

III.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CAERLAVEROCK CASTLE. BY G. P. H.
WATSON, F.S.A.ScoT., SECRETARY.

Caerlaverock Castle, which stands in a swamp on the Solway flats about nine miles south-south-east of Dumfries, must be reckoned among the foremost examples of secular architecture in Scotland. The site is naturally secured by its marshy surroundings, but immediately to the north rises firmer ground, and a spur of this declining into the marsh has been adapted for the castle by insulating and protecting it with a system of ramparts and ditches; the inner ditch formerly spanned by a drawbridge is full of water, 10 feet deep in parts; the outer ditch, swampy and difficult of passage, was probably crossed on a traverse controlled by a gate or other forework; the entire system of outworks was commanded from the defensive wallheads of the castle.

The ramparts seem to be mainly of sand; the subsoil of the site is clay, and the distribution of rock and hard foundation upon it may have dictated the extent and general arrangement of the structures. The castle is illustrated in an interesting MS. military report prepared between 1563 and 1566 by an English official and now preserved in the Cottonian Collection, British Museum; the report is reproduced in the *History of Liddesdale and the Debateable Land*, App. LXX. p. CIX., from which the undernoted extract relative to Caerlaverock is taken.

“The mouthe of the Water of Nytht: A schallow revare; noo weshalles can come furtht of Englonde in yt but at the ful sea, and that at the crope of the tyde; soo that thei mon pas the Longrake sande, in the myddes of Sulwaye: And yf thei come from Wirkingtoun or that coest, thei mon come upoun Gallowaye syde on the same maner. There boates and vesshells can not excede ten townes, soo any interprise in that revare to be attempted by watter, ys to small purpose, oneles the cuntrie wor ones wyn, and some fortification in the same, and in that caise bootes may arryve as occacion served, witht vittell and other necessariis, from Holme lordshippe and that coest, being ten myles over by watter.

“Half a myle from the watter mowtht of Nytht, and upoun theast syde of the same, standith the castell of Carlaverok, pertenyng to the Lorde Maxwell: Noo house presentlie to be kept from cannon or battarde, nor yet can be made strong, as the platt thereof hereafter presentlie will shew, onles the hill above the same, called the Warde Law, be fortified; bootes as said ys of ten tonnes will come to the foote of this hill at the full sea, distant from Holme lordshippe in Englonde xj myles over Sulway watter. Shoulde Lorde Maxwell making a joyall of yt to schyft

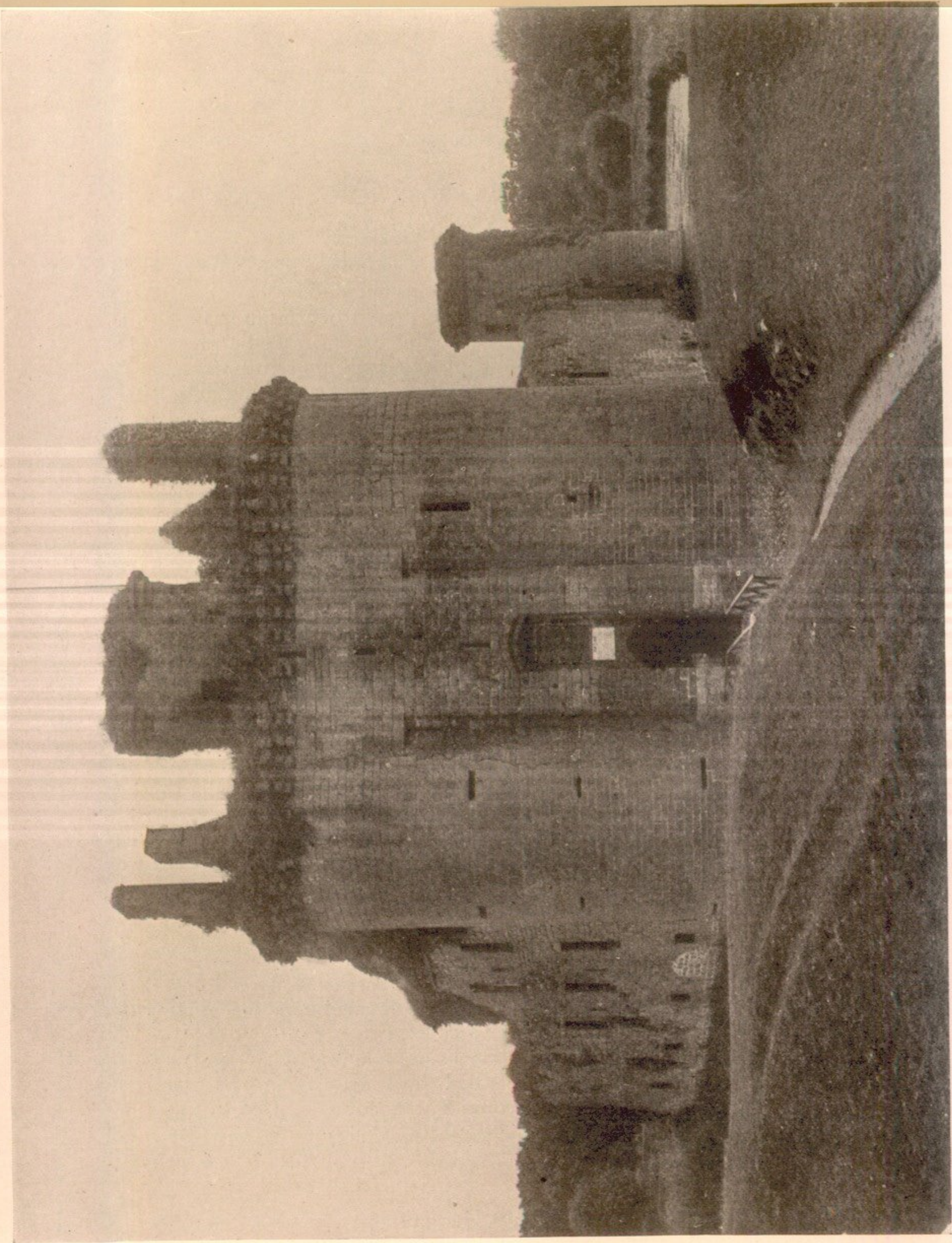


Fig. 1 Caerlaverock Castle: The Front.

him self furtht of Englonde after his apprehension, caused the same be delyvered in Yngles possession; and for vittaling thereof, Henry theight of eterne memorye sent to aide my Lorde Wharton, capitane Camboo, witht a thowsande hargabusers, spanzeondes, and foure hundreitht clavoys horsmen, whiche tuik noo effect, the howse being rendred up or aide camme, and as noo strenght tenable."

The Ward Law, rising to a height of 313 feet over sea-level, overlooks the castle, from which it lies northward and about a mile distant. On the summit is a prehistoric earthwork.

On plan the castle is a triangle disposed with the apex to the north and the base to the sea; flanks and base are protected by curtains originally surmounted with a parapet walk, terminating at the angles in circled towers. There are single towers at the base, and twin towers at the apex, the latter fronting the gatehouse and flanking the entrance, which looks northward to the higher ground, where there was a large walled enclosure provided with an unusually large and lofty gate, still extant, opening to the north-east.

The front (fig. 1) is perhaps the most majestic of the quasi-military facades of Scotland. It comprises the gatehouse, the kernel of the castle, which bears detail rather similar to that on David's Tower in Edinburgh Castle, detail that can definitely be assigned to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century. The gatehouse is a piecemeal construction. Messrs. MacGibbon and Ross have shown that the original entrance lies obscured, as will be seen from the plan, behind a forework built about the middle of the fifteenth century, at which time the parapet or bartizan was completed. The west tower had at first no gun-loops, and those which exist are obvious insertions; while the masonry of the east tower shows no sign of disturbance externally, internally there is evidence that the gun-loops in this tower also are secondary. The cap-house and superstructures are early sixteenth-century additions.

The east flank (fig. 2) comprises the east tower and gable of the gatehouse, beyond which the curtain, formerly much lower, has been largely rebuilt and finally embodied in a range of seventeenth-century building. It will be noticed that the south-east tower no longer survives. The bartizan is carried across the gable and is continued for a short distance southward on a screen of masonry, forming a protective wing to conceal the junction of gatehouse and curtain. There is little doubt that the vulnerable points of a structure were obvious to the mediæval soldier, and devices such as this were employed to render his deductions ineffectual.

The base curtain is demolished for the greater part of its length. The south-west tower, contemporary with the gatehouse, has four storeys,

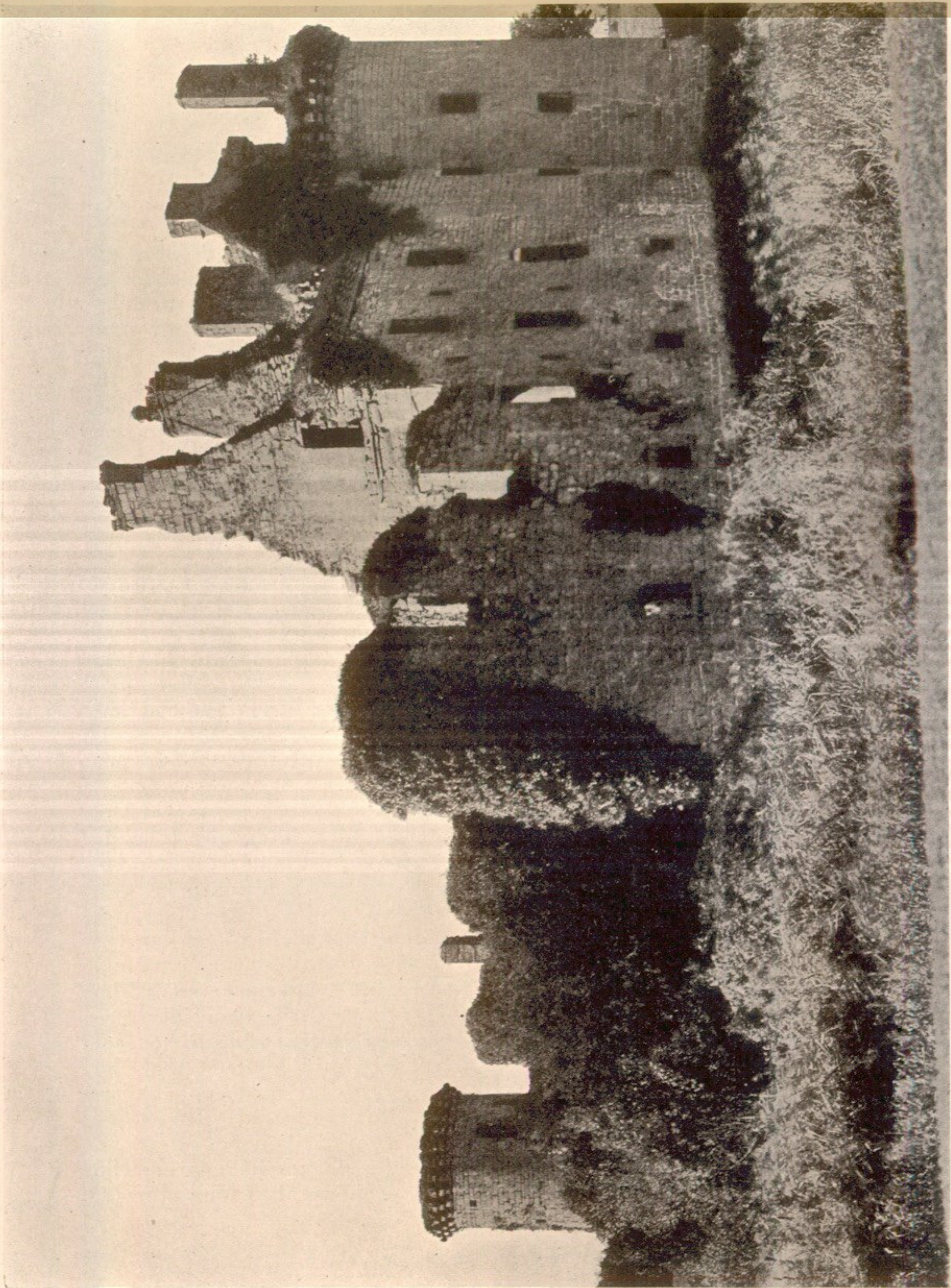


Fig. 2. Caerlaverock Castle : East Flank.

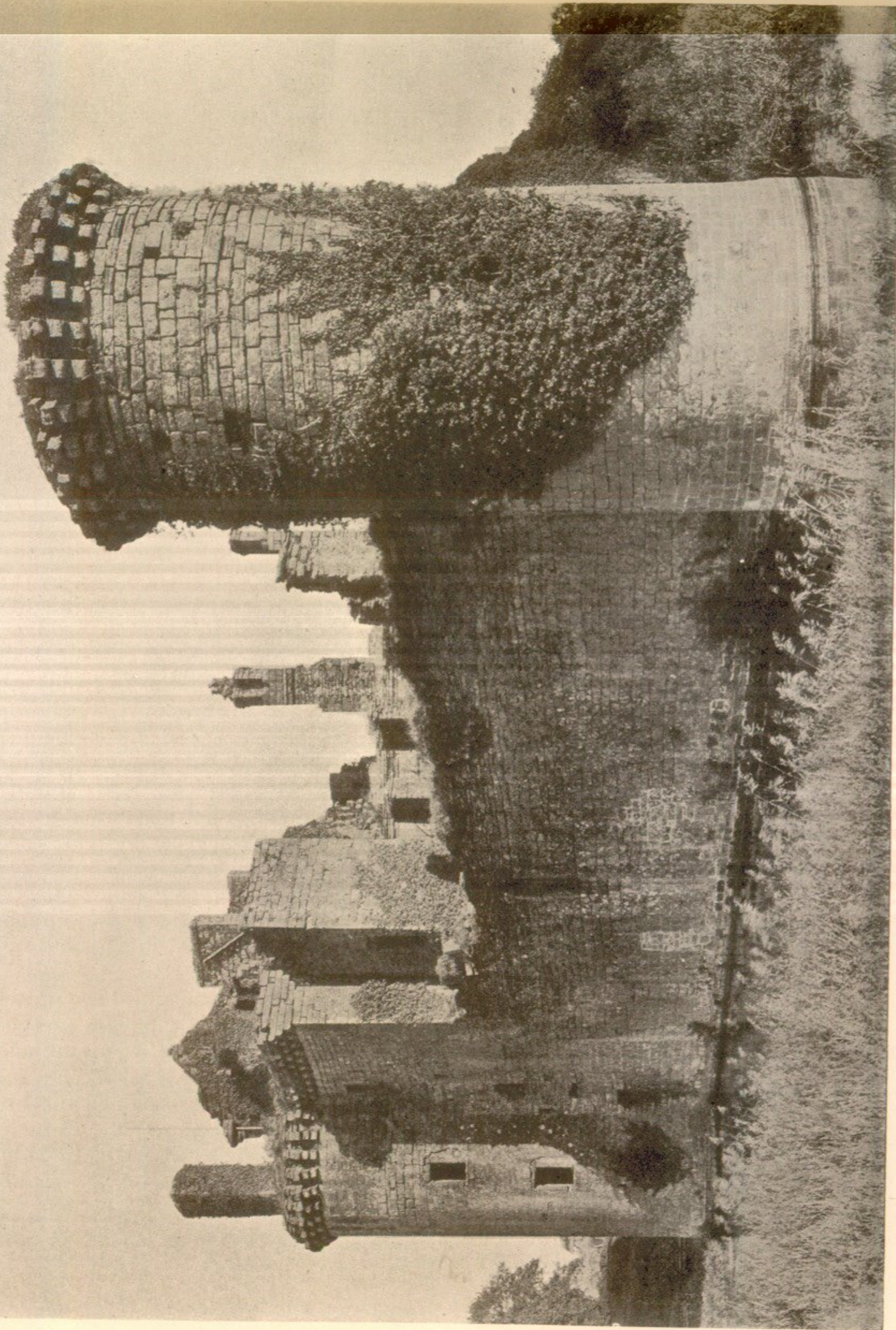


Fig. 3. Caerlaverock Castle: West Flank.

none being vaulted; the upper storeys were entered from the curtain walls, for there were no internal stairs. Filled up, but just distinguishable, are meurtrières formed in the window breasts. At the junction of the tower with the base curtain lay a door opening to the ditch, in which, at this place, there are 10 feet of water.

Within the interior, the rear of the gatehouse is seen partly obscured by a rear-work (*c.* 1500) supported on lofty piers. Against the west curtain is an early sixteenth-century Aving, and just beyond it rises a stair tower of rather later date. Against the east curtain stands the latest addition, a seventeenth-century range which returned on the south along the base and incorporated the curtain.

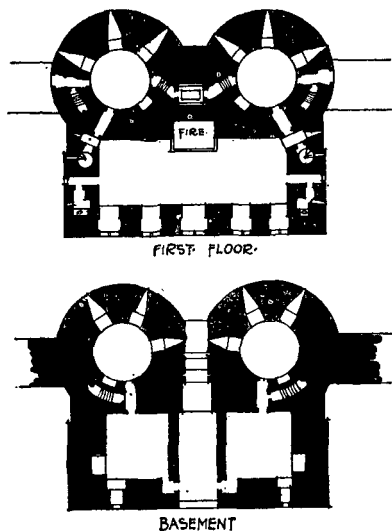


Fig. 4. Plans of Porte de Laon at Coucy-le-Château.

and indicates that the base tower and some 3 feet of the adjoining curtain were constructed as a unit. The masonry at the north end of the curtain has apparently been spliced.

All fortifications run pretty much on stereotyped lines, and the gatehouse of Caerlaverock has its analogies. For example, the plan of the Porte de Laon at Coucy-le-Château, shown in fig. 4, is markedly similar, though that building is much larger and presumably a century and a half earlier than Caerlaverock. While there is this resemblance in the plans, the purpose of the structures is entirely different. The French example is technically a "chatelet,"¹ merely a fortified gate, in this instance on a town wall, simpler patterns of which are the "Bars" of

¹ Longtoft, speaking of the Caerlaverock Castle captured by Edward I. in 1300, described it as "povere chastelet," a poor little castle, but in France the term seems specific.

York and other English towns; Caerlaverock, however, was essentially a residence, a strong one certainly, of the type termed the "gatehouse castle," since the house is concentrated over the entry. Although a French example is cited here for comparison, that is not to say that this entry is peculiar to France and Scotland; on the contrary, a lengthy list might be given of gates both in England and in Wales very similarly arranged.

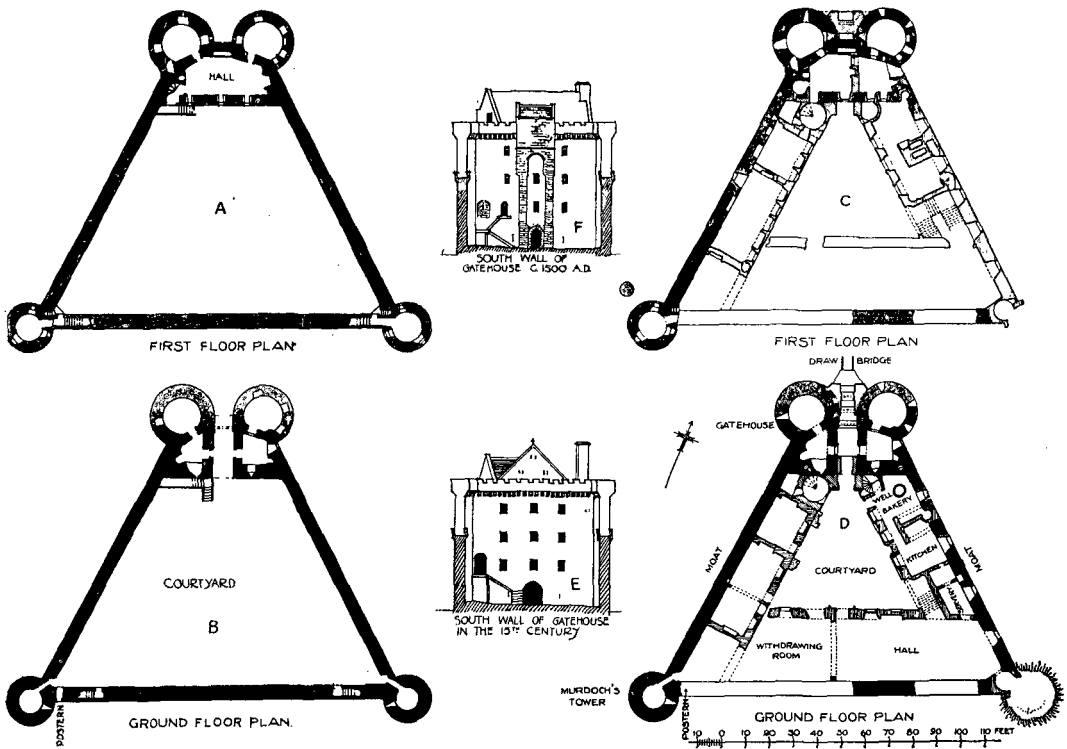


Fig. 5.

A B. Plans of Castle as originally built; C D. Plans of Castle showing additions; E F. Elevations of south wall of Gatehouse.

Caerlaverock in its earlier form (*cf.* plan, fig. 5) comprised a house of five storeys with a courtyard in rear enclosed by curtain walls less than three storeys in height, terminating at the base angles in four-storeyed towers. The house was complete in itself, for the base towers, to judge by the survivor, were intended primarily for defence and temporary shelter and not to provide additional dwelling accommodation. The entrance lay deeply recessed within the frontal towers, and the vaulted trance was protected first, by an opening that penetrates the wall

vertically and can only be a machicolation through which hot water, tar, or such like could be poured on assailants; the second defence was a portcullis, the third a gate. Sufficient barriers we might suppose, yet evidently inadequate in the opinion of the mediæval engineer, for we find in course of time that they were considerably augmented till they finally comprised, first, the drawbridge which folded up within a recess and completely covered the entrance; second, a gate which opened out and could only be opened when the drawbridge was lowered; third, a portcullis; fourth, a gate opening inward; fifth, another portcullis; sixth and seventh, the portcullis and gate first mentioned; eighth, a gate opening outwards (*i.e.* to the north); ninth, a similar gate; and tenth, a feature which is assumed to be a rear portcullis. The builders of Caerlaverock seem to have realised that the entrance to a castle was its vulnerable point. The three last-mentioned defences were intended to prevent access from the courtyard, a precaution not usually taken. It is of course most unlikely that all these barriers were in use at one time.

On either side of the trance lies a vaulted porters' room communicating with a cellar in the towers, once vaulted, though I agree with Messrs MacGibbon and Ross that the vaulting is secondary. I would go further and suggest that much of the existing vaulting is a renewal. As the basement was vaulted and there was no internal communication with the upper floors, the former might be taken without involving the fall of the whole; further, if the basement went on fire there was little danger of the conflagration spreading upward.

The first floor seems to have been originally entered towards the west end of the south wall, where a wide arched doorway is seen built up; it must have been reached by a forestair of timber (fig. 5, E),—and a precisely similar arrangement is found in a gate tower at Carcassone. When the turnpike behind this doorway was altered, a window adjoining was opened up to form a "more convenient entrance" which must also have been reached by a forestair (fig. 5, F).

The hall of the gatehouse occupied the body of the first floor, for the present mid-partition is sixteenth-century work, and there was an inner room in each of the towers; between the entrances to these lay a recess from which the portcullis was worked. The east gable has been rebuilt internally; it would contain a large fireplace probably with a mantel or hood. The upper floors, reached from the turnpike on the west, were similarly arranged. The towers have vaulted ceilings to the second floor; the western of these is ribbed, as will be seen from fig. 6. From the second floor upwards there is an additional chamber within the mid-fifteenth century forework, which in each case was devoted to defence and not to domestic purposes. • The lowest chamber

has provision for the mechanism which worked the portcullis and drawbridge.

The first alteration on the castle of any importance was the projection of the entrance and the provision of additional barriers. A detail of the forework is given in fig. 7, which shows the recess A-A into which the drawbridge folded, the hole C for the cable which raised or lowered the bridge, two socket holes B-B for the ends of the timber stays from which the bridge depended, and the socket holes D for the bridge transom.



Fig. 6. Vaulted Ceilings, N.W. Tower.

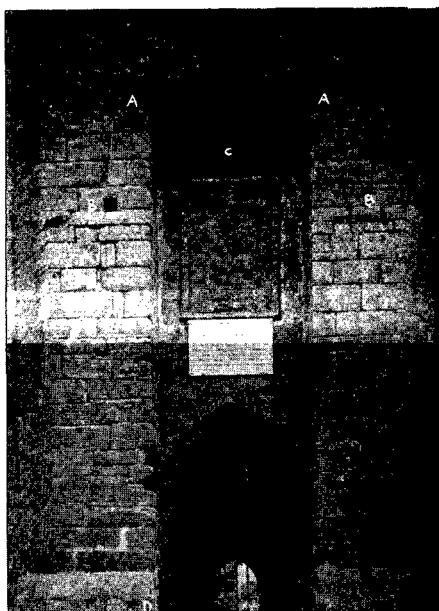


Fig. 7. Detail of Forework.

A seventeenth-century armorial panel has been inserted within the recess; the principal achievement is that of Robert Maxwell, first Earl of Nithsdale, while subsidiary shields at the corners bear respectively the Royal Arms, the arms of John, eighth Lord Maxwell, Earl of Morton, of Maxwell impaling Mar, and lastly of Stewart of Dalswinton. The back of the pend was subsequently contracted, and this alteration dates with the later entrance to the first floor, about the middle of the fifteenth century. The foregoing were entirely defensive additions; but in the same period a lodging was built against the west curtain. Its extent and appearance can only be conjectured, for it was demolished to make room for the present west wing in the sixteenth century.

About the beginning of the sixteenth century the cap-house, super-structures, and chimneys were added, and a curious lofty rear-work was built at the back of the pend. This is supported on high piers spanned by an arch surmounted by a little house (fig. 5, F). The soffit of the arch is slotted, and the corbelled ingoings are chased to permit some construction to slide up and down. The outer east face is similarly corbelled and chased, perhaps for counterweights. While the rear-work adds greatly to the charm of the courtyard, it affords useful abutment to the lofty south wall of the gatehouse. Some little time after it, the present handsome lodging was built against the west curtain, which is two storeys in height and comprises on each floor a succession of elegant chambers which we might call public rooms if there were mediæval precedent for the term. The fireplaces are particularly fine of their kind, each having shafted jambs and moulded capitals and bases beneath a massive lintel surmounted by a cornice. The windows to the courtyard are of good size, and those on the upper floor have had mullions and transoms. The only identification on this building is a skew-put bearing a shield charged, a saltire for Maxwell. This range was clearly erected prior to the stair tower adjoining, for a very beautifully moulded doorpiece with slightly ogival head is obscured by the tower; the door must have opened to the stair which served the second entrance to the first floor of the gatehouse.

The stair tower was built within the sixteenth century to give easier access to the upper floors of gatehouse and west wing. The open area between it and the curtain was ingeniously utilised by flooring it to form little galleries or balconies beneath a penthouse roof. During the sixteenth century the windows of the gatehouse were enlarged, the mid-partition was built and a niche to hold a "dressing" for the display of plate was formed at the dais end of the Hall. It was subsequently slapped out as a door to a later turnpike.

The final and largest addition was built by Robert Maxwell, the first Earl of Nithsdale, about 1638, apparently on the site of the late sixteenth-century structures. It is a building of three storeys beneath the wall-head, and the accommodation comprises to the south the "New Hall" with drawing-room off it, and, to the east, offices and the great staircase. On the upper floor a gallery, the "Long Hall," probably extended above the "New Hall," while the east wing contained, *en suite*, "my ladies Chamber and the dining-room." In addition to the main staircase which rose to the first floor only, leaving direct ascent to be continued by a rather mean little service turnpike, there are two handsome turnpikes at the north-eastern and south-western angles of the range, which served all floors in transit.



Fig. 8. Caerlaverock Castle : North angle of Courtyard.

The seventeenth-century fireplaces are very handsome and have moulded console-shaped jambs,—some of the gatehouse fireplaces have been renewed in this pattern. From the occurrence of the fleur-de-lys on the fireplace of the chamber next the main stair, the room has been identified by Mr W. M. Mackenzie, Secretary of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments, as "My Ladies Chamber." Elizabeth Beaumont, Countess of the first Earl of Nithsdale, bore three fleurs-de-lys on her shield.

The facade of Nithsdale's addition (fig. 8) is one of the most exquisite Renaissance compositions left to us. It is not in the stately articulated Renaissance of Palladio and his followers, but its appeal is perhaps more subtle. The composition is admirably handled and most happily grouped. The setting of the turnpike windows, which form a terminal to the façade, is particularly good, and the windows proclaim their purpose. Throughout, the architectural detail is most refined and dainty; the window architraves of the ground floor are moulded and fluted and those above are furnished with little shafts; the pediments contain heraldic and allegorical carvings of considerable interest and some æsthetic value.

The first castle of Caerlaverock which stood either on this site or on one adjacent¹ was, for the second time, razed in 1356.² Some little time after this destruction, between 1375 and 1410 to judge from the architectural details, the present castle was constructed; Fraser³ informs us that Sir Robert Maxwell (1373-1409) was the builder, and his statement is apparently correct. The present west range may have been built by John, fourth Lord Maxwell (1485-1513), but is more probably the work of Robert his successor (1513-1546). In 1593 John Carey reports to Lord Burghley that "Lord Maxwell makes great fortification and has many men working at his house 5 miles from Dumfries."⁴ While no indication is given of the nature of the work then being executed, the date would quite well suit sundry remnants spared by Robert Maxwell, Earl of Nithsdale, in erecting his new wings in the early seventeenth century.

I am indebted to H.M. Stationery Office for the loan of blocks of figs. 1, 2, 3 and 8.

¹ Cf. *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland: Seventh Report and Inventory*, 33 (I. and II.).

² *Scotichronicon*, lib. xiv. cap. xv.

³ *Calendar of Border Papers*, i. p. 470.

* *Book of Caerlaverock*, i. pp. 119, 120.