ART. XVII.—*Shank Castle.* By W. T. MCINTIRE, B.A.

Read at the site, September 13th, 1921.

IT seems strange that the great pele tower we are visiting to-day, built amid surroundings of such romantic beauty, possessing such features of strength and standing in the midst of a district where that strength must have found such ample opportunities for useful employment, should have left so scanty a trace upon the pages of historic record. And yet, though its present structure bears—as I think we shall see—evidence of a far earlier origin, there is no definite mention of the building before the beginning of the seventeenth century.

Its site is one of considerable natural strength and one of great interest. The peninsula of rising ground upon which we stand at the confluence of the Raeburn on the north and the Lyne on the south has been known from early ages as " The Shank " and upon the Shank lay the demesne lands and dwelling-house of the great manor of Solport. This manor, part of the parish of Stapleton, appears in documents of the 13th and 14th centuries under the names of Solpert, Solporte, Solperd, Soelberth and Solpard, whilst in the old ballad " The Fray of Solport "—a ballad by the way which casts a lurid light upon the morals of its inhabitants—it appears again as Suport. The place-name has puzzled etymologists; Professor Sedgfield suggests a personal name and the Old Norse *bardh*—' edge or corner of a field,' but apparently without conviction.

The manor of Solport, originally in the hands of the de Levingtons, passed to the de Tilliols, to whom such large grants of land in the neighbourhood were made by Henry I. From that family by marriage it descended in

succession to the Colvilles and Musgraves. It was sold by Sir Edmund Musgrave to Lord Preston, from whom it descended to the Grahams of Netherby. The Castle is now the property of its present occupier, Mr. Waugh, to whose kindness and helpfulness on the occasion of a recent visit I have much pleasure in now paying a willing tribute.

There is not much information to be gleaned with regard to the early history of Solport. The Manor was held of the Barony of Liddale, and figures in John Denton's account of that barony. It was the home of the powerful Border clan of the Taylors. The mill was built upon the Raeburn, and its customary tenants owed suit and paid sixteenth corn.

Hitherto we have had no mention of the Castle, except perhaps of it or its predecessors as the dwelling-house of the manor of Solport upon the Shank, but suddenly Shank Castle and its surroundings become a subject of vivid interest with the advent upon the scene of Sir William Hutton of Penrith. The Lysons, quoting Thomas Denton, write:—"Sir William Hutton built (do they mean altered and enlarged?) a neat house here for his own habitation when steward to George, Earl of Cumberland, and he dwelt here to subdue the Moss Troopers."

Now this Sir William Hutton was also one of the Commissioners of the Border during the troublous times of what is known as the Extirpation of the Grahams, and a flood of light is let in upon the darkness of the Shank and its surroundings by the parts of the Household Books of Lord William Howard—the Belted Will of romance—which relate to this official.

It was to no very pleasant neighbourhood that poor Sir William Hutton was called to exercise—not without excessive impartiality, it would seem—the powers entrusted to him under his commissionership. Not to speak of the somewhat insalubrious proximity of the

Armstrongs of Gilnockie, the Grahams of Netherby, the Nixons of Bewcastle and the Fosters and Taylors nearer home, we read in Lord William Howard's "Brief Survey and Certificate of Disordered persons" thumb-nail sketches of many lawless and disagreeable characters in his immediate neighbourhood. Such were John alias Jock Martinson of the Hirst in Solport," a common noted theefe and receitor of theeves," who had lived "under the countenance of a knowne officer, which made him bould and poore men fearfull to complaine of the wrongs he offered them." This Jock is a noted horse-stealer, and is said to have a brother "as badd as hee," while both are described as friends of one Smith, "who is worse than these, if worse may bee." Again, James Battie of Crossrigg in Solport "on the XIXth of March, 1617, did steale iijteen sheep from Brakenhill," and, later, "three bushels of bigg from a barne there." George Armstrong, late of Whelpholmedale is described "as now keeping a lewd and disordered ostlery on the Shanke," while William Taylor of the High Yeate in Hethersgill "about foure yeares since had fower nowte about his house, stolen from Chaulke, and plaied one of them away at cardes." Another of these charming characters, "John Taylor, neare the Shanke" married "Jannet Greene, much suspected to be a witch and of badd behaviour and the neighbour inhabitants doubt sometimes of bad neighbourhood."

So, too, did Sir William Hutton, who "of his owne knowledg affirmed lately to his Majestie that there was not a true man inhabiting on Liddale." I notice, too, that in 1606 Sir William's name is recorded among those of the few gentlemen who cared to contribute to the so-called voluntary fund raised for the deportation of some of the Grahams, the amount of his contribution being £4.

But the continual annoyance caused by these malefactors was not the sole cause of Sir William Hutton's

troubles. His relations with the powerful Lord William Howard seem to have been of the worst. Lord William, who seems to have anticipated the popular demand of the present day for the dismissal of superfluous officials, had pointed out to the king that economies could be effected by dismissing certain officers, among these Sir William Hutton, whose administration he sharply criticised. Sir William proved a staunch "limpet." He made counter accusations; among others, one against Lady Elizabeth Howard as having allowed a notorious criminal, Thomas Routledg, to escape from Naworth Castle. Such accusations were flying about among the Border leaders at the time. He met with a vigorous counter-attack from Belted Will. Nine separate charges are brought against him of similar conduct at Shank, and the whole document ends with a fiery denunication of his iniquity. He is urged to make his peace with heaven and to remember how three of his servants had committed suicide, and reminded of the untimely deaths of three of his sons under unpleasant and most unedifying circumstances. Poor Sir William Hutton can only reply with a letter of abject apology, entreating his Lordship to help him in the payment of a fine of £20 which he has incurred over the matter. And so he passes from the scene, and with him we lose sight of the castle which the Earl's papers call his "mansion house neare adjoining, called the Shank, where he much resideth."

The existing remains of the Castle consist of a massive tower, measuring 52 feet by 29 feet, with its longer axis lying from the north-east to south-west. Including the basement, it has four storeys, and two transverse walls divide each of these storeys into three large rooms. Access to the basement is gained by a doorway in the south-west wall of the tower. This doorway has, externally, a square head with a label round it, but within, in the thickness of the wall (here five feet thick) it is vaulted

and provided with holes for the insertion of bars or baulks of timber to protect the entrance during raids. The basement is now used as a henhouse and stables. In it can be seen the remains of a newel staircase which leads to the floor above.

The main entrance to the tower is in the first floor above the basement, some ten feet from the ground, in the south-eastern face of the building. It is of a similar character to that of the basement doorway, and, like the latter, is provided with socket-holes for bars.

The positions of these doors, the massiveness of the masonry and other peculiarities of the structure would incline one to attribute an earlier origin to the building of part at least of the tower than the 16th century and the days of Sir William Hutton. There is further a fact which seems significant. High up in the wall between the two inner divisions of the tower—the third, that towards the north-east, has fallen into ruins—are the remains of a window looking north-eastwards. The wall in question is 1 foot 9 inches thick. Does this mean that part of this wall was formerly the outer wall of a fourteenth or fifteenth century building and that the window, referred to above, looked out over the penthouse roof of a building which was subsequently heightened? It may be a mere coincidence, but I found on measurement that there was a considerable difference in the thickness of the walls of the two compartments of the tower, the wall to the south-west being 4 feet 6 inches thick, and that to the north-east only 3 feet 10 inches on the north-west face of the tower; moreover, a crack is to be observed in the masonry. I wonder if there is any possibility of maintaining the theory that the south-western portion of the building is the small original pele tower, and that the north-eastern portion represents the additions of the time of Sir William Hutton.

The two existing rooms are now used as a hay-loft. The floors of the two storeys above have disappeared, and were evidently of wood. The corbels which supported the beams of the top floor are still to be seen in the north-east chamber.

The height of the two rooms of the principal floor seems to have been 7 feet 1 inch, and the dimensions of their floors 20 feet 9 inches by 12 feet 3 inches for the south-western room and 21 feet 10 inches by 13 feet 5 inches for that to the north-east.

There are numerous fire-places, the largest, that of the south-west room, with an arched opening measuring 9 feet 4 inches across. Its flue still remains intact.

In the same room may be seen the upper part of the newel staircase leading to the basement, and, in its south-west corner, the remains of a large circular mural chamber with a smaller one above. This may have been a garde-robe. A similar position in the more northerly room is occupied by the remains of a newel staircase. There are other smaller mural chambers, and, on the exterior of the tower, on the south-west face, is a stone spout which may have served as a drain to one of these.

The numerous windows on each storey appear to be of Tudor date, and may have been insertions of the time of Sir William Hutton.

The ruined north-eastern portion of the tower contains an interesting staircase.

There are no traces of machicolations, and the tower is not crenellated.

There are short descriptions of Shank Castle by Mr. T. H. B. Graham in these *Transactions*, N.S. ix, in the late Dr. M. W. Taylor's *Old Manorial Halls*, and in Mr. John F. Curwen's recent work on the Castles and Towers of Cumberland and Westmorland. The last-mentioned work contains two excellent photographs of the Castle by the Rev. G. J. Goodman, and I lately came

across, at Tullie House, in the Jackson Library an interesting pencil sketch, undated, of the same building. The only differences from its present condition to be observed were a stone staircase to a door at the angle between the tower and the adjoining farm building, and two beams at the upper angles of the principal entrance doorway, both of which features have now disappeared.
