

ART. XVI.—*Dalton Castle*. By PAUL V. KELLY.

*Read at the site, September 19th, 1928.*

THE late Mr. Harper Gaythorpe of Barrow was the recognised authority on Dalton Castle, and his description of it, read on this site in 1909, and printed in our *Transactions*, N.S. x, is still the most authoritative account we possess.

Consequently the present description is to some extent based upon materials culled from that article, together with some observations of my own. The earliest reference we have to Dalton occurs in the Domesday Survey, where the vill is returned as containing two carucates of land, and formed part of the Manor of Hougun, which in the time of Edward the Confessor was in the possession of Tostig, Earl of Northumbria. We do not know who was Tostig's feoffee in Dalton, nor where he dwelt, but it is possible that, following the Norman fashion, he maintained a small wooden stronghold on some defensive position of his holding. Such a position exists at High Haume, just outside, and commanding a full view of the town, where on the hill-top are earthworks, consisting of an apparently artificial mound, partly encircled by a deep moat. But with the passing of the whole of the district into the peaceable possession of the Church, by the founding of Furness Abbey in 1127, the necessity for these fortified dwellings no longer existed, at least until the outbreak of the Scottish wars. We may be sure, however, that the monks would, very soon after the founding of the abbey, require a building of some sort, distinct from their ordinary conventual buildings, in which to transact the many business matters arising out of the management of

their great estates. They would need a place wherein to hold their manor courts, and for the confinement of debtors, and a prison for the reception of criminals taken within the jurisdiction of their Liberty of Furness. Dalton was the most important place in the monk's territory, as it was especially mentioned in their foundation charter; and being conveniently near the abbey, it became the centre from which the abbot exercised his feudal authority, and where he received the fealty of his tenants. The existence of a court house and prison at Dalton is first referred to in a document of 1257 (Beck, *Annales Furnesienses*, 217; *Furness Coucher*, vol. i, 457) by which the abbot William de Middleton, acquitted William de Furness, son of the second Michael le Fleming, from the necessity of performing suit and service at his court at Dalton, and he further undertook not to imprison either him, or any of his men in Dalton Castle, or elsewhere in the monastic territory, except for such great crimes as came within the cognizance of the law of the land. This early structure, not being intended for defensive purposes, probably disappeared in the first onrush of the Scottish raids on this district in 1314-1346, and the present tower was then built on its site. The actual date of its erection is not known, and no licence to fortify it seems to have been issued.

In 1323, the abbot was directed by King Edward II "to deliver his peel near the abbey to John Darcy, Sheriff of Lancaster, whenever required to do so, and to cause the peel to be provisioned and guarded, whilst in his custody, according to the directions of the said John," but writers on this subject are not agreed whether that order refers to Dalton Tower, or to Peel Castle. This little fortalice, however, seems to answer best to the description of "the peel near the abbey," from which it is scarcely a mile distant, and its architectural features accord also with that date.

The present building continued to serve as a prison until 1774, and the manor courts for the Liberty of Furness were still held here, with all the picturesque ceremonial associated with such functions, until these courts were abolished by the recent Law of Property Act, the last court being held in October, 1925.

Eight years after the surrender of the abbey, Dalton Castle was reported to be in a state of ruin, the floors, roof, and other woodwork being greatly decayed, and the walls at the corners much weakened, owing to the scouring action of the rain in washing out the mortar of the joints. In the following year, 1546, William Sandes, the King's Bailiff, was ordered to proceed with the immediate repair of the castle.

According to William Close, the editor of West's *Antiquities of Furness*, extensive alterations were made in 1704. The apartment immediately within the great door was converted into a stable, and apparently the ancient entrance in an interior wall which led to the spiral stair was built up, and a new doorway to the stairs was made in the west wall.

In 1784 and 1816 other alterations were made, and the windows of the upper room on the third floor were built up.

Then in 1856, the interior of the castle was entirely reconstructed, and converted from three stories into two, a new staircase being made from the south door to the court room, and the doorways from the spiral stairs were blocked up. Several new windows were inserted, and others were lengthened.

Finally in 1907, the old roof being greatly decayed, it was replaced by a new one, and releaded.

From the Commissioners' Report in 1545, and Close's description in 1805 it is possible to re-construct what was probably the original internal arrangement. The basement was not vaulted, but all three floors were carried on

corbels, which yet remain in place. On the ground floor were two rooms, the south room being divided from that on the north by a wall 15 inches thick. The north room was the smaller, and appears to have been lighted only by a narrow slit. Underneath this room was the dungeon 5 feet 6 inches deep. At the foot of the spiral stairs is an arched passage in the thickness of the wall, 13 feet 6 inches long, with a doorway 1 ft. 10 inches wide.

Access to the upper floors was by means of doorways from the spiral staircase.

There is no well or other visible water supply, and the castle being built on a dry eminence of limestone, this indispensable commodity would have to be carried from the Church Well, or the Mary Well, two excellent springs in the valley below, on the south side of the town.

In its present state, Dalton Castle consists of a rectangular tower, 45 feet by 30 feet, and 40 feet high to the top of the parapet, the longer axis being north and south. The outer walls are from 5 to 6 feet in thickness, except the north end of the west wall, where it is thickened out to over 9 feet, to contain the arched passage. The masonry is of limestone, with the parapet, quoins, window and door dressings, of red sandstone. There is a plinth and base moulding on the south, west, and north faces, but none on the east, and a string course about midway between the plinth and parapet goes around all four sides. A line of outer corbels extends along the west and north faces, between the string course and the plinth, probably to support a roof of some adjacent building, of which no record exists.

The east front, facing the market cross and fish stones, has two small square-headed windows, one of two lights, and the other a single light. They probably belong to the 1704 alterations. Above these are two double-light windows in semi-circular openings. Each light has trefoil heads, with a quatrefoil between the heads. That

to the north is ancient and partly restored, but the other window is an insertion of 1856 in place of one with an elliptical head, as shewn in a drawing of 1817. Both windows have plain hood mouldings. In the parapet are three loops for discharging missiles from the roof, and at the corners are gargoyles, one at the north end with a grinning face, the other being a winged figure. Old drawings shew two rough-cast gabled houses built up against this face of the tower, the upper floors of which were carried upon columns, and the lower open front used as a market-hall. The absence of a plinth on this side may be due to its being cut away when these houses were built, probably in the 18th century. In the south face is a great four light window with an elliptical head, depressed to get the window close below the parapet. Each light has a trefoil head, with quatrefoils between. The centre quatrefoil differs from those at the sides, both in form and size. This window was lengthened in 1856 by three feet, new tracery and mullions being then inserted, and the window below, which lighted the second floor, and is illustrated in Close's *West*, was then removed. The principal entrance is on this side, and consists of a doorway near the south-east corner 6 feet high, and 4 feet 6 inches wide, with a semi-circular head of two chamfered orders, with hood moulding and double chamfered jambs. The lower parts of the jambs are restorations. In the parapet are two loops, but the gargoyles have been removed.

On the west side, the larger two-light window on the ground floor was inserted in 1856 to light the room then partitioned off from the new staircase. The smaller upper two-light window, similar to those already described, is an original window partly restored. Much of the masonry on this side, comprising the casing of the newel stair, and the arched passage previously referred to, consists of red sandstone. In the centre is the small doorway of 1704, giving direct access to the foot of the

stairs. There are two slits, chamfered on the outer edges, in a line above the doorway, and a similar slit on the ground floor to the north, to light the stairs and the mural passage. The string course on this side is not continuous, but is interrupted about midway, and then continues to the north west corner on a higher level. Two gargoyles remain, one being a female figure, and there are two loops in the parapet.

The north face has three openings, the lower being a small square-headed window of one light with trefoil top. Above this is a similar window of two lights, made in 1856 to light the head of the new staircase. The top window of two lights has a pointed arch with chamfered moulding similar to the south doorway, and the tracery at its head is similar to those already described. There are two loops in the parapet, but only one gargoyle. No trace whatever can be seen of the doorway which Mr. Gaythorpe says formerly existed in this wall, and opened into the mural passage, and if ever there was such a doorway the head and jambs have been removed.

The internal arrangements of the tower were, as already mentioned, entirely re-constructed in 1856, and consist now of only the ground floor, and one upper floor raised about 2 feet above the second tier of corbels. There are two rooms on the ground floor, with a lobby or passage about 5 feet wide, partitioned off, which leads from the principal entrance at the south-east to a wooden staircase of the same width, ascending in three flights to the upper floor. In the east wall are two fireplaces with segmental arched heads, one above the other, the heads and jambs chamfered. The upper one on the original first floor is now blocked up. The larger room to the south is occupied as a store-room and armoury for the local Territorials. In the north-west corner is the entrance to the newel staircase, against which is built a modern fireplace. The doorway to the foot of the stairs has a pointed arch, with

chamfered head and jambs, but that leading into the mural passage has an ogee head. The stairs wind upwards from right to left, contrary to the usual practice, which is generally from left to right, with the newel post at one's right hand. On the walls of the staircase are several mason's marks, chiefly of the hour glass and arrow type. The three doorways from the staircase to each of the upper floors are now bricked up, and the head of the upper one has been cut away to clear a ventilator. They are similar to, but wider than the doorway into the mural passage. The terminal of the newel post is broken off, and a low wooden structure covers the head of the stairs from which a doorway opens out to the alure around the parapet, whence a good view of the town and surrounding district is obtained. The parapet is 5 feet high, and is carried out 6 inches from the face of the tower on a continuous corbel table. It is built of red sandstone, but this is of much better quality than the local stone. It has stood the weather remarkably well, and may possibly have been brought from St. Bees. The coping consists of three courses of bevelled stones, the lower lip of each course on the outer face projecting about an inch beyond the one below it and the ridge of the upper course is finished off with a roll moulding. It has been suggested that these projecting lips were for the purpose of throwing off the rain from the face of the wall, but Mr. Curwen makes the interesting suggestion (*Castles & Towers*, p. 184) that they were designed to prevent such arrows as struck the wall from glancing upwards, and falling back upon the defenders. A similar coping occurs on the precinct wall at Furness Abbey, but is without the roll, and the projecting lips are on both faces of the coping. At the corners of the parapet are figures of the 14th century in fighting attitude. One of them is bent backwards as if in the act of throwing a spear or drawing a long bow. These four figures are each carved in one block of stone with the corner stones of the parapet.

Descending again to the ground floor, the north room is divided from the other by a thin partition. Under this room is the so-called dungeon, the entrance to which is covered by a trap door. Whilst removing the joists of the floor over the dungeon in 1906, another passage, 2 feet 4 inches wide, was found in the thickness of the north wall. It was not explored, but probably led to a garderobe.

The present upper floor consists only of one large room and the landing at the head of the staircase. This room is now used as a masonic lodge room, and in it were also held, until recently, the courts of the Manors of Dalton and Plain Furness. On the walls of the staircase and landing is an interesting collection of arms and armour of various periods, but these, with the exception of the halberds used on court days, have not, I think, any connection with Dalton Castle. In the armoury on the ground floor is a curious piece of ordnance which has been ascribed to the 14th century. It is about 2 feet long, made of hammered iron plate and hooped like a cask, with a bore about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  inches diameter. It is said to be similar to other pieces which were found about 1842, near the south end of Walney Island, and to resemble the cannons used at Crecy in 1336.

This find has been described in Richardson's *Furness Past and Present*, p. 223.