

ART. XVIII.—*Nether Levens Hall*. By JOHN F. CURWEN,  
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ABOUT five miles south from Kendal, lower down on the banks of the Kent, are the two ancient halls of Over and Nether Levens, one on either side of the river and each a moiety of the other. In the year 1188, Ketel,\* the son of Uchtred, who then owned the whole, sold off Over Levens to Henry, son of Norman de Redeman, but retained Nether Levens until at least the year 1197, when, or soon after, it passed into the hands of a family who bore the local name of de Levens. How long they remained in possession I cannot say, but during the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries there were several members of the family, who, by the way, attained to a considerable position, mentioned as of Levens Hall. For arms they bore—Argent on a bend sable three escallops of the field; for crest, a slip of vine proper.

The family of de Levens probably sold the manor to the Prestons of Preston, and as early as the year 1452, we find mention of a Richard Preston who obtained a license to have an oratory within the manors of Preston and Levens. In 1677, Sir Thomas Preston was charged with a free rent of 20s. for his fishery in the river Kent. He died without male issue, and one of his two co-heiresses carried the manor of Nether Levens in marriage to Herbert, Lord Montgomery, who about the year 1694 sold the same to Edward Wilson of Dallam Tower. Such is the very brief outline of the possessors.

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\* This Ketel must not be confounded with Ketel, the son of Eldred, who one hundred years before was a witness to the foundation charter of Wetheral Priory.

The hall itself stands upon the west side of the river, from which it is only separated by a narrow roadway. Several yards of the defensive curtain wall, which enclosed the ancient pele, are still standing, shewing a height of 12 feet to the rampart walk some  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, but the breastwork which would rise above is gone. The pele stands in a line with this wall, and was apparently only a small one, measuring 25 feet in width, with probably a proportionate length of about 32 feet; such as those of Clifton, Dalston, or Kentmere. It is now, however, with the adjacent buildings, a total ruin—the openings are broken down and the stone dressings gone—leaving no clue as to its date, and little can be gathered as to the internal arrangements. The walling consists of rough limestone rubble and boulders, and is about 3 feet thick. Within has been as usual a low cellar, but apparently not vaulted; above has been the solar, with a window opening to the east and two to the south, on which side also there is a fireplace with chimney flue. Away to the west an angle of an old wall remains, which seems to shew that the whole block, as it existed at this period, extended to some 60 feet.

When this ancient structure became insufficient as a residence, at the latter end of the sixteenth century, a new hall was erected at right angles to it, thus forming the well-known L shape on plan. From the date stone at the northern end it would seem that Thomas Preston was the builder of the enlargement in the year 1594. The hall is a magnificent apartment, measuring 48 feet by 22 feet internally, and has had the dais at the southern end, for here is placed on the eastern wall a large wide Tudor window of four lights, with elliptic heads surmounted by a square dripstone hollowed in cavetto. The casements, with the diamond-shaped panes, have been removed, but some glass with the old Preston arms and the arms of the Wilsons is still preserved. On one of the mullions is scratched the date 1649. Opposite, on the western wall,



NETHER LEVENS HALL : WEST ELEVATION.

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NETHER LEVENS HALL.

DAIS WINDOW.

TO FACE P. 237.



close to the dais, is a remarkably fine example of a wide open-mouthed fireplace. The span is 10 feet, and consists of a built up four-centred arch, with a hollow cut on the edge all round. The remains of the old stone staircase to the rooms above can still be traced, and at the north-west corner is a projecting turret, which must have been used as a garde-robe. Leading out from the hall are two doorways, connecting with the larders and kitchen, the great fireplace of which latter apartment was recessed back into an enormous wall 10 feet in thickness.

We now pass to the later development of the seventeenth century. The great hall, now no longer wanted of such dimensions, was partitioned off, and an oaken staircase in four flights, with square moulded handrail and turned bannisters, took the place of the older stoneway. The kitchen became a parlor and a new kitchen extension was erected, where we find the development of the ingle nook.

The back or west side of the house, of which is given a view, presents several mullioned and elliptic arched windows and projecting chimneys built out square and running up into the heavy circular shafts so characteristic of Westmorland. On this side also there are some interesting traces of a raised up roadway below the turf leading toward a circle of trees, which I must leave to others to elucidate. Interesting also is the pigeon house with its walls covered with pigeon holes from floor to roof, and there has been dug up from below the soil an ancient grave slab with a bishop's pastoral staff carved upon it, but to which bishop's tomb it belongs or from whence it came I cannot explain.

I am indebted to Mr. Harry Cottam for kindly measuring up the plan here illustrated.

