

ART. XXXII.—*Ulpha Old Hall*. By W. G. COLLINGWOOD, M.A.

WEST of Duddon, above and behind the crags that form the wall of its valley, is a broad stretch of lofty rolling moorland rising here and there into mountain tops of fifteen hundred to two thousand feet, and falling into sinuous water-courses which deepen as they approach the great dale, and break its edge with narrow gills of unusual depth and romantic character. On the brink of such a ravine, in the upper air and bleaker climate of the windy highland, but overlooking the vale and the Dunnerdale and Coniston fells behind it, stand the ruins of Ulpha Old Hall.

Denton, writing nearly 200 years ago, says :

Ulfhay was granted to one Ulf, the son of Evard, whose posterity enjoyed it till the time of K. Hen. 3rd. Ulf had issue, Ailward, and Ketell. Ailward paid to K. Hen. 2nd in the 27th year of his reign, twenty marks for a fine assessed upon him for an attain. Ketell had diverse sons, Bennett, William, and Michael. Bennett lived in K. John's time, and had a son named Alan. But now the land is reduced to demesne again, and Mr. Huddleston, the present Lord of Millum, and diverse of his ancestors have made there a park enclosed for deer, which yet to this day is called Uffhay Park.\*

The Park is now a bare hill, extending two miles south of the ruins, between them and Duddon Hall: but anciently it must have been wooded, for the chief place in it is Frith (wood) hall. Indeed the whole moorland from Birkerthwaite and Woodend in the north, to Scoggerbar (*Skógar-bard*, Icelandic for "edge of the woods") in

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\* An Account of the most considerable Estates and Families in the county of Cumberland, etc., etc. By John Denton of Cardew. Published by this Society, 1887, p. 14.

the south was called in a deed of Henry de Boyville "the Forest": and though "forest" and "park" do not necessarily imply this, it must have been covered with copse, because a part of it is still called Storthes, and overlooking Devoke water is Stords pike, meaning, like Storth and Storrs, "copse," the Icelandic *Storth*.

Ulf and Ketell are distinctively Scandinavian names; and their family must have been of the Viking stock which left its mark in many a spot hereabouts. Up on the moor is Hest-fell, where they turned out their ponies (*hest*) to graze. Down in the valley is Sella (*sel-laut* or *sel-lág*) their "low dairy pasture." Ulpha itself, though it may be *Ulf's-hagi*, the "field of Ulf," as Denton evidently thought in writing it Ulfhay, looks more like *Ulfá*, the "river of wolves," for *Ulf's-hagi* ought, by the analogy of Ullswater etc. to have kept the s and become Ulshay. That the wild wooded fell harboured wolves till a much later date we gather from local tradition. There is a depth in the ravine close to the Hall named the Lady's Dub; in which it is said a lady of Ulpha met her death as she was trying to escape from a wolf.

The story does not say whether she was one of the original Norse family, or one of the cadet branch of Huddlestone's who held it "as a lesser freehold,"\* and built the Old Hall. The author of "Antiquities of West Cumberland" (1849) speaking of this "old fortress," says that "no one can tell when or by whom it was built, or to whom it has belonged as a residence." He continues:

Nothing of it now lingers in the land of being, save the one tower, whose decaying masonry will, if uninjured by design, abide for many a generation to rouse inquiry and admiration at the amazing thickness of its walls, and its secluded position. One or two small houses standing near it have been constructed out of its ruins, and the surface of the neighbouring ground shows that the enclosure has

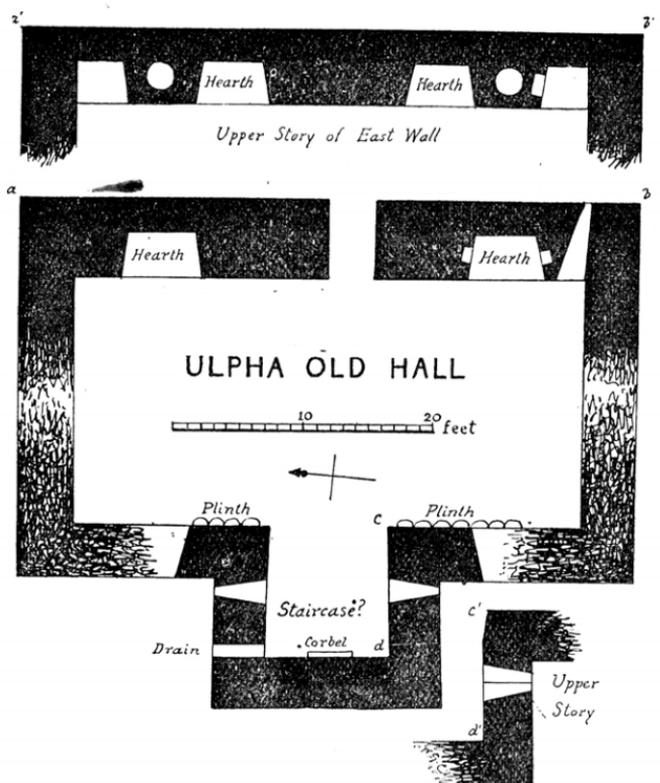
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\* Denton, *ut ante*, p. 14.

been

been extensive. Its rude style, though not wholly destitute of ornament, seems to indicate a very remote antiquity, and the cemented cobbles are bound together by a lime to which age has given the tenacity of stone; a facing of hammered freestone is discernible in parts, but the walls, which are of two yards in thickness in some places, are nearly entirely of boulders cemented in lime.

Nothing in the way of ornament now remains; but as the head-stones have been torn out, and the rest is as solid as concrete, there is little left to tempt the builder's



man. There is no ivy tearing at it, only tufts of wild flowers and wall rue in the crannies. The gaps left by the complete removal of the north-west and south-west corners (lightly shaded in the plan) have been roughly fenced

fenced to make the place useful as a fold : and it is to be hoped that no further destruction will take place.

The east wall, six feet thick (though the chimney flues reduce it to 2ft. 6ins. in places) stands 22 feet high, as in the view (fig. 2); the Diagram (fig. 3) is partly restored

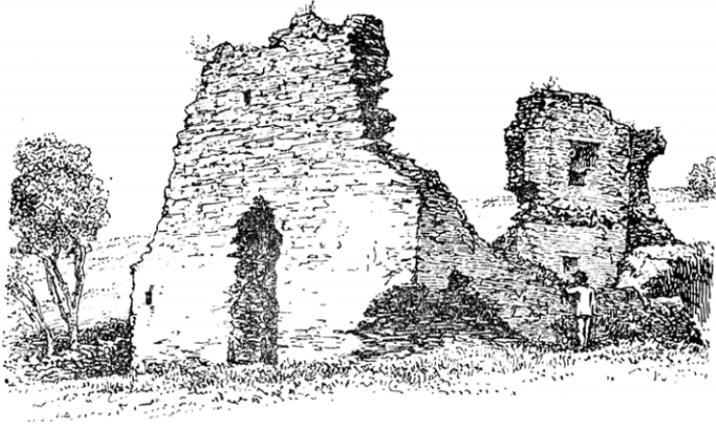


FIG. 2.

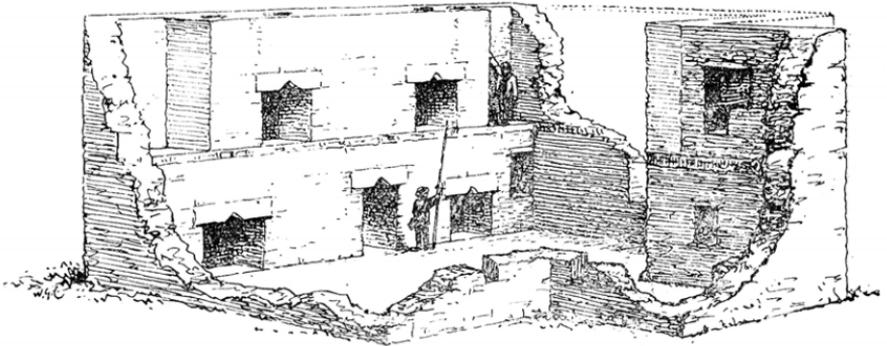


FIG. 3.

for the sake of explanation. The other walls are 4 feet thick. The main building, in which no traces are left of partitions, measures internally 39 ft. to 39 ft. 2ins. by 19 ft. 3ins. to 19 ft. 4ins., the plan being a little out of the square

square. In the recess (staircase?) opposite the door the crookedness is visible to the naked eye: 9 ft. 2 ins. in front widens to 9 ft. 7 ins. at the back, and 10 ft. 4 ins. along the south side becomes 10 ft. 6 ins. on the north. Along the west wall on each side of this recess is a plinth of great cobbles to support the floor, and at the back of the recess are remains of a broad projection which looks like a corbel to carry a wooden staircase. A drain at the level of the floor would serve a chamber (scullery) under the stair, communicating with the kitchen, which would be on the north side of the door. The hall would be on the south side, rather better lighted, and with awmries in the fireplace. These lower rooms were 10 feet high from the hearth stone to the joists.

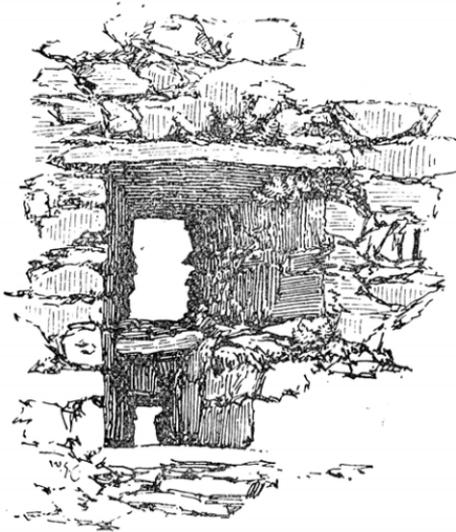


FIG. 4.

The upper story had also two fire-places, and in the nook at the south-east corner is a larger awmry (into which the figure is putting his hand, in the diagram) measuring 2 ft. 7 ins. wide by 1 ft. 10 ins. high, about  
4 ft.

4 ft. 10 ins. from the floor of the room, and cut out of the wall of the flue from the room beneath, to be warmed like a linen cupboard. From this best bed-room there must have been a passage, for which the wall is slightly splayed, leading to a chamber over the stair, with a window and a shoot directly under it (fig. 4). This and the other smaller windows are square headed with rough lintels; the fire-places were evidently surmounted with solid freestone headings; those shown in the diagram are merely imaginary. The doorway is too ruined to be sure about. It has fallen in, leaving a tall irregular gap, which is the only feature in the unbroken blank of exterior wall, except the narrow slit of the "squinting" window at the corner.

Other enclosures, etc. are barely traceable. The place was evidently built as a peel, in the latest period of peel-building: though, in this quiet spot, with no records of raids or wars, it is hard to see why such a fortress was wanted, unless to emulate the grandeur of Millom Castle.

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