

GLEASTON CASTLE FROM THE EAST.

ART. IV.—*Gleaston Castle*. By H. S. COWPER, F.S.A.

Read at Appleby, July 4, 1893.

ABOUT half a mile north-east of the village of Gleaston in Low Furness, and to the left of the road to Scales, rises an oblong hill, which is also about half a mile in length, and the summit of which is nearly 100 feet above the road where it approaches the modern farm buildings of Gleaston Castle. At the southern base of this hill are situated the ruins of the ancient castle.

The castle is built in one ward, presenting a quadrilateral figure of which the sides are of unequal length, and having, like the hill, its longer axis north-east and south-west. In the following description of the ruins, the two shorter sides will, for convenience, be termed the north and south sides, and the two longer the east and west sides. The greatest measurement from north to south including the towers is 330 feet; from east to west at the north end 244 feet; and at the south 185 feet.*

As we cannot now decide with certainty the position of the original entrance, we will commence the description at the north end of the west curtain and proceed southwards. At this point we find an entrance in the curtain about 13 feet in height, 6 feet in width, and with a round head. Externally there have been facings of dressed stone, which have been entirely removed. From this point the curtain runs south in a somewhat decayed condition for rather over 70 feet, where it is interrupted by a mass in a state of absolute ruin some 70 feet in length. Externally this mass projects towards the field, and examination here reveals portions of the wall faces of a

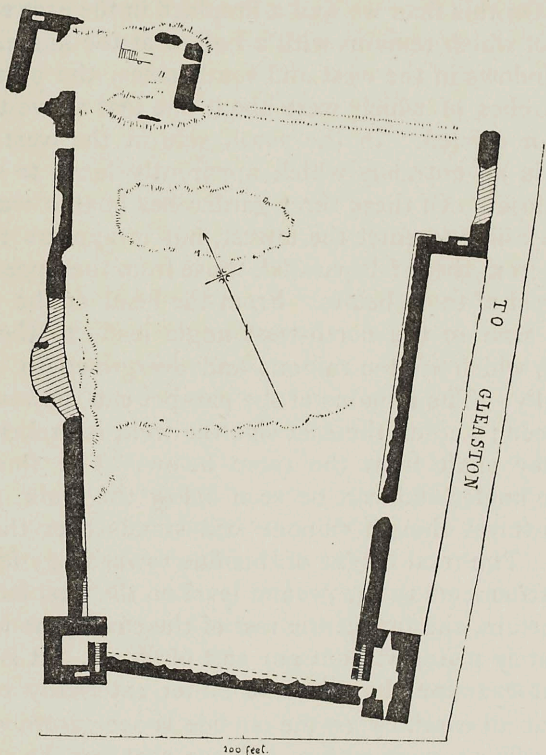
* The ward measures about 265 feet in length, by about 170 feet in width at its northern, and 120 feet at its southern ends.

tower measuring about 30 feet from north to south.* Below this ruin the curtain is continued straight for a distance of nearly 100 feet, where it reaches the south-west tower. It is not however in the same straight line with the curtain north of the ruined part. The portion of curtain adjoining the south-west tower is the best preserved in the castle, being about 30 feet in external height, and apparently complete except the battlements. It is plain work of limestone rubble, of roughly squared blocks set in mortar, and has neither plinth, offset, string course, nor ornament of any kind. Like the walls throughout the castle, it is about 9 feet thick. The south-west tower is the smallest in plan of the four towers of which anything can now be seen, and is fairly complete. It is almost a square, measuring 31 feet by 33 feet, set a trifle askew against the west curtain, and is of the simplest construction. The basement is entered from the ward by a door in the east wall, now ruined, but which has been $4\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide. It is a dungeon with no aperture for light, measuring 15 feet by 13 feet and in height about 7 feet. It was not vaulted, but the floor, as is the case in all the towers, has gone. From the left side of the entrance, a staircase in the thickness of the wall leads to the first floor.

At the first floor level, the wall is reduced in thickness by a set-off something less than a foot on the north and south, so that the measurement of this room is about 17 feet by 13 feet, and its height was about 10 feet. It was entered by a doorway to the right at the summit of the stairs. There are two windows, one to the north, and one to the east: there is also a diagonal aperture lighting the stairs near the head. There is besides, a fireplace in the east wall, and a garderobe closet in the south wall. Between this room and the upper two chambers of the tower

* This must not be confounded with the walls of a modern byre standing just south of it.

there is no internal communication. To reach them it is necessary to descend and come round to the north face. Here the curtain next to the tower is bevelled away internally to allow an external staircase to be formed without adding to the thickness of the wall. Ascending this, the second floor is entered by a pointed sandstone arch 2 feet

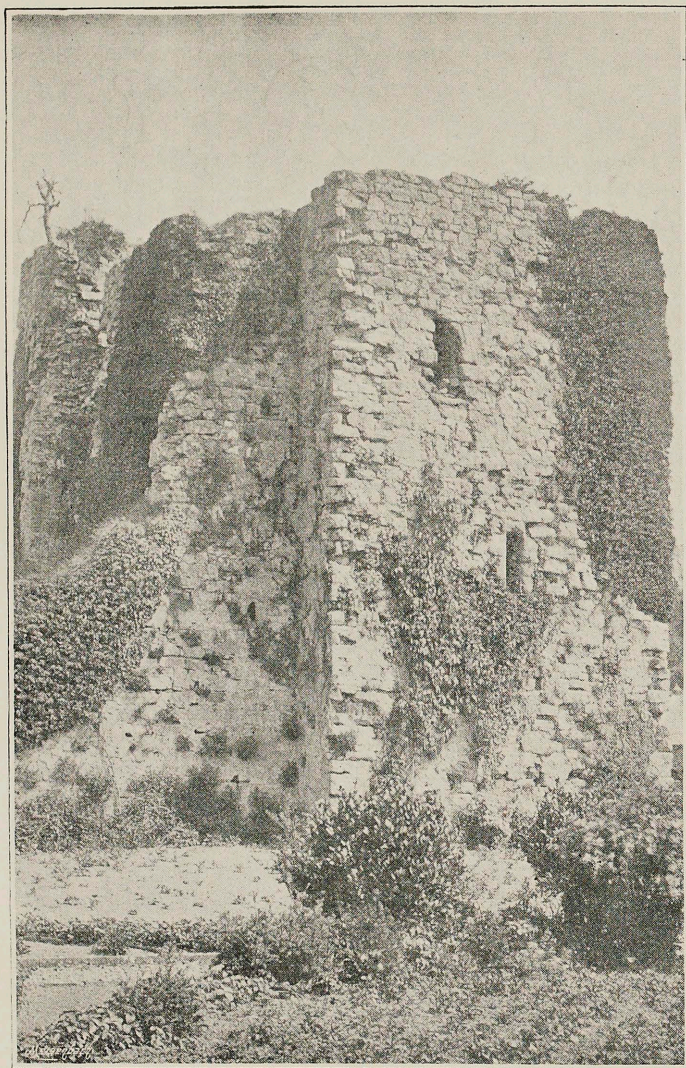


10 inches in width. At the floor level, the wall has again a set-off of one foot on the south and east, so that the size of this chamber is 18 feet by 14 feet, and its height was about 11 feet. There are two windows in the south and east walls, the sills of the rear arches of which were about 2 feet above the floor: and a square headed fireplace with plain

plain chamfer in the west wall, in which also remain three corbels, which probably supported the floor. A garderobe closet occupies the same position as the one below.

From the right of the entrance, a straight flight of stairs lighted by a loop and a window* ascends to the third floor, which is entered on the left by a pointed doorway. On this floor we find a fireplace in the east wall, one jamb of which remains with a hollow at the angle. There are windows in the west and south sides, the sills of the rear arches of which were about one foot above the floor when it existed. In the south side at the west corner, there is an entrance which apparently leads to a garderobe closet. Of these three garderobes in this wall, it is only possible to enter the lowest, but it appears that the shafts from them fall parallel, those from the upper stories just west of those below. From the head of the stairs a newel stair in the north-west angle leads to the battlements, which are too ruinous and overgrown to examine carefully. The remains of the parapet can, however, still be traced; and on the east side the walk is broken by the chimney shaft from the room below. The line of an obtuse angled roof can be seen below the walk, and the watch turret though ruinous still stands over the newel head. The total height of this fine tower is 43 feet from the battlements to the ground level on the west face. Like the curtain, and in fact the rest of the castle, the walls are absolutely plain, without any sort of off-set. It is impossible to examine the windows either externally or internally at all carefully, as the outside is overgrown with ivy, and no floors exist within. Those that can be seen are very weathered about the head. In most cases they appear to have been narrow, pointed apertures, about a foot in width, with a plain chamfer externally, splayed to

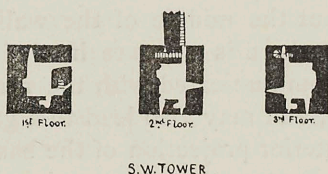
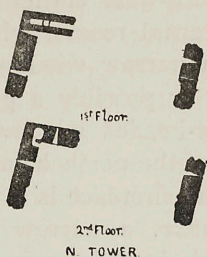
* This, at the head of the stairs, looks as if it may have had a trefoil head, but it is too weathered to be certain.



GLEASTON CASTLE, SOUTH-EAST TOWER.

3 to 5 feet within, and with the rear arch roughly pointed. The door arches have also a plain chamfer.

Distant from this tower about 120 feet, and connected by a straight curtain wall, stands the south-east tower. The connecting wall, which runs at rather more than a right angle from the west curtain, is flush with the ward level internally, but externally is about 3 feet high.



GLEASTON CASTLE.

The south-east tower is somewhat larger in plan than the last, but is only two stories high. Its situation is the lowest in the castle. In plan it is a rectangular parallelogram of 31 by 44 feet, with a recess 8 feet long and 5 feet deep cut out of the south-west corner. The entrance is
from

from the west, next to the curtain, through a pointed doorway of red sandstone 3 feet 10 inches wide, having a plain chamfer, and a weather moulding above. In the wall, the hole for the great sliding bar to secure the door can be seen. There is also the jamb of an inner door beyond the thickness of the wall. The basement is an apartment 26 feet by 13 feet, and was about 12 feet high: at the south-west corner is a projection corresponding to the external recess, which is occupied by a closet lighted by a narrow window, which may have been a porter's room, or possibly a garderobe. At each end there is a square-headed window, about a foot wide at the opening, that on the north being splayed to about 5 feet internally. The fireplace is in the east wall. On the left of the entrance, a narrow stone stair in the thickness of the wall, lighted by two loops, leads to the first floor, which was entered at the top through a large pointed door, one jamb only of which is now remaining. At the first floor, the wall has a set off of a foot all round for the double purpose of flooring, and of increasing the space, which now becomes 28 feet by 15 feet. This room is well lighted, having windows on the north, east, and south: while on the west, there is one on the left of stair top, one about the middle of the wall; and in the south-west corner there is a square headed doorway that appears to have communicated with the rampart walk of the south curtain, and may also lead to a garderobe. At this corner the interior projection of the basement is discontinued on this floor, so that the plan is a parallelogram. In the east wall is a fireplace with a hollow at the angle. From the head of the stair, a stone newel in the north-west angle leads to the battlements, which like those of the south-west tower, are overgrown and ruinous. The parapet however still remains on the east and south sides, and through the latter a plain drain to carry away water can be seen. Over the newel head is still standing the
ruined

ruined watch turret. No roof line is distinguishable, so that the roof may have been flat. The height of this tower from the battlements to the ground on the west side is 30 feet. The windows are here also too weather-worn and overgrown to make much of. Those on the upper floor seem to have been plain lancets with a chamfer, splayed internally, with the rear arches throughout obtusely pointed, and the sills about 4 feet above floor level. In Buck's view (1726) some are shown trefoil headed, but this does not seem to be correct.

From the south-east tower the curtain runs north-east, in a straight line with the west wall of the tower, and therefore not parallel with the west curtain. Except a portion at the southern end which is still standing about 10 feet above ward level (and about 20 feet above the ground outside), it is so ruined as to appear simply a mound from the interior of the castle, although externally it has an elevation of 9 feet. The gap is probably quite modern.

At about 190 feet from the south-east tower are the fragmentary remains of the north-east tower. As only its southern wall which projects about 25 feet from the curtain, and some fragments of its east wall remain, it is impossible to say much as to its plan. There are two apertures in the former which seem to be a fireplace and perhaps the shoot of a garderobe. The tower appears to have been about 60 feet long. From here to the north-west tower, a distance of 150 feet, the curtain has entirely disappeared although its line is traceable in the turf.

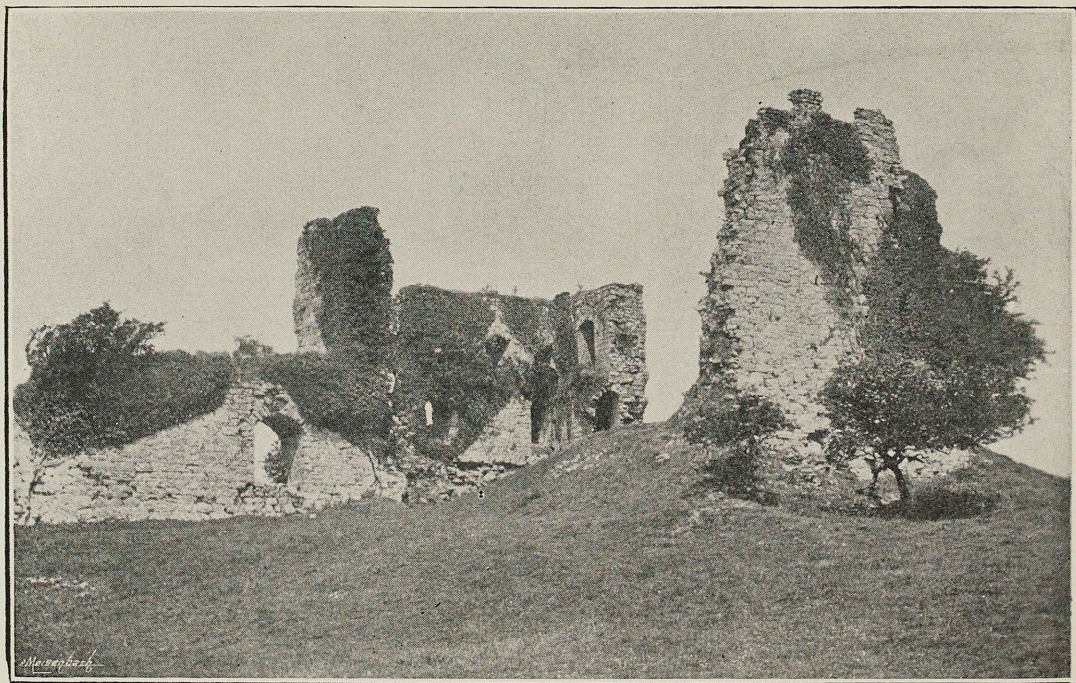
The north-west tower is placed at the highest part of the enceinte, at about the 100 feet ordnance contour, but, as immediately outside its walls the hill slopes gently up to 150 feet, its position is without natural strength. It was in fact the weakest corner of the castle and accordingly the keep, the largest and strongest tower was placed here.

The

The principal portions now remaining of the keep, are a large piece of the north and west walls, a fragment of the east wall, and a block of the south wall where it was joined by the west curtain. In the west and north portions, there are no lights into the basement, which must have been a dungeon: and above the first floor there is a set off in the wall to support a floor. These parts stand between 30 and 40 feet high, and at the west end there are two narrow freestone lights facing west on the first floor; above which can be seen the remains of another window, a fire-place and a doorway. The adjoining piece of north wall shows a section of a mural passage at the first floor which leads to a garderobe above which is one narrow trefoil headed window. There is also a garderobe at this angle in the second floor, to which the doorway above mentioned appears to lead.

In the east fragment, there is in the basement a narrow light, splayed internally 4 feet, from which the dressed stone has been robbed. At the first floor there is a plain fireplace with segmental arch and chamfer, on the left of which there is a drain passing through the wall. Again to the left of this there is a narrow trefoil headed window. Above the fireplace can be seen two unornamented corbels, which probably supported the second floor, and there is another trefoil headed window at this level above those already mentioned. On the summit are two merlons in a ruined condition. In the mass of masonry terminating the west curtain, there is a window at second floor level. The external measurements of this tower have been about 90 feet by 45 feet, but the remains extant are hardly sufficient to draw conclusions as to its original plan.

About half way between the east and west fragments is a large ruinous block of masonry, which was once a stone stair leading from the basement to the first floor. In Buck's engraving of the castle (1726), the drawing of this part is so confused as to be of little use; but it can be
seen



GLEASTON CASTLE, THE KEEP.

seen by it, that a portion of the south wall was then standing adjoining the east end. This can indeed be still traced in the fallen debris. The engraving represents a two light window in this part, apparently on the first floor, which perhaps was a window of the hall, which may have extended the full width of the building for some 50 feet from the east end. It is not however impossible that a hall of less lasting material stood somewhere in the enceinte. This tower now stands in a mound of debris, formed by its own fall.

Throughout the castle the walls are of the same thickness, about 9 feet. The masonry varies somewhat, but is a rubble of limestone blocks of various sizes, in places laid with some regard to courses. The blocks are generally roughly squared but not dressed: and the masonry appears to be all, or mostly of one date. Throughout the southern part of the castle the interior of the ward is raised, probably artificially from 3 to 6 feet above the ground level without the walls. This is found occasionally in other castles, and was probably done, to make a more level interior, and to ensure a drier surface.

The history and descent of the manor or manors of Muchland and Aldingham has been told at length in the works of West, Baines, and Whitaker,* so that it is not necessary to take here more than a passing glance.

The names of Aldingham and Gleaston both occur in Domesday. The former was a manor in the possession of one Ernulph who had six carucates. The latter "Glassertun" (evidently an English name) was a portion of the manor of Hougun, in which was two carucates.

Ernulph disappears; and soon after in his stead we find one Michael Le Fleming or Flandrensis, a foreigner, whom it is supposed that the Conqueror installed here as a buffer against the Scots. He and his descendants were

* The genealogist should consult the Coucher Book of Furness Abbey.

important and powerful people in the country, and in the foundation charter of Furness Abbey in 1126, the lands of Michael le Fleming are excepted from the grant. This domain formed the manor of Muchland. It has been suggested very plausibly that Muchland and Much Urswick are corruptions of Michaels land and Michaels Urswick, and supporting the theory we find the term Mychel land in use in deeds as late as the time of Henry VIII. The transition by the old English "Mickle" is easy enough.*

After some three or four generations of Flemings, the manor passed about 1270 by an heiress to the Cancefields,† in which family it remained till 1293 when it went, also by an heiress, to Robert de Harrington, the first of that family to exercise territorial power in Lancashire. In this family it continued four or five generations, till in 1457‡ it was again transferred by an heiress to Lord Bonville of Shuton, who took the title of Lord Harrington. His granddaughter (a fourth heiress) carried it by marriage to Thomas Grey, first Marquis of Dorset, whose grandson Henry, created Duke of Suffolk by Edward VI, shared the fate of beheading with his two brothers, his daughter Lady Jane Grey, and her husband Lord Dudley. On the Duke's attainder in 1554, the manor and castle were forfeited to the crown, and were afterwards granted out separately, into which part of their history it is unnecessary to follow them here.

About $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles south-east of the castle, on the edge of the sea, are the earthworks called Aldingham Moat Hill, which were no doubt the "burh" of the thane Ernulph,

* So we have Much the Miller's son. In the Sloane MS. he is called Muchel.

† Spelled in various ways.

‡ Members of the Harrington or Haryngton family lingered for some time in the parish. One William Haryngton was supervizer of the will of John Cowper of Aldingham, 6 Jan., 1543. The name is found considerably later in Much Urswick.

and of his successors the early Le Flemings. Tradition says that the sea having swallowed up the early residence at Aldingham, the Lords were compelled to build Gleaston Castle. This is evidently erroneous as the existence of Aldingham Moat Hill bears witness: but it is not improbable that fear of such a catastrophe caused their migration to the safer site of Gleaston.

From the great thickness of the walls, the fact that throughout the castle there is not extant a solitary double light window, and that all that can be examined, are either plain lancet, square, or trefoil headed lights, we must conclude that it was erected some time in the thirteenth century, but whether by one of the later Le Flemings, or by the Cancefields, or the earliest Harrington it is difficult to say.* The great thickness of the walls, and the height and strength of the towers contrast oddly with the weakness of the site, which must probably be accounted for by some caprice on the builder's part. The idea was perhaps that the castle thus situated would more easily escape observation, a singular desideratum for a fortress of the dimensions of Gleaston. Again it is most curious that the builders did not dig a deep dry ditch round the northern end, a thing easy to do, and which would have added greatly to the strength of the site.

The story so often repeated that the walls are run together with mud instead of lime is hardly correct. There is indeed in much of the walls, and everywhere in the outer courses, an abundance of lime mortar, but in some places where the ruined wall allows its interior to be examined, it is earthy and poor.

There are no signs of a well within the enceinte,

* Probably in the last part of the reign of Henry III, or in that of Edward I. Domestic work of the 13th century is exceedingly rare in Cumbria because of the continual Border disputes. Castles of the same date are also rare in the north. Kirkoswald however has probably some work of this period. The minor castles of Cumberland have not however yet received the attention they deserve.

although

although good water supplies exist at Gleaston beck on the west, and at a well on the east, neither of which are at any great distance. There is nothing to support the repeated suggestion that a strong keep existed within the walls. If that was the case, where are the ruins? The centre of the ward seems to have been artificially levelled, but there are no mounds of debris. Some building, probably of timber or wattle, did most likely exist here, but the north-west tower, of which parts remain, was the keep. In it I think was the first hall. Whether any of the later lords built another hall within the ward, there is now no evidence, but it is not improbable. Buildings of different sorts, barracks, stables and offices, would, in the time of the Harringtons and Bonvillies, line the inner sides of the curtain, but the absence of debris shows that they were but slightly constructed. Wood was extensively used in the thirteenth century.

What the north-east tower was cannot now be told. It was evidently quite in ruins in 1727, for Buck's plate omits that corner altogether, which would hardly have been the case, had anything of importance been then standing.

As to the ancient entrance, I would suggest it was through the ruined tower in the centre of the west curtain. That near the north-west tower is evidently an insertion. The west wall, as it is not straight may have been partly taken down and rebuilt at some time.

The castle had all the appendages of a medieval fortress and household. John de Harrington obtained a license for a park within the manor of Aldingham in 1340. The farm called Gleaston Park lying halfway between the castle and Aldingham moat shows where this was situated. The beacon hill lies close to the castle on the south-east side, and the corn mill still is to be found in use, a third of a mile away on the road to Gleaston.

Within the village is a well called *St. Michael's* well, which

which we may conclude was originally *Sir Michael's* well, and to be another memento of Michael Flandrensis or one of his successors.

I will conclude with the quaint words of Leland's Itinerary,* which show that the castle had gone to ruin in the time of Henry VIII, so that it must have been abandoned early.

“There is a Ruine and waulles of a Castle in Lancastreshire cawlyd Gleston Castell, sometyme longynge to the Lord Haringtons, now to the Marquise of Dorset. It stondithe a 2 miles from Carthemaile.”

Needless to say, “Carthemaile” is much further from Gleaston than “a 2 miles.” Possibly Furness was meant.

* VIII, p. 94.