

## The South Court of Codnor Castle.

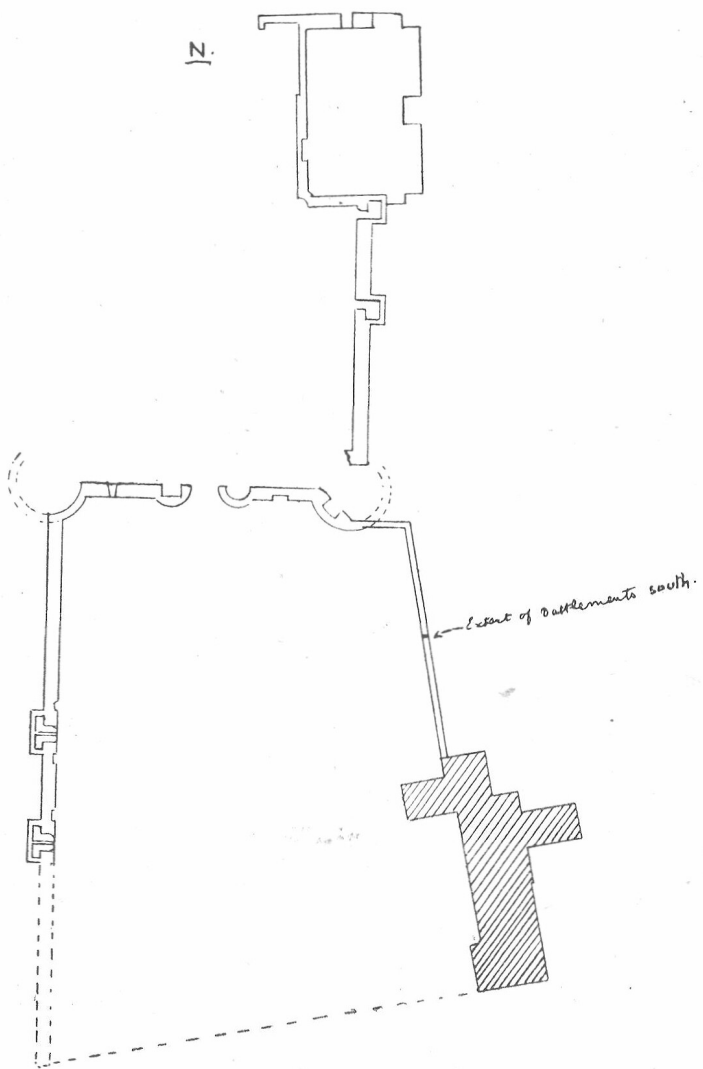
By WILLIAM STEVENSON.

### (A)—INTRODUCTORY NOTES.

LIVING in this picturesque county for nigh upon a dozen years and within easy reach of the ruins of this one-time great house of the barons Grey and Zouch, I was led to study that little is left by the hand of time, to which a use, or an approximate date, can now be assigned. The oldest half of the castle, that north of the crumbling south-bastions is reduced to a gaunt standing mass of dangerous walls, whose last remnants of dressed masonry was destroyed in a storm about five years ago. From first to last we have evidence that local thin-bedded sandstone, known as "Skerry," was the main building material, sparingly intermixed with bricks, whose presence in this stone-county registers a late if not a Tudor date.

The south curtain wall of the old part which included the remains of the Gate-house, retains a small Gothic window of interest, which well up in height looks south into the garden of the attached castle-farm or habitable part of the old buildings; this, in its curvilinear lines, dates *temp* Edward III (1327-1377), when that part took a defensive form we are still able to trace. One here regrets that Buck's eighteenth century view of this castle omitted this important feature and all others south of it, and that its lines of perspective are too indifferently drawn to be of use to a twentieth century student of ruins.

With these remarks the question of this north part



Ground Plans of Ruins of  
Condor Castle  
L. O. C. to L. S. S. S.  
W. J. Langton



1.—PLAN OF CONDOR CASTLE RUINS,

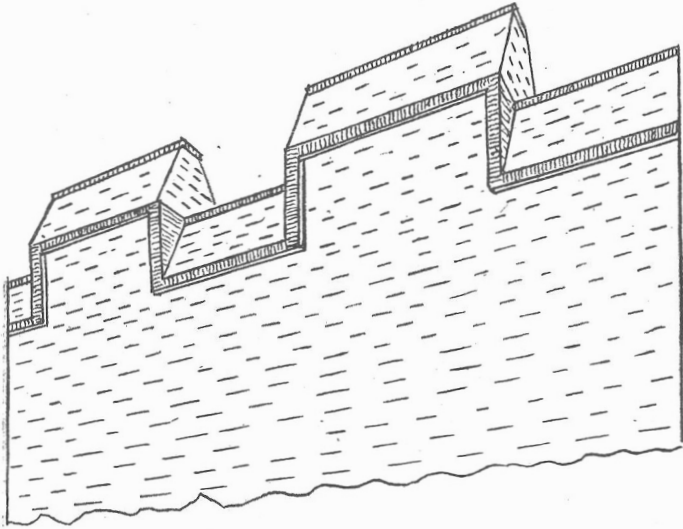
or half, now mainly bald ruins, may here be ruled out or dismissed. The "garden," above alluded to we will now call by its old name—"The South Court." Its north-bound is the old castle's curtain-wall, its towers or bastions and its south Gate composed of two entrances, or what is left of their crumbling masonry.

(B)—THE EAST BOUNDARY.

The east-bound is a surviving part in length of a stone wall of no great height, one hitherto passed over as "modern," but of considerable interest, that informs us it was originally capped with an embattlement or with stepped copings of a late gothic character; the low parts the *embrasures*, and the high parts the *merlons*; the design and age is such as was usually enriched with a *string-course* of wrought masonry, here the order went forth that local stone should be used, and if anything further was required, bricks were to be pressed into service. Hence we have nothing in the east wall of this south court beyond hammer-dressed work in local thin-bedded sandstone, with a touch of decoration in brickwork. As walls of this age are now rarely met with in a perfect or even a readable state in their upper parts, we have here an object of sufficient interest to engage attention, or to warrant a passing note.

No. 2 diagram is drawn in angular perspective as a restoration of part of the original wall on paper: the light portion, "rod-lined," is stonework, the dark part is brickwork; the bricks hand-made, and possibly clamp-burned, are  $9\frac{1}{2}$  inches long,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches broad, and  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches in thickness. The ends of the bricks only are shown on the wall-face, and each one is bedded on the flat. It thus follows that the vertical lines are  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches broad, and the horizontal ones only  $2\frac{1}{4}$  inches deep. This was a breach of the laws of true masonry caused by the strange character of the material used. The con-

nection of the two horizontal lines in this class of military architecture (that also found place with church builders) by the introduction of vertical lines, is a dating feature,

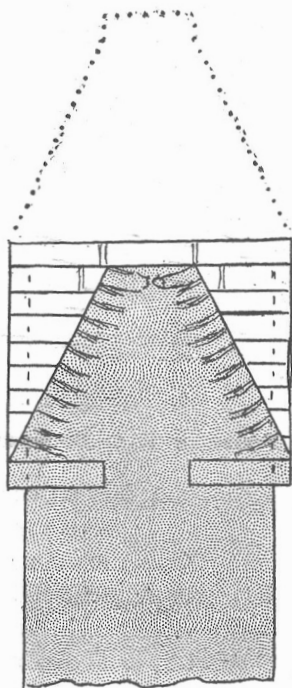


2.—ORIGINAL FINISH OF EAST BOUNDARY WALL.

as also is the use of bricks in this county; taking them jointly it would be unsafe to rate this construction earlier than the reign of Henry VII, which commenced in 1485.

No. 3 diagram is a measured section of this castle wall, hitherto rated as modern, which, although military in style, is civil in its character, or shows a settled time or state of life to have then obtained in the country, as it is only twenty-four inches in its thickness (which stands for a scale), and has no rampart or works on its inner side. The dark or shaded part shows the full height to which the masonry is traceable, and—as its thickness there is equal to the length of a brick—it is fair to presume it was originally capped with a row of such material; this final capping is thus based on assumption. These

coping stones, each only about two inches in thickness, are—strange to say—not bedded on the horizontal plane but dip inward; this was evidently done to avoid a stepped appearance in the several courses. One would now taboo this system as tending to collect water, but in practice it seems to have answered. The wedge-shaped bed-courses are “toothed” into the *merlons* at either



3.—SECTION OF EAST BOUNDARY WALL.

end of the *embrasures* where they occupy the places of the lowest bricks in the vertical parts of the ornament.

Above this dark part of the section one course of bricks (as shown) can be traced; this is the upper horizontal course in the design. On both faces the bricks project beyond the masonry—two to two and-a-half-inches.

The coping of the *merlons* has long gone the way of all flesh ; it need scarcely be said it was a repetition of that of the embrasures here shown on the merlon in " dotted-line." The north end of this wall is a short angular return that trends westward to the south-eastern bastion of earlier castle-building date ; see plan ; the south end has been shortened—at a date beyond living memory—by or for the erection of the dairy buildings of the adjoining or lineable-castle farm residence, which in itself, although largely of brick, may date back, in the stone mullioned windows, to the sixteenth century.

(C)—THE WEST BOUNDARY.

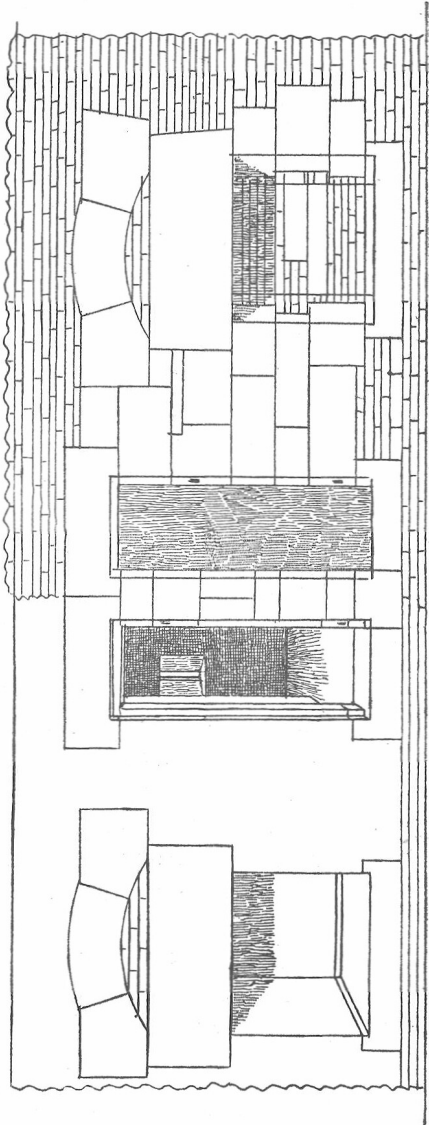
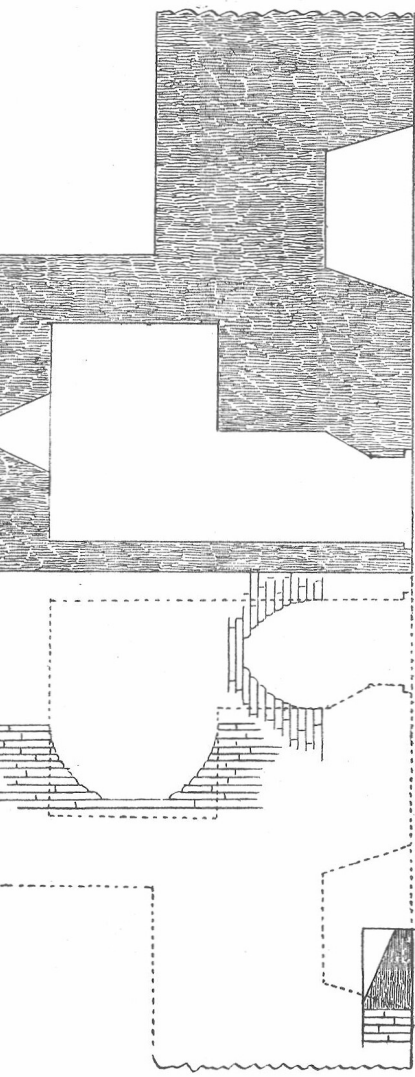
Turning to the west side of this south court of the castle—now a garden—we find it bounded by an immense stone wall ten or more feet high, and five feet three inches in thickness—flat, but without finish at the top—and wholly innocent of brickwork and dateable features ; its north end abuts upon the face of the old castle wall, to which it is clearly a late adjunct or addition ; the original south end of this wall is not in existence to-day, hence there is no clue where it extended to. With the exception of *two points* in its present definable length it is a solid mass of thin-bedded masonry, somewhat disturbed by intruding roots of great trees, which until recently were allowed to grow upon the top. Its original occupation—whatever that may have been—is gone ; its present one is the garden wall. The " two points " alluded to are projections of four feet each for the length or stretch of thirteen feet, on the west, the field, or outer face of the wall, in each of which there are or were until recently two narrow slits or lights, which throw light into the same number of mural chambers ; these slits at first sight have the appearance of arrow-slits in watch or defence towers ; but in detail, or in thickness of walls they do not conform to this view and in being

only shoulder high from the ground could not, one would think, have been planned for offensive or defensive purposes.

Stephen Glover, in his *History, &c. of the County of Derby*, 1833 (vol. II, p. 342), has the following:—"On the south side [of the old castle] there was formerly a large square court . . . . the wall on the west side of the court is yet standing, in it are two large recesses, which were probably used as watch-houses." His stand was on the east or court side of this wall, where each—viewed as a "watch-house"—contains two mural chambers, thus four in all; which two recesses appear to have divided the original length of this great wall into three parts or sections.

Diagram No. 4 is a measured plan and elevation of one such recess or couple of mural chambers, which shows the thickness of the main wall (5 feet 3 inches) and a considerable portion of fine or tooled masonry in large blocks, constructed to carry some great superimposed weight or weights. The left hand half shows in perspective what was clearly intended as a fire-place, with a deep head or mantel, and a 'relieving' or 'discharging' arch above it: the doorway here gives a view into the mural chamber, showing the narrow 'light-slit' and its deep inner splay. The ground plan in this half gives a section of this mantel stone, showing its thin lower edge so treated for the free passage of smoke: there are or were flues in the wall above, in all four instances. The mural chamber here gives sections of the arch vaults overhead and their horizontal mode of construction out of thin sandstone slabs, each course "sailing," or "tailing" over until the respective spaces are covered. This is indeed a primitive mode of treatment—one seen, in one instance, on a larger scale in the older part of this castle.

Touching the four fire-places, one has practically fallen to ruin, another has an oak plank built in, which gives



4.—MURAL CHAMBERS IN THE WEST WALL.



it the appearance of a cupboard; in one instance the mantel-stone is rudely cut away, or arched in the lower edge, to convert the recess into a seat, i.e., to give it head-way. There are hooks for door bands as shown, and the shallow rebates in the stone jambs prove that the doors were light, made of two thicknesses of boards nailed together, one set vertical, the other horizontal; no doors now remain. There is no evidence of glazing the "light-slits" of the small apartments or of any fittings therein, nor can any damage be traced by fires kindled in the fire-places. The hooks show wear from door bands, and the jambs have bolt or lockholes mostly broken away.

#### (D) THE SOUTH BOUNDARY.

The consideration of a bound of this character brings us up against a question difficult if not impossible to answer. There is nothing here but what falls by easy gradient down to the modern farm buildings, and the great rudely built stone dovecot. The ground floor level of the farm house is below that of this court, which in itself has the appearance of the ground being lowered in the northern part and raised in the south before the line of that house was reached; but assuming there was a boundary of some description, it might be fixed by recovering that of the south end of this great western wall, which might be done by applying the length of the north section from the old castle curtain to what Stephen Glover would call "the most northern recess," to the like wall south of the most southern recess; this would fairly well extend it the dovecot way (see plan).

#### (E)—EXPLORATIONS.

It is "one touch of nature" that inclines a man investigating the remains of an old castle to run on military lines, or on that particular class of architecture; thus a first impression, on entering one of the above

mural chambers, is to rate it as originally a closet, otherwise, in the language of our Latin neighbours, a *latrine*, or a *garderobe*; a second thought—one calling for action—is to put that idea to the test of the spade; this has been done, taking one of the above four as an example. The ground has been delved both inside and outside without anything of the kind being found or proved; the contrary was fully demonstrated, the floor being capped and the foundations composed of slab-stones bedded in mortar. The doors, opening outward from these wall-chambers, and the free use of fireplaces, suggest the onetime presence of living rooms or apartments on the court side of this great wall—in what is now the garden—with a second wall supporting one half of a floor or roof overhead. No evidence of any such wall has been found, although the ground has been dug over and closely examined as a kitchen garden for time out of mind where walls have been suspected. Still, in support of this view, a short stretch of brick-paved floor, hidden in “wilds” and “nettle-beds,” clings to a section of the wall side or foot, one that might date from the building of the wall itself, or record a later piggery.

We know we are here treating of a time when buildings of stone had rarely cross partitions in them other than of wood and plaster, or “post and panel,” *alias* “post and pan.”

In searching along the inner face of this wall its construction is readable—no evidence of attachment of cross partitions is traceable, no making good of holes, or of obliterating the seats of pre-existing beams; but such divisions are certainly adumbrated in the walls separating the mural chambers, which would find place against the jambs that intervene between the pairs of narrow doors shown in the elevation, diagram no. 4, which are certainly seats of partitions or cross walls—onetime real or intended. In searching along the south or outer face of the curtain

wall of the older part of the castle, against which the most northern of such foreshadowed apartments would have abutted, no evidence of any passage-way or disturbance of the masonry can be seen on the ground or higher level; in other words no connection can be traced between the old castle's clearly military works and the new castle's civil or Tudor ones, lying immediately south.

(E)—EVIDENCE OF DATE.

Hereon, it must be admitted that the stones are silent, the walls are speechless, the builders have left no writing upon them, other than the style or fashion in which they conducted their work under slow but ever changing circumstances; facts which must be constrained to serve our purpose where actual dates are absent.

A glance at the east and west walls or bounds of this old south court of Codnor Castle, and the manner in which they abut, but do not coalesce, gives us a clear old and new date line; the brick introduction on the eastern wall of the court, and the large wrought masonry stones in the west wall, define that date as late in "the Gothic style" of building, which means in what is rated as its "perpendicular period," which obtained say 1399-1546 (or Henry IV—Henry VIII)—a middle date of which would be 1473. Of the two halves the latter is suggested, 1473-1546 which covers close upon a century. "The War of the Roses," in which we cannot trace the last Henry, Lord Grey of Codnor participating, terminated in 1485. The peace that followed was one of sunshine, in which the governing class came out of their walled-castles and moated-sites to enjoy the fresh air, build new houses, or enlarge or modernize their old ones. The last Lord Grey died, not childless, but without legitimate issue, in 1496. He, knowing the castle would not descend to his children, was not likely to enlarge

it ; nor were the last eleven years of his life—so close after the long war—favourable to him doing so had he been so minded. The new development in the building world called “The Renaissance,” was not the blossom of a day. J. Alfred Gotch, author of the monumental work *The Architecture of the Renaissance in England*, in his later *Early Renaissance Architecture in England*, adopts the dates 1500-1625, the latter marking the advent of Inigo Jones.

In the above 1496 the Castle of Codnor and its broad domains passed to an heiress, a brother's daughter, who, through her marriage, brought in the second son of William, Lord Zouch of Harringworth, Northants, in the person of Sir John Zouch, knight, as the new Lord of Codnor, who made this his capital residence, as did his posterity until the entail was brought to an end by agreement in 1634, when Richard Neile, Archbishop of York (1632-1640) and his descendants became the owners down to 1692.

During this 1496-1634 date, or Lord Zouch's occupation, we have proof that the above south court, works, or additions to the old castle of Codnor were wrought ; that proof being found in the west walls, their immense strength, extent, mural chambers and vacant fireplaces, which are survivals of a onetime built, or partly built, “Great Chamber,” or “Long Room,” a spacious feature which had then become the fashion or order of the day with the favoured few that composed the higher class.

#### (F)—THE LONG ROOM.

In the instance of Codnor Castle, the long room was on the first floor, which was invariably the case elsewhere ; the ground floor was divided into apartments mainly for the accomodation of visitors, hence the provision of fireplaces and mural chambers or storeplaces, the latter were utilizations of what would otherwise have been

solid masonry—as were the 5 feet 3 inches thick walls ; they may not have been common fitments, but dry, useful places, for immediately over them were the great open hearths of the fires in the long room proper, above which were three-flued chimnies carried up as great architectural features, two of which, in each of the two instances, belonged to the ground floor apartments. We thus see that along the west side of this long room there were two fires and two great fireplaces, mostly burning wood. It is not known which side, or whether one only, contained the windows of this great feature ; we know that those in the ground floor part would have an east prospect into or over the court, hence it is fair to presume that the large room, or great gallery over, was arranged in the same order, its view would be over the wall on the other side of the court, and away over the Erewash valley to the limestone hills of Nottinghamshire, hence the high finish or crenellation of that wall, as shown in Diagram no. 2. The great thickness of this wall is traceable to the work it had to perform ; it was two stories in height, and in the upper one had no cross or supporting walls, it so to speak carried a large sail, and had to be supported in that high position against wind pressure. In the weakest parts of the wall's length the chimney stacks were placed, which added an extra four feet, making nine feet, three inches in all ; this constructionally was making the chimney stacks do a second service—that of buttresses.

Of other “ long rooms,” within a few miles of Codnor Castle, in usable, altered, or ruined forms, those of Haddon and Hardwick Halls may be noted, as also Linby, and Kirkby-Hardwick, Notts., to which may be added Sheffield-Lodge. The latter was built aloft of timber, and its remains are locally known as “ Wolsey's walk.” Haddon and Hardwick, still in use, are well known. Mr. J. Alfred Gotch (as above, p. 224), says :—“ It is tolerably certain that Sir George Vernon [king of the

peak] had no such room as the Long Gallery." He credits the building of it—now the Ball Room—to his daughter Dorothy, which means Sir John Manners, her husband. In Hardwick we have a date, one evidently later than Codnor; like Wollaton it was a provision in an entirely new house. Linby was a new wing to an old Hall, and the only part, and that a very interesting one, to survive, as a farmhouse.

The above author (p. 223), says of the Long Gallery:—"It may have had its origin from reasons of display or in imitation of royal palaces, where its use as an ante room to the royal closet is easily understood." As now we may remark are the remains of "the South court of Codnor Castle."

#### (G)—THE WORK OF THE PLANS AND EXCAVATIONS

must be largely credited to Mr. A. J. Langton, of Codnor, who, as a diligent student of local history, has been a working partner from first to last in the above E. Derbyshire investigations. Another assistant to be named is Mr. W. H. Hanbury, of Derby.

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#### NOTE BY THE EDITOR.

More than a quarter of a century ago, an account of Codnor Castle was published in vol. XIV of this *Journal*, written by the Revd. Charles Kerry, then Editor. In vol. XV, p. 105, appears an account of a Font supposed to belong to the Chapel of the Castle, and giving other information about Codnor. The former article is illustrated by three engravings, one of which is that by Buck, dated 1727, alluded to above. This present article adds much interesting matter and more modern information and is the work of much diligent research. Readers, however, would do well to refer back to Mr. Kerry's article and compare the two.