



CONISTON HALL.
(Entrance Front).

ART. XXXII.—*Coniston Hall*. By H. SWAINSON COWPER.

Read at that place, Sept. 14, 1887.

CONISTON Hall is the ancient manor house of the manor of Coniston, in Lancashire, which name is probably Kunyngston, or Kingston. There is also a Coniston in Craven, which Dr. Whitaker, in his history of Craven, derives in the same manner.

This Coniston in Lancashire is divided into two parts; Church Coniston, sometimes called Conniston Fleming; and Monk Coniston in the manor of Hawkshead, which formerly belonged to Furness Abbey. This manor was originally in the hands of Roger Fitz-Reinfrid, as it appears by the original grant at Rydal, (cited by West in his *Antiquities of Furness*), that Roger FitzReinfrid, father to William de Lancaster, 8th Baron of Kendal, gave the manor of Coniston to Gilbert FitzBernulf, (otherwise de Urswick.

From the hands of the Urswicks, where it only remained two generations, it passed to the Flemings: Baines tells us:

the Manor of Coniston passed by the marriage of Elizabeth daughter and heiress of Adam de Urswick in the reign of Hen. III., to Ric. le Fleming, and Coniston Hall became the family seat for seven generations: in 10 Ed. III., the Abbot of Furness had a grant of free warren in several places, amongst which was Kunyngston. About 10 Hen. IV., Thomas le Fleming married Isabell, one of the four daughters and coheirss of Sir John de Lancaster, by whom he acquired the manor of Rydal in Westmorland, and for seven generations more Rydal and Coniston vied with each other to fix the family in Westmorland and Lancashire. Daniel Fleming, knighted May 15, 1681, gave preference to the former and died at Rydal Hall, March 15, 1701.

This Sir Daniel was an antiquary. His father William was the last who resided at Coniston; he was born at
Coniston

Coniston 1610, and died at the same place 1653. He married Alice, eldest daughter of Roger Kirkby of Kirkby Ireleth. Since its abandonment by Sir Daniel, the house has been, like so many of the old manor houses, chiefly used as a farm.

The hall, although West writing in 1777, says :

Coniston Hall appears upon the bank of the lake. . . and though now abandoned and in ruins, it has the air of grandeur and magnificence,

cannot be considered a ruin now; clusters of ivy hang upon its grey walls, mosses grow upon its massive chimneys and roof, and from many points, but perhaps especially from the lake, it presents a most romantic appearance.

The hall, the most interesting and probably the most ancient part, remains intact, although its features are partially or entirely destroyed. It is approached from the north by a modern raised path or causeway and entered through ordinary barn doors.

The present large barn has I think included the banqueting hall, the chamber or withdrawing room, and above the last, the solar or lord's bed-room.

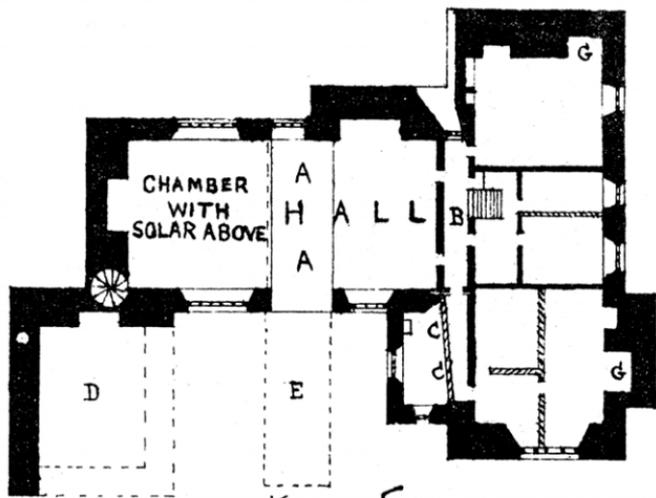
The banqueting hall, which lies on the right of the entrance, has been separated from the chamber on the left, by a partition which has now disappeared. Its length from this partition to the screen is 26 ft. and its breadth 23 ft. The dais is still extant. At the west end are the remains of the screen in a ruinous condition, through which there have been two doors. A window at the south end of this, lights both the inner and outer sides of the screen,* and it seems probable that the minstrels' gallery, if ever there was one.

Above this screen, may be noticed a window overlooking

* Externally the wall of the west wing is bevelled away in a very curious manner, in order to bring the light to it.

the

- A.A. DAIS
- B. SCREENS
- C.C. MODERN PARTITION
- D. REMAINS OF EAST WING
- E. MODERN CAUSEWAY
- G.G.G. CLOSETS: THOSE ON FIRST FLOOR BLOCKED



FIRST FLOOR.

CONISTON HALL. PLATE I.

the hall from an upper chamber in the west wing, an arrangement sometimes met with in ancient houses. Mr. H. B. Wheatley, F.S.A., writes as follows in the *Antiquary*:—

Sometimes there were small lattice windows in the wall between the hall and some of the upper rooms, and at the ancient manor house of Great Chalfield in Wiltshire stone masks of a king and a bishop are inserted in the walls, through the eyes and mouth of which, a view of the hall can be obtained. Archbishop Parker on the occasion of entertaining Queen Elizabeth at a banquet at Lambeth, writes: If her Highness will give me leave I will kepe my bigger hall that day for the nobles, and the rest of her traine; and if it please her majesty she may come in through my gallery, and see the disposition of the hall at a window opening thereunto.

Besides this window there have been three others, one at each end of the dais, (the one at the north end being the present doorway), and another in the north wall between the last mentioned and the screen, and facing the fireplace. The fireplace is of red sandstone and is now blocked up, as is also the window opposite.

This room, the chief one in the house, is not, as was most commonly the case, upon the ground floor, in which particular it resembles somewhat Burneside Hall, which has a room nine or ten feet high beneath the hall, (which is of about the same dimensions as this): this arrangement the late Canon Weston thinks, may be a modification of the original plan, in which the hall was upon the ground floor.* Such also may have been the plan here. The rooms beneath the hall and adjoining chamber contain fireplaces, and therefore were probably used as some sort of living rooms: it is however possible the present arrangement may have been original and adopted because of the lowness of the site and its proximity to the lake. The fine old beams in the roof of this apartment are worthy of notice.

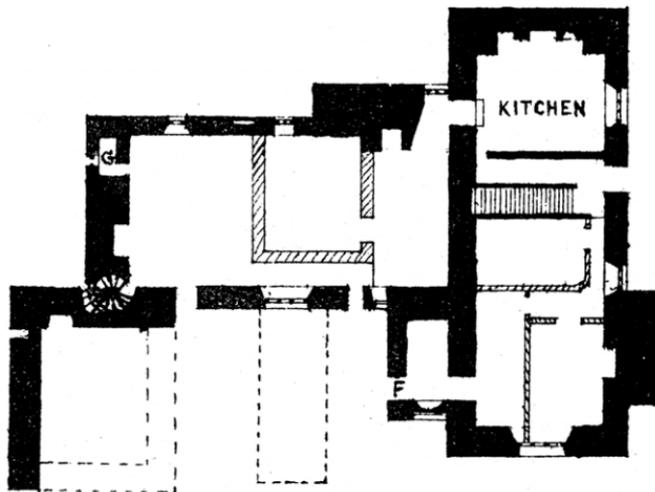
* These Transactions, vol. vi, p. 94.

The east end of this barn has been occupied by three rooms one above another; the upper two separated from the hall by a partition, the lower of these was probably the withdrawing room, and the upper, the solar or lord's bedroom. There seems to be some want of distinction among antiquaries, as to which room was the solar or chief bedroom, and which was the chamber or withdrawing room, some authors placing the former immediately behind the dais, others on the next floor, and in some cases in the roof above the hall. Perhaps really no rule can be laid down: it was, I believe, quite common even as late as the 14th and 15th centuries to have beds in the sitting apartments. This lower room may therefore, not improbably, have been the withdrawing room and yet contained the lord's bed, while the room above was appropriated to the other members of the family. It is 21 ft. 6 in. by 23 ft. and contains a large fireplace at the east end, of the same description as the one in the hall, and windows at either side, all of which are blocked. The solar has been above this apartment in the roof, and the ends of the joists can be seen resting upon the walls; it has been lighted by one small window from the east, and the beams differ from those in the hall, being higher and without the king-post.

These two rooms have been approached by a spiral staircase, contrived in the thickness of the wall at the north-east corner, and not therefore as was usual, in direct communication with the hall, but with the room beneath in which was the lowest entrance. This staircase has been lighted by windows, and the steps are composed, not of stone, but of solid blocks of oak.

The original arrangement of the entrance to the hall is rather difficult to ascertain, but it certainly was not by the present causeway leading from the end of the dais. It must be looked for at the end of the screens' lobby: this position is now occupied by a small lean-to building of two stories projecting in the angle of the hall and the west wing

F. ORIGINAL ENTRANCE.
G. CLOSET



GROUND FLOOR PLAN.

Scale 3/8" = 1 foot
1000' = 1 inch

DRAWN - BY
John Bell.
Coniston.

CONISTON HALL, PLATE II.

wing. This building, although of considerably antiquity is, possibly, not part of the original plan. Indeed it may be questioned whether this house had in the first instance either east or west wing. The first mode of access may have been by an external staircase of wood or stone, (perhaps protected by a pent house), to a door at the north end of the screens, as at Markenfield Hall, Yorkshire, or Belsay Castle, Northumberland. There is however, nothing to prove this, as the whole building seems 15th century, and such a theory would, perhaps, necessitate the existence of an earlier hall in the same position.*

Looking now at the ground plan it will be seen that the west wing is divided from the rest of the building by a thick wall running the whole length of it ; in the first floor plan this does not appear, it is in fact only the height of the ground floor rooms, and the passage behind the screens rests upon it. In the lean-to building, the room on the ground floor is small on account of this thick wall ; the upper has been bigger by the thickness of the wall, but is now cut down to about the size of the lower room by a modern partition.

The lower room has been a sort of porter's porch with an entrance door at F : inside to the right is a semicircular recess in the wall, which Mr. Ferguson suggests may have contained a seat ; opposite is a door leading to the offices. From here to the room above, there must have been a staircase, which has now entirely disappeared, and from this room the passage behind the screens was entered.

This upper room has finely moulded joists and has been, I think, what was called the oriel or oriole, forming a waiting room outside the hall, and being perhaps used as a chapel, as well as for domestic purposes. Parker, in his " Domestic Architecture 14th Century," remarks that

* It is possible however, that the hall is an earlier, perhaps 13th or 14 century building, re-edified in the 15th century. It is unlikely that the solar would have been placed in the roof, if the west wing, as it now stands, was built at the same time.

Dr.

Dr. Copleston inclined to the opinion that the word oriel or oriole signified the porch or entrance with a chapel over it,* a description which exactly tallies with the arrangement here.

Entering then the screens from the oriel, on the left are two doors into the hall; on the right, about the centre, the staircase descends to the kitchen and buttery.†

The rooms in the first floor in the west wing are bedrooms, and are divided by ancient pegged wooden partitions. In the southernmost room, which is now used as a court room, may be seen two curious seats fastened in the wall in cosy proximity to the fireplace. Beneath this is the kitchen, which still retains its fine wide open fireplace.

The exterior architecture of this, the west wing, is Elizabethan, and shows the restorations of William Fleming, who died about 1598, and is described by West as a "gentleman of great pomp and expense": the mullions throughout this, as well as the rest of the building are of oak.

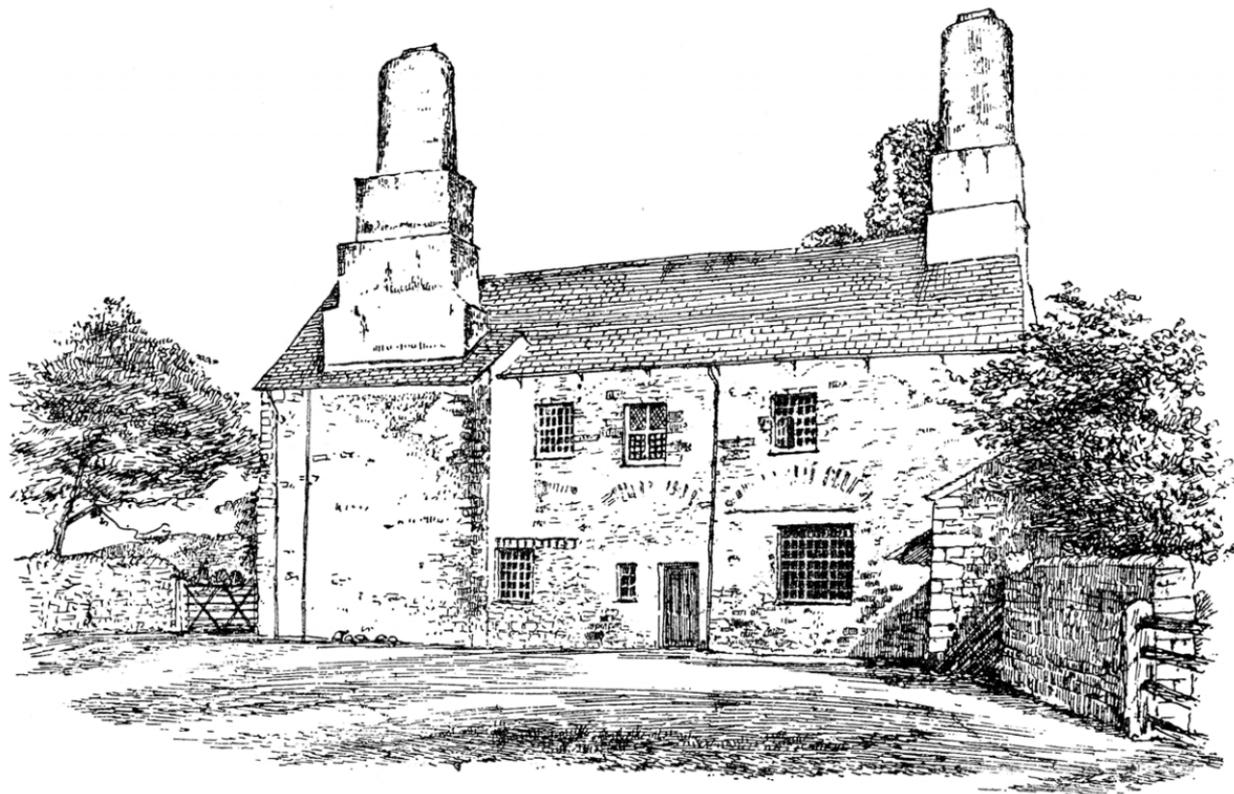
Foundations of buildings have been found in the field just north of this wing.

Of the east wing, which has been destroyed, except a small portion fronting to the north, I can learn nothing; it has been an almost square building with walls of considerable thickness, but as it has never extended to the rear of the house it has not been of great extent; what remains shows a sandstone fireplace of the same character as those in the hall and chamber. In its east wall, part of which remains, there is a garderobe closet. During repairs at the hall two small chambers have been found in the walls, which may have been "priests' hiding holes" or

* Printed in Skelton's *Oxonia Antiqua.*, vol. ii., p. 104. *Liberata Rolls*, 30 Hen. III., at Oxford to "make also a door and windows beyond the porch of our hall there:" at Ludgershall "to make an *Oriol* before the door of the King's chamber there and also one covered alley from the door of the aforesaid chamber to the door of the hall." 31st at Brill "an *Oriol* with a stair before the door of the Queen's chamber." Parker's *Dom. Arch.* 14th century.

† i.e., Butlery "Buttries without butlers guarded: *vide* Drunken Barnaby."

perhaps



CONISTON HALL
(From the West).

perhaps only closets. One was in the great chimney stack at the west end of the building, and the other in the west corner of the south wall of the same wing, in the large bedroom I have mentioned as containing the curious seats.

A very noticeable feature in the building are the huge round chimneys, sometimes called Flemish chimneys, which are good examples of an ancient form of architecture extremely common in this part of Lancashire, and specimens of which, may be seen at Kirkby, Hawkshead, and Carke halls, as well as formerly at Graythwaite Low hall, and many of the ancient statesmen's dwellings in the district.

The house is built of the hard silurian rock of the district, and is thinly rough-cast. Throughout the building there remains no wrought stonework, except the fireplaces, all the mullions being of wood. There are no signs of a pele tower, nor do I think it has ever had one, thus resembling more a southern manor house than a border hall. Few indeed of the Furness houses possessed this feature.

Baines tells us that some years ago the hall was adorned with carvings in wood, bearing the initials of William Fleming, who died about 40 Eliz., and by whom it was probably erected or repaired.

Within the park in which the hall stands, and which still contains some fine old oaks, and close by on the manor farm, are the remains of two ancient bloomaries, both overgrown by full-sized trees, an ample proof of their antiquity. The Rev. T. Ellwood, vicar of Torver, who gave a description of these in his paper on the "Bloomaries of High Furness" read before this Society in 1884, remarks:*

Situated as two of these bloomaries are, one within the ancient deer park of the Le Flemings, and the other upon the Manor Farm, both quite close to Coniston Hall, they would not, I think have been

* These Transactions, vol. viii., p. 85.

worked in the time of the Le Flemings, without some note of the fact being found in the archives of the Manor. Failing this, the most natural conclusion seems to be that they are Roman or very early English.

Last year I was lent a small MS. written in a last century hand entitled "Some remarks ab't Coningston Boundary."

The Boundary of Coniston 1621.

First from Yowdell beck falling into Thurston water, from thence ascending to height of Drycove over against Greenburne from thence to height between Leverswater and Greenburne; and so by the head of Greenburne and so descending by the tarn of Gaitswater aforesaid to a little river in Torver and so descending by the saide river to the Land of Torver, and so by the said river between Brackenbarrow and little Ayrey descending into Thurston water, and so by Thurston water to Yowdell beck falling into Thurston water aforesaid.

Amongst other notes on the same subject was the following :

Sept. 3, 1688.

Memorandum That Sir Dan^l Fleming Knight lord of the said manor of Coningston within written did ye day and year above said ride this boundary from Coningston alias Thurston water unto the height of Drycoves over ag'st Greenburnes as within mentioned he being accompanied with all those whose names are here under written and with many other persons, and it being not easily possible for horsemen from ye height of Drycoves aforesaid by ye lile wall to ye height between Laverswater and Greenburne and so to ye head of Greenburne according to ye boundary aforesaid the said lord appointed Adam Fleming bailiff of the said manor with other persons whose names are here writ under his and who were footmen to walk ye same and then to proceed no further in this boundary by reason of ye illness of ye day.

Adam Fleming's bailiff's mark. X

D Fleming

R Fleming

H Fleming

"The illness of the day," shows that Coniston 200 years ago, sometimes experienced what is now proverbial
as

as Lake District weather. It would also seem by "Adam Fleming's bailiff's mark X" that the bailiff of the manor was unable even to sign his name.

This Sir Daniel Fleming was the antiquary, who abandoned Coniston for Rydal, and who would then be 55 years of age.

In June this year, 1887, this ancient custom of boundary riding was revived after a lapse of over 30 years, and numbers of people assembled to witness the ceremony. A little boy 10 years old, walked from Little Langdale, and, accompanied by his twin sister, carried a large flag bearing the Le Fleming arms, nearly the whole way round, about 16 miles, which considering the heat of the weather, and the extreme roughness of the walk, speaks well for the hardihood of the youngsters in these parts.