

ART. III.—*Yanwath Hall*. By W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON,  
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IN the later medieval period, the trend of English castle building lay away from the conception of a donjon, great tower, or keep. The donjon was a large square or circular tower, usually placed at the rear or on one side of the *enceinte*, as far away as possible from the entrance, which always in the Middle Ages was regarded as the weak spot in a fortification. But the purely passive nature of the defence that could be offered by the donjon, and its inability, in many cases, effectively to command the rest of the castle, and to co-ordinate its resistance as a whole, led to the discontinuance of this feature. About the middle of the thirteenth century, accordingly, the donjon is usually omitted, and the castle becomes simply a courtyard enclosure screened by massive and lofty curtain walls which are flanked by towers, two of these being placed on either side of the entry so as to form a gatehouse. Such a castle is Barnwell, near Oundle, built in 1266, or White Castle in Monmouthshire, dating from about the same time.

Towards the end of this century, increasing attention came to be paid to the gatehouse. This was developed into a kind of combination of a donjon and a fortified house of entry—a keep-gatehouse, as it may be called, where the lord or constable dwelt apart from the general body of the garrison or retainers, having the entrance into the castle under his own immediate control. The frontal massing of the weight of the castle, thus involved, substituted an aggressive for a merely passive attitude of defence, and greatly facilitated the co-ordination of the

movements of the garrison. Examples of this keep-gatehouse type of castle are the concentric fortresses erected by the English in Wales—Caerphilly, Aberystwyth, Harlech and Beaumaris—as well as such simpler structures as Llanstephan or Doddington, and (in northern England) Dunstanburgh, Bothal, Bywell and Hylton.\*

In France and in her “auld ally,” Scotland, this type of castle was developed until the frontal gatehouse consolidation reached vast and complex forms, as at Pierrefonds and Doune.† But in England it soon passed out of favour. Evidence exists, as I have pointed out in discussing Dunstanburgh,‡ that the reason for this was the practical difficulty of combining the lord’s or governor’s residence with a gatehouse—in which at least one whole storey, and that usually the principal one, had to be set aside as a fighting-deck, from which the complicated tackle of the drawbridge and portcullis was worked, and the *mâchicoulis* or *meurtrières* were served. Thus it comes about that in the later fourteenth century an English castle, when new built on a virgin site, tends to lose any special emphasis on any one of its component parts, and assumes the form of a quadrangular pile enclosing a courtyard, around which the domestic buildings are compactly articulated. At the angles are towers, and in the middle of one side is the gatehouse—but this is no longer the lord’s residence, and wholly lacks the over-dominant emphasis and structural elaboration of its Edwardian predecessor. The perfect example of this, which is really the latest style in the evolution of the English castle, is Bodiam, erected pursuant to a royal licence granted in 1386. In the north country, we have

\* For all this, reference may be made to my paper on “Castles of Livery and Maintenance,” in *Journal Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, iiiird ser., vol. IV, pp. 39-54.

† See *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. LXXII, pp. 73-83; *Trans. Dumfries and Galloway Nat. Hist. and Antiq. Soc.*, iiiird ser., vol. XXI, pp. 180-204, 258-74; vol. XXII, pp. 26-35.

‡ *Archaeol. Aeliana*, ivth ser., vol. XVI, pp. 31-42.

of the same type Bolton, 1378, and Sheriff Hutton, 1382.

By this time, the days of castle building in England were virtually over. It is true that the recrudescence of feudal anarchy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, culminating in the Wars of the Roses, led to the erection, in connexion with already existing castles, of a number of strong towers of specialised types, like those of Dudley, Warkworth, Tattershall, and Ashby-de-la-Zouch.\* But these are exceptional phenomena, and do not affect the broad generalisation that by this time the castle has yielded pride of place to the manor-house.

Yet in the north of England, behind the Scottish Border, where warlike conditions persisted for another two hundred years, the old Norman tradition of a square keep or tower-house was never forgotten, and throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries we find numerous baron's houses, some of them large, some of them small, built on this plan. These northern tower-houses are not the great Crown fortresses or the strongholds of mighty feudal lords. They are the residences of the intermediate and minor landowners; and the significant point about them is that they are entirely different in kind from the sort of dwelling in which these lesser gentry had been living before the Plantagenet attack upon Scotland. Previous to that unhappy venture, the country squires had dwelt in timber or stone-built halls, having at the upper end the *camera* or private room, and at the lower end the kitchen and offices. We can study at Aydon Castle how such a peaceful establishment, in those iron years of war, had to be enclosed with a fortified wall; and we have its builder's own word for it, in 1315, that "he had lately fortified his dwelling house at Ayden with a wall of stone

\* See *Journal Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, n.s., vol. XL, pp. 177-92; *iiird. ser.*, vol. II, pp. 121-32; *Archaeol. Journal*, vol. XCVI, pp. 142-58; *Arch. Ael.*, ivth ser., vol. XV, pp. 115-36; vol. XIX, pp. 93-103.

and lime against the King's enemies, the Scots.\* ” Where a house was being erected *de novo*, it had perforce, under the new conditions, to be designed as a strong fortalice. For such requirements, in the case of a landowner of moderate resources, the scheme of a simple rectangular tower was obviously alike the most defensible and the most convenient.

For a similar reason, during those same centuries, the tower-house plan became an exceedingly common one throughout Scotland, where it remained the characteristic pattern of a laird's "house of fence" until far on into the seventeenth century. No other nation, in fact, has developed the tower-house conception to a greater extent, or rung the changes on it in such a scintillating variety of designs.† Yet the pedigree of the Scottish tower-houses remains an obscure one, for north of the Border there do not seem to have been any square stone keeps during the Norman period. Probably, therefore, the Scottish tower-houses of the fourteenth century, of which Threave Castle in Galloway may be cited as an impressive example, derive from those towers of timber or wattle and daub which we know were frequent in the thirteenth century and for long thereafter, though none have survived to teach us what they looked like. There is, however, some evidence for the existence of stone tower-houses in Scotland before the War of Independence‡; and so many castles north of the Tweed were demolished in the course of that desolating struggle that it is dangerous to be dogmatic upon the subject.

\* " *Mansum suum de Ayden . . . muro de petra et calce nuper kernelatum et contra inimicos regis Scocie afforciatum, armisque et victualibus decenter munitum.*" *Hist. Northumberland*, vol. X, p. 345, note 4.

† Even as late as 1658, when the Senatus Academicus of King's College, Aberdeen, wished to provide what we should nowadays call a "hall of residence" for their students, they built not an *aula* or a *palatium*, but a great tower-house, for all the world like a fourteenth-century castle—six storeys in height, with a hall on the first floor and the traditional flat open parapetted roof.

‡ See *The Book of Dunvegan* (Third Spalding Club), vol. I, p. xxxix, footnote.

We have therefore to consider the existence, during the later Middle Ages in Britain, of a "tower-house province" beyond the Tees, embracing all Scotland and the four northern English counties, Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland and Westmorland. In passing it may be noted that Ireland forms a separate "tower-house province"; for here also unsettled conditions, persisting to an even greater degree, resulted in the erection of numerous structures of this type right down into the period of the Tudor and Stuart plantations.\*

An excellent example of a simple English fourteenth-century tower-house may be seen at Yanwath Hall, in Westmorland, on a bold wooded bluff overlooking the bonny Vale of Eamont, about two miles south of Penrith. The tower, to which a hall and later buildings have been added, is stated to have been built by John de Sutton after he acquired the property by marriage in 1322. It commands an important ford over the Eamont, from which it is about half a bowshot distant. Yanwath Hall has come down to our own time as an almost unaltered and altogether charming vignette of the Middle Ages, and as such it has attracted much attention from students of medieval military and domestic architecture. The most recent description of the building is contained in the Westmorland volume of the Historical Monuments Commission.† If, in the present study, I shall be found to reach conclusions about the development of the building, and the dates of its several portions, differing radically from those adopted by the Commissioners, it must not be thought that any disrespect for their judgment is thereby implied.

\* See H. G. Leask, *Irish Castles*, chaps. IX-XI.

† Pp. 250-2. See also J. H. Turner and J. H. Parker, *Domestic Architecture of the Middle Ages*, vol. II, xvth century, pp. 216-9; M. W. Taylor, *The Old Manorial Halls of Westmorland and Cumberland*, pp. 52-64; J. F. Curwen, *The Castles and Fortified Towers of Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire North-of-the-Sands*, pp. 319-22.

The tower measures 37 feet 3 inches by 29 feet 6 inches, over walls about 6 feet thick at ground level, and contains three storeys, being 53 feet in height to the summit of its loftiest turret. The basement forms a vaulted cellar, lit originally by two narrow loops, one of which has been enlarged. At the north end of the east wall is the pointed arched door, on the right side of which opens a spiral stair, steep and narrow as the way of righteousness. This stair serves both upper floors and reaches the flat leaded roof, which forms the fighting deck from which the tower was defended. On the first floor is the hall, now lit by three large Tudor windows that doubtless occupy the positions of smaller predecessors; there are, in addition, a fireplace, an aumbry and a garderobe. The hall is now covered with a fine wooden ceiling, on which the date 1586 was formerly visible. Above the hall is the solar, with an open timber roof of rather earlier date. The solar has on every side a window, two of them with side-benches; the window on the west side has an ogee arch, trifoliated. There are also, in this room, a fireplace, three aumbries, and two garderobes, one of which has the unusual fitment of a stone sink. On both floors, the newel stair does not enter the room directly, but by means of steps up in a lobby, of which that admitting to the solar is provided with a laver.

Externally, the staircase forms a slight, buttress-like projection at the east end of the north front of the tower. There is a wave-moulded plinth all round the base of the walls; and, as this plinth is carried westward for a distance of 1 foot 9 inches into the north wall of the hall afterwards added to the tower, it appears that on this side also the staircase and its attendant passages were strengthened by an external buttress. A simple moulded cornice carries the battlements, which have a projecting cope returned on merlons and embrasures—very like that found in a corresponding situation at



Belsay Castle in Northumberland. At all four corners are square turrets, battlemented similarly to the main building. These turrets contain small chambers beneath flat stone platforms reached from the leads by external stairs of stone. The north-west turret is larger than its fellows. Into the lower stage of the north-eastern turret rises the newel stair. All these arrangements, though simpler and on a smaller scale, remind us very strongly of the corresponding features at Belsay. One finely moulded octagonal chimney stack, with an open lantern,\* still remains. It is of a good fourteenth-century pattern and strongly recalls the well known one at Grosmont Castle.

Although the tower has been much altered in Tudor times, its original arrangements are in no way obscured. The upper part is carried out in superior masonry, of coursed rubble, approximating almost to ashlar, in large blocks high in the course. It is a good and characteristic fourteenth-century face. This change in the masonry shows that the upper part is somewhat later; but it is impossible to follow the Historical Monuments Commissioners in their assertion that this portion of the tower is no older than the sixteenth century. The Decorated window on the west side, the character of the chimney stack, and the whole arrangement and aspect of the battlements and turrets, all forbid the assumption of so late a date. At Belsay Castle there is evidence that the work of building was similarly interrupted, and it has been plausibly suggested that the reason was the Black Death.† Quite likely some such cause of delay intervened also at Yanwath.

Towards the end of the fourteenth century, when the manor was held by the Threlkelds, a hall block was added

\* This important chimney is not noticed by the Hist. Mon. Commissioners. There is a measured drawing of it and the south-east turret in our *Transactions*, n.s. vol. xxii, p. 437.

† See Sir Arthur Middleton, *Belsay Castle*, pp. 34-6.



on the eastern side of the tower-house. The original purpose of such a hall was to accommodate the retainers at a common board, leaving the tower for the exclusive use of the family. Such a hall was often built on the north side of the tower-house, in order (presumably) not to interfere with the lighting of the latter. Thus a hall block, known in the seventeenth century as "the new hall of the plaice of Elphinstoun"\* was added on the north side of Elphinstone Tower, East Lothian. And at Widdrington Castle in Northumberland a hall building seems to have been added on the north side of the old tower. Here at Yanwath the addition was made on the east. Perhaps this may have been to cover and provide additional security for the tower door. Or the courtyard buildings to the north of the tower may already have taken shape, rendering it practically inconvenient to extend the hall block on this front.

The hall block, including a vestibule between the hall and the tower, and the kitchen at the lower end of the hall, measures about 86 feet by 32 feet over the walls, excluding the kitchen chimney breast. On the north side, the walls are strengthened by two massive buttresses, with bold weathered offsets; the lower parts of these buttresses are reconstructions, but the upper portions are bonded into the walls. The tall chimney on the south front, the great kitchen chimney on the east gable, and another chimney towards the west end, all have their upper parts built of ashlar with an elaborate projecting cornice consisting of a cable moulding beneath two rows of chequer-pattern corbels. This is very like Scottish work of the later sixteenth century.

The hall measures 42 feet by 23 feet 6 inches. It was much pulled about in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but the original arrangements have not been radically disturbed. The dais was at the west end, next the tower,

\* *Hist. MSS. Com., Appendix to Ninth Report*, pp. 193-4.

and was distinguished by a tall and very beautiful oriel window of three trifoliated and transomed lights, all still in perfect condition; while the body of the hall is lit by a couple of shorter windows each of two trefoiled lights. At the lower end of the hall is a stone screen of the sixteenth century evidently taking the place of a medieval predecessor; and the servery behind has doors at either end, towards the field and towards the courtyard, after a fashion seen in the fourteenth century at Bodiam Castle, and persisting commonly in Elizabethan houses. Above an inserted plaster ceiling the hall still retains, in good preservation, a fine open-timbered roof of the fifteenth century. Beyond the servery is the kitchen, which was almost entirely reconstructed in Elizabethan times, during the Dudley ownership of Yanwath.

A corbel over the main door into the tower,\* and other indications on its eastern wall, show that the floor levels of the hall range have been altered, probably during the sixteenth-century reorganisation. The Historical Monuments Commissioners connect these traces with the extension of the tower plinth for less than a couple of feet along the north wall of the hall block, and conclude accordingly that from the outset the tower was designed to have a hall attached. All the probabilities seem to me to be against this idea. The characteristics of the tower are in every respect those of a free-standing tower-house, and it has nothing in common with the solar blocks integrated with a contemporary hall, like those of Hazelslack and Clifton Hall, with which Yanwath is, in my opinion, quite erroneously compared.† The whole character of the tower entrance is that of an outer door. Moreover, the structural evidence at every point is hostile to the Commissioners' view. On the north side, the short length of walling between the tower face and

\* The Hist. Mon. Commission speaks of a row of corbels, but I can see only one.

† Op. cit., Introduction, p. lx.

the joint marked on their plan is not contemporary with the tower, as they depict it, but has been roughly spliced into the tower face. And on the south side, where the plan shows the tower and the hall front as of one build, there is in actual fact a conspicuous joint, the large quoins of the tower passing in behind the wall afterwards built against them. Finally, the second floor window of the tower is cut by the hall roof. This clearly shows that even when the upper stage was built the tower-house was free-standing.

About the same time when the hall block was erected, a range of offices, now pierced by a modern entrance passage, was added on the east side of the barmekin enclosure. The upper part of its eastern wall, at the north end, is faced with cubical ashlar. To the north, this range terminates in an embattled tower—or rather in the appearance of one, since the so-called tower is nothing more than the end of the east range, carried up above its roof-ridge, and finished off with an open platform that doubtless served mainly as a look-out in a direction which, after the new buildings had been erected, could not be properly overlooked from the tower-house. This platform is machicolated on its eastern shoulder, no doubt for purposes of drainage. The design of the parapet is the same as that of the tower-house. The masonry in the upper part of the wall here is carried out in cubical ashlar. It is said that the chapel occupied the upper floor of this end portion.

In Tudor and Jacobean times the east range was partly rebuilt, and prolonged by a further range of stabling on the north side. It will be observed that in none of their additions, not even in the hall block, is there any pretence of fencible strength, and doors were freely slapped through from the hall block into the old tower. This is in marked contrast to what took place at Belsay and its sister castle, Chipchase, as also at Catterlen Hall not far



FIG. 2.—VIEW FROM SOUTH.

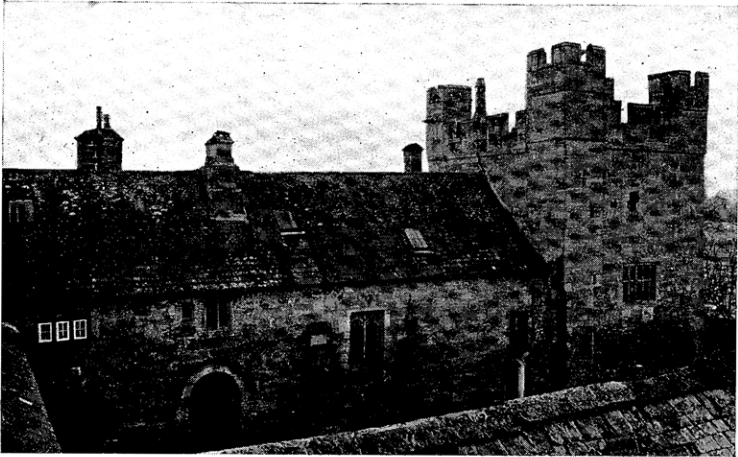


FIG. 3.—VIEW FROM NORTH.

YANWATH HALL.

*To face p. 64.*

By permission of the Controller, H.M. Stationery Office.

from Yanwath—in all of which the security of the tower-house was jealously maintained even when the large Tudor or Jacobean additions were made.

The minor architectural details and fitments of Yanwath Hall have been fully inventoried by the Historical Monuments Commissioners. They include many features of much interest, in which the delight in grace of form and vigour in execution which the old craftsmen brought to their labours is abundantly manifest. Mention may here be made of a corbel which supports a beam on the west side of the tower hall; it is carved with a head that might be Shakespeare's. Another corbel on the north side shows a blank shield. In the south wall of the later hall, but not now carrying a beam, is a corbel displaying another blank shield, of florid Renaissance design. The fine coat of arms of Queen Elizabeth, in modelled plaster, over the fireplace in the hall of the tower-house, though simpler in design, is obviously by the same hand as that at Levens Hall. But the most remarkable feature of the Elizabethan embellishments at Yanwath is the large painted clock-face on the west wall of the hall. Above the dial are the sun and moon, at which a gentleman in each lower corner is looking up, while underneath is the motto SIC TRANSIT GLORIA MUNDI. The dial is painted on boards, and on either side of it is a panel filled with conventional floral ornament.

Yanwath, observed Thomas Machell, the seventeenth century historian of Westmorland, "hath a delicate prospect when you are at it, and hath the grace of a little castle when you depart from it." Although nowadays the west-coast expresses thunder past within a stone's cast of its walls, this fine example of a small Border stronghold retains a full measure of its ancient grace, while the "delicate prospect" from its time-worn battlements is little impaired by all the changes that have taken place

since Machell wrote. The view from the tower head is indeed a splendid one, and reveals how carefully the site has been selected. On the west are the Cumberland fells, with Helvellyn and Saddleback in all their glory. Eastward, the broad strath of the Eden valley is generously displayed, with the fine outline of the Pennines beyond. To the south extends an ample rolling champaign country; and immediately under the castle to the north is the romantic, deep and wooded valley of the Eamont, with Penrith Beacon in the middle distance beyond.

The courtyard buildings on the north and east side are still occupied for farm stabling purposes, and so give us a salutary reminder of the intimate connexion between a medieval manor house and the agricultural system upon which its economy was based. We are apt to forget this amid all our preoccupation with "military architecture."

A muster roll of horsemen in the West March, dated 14th February, 1581, provides us with particulars as to the number and quality of men which a small property like Yanwath was expected to furnish. The list for the parish is as follows:—\*

YANEWATHE AND EMONDBRIGG. "Mr. Richard Dudley, esquier, and two of his household servantes furnyshed with horse, bowes or speares." John Armerer, Richard Walker, John Todde, John Gibson, Thomas Jackson, Peter Browham, Richard Peak, William Cartmell—"8 furnysshed withe naggess and bowes." Richard Walker, John Walker, John Law, John Cowper, William Varay, Christofer Gibson, Thomas Wilson, Thomas Bank, Henrye Haulle, William Harrison, Michaell Syssen, William Lister—"12 furnysshed withe naggess and bylles." Michaell Jyen, Michaell Browne—"2 furnysshed withe naggess and gownes called callevers."

\* *Cal. Border Papers*, vol. I, p. 64.

The three men called up from Yanwath may be compared with the six that Brougham Castle had to find.

In the 16 Fleming manuscripts at Rydal Hall\* are many papers dealing with Yanwath. Among them are household and farm accounts of the place in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. These are likely to be of much interest, and it is to be hoped that some day they will be investigated with a view to publication.

Since 1654 Yanwath Hall has formed part of the Lowther estates. Owners and tenants alike have combined to maintain it in good repair, and in a state worthy in every respect of its high architectural importance. To-day, however, signs are not lacking that time is beginning to tell upon the stout old fabric. In particular, there is a serious settlement at the north-west corner of the tower, and the foundation stones of the corresponding angle of the northern range of the courtyard have recently fallen out. It is much to be desired that steps will be taken betimes to secure this interesting memorial of the Middle Ages from further deterioration.

Acknowledgment is due to the courtesy of the Historical Monuments Commission in permitting the reproduction of the illustrations, and to H.M. Stationery Office for lending the blocks.

\* *Hist. MSS. Com., Twelfth Report, Appendix, Part VII.*