

NOTICES OF CERTAIN REMARKABLE FORTIFIED CHURCHES  
EXISTING IN CUMBERLAND.<sup>1</sup>

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ON a Survey of the churches in the border counties, though we cannot commend them to the notice of the antiquary as examples of architectural beauty, for in no part of England, possibly, are the rural churches so devoid of ornament, yet these comparatively simple structures forcibly tell a tale of the state of the country in former times; and, if historical evidences had perished, these buildings might suffice to give the archæologist no slight insight into the social condition of the locality in olden days. Their distance apart from each other tells of a scanty population; the deficiency of architectural decoration shows that the inhabitants of the district were otherwise engaged than in peaceful occupations; whilst the traces of continual repairs in the fabric are evidently not to be attributed to the desire shown in the churches of many Southern counties, to make good buildings better, but they resulted from the necessity occasioned by the partial destruction of churches through hostile aggressions. In many instances, it may be said that the church had been erected scarcely less for the safety of the body, than for the benefit of the soul.

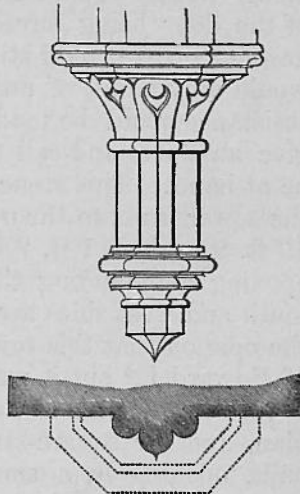
As the peculiarities, to which I have alluded, are very indicative of the former unsettled state of the country, I have selected as the subject of the present observations three churches in Cumberland, which I think worthy of notice on this account; for in these buildings the defensive or warlike character is strongly marked. These may be already known to some members of the Institute through the concise notices and the ground-plans given by Messrs. Lysons, in their *History of Cumberland*;<sup>2</sup> yet these remarkable specimens of ecclesiastical architecture appear to claim more

<sup>1</sup> Communicated to the Architectural Section, at the meeting of the Institute in Carlisle, July, 1859.

<sup>2</sup> *Historical Account of the County of Cumberland, Magna Britannia*, vol. iv. p. cxci.

careful and minute consideration than they have, as I believe, hitherto received.

The first of the border churches to which I would invite the attention of the archæologist, on a visit to our county, is that of Burgh-on-the-Sands, situated on the southern shore of the Solway. It was at that place, it will be remembered, that Edward I. died, on July 7, 1307, in the midst of his preparation for a campaign against the Bruce.<sup>3</sup> The church stands in the south-eastern angle of one of the stations on the line of the Roman Wall, supposed by some antiquaries to be the Gabrosentum, by others, the Axeldunum, of Antonine's Itinerary. The earliest portion of the building is of late Norman date, and the remains of a round-arched doorway of that period exist on the north side of the north aisle of the church, but not in its original situation. Hugh de Morville, lord of Burgh—one of the four knights who conspired to murder Thomas à Becket in 1170—had a castle there, of which the site is traditionally pointed out near the village, and he gave the church to the abbey of Holme-Cultram in Cumberland. If we could regard the erection of the earlier fabric as in any manner connected with the remorse of the blood-stained knight, the doorway, which presents some elaborately worked details, would possess an interest which it cannot be said to possess as an architectural example. The church was almost, if not wholly, re-built in the thirteenth century; and the fabric presents some features which show that defence was not at that time the only object considered by the builders. Among them may be cited the details of the aisle, such as the respond here figured; windows, however, constructed at a height of eight feet above the ground, suffice to remind us that security was not altogether neglected. At a later period, the tower was erected at the west end of the



Respond in the south aisle,  
Burgh-on-the-Sands.

<sup>3</sup> See the circumstantial details regarding the last days of Edward I., given in

Nic. Trivetii Annales, edit. Hist. Soc. p. 413; and Arch. Journ., vol. xiv. p. 269.

church, the main object being evidently for purposes of protection. Its walls measure six to seven feet in thickness. At the time of the building of this tower, probably, a new door, of small dimensions, was opened at the west end of the north aisle; it was so placed as to be commanded by a loop-hole in the north side of the tower, at the end of a recess in the wall, in the ground-floor chamber, as shown in the plan. The larger doorway, before mentioned, was doubtless at that time built up. Instead of the large arch opening into the tower from the nave, as usually found in churches in other localities, a small doorway gave access to the vaulted chamber on the ground floor of this fortress-tower. This chamber measures about 9 ft. by 8 ft., and the entrance was strongly guarded by a ponderous iron door, 6 ft. 8 in. in height, with two massive bolts, and constructed of thick bars crossing each other, and boarded over with oak planks. The wooden covering has become decayed, or has been destroyed, but the strong iron skeleton of the door would still defy any ordinary efforts to force a passage; whilst the great thickness of the walls would long delay any attempt to gain ingress in any other quarter. The ground-floor chamber being vaulted would be secure against fire, and, in the event of the door being forced and the lower story carried, the newel-staircase could still be strongly barricaded; thus, as it would only admit of one person ascending at a time, a stout resistance could be made, whilst the bells would be rung to give an alarm and call to the rescue any succour that might be at hand. This stone staircase at the south-west angle of the tower leads to the upper chamber, which measures about 10 ft. 9 in. by 11 ft. 7 in.; on the east side of this is an opening commanding the interior of the church, and on the south and west sides are small narrow lights. Lysons states the opinion that this tower was probably built in the reign of Edward I.,<sup>4</sup> but it may be of rather later date.

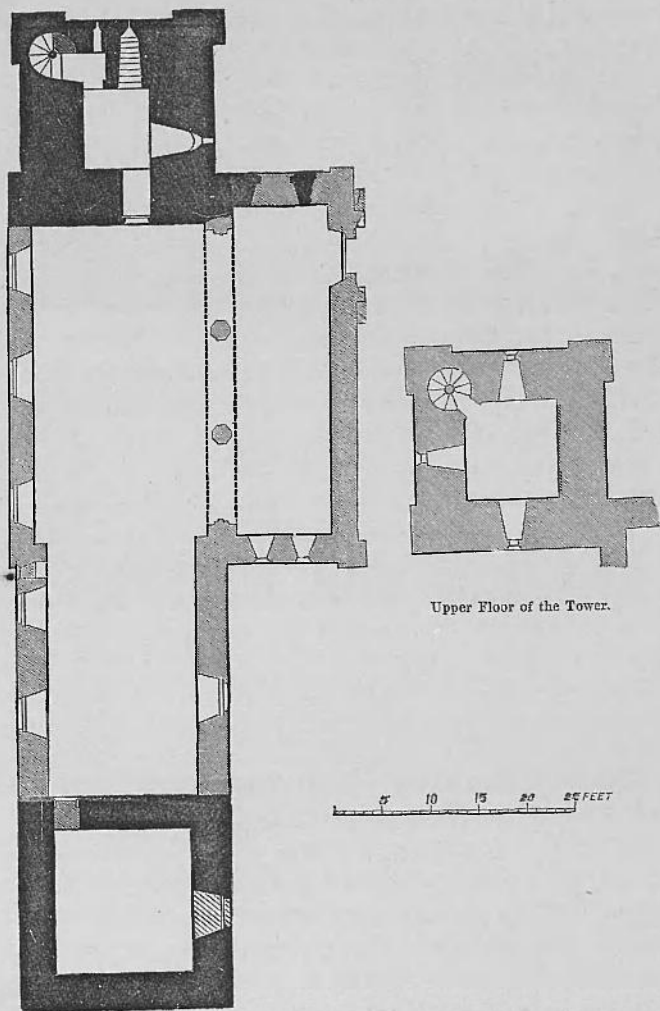
At the east end of the church, as shown in the ground-plan, another square structure of considerable strength was built, opening by a small doorway into the church; this may possibly have been a dwelling-place for the vicar. Its walls are rather thicker than those of the church. There is an

<sup>4</sup> History of Cumberland, Introduction, p. cxcii. We are indebted to that valuable work for the accompanying

ground plan of the upper story of this very curious tower.

FORTIFIED CHURCHES IN CUMBERLAND.

EAST.



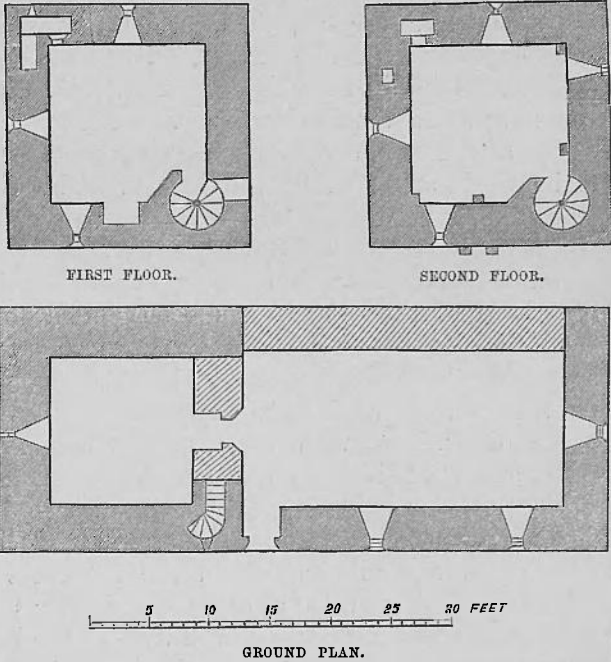
Upper Floor of the Tower.

Ground-plan of the Church of Burgh-on-the-Sands.

With the plan of the upper floor, as given in Lysons' *Magna Britannia*.

entrance on the north side of this building, which is entirely modernised, if not of recent construction. The unusual addition of such a building at the east end of a church has not been noticed by Messrs. Lysons.<sup>5</sup>

The next church to which I would invite attention is that of Newton-Arlosh, on the coast of Cumberland, a few miles



Newton-Arlosh Church, Cumberland.

to the west of Burgh, and in the parish of Holme-Cultram. This curious example is of especial interest, because the date of its construction has been ascertained. The abbot of Holme had obtained, in 1301,<sup>6</sup> a grant from the bishop for building a church at Shinburness, at that period a place of consequence as a depository for supplies for the forces engaged against the Scots. Shortly afterwards, however, the

<sup>5</sup> It is stated by Messrs. Lysons, in the History of Cumberland, p. xcxi. note, that the church of Annan, in Scotland, on the opposite side of the Solway, appears to have been as strongly fortified as that of Burgh. Other examples are doubtless not wanting on either side of the Border, which would repay the investigations of the architectural anti-

quary. Many of the low square embattled towers of the old churches in Northumberland present, as Mr. Parker has observed, evidence of having been inhabited. That of Ancroft, in particular, which is called in an old record the house of the Curate. Domestic Architecture in England, vol. ii. p. 199.

<sup>6</sup> Nicolson and Burn, vol. ii. p. 177.

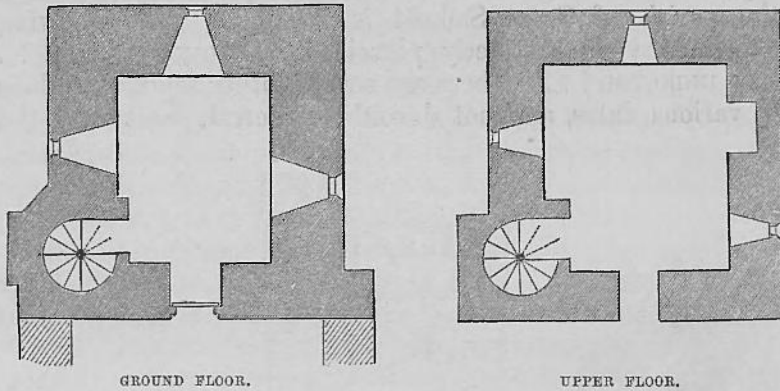
town was destroyed by the inroads of the sea ; and in 1309, John de Halaughton, bishop of Carlisle, granted licence to the abbot to build a church or chapel within the territory of Arlosh, which, subsequently to the removal of the town thither, received the name of Newton, which it still bears. In consequence of the frequent hostile invasions and depredations of the Scots, to which special attention is made in the bishop's charter,<sup>7</sup> the church then built was so constructed as to appear more like a fortress than an ecclesiastical structure. The doorway is only 2 ft. 7 in. wide ; all the windows are more than seven feet from the ground, and not one, even at the east end of the church, measures more than 1 ft. in width, and 3 ft. 4 in. in height. The chamber on the ground floor is vaulted in the same manner as that at Burgh ; it measures about 13 ft. square ; and it probably had a similar defensive door, but the lower part of the wall towards the body of the church has been pulled down and the steps altered, so that the original arrangement is not clearly seen. A single small aperture, 18 in. high and 9 in. wide, is formed on the west side. The first floor is nearly of the same dimensions, with three narrow oilets on the north, south, and west sides, and it has the unusual feature of a fire-place, which will be noticed likewise in another example to be described hereafter. There appears in Lysons' plans to have been a small chamber in the thickness of the wall, probably a privy, with a drain possibly, as in the Border pele towers, passing down to the base of the building. There was a second story, resembling the last in dimensions and arrangements, with the exception that there was no fire-place. The upper part of the tower, however, has been rebuilt some years ago, when the church was enlarged ; the whole building had been allowed to go to ruin, as it was found by Messrs. Lysons, and is represented in the section and south-west view of the church given in their History, in 1815.<sup>8</sup>

A third, and very interesting, example, is the church of Great Salkeld, about six miles north-east of Penrith, and at a greater distance from the Scottish border than the other churches which I have described, but not sufficiently remote to have been secure from hostile invasions. In

<sup>7</sup> Monast. Angl. Caley's edition, vol. v. p. 595.

<sup>8</sup> Hist. of Cumberland, *ut supra*, p. exci.

this instance the tower of defence has been added to a church of Norman date ; the south doorway is elaborately ornamented in the style of that period, having a semi-



Tower of Great Salkeld Church, Cumberland.

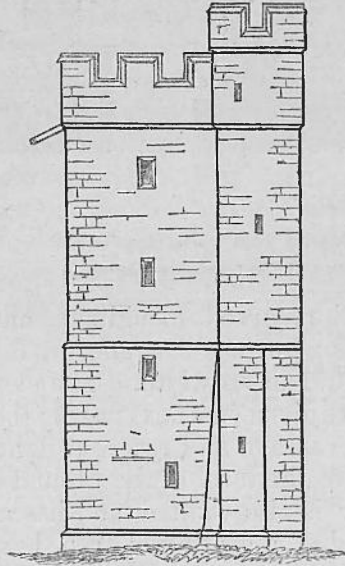
(Dimensions, about 24 by 26 feet.)

circular head, with recurved mouldings, and three shafts in each of the jambs ; yet the entrance, like that at Newton-Arlosh, is only 2 ft. 7 in. in width. The elevation of one side of the tower is here given (see next page) ; there are five floors ; the basement is vaulted, and received light by a diminutive aperture just above the level of the ground on the west side. The ground floor is also vaulted, and has a small door from the church formed of a grating of iron bars and oak planks of great strength, like that at Burgh, before described. In the south-east angle there is a newel staircase, giving access to the basement beneath, and to the three chambers above, which had floors of timber. In the chamber on the first floor, as will be seen in the ground plan, there are three small apertures, and also a fireplace, as at Newton-Arlosh. An incised sepulchral slab,<sup>9</sup> placed sideways, forms the lintel of the fireplace. It is a memorial of some interest, and has been figured in Messrs. Lysons' work. It bears a cross flory of peculiar design ; the shaft of the cross rests on a gradated base ; on one side of it is a sword, with a belt and buckle, on the other side appears a hunting horn,

<sup>9</sup> Hist. of Cumberland, p. cxcv. The date of this sepulchral slab may be as early as the thirteenth century. Inglewood Forest abounded in deer at that

period. According to the Chronicle of Lanercost, Edward I., during a few days hunting in Inglewood, killed no less than 200 bucks.

appended to a baldrick. The inscription has not been deciphered, but enough remains to suggest that the person commemorated may have been a forester or official of the royal forest of Inglewood, in immediate proximity to which the parish of Great Salkeld is situated. The following letters may be distinctly perceived . . . OMOBV . . . . .  
 . . E INGELVOD . . . . There are several other sepulchral slabs of various dates, and not devoid of interest, built into the



Elevation of the south side of the Tower, Great Salkeld Church.

walls of the tower.<sup>1</sup> This remarkable structure was, as has been shown, well adapted to defend the peaceful inhabitants of a rural village in a district which suffered so severely from predatory and hostile raids.

The manor, or honour, of Penrith, with certain other manors, including Great Salkeld, Castle Sowerby, &c., had been assigned to Alexander, king of Scots, in 1237, but in the quarrel between Edward I. and Baliol they were seized, and reverted to the crown. This locality suffered greatly

<sup>1</sup> On the south side of the chancel there is a stone effigy, not mentioned by Messrs. Lysons. It represents a priest in the mass vestments, rudely sculptured on a slab, on the chamfered margin of which

is inscribed THOMAS DE CALDEBEC ARCHIDIACONVS KARL. Thomas de Caldbeck occurs as Archdeacon of Carlisle in 1318. Le Neve's Fasti, edit. by Hardy, vol. iii.



at various times from the invasions of the Scots, on account of the King of Scotland's claim to these manors. In 1345, Penrith was burnt, and Salkeld and Sowerby were laid waste ; in 1380 also another fatal invasion occurred, as related by Walsingham. Richard II. granted the manors of Penrith, &c., to Ralph Nevil, Earl of Westmorland, about the close of the fourteenth century ; it has been supposed with much probability by Messrs. Lysons, that about that time Penrith Castle was built by the Nevils, as a protection to the town, and that the church of Salkeld also was fortified at the same period.<sup>2</sup>

I need not occupy time by speculations on what may have occurred in these fortress churches in olden times ; on the savage attack and the gallant defence, or the dreadful oaths of revenge at the sight of the wanton destruction of life and property. I am desirous, however, to recall attention to the very peculiar buildings of this class in the northern counties, as serving to remind us of a state of society now happily passed away.

<sup>2</sup> History of Cumberland, pp. cxcii, 144, 151.