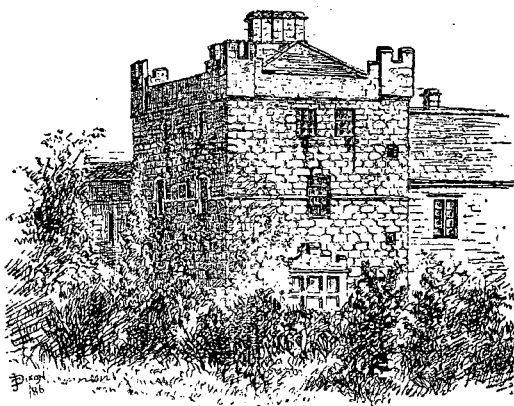


WHITTON TOWER.

THE situation of Whitton Tower, on the south of the Coquet, about a quarter of a mile from Rothbury, is very singular, as it is so built into the hill-side that the external base to the north is some twenty feet below that fronting the south. The vault that occupies the basement



has thus a semi-subterranean character, and its door in the north wall, and that leading into the first floor of the tower on the east side, are both on the ground level. This singular position is probably to be explained by a desire on the part of the

builder to include within his tower the excellent supply of water that here issues from the higher ground to the south.

Although a square panel in the centre of the west wall contains a shield with the arms, *a cinquefoil within an orle of six crosses moline*,¹ there is no good reason to suppose that the tower was built by the Umfrevilles and not by the rectors of Rothbury, who appear

¹ It is curious that in each of the three undoubted examples of the Umfreville arms that are found carved in stone in Northumberland the form of the crosses composing the orle is different, while there are sometimes six and sometimes eight crosses. The shield on the effigy of Gilbert de Umfreville, who died in 1307, in Hexham church has had *eight crosses patonce*; that on the battlements of the gateway of the inner ward at Alnwick Castle, *circa* 1350, has *six plain crosses croset*; while on that at Elsdon tower, probably 1421-1436, are *eight crosses croset patty*. The crosses of the Umfreville shield on the gatehouse of Cockermouth Castle are *flory*, and seem to be only four in number. The exact shape of such crosses is, then, matter of no moment; and as the arms of Cooke are given as *gules a cinquefoil between six crosses croset fitchy argent*, and Alexander Cooke was rector of Rothbury from 1435, the shield on Whitton may be with more probability considered to be his, since the Umfrevilles had no direct connection with the place.

to have been lords of Whitton manor from early times. It seems evidently the work of the last half of the fourteenth century; and in the roll of Northumbrian fortalices drawn up in 1415 it is entered as being in the possession of the rector. There was nothing very peculiar in a priest occupying a strong tower in those wild times; the rector of Elsdon, and the vicars of Corbridge, Stamfordham, Chatton, Ponteland, and Embleton, appear as owners of fortified parsonages in the same record, and instances occur of the clergy in the bishopric obtaining licences to crenellate. The notion that ecclesiastics slipped into these strongholds on their being abandoned by more warlike occupants is devoid of any foundation in fact. In the View of the Border taken by Bowes and Ellerker in 1541, the tower of Whitton and the little barmkin, 'being the mansion of the parsonage of Rothbery,' is reported to be in a good state of repair.² Sir Ralph Sadler, in about 1560, recommended to Elizabeth that the parsonage of Rothbury should be annexed to the castle of Harbottle for the better defence of the country from the spoil of the enemy;³ but this means, not that the tower of Whitton, 'the mansion of the parsonage,' was to be made an outlying fort of Harbottle, but that the revenues of the living of Rothbury were to be applied to the maintenance of the castle. Nothing, however, came of Sir Ralph's advice.

Some sort of stone house may have been built on to the tower in the seventeenth century; but Dr. Thomlinson, who was rector for more than forty years, says:—'At my coming to Rothbury, which was January 24th, 1679, it was not easy to determine whether the parsonage house and chancell, incumbent upon me to repair, or the profits belonging to the parson, were in worse circumstances.'⁴ Dr. Thomlinson left the tower in good condition at his death,⁵ and Edward

² See above, p. 45.

³ Sadler's *State Papers*, 1809, ii. p. 15.

⁴ See a very interesting account of Whitton Tower, by Mr. D. D. Dixon, reprinted from the *Newcastle Courant*, July, 1885.

⁵ The Rev. A. O. Medd, the present rector of Rothbury, has in his possession a curious sketch of Whitton Tower with the dedication, 'To the Rev^d. Thomas Sharp, Archdeacon of Northumberland, this west view of Whitton Tower and part of Rothbury is most humbly inscribed by his ever dutifull son, Granville Sharp. Taken in June, 1754.' The original is in the possession of Granville Baker, esq., of Hardwick Hall, Gloucestershire, a descendant of the archdeacon. The tower itself, however, is too distant an object in the quaint landscape to show much of its architectural character at the time.

Hay Drummond, who became rector in 1784, appears to have added to the east side a substantial wing of three storeys with a high pitched roof that was returned in a gable over the tower. A sketch of Whitton, by the Hon. Mrs. Leveson Vernon, was reproduced by lithography by Hullmandell, for Hodgson's *History of Northumberland*, in 1828, and the plain solid dwelling-house shown in it seems to have so much Northumbrian character about it, that it is perhaps matter of regret that it should have been since transformed into a modern Tudor mansion.

The vaulted basement measures internally 27 feet 6 inches along the east and 13 feet 4 inches along the south wall. The entrance is at the extreme east end of the north wall, which is here 9 feet 5 inches thick. There were two doors, both pointed, with a passage about 4 feet wide between them. Neither of them was protected with the stout bars, the holes for which are usually conspicuous in buildings of this character. The outer door seems to have been secured by some small rough bars, and the inner one, which opened outwards, to have been merely locked. Immediately to the right on entering is the well, walled round in ashlar, and almost 3 feet in diameter and 14 feet 4 inches deep. The cylindrical stone roof rises to a height of 11 feet 9 inches, and is pierced near the south end by a man-hole about 2 feet 8 inches square that formed the only means of communication between the basement and the floor above it.

The first floor has also a stone vault, which is unusual in Northumberland, and may be accounted for by the fact of its being on the ground level of the south side. The pointed inner door of the entrance from the east side of the ground level still remains, and near it the shouldered door that leads to the wheel-stair occupying the south-east corner of the tower. These doors are both in the rector's study, which has been formed in the southern portion of the vault, and is lit by a large window inserted in the south wall, here above 8 feet thick.

Ascending the wheel-stair past slits and mason-marks we reach the second floor, which has been divided into bed-rooms. A small piscina, projecting in a semi-hexagon from an ogee niche, was discovered a few years ago on what was evidently the southern splay of a large window-recess in the east wall. The basin is ornamented on its

three under sides with trefoils, and the angles are covered with oak leaves. This window-recess probably formed a small oratory, as at Borthwick, in Midlothian, and the whole floor—the first, if we reckon from the south side of the tower, the second if from the north—was probably the living hall of the medieval rectors. The uppermost floor presents no particular features of interest, and the battlements are, of course, modern.

HEPPLE TOWER.

ORIGINALLY held by thanage, Hepple, or 'Heppedale' as it was anciently styled, was raised to a barony by king John in favour of Ivo de Tailbois, one of the three husbands of its heiress. Afterwards it was parted between the families of Tailbois and Hepple. The marriage of Jane de Hepple in 1331 brought her moiety to the Ogles, who probably acquired the whole during the Wars of the Roses. Hepple continued with the representatives of the lords Ogle till the third duke of Portland sold it in 1803 to the father of Sir Walter Buchanan Riddell, the present owner.

The tower is probably of fourteenth-century construction. It appears as one of the six strongholds of Sir Robert Ogle in 1415, and was 'decayed in the roofes and scarcely in good reparacions' in 1541. The walls are over 6 feet thick. The internal dimensions of the ground floor are about 26 feet east to west by about 17 feet north to south. The cylindrical stone vault rises to nearly 17 feet, and beneath it there has been a loft supported on stone corbels, two of which remain in the western angles. A slit for light at the west-end is set in a round-arched recess of wide splay. The entrance was by a pointed door at the east end of the south wall. The holes for the sliding bar, 7 inches square, are still to be seen. The roof of the passage between this outer door and that leading into the vault is pierced by a *meurtrière*. On the left, a straight stair seems to have gone up in the thickness of the south wall through a square-headed door, now built up. Beyond a small window opening in the west-wall, the first floor retains no details of interest.