

ART. X.—*Excavation of the fortified manor-house at Burgh-by-Sands.* By ROBERT HOGG, B.Sc., A.M.A.

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INTRODUCTION.

BURGH "castle"¹ is described by T. H. B. Graham in his list of extinct Cumberland castles (Part III).² Although no remains of the building have been visible for some considerable time,³ its site has been accurately recorded.⁴ In 1948, interest in the castle was revived by the chance discovery of structural remains on the traditional site. On 29 November 1948, at the request of Mr T. Hodgson, The Demesne Farm, Burgh-by-Sands, the writer visited the castle site and examined a foundation structure of well-dressed sandstone, two courses in depth, which had been found by ploughing one foot beneath the surface, at a point some 75 ft. south of the SW corner of field 1197. That these remains were part of the lost castle was suggested both by their location and by their medieval character, and was fairly certainly confirmed, after a quick examination of them with the spade, by the useful yield of medieval potsherds found associated with them.

The excellent state of these foundation structures and their nearness to the surface gave every indication that the plan and foundation history of the building might be recovered, and for this reason a full-scale excavation of the site was planned and subsequently carried out.

The excavation began on 10 July 1950, and was conducted by the writer with a labour force, for the first two weeks, of three paid labourers and several voluntary

¹ Curwen, *Castles and Towers*, p. 20 and references.

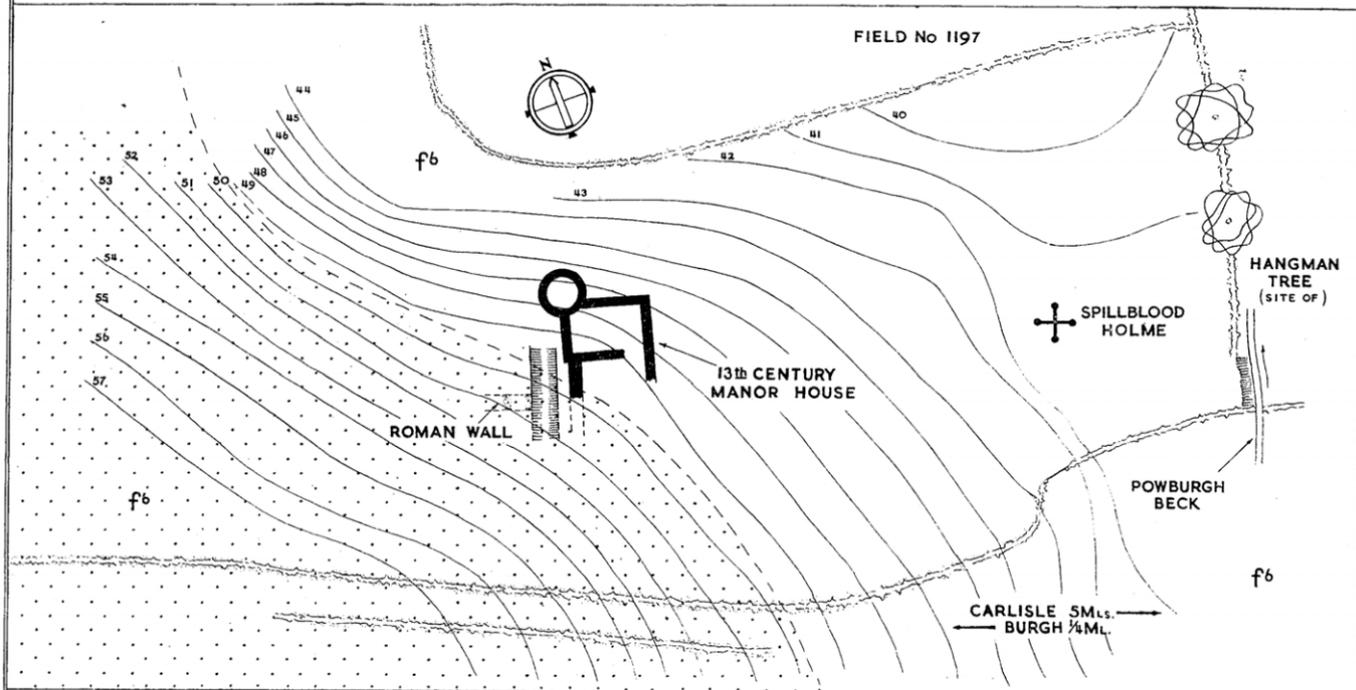
² CW2 xi 242 ff.

³ John Denton's *Accompt*, ed. Ferguson, p. 79, mentions the existence of ruins in 1610.

⁴ O.S. 25" 1925 ed.

MANOR-HOUSE, BURGH-BY-SANDS, 1950.

TOPOGRAPHICAL SETTING



20 0 50 100 150
SCALE FEET

GEOLOGICAL SIGNS

- BOULDER CLAY
- FLOOD PLAIN ALLUVIUM
- f6 STANWIX SHALES

R.H.

workers recruited from the members of the Carlisle Regional Group. In addition to the above helpers, members of the County Architect's staff made themselves responsible for the survey work. After the first two weeks of intensive digging the excavation was kept open for a further month, and with the help of voluntary diggers the work of consolidating the results achieved during the first two weeks proceeded as time permitted.

THE SITE.

The castle site (fig. 1) lies on the lower eastern slopes of a ridge of boulder clay and is skirted on its northern and eastern sides by the comparatively broad alluvial tracts of the Powburgh Beck. To the east of the Powburgh Beck the ground rises, for about a mile, to the crest of a boulder clay ridge upon which stands the village of Beaumont. Beaumont is the site of the motte of the le Brun, or de la Ferté, family. Here also the Roman Wall makes an almost right-angle turn away from the River Eden, and after crossing the ridge its line is plainly discernible descending its western slope on its way to Burgh fort. To reach the fort the line of the Wall traverses the site of the medieval castle, although its precise course at this point is lost, and a conjectural line is given on O.S. maps, obtained by the continuation of the observed line immediately east of Powburgh Beck. The road from Carlisle to Bowness, which is no doubt a communication route of the greatest antiquity, passes the site on its immediate south side.

The choice of such a low-lying site for the castle, in preference to one on the crest of the hill where the ruins of the Roman fort stood and where later the church pele was built, is difficult to understand; and the only explanation that can be offered is the possible wish of the first builders to make use of the marshy tracts of the Powburgh Beck as a protection for the northern perimeter of their building. The choice of site becomes easier to understand,

however, when one considers the essential function of the building. Although it has been referred to since the time of Horsley as a castle, the structure, as shown both by excavation and by the documentary record, was in fact a fortified manor-house designed only for the convenience and protection of the lord of the manor and his family, and not as an integral part of some larger scheme of Border defence. That the planning of the manor-house was adequate, to meet the requirements of manorial control, was shown by the peak of prosperity which the affairs of the manor reached by 1314, the year of Bannockburn; but that it had not the strength to accept any heavier commitments was quickly evident when the Scottish reprisals began in the ensuing years when, as Dr Storey points out in his paper, the manor-house was destroyed probably by 1339. Thus we need not seek in the siting of the building a defensive strength greater than was required by the commitments for which it was planned.

THE EXCAVATION.

(a) *The 13th century manor-house.*

The immediate objectives at the start of the excavation were firstly, the uncovering and development of the 1948 discovery, and secondly, the determination of the exact line of the Roman Wall so that its position in relation to the medieval structures would be known. With respect to the latter project, the conjectural line of the Great Wall was cross-sectioned at a point near where it intersects the modern road, i.e. where it was anticipated that there would be no interference from medieval structures. A trench was cut for thirty-four feet, to a depth of five feet, at which point compact boulder clay was reached. No trace of the Great Wall or of its ditch was found. The upper two feet of make-up was composed of road metalling which had been spread over the field when the modern

road surface was lowered,⁵ and the presence of this compact surface stratum made the work of cutting the section extremely arduous. Meanwhile, however, rapid progress was being made with the second project, and as evidence was coming to light there indicating that the Great Wall lay north of the conjectural position, the whole of our efforts were now concentrated at this point.

The first trench cut on the castle site exposed the edge of the flag foundation work of a large circular angle tower, which subsequently proved to be the best preserved structure discovered on the site. The overall diameter of the tower measured twenty-five feet, and the walls were four feet ten inches thick. The tower was built over the filling of the ditch of the Roman Wall, and a packing of large boulders, chiefly erratics of Dalbeattie granite, had been rammed into the filling material of the ditch to underpin the foundation course (pl. I, fig. 2). A number of Roman Wall building-stones were found in the filling material of the ditch, where obviously they had fallen and been buried before the arrival of the medieval builders. Not a great deal of first-course masonry of the tower survived, but the little which did consisted for the most part of a facing of re-used red sandstone ashlar from the Roman Wall, with a core composed of a rubble of sandstone brash and beach cobbles set in lime. At one point a short stretch of the second or plinth course was found in position; it was composed of much fresher cream-coloured sandstone, of the local New Red Series. Apparently the medieval builders made the fullest use of the Roman Wall as their main source of dressed stone, and introduced material from a second source only when carved units were required which were too large to be cut from the stone provided by the Wall. Thus the large foundation flags, the plinth course and the stone work from a small loop window, subsequently discovered, were all composed of cream-coloured sandstone.

⁵ Cf. CW2 xxiii 6 for a further reference to the road-lowering at this point.

The ditch found beneath the tower was identified as the north ditch of the Roman Wall, from the great thickness of heavy black filling which it contained, and from the occurrence of unmixed Roman pottery at a low level within the filling. Our efforts to delimit the ditch were, however, frustrated by the disturbed condition of the ground near the tower, due to medieval excavations for the castle earthworks. To the south of the tower, however, the flag foundations of the Great Wall were found at a depth of eighteen inches, and in a position some 110 feet north of the recorded conjectural line; but here again the almost complete destruction of the Wall by the castle builders, and the restricted area of the excavation beyond the limits of the castle, denied us the opportunity of determining the exact line of the Roman works. The considerable discrepancy between the true and conjectural positions of the Wall at a point so near the fort at Burgh, re-opens the critical question of the relation of the Wall to the East rampart of the fort,⁶ which is a matter that could be cleared up with very little further work.

The Great Wall, exposed to the west of the castle excavation, had been robbed of stone down to the flag foundation level, which consisted of soft and much weathered sandstone flags. The width of the foundations corresponded to that of the Intermediate Wall.

The perimeter of the tower foundations was traced on its eastern and southern arcs (fig. 2), and its junction with the western and northern walls of what was presumably the hall was located in the south-eastern quadrant. The footing course of the tower wall was cross-sectioned and was found to be 4 ft. 10 in. thick; it was faced on both sides with re-used Roman ashlar and it had a rubble core. There was no trace of a paved floor. The stones from one of its loop windows (pl. I, fig. 2), presumably from the tower basement as the sill stone had a socket hole for an iron bar, were found at one point buried in

⁶ CW2 xxiii 3 ff.

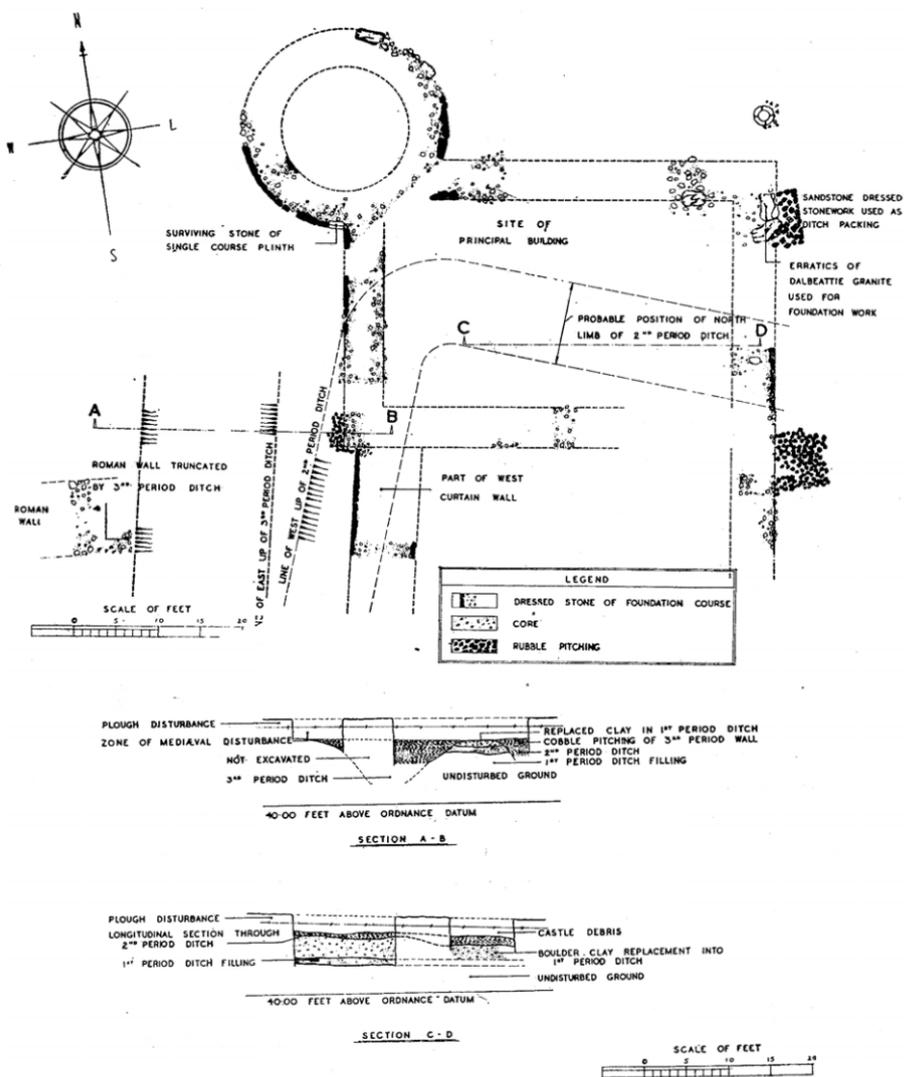


Fig. 2.—Plan and sections of the structures excavated in 1950.

soft ground on the north side of the tower. Five carved stones of the window were recovered, including the sill and three facing stones from one side and one from the other. All are of cream-coloured sandstone. The estimated size of the loop-hole is $3\frac{1}{4}$ in., splaying to $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. wide, and it is 23 in. long. On the chamfered face of one of the two smaller facing-stones is a mason's mark, very similar to but not exactly like one at Furness Abbey,⁷ and others of the same type are noted from Carlisle cathedral.⁸ The masons' marks known to be present on the inside walls and pillars of Burgh church were compared with the one from the castle. In all twenty-four marks were found in the church, all of one type also recorded from Furness Abbey.⁹ On the other small facing-stone from the castle window there was a mason's mark which appeared to be an incomplete example of the first. All the stones from the window are now housed in the tower of Burgh church.

Only two other examples of the round tower are known in Cumberland, namely at Cockermouth and Egremont castles.¹⁰ Both the north and west walls of the hall were traced from their point of juncture with the tower. Except for parts of the flagging course, dressed stone-work had been wholly removed, but the two walls were clearly indicated by the surviving mass of their rotted cores, and their exact alignment was determined from the line of their foundation flagging (fig. 2). These walls had the same width as those of the tower, i.e. 4 ft. 10 in. over their flag foundation course. The east wall of the hall was subsequently located in a similar state of denudation, but here again the flagging was found at one point from which its precise line could be determined (pl. II, fig. 2). With the finding of the northern and eastern walls of the hall the position of its north-eastern corner could be deduced, for at this point stone robbing had been so thorough

⁷ CWI vi 357, plate III No. 79.

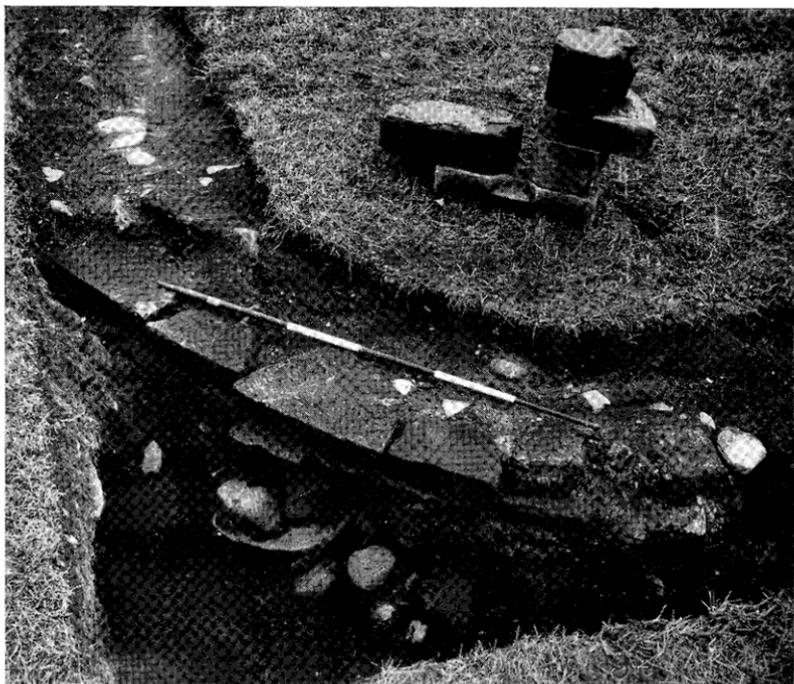
⁸ CWI v 132.

⁹ CWI vi, plate I No. 6.

¹⁰ *Castles & Towers* p. 125 f.



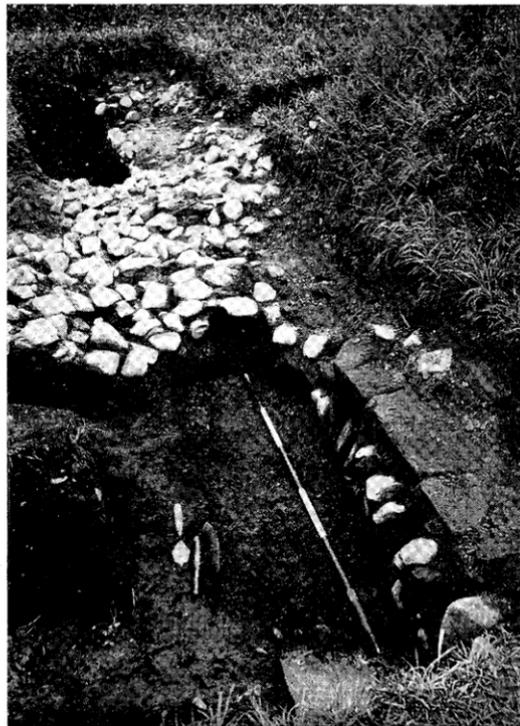
PL. I, 1.—S.W. arc of tower foundation from the W., showing point of juncture with W. wall of hall.



PL. I, 2.—N.E. arc of tower foundation; below, boulder packing of Wall ditch.
facing p. 112.



PL. II, 1.—W. wall from the N., showing mass of rotted core on flagged foundation.



PL. II, 2.—E. edge of E. wall from the N., showing spread of cobble pitching outside the wall.

that even the core mass of the walls had been removed. The only surviving structures here were one or two large granitic boulders and some stone pitching, which had been used for the consolidation of the ditch of the Roman Wall, which lies beneath the north wall of the castle. The lay-out of these foundation structures clearly indicated the rectilinear character of the north-eastern corner of the wall, and therefore the absence of a second tower.

In tracing the west wall along its west face, it was found to be slightly recessed at a point twenty-six feet south of the tower. South of this recess a cross-section of the west wall showed that its thickness had increased to 7 ft. 6 in., i.e. about one and a half feet thicker than the walls of the hall. The footing course of this broader continuation of the west wall was found in good condition, standing two courses high. It was built in such a way as to prove that it was not contemporary with the hall. Thus its foundations, resting on a mass of cobble pitching, stood two and a half feet above those of the hall, and although it was parallel to the west limb of an outer ditch, it was not exactly aligned with the west wall of the hall. It was concluded that this broad wall was the curtain of a courtyard lying to the south of the hall—a deduction that was supported by the occurrence of an appreciable amount of occupation material within the hall area, and its relative absence to the south; and the probability was noted that this courtyard may have served an earlier building, subsequently reconstructed when the tower and hall were built.

The lack of time and the considerable difficulties encountered on the south side of the site towards the modern road, where the almost completely destroyed medieval remains were buried beneath heavy up-cast material of post-medieval date, prevented the recovery of the plan on the south side—although, taking the road as the delimiting feature on this side, the southern extension of the site cannot have reached much beyond the area examined.

The recess in the west face of the west wall, which marked the southern limits of the narrower wall, clearly gave the south-western corner of the hall, and with the discovery of this point the south wall of the hall, in line with the recess, was easily located and cross-sectioned. Only core material had survived, from which however it was possible to estimate that the width of the south wall corresponded to that of the other three sides. An effort was made to locate the south-eastern corner of the hall but, owing to fairly thorough stone robbing at this point, no clearly defined structures were found.

At one point on the outer face of the west wall, and at two others on the outer face of the east (fig. 2), there were small areas of cobble pitching associated with the foundations. These structures may have been the foundations of buttresses, but no masonry of such survived.

The plan of the building, as now revealed, showed that the tower was attached to the north-western corner of a hall the inner dimensions of which were forty feet nine inches by twenty-five feet; to the south of the hall was a courtyard, which presumably gave access to the Carlisle to Bowness road. The building was surrounded by a ditch, the west limb of which was cross-sectioned and found to be V-shaped and measuring some 16 ft. across the mouth and 9 ft. deep; the berm on the west side was some 9 ft. broad. The form which the 13th century building assumed, having a round watch-tower of contemporary design, a hall and court with possibly out-houses which may have been of wood, the whole surrounded by a small moat, is that of a small fortified manor-house. The building is of a rare Border type that has not been previously described, and its importance in the study of the development of the Border manor-house is discussed at the end of the paper.

(b) *The lower levels.*

The 13th century building was clearly the last to have

been built upon the site, but evidence was found showing that in addition to the one re-building phase which has already been referred to in the report, there were two earlier reconstructions of the site. The only structural evidence recovered from these earlier levels were parts of the earthworks, i.e. no buildings older than the 13th century were found.

The stratification sequence and the nature and significance of the remains may therefore be described as follows.

Period I.

The earliest medieval structure found on the site was part of a ditch-system which was seen only in part in section, and which was too extensive to delimit. The bottom of the ditch contained a small amount of clean silt and the rest of the filling consisted of clean boulder clay. This ditch almost certainly formed part of a Norman motte. As no pottery was found in the filling, the date of the level must be estimated by relative means, by which an early post-Conquest date is indicated. The motte could therefore have been the work of the first baron, Robert de Trivers, who was granted the barony c. 1100.

Period II.

A later ditch, some ten to twelve feet wide, i.e. much smaller in size than that of Period I, was cross-sectioned and its western and northern limbs traced in part. The ditch contained an appreciable thickness of heavy black filling, and had been finally artificially filled and in places packed with cobbles, as a reinforcement for the foundations of the stone manor-house which were built across it.

The area enclosed by this ditch to the south was trenched, but no trace was found of buildings which might be associated with it. The absence of stone remains makes it possible that the buildings of Period II were of wood, in which case an examination of their

remains would require a complete excavation of the site. Period II may therefore have been a moated grange, a structural type which replaced the motte and bailey towers in the 12th and 13th centuries, when the manorial system was successfully established. The earthworks of a number of moated granges have been described,¹¹ but the buildings themselves have long since perished.

Period III.

In this period we have the earliest positive evidence of the construction of the manor-house in stone. It has been explained above that there was found only the west curtain and its outer ditch, which probably served a building pulled down when the 13th century hall was built. From the structural evidence a fairly late date in the 12th century would seem to be the probable time when the conversion to stone occurred, and the life-time of Hugh de Morville, during which the fortunes of the manor were considerably enriched by his marriage to Helewisa de Stutville, appears the most likely period.

Period IV.

The 13th century manor-house is the final structural phase, the time interval of which must be approximately from mid-13th century to the date of the final ruin of the site *c.* 1339.

This sequence of structural levels gives some indication of the progressive development of the manor during the first two centuries of its history, and therefore of the success of the system which controlled it. The collapse and ruin which followed in the succeeding century were due to the site's misfortune in lying in the path of destructive forces far greater than it had the means to withstand. The tragedy of Burgh was of course the tragedy of the Border as a whole, and with that fact in mind its history

¹¹ *Castles & Towers*, Chapt. V.

is set down here, as a commentary on human affairs no less than a study of archæological remains.

CONCLUSIONS.

The significance of the Burgh plan for the study of the evolution of the Border manor-house.

The Burgh plan consists essentially of a domestic element—the hall, and a defensive element—the tower. The tower is extremely interesting for its design, which was universal in the 13th century, did not continue to be used on the Border in the 14th.¹² The circular tower is very rare in Cumberland as noted above, so that the Burgh plan is of interest firstly as providing further evidence of the influence on 13th century Border architecture of contemporary national trends. The Burgh plan has however a much greater importance than this. We have noted above that the early post-Conquest motte and bailey fortified towers were later replaced by the wooden manorial halls of the moated granges. The Burgh plan is of the manorial hall type and probably represents a stone version of earlier wooden prototypes. As such it is the only example of its kind from our area, and it is the first illustration that we have of the final phase of the earliest line of development of the Border manor-house, from motte-and-bailey tower through wooden manorial hall to stone hall.

The 14th century pele-tower represents an abnormal development of the Border manor-house due to the effects of the Scottish wars, and the return to the then archaic design of the Norman rectangular tower-house.¹³ Thus the manor-houses derived from the pele in the 15th and later centuries represent a different line of development from that of the Burgh type. The stage of development of the pele corresponding to that of Burgh manor-house

¹² AA4 xxvii 4 ff.

¹³ Cf. AA4 xxix 123 ff for a recent discussion of this point.

is the 15th century plan of pele with attached hall, and the two plans provide an instructive comparison.¹⁴

Acknowledgments.

To Mr T. Hodgson, formerly of the Demesne Farm, Burgh-by-Sands, must be given the credit not only for the discovery of the remains of the castle, but also for bringing his discovery to the notice of the Society. To him too we were subsequently indebted for permission to dig on the site and for the consideration shown to us during the work. Through the kindness of Canon and Mrs Clarkson we were permitted to establish at the vicarage a most comfortable HQ which helped so much to mitigate the vexations of a rather wet season. Our member Mr J. H. Haughan, F.R.I.B.A., the County Architect, took the greatest interest in our work, and offered to us the invaluable technical help of his department. Members of the County Architect's Department carried out the survey and prepared the plan which illustrates this report.

The cost of the work was met by grants from three sources: the major amount was provided by the Cumberland County Council, and supplementary sums were received from the Carlisle City Council and from the Society's Research Fund. In all £57. 5s. was expended on the work. The cost of the work was effectively reduced however by the voluntary help given by several members of the Carlisle Regional Group of whom Messrs Hugh F. Dias, R. L. Storey, Maurice Clarkson and William Carruthers carried out the major share.

¹⁴ Cf. *Castles & Towers*, Chapt. XV, for an account of the 15th century development of the pele-tower; and *ibid.*, p. 354, for an excellent example of the 15th century plan.