

VIII.—THE CASTLE OF DURHAM IN THE MIDDLE AGES.*

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In the year 995 the peninsula on which the castle and cathedral of Durham now stand was occupied by the congregation of St. Cuthbert. There seems little doubt that it was then heavily timbered, with perhaps an open space where now stands Palace Green. On the neighbouring hill was Maiden Castle, which may have been occupied by an Anglian community as a protection against the Danes, or perhaps by Danes. It is hoped that some day excavation may reveal the secret. Perhaps the Castle Hill also was inhabited, and protected by some kind of defensive works, but its occupation by St. Cuthbert's congregation was the first recorded in history. The place must have had some kind of defence; probably a ditch and an earthen rampart, surmounted by a palisade stretching across the neck of the peninsula, perhaps round the brow of the hill as well. It is very probable that early in the tenth century the mound was constructed; its position seems unusual for a natural mound, and unless further evidence comes to light we must assume it to be artificial. There must have been defenders of some kind, because Durham was twice attacked at an early date by a Scottish force. It was besieged by Malcolm in 1006,¹ and by Duncan in 1040.²

* The accompanying plan, plate XI, reprinted by permission from the *Durham University Journal*, was drawn by the late W. T. Jones, M.A., F.S.A.

¹ *Symeon of Durham*, Rolls series, I, 215. Malcolm reigned from 1005 to 1034. The date given above is only conjectural, but the siege took place in the early part of the reign.

² *Symeon of Durham*, Rolls series, I, 90.

William the Conqueror visited Durham in 1069,³ and ordered a castle to be built. It was begun by earl Waltheof in 1072, and the work was continued by bishop Walcher. The general plan was a tower, a one-storied outbuilding containing the chapel, a series of towers connected by a curtain wall; the whole forming a rough triangle with a mound and tower at the apex. The chapel referred to seems undoubtedly to have been part of the work of Waltheof and Walcher. The original entrance was in the south wall, approached by a vaulted passage from the circular newel stair. The history of the early fortifications is far from complete. We know that bishop Flambard added to them considerably, and the late W. T. Jones was certain that much of the work ascribed to Puiset was really the work of Flambard. Amongst other things, he cleared the houses from the Palace Green or Place Green (to give it its earlier title), and built a wall from the east end of the cathedral to the mound. Framwellgate bridge was built by Flambard about 1120, and it was necessary to strengthen the defences at this point. From the drum tower in Saddler Street a wall runs round to the extreme west of the castle, and is on the line of an earlier wall strengthened by towers, which Flambard built for this purpose. It ran on the inner side of the north moat.

Laurence, prior of Durham from 1149 to 1154, gives us a description of the castle, which shows that the main outlines of the buildings must have been very much as we see them to-day. The mound, forty-five feet high, surmounted by the keep, dominated the north front. At the beginning, no doubt, there was simply a stockade of timber on the mound. Later there was a ring-wall surrounding a wooden tower, the masonry representing the old palisade. This construction was probably the work of Flambard. At any rate by Laurence's day the "citadel," as he describes it, seems to have been of this nature. One gathers that after the destructive fire, related by Reginald

³ William was in Durham in 1069, but the Continuator of Symeon (*Symeon of Durham*, Rolls series, p. 93) says he "built the castle" on his return from Scotland in 1072.

of Durham as occurring in the year 1155, the stone ring-wall was still standing.

Bishop Puiset (1153-95) repaired the damage done by the fire and erected the range of buildings known as the Norman Gallery or Constable's Hall, and Puiset's Hall underneath it. The north wall of this building had turrets at the east and west sides, and two intermediate ones of which only the foundations remain. The north-west turret soon collapsed; indeed, all the Puiset buildings were of bad workmanship. Bishop Bek (1284-1312) built the present Great Hall, evidently superseding some earlier Norman building, because there is some Norman work still remaining in the undercroft. This hall was enlarged by bishop Hatfield about the year 1350. He also extended, widened and perhaps lowered the mound, and enlarged the keep, which now presented the form of a shell-keep. The three terraces are Cosin's work in the seventeenth century, and the present keep only dates from the early days of the university.

Durham castle as we see it to-day was part of a great fortress standing in an almost impregnable position. The river runs round three sides of it. The banks rise to as much as a hundred feet, and probably, in the days before centuries of accumulation of stones and debris collected on the slopes, were steeper. On the north side of the peninsula you have the castle keep and the main buildings. The great hall is on the west side and from this strong wall ran past the old Exchequer buildings, now the University Library to the cathedral and the monastic buildings, and then on to the Water gate, which led down to the river near the point where Prebends' bridge now stands. Here, as the banks were lower and more sloping, the wall was higher, and the gateway was only a small postern. But to attack this point meant crossing the river. To do that, to climb the banks, and to attack the wall in the face of showers of missiles, would be a well-nigh hopeless task. The peninsula, then, will be impregnable on the west and north.

The point of danger, however, is at the north-east angle. There is a triple approach to it. There is the road which comes down the hill through the borough of St. Giles. On the one side of the narrow neck of land there is Framwellgate bridge, on the other Elvet bridge. There were outworks at each of these.

Framwellgate bridge was reconstructed at the end of the fourteenth century by bishop Skirlaw. On the far side of it was the merchants' quarter of Framwellgate. The city end was guarded by a gateway surmounted by a tower, and strengthened by a barbican and drawbridge. This tower was removed in order to widen the passage in 1760. A wall ran down and connected Flambard's wall with the bridge.

On approaching from the opposite side of the peninsula, through the borough of Elvet, the traveller crossed Elvet bridge, completed by bishop Puiset just before he died in 1195, but very different from what it is now. In the great flood of 1771 four of the arches were washed away. It was repaired soon afterwards, but in 1805 it was widened to twice its former dimensions. There were two chapels here, one dedicated to St. James and the other to St. Andrew. There was also a turret at the inner end of the bridge. The fact that the steps leading up into Saddler Street bear the name of Magdalene steps has been taken to suggest the existence of a third chapel there, dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene. The theory, however, is weakened by the fact that there was a chapel of St. Mary Magdalene not very far away, at the top of Gilesgate, and it seems hardly likely that there would be two chapels of the same name in such close proximity.⁴

In 1312 Bruce raided and burnt the suburbs of Durham. Two years later bishop Kellaw built a wall round the Market or "New Place" as a defence against marauders. The Claypath or Cluerport gate was finally destroyed in 1791.

But by whichever of the three roads you came, you arrived at last at the great North gate. Its final form is

⁴ There was a Maudlingild House in the Bailey.

due to bishops Skirlaw and Langley. The latter, indeed, practically rebuilt it. The angle at which it was built tends to show that the modern Saddler Street does not exactly follow the line of the original double row of houses leading towards the Market Place. The great gaol at the gate, also the work of Skirlaw and Langley, joined the castle on the one side and extended to Elvet bridge on the other. Behind no. 3 Queen Street is the drum bastion, or round tower, which protected the angle that flanked the gateway. It was very strong, and pierced with loopholes for archers, was probably built between 1180 and 1200, and is a building unique in the north of England.

The North gate itself spanned Saddler Street, and was only pulled down about 1820. Part of the old masonry is still to be found under the *Advertiser* offices. There was originally a main tower, and a barbican crossing the moat, with its entrances defended by turrets. The gates were double, and there was a portcullis on the side facing the city, and probably one on the other side as well. On the north front were two large turrets, and on the south there was certainly one turret, and there were probably two. The passage between the gates was vaulted, there was a drawbridge within the barbican, and probably another outside.

In 1353 we learn that Lord Thomas Gray had a lodge or chamber in the Tower, and the gate is described as leading *ad hospicium Duresmi*, that is, to the Durham inn. This inn is mentioned in many mediaeval documents, and would be frequented by pilgrims to the shrine of St. Cuthbert and persons coming on business to the castle and the abbey.

In front of the North gate was a moat, which ran all along the north side of the castle. Moat-side Lane represents, generally speaking, its course. As you leave Saddler Street and go along the lane, the wall on your left hand represents the turreted wall which Flambard constructed when he realized that his new bridge might prove a weak spot in the defences.

Passing through the North gate, before reaching Palace Green the visitor was confronted with Owen gate, near the top of the present Queen Street. Here was the wall built by Flambard, its foundations running mostly under the present line of buildings on the east side of Palace Green. Before entering the present courtyard of the castle the inner moat had to be crossed. This extended from the North gate to the west wall, and was crossed by a barbican. This barbican, with its outer and inner gateway, is believed to have been built by Flambard. Of the inner gate only the vaulting and the outer entrance arch remain. The outer gate and barbican were destroyed by Cosin.

Even inside the courtyard an enemy would find himself faced with a wall running from the gateway up the mound to the keep—one of the walls which divided the mound into sectors and would divide the attackers. The base of the mound, too, was encircled by a wall practically on the same line as the present wall.

Durham castle was of the "motte and bailey" type. A bailey (*balium* or *ballium*; a corruption of *vallum*) was the space enclosed within the external walls of a castle. There were three such courts here. The first was the inner bailey, the castle courtyard. The Palace Green was really the upper bailey, and may be thus distinguished from the lower or nether bailey, the latter being what we to-day know as the Bailey. So when you walk along the Bailey you are still in the castle precincts. At the east gate of the abbey the Bailey divides into the North and South Bailey, although it was originally divided at the church of St. Mary-le-Bow. There was formerly a gate in a wall which ran down Dun Cow Lane and Bow Lane, and separated the ecclesiastical from the civil part of the city.

In the south-east corner of the Palace Green, where Dun Cow Lane is now, was Side gate, or Lye gate, and on the opposite side of the Green Windishole gate. At the bottom of Bow Lane was King's gate, which commanded a ford across to Elvet. The ford must have gone slant-

wise across the river, because of the height of the bank on the other side opposite Bow Lane. In the fifteenth century there was a bridge there, Bow bridge, but no trace of it is left. The Inquisition returns of May, 1594, refer to "the street in the North Bailey called Kingsgate, which lieth down by the North Bailey churchyard to the postern gate there." The name Kingsgate is said to have been derived from the track by which William the Conqueror galloped down to the ford. He had disbelieved the monks, so the story runs, as to the uncorrupted state of the body of St. Cuthbert. They were preparing to demonstrate the fact, but he was seized with a sudden panic, and rode headlong away. The King's gate was a small postern flanked by towers, and situated some little distance up the bank, away from the river.

At the far end of the South Bailey there was a gate called the Bailey gate, or Water gate, commanding another ford over the river. In bishop Bek's time it was held as a grievance that he had closed this gate against pilgrims; subsequently he agreed that it should be closed only in time of war. Bishop Neville, however, in 1449 granted to Robert Rhodes and his heirs the right to annex this gate to their house, with the power of closing or opening it at pleasure. The old gateway was quite small, as may be seen from Speed's map of Durham, dated 1610. Prior Laurence described it as resembling the King's gate. In the latter part of the eighteenth century canon Egerton destroyed it, and was responsible for the building of the present archway. The original gateway was probably a little farther in the direction of Count's Corner. Prebends' bridge only dates from 1777, and was built to take the place of an old horse-bridge a little higher up the river, destroyed by floods in the previous year.

On the east and west sides of the peninsula a strong parapeted wall ran along the top of the bank, with square projecting towers at intervals. The portion running from the North gate to the Water gate may be ascribed with fair confidence to bishop Puiset, and there seems little

reason why he should not be credited with the portion on the west side also. Speed's map makes it fairly clear that most of this wall was in existence in 1610. Only fragments now remain, but foundations have been traced from time to time. There was an angle tower where no. 4 North Bailey now stands, and the foundations of a circular tower lie underneath the west end of Hatfield College dining hall. At the back of St. Chad's College in the South Bailey a portion of the wall and the base of a square tower are visible. Similar fragments are in the garden of St. John's College, and in that of no. 9 South Bailey. There seem to have been at least nine towers between the North gate and the Water gate. On the other side, at the point beyond St. Mary's College where the wall suddenly turns west and then north again, there may have been a sallyport.

The *Inventarium* of Durham Priory, 1464, reveals what the tenants of the monastery living within the Bailey paid by way of rent. But by no means all of the houses in the castle precincts were occupied on these terms. In the fourteenth century no attempt was made to maintain a large garrison continuously within the castle, though one would imagine that a skeleton force at least would be kept. Besides this, some of the bishops' tenants outside the city held their lands on condition that they came to Durham and served a certain number of days in each year. Others held houses in or near the Bailey on condition of personal service as stated in their respective leases. Portions of the wall were under the special care of certain tenants; some, for instance, had the duty of defending the North gate. In cardinal Langley's Inquest there is an entry that John Killinghall held nine messuages in the Bailey by castle-ward; he had to find one archer for the defence of the King's gate in time of war. Most of the householders in the North Bailey were tenants of the bishop, and had to find archers when required, or to pay a sum of money instead. In the thirteenth century Reginald Bassett gave all his land in the Bailey to the

abbey in return for four marks of silver already received, and on condition that the monks paid him and his heirs two shillings a year. Furthermore, when he or his heirs had to do service in guarding the castle they were to provide a suitable chamber and stalls for four horses on the same land.⁵ Beyond this, however, his service is to be at his own expense. At times when the Scots made frequent raids the burden of military duty may sometimes have become irksome. We must not forget either that some of the bishops' tenants had also to perform military duties which were more than mere garrison work. But if such services were required beyond the bounds of the territory of St. Cuthbert they had a claim for pay. Whether they always received it is another thing.

It is in the hall of one of the most wonderful buildings in England that we have gathered. Here reigned great prelates, coining their own money, holding their own councils, summoning their own warriors, ruling almost, but not quite, as kings over their broad lands. In this place have dwelt great ecclesiastics, statesmen, administrators, scholars and benefactors. Hither came Walcher of Lorraine, one of its first great builders; William of St. Calais, the founder of the cathedral; and Ralph Flambard, the minister of William Rufus. Hugh de Puiset, to whom much of the castle is due, built Elvet bridge, rebuilt the castle at Norham, founded Sherburn Hospital, and partly built the great parish church of Darlington. Here lived Anthony Bek, the magnificent, who went to war in Scotland in 1296 attended by twenty-six standard-bearers, a hundred and forty knights, a thousand foot and five hundred horse; a bishop who caused amazement at Rome by the splendour of his retinue, and bore proudly the titles of Patriarch of Jerusalem and King of Man. Here dwelt the great book-lover, Richard de Bury, the author, I still believe, of that great book on book-loving, the *Philobiblon*. Among others of the mediaeval bishops we remember Thomas of Hatfield leading his eighty archers to the

⁵ *Feod. Prior. Dunelm*, Surtees Soc., p. 196.

siege of Calais, and Walter of Skirlaw, who built the bridges of Shincliffe, Yarm and Auckland, the tower and chapter-house of Howden, and part of the great central tower of York. And since we pray that here in Durham pure religion and sound learning may ever flourish and abound, we must not forget cardinal Thomas Langley, the founder of Durham School.

We picture Durham castle, then, in the Middle Ages not merely as the great block of buildings which to-day so impressively overhangs the Wear. We can picture it in peace-time as a great fortress containing within its walls the abbey, two other churches, various chapels, a hospital, and inns, with the boroughs of Framwellgate and Elvet and the vill of St. Nicholas nestling under its shadow. Or we can picture it in time of invasion with its gates closed, with guards on the battlements and at the barbican, its walls and towers bristling with archers, its citizens ready to fight in the gateways and on the bridges. From the days of Malcolm of Scotland to the days when the accession of James I took away one of the main reasons for its existence, it guarded the road to the south, along which the bishop of Durham had his castles of Norham, Durham and North Allerton. It was constantly kept provisioned. It had plenty of water, there were two wells on the Palace Green, one inside the castle courtyard, one at the end of the Galilee chapel, and another in the cloisters; so it could always hold out. Always it had the proud distinction of being a maiden fortress. The Scots never captured it.

But the romance is a thing of the far-off past. There are few pilgrims at the shrine of St. Cuthbert; there are no Scottish troopers hammering at the gate; and its present guardians anxiously wonder how much longer it will stand, or rather how soon it will be before part of it at least becomes a mere picturesque ruin.



