Peverel's Castle in the Peak.

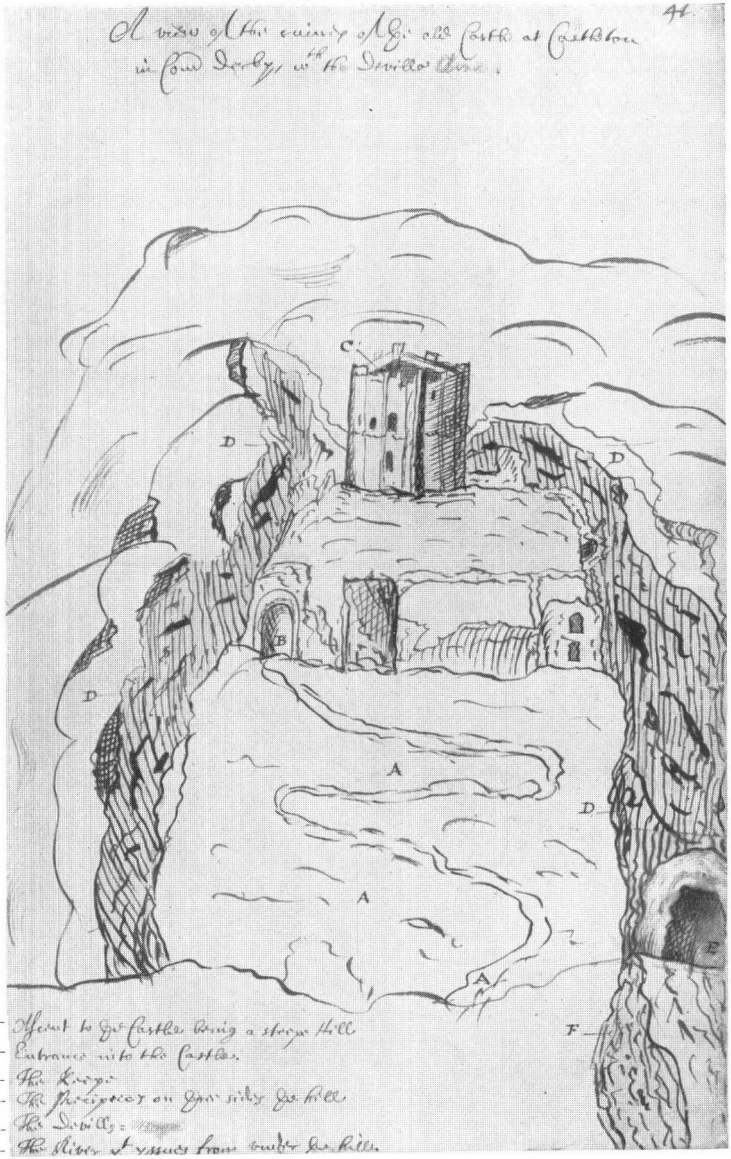
By Henry Kirke, M.A., B.C.L.

PEVEREL'S CASTLE IN THE PEAK, which gave its name to Sir Walter Scott's well-known novel, has been often visited by archæologists and travellers, and the results of their observations have been published at various times. The travellers and authors of popular histories content themselves with somewhat vague generalities and mythical legends; the archæologists plunge into minute description, and sometimes advance theories which are rarely warranted by the facts before them. It is startling to see how these learned men differ in their description of what they saw, measured, and delineated.

In this short paper I propose to attempt a comparison of their different statements when describing the old Castle, pointing out in what respect they disagree, and making a few suggestions towards reconciling their discrepancies, or giving a new interpretation to their discoveries.

Detailed descriptions of the Peak Castle by competent persons are not numerous. As far as I have been able to ascertain they are as follows:—

1. In the *Archæologia* for 1782 there is published a full description of the Castle, written by Mr. Edward King, illustrated by plans.



From the original Drawing from Elias Ashmole's Collection.

2. In the *Archæological Journal* for 1848 we find an historical and archæological notice of the Castle, with plans and sketches, by Mr. C. E. Hartshorne.

3. In our own *Journal* for 1889 there is to be found an interesting paper read by Mr. St. John Hope before the Derbyshire Archæological Society.

4. In his excellent book, *The Evolution of the English House*, Mr. Addy gives us a clear dissection of the anatomy of the Peak Castle, which he rightly selects as a fine type of the Norman fortress of the twelfth century.

5. I have had the good fortune to discover, amongst Ashmole's *Church Notes*, preserved in Bodley's Library at Oxford, an old pen-and-ink sketch of the Castle and its environs as it appeared about 1662. This drawing has been photographed for me by the Clarendon Press, and a reduced copy of it illustrates this article as a frontispiece.

Dr. Pegge's monograph on Bolsover and Peak Castles contains nothing that is interesting, nothing that is new, with regard to the Peak. Glover, in his *History of Derbyshire*, devotes nearly five pages to the Peak Castle, most of which are taken up with the family history of the Peverels; the rest is a compilation from Mr. King's article and other sources.

The almost inaccessible and easily defended rock on which the Castle is built must from remote times have offered itself as a place of refuge, so we may fairly conjecture that some kind of stronghold was erected thereon during the Saxon period, or even earlier. Possibly on its summit was built one of that chain of fortified camps which Edward the Elder erected across Derbyshire to check the inroads of the Danes.

When William Peverel at the time of the Norman Conquest obtained possession of the Honour of the High Peak, he grasped at once the advantages of the position, upon which he erected the ancient stronghold, which is described in Domesday Book (completed in 1086) as the castle of William Peverel in Pechefers. When, by the forfeiture of the Peverel estates, the Castle fell into the hands of the Crown, its royal

owners appear to have spared no expense in maintaining its structure and increasing its importance.

Mr. C. E. Hartshorne, Mr. St. John Hope, Mr. Yeatman, and other antiquaries, have unearthed from the Pipe Rolls many interesting items of expenditure on the defences of the Castle. During the reign of Henry II. more than £282 (equal in our money to about £4,200) was spent on new buildings and repairs, of which sum £135 (about £2,000) was spent upon the keep alone. Nor was this purposeless expenditure. The Peak Forest, which abounded in deer, wolves, and wild boars, was a favourite hunting-ground of the Plantagenet Kings, who in the intervals of the chase caroused in the gloomy hall of the Castle.*

We find entries in the Rolls for wine and provisions for the King and his royal guest, Malcolm of Scotland, at various times amounting to sums equal to one thousand pounds of modern money. In the turbulent reign of King John the Castle was further strengthened, £80 (£1,200) being expended in repairs. During the troubles in the reign of Henry III. the Castle was held by the King and the barons in turn; but in the reign of the English Justinian it was firmly held in the royal grasp, and was honoured on several occasions by the presence of the King, who was the last of our monarchs to chase the wolves and the deer through the Royal Forest of the High Peak.

Even in the rude age of the Plantagenets the Peak Castle must have afforded but sorry lodgings. The hall, only twenty-two feet by nineteen feet, must have been crowded to excess by the King, his nobles, and their followers, although no doubt the bulk of the retinue, with the huntsmen, horses, and dogs, were quartered in the village of Castleton, which nestled at the foot of the Castle hill. The village was itself protected

* There are entries in the Forest Rolls dated 1255-6 of a colt strangled by wolves in Edale, and two sheep in another place. The Peak Forest abounded in red deer and roe deer, wild boars and wild cats. Otters were killed in the rivers, and "cornilus," whatever these were, possibly wild goats, appear to have been numerous.

from sudden attack by an earthwork, which formed a semi-circle stretching from the rocks near the entrance to the Peak Cavern round the village to the opening into Cave Dale. Bray, in his *Itinerary* (eighteenth century), describes it as "an intrenchment which began at the lower end of the valley called the Cave, enclosed the town, ending at the great Cavern, and forming a semi-circle. This is now called the Town Ditch, but the whole of it cannot be easily traced, having been destroyed in many places by buildings and the plough."

That mixture of fact and myth which passes for County History asserts that the barons who extorted Magna Charta from King John met at the Peak Castle. In fact, their meeting-place was at Stamford, from whence they marched to London, through Northampton and Bedford. One also reads that King Henry III. slept at the Peak Castle the night before the battle of Evesham; a physical impossibility, as Castleton and Evesham are about a hundred miles apart. But there is no doubt that Henry III. visited the Peak Castle on several occasions. He was there in 1235-6, as it appears by an entry in the Forest Rolls that Robert de Ashbourne, bailiff of the Forest, provided him with four wild boars and forty-two geese, charging for them 16*s.* 3½*d.* in his accounts. The King was also at the Castle in April, 1264, some time before the battle of Lewes. Its possession at that period was, no doubt, of some importance, as it was specially mentioned as one of the castles which Simon de Montfort demanded from the King after the rout at Lewes. The tournament said to have been held beneath the Castle walls, when the gallant Guarine de Metz won the hand of the fair Mellet Peverel, may be classed with the legends of King Arthur and his table round.

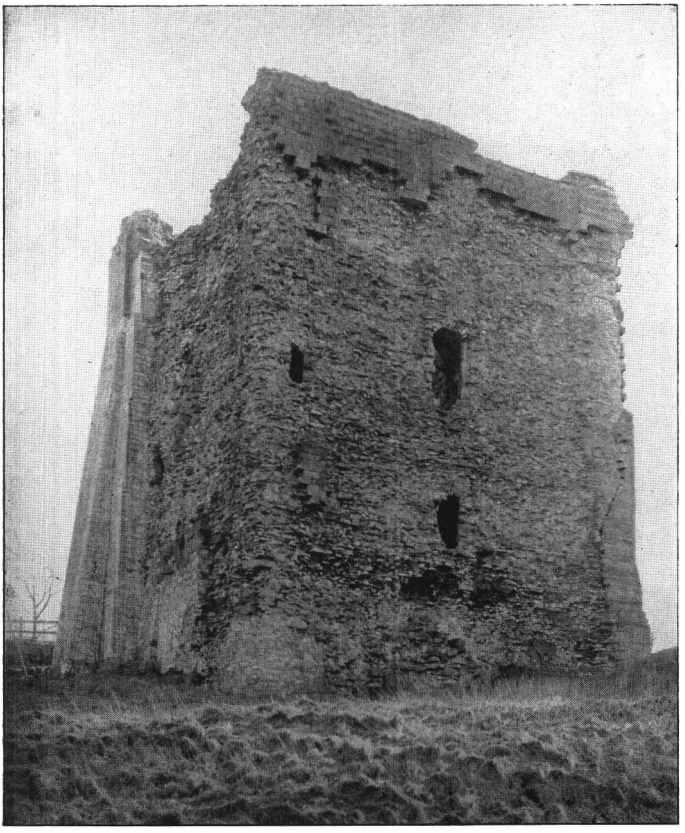
The Peak Castle attained its full extent and importance under the first Edward. There is reason to suppose that its neglect and decay began soon afterwards. Under the first three Edwards a new form of fortification which superseded the rectangular Norman donjon was introduced into England. The keep was dispensed with, its place being taken by an

open court, walled and towered at the corners, and having its hall, its chapel, and its living rooms built within the walls. From this period the English castles became stately residences requiring a considerable garrison, and could only be maintained at vast expense. The small area which was available around the Norman keep of the Peak Castle was insufficient for the erection of such extensive buildings, so it was abandoned for more ample localities. Alnwick, Ludlow, Warwick, and many other stately fortresses, all date from this period.

The hunting-box of the Plantagenet Kings, the watch-tower of Edward the Elder, the stronghold of the Peverels, was degraded into a casual prison for the victims of local tyranny, until, in more civilized times, it fell into decay and became a mere quarry of stone open to the depredations of unscrupulous builders.

The present aspect of the old keep shows unmistakably how early was its abandonment as a place of residence. There seems to have been no attempt made to alter or enlarge the building to suit more modern requirements, so it has escaped the fate which overtook Guildford, Rochester, and many other Norman donjons. Except for the ruthless spoliation of its venerable walls in the eighteenth century, we possess the shell of a perfect Norman keep as it left its builders' hands in the twelfth century. The turrets and battlements have disappeared, the wooden floors and roof have, of course, decayed, and two sides of the building have been stripped of their ashlar facings. I have been told on good authority that the stone facing from the castle was used by a local functionary to build himself a new house at Castleton.

The remains of the castle still left to us are, without doubt, of Norman work. Mr. King was of opinion that the keep was built during the Saxon Heptarchy; but although several antiquaries have dogmatized from the existence of some herring-bone work in the base of the keep and in the walls enclosing the Castle area that a Saxon *stone* fortress formerly stood on the spot, there can be no doubt that the keep as it stands is entirely Norman work.



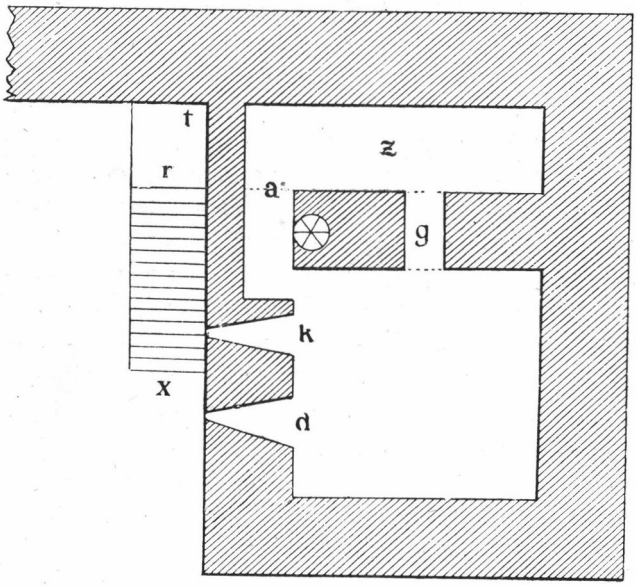
PEAK CASTLE, 1906.

Saxon strongholds were invariably built of wood-stockades of felled trees, supported by earthwork; the herring-bone design which is supposed to indicate Saxon work may have been supplied by Saxon masons working under Norman masters. Similar herring-bone work has been found in Norman erections at Lincoln.* It is only necessary to compare the donjon with similar edifices in England and Normandy to be satisfied that the keep was built in the century succeeding the Norman Conquest.

Ascending the steep hill by a zig-zag path on the north side next to the town, we enter the castle yard, or ballium, by a ruined gateway. The castle yard forms an irregular parallelogram surrounded by walls, measuring roughly two hundred and twenty feet in length from east to west, and one hundred feet and sixty feet in width at the west and east ends respectively. It is a sloping platform which has been levelled up to the north wall to the height of about eleven feet. The north wall, which was about six feet thick, is now almost destroyed, but on reference to Ashmole's drawing it will be seen that the Castle was entered by a gateway surmounted by a Norman arch ornamented by dog-tooth moulding. On the right hand was a bastion to defend the entrance to the gate. The curtain wall extended across the slope of the hill to the precipices overlooking the entrance to the Peak Cavern, ending in a square tower at its north-west angle. As the north was the only accessible part of the hill, this wall was, no doubt, of considerable height, battlemented, with an inside parapet for the use of its defenders; the bastion and tower would also be of great strength. To judge by the sketch, the tower must have undergone some alteration in later and more peaceful days, as the windows seem to have been enlarged and the building adapted to some un-warlike purpose. No other defensive works appear to have existed on the walls which surround the area on the south, east, and west sides; nor would they

* *Brit. Arch. Journal*, 1900, pp. 272-3.

be required, as the walls skirt almost inaccessible precipices. In the west wall there is a rectangular projection which Mr. King describes as the foundation of another small tower, and which Mr. Hartshorne calls a sallyport. Neither of these suggestions commends itself to me. At the south-west angle there are some remains of a rude arch four feet wide, which Mr. King describes as the site of a small tower with a window looking outwards. Mr. Hartshorne considers this



Ground Plan of the Castle.

building, whatever it was, to be of later date than the Keep itself. The wall on the south-east side is modern, and merely protective to visitors.

The keep, as is usual, stands on the highest part of the area; it is rectangular, like most Norman donjons of the period. On the basement floor the walls are eight feet thick, built of concrete made of broken pieces of limestone mixed with

mortar. Both the outside and inside of these concrete walls were faced with fine and well-pointed blocks of gritstone ashlar, which must have been brought from some distant place, as no such stone is found in the immediate neighbourhood. The concrete is of intense hardness, like a Roman wall—it is a solid mass.

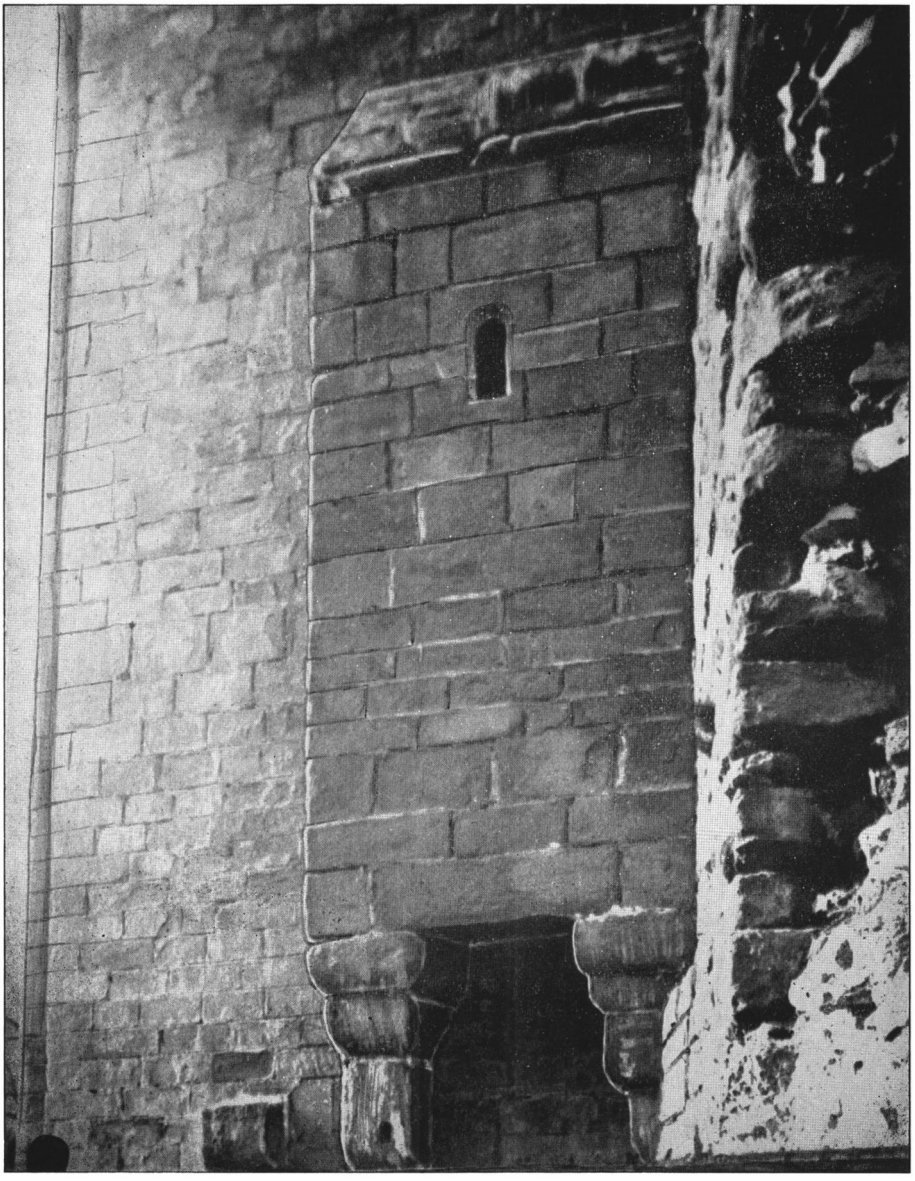
Mr. Addy is of opinion that the keep only contained two rooms—the basement and the hall. Mr. King and Mr. C. E. Hartshorne held different views. According to them, the Peak Castle was built on the same lines as Guildford, Corfe, and other Norman donjons, and contained three storeys, and I was myself disposed to accept their conclusions. But a recent careful investigation of the ruin has satisfied me that Mr. Addy is correct. This is an interesting fact to have established, although it was not unusual in the smaller Norman keeps. As Mr. Clark points out: "In the smaller keeps the roof was a simple ridge with lateral gutters; the original roof having its ridge rather below the parapet, had its side gutters in deep hollows. Where the walls have been raised the roof has been replaced by a floor and an upper storey introduced, with either a flat, or nearly flat, leaded roof." That this was never done at the Peak is a proof of my statement that the Castle was early abandoned as a place of residence for more extensive areas.

The keep was entered, not by the opening broken into the basement on the north-east side at a later date, but by an arched doorway opening into the first floor room on the south-east side, and access to it was obtained by means of a wooden ladder, a staircase which could be drawn up in time of alarm. Mr. Edward King (see *Archæologia*, 1782) does not accept this simple means of access. He says: "In the room above"—*i.e.*, the first floor—"was the ancient great entrance, to which it seems exceedingly probable there was a flight of steps that led first to the top of a low wall built across the space from *r* to *t* (see plan), and from thence along a platform to the great portal, having

most likely a drawbridge placed above the crown of the little arch of entrance (*a*) beneath. Many circumstances lead to this conclusion, for, in the first place, that the arch at (*g*) was the grand entrance is obvious." There is no "grand" in the matter—it was, in fact, the only entrance to the keep. "Moreover," he continues, "the crown of this arch, as well as the bottom of the portal, is lower than those of the windows. And yet nothing can be more evident than that a flight of steps could hardly, with any degree of possibility, be made to ascend to it between the outward wall of the Castle, and that of the keep itself blocking up the lower arch of entrance at (*a*), unless, by some means or other, they were so constructed as to be carried over the top of it." I do not understand this, unless Mr. King imagined that there was another entrance to the keep itself blocking up the lower arch of entrance at (*a*), unless, "I believe the grand approach to have been as represented, the steps ascending from (*x*) to (*r*), where was a considerable platform, after which the passage went directly over the top of a wall at (*r*) (*t*) to a drawbridge at (*z*), and thence by a continuance of platform to the portal (*g*), in which case the approach to the steps would be well commanded both by the lower loop at (*d*) and by the great window above at (*k*), and this will account for the loop at (*d*) being placed so irregularly near one corner of the room, instead of being placed in the middle as the window above is."

This conjecture of Mr. King is very ingenious, and worthy of consideration, but I think that the simple mode of access is more likely to be correct when we compare the Peak with other keeps erected about the same time. Speaking of Norman keeps, Mr. Clerk, in his *Mediæval Military Architecture*, says that access to such donjons was by an external staircase of timber which could be drawn up. None of the other authorities whom I have mentioned venture to give an opinion on the subject.

The arched entrance doorway on the first floor is 4 ft. 9 in. wide, and is surmounted on the outside by a relieving arch or tympanum. It is 8 ft. 6 in. above the present level of the



THE GARDEROBE.

ground outside, which level has been raised by accumulations of soil and rubbish.* The principal room in the keep was entered through this archway. This hall is twenty-two feet in length by nineteen feet in breadth. In the thickness of the south-east wall is a garderobe, well concealed from view by a tortuous passage, and having formerly a door at its entrance. This garderobe projects like an oriel window over the precipice below, and is lighted by a small opening. These garderobes, which are almost universal in Norman keeps, were evidently latrines, and have the usual kind of outlet through a loop, or by a vertical shaft in the wall, with an opening at the base. Ignorant guides often describe them as oubliettes. It is a curious fact that on the outer face of the wall there is inserted an extra corbel (as will be seen in the photograph), which would seem to suggest that the garderobe was originally intended to be twice its present size, and that the plan was subsequently altered and reduced. A narrow opening, formerly closed by a door in the north-east wall, leads to a mural chamber, which has two small windows, one on the north-east and the other on the north-west. This room might be used either as a bedroom or a storeroom. The hall, as we may call it, is lighted and ventilated by three narrow windows, the highest of which is in the south-east gable and ten feet above the floor. The other windows are in the north-east and north-west walls. All these openings, which I call windows, throughout the whole keep are deeply splayed on the inside and slipped up to; they are small, and the hall must have been badly lighted. At night these apertures were covered by curtains; the holes which contained the ends of the curtain rods can still be seen below the semi-circular arches which surmount the sides and jambs.

The different sections of the keep were connected together by a well staircase of stone which ascended and descended from the entrance doorway. By this staircase ascent was made

* I take the measurements from the accurate survey of the building made by Mr. Addy.

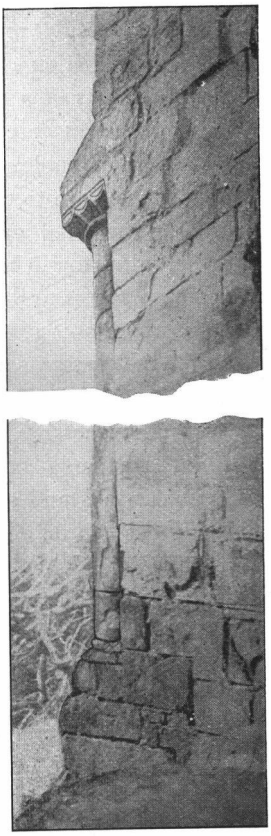
from the hall to the belfry tower opening on the rampart walk around the roof. The walls which surrounded the roof were unusually lofty, battlemented and pierced at certain points by openings which served as look-out stations or places for the burning of beacon fires. The window-like aperture in the south-west wall above the roof may have been such a watching-place, as, unlike the windows below, the floor of this aperture is flat. It is about 6 ft. 5 in. in depth and 4 ft. 1 in. in breadth. The narrow loophole at the outer end of the aperture has been crossed horizontally by two iron bars, which would afford protection to the watchman from falling out. This recess Mr. King, on what authority I am ignorant, asserts to have been "the idol cell or little idolatrous chapel in Pagan times, as at Connisburgh." This seems improbable. The "recess" at Connisburgh referred to by Mr. King is an oratory of considerable size, with a vaulted roof, and designed for Christian worship. Besides, accepting, as we must do, Mr. Addy's theory, it is impossible that a shrine or chapel could exist in such a situation.

The line of the roof is well marked by a remarkable weathering course, which is composed of large stones standing out eight inches from the flat of the wall, and about four inches thick. There is a smaller corbel table above the corbels which support the roof, which apparently supported the platform on which the guard would walk from the staircase to the look-out station, which I have previously described. A gutter, which seems to be original work, leads from the corbels which support the roof through the outer wall to discharge rain-water.

The basement is on the exterior ground level, and does not seem to have been excavated to form a level floor. There is a curious stonework drop in the floor of the basement, as if the south wall of the keep had been built upon an older wall foundation, probably part of the original keep built by Peverel. The height of this room was twelve feet from the highest part of the ground, and seventeen feet from the lowest. It was approached from the hall by the well staircase, which was closed

at both ends by strong doors. There are two narrow deeply splayed windows which give light to the room, which was evidently used as a storeroom.

There is no sign of any well within the Keep. In Glover's *History* it is stated that a well was discovered on the summit of Long Cliffe Hill, between which and the Castle there is a communication across the narrow ridge of rock that overtops the entrance into the Peak Cavern. This well is said to be built of the same kind of gritstone as the facings of the Keep, and it is so situated as easily to be made available for an abundant supply of water. Certainly a supply of water must have been obtained from somewhere, otherwise the castle would have been untenable.



Capital and Base of Shaft.

Mr. Addy says: "Strange to say, a small natural cave extends beneath the building, with openings in the cliff on the south-east and south sides." I have not been able to verify this statement.

From the ground level to the top of the battlements the Keep must have been almost sixty feet high, and forty feet square on the outside of the basement. The exterior was flat, relieved by broad pilaster strips of slight projection at the angles and flanking each face, with one in each centre between them. The flanking pilasters covering each angle were each ornamented by an elegant shaft with boldly-carved capital. Only one of these remains now at the south angle, of which

we give a photograph. The well staircase, situated in the east angle of the building, rose right through the keep from the basement to the belfry in the roof.

Although a small and insignificant object when compared with the lordly castles which are scattered over the length and breadth of Great Britain, the Peak Castle affords us, as I have already remarked, an almost unique example of the Norman donjon of the twelfth century, unaltered to suit the requirements of a more advanced civilization. It was built with such jealous care and with such enduring materials that, as we see by Ashmole's drawing, the walls of the keep remained almost intact down to the end of the seventeenth century. The floor and roof had certainly gone; some of the battlements and the belfry tower had crumbled away; the wooden staircase which gave access to the fortress had disappeared, and doubtless the gap which now gives access to the building had been broken through the massive walls; but its main features remained unaltered. It was left for an unsentimental and utilitarian age to strip the venerable keep of its covering and leave it naked but not ashamed, and still able for centuries to defy the boisterous winds and snowstorms of the High Peakland.

It is greatly to be desired that a careful and minute investigation should be made of the Castle yard. The foundations of the bastion and towers might be unearthed. Let us hope that this may be done at some future date under the auspices of the Derbyshire Archæological Society.

EDITOR'S NOTE.—The Illustration facing this page is from an old print in my possession. For the photographs we are indebted to the kindness of Mr. G. Le Blanc Smith. That of the Garderobe is the result of a somewhat exciting adventure, for, finding it impossible to get a successful position in any other way, he, and his camera, were lowered some twenty feet down over the side of the rock on a rope, Castleton-made, by the custodian and his son. From that position, hanging in mid-air over a precipice some 100 feet from the ground, he managed, in a high wind, after several unsuccessful attempts, to obtain the one which illustrates this article.

NORTH-WEST VIEW OF PEAK CASTLE,
Granted by King Edward II. to John, the Eighth Earl of Warren.

Published as the Act directs, Aug. 20, 1785.