

a Deo collatis contulerint subsidia caritatis, xl dies indulgentiæ —totiens quotiens—; Deo propitio, concedimus per præsentēs, per quadriennium a data eorundem continue numerandum tantummodo duraturæ. In cujus, etc. Data in palatio nostro Ebor., xvij die mensis Aprilis, anno Domino m^o cccc^{mo} nono.

ART. XIV. *Dacre Castle.* By Michael W. Taylor, M.D., Penrith.

Given at Dacre, Penrith, September 23rd, 1868.

THERE are in the north of England still remaining, a number of tower-built houses, to which the title of castle has been attached, which are intermediate in extent and importance, between the ordinary pele tower of the border counties, and castles properly so-called,—that is, fortresses, constructed exclusively as places of strength, for security, or for the defence of important positions.

At our meeting last year, we examined, on the other side of the river Eamont, about two miles from where we now stand, the old manor house of Yanwath Hall, of which the tower is one of the best examples still existing of the ordinary border pele. In it, we noticed, in their original form, the usual primitive domestic arrangements of a pele tower; viz., a quadrangular, battlemented tower of three stories,—consisting, 1st, of the strong barrel, vaulted, and loopholed substructure on the ground floor; 2nd, the “Solar, or King’s chamber,” with its closets; 3rd, the “Ladies chamber, or Bowere;” and 4th, the roof, constructed for defence, with its watch towers, loopholes, and crenellated parapet. In the gable wings, built at subsequent periods, we found the hall, and the kitchen, and offices.

But the class of buildings to which I now refer, are on a more dignified and imposing scale than the ordinary border pele. They consist uniformly of a massive square tower, of larger dimensions than the pele; often with a projecting square turret at each angle, and contain a greater number and variety of apartments. But whilst domestic requirements and accommodation have been studied in these mansions, the character of the place as a fortress has still been maintained.

To this class of houses, what now remains of the castle of Dacre belongs.

Of

PLAN OF DACRE CASTLE

POND

Moat

A. Hall.

B. Bedroom.

C. Pantry.

D. Garderobe Turret.

E. Staircase Turret.

f. Entrance.

g. Fireplace & Oven.

Foundations

of Walls.

Ancient Walls.

Moat

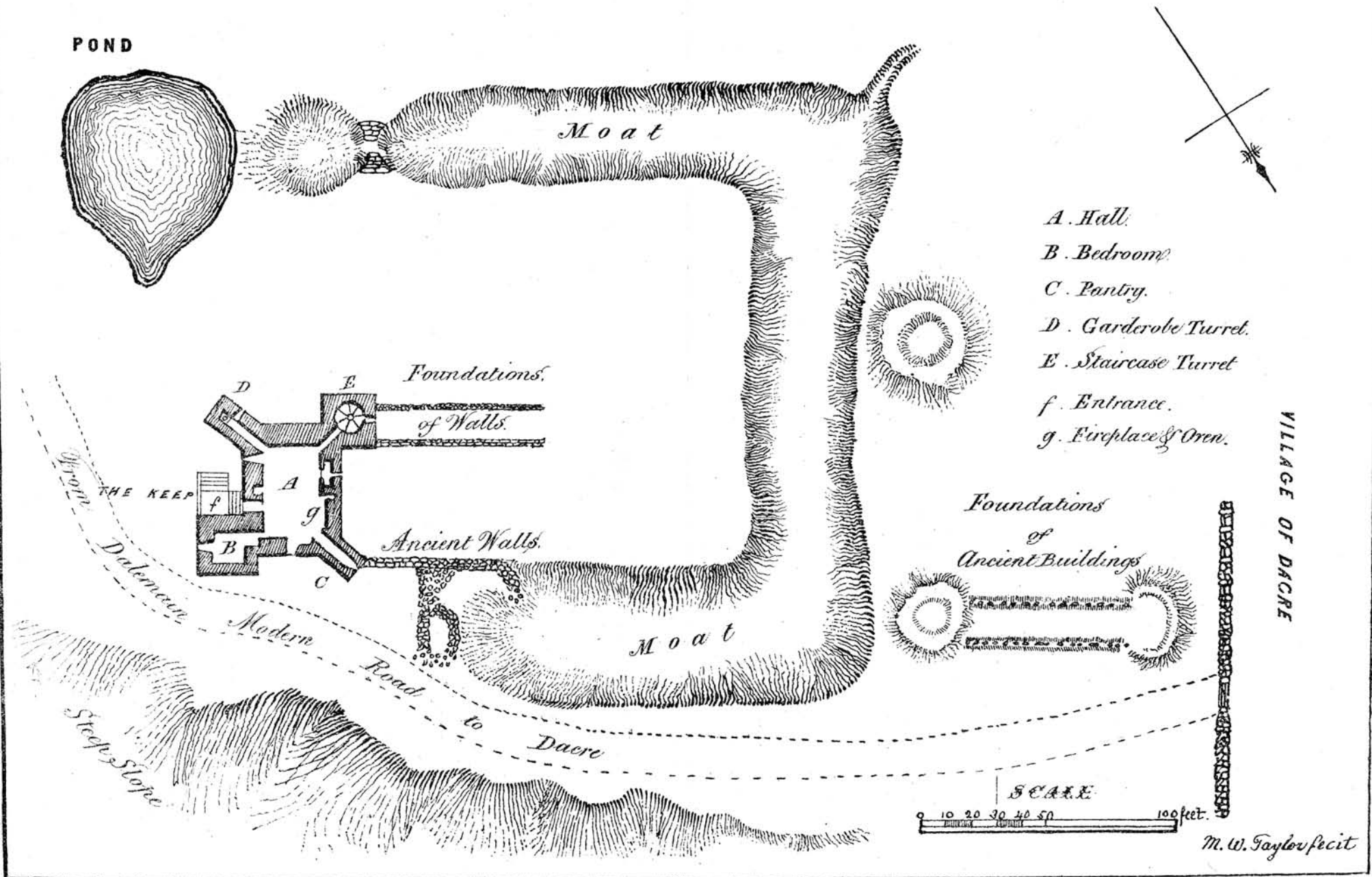
Foundations
of
Ancient Buildings

VILLAGE OF DACRE

SCALE

0 10 20 30 40 50 100 feet.

M. W. Taylor fecit



Of this variety of tower-built houses, there are several examples existing; I may instance, Aydon castle, Belsay castle, and Langley castle, in Northumberland; Crumlongan castle near Ruthwell, on the Solway, a fine example of the 15th century; also, of a later date, Tattershall, in Lincolnshire, and Askham hall, in Westmorland, with which many of you are familiar.

The watershed of the high country between Penrith and Keswick, flowing eastwards, and also the drainage of the extensive pastoral valley of Matterdale, unite in a stream called Dacre beck; this, after flowing past the ancient tower of Hutton John, courses through the beautiful vale of Dacre, and joins the river Eamont near Dalemain.

The valley is narrow, but the slopes of the hills on either side are gentle, and admit of high cultivation.

Just at the outlet of the valley, on a spur of high ground, on the left bank of the beck, stands the castle of Dacre. Towards the south and east, this bank rises abruptly to the height of 50 feet above the level meadow, through which the river runs. On the other sides, the ground occupied by the castle and its enceinte possesses no natural advantages as a defensive position, except a small ravine on the north, separating it from the church.

Here was its weak place as a fortification; and the first point of interest to note concerning Dacre Castle is, that it is moated.

All the large Norman and later castles in Cumberland and Westmorland, such as Carlisle, Cockermouth, Brougham, Appleby, Brough, &c., have of course a moat, as the outer defence of the main wards and courtyards, and curtain wall; so also have castles of secondary size and importance, such as Naworth, Penrith, and Kirkoswald. The moat at Kirkoswald is very fine and distinct, and well worth inspection. It is rectangular, and completely surrounds the fortress; moreover, within the moat, there is an outwork, so placed as to command the main gateway and drawbridge. This outwork itself is moated, and stands in the ditch in the same manner as a ravelin or flanking defence in a work of modern fortification.

But in the ordinary fortified manor houses in this country, it is very unusual to find a moat round the building; a position of natural strength having generally been chosen, which dispensed with the necessity of that additional safeguard. Dacre, however, forms an exception to this rule, as does

Sizergh

Sizergh Hall, in Westmorland, and Hoddam Castle on the Annan. In some feudal strongholds in some parts of Scotland, the site chosen has been a piece of dry land in the midst of a morass, or some locality capable of being flooded artificially with water. For instance, on the other side of the river Eamont, opposite to this place, in Westmorland, there is an old 16th century manor house, now standing, Barton hall, which anciently must have been surrounded by a marsh and low swampy ground, approachable only by a narrow and difficult causeway.

The moat at Dacre is very perfect, and occupies three sides of a quadrangular figure, and encloses a space about 80 yards long, and about 60 yards wide; inside the ditch, at the eastern corner of this space, stands the present remnant of the fortress,—the keep.

The depth of the moat must have been considerable in its original state, from 12 to 20 feet, and even now it is generally filled with water. The width varies from 20 to 50 feet from bank to bank.

It is evident that the moat never entirely surrounded the castle courtyard. At the northern side it dies away at about twenty paces from the keep, at the steep sloping bank, on the edge of which the north-eastern face of the keep has been planted. At this weak part, the defence of the courtyard has been by means of a curtain wall, which has abbutted on the northern angle turret, and has been carried onwards to the scarp of the ditch. At an angle from this curtain wall, there appears to have been projected a flanking buttress, or spur work, to guard and close the head of the moat. The foundations of masonry may be traced here; but from the absence of stonework elsewhere along the scarp of the moat, I presume that the enceinte was fenced, not by substantial walls of masonry, but by pallisades and timber.

The plan of the castle is that of a massive square tower of three stories, each of which is occupied by a large apartment; but at each angle of the tower, there is a square turret projected from the building; of these turrets, the two at the east and west are of larger size, and are set on parallel to the sides of the central building; the two at the north and south angles are smaller, and are set on in a diagonal direction, which peculiarity of construction, from all points of view, imparts to the tower a very bold, remarkable, and unusual aspect. The height of the higher turrets is about 66 feet.

The

The large turret at the west, (E) is the entrance and staircase turret, which contains a newel stair, leading up to the upper stories, and to the battlemented roof and its watch towers. The large turret (B), at the east, contains four flights of small apartments or bedrooms. The small northern turret (C) also contains rooms, and the small south turret, (D) is appropriated exclusively to closets and drains, and is now blocked up.

We will notice the arrangement of these apartments as we proceed higher in the building.

Including the turrets, Dacre keep occupies a space of ground which we may estimate as measuring 66ft. by 45ft. It may be interesting to compare its dimensions with those of a number of neighbouring border towers which I have examined. The dimensions of these border towers vary; I have found the longer measurement generally running east and west by the compass.

		feet	in.	feet	in.
Stapleton tower, near Annan, at the base is	..	42	0	by 34	0
Bonshaw tower, on the Kirtle, about	..	40	0	„	34 0
Crumlongan castle, near Ruthwell	..	64	0	„	45 0
Belsay castle, Northumberland	..	56	0	„	47 0
Elsdon tower, do.	..	43	0	„	30 10
Corbridge tower, do.	..	32	0	„	26 0
Hutton John, Cumberland	..	38	0	„	30 0
Dacre castle, do.	..	66	0	„	45 0
Yanwath hall, Westmorland	..	38	0	„	30 0
Askham hall, do.	..	78	0	„	45 0
Clifton hall, do.	..	32	0	„	24 0
Hutton hall, Penrith	..	28	0	„	24 6

Let us glance at the exterior. I must premise, that the original architectural character of the castle is very much impaired by the alterations made in the 17th century; the large square-headed windows were then inserted: and the present doorway, approached by the external flight of steps, was broken into the second story. These changes were made by Thomas Lord Dacre, afterwards created Earl of Sussex, whose arms are over the entrance. He died in 1715, and on his demise, the castle and manor of Dacre was conveyed to Sir Christopher Musgrave, and afterwards sold to the ancestors of the present much respected squire, E. W. Hasell, of Dalemain.

The original entrance to the castle was by the slightly pointed doorway at the foot of the west or staircase turret.

A

A short passage from the foot of the stairs leads to the ground floor; this consists of two barrel or tunnel vaulted rooms, each twenty feet long, by fourteen feet wide, and eight feet seven inches high to the top of the vault: the partition wall between them is five feet thick. The exterior wall are strong and massive, and calculated to withstand fire and assault, being eight feet six inches thick. They are lighted by three small windows, approached by a flight of six steps from the floor. In all these particulars, the basement structure accords to the plan of border towers in general.

We ascend by the staircase turret (E), and from a landing place on the stairs, a pointed doorway gives entrance to the large chamber on the second story, or the hall (A).

THE HALL.

This seems at one time to have been occupied as a kitchen, as well as a hall; for you have the oven and open fireplace still remaining. A partition divides it now: but the measurement of the original apartment is thirty-six feet by twenty-one, exclusive of the recesses in the thickness of the walls, and the attached closets and bedrooms in the north and east turrets. The corbels which support the roof spring at a height of thirteen feet from the floor.

I must call your attention particularly to the arched niche in the wall, opposite the fireplace. It encloses a shelf, and a piscina, and waterdrain. The arch is trefoil headed, with ornamented cusps, and round and hollow mouldings, surmounted by an arched canopy or drip-stone, terminating in heads. The style of the work is pure Early English, or of the 13th century. Though similar in design to the piscina found in churches of that period, it is very problematical whether it was used for sacred purposes, as there is no chapel here: more likely it was a lavatory, for the convenience of the guests in the hall. The position which this niche occupies, is in that part of the hall which was called the "Screens," which is near the door of entry. I think originally there may have been a door of entrance, where the modern entrance now is, with an external flight of stairs, with a porch or pent house, as was common in that period. The position of the "Dais," or "high table," I take to have been in the recess in the thickness of the wall, now partitioned off into a separate room opposite the "Screens." The other recess on the right-hand side was for a dresser or cupboard, on which stood the plate, and glass, and spicery, at the lord's banquets.

This

This recess, in many castles, was richly ornamented with stone carvings and mouldings, as at Crumlongau castle, in Dumfriesshire.

I cannot pretend to understand the meaning of that broad headed corbel, situated in the "Screens," half way up the wall.

THE KING'S CHAMBER.

We will now ascend by the staircase tower to the upper story. This is popularly known as the king's chamber. Its measurements are thirty-four feet by twenty-one feet six inches. The height to the top of the corbels, from whence springs the present open timber roof, is seventeen feet. The fireplace is on the north-west side. The present windows are all comparatively modern. Examine the north and east turrets, with their small rooms one above another, and notice the flight of steps in the window jambs, ascending to the room in the east turret, and the flight of steps, descending again from its top-most chamber, through the thickness of the wall, towards the king's chamber.

I wish to point out to you the existence of a gallery here. This flight of steps leads evidently to a passage in the thickness of the wall, occupying the whole breadth of this side of the king's chamber. You notice in the middle of the wall, half way up, a pointed arched doorway, now blocked up. At the height of seven feet nine inches from the floor, you notice three corbels still remaining. These have evidently been for the support of a wooden gallery or loft, stretching across this end of the hall. This has been the "Minstrel Gallery." The arched doorway is of the same character as the other original doorways of the building, and belongs to the period of architecture to which I am about to refer: it has formed the entrance to the music gallery, and the passage in the wall and the narrow staircase led to the small upper room, or minstrel's chamber, or lodging room. The practice of employing music during the time of dinner seem to have been universal in the middle ages, and it was usual to have a gallery or loft in the hall, set apart for the players. These players, or wandering minstrels, or jongleurs, did not form a permanent part of the establishment, but travelled about the country from one great house to another. Sometimes this music gallery was of stone, but in the wall, with an opening looking into the hall, as we found well illustrated in our visit to Yanwath, last year. Here in Dacre Castle it has been of wood.

T

DATE

DATE OF THE CASTLE.

The venerable Bede wrote in the 8th century, in the year 731, and he mentions that a monastery existed here in his time. If so, it was probably built of wood and shingles, for the Saxons at that time were not masons. In a later century, this monastery may have been repaired and rebuilt with stone; and it is possible, that the inequalities of the surface of the field, behind the present church, cover the site of that establishment. There are, however, no records of any monastery existing here, after the date of William the Conqueror.

Moreover, William of Malmsbury, writing in A.D., 1131, mentions, that Dacre castle was noted as being the place where Constantine, king of the Scots, and Eugenius, king of Cumberland, put themselves and their kingdoms under the English king, Athelstane. This circumstance must have happened about the year 927, after the battle of Brananburgh, in Northumbria, in which Anlaff, king of that province, and Constantine, king of the Scots, and the confederacy formed against Athelstane, were routed and overthrown.

Furthermore, Camden, in his *Britiannia*, repeats the story from Malmsbury: and Gibbon adds as a note, "Here is a castle standing, which has formerly been a magnificent building, and a seat of the family." From the fact of these very ancient records making mention of a castle existing at Dacre, in those early centuries, popular belief has accorded a fabulous antiquity to the present building; and this chamber in which we now are, called the "King's Chamber," is commonly credited with being that in which the three king's held their conclave. I fear we must disturb that idea.

The Norman style of architecture was not introduced into England, until the time of Edward the Confessor, A.D. 1060, and the work, at that early period, was so rude and clumsy, with wide rough-jointed masonry, and in fact, so bad, and perishable, that very few remains of it now exist in this country. But examine the masonry in this castle; examine particularly the courses in the newel staircase, and other portions of the interior, and you will find it of excellent workmanship; it is not rough and open, with the interstices grouted and filled with mortar, as in very early Norman work, but the stones fit closely, and it is what is called fine-jointed, which is the distinctive character of later work.

Let

Let us try and come to some decision as to the date of this building, by a scrutiny of such parts of the original structure now remaining, as may aid us in the enquiry. But these parts are few. It is from the character of the arches, the nature of the window lights, and, above all, the style of the mouldings and ornaments, that the date of a structure is determined. We know that in the 12th century, the arch adopted by the Norman builders was the round-headed or semicircular arch. You certainly have it here. In the original doorway, at the foot of the staircase turret, you have a round-headed arch, plain and square edged, without chamfer or mouldings. On the south-west side of the "King's chamber," you may observe the rear arch of one of the original windows still visible; it is of one light, it is round headed, it is not recessed, and it has a moulding. That moulding is of the plainest description; it consists of a round bead or keel, with a hollow on each side, cut on the angle. It is an early Norman style of moulding, which preceded the infinite variety of rounds, and hollows, and scrolls, and ornaments, which were profusely used in later styles. There is one other window, now blocked up, with a plain round-headed arch, with a single light, to be seen on the exterior on the north-west side. But again, in other original parts of the building you have the pointed arch. Now the presence of this change in the formation of the arch brings us into the 13th century, for the pointed arch did not prevail until the transition period of Norman architecture, when it began to overlap into the early English style. You see the pointed arch in the small doorways leading into the different apartments; it is generally plain and without mouldings, not recessed, but simply with the angles chamfered. Again, some of the openings exhibit examples of what is called the Carnarvon arch, or shouldered arch, that is, a flat-headed lintel, supported with a corbelled stone at the angles. This form again is characteristic of the early English style. And lastly, there is in the hall the trefoiled niche, with its cusps and mouldings, and multifoil piscina, which is so eminently Gothic, as in point of date to lead us well into the 13th century.

To sum up then; sparse as are the evidences left, yet they are sufficient to enable us to assign, with reasonable probability, the date of the building of the present castle of Dacre, to about the middle of the 12th century.

ART.