

Fig. 1.—The Ruined Walls of Benrith Castle.

ART. II.—*Penrith Castle.* By F. HUBLESTON.

*Read at the site, April 17th, 1929.*

SINCE Col. Haswell and Mr. J. F. Curwen in 1907 and 1918 respectively gave us their papers on Penrith Castle, the Office of Works have completed their work on the ruins, and by the courtesy of our Honorary Member, Mr. C. R. Peers, Chief Inspector of Ancient Monuments, who lent me the whole of the drawings he had prepared, I am able to lay before you a plan showing the foundations of walls and towers which are now laid bare, and these discoveries must undoubtedly modify the ideas we formerly held.

Many of the suggestions I make in the following pages are at variance with the views expressed by Col. Haswell and Mr. Curwen—two antiquaries to whom I always “touch my hat”—but I would beg them to excuse my temerity, because many thousand cubic yards of rubbish have been removed from the ruins since the end of the Great War, and thus I have been able to see much masonry that was completely hidden from them when they prepared their papers.

The Castle is rectangular in plan with its diagonals lying on the four cardinal points of the compass, and its buildings cover barely half an acre. It is composed primarily of a thick curtain wall with diagonal buttresses at three of its corners, and square buttresses at mid-length of two—or perhaps three—of its sides; and each side was about 44 yards long. On the N.E. and N.W. sides we find two entrances and the remains of buildings outside the main wall, while *inside* it we find the foundations of many buildings arranged round an inner courtyard. The castle certainly had no existence before 1399, yet in

1550 it was more or less a complete ruin; even for this comparatively short period of 150 years we have no documentary knowledge of its history beyond the scanty records that Col. Haswell and Mr. Curwen were able to give us; but now at last the ruins can, I think, tell us pretty clearly how the castle grew up to its greatest importance in the reign of Edward IV and then tumbled down to a ruin.

The earliest masonry is undoubtedly that of the square tower on the N.E. face and the curtain wall, for the walls of every building *inside* the enclosure are merely butted up against the wall of the curtain, while near the northern end of the N.E. face we can *now* see the base of an original diagonal buttress, which has been demolished at the time when the Red Tower was erected, *outside* the early square enclosure, with its own N.E. side properly bonded into the pre-existing curtain wall, so that the whole N.E. face of the castle—as we now see it—makes one continuous wall 52 yards long. But when we walk round this Red Tower, we find its S.W. side is *not* bonded into the N.W. curtain wall where these two walls meet at right angles; and we also find that the walls of the outer defence of the N.W. entrance are, in their turn, merely butted against the Red Tower and the old curtain at right angles to both.

To those of our members who are not architects or civil engineers I would explain that it is impossible to *bond* a new lime-mortared masonry wall into an old one at right angles to it, for the inevitable settlement of “green masonry” will tear apart every bond stone you may insert into the old wall unless you take extraordinary precautions for each and every bonder you consider you *must* put in. Here in Penrith Castle, where speed of building was, of course, essential, the masons have made no attempt to bond their new walls into the old ones in any portion of what is now left standing, and thus we—after the lapse of three or four centuries—can say

definitely that the curtain wall was at first nothing but a curtain wall and had no immediate connection with any other building whose ruins are now visible except the square tower (marked A on the plan) on the N.E. face, which I now submit is the actual pele-tower that William Strickland built in 1397 to 1399.

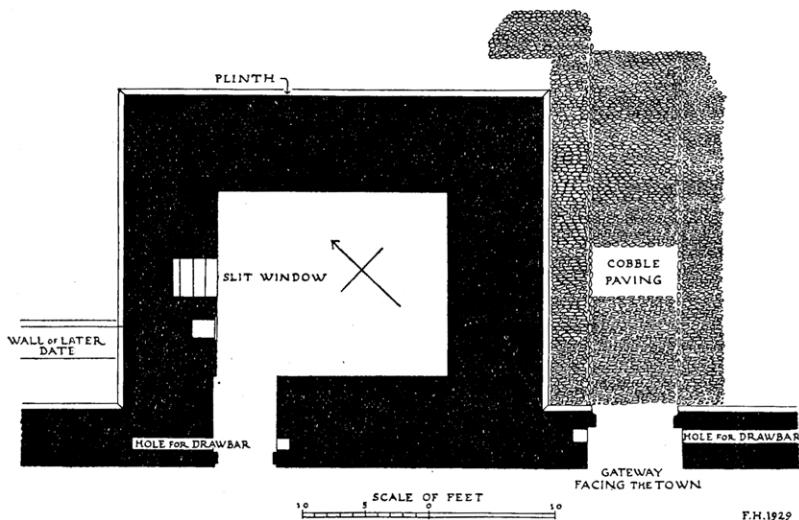


Fig. 2.—Plan of Strickland's Tower.

This tower measures 33 feet by 29 feet,\* and has walls  $7\frac{1}{2}$  feet thick with a plinth near ground level just like all our Cumberland 14th century towers; it has also the usual ground floor entrance doorway near one corner, but I can find no trace of the customary spiral stairs in any part of the original work, which by the way is now only a foot or two above the plinth; but there must have been *some* way

\* The open space inside the walls of the upper rooms would be 18 ft. by 14 ft. and probably a little more since our Border towers often have an internal set-off at each floor level on which to lay the actual wooden floor, so that the 6½ yards square of "timbre and leade in good repac'ons" on the Bishop's Tower in the 1565 Report (*Trans. n.s.*, vii, p. 290) fits in well with the identification here suggested.

of getting up to the first floor because the doorway into the arched basement is rebated for a door that opens *inwards*, and there is a hole for a timber draw-bar behind it. These walls are faced with a white stone, and the plinth which runs all round the three exposed faces of the tower is of the same *white* stone, and this white stone plinth has been carried at the same level along the face of the N.E. wall towards the North and the South of the tower until it changes into a *red* stone plinth of the same moulding.

The S.W. face of this tower is exactly in line with the inner face of the curtain wall, and this side of the tower with the gateway next it on the south is faced with the same white stone which is also used for the inner side of the curtain wall for some little distance towards the north until it dies out *below* the courses of the red sandstone which has been used in the construction of all the rest of the castle.

Now this Tower (A), the gateway (B), and the curtain wall on the north side of the Tower are all thoroughly bonded together, and have clearly been built at the same time.

I am informed by a well-known builder and contractor that the white stone in Penrith Castle is probably from one of the quarries near Stainton rather than from Lazonby, which by the way is much further off. And now for a bit of special pleading.

In the printed "Calendars of Patent Rolls, Ric. II, vol. vi, 1396-1399" are these three entries.

- (1) " 12 Feb. 1397. Westminster. License for William Stirkeland, clerk, to crenellate his chamber in Penreth in the March of Scotland."
- (2) " 10 Feb. 1399. Westminster. License with the assent of the Council, for William de Stirkeland, clerk, who at his own great cost is making a fortalice at Penreth on the March of Scotland, for fortifying

that town and the whole adjacent country, to dig stone in Penreth felles within the forest of Inglewood in order to complete the said fortalice."

- (3) "2nd April 1399. Westminster. License for William de Stirkeland, to whom the King lately granted license to crenellate with stone and lime a chamber in Penreth upon the March of Scotland, to make a mantlet of stone and lime, join it to the same chamber and crenellate the same and to hold it for ever in aid and succour of the said town and adjacent country."

Here we find Strickland in 1397 getting leave to build a tower for *himself* in Penrith, in the King's manor; but he has no leave to dig stone there, and he perforce procures his material from the adjoining manor of Dacre which is held under the baron of Greystoke, *not* under the King. But while the work of quarrying and dressing this stone is going on, he conceives the idea of extending his scheme for the general benefit of the town, and, as the stone from Stainton is proving costly to prepare and transport, he asks for, and obtains, leave to get it from Penrith Fell where the new red sandstone is far cheaper to quarry and dress and transport to the site than the harder and, I would add, decidedly superior freestone of the Carboniferous series at Stainton.

But before he actually gets this permission from the King and before he has decided to build a "mantlet" he has already dressed a lot of his facing stones, the arch stones of the basement, and sufficient *plinth* to go all round the four sides of his Tower; and as he does not now want the architectural effect of a plinth on the inner side of his barmkin—where nobody would notice it—he uses up his plinth stones, when he actually begins to *build*, by prolonging his plinth along the outside of his new curtain wall until it is all used up, and then he carries on with a red sandstone plinth for the rest of the N.E. face

of his “mantlet,” which—by the way—is the only face of the whole curtain that now shows a well-defined plinth. Now if we measure up the length of the white stone plinth, we find there is just enough to go right round the four sides of the Tower if it had been laid in the recognised manner of all our fourteenth-century Border-towers in Cumberland.

The greater portion of the now existing vaulted basement storey of this tower is new work built by the Office of Works since the Great War, and they have purposely set their new stone an inch back from the face of the old work to prevent confusion in the minds of visitors, but you will notice on the northern side of this cellar the original lower courses of an opening which closes in as if it was the lower part of a slit window similar to those we generally find in our fourteenth-century towers, and you will search in vain throughout the whole of the castle ruins for another slit window at so low a level.\* Does not this provide additional circumstantial evidence that it was Strickland who built it in 1399 as a house for himself, and not some other man who carried on the work on a greatly extended scale at some later period?

The ruined curtain wall, which averages  $4\frac{1}{2}$  ft. in thickness, shows two† gateways (B and c) in it, undoubtedly arched over originally, and each has a draw-bar hole on the right hand of the defenders similar to that of the Tower door. The gateway (B) which faces Castle Gate is 6 ft. wide, while the one in the N.W. side (c) facing the Railway Station seems to have been at least 8 ft. wide, judging from the length of the draw-bar hole there (which, by the way, has had a doorway cut through it, to give access to the guard room on that side, when the outer “Rat-trap”

\* The other slit window on the southern side of this basement vault is entirely new and has been put there by the Office of Works on purpose to admit light into the cellar-like basement and so help to prevent misuse of the chamber by idle or mischievous persons.

† The doorway next to the Red Tower is obviously a modern opening.

was added); and these two gates with their draw-bars constituted the sole means of holding the earliest enclosure against an enemy. Now this is exactly the method of defending the barmkins of all our fourteenth-century fortalices in Cumberland and Westmorland.

Inside his mantlet Strickland would have contemplated nothing more than the usual lean-to sheds of timber for refugees or for cattle; but the fortalice was soon improved by some successor, and I suggest he was probably Ralph Nevill, Earl of Westmorland, to whom King Richard II gave the town and manor of Penrith in 1398.\* This great noble, a near kinsman of the King himself, would hold views of a more imperious nature than those of a cleric like Strickland, and we find from the ruined walls now brought to light that each of the gateways had a "rat-trap" addition (D, and D2) inside the enclosure, with portcullis at the inner end of the passage and guard chamber on one, if not both sides of the passage-way. The "rat-trap" for the gate facing Castle Gate seems to have been retained for use right up to the time when the castle became neglected, and one of the jambs of its portcullis (P J), at the inner end of the passage way is still to be seen; but the inside "rat-trap" defence of the other and more important entrance on the N.W. face has been replaced by another one *outside* the curtain wall, with a portcullis at its outer end, at some comparatively late period, and *after* the Red Tower had been erected, as we shall see later.

These two *inner* gate defences (D1 and D2) were—I suggest—a Nevill addition to the castle in the early years of the 15th century, and to this same period I would attribute the building of the Red Tower, as a watch tower

\* *Calendar Patent Rolls*, Hen. IV, Vol. 1, 1397-1401.

25 May, 1400. Inspeximus and confirmation to Ralph, Earl of Westmorland and Joan his wife and the heirs male of their bodies, of letters patent dated 7 October, 21 Ric. II, granting to them the manors and towns of Penrith and Sourby with the hamlets of Langwathby, Scouteby and Carleton, and a rent of 12*l.* yearly in the part of Newcastle on Tyne; and a grant to them of arrears.

to face any Scottish invader, rather than to the time of Crookback Richard, to whom I am inclined to attribute the defence which I have called the "outer rat-trap" (E) of the N.W. entrance,\* for there can be no question that this addition was put up some considerable time *after* the Red Tower was built, because its N.W. and S.W. walls merely butt up against the Red Tower and the older curtain wall, while its plinth, where we can still see it on the outside of the S.W. wall of the left-hand guard room, has quite different moulding to that which runs round the Red Tower. The lower stone of one portcullis jamb (P,J2) and part of the sill of the portcullis were laid bare by the Office of Works and we have here an excellent example of the latest style of 15th century military architecture.

I strongly suspect that there was a drawbridge here across a walled ditch, for the N.W. face of the Red Tower, close by it, has been laid bare by the Office of Works for nearly 6 ft. below the level of this portcullis sill; but I am informed by Mr. Longstaff, the Engineer and Surveyor of the Penrith U.D.C. that no excavations were made by the Office of Works in front of the gateway itself so that the matter is still wrapped in mystery.

There is a curious mass of masonry (G) inside the left-hand guard room of the outer "rat-trap" which I am inclined to think may be the lower part of a mid-length buttress of the old curtain wall similar to those on the S.W. and S.E. faces, for it shows some signs of having been incorporated with that wall; the straight joint that is so obvious at all other junctions with the curtain is not so obvious in this particular instance.

The only other outside addition to the curtain is a garde-robe turret (H) with two shoots, a little further along

\* I suggest that this constitutes the "utter gate house" which in 1565 was "cleane for the moste p'te fallen downe to the grounde," (*Trans. N.S.*, vii, p. 290), but the items of this report jump about the building in a most confusing manner.

this N.W. face, and this also is not bonded into the curtain wall.

If we now consider the remains of masonry inside the "mantlet," we may look in vain for any wall that has not a straight joint where it touches the curtain, and consequently every one of these inner walls must be considered an addition of later date. These remains indicate a number of buildings clustered round an inner rectangular courtyard, 70 ft. by 65 ft., placed a few feet off the centre of the original enclosure so that these buildings are of various widths; the narrowest of them are those against the N.W. curtain wall and two—at any rate—of these rooms ( $\kappa_1$ ,  $\kappa_2$ ) have been arched over. You will observe that the springing stones of these arches enter the N.W. curtain wall by only a few inches, and this is, I submit, clear proof that they are insertions into a pre-existing wall. The room ( $\kappa_3$ ) against the S.W. curtain wall shows a faint sign of having been arched over but the remaining masonry is very low on this side, so one cannot be positive on the point. The fireplaces seem to point to kitchens at ground floor level and in room (L) one of these fireplaces (which I think must be a Gloucester addition) had an oven alongside it with a wide arch spanning fireplace and oven mouth.

The southern end of the S.W. wall, the whole of the S.E. wall, and part of the N.E. wall are still standing for almost the whole of their old height, and here we can see that the basement storey was never arched over but had a timber covering resting on stone corbels and forming the floor of some large living rooms lighted only from the inner courtyard and intended apparently for the day accommodation of the garrison, for there are three large fireplaces in the outer walls here; while at a still higher level are corbels for the beams that supported a second floor, probably for dormitories, where the outer walls have no fireplaces but have several window openings, the height

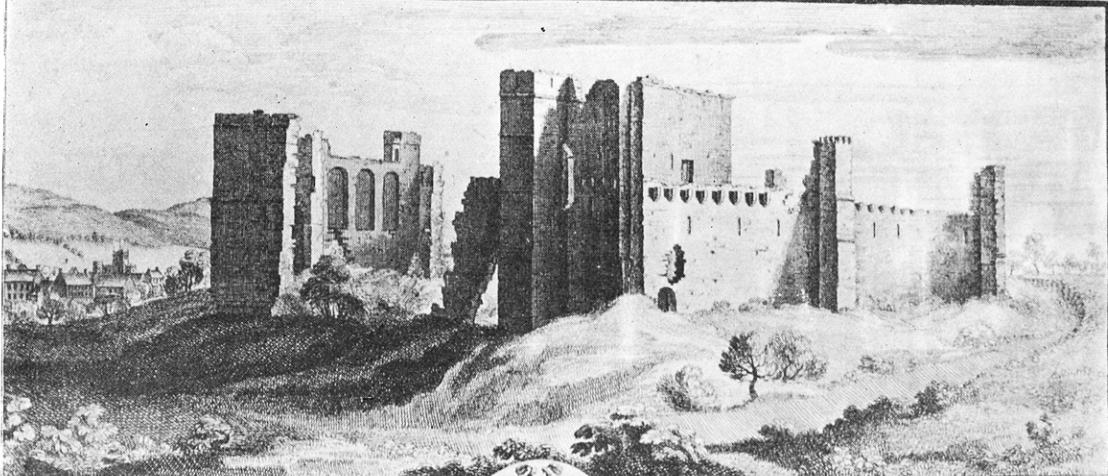
above ground level being far more than the scaling ladders of that time could reach.

The east corner of the castle has at its topmost level, and well above the row of outside corbels, a couple of large windows which seem to show that here was the chapel mentioned in the 1565 report, built apparently as a third storey above the dormitory floor. The eastern portion of the S.E. wall is 9 or 10 ins. thicker than the average of the curtain wall; it has no signs of an outside diagonal buttress at the E. corner, but inside it there is a well-built chamber (M) for smoking meat, with a smoke hole at its top and a small door at ground level to close it up and keep a smouldering fire for the purpose.\* I suggest that all this indicates an early alteration of design and very possibly one while Strickland's own design was being carried on, for I cannot find any signs of change in the lower courses of masonry until we get up to the curious corbelling on the S.E. face of the corner which Col. Haswell refers to on p. 285, N.S., vii.

A row of outside corbels still *in situ* along the top of the S.E. curtain wall marks the top of the original thick wall; they were put there to carry the battlemented parapet. Buck's print in 1739 (reproduced by Col. Haswell (*Trans. N.S.* vii, p. 283) shows similar corbels all along the S.W. and N.W. walls up to the garde-robe turret and beyond it again as far as the wall remained for Buck to sketch it. The imposing tower-like erection that Buck shows at the W. corner is obviously merely built on the top of the pre-existing curtain wall, for the corbels have never been removed, and we now find corroborative evidence that it never was a true "tower," for its S.E. and N.E. walls are

\* In the basement of the 14th-century tower at Hutton John there is a very similar chamber, on a smaller scale, with a narrow and low doorway rebated and *hinged* for a door that opens inwards—like this at Penrith Castle—and with a smoke hole at the top of the arched roof; all forming an excellent arrangement for smoking meat and obviously too small for a dungeon, which by the way would never have a door that opened *inwards* at ground level.

E NORTH VIEW OF PENRITH-CASTLE, IN THE COUNTY OF CUMBERLAND.



To the most Noble  
William Duke Earl of Portland

Lanques of Tidfield Viscount Woodstock and Baron of Cirencester

Esq; & his Honourable Son the Right Honourable John the second Lord

Sam'l Nau' Buck

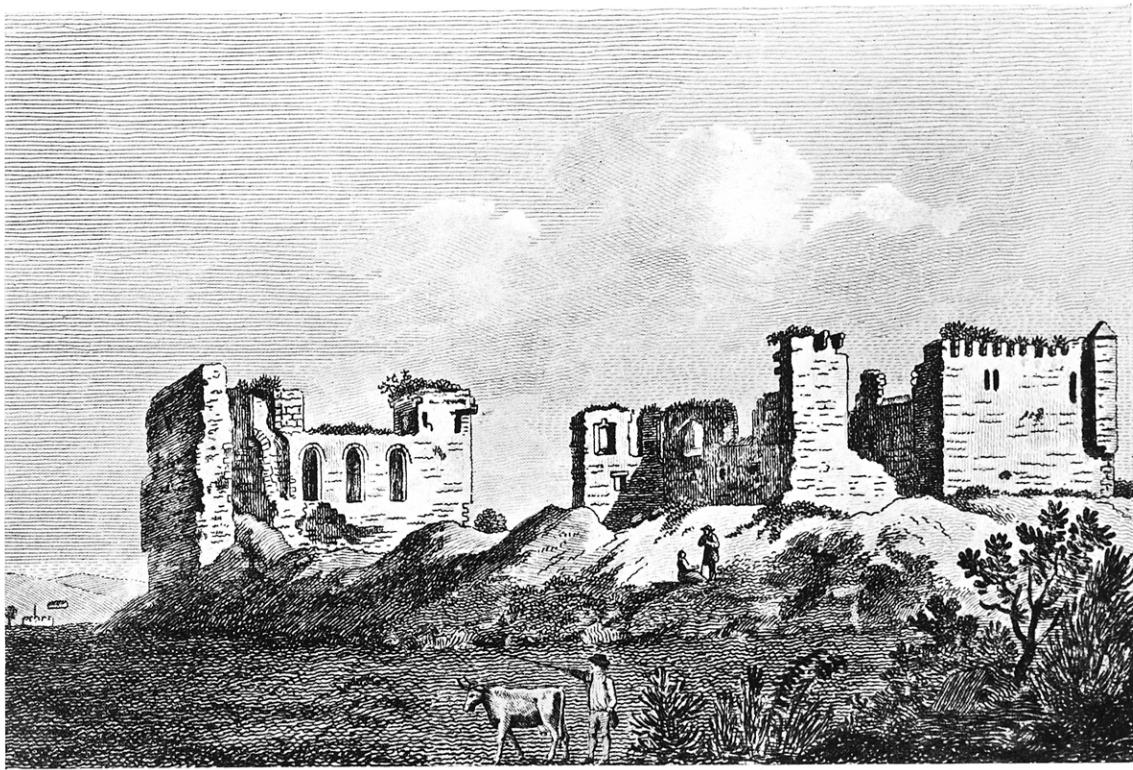


THIS Castle was formerly one of strength, but it does not appear when or by whom it was founded. It was reported by Mr. Sanderson in his Account of the Antient Castles of Britain, of Mabrig, a Roman fort hard by Penrith, that there were great traces of a fortress, that it was never in the hands of the Romans, nor was there ever any Roman fort built upon the same ground, or in the neighbourhood of it, but a Danish temple. However that be, this Castle, & having been built in a strong situation in Crown rule to King III. who granted it to Thomas of Penrith, to whom Edmund Earl of Portland, grandfather to the present Duke of Portland, was married.

PENRITH CASTLE

Buck's Print, 1739.

TO FACE P. 22.



PENRITH CASTLE IN 1784.  
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S. Hooper.

TO FACE P. 23.

not bonded to the other two sides; small wonder that it fell down in 1750/60 or that Mr. Curwen in 1918 declined on general grounds to regard it as the "Bishop's Tower," although he could not then see its composite structure; unequal settlement was no doubt the ultimate cause of its collapse. I suggest that this building was the tower built for the Duke of Gloucester, whose repair work—so Clark tells us on p. 18 of his "Survey of the Lakes"—"gave way very readily" as compared with the older work when certain workmen attempted to pull down the latter.

The walls along the N.E. side of the quadrangle are obviously of two distinct periods, and they show us that the final buildings here were much the widest of all in the castle. It is on this side that Buck's print shows three tall windows overlooking the town; one of them is still sufficiently *in situ* to show us that their sills were some 18 feet above ground level. This apartment must have been the banqueting hall, and it may have been almost 50 feet long, 25 feet wide and 20 feet high if, as is possible, it absorbed the whole first floor space between the Red Tower and Strickland's Tower; underneath it were various rooms and passages indicated now by sundry walls and the modern kerbstones which stand a few inches above ground.

In the sketch of S. Hooper, 1784 (which is reproduced in Curwen's *Castles and Towers*, p. 219) we get that artist's impression of the place after the Western tower and the mid-length buttress of the S.W. face had both disappeared, but between the two a piece of curtain wall is still standing and Hooper shows corbels here just as Buck did. On the N.E. wall we still find the three windows of the banqueting hall but we can see that Hooper was more impressed than Buck had been by the size of the ruins of the tower I have here identified as Strickland's earliest work.

These sketches of Buck and Hooper and also the map in Clark's "Survey" show that the old road from Keswick to Penrith was then some little distance from the Castle; the present road passing close to the Red Tower was made in 1840-5 when the Lancaster and Carlisle Railway was under construction, and the Railway Company had to purchase the site of the Castle as well as the actual land they wanted for their job. The station approaches have altered the whole face of the country here, and I can find nothing to show whether or no there was any ditch on this side comparable with those which the Office of Works opened up quite recently along the S.E. half of the Castle. This ditch is somewhat of a puzzle; no medieval castle would have a ditch so far off its walls as to actually assist an enemy in his attack upon them. I suggest that all the deep ditches here are an addition made at some period later than the Wars of the Roses, when Penrith Castle had reached the zenith of its fortunes; the masonry remaining in the ditch on the line of the street called "Castle Gate" seems to imply some reason to suspect the "Town" of giving trouble; but the N.W. gateway was undoubtedly the most important in the eyes of the 15th century garrison.

The westernmost block of masonry (N) may have been the west abutment of a bridge across the moat, while the eastern block (o) seems to be the base of an entrance gate tower which supplanted that bridge, and apparently there was also a retaining wall (Q, Q, Q) on the inner side of the moat as far as the present roadway.

The photograph facing, for which I am indebted to Messrs. Reeds, Ltd., of Penrith, was taken by them in 1927 from the top of the big water tank in the Railway Station, looking S.S.E., and from this altitude one can see most of the walls laid bare by the Office of Works. At the left of the picture, behind the telegraph pole, is the lower portion of the tower I consider to have been Strickland's



PENRITH CASTLE IN 1927  
From the top of the Railway Company's big water tank.

*Photo. by Messrs. Reeds, Penrith.*

TO FACE P. 24.

original building (A); then comes the E. corner of the castle with one of the Chapel windows, and a window of the dormitory in the S.E. wall. On the near side of Strickland's tower and projecting a little into the daylight opening of the Chapel window are the remains of the N.E. wall of the Banqueting Hall and one of its windows. Then comes a *part* (only) of the N.W. face of the Red Tower, for both its corners have gone and the Office of Works have had to strengthen it somewhat. To the right of the picture—i.e. on the sinister side of the Red Tower—appear the massive walls on each side of the S. corner with the corner itself running up to form a watch tower, and in these main walls the photograph shows two out of the three huge fireplaces in the row of living rooms described on p. 21 above.

Between the Red Tower and the S. corner you see the inner courtyard of the Castle, the grating over the well and many of the ruined walls of the interior buildings. On the right hand of the Red Tower comes the outer N.W. gateway (E) with its guard rooms on either side of the passage and half its portcullis sill (P J2) is clearly shown in the photograph. Then comes a piece of the earliest curtain wall and just below the vertical line of the broken end of the S.W. wall you can see the bottom of the garde-robe turret (H) that shows so prominently in Buck's print.

In the 1565 Report mention is made of "twoo stables" 25 yards long by 7 yards wide and "three howse high." I think these must have been along the N.W. wall above the arched basements there, and that they were approached by a couple of stone ramps in the north and the west corners of the inner courtyard. There are at these points the lower courses of two masses of masonry (R1 and R2) *within* the open space of the courtyard and covering up its plinth, which must have been an afterthought, and they are quite wide enough for a man to lead a horse up them. You could not stable horses on any floor above ground

floor unless it was a *stone* floor, while if the horses were not stabled here what on earth could have been the need for these two clumsy excrescences in the inner court?

I suggest that the “twoo stables” were improvised in early Tudor times when the castle was only considered useful for a few light horsemen kept ready to sally out against a marauding band of Scotchmen. Both ramps have a right angled turn in them because of their necessary length; both of them pass *over* a doorway of a basement chamber, and *one* ramp (R2) must have fouled the great N.W. entrance (E) which would never have been permitted when the castle was a real fortress.

Penrith Castle has no foul dungeons like those two gruesome oubliettes in Cockermouth Castle, nor can it compare in military importance with our three great medieval castles of Brougham, Carlisle and Cockermouth; those were 12th century safeguards against the whole might of Scotland, whereas Penrith was only founded long after we had started our Border bickerings in the 14th century; but we must not forget that the area of Penrith Castle is as large as that of Naworth Castle, which figured so prominently in Border troubles, that the accommodation for its garrison was more extensive than that at Naworth, and that King Richard III, when he was Duke of Gloucester and Warden of the Marches next Scotland, lived here sometimes to keep the district in subjection to his brother, King Edward IV. In 1539 old John Leland could still call it a “strong castel of the Kings,” but a few years later it was neglected and ruinous.

Nowadays it is even more ruined, but happily no longer neglected, for Penrith Town is proud of its castle, while the Office of Works announce that *they* will prosecute anybody who dares to meddle with it.