

A NOTE ON THE DATE OF CLIFFORD'S TOWER, YORK¹

By B. H. ST. J. O'NEIL

The erection of the mound on which Clifford's Tower now stands can with certainty be attributed to William I either in 1068 or in the following year, when a revolt recalled him to York. Upon it was a wooden tower surrounded by a palisade and below was a bailey of about four acres, also with defences of earth and wood.

Even after the massacre of the Jews and disastrous fire of 1191 this tower was rebuilt in wood, a sum of £207 17s. 1d. being expended in that year on the motte and the castle.² Remains of these successive wooden towers were found during excavations in 1903. The first mention of stone for building at the Castle occurs in 1200; this probably refers to the erection of the Great Gate (facing Fishergate).

In her book, *Early Norman Castles*, Mrs. Armitage put forward the view that the tower on the mound at York Castle, now known as Clifford's Tower, was erected between 1245/6 and 1258/9 at a cost of £2,000. This dating was followed by Mr. T. P. Cooper in his book already mentioned, supported as it seemed to be by the Pipe Rolls (unpublished), which Mrs. Armitage was able to quote. It seemed at the time rather strange that there is no mention of a *turris* in the accounts; all references are to the *castrum* of York (and its chapel),³ and, as already stated, these two are always clearly distinguished in documents. Mrs. Armitage endeavoured to explain away this discrepancy by

¹ All references to documents, unless given in footnotes, will be found in T. P. Cooper's, *The History of the Castle of York*, but, as will appear, the present writer does not share Mr. Cooper's belief in the thirteenth-century date of the masonry tower.

² Pipe Rolls. From the beginning

there is a clear distinction made between the mound with its tower and the main part of the castle below.

³ It would be strange indeed for the Chapel in the forebuilding, obviously one of the last things to be built, to be erected in the first year of work.

maligning the Pipe Roll scribes, but in her anxiety to show that Clifford's Tower could not have been erected in 1191 apparently never thought of the possibility that it might be even later than 1259.

It is quite clear that the medieval word for Clifford's Tower must have been *turris*. This is the word used for a Norman keep and, although Clifford's Tower is certainly not a keep in the proper sense of that term, such a prominent structure could not fail to receive such a name. Moreover, as a new building of the most up-to-date style at one of the king's most important castles it would surely occur in records constantly from its earliest days. Yet a study of the Calendars of Close and Patent Rolls has failed to reveal any earlier reference than that of 1312, which will be examined at a later stage.

A study of the architecture of the tower leads in the same direction. The arcading in the Chapel has dog-tooth ornament, which would suit a date in the middle of the thirteenth century, but this is the only feature of that period. The rest of the structure shows openings, whether windows, arrow-slits or doorways, invariably with either square-headed or shouldered arches. The peculiar arrow-slits with windows above can be paralleled at Caerlaverock Castle in Dumfriesshire, which is certainly not earlier than the fourteenth century.¹ The shouldered-arches of the doorways, etc., are exactly like those which are so typical of the Edwardian castles in N. Wales that they are sometimes called Caernarvon arches.

It is true that examples of this style of arch can be found in architecture of a much earlier date, but an acquaintance with the castles erected by Edward I along the coast of Wales suggests that it was perfected in military architecture precisely at this period. Flint Castle, which was the first to be built (1277-80), has no such arches. Rhuddlan Castle, which was started soon after Flint, normally has pointed recesses with simple slits and pointed or flat-headed passages and

¹ Perhaps 1333; there is one opening of this type on Murdoch's Tower with square-headed window, like the ground-floor examples at Clifford's Tower.

doors. In the tower of the outer curtain by the river there is one opening with internal corbelled head, which seems to show the line upon which the shouldered-arch was developing. In the main gate each tower has one window recess, which illustrates a further stage in this development. The corbel instead of being left square is chamfered. There are no other door or window heads of this type in the Castle, but in the town of Rhuddlan the so-called Parliament house contains an example of the final form of this arch with cavetto moulding in place of the chamfer. This is, of course, the true Caernarvon arch, which occurs everywhere in the castle of that name (built 1292 onwards) and this is the type, which is universal at Clifford's Tower.

A noted peculiarity of Clifford's Tower is, of course, its quatrefoil shape, and it has been compared in this respect with Pontefract and Etampes, both earlier structures of similar plan. It is, however, not a keep but a tower of unusual character. It belongs rather to a class of small residential defensive towers, of which Dudley Castle 'keep' seems to be an example.¹ This is of early fourteenth-century date. A later development of this style, although not on a mound, is shown by Nunney Castle, Somerset, erected in 1373 and following years.

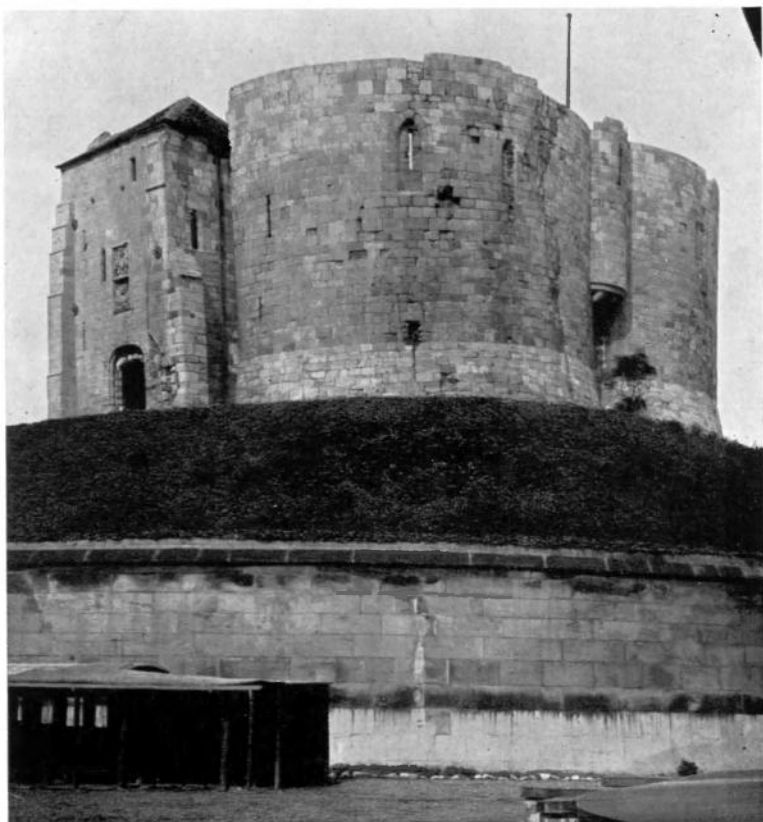
Since it appears that literary references and architectural considerations are in agreement upon a date for the erection of the tower late in the reign of Edward I or early in that of his successor (c. 1300-1310), it remains only to discuss the Chapel, which has already been mentioned.

It is true that the ornamental detail of the arcading within it should be attributed to c. 1250, but there is considerable evidence, amounting in sum to definite proof, that this was originally made for some other building and has been rebuilt in its present position.

The points are as follows :—

(1) The window on the north-west side, which looks on to the area of the tower, has clearly been built

¹ *Arch. Journ.* lxxi, Pl. i.



CLIFFORD'S TOWER FROM THE EAST

(Photo: H.M.O.W.)



A. CLIFFORD'S TOWER : INTERIOR AND ENTRANCE



B. CLIFFORD'S TOWER : ARCADING IN THE CHAPEL

(Photos : H.M.O W.)

before the arcading, for the stones of the latter are rest-bonded against the original internal return of the window jamb.

(2) The wide arch over the doorway was certainly not originally intended for its present place; a close inspection shows that on the north side the lowest part of the ornament has been roughly cut off to rest on the cap. It has probably been mitred into the next arch.

(3) Again it will be noticed that all the caps on the north-west side are of a different stone, suggesting that fresh ones had to be obtained for some reason at the time of rebuilding.

Finally there is the case of the northern corner. Here the lowest two voussoirs of the arch on the north-west have fallen outwards and slightly round at the time of the subsidence of the whole structure,¹ and still remain aligned with the north-east wall and its arcading. It is quite clear that, even if the masonry, which is now leaning, were to be pushed back into its original position, the dog-tooth ornament on these two voussoirs would not be in the same plane as that of the voussoir next above them. There must always have been an awkward join, due to re-use of old stone, which caused the break at this point, when the general subsidence occurred.

Thus it appears that the Chapel arcade was built in its new position after being brought from some earlier structure. It may have been part of the Chapel in the Castle of the 1245/6 Pipe Roll, since its detail would suit such a period very well.

It is indeed possible that this rebuilding of the Chapel is actually referred to in the document of 1312² already mentioned. This runs as follows³ :—

Precipimus tibi quod de exitibus ballivi tui pelum et fossatum juxta castrum nostrum Eboraci quos

¹ v. T. P. Cooper, *op. cit.* p. 76. The subsidence was doubtless gradual, but it is referred to in 1358 *Turris . . . scissa in duobus locis . . .* The cracks are still visible.

² Close Roll. 5 Edw. II. Memb.

4. May 29. York. Calendar p. 424, not 24 as stated by Cooper, *op. cit.* p. 54 n.

³ The writer is indebted to Mr. W. J. Hemp for examining the original at the Public Record Office.

nuper incipi fecimus sine delatione profici ac capellam infra turrim castri predicti de novo constructam.

(We command you from the issues of your bailiwick to cause to be completed the palisade and the ditch adjoining our castle of York, which we lately caused to be begun and to cover with lead the chapel within the tower of the said castle which has been constructed anew.)

It is absolutely certain that *pelum* here means palisade in spite of its apparent use in other records as a synonym for *pela* (= a peel or tower).¹ A later Close Roll (1323)² puts the matter beyond question when it refers to the *pelum* about the great tower, which had fallen down. It seems likely that a new palisade was being built in 1312 and the ditch being re-dug because the tower had recently been erected. With regard to the Chapel the phrase used is quite a usual one and one which is a common crux, as Mr. Charles Johnson informs the writer. At the very least it must mean 'newly built' and it must refer to the existing structure. As stated above, this structure has arcading of a style which was employed sixty years before this date and it is tempting to conclude that the expression '*de novo constructam*' was indeed used to indicate the re-use of old material.

¹ See Du Cange dictionary.

² Cal. 1323-27, p. 25.

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