

ART. IX.—*The Fortified Church of St. John the Baptist, Newton Arlosh.* By JOHN F. CURWEN, F.S.A., F.R.I.B.A.

*Read at the site, June 27th, 1912.*

DURING the campaigns of 1300-6 against the Scots, Edward I. formed the town of Skinburness into a naval port to supply and strengthen his base at Carlisle.\* So great, seemingly, was its value that the King, on the 12th day of February, in the 29th year of his reign (1301), granted to the Abbot and Convent of Holm Cultram, within whose island-holm the town was situated, the liberty to have a free borough there under the custody of some faithful man to be elected by the Abbot and his successors, so that the burghers and merchants, trading either by land or sea, should have all liberties and the free usages that belong to a free borough for ever. He also granted the privileges of a weekly Thursday market and an annual festival to be held on the vigil of the day of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist and the following 15 days.†

With such encouragement to the prosperity of the town, bishop John de Halton found it necessary to grant a charter, dated from Bridekirk on the 6th day of August, 1301, giving the Abbot leave to erect a church there for the spiritual welfare of the inhabitants.‡

However, nature determined otherwise. Within four years the town was inundated and swept away, together with the way leading to it, as the records say "by the

\* *Cal. Pat. Rolls*, 1292-1301, pp. 389, 488, 554, 585.

† Harleian MSS., 3891, fol. 21b.

‡ *Epis. Registers of Carlisle*, Halton, ed. by W. N. Thompson, part ii., p. 161.

terrible inroads of the sea and bad weather so that men could not reach it or live in it as they used to do.”\* The inhabitants then seem to have removed further inland to a hamlet within the territory of Arlosh and to have erected a new town there. At or just before this time bishop Halton granted another charter, dated from Linstock on the 11th day of April, 1304, to the Abbot of Holm for a new church to be built in this hamlet, as follows :—

John, Bishop of Carlisle to his beloved sons in Christ, the Abbot and Convent of St. Mary of Holm Cultram of the Cistercian Order in our Diocese of Carlisle, peace, grace and benediction. . . . Noticing that your lands possessions and localities beyond your boundaries at Holm are situated outside the limits of all parochial churches in our Diocese and are at a distance from the same ; considering moreover their poverty-stricken condition as the result of the hostile invasions and depredations of the Scots . . . . To the glory of God, to the increase of His worship and the safety of souls, for the reverence of your holy religion and for the quicker relieving of your notorious oppressions and losses ; we, with the help of the Most High, after invoking the grace of the Holy Spirit and after due deliberation held thereupon with our priestly authority and with the consent of our ‘ Capitulus ’ of Carlisle, grant on behalf of ourselves and our successors and give special licence that you may in your land of Arlosk build one chapel or church afresh† for your parishioners and inhabitants that dwell and will dwell in your lands of Holm. And when this chapel or church is built, it is our will and decree that it shall have all parochial rights and by our authority we annex and appropriate all greater and lesser tithes and any additions that come from the aforesaid parishioners and we freely grant them by these presents to you and your Monastery of Holm and your successors. Furthermore

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\* For account of the destruction of Skinburness, see T. V. Holmes, Cumberland Scientific Association, *Transactions*, part vi., p. 121.

† Whellan (p. 237) mentions a tradition that a church was built here by S. Ninian out of gratitude to God on his safe return from Rome, where he was educated. If there is any substance of truth in this, Mr. W. G. Collingwood (*Early Sculptured Crosses*, p. 239) says that we must look upon this village as the oldest Christian site in our district, but that there is neither history nor pre-Norman fragment to support it.

. . . with thorough trust we exempt the aforesaid chapel or church as far as it concerns its ecclesiastical adornment, its covering and the enclosure of the cemetery, with the upkeep and repair of which we charge your conscience, lord Abbot, and that of your successors, from our visitation and jurisdiction and that of our successors, officials, archdeacons and other ministers and we do judicially decree that it be exempt for ever. And that the greater advantage of temporal good may increase for you and your successors from this appropriation we grant that the aforesaid chapel or church may be well and faithfully served by some convenient priest to be chosen by you but approved by us, or by our officials when it happens that we are outside our diocese. And we decree that this priest thus elected by you and presented by us . . . shall receive the cure of souls of your parishioners and your aforesaid inhabitants from us and shall administer the ecclesiastical sacraments as laid down in the canon. And to this priest for his labours and for his maintenance and for all burdens incumbent upon him you shall pay £4 sterling at two terms of the year, viz. after Easter and after the feast of St. Michael, and you shall assign him a suitable piece of ground for his house and curtilage after your own discretion. And the same priest shall faithfully give a full report of all such matters as concern our ordinary jurisdiction . . . to us in our courts to be held in the deanery of Allerdale and shall receive with reverence and shall with diligence follow out our canonical injunctions and shall faithfully pay to us a sign of his submission under the title of Cathedral dues half a mark of silver per annum . . . and 40 pence to the archdeacon for procurations etc.\*

It will be noted that there is in this charter no direct allusion to the encroachment of the sea at Skinburness, neither to the name of New-town, so that it may have been granted just prior to that great calamity; and this view is strengthened by the fact that for some time the hamlet within the territory of Arlosk was known by the name of Kirkeby Johan or the hamlet surrounding the newly-erected church dedicated to St. John the Baptist. Be this as it may, it is clear that when the hamlet

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\* Harleian MSS., 3911, ff. 7 and 7b; Monast. Angl., Caley's Edition, v., 595.

increased by the incoming of the Skinburness folk the name of Kirkeby Johan gradually gave place to the designation of Newtown-in-Arlosk.

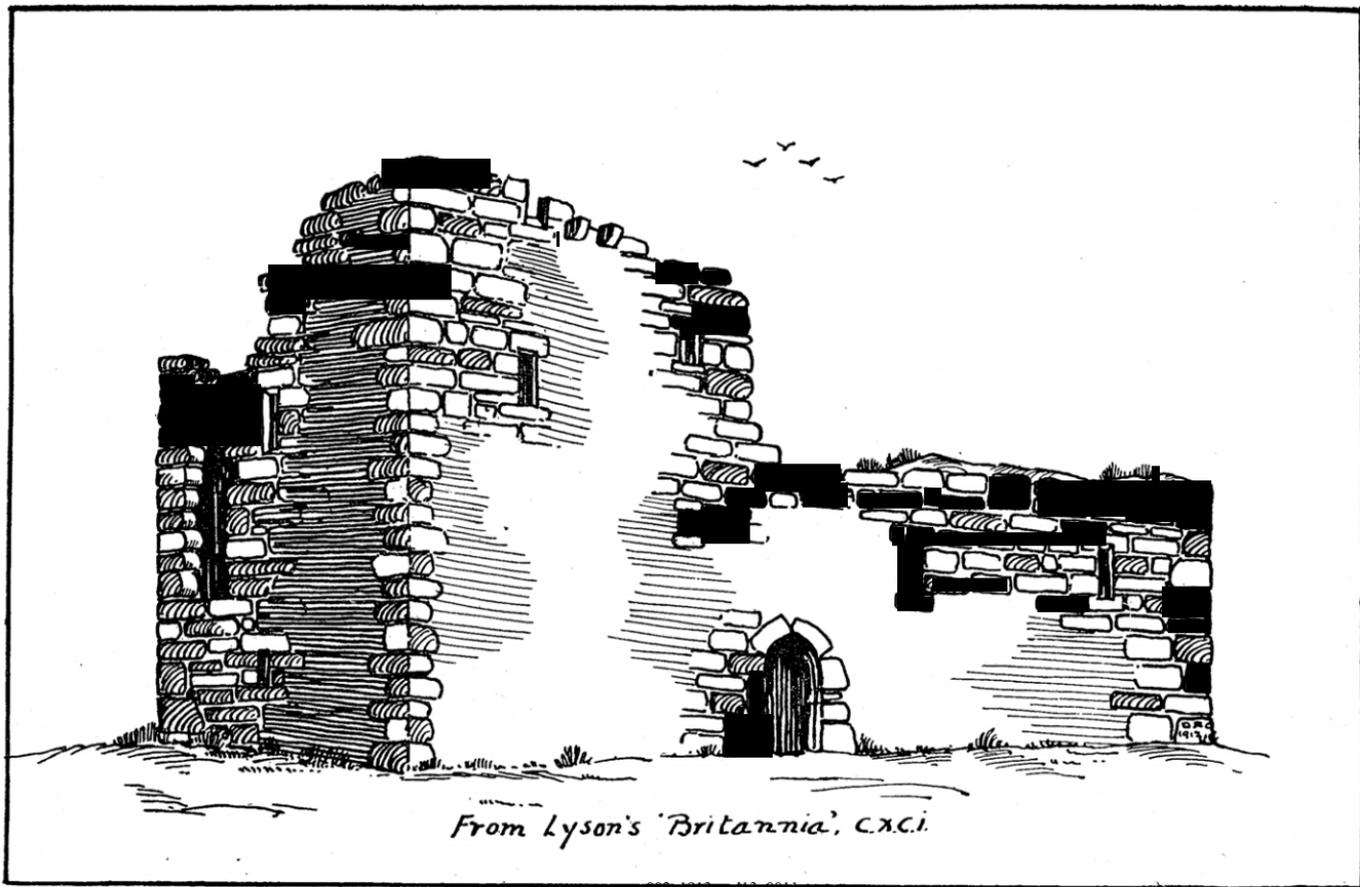
And so time went on until the Abbot petitioned King Edward requesting that whereas he had paid a fine of 100 marks for a fair and market at Skinburness which had been carried away by the sea, the King would grant him leave to have the freedom of the borough with its weekly market and annual festival transferred to his town of Kirkeby Johan. To which petition the King responded by granting a fresh charter, dated from Westminster on the 28th day of March in the 33rd year of his reign (1305), stating that "whereas the Abbot and Convent have given us to understand etc., and have begged us that we should graciously allow the same liberties granted them aforesaid to be transferred to their village of Kirkeby Johan, which is within the boundaries of the aforesaid island, we hereby grant that the village of Kirkeby Johan should be a free borough etc. in lieu of the borough of Skinburness."\*

Now the militant John de Halton knew what he was saying when he spoke about the poverty-stricken condition of Holm owing to the hostile invasions and depredations of the Scots. He was not only bishop of the diocese but governor of Carlisle castle, and three times over the Scots burned his palace at Rose in revenge because they could not conquer him in his castle. The Solway formed a convenient entrance for these invasions, and I have no doubt but that he himself advised the Abbot so to construct his new church as to render it strong enough to protect the women folk when the men were called out to the fray. And there are many of the low embattled church towers near the border which present evidences of having been inhabited for short

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\* Rot. Parl. i., 161; Harleian MSS., 3891, fol. 21b, 3; Riley, 245, 246.





*From Lyson's 'Britannia', c.xci.*

periods during seasons of great danger; indeed the chroniclers record instances when the Scots even forced these sacred edifices and committed the greatest of barbarities in them. The most notable examples are undoubtedly the churches of Great Salkeld, situated in a locality peculiarly harassed by the invaders, this church of Newton Arlosh, and Burgh-by-Sands, a few miles to the eastward on the Solway coast.

Unfortunately we can find little history concerning this church. The monks of Holm served it, and after the dissolution of that monastery the building fell rapidly to decay. Under date 1580 we read "The chapel of Newton Arlosh did decay; the door stood open, sheep lay in it. About fifteen years since the roof fell down and the lead was taken away by some of the tenants and converted into salt pans."\* For about 250 years it remained in this ruinous condition, and is well depicted by Messrs. Lysons,† from whose drawing the accompanying illustration is taken. "Many of the incumbents of Holm Cultram," says Whellan, "were inducted into the parish church of Newton Arlosh amid the ruins of the ancient edifice."

In 1844 the church was restored by Canon Simpson, Miss Losh, and others, and has been since rather unfortunately enlarged. In 1856 the parish was separated by Lord Blandford's Act from the mother church of Holm Cultram, and in 1894 considerable alterations were made in the interior.

#### DESCRIPTION.

So great was the attention paid to security in the construction of this edifice that the main doorway was only made 2 feet 7 inches wide, all the windows were placed more than 7 feet from the ground, and not one, not even

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\* *Some Records of a Cistercian Abbey*, p. 81.

† *Magna Britannia*, vol. iv., p. cxcii.

the principal east window, measures more than 1 foot in width and 3 feet 4 inches in height.

Supposing the church to be gained by the raiders, refuge was sought in the tower. It is a pity that the lower portion of the wall against the nave has been pulled down so that the original arrangement has been lost, but fortunately we can reconstruct it from the similar example at Burgh. Here we find, piercing the massive wall, a narrow doorway, giving the only access to the tower. It is strongly protected by an iron-framed door constructed of thick crossing bars, 2 inches by 1 inch, forming a grill of 8-inch mesh, and the whole covered over with oak planks and fastened by two massive bolts. The wooden covering has perished, but the iron skeleton of the door would still defy any ordinary effort to force a passage, whilst the great thickness of the surrounding masonry would effectually prevent any attempt to gain other ingress.\*

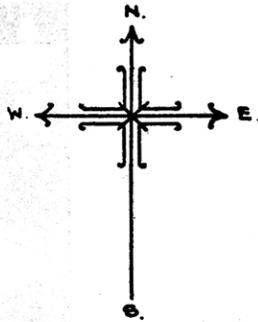
Within is the vaulted basement of the tower, secure against fire, and measuring 12 feet 6 inches by 11 feet 6 inches. It is lighted by a small unglazed loop-hole, 18 inches high and 9 inches wide on the west side.

In the event of the door being forced and the basement carried, the newel staircase, with its winding steps up which only one person could ascend at a time, could still be easily defended whilst the bells would be rung to give the alarm.

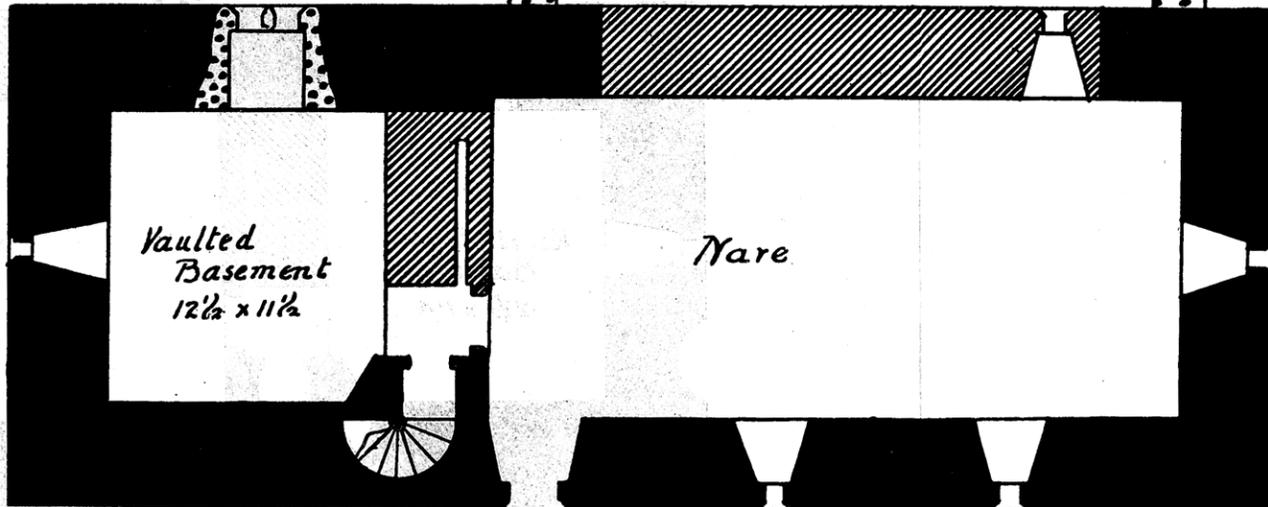
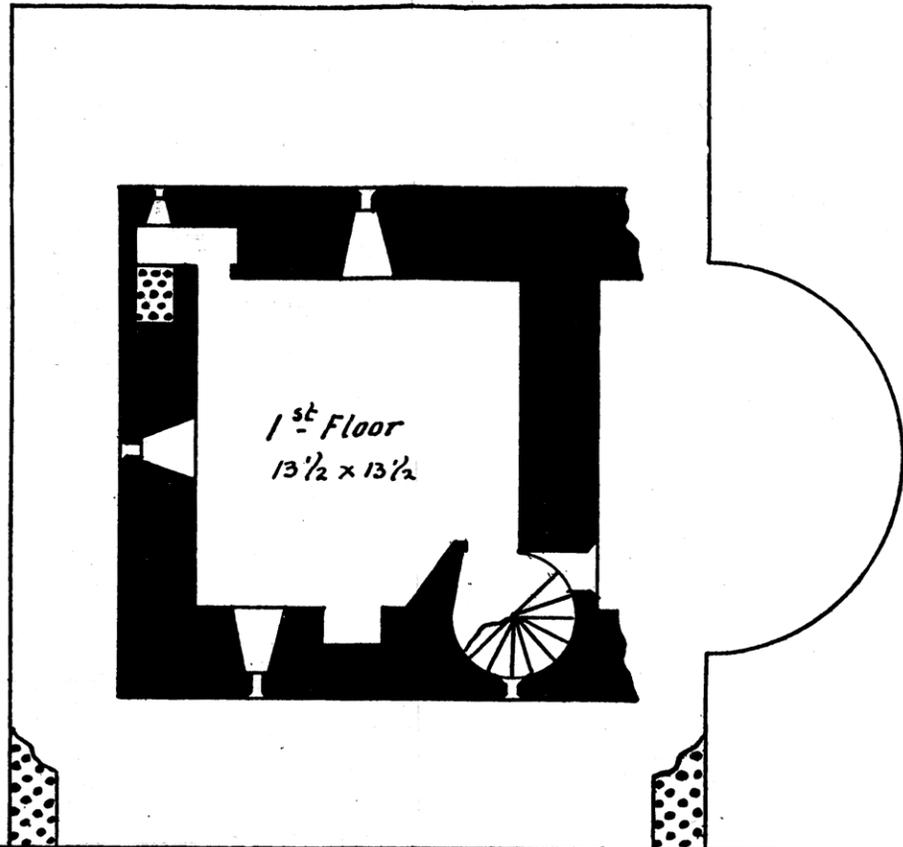
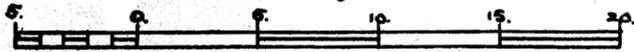
This newel stairway ascends to the first floor of the tower, at the head of which there was a small opening, as at Burgh, commanding the interior of the church and the besiegers attacking the door beneath. This opening has been enlarged and made to resemble a doorway, and the fact that the walls of the church set back about this level gives the false local impression that at some period a sort of gallery went along the south wall

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\* A similar door exists at Great Salkeld.



Scale in feet



John F. Curwen. 27. 1/12

NEWTON ARLOSH CHURCH.

and was entered from off the newel stair. But this is quite an error. The reason for the original opening has been noted, and the reason for the wall setting back is explained by the restoration of 1844, when the upper portion of the walls were rebuilt with less substantial masonry and the nave reroofed.

The first floor of the tower measures 13 feet 6 inches square, and is lighted by three narrow windows or rather arrow slits on the north, south and west sides. A fireplace existed on the south wall to insure the comfort as well as the safety of the refugees, and a mural garderobe remains at the north-west angle. The western arm of this chamber was built up solid when a large rent in the face of the tower at this point was restored.

The second floor has been rebuilt. It is now somewhat similar to the floor below except that it has no fireplace and that a fourth window has been added above the nave roof. Messrs. Lysons give the plans in their *Magna Britannia*, but by a mistake the lettering "Second story" and "Third story" has been transposed.

Without, there are traces of a dial to be found on a stone in the east jamb of the entrance doorway. The circle is  $8\frac{3}{4}$  inches in diameter with two rays, one supposed to be marking noon and the other about one o'clock.