The Archaeological Journal.

JUNE, 1887.

CULVERHOUSES.

By R. S. FERGUSON, M.A., F.S.A.

(Chancellor of the Diocese of Carlisle.)

In the Autumn of 1886, shortly after the Chester Meeting of the Institute, one of the members of our Council, Mr. H. Hutchings, was staying at Hutton-in-the-Forest in Cumberland, the seat of Sir Henry Vane, Bart. In the course of his ramblings about the precincts, he came upon an almost forgotton dovecot or "culverhouse" as such are called in the south, which proved on examination to still retain the greater part of the wooden *potence* or revolving ladder by which the attendant got at the nest holes in the walls. To this interesting building Mr. Hutchings directed my attention and suggested that I should bring the general subject of pigeonhouses under the notice of the Institute.

The following extract from M. Viollet-le-Duc's *Dictionnaire de L'architecture* lays down the law and practice of the middle ages as to pigeonhouses so well that I cannot do better than cite it. It will be found under the title *Colombier:*

Pendant le moyen age, la construction d'un colombier était un privilege reservé à la feodalite. Le paysan ne pouvait avoir son four; il fallait qu'il apportât son pain au four banal du château ou de l'abbaye, et qu'il payât une redevance pour le cuire. Il ne lui était pas permis non plus d'avoir un pigeonnier à lui appartenant. Il en était des pigeons comme des troupeaux de bêtes à cornes et à laine, ils appartenaient au seigneur qui seul en pouvait tirer un produit. Les troupes de pigeons étant un

rapport, ceux qui avaient le privilege de les entretenir cherchaient tous les moyens propres à en rendre l'exploitation productive. Tous les châteaux possédaient un ou plusieurs pigeonniers; les manoirs, demeures des chevaliers, petits châteaux sans tours ni donjons, pouvaient encore posséder un pigeonnier. Il n'est pas besoin de dire que les abbés, qui étaient tous seigneurs féodaux, et qui possédaient les établissements agricoles les mieux exploités pendant le moyen age, avaient des pigeonnières dans les cours des abbayes, dans les fermes qui en dépendaient, les prieurés et les obédiences. Les propriétairies de trente-six arpents avaient le droit de joindre à leurs habitations, non un columbier construit en maçonnerie, mais un pigeonnier en bois de seize pieds de hauteur et pouvant contenir seulement de soixante à cent vingt boulins. On entend par *boulins* (du grec Βῶλος) les trous pratiqués dans les columbiers et destinés a la ponte des œufs de pigeons.

The swarms of hungry birds which issued from the *colombiers* of the great French nobles and precipitated themselves on the crops of the helpless peasants were one of the causes that promoted the French Revolution.

Similar rights once existed in England; it was formerly held that only the lord of the manor or the parson might erect a pigeonhouse, but those rights have long ago become obsolete, and the pigeonhouses themselves have disappeared. We have now-a-days very little idea of the numbers of dovecots, pigeonhouses, or culverhouses that once existed in England, or of the numbers of birds that were reared in them; the following passage, extracted from that fine standard work, *Daniels on Rural Sports* may therefore be usefully cited here. The author says:—

Corn is much destroyed by Pigeons, and the greatest number of them kept in England is about Retford in Nottinghamshire. Hartbil in the *Legacy of husbandry* calculates that there were in his time 26,000 pigeonhouses in England, and allowing 500 pair to each dovecote, and four bushels yearly to be consumed by each pair, it makes the whole of the corn lost to be no less than thirteen millions of bushels annually.

The reason why in the middle ages such large numbers of these destructive birds were kept is not far to seek. Fresh meat could only be procured during the summer; turnips, mangel wurzells, and other green crops were unknown; hence oxen and sheep could not be fattened during the winter; indeed they could be barely kept alive; large numbers of them were therefore slaughtered and salted down at the beginning of winter, so much so that the old German name for November was *Slagtmonat*, or slaughtermonth, and the Anglo-Saxon name was *Blodmonath* or bloodmonth. The characteristic occupations of the

various months of the year are sculptured on the late fourteenth century capitals in the choir of the cathedral at Carlisle, and December is represented by a man with a pole axe, slaying an ox.[1] Lord Macaulay points out that it appears from the Northumberland Household Book that

> In the reign of Henry the Seventh, fresh meat was never eaten even by the gentlemen attendant on a great earl, except during the short interval between Midsummer and Michaelmas. [2]

Those, who were too poor to afford salt meat, subsisted upon rye bread and salt fish, and one of their winter occupations was to tend their stores of it. Thus Tusser in his "Decembers husbandrie" advises

> Both saltfish and lingfish (if any ye haue)
> through shifting and drieng from rotting go saue
> Least winter with moistnes doo make it relent,
> and put it in hazard before it be spent.[3]

Such being the prevalent diet from Michaelmas to Midsummer, it was no wonder that many leper houses testify to this day of the ravages of leprosy in England; anything that could vary or palliate such diet was eagerly cultivated; hence we have the fishponds and stews, in which carp and tench were assiduously fattened for the table, and hence the value attached to warrens of conies, while "the large round dove cot arose in the immediate neighbourhood of the abodes of the great and wealthy, of the castle, the convent and the manor house."[4]

Their frequency is attested by the occurence in lists of field names of dovecot, pigeonhouse and culverhouse fields, where now are no such buildings; and by the occurrence in old forms of general words for use in conveyances of land of the term "dovecots." Instances of every class could easily be selected either at home or abroad, for they were as common, or more so, in France and

[1] See a paper *On the sculptured Capitals in the Choir of the Cathedral at Carlisle.* By James Fowler, F.S.A. Transactions, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society, vol. iv., pp., 280, 290.

[2] *History of England* vol. i., p. 326.

[3] Tusser's *Five Hundred points of Good Husbandrie.* English Dialect Society's Edition 1878, p. 63.

[4] *Sussex Archæological Colls,* vol. xi. p. 1. Until the railways put an end to them, the large posting houses on the north road kept numbers of pigeons in their stable yards; they afforded a ready viand for the sudden traveller. The hostler and people in these yards were quite up to the use of "saltcats" and other lures for enticing away their neighbours pigeons, as the writer can testify.

Italy as in England and Scotland. Every traveller in Egypt will recollect the swarms of pigeons in the villages there, and the bonny little brown hawks that prey on them. To take a few instances nearer home; in the case of a castle, liable to be besieged, a detached dovecot would be useless, except in time of peace; accordingly we frequently find provision made on a small scale in the castle itself; thus, at Rochester, there are in the inner face of the north wall, above the gutter, two rows of pigeon holes, probably original, and even now accommodating a few birds:[1] also at Conisborough Castle.[2] A survey taken of Kendal Castle in 1572 describes a "dovecote in good repair" as being "in the south side" thereof, and I have indicated elsewhere the position of this in the existing ruins of Kendal Castle.[3]

The Priory of Lewes possessed a dovecot of cruciform shape, much like a church. It is engraved in *Archæologia* vol. 31 p. 431 and is thus described in a communication to the society of Antiquaries, dated 11 Dec., 1845.—

> Fifty years since, there remained . . . . . together with a dovecote or pigeon house built in the form of a cross, the cells or recesses of which were ingeniously constructed of hewn chalk. These pigeon holes were formed in a similar manner to those described in the notice of the dovecote of Garway, given in the present volume of the *Archæologia*; they were in number between three and four thousand, and were arranged in parallel rows, extending over the interior face of each building. The entrances for the pigeons were four in number, one under the roof at each extremity of the cross, as may be seen in the representation here given. The building measured in length, from east to west, ninety feet; from north to south the same; the height of the walls to the roof was thirty feet. This structure was pulled down within my memory for the sake of the materials.[4]

In the Sussex *Archæ. Coll.* vol. xi, p. 5 the number of cells in this dovecot is given as 2,500.

The dovecot at Garway, just mentioned, belonged to the preceptory of the Templars at Garway in the county of Hereford, and according to an inscription on it was built in the year 1326, by "brother Richard." It is circular in shape and contains 666 cells or nests for the birds; it

[1] Clark's *Mediæval Military Architecture*, vol. ii., p. 417.

[2] *Ibid.* vol. i., pp. 445, 446. *Journal British Archæological Association*, vol. xxx p. 21.

[3] *Kendal Castle* by R. S. Ferguson, F.S.A. *Transactions, Westmoreland and Cumberland Antiquarian and Archæological Society*, vol. ; ix., p. 181.

[4] *Archæologia* vol. xxxi, pp. 431, 432 in a communication by G. S. Mantell, F.R.S.


MANOIR D' ANGO, VARENGEVILLE.
FROM "FRANCE EN MINIATURE."

is 17 feet 3 inches in diameter in the clear of walls, and 16 feet in height to the spring of the arch.[1]

The cells are described as having apertures varying from $6\frac{1}{2}$ to 7 inches in the entrance, and about 17 inches in depth, being countersunk in the walls, one course of holes inclining to the right and another alternately to the left.

There was a large pigeon house at Bradsall Priory, near Derby, octagonal in shape, which is figured in Blore's *Bradsall*. There was a round one at Hurley Priory, Berks; another at Monkbretton in Yorkshire; a square one at Penman Priory in Anglesey, with a stone pillar in the middle, from which flat stones projected, and wound up as a ladder, thus giving an attendant access to the cells. Almost every religious house must have had one, and we need not multiply instances. In Bishop Nicolson's Account of his diocese of Carlisle[2] we find pigeons breeding in the very churches of Warwick and Skelton in Cumberland, and Morland in Westmorland, and no doubt the incumbents of those livings profited thereby. At Aspatria in Cumberland, the vicar had a regular built pigeon house, capable of holding a large number of nests.

We will just mention a couple of foreign examples because they are figured in English publications. The *Spring Gardens Sketch Book*, vol. VI, plate 54, contains a very beautiful example of a pigeon house, combined with a well, at Veules in France, of the date 1776. In the ninth volume of this journal are sketches and details of brickwork by Mr. Petit, of a pigeon house at Boos near Rouen; of it M. Viollet-le-Duc writes as follows:—

> Il existe encore pres Rouen—a Saint Jacques, un tres beau colombier bâti en briques de diverses couleurs, et qui appartient au commencement du XVI siecle. Trois lucarnes en bois s'ouvrent dans le comble. Ses dispositions rappelent le colombier de Nesle. Cependant l'etage supérieur est porté en encorbellement sur le soubassement, ce qui donne à cette construction une certaine grace.

Mr. Hartshorne has been kind enough to send me from his father's collections a picture of the "Manoir D'Ango à Varengeville pres Dieppe," a charming old house of the famous French merchant and friend of Francis I; it

[1] *Archæologia*, vol. xxxi, pp. 190, 195.

[2] *Miscellany Accounts of the Diocese of Carlisle* 1703 and 1704 by W. Nicolson, Bishop of Carlisle, published by the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiq. and Arch. Society, 1877.

gives so good an instance of a manorial pigeon house standing among the other buildings of the manor that it is reproduced with this paper.

Let us turn now to Cambridge: in that magnificent work, *The Architectural History of the University of Cambridge*, by Willis and Clark[1] it is stated that a pigeon house [columbarium] is first mentioned in 1414-5, when a regular heading "expenses of the dovehouse" makes its appearance in the accounts of King's Hall: the expenses of construction are not recorded, but the purchase of four dozen pigeons in this year indicates its stocking.

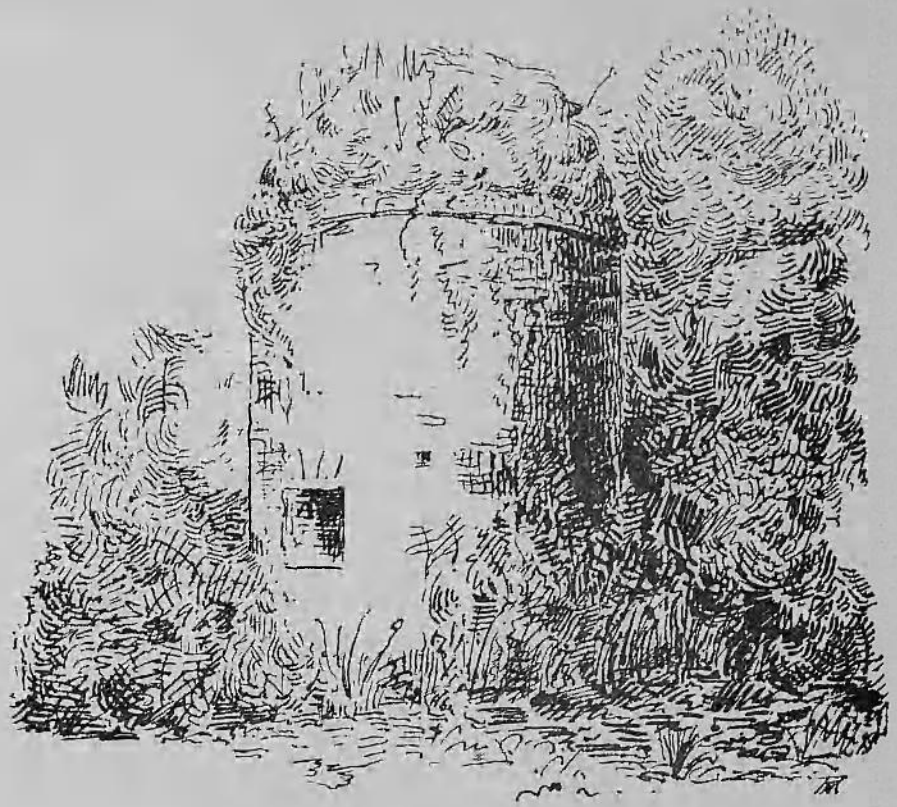
Item pro remuneracione portatorum columbarum ad columbare iiij dussen iiij^{d}ob. It pro una salcath v^{d} ob.

The salt-cat was a lure for keeping one's own pigeons at home and enticing of one's neighbours; it will be dealt with presently.

Messrs. Willis and Clark give[2] the following account of the pigeon houses at Cambridge.

It may be gathered from the collegiate histories that a pigeon house once existed at every college except Clare Hall, Magdalene, and Sidney Sussex; and it is possible that there may have been one at these colleges also, for the early accounts of the two first mentioned have not been preserved, and those of the last have not been examined in detail. In the 15th and 16th centuries a pigeon house was evidently regarded as a necessity to be built soon after the foundation of the college. At King's Hall the pigeon house was built in 1414-5; at King's College in 1449; and at Queen's College in 1505-6. At Peterhouse the date of the erection has not been discovered, but the building is frequently mentioned in the early account rolls; at Pembroke College it is shewn standing in the orchard in Lyne's map, dated 1574; it was built at Gonvile Hall in 1536 as recorded by Dr. Caius; at Corpus Christi in 1547 by Matthew Parker, a work thought worthy of special commendation by his panegyrist Josselin; at Jesus College in 1574 and at St. John's College in 1622, but the work then done was evidently only a rebuilding of an older structure. Some of these pigeon houses must have been of considerable size; that at St. John's College cost £109 17*s.* 2½*d.*, and those at Queen's College and Jesus College had windows, for at the former in 1537-8 'Thirteen feet of glass for the windows of the pigeon house' are paid for; and at the latter in 1575-6 we find 'for glassing ye doue howsse conteynninge xliiij feet of glasse xxij^{s}.' In the course of the 17th century the practice of keeping pigeons fell gradually into disuse. At Jesus' College the pigeon house was let on lease in 1633, and at Peterhouse in 1675. By the end of the century nearly all had been pulled down, for Loggan's accurate views shew a

[1] Vol. II, p. 441. [2] Vol. III, p. 592.



PIGEON HOUSE, MANORBIER CASTLE. AUGUST, 1861.

The Phototype Co., 303, Strand, London.

pigeon house at three colleges only, viz, at Trinity Hall, at Queen's College and at Christ's College; and in the latter the building is in the Master's garden and therefore not the public property of the college. At Trinity Hall, however, the pigeon house was still in use in 1730.

We must not omit to mention that Corpus College, Cambridge, built their pigeon house in 1547, and defrayed the cost by sale of certain pieces of church plate, which had gone out of fashion.[1] The Cambridge houses appear to have all been quadrangular ones.

I have no information as to pigeon houses at Oxford; but the Rev. the Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, tells me that at one or more of the farms belonging to that college are large pigeon houses of the quadrangular kind.

Many examples of manorial pigeon houses still exist, though generally converted into something else, cattle sheds, pig styes, potatoe houses, stores of all kinds, blacksmiths' shops and even schools and cottages. When the Institute visited Bedford in 1881, we saw at Willington a most interesting and picturesque pigeon house, quadrangular in shape, whose details our guide, the late Mr. Parker, C.B., said would be well worth careful reproduction.[2] At Ashby St. Legers in Northamptonshire, my friend Mr. H. P. Senhouse has two quadrangular pigeon houses, one of which has 2,292 cells, and the other 1,560, or 3,852 in all; an enormous number for one manor; there are yet a few birds in these houses, but the rats and jackdaws have also got possession and steal the eggs. At Manorbeer Castle near Tenby there is a circular one in the *enceinte* of the castle. We reproduce a sketch of this from the pencil of Mr. Hartshorne. There is a good square brick pigeon house at Delaford Park, Iver.

Mr. W. Oldham Chambers, F.L.S., the present occupier kindly sends the following note:—

This Culver House is alluded to in the writings of the property as "the Falconry." It is built in red brickwork, with diagonal patterns in black headers on the outside facings. The House is 17 feet square, and 17 feet 6 inches high; the walls are 2 feet 3 inches thick. There are indications of the walls being originally higher than at the present period. There were 572 holes contained in thirteen rows on each side, but the

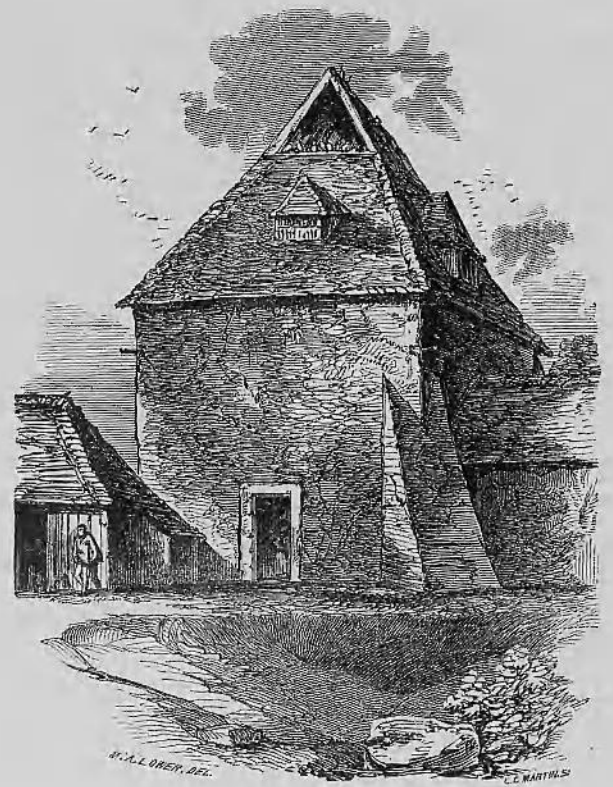
[1] Willis and Clark, vol. i, p. 261.

[2] The stone details of this pigeon house have the appearance of having formed part of an earlier structure, and to the re-use of these stones may be partly attributed the very quaint and unusual form which the gable presents . . . Probably Gostwick pulled down the old manor house and re-used the materials. *Archæological Journal*, vol. 38, p. 453.

three lower rows are now blocked up. The lowest started 15 inches from the ground, this level has probably been made up. The original door was on the south side; this has been blocked up and a new one cut in on the north side. The House remained open for a considerable period, the present roof being a comparatively modern structure.

At Trimmers near Paxhill, the seat of the Wyatts in Sussex, is a square one with 700 cells. At Berwick in the same county is a square one, of which, by the kindness of the Sussex Archæological Society, we give a view; this was let in 1622 for £5 per annum, and was tithed, as no doubt were others. There is, or was, a quaint wooden one at Burton Mill, near Petworth; and a fine one of brick with a conical top at Rochford Hall, Essex. At Daglinton, Gloucestershire, is a circular one of stone; the ancient pivoted central post with perches for the birds and ascending ladders for the attendant remains, or did until lately. The list might be easily extended; there are several in my own county of Cumberland, viz. at Hutton-i'th'-Forest, Rose Castle, Highhead Castle, Corby Castle, Barrock Park, Hutton-John, Crookdake Hall, Wreay Hall, Aspatria Vicarage, Bunker's Hill, Plumland Vicarage, etc., while others formerly existed at Naworth Castle, Crofton Hall, and Bootle Rectory.

Pigeon houses in plan may be divided into two kinds, quadrangular and circular, for the cruciform one at Lewes may be taken as an eccentricity; and the sexagonal, octagonal, &c., as approximations to the circular shape. In the quadrangular the attendant gets at the nests by climbing along the ledges in front of them, and holding on with his hands; to this there probably were exceptions, and we have already mentioned one at Penmon Priory in Anglesey, where the flat projecting stones wound, ladder-wise, round a stone pillar in the centre. But the circular ones were provided with a revolving machine, called a *potence* by which all the nests could be conveniently got at in turn. This is admirably described and beautifully illustrated by M. Viollet-le-Duc in the article to which I have already referred: the whole article is most interesting, and worth transcription, but it refers to circular *colombiers* on a larger scale than any I know of in this country: ones that have a lower story for cattle or sheep. It would be difficult to understand without the



Pigeon House, Berwick, Sussex.

illustrations, which again apply to a more complicated potence than any I have seen in England. I must therefore be as clear as I can without pictures. The *potence* consists of a stout upright post, *un arbre vertical muni de deux pivots en fer a chacune de ses extremités;* one of these pivots works in a socket in the centre of the floor of the pigeon house, and the other in a socket in the centre of the rafters of the roof. This upright post carries two or three arms at right angles to it [*potences*, hence the name *potence*] which carry at their extremities a ladder: the arms are not in the same plane with one another, but so arranged as to give the ladder a convenient slope. A person on the ladder can ascend to any required tier of nests he may wish, and can make the *potence* revolve under him so that he can reach any nest he pleases. Convenient as the *potence* is, or was, when a pigeon house was put to its original purpose, it is highly in the way, when other uses are found for the building: hence it is generally destroyed, or else mutilated. In the larger French *colombiers* the *potence* carried two ladders one on either side, the supporting arms running right through from side to side of the house.

The pigeonhouse, dovecot, or culverhouse (though I doubt if that name was ever used in Cumberland) at Hutton-i'th'-Forest is situated in a plantation near to Sir Henry Vane's beautiful mansion of Hutton-i'th'-Forest. The site is near to where the old farm buildings once stood, and would be bare of trees when the pigeon house was occupied by its proper inhabitants, who will not resort to a pigeon house in a wood. It is octagonal, of dressed stone; the sides of the octagonal being, in the interior of the building, about 5 feet 4 inches. It has twelve rows of nests; the lowest row is 4 feet from the floor, and has a ledge of flag 6 inches broad projecting in front of it, thus interposing an effectual bar to any climbing or jumping rat that may have intruded; all the other rows have similar ledges of half the breadth. The nests or cells are 9 inches in height, L shaped, the short limb or entrance being 5 inches broad by 9 inches long, and the long limb 10 inches long, by the same breadth of five inches. There are about 40 nests in each row, or in all, taking off for the door, about 450. The roof is octagonal, on which is an octagonal

turret, or glover, as it is technically called, with holes for the pigeons to pass in and out. The existence of this pigeon-house had been almost forgotten, when Mr. Hutchings came across it in his fumigatory strolls; it was lumbered up with an inserted second floor, and had been used as a kennel for young foxes, so that its odours were certainly not those of Araby the blest. Mr Hutchings however was not to be denied; armed with a cigar he explored the interior, and was rewarded by finding that the upright of the *potence* and the upper arm were in existence and perfect. Sir Henry and Lady Vane's interest was aroused; the place was cleared out, and the second floor knocked out; in a neighbouring shed the ladder of the potence was found and reinstated in position; and the "culverhouse" now forms one of the sights of one of the most charming places in Cumberland. The ashlar work of the pigeon house is identical with the ashlar work of that part of the mansion house, which was built by Sir George Fletcher, M.P. for Cumberland, with one or two intermissions, from 1661 to 1697; his architect was Inigo Jones.

At Barrock, also in the Forest, is another pigeon house, also octagonal, measuring on the exterior along one side of the octagon 9 feet 4 inches; on the inside 7 feet 4 inches; it has a potatoe house below it. It seems to me to be an inferior imitation of the one at Hutton-i'th'-Forest, fatter and squatter; it was so lumbered up with flower-pots, a modern second floor, the ruins of a church organ, and a family of owls, that I could not make much investigation into the interior, but it seemed everyway a poor copy of the last. I conjecture it to have been built by the Grahams, who shortly after 1768 purchased Barrock from the Duke of Portland, and converted it from a farm house into a gentleman's residence. It has had a *potence*, which has totally disappeared, but I found the upper pivot hole.

The pigeonhouse at Wreay Hall, a place about five miles south of Carlisle, much resembles that at Hutton-i'th'-Forest; it is octagonal, of dressed ashlar work, and has fourteen rows of nests, or about 530 in all; the lowest row is only two feet from the ground. Great part of the *potence* is remaining and it has on its central axis a sort of shelve, or ledge, the use of which I do not quite see,

but it resembles the top of a music stand. I take the date of this to be the same or thereabouts as that at Hutton-i'th'-Forest. The pigeonhouses at Corby Castle and Bunker's Hill Cumberland are circular, those at Rose Castle, Aspatria, and Crookdake Hall are square, but a detailed account of these is better suited for the pages of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian and Archæological Society's Transactions, than for the pages of this Journal.

From the following entry in Lord William Howard's Household Books [1]

"A saltcat for the dovecoate xiiij^{d}"

we learn that a dovecote once existed at Naworth Castle, but it has now disappeared, though its site is known.

The domestic economy of these pigeonhouses is curious; they required a deal of attention; the attendant only visited them early in the morning, otherwise the birds would never settle for the night; cleanliness was requisite, and the interior required to be scraped and whitewashed twice a year, in November and February; Messrs. Willis and Clark cite an entry in the accounts of Peterhouse, Cambridge shewing that in 1546-7 four gallons of wort were bought to wash the nests with, probably to kill the fleas. Birds of prey had to be guarded against and the same gentlemen cite from the accounts of Queen's College in 1513-4 the following order for the purchase of bird-lime—

Item X^{o} die novembris dedi ad jussum Mr Waham tunc vices vice presidentis gerentis Johanni Fenys ad emendum visum quo caperet aves deuorantes columbas collegii ij^{d}.

Lures of various kinds were much used to attract the birds; the salt cat has been already mentioned, and to Messrs. Willis and Clark we are indebted for the following reference to John Moore's *Columbarium or the Pigeon House*, first published in 1735 and reprinted by W. B. Tegetmeier, 8vo. London, 1879.

THE SALT CAT.

Being thus entered on the head of diet, it necessarily leads us to consider a certain useful composition called by the fanciers a Salt Cat, so named, I suppose, from a certain fabulous oral tradition of baking a

[1] *Surtees Society*, vol. lxviii. p. 135

cat . . . with cummin seed, and some other ingredients as a decoy for your neighbour's pigeons; this, though handed down by some authors as the only method for this purpose, is generally laughed at by the gentlemen of the fancy and never practised.

The right Salt Cat therefore is, or ought to be thus made ; take gravel or drift sand, loom such as the brick makers use ; and the rubbish of an old wall, or, for want of this, a less quantity of lime, let there be a gallon of each ; add to this a pound of Cummin seed, a handful of bay salt or saltpetre and beat them all up together into a kind of mortar . . . . . and your pigeons will take a great delight in it . . .

The Cummin seed, which has a strong smell in which pigeons delight will keep your own pigeons at home, and allure others that are straying abroad, and at a loss to fix upon a habitation.

It is open to conjecture that the cat in saltcat is nothing else but "cates" or "acates," but I am inclined to think that a *bonâ fide* pussy sometime entered into the composition, for at Jesus College in 1651-2, occurs the following entry

For a roasted dog and comin seed 00 : 02 : 00.

The Sportsman's Dictionary, published in 1778, gives two receipts for a lure for pigeons, the chief ingredient in each being a boiled goat's head.