequent additions and is rather unusual for its time. As a rule, the medieval manor-house consisted of three units: a central hall of one storey, flanked on one side by a service end (kitchen or buttery or pantry, usually of one storey) and on the other by a private end (bower, or solar, or parlour, often of two storeys). The 14th century portion of Castle Dairy, Kendal, and Howgill Castle, Milburn, both illustrate the arrangement. Where the manor-house occupied a pele-tower, a similar disposition was made vertically, the principal room being on the first floor, with service rooms below and private withdrawing rooms above, while a fighting platform occupied the top of the house.<sup>3</sup> Since occasion for defence was frequent, the 14th century manor-houses of North Westmorland usually had the

<sup>2</sup> *RCHM Westmorland*, 147; M. W. Taylor, *Old Manorial Halls* (= this Society's Record Series), 140.

<sup>3</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, 42.

private end of the house taken up to form a defensible tower, as at Yanwath, while sometimes both ends were taken up, as at Howgill. With either arrangement the walls of the tower were stoutly built and at least 5 ft. in thickness. At Kirkby Thore, however, only the hall and bower units remain, there is no provision for defence and the walls do not exceed 3 ft. in thickness.

The hall unit is at present divided into two floors and several rooms, but originally was a single room open to a roof of three bays divided by collar-beam "upper-cruck" trusses. There is no indication of an original wall fireplace and it is possible that there was a central hearth without chimney. The bower unit was of two floors, connected by a winding staircase which rose, as was customary, from the dais end of the hall. The upper floor of the bower unit was open to a roof of three bays with four trusses, apparently of "upper-cruck" shape. At the opposite end of the hall there is no trace of a service unit. This may have been an independent structure, or it is possible that the kitchen was contained in a timber continuation of the hall, but superficial examination reveals no sign of any structure or blocked doorway at this end of the hall. At Yanwath Hall the 14th century remains are of hall and bower end only, but a 15th century service end survives and probably replaces a 14th century stone or timber structure.

The bower wing retains a roof at what was presumably the original pitch, though probably not covered with the original roofing material. There is no indication that a flat fighting deck has even existed in contrast to Howgill Castle and Asby Rectory, where the remains of the corbelling for a parapet can be seen below the late pitched roof. In fact there is no indication of any provision for defence. As Clifton Hall, only a few miles to the west, was provided with a fortified tower wing at the turn of the 15th century and Smardale Hall, Waitby, built late in the 16th century, included corner turrets,

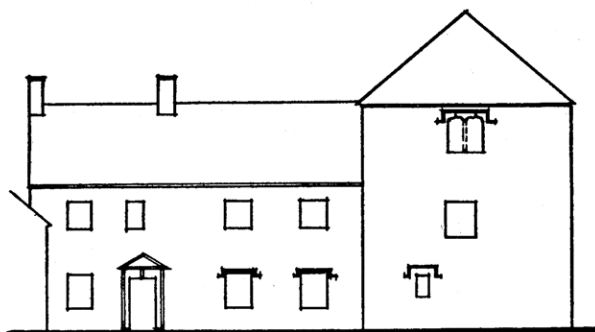
the pacific character of Kirkby Thore Hall is difficult to understand. It is not that the 14th century was one of comparative peace in the border counties. On the contrary, our President equates it with "War and Pestilence",<sup>4</sup> and in 1388 the Scots all but destroyed Appleby. Yet the architectural details of Kirkby Thore Hall are certainly those of the 14th century.

Although at present rendered and white-washed, the walls are of sandstone as one would expect in this part of Westmorland. The staircase is of stone, narrow, winding, and rises from the dais end of the hall. The roof is at present slated but it is unlikely that such material was used in the 14th century. The pitch is appropriate for stone flags but suitable also for thatch.

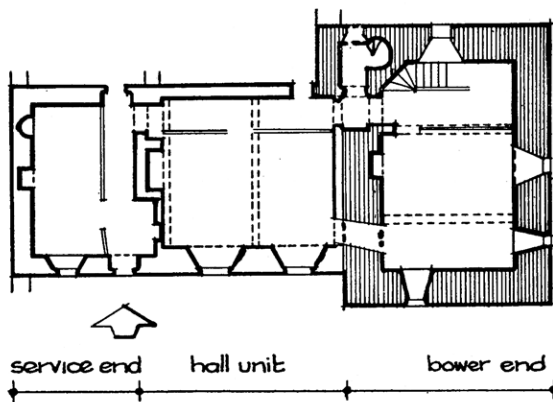
The windows illustrate the phases of development through which the house has passed. Both bower and hall retain 14th century type windows of two lights with transomes. The one lighting the first floor of the bower resembles the contemporary window of Asby Rectory, but though now blocked retains its iron grille, and it is unlikely that the window was glazed at this time. Projecting from the dais end of the hall is a bay window of 16th century form, and, in further improvement of the accommodation for the master of the house, there is a 16th century window lighting the ground floor of the bower wing and replacing the small original slots (of which one survives). In the hall again, a window of 17th century shape and mouldings lights the upper room which was formed on the insertion of a floor at this time. The lighting of the ground floor part of the hall was improved by the inclusion of a window of three lights with square-cut mullions, and early 18th century form in the locality. Finally the bower end was provided with tall sash windows during the 19th century.




Apart from the cusped and foliated mediæval windows, the only decoration of the building consists of a panel,

<sup>4</sup> *Prelates and People of the Lake Counties*, 63 ff.



elevation



 early 15<sup>th</sup> cent.  
 17<sup>th</sup> century  
 15 ft.

# ORMSIDE HALL

bearing the arms of the Wharton family, set in the SE. gable of the bower wing. Taylor mentions that there survived panelling of 16th century design at the dais end of the hall.<sup>5</sup>

Bearing in mind the additions and alterations of subsequent periods Kirkby Thore Hall remains substantially a mediæval house. There is no attempt whatsoever at symmetry. The principal part of the house was of one storey; in the two-storey bower portion the upper was much the more important; the lower being poorly lit by any standards and very poorly lit in comparison to the upper. Rooms were few, only three in the house as surviving, with probably one or two in a separate kitchen. There were no corridors and the wall was used as a circulation space. There was probably only one fireplace and it is unlikely to correspond with any of those existing. Windows, apart from the 19th century insertions, are mediæval in shape and detail. The original doorway does not survive but there are no signs that it was ever emphasised by porch or tower. Decoration was mediæval in character and bears no suggestion of Renaissance influence.

### ORMSIDE HALL.

Ormside Hall has suffered more destruction and reconstruction than either of the other two manor-houses, but sufficient remains to provide interesting details of the 15th century.<sup>6</sup> The house is on the banks of the Eden and so, like Kirkby Thore Hall, falls into the second group of locations. It is adjacent to the parish church and the village. As it lies at the foot of the mound on which the church has been built it may have formed part of a local defensive system.

In Ormside Hall, the mediæval three-unit plan of hall flanked by service and bower ends remains, but only the bower end is original, the hall and service end having been

<sup>5</sup> Taylor *op. cit.*, 141.

<sup>6</sup> *RCHM Westmorland*, 187.

rebuilt apparently in the 17th century. The bower end has three storeys: the ground floor, lit by two small windows (one of which has been altered), was probably a store; the first floor, lit by windows of 15th century and later type, was probably the principal bedroom. It retains a plaster frieze; the second floor is lit by two windows of 15th century design. A stone spiral staircase of which the first few treads survive originally linked the floors. It rose from the lobby which joined the dais end of the hall to the bower block. In standard of accommodation the bower end marks a definite advance on that provided at Kirkby Thore Hall. At Ormside there are three usefully sized and adequately lighted rooms; at Kirkby Thore there was one well-lit room and a dingy store.

It is difficult to decide whether the bower end ever provided a defensible wing. There is corbelling of the masonry at the present gable similar to that found at the foot of the crenellated parapets of surviving fortified bower ends (as at Yanwath Hall and Askham Hall) and similar to that which is held to indicate the former presence of a parapet at the contemporary Grange Hall, Asby. On the other hand there are no other indications of a parapet and in place of the stone-vaulted floor customary between ground and first storeys of defensible wings there is a wooden floor. The needs of defence, therefore, cannot have been taken very seriously.

The existing hall and service ends bear door and window mouldings suggesting a 17th century date. Both are of two storeys, as usual by that time. The main entrance of the house gives on to a passage which crosses from front to back of the service end. The principal fireplace of the house is placed in the wall dividing hall unit from service unit; the hall is entered around the fireplace at the far end of the cross-passage. This arrangement was customary at least in the late mediæval manor-houses of Westmorland, e.g. Middleton Hall, Castle



Dairy, Kendal, Yanwath Hall, and was almost universal in the 17th and early 18th century yeoman's houses in the Eden Valley.<sup>7</sup> Unlike Kirkby Thore Hall, the principal room of Ormside Hall is not open to the roof but lies beneath a bedroom.

Ormside Hall is built of sandstone as is to be expected in this part of the Eden Valley. The walls of the 15th century portion are 5 ft. thick, but those of the 17th century portion only 3 ft., though this is greater than the 2 ft. thickness customary in *small houses* of the period. The original spiral staircase was apparently retained in the 17th century alterations but replaced in the 19th century by a wooden staircase of conventional construction. The roof of the whole block is at present slated and may be original over the hall and service units; the problems presented by the roof of the bower end have already been discussed.

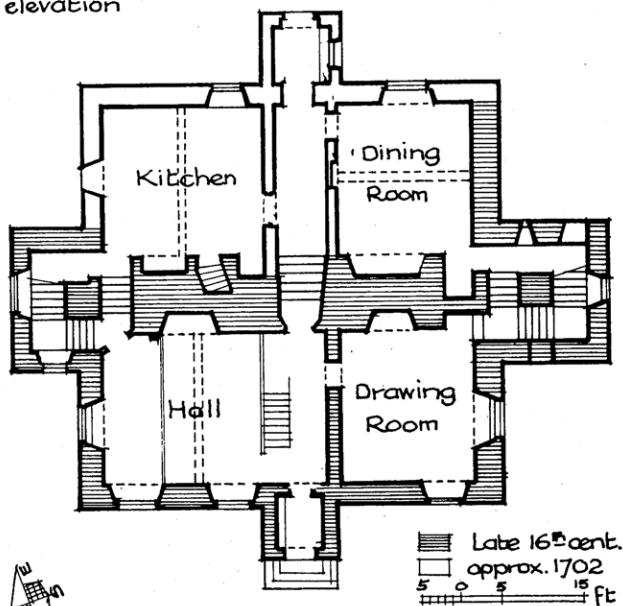
Windows of 15th century pattern remain in the two gable walls of the bower end. The cusped and foliated heads of the windows continue a mediæval fashion but the right-angled label mould which surmounts each pair of lights indicates a movement from the pointed arches of the 14th century windows of Kirkby Thore Hall to the square-headed 16th century windows of Gaythorn Hall. There are remains of windows of 17th century character in bower and hall units, but those in the hall have been mutilated by later enlargement and only the label moulds and some of the jambs remain.

Although mediæval in the disposition of its plan units and in much of its window detailing, there are signs of Renaissance influence at Ormside Hall in the 17th century doorway and plasterwork. The doorway has a moulded architrave and pediment surmounting an ornament key-stone (it is carved from a solid lintel) all in Renaissance style, but of proportions and detail so crude as to suggest

<sup>7</sup> *The Development of the Small House in the Eden Valley from 1650-1840* by the present writer, CW2 liii, 160 ff.



elevation



GAYTHORN HALL

little confidence in the new design. The plaster frieze in the principal bedroom is more promising, though of the same period, and is one of many examples of the popularity of this form of decoration in the Eden Valley during the 17th century.

In general arrangement, then, Ormside Hall follows 14th century pattern, but the multiplication of rooms and better utilisation of floor-space mark an advance on the former standards, while simplification in window detailing marks the beginning of a decline in the vigour of mediæval design anticipating its replacement by Renaissance imagination.

#### GAYTHORN HALL.<sup>8</sup>

Gaythorn Hall is located close to the 1,000 ft. contour line in a most isolated situation, and it must be a source of surprise to any travellers that such a substantial house should occupy such a wild and lonely position. Yet there are several comparable examples at the head of the Eden Valley: Grange Hall, Asby, nearby is one; Smardale Hall, Waitby, is another. Lying in such an isolated situation Gaythorn Hall is far from any existing township, nor has any report come to light of the disappearance of a township, as at Mallerstang, for example.<sup>9</sup> The Hall is over two miles from the nearest church in contrast to Ormside Hall.

To a remarkable degree Gaythorn Hall remains as originally built. True the rear portion has been rebuilt, probably in 1702, the date cast in a rainwater head, but the re-building appears to be on the original plan, and although windows in this portion take the more fashionable upright rectangular shape, windows in the rest of the house appear to have been untouched.

There are on the ground floor a hall, parlour (drawing-room), dining-room, and kitchen; on the first floor, four bedrooms; on the second floor, two bedrooms, and in

<sup>8</sup> *RCHM Westmorland*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> *The History and Traditions of Mallerstang Forest*, W. Nicholls, 97-8.

the basement two cellars and a cell. At the front of the house there is a two-storey porch and on each side a projecting staircase wing. A modern staircase rises from a lobby now partitioned from the hall, but it is evident that the door from the front porch formerly opened directly into the hall. This room retains its long-established function as a circulation space since one of the principal staircases and the flight of steps leading to the other ground floor rooms both open from the hall. The other staircase opens from the parlour, thus echoing the association hitherto persisting between the bower end of a *large house* and its first floor rooms, and maintained in *small houses* for another 150 years. The designer of the house has shown admirable ingenuity in accommodating the change in floor level required by the slope on which the house is built within the two staircases and a flight occupying the thickness of the fireplace walls. Gaythorn Hall was built from the first as a multi-storey structure and in this represents an advance, typical of its period, on the earlier manor-houses such as Kirkby Thore Hall which may have included one or two multi-storey tower wings but had a single storey hall. Newby Hall is another good example of the same trend. However Gaythorn Hall differs from Newby Hall, and indeed all its contemporaries in the Eden Valley, in that the whole plan is two rooms in depth. This feature does not become characteristic of *large houses* until the late 17th and early 18th centuries (e.g. Mansion House, Eamontbridge, of 1685) and even during the 18th century, many *large houses* were built one room in depth (e.g. Manor House, Winton, 1726).

The two staircases are probably the most interesting features architecturally of the house. They consist of straight flights round a solid core of masonry. Each flight consists of steps cut individually from solid baulks of timber not from stone as in their immediate predecessors nor from separately jointed rises and treads of

timber planks as in their immediate successors and, indeed, in practically all modern wooden staircases. Thus the two staircases are examples of the rather unusual short-lived technique which made the transition from the stone spiral newel stair of the mediæval house to the wooden open well stair of the Renaissance house. One or two similar examples have been found by Fox and Raglan in Monmouthshire but are ascribed by them to the first quarter of the 17th century.<sup>10</sup>

The walls of Gaythorn Hall appear to be of carboniferous limestone rubble with sandstone dressings. In this they are typical of the houses of better quality in the limestone-producing portion of the Eden Valley, which add the superior finish of imported sandstone to the local limestone used for the general walling. A thickness of 3 ft. employed for most of the external walls of the house would have been inadequate for defensive purposes and may be contrasted with the thickness of 5 ft. employed in the portion of Ormside Hall built in the previous century.

The roof, probably original, of grey slate is such as would be expected on a house of this quality even at a period in which most other houses in the valley were still thatched. The unusually generous overhang at the verges and porch are worth note.

Windows at Gaythorn Hall are numerous, large, and thoroughly Elizabethan in appearance. Each window on the main elevation is of three or four lights transomed and surmounted by a label mould. The square shape of these windows illustrates the transition from long low mullioned windows of the later mediæval period to the tall narrow window of the period of Renaissance influence. The glass is in diamond panes set in lead cames and there are opening lights of wrought-iron. The severe shape of the windows at Gaythorn Hall contrasts strikingly with the cusped and foliated heads of windows surviving at Ormside Hall and Kirkby Thore Hall.

<sup>10</sup> *Monmouthshire Houses*, Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, 1955, III, 30, 32.

Decoration is displayed at Gaythorn Hall in the principal doorway, the fireplaces, and in plaster friezes. The designer of the building has devoted considerable attention to the entrance; he has stressed its importance in a two-storey panel; he has provided an outer doorway which, with its semi-circular arch and emphasised key-stone, is definitely Renaissance in character. In its shape the inner doorway retains the transitional character of the rest of the house, but on either side are carvings of a man and a woman, and above the flat sided "arch" of the head there is a carving of a memorial. Inside the house there is a plaster frieze of strapwork with acorn motif, probably of the last years of the 16th century, and comparable with those surviving at Blease Hall, Old Hutton; Calgarth Hall and Burneside Hall.

Although still a mediæval house, Gaythorn Hall presents several Renaissance characteristics. In general arrangement it shows a tendency to symmetry. It is not completely symmetrical, even in its main elevation, for the two staircases are dissimilar, but the aim of the designer has obviously been to dispose the elements of his composition equally about a centre line. Emphasis of the doorway by placing it on the centre-line and incorporating it in a multi-storey panel is another Renaissance characteristic. The house includes two full storeys, whereas earlier mediæval houses had a principal single-storey room. Staircases of some convenience and pretensions have replaced awkward but easily defensible spiral stairs. Higher standards of comfort and privacy have required a multiplicity of rooms to contain a household previously confined to hall, kitchen, and bower and decoration has just begun to turn for inspiration to third-hand versions of the objects of antiquity which had come into favour in Italy 150 years before.