



KENTMERE HALL.

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ART. XXIII.—*Some Notes respecting Kentmere Hall.* By
JOHN F. CURWEN, F.R.I.B.A.

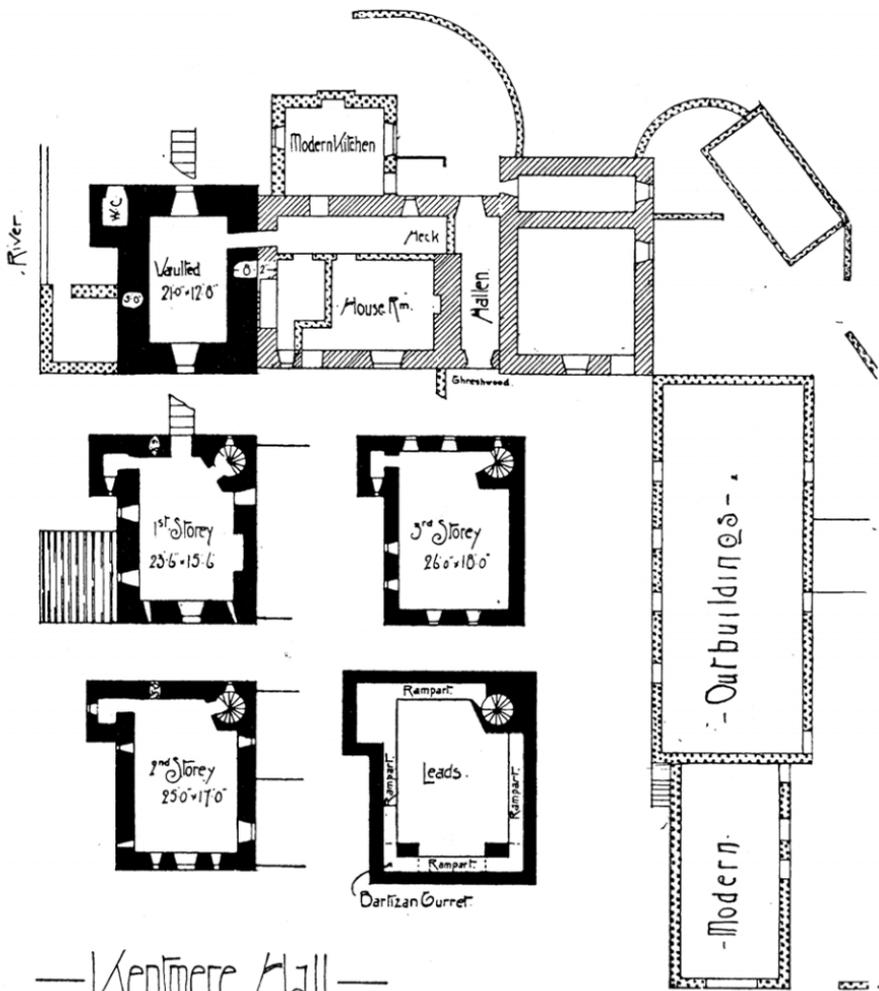
Read at Kentmere Hall, September 18th, 1900.

THE Gilpin family appear to have been influential inhabitants of Kentmere for many centuries. The earliest certain information that we have about them is that one William Gilpin lived in the valley in the year 1375, and married a daughter of Thomas Ayray, the bailiff; but we have no description of his homestead.

Of the hall, now standing snugly sheltered from the north by the lofty fells of Patterdale and of the High Street range, the best account is undoubtedly that given by Dr. Taylor in his *Manorial Halls*, in which he affirms that the above date "accords very well with the age of the existing remains of this building." But I would venture to suggest that from an architectural point of view the hall is clearly of a much later date; the over-sailing parapets and bartizan turrets, for instance, being evidence of this. For in the earlier periods peles were built absolutely plain, without string or off-set of any kind; but as time advanced, and the state of the country became more secure, their window apertures were enlarged, and their external features became more decorated.

Moreover, considering the isolated position of the pele, I do not consider it necessary to believe that it was built for defensive purposes. For the principle of a simple keep became the universal type of country houses of the fifteenth century, and continued so during the sixteenth, and even as late as the early part of the seventeenth century—until the time when mansions dropped their castellated character.

Here we have at Kentmere one of the smallest towers



— Kentmere Hall —

— Westmorland —
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of the district, measuring outside only 31 by 23 feet, the length being but one foot longer than the width of the neighbouring pele at Burneside. Above the vaulted ground floor there have been three floors of single rooms, whilst at the roof-level the parapet boldly projects outward, being supported on massive corbels. At the angles rise the bartizan turrets, already referred to, whilst at the south-western angle there is a garderobe turret, 11 feet wide and projecting 6 feet, running up the full height of the tower.

From the plan it will be seen that the walls of the ground floor are 5 feet thick, and that as each storey rises the walls are reduced until they reach a thickness of only 2 feet at the top. The fireplaces are all on the northern side, the smoke being emitted by horizontal apertures through the thickness of the wall. The first floor contained the solar, entered by some steps from the outside, like to the halls of Linstock and Skelsmergh. This apartment was lighted by three windows, and two defensive loopholes pierce the wall in an oblique direction, so as to command the only approach from the east. The other opening on the north wall has clearly connected, at some later period, the bedroom floor of the house-part adjoining. By a slight error, Dr. Taylor mentions this doorway as opening out of the second storey, which is above the level of the slates. Of the three windows, the one to the east is of the late decorative style, the two lights of which are trefoiled beneath ogee heads; but I can see no reason to follow Dr. Taylor in the belief that this indicates the fourteenth century, because it was no uncommon thing then, even as it is to-day, to copy for decorative purposes a style of an earlier period.

From this floor the upper rooms are approached by a spiral stair projecting somewhat into the north western angles of the rooms. The stone steps are built into the wall, and overlap each other, without a central pillar for their support. There is now little remaining in these

upper rooms worth mentioning, but the parapet above is decidedly interesting, so far as it reveals the plan of the turrets and the delightful corbels, which are only too sadly hidden by the overhanging ivy.

We must now pass to the house-part, which adjoins the tower on the north side, and here also, unfortunately, it is necessary to cross swords with Dr. Taylor, who claims for it a coeval existence with the tower, pointing out in support of his theory the fine old entrance doorway. It is of dressed sandstone, pointed in the arch, and splayed on the angles. But if so, how did the tower fireplaces emit their smoke before the introduction of chimneys into this country? The fact is that the plan published in Dr. Taylor's book has grievously misled him, for after taking careful measurements of the place, it at once became evident to me that the house-part has its own southern wall, 3 feet in thickness, built in a different way, and abutting hard up against the tower, as may be seen on the plan which is here published. Moreover, is it not quite possible that—when this addition was made—the old pointed doorway, which at first might have formed the external entrance into the vaulted ground floor of the tower, was removed to adorn the entrance of the new and more habitable dwelling?

However, the doorway now leads into the *hallen*, 28 feet long, which traverses the breadth of the building, to the *down* house and back door. This was the prevailing plan of entry in most of the country houses of the seventeenth century. From the *hallen*, by passing through the *mell* door, you enter into another passage, called the *heck*, which is now fully divided off from the house-room by a thin plastered partition. This room—the great dining hall of later days—originally seems to have been about 28 feet by some $14\frac{1}{2}$ feet, but the space has in modern times been divided into two rooms, and an external doorway has been opened through the old mullioned window. The farm buildings are of quite a modern date.



THE OLD POINTED DOORWAY, KENTMERE HALL.

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