

BYWELL CASTLE.

It was to Bywell Castle that Henry VI. fled from the battle-field of Hexham on the 8th of May, 1464. At any rate when the castle was surrendered to the victorious Lord Montagu, Henry's helmet with his crown and sword, and the trappings of his horse, were found in it. 'How and whither the king himself had escaped,' adds the old chronicler, 'God knows, in whose hand are the hearts of kings.'¹ Probably Henry made his way back to Bamburgh.²

This seems the earliest reference to a castle at Bywell, and the present gate-tower was no doubt built by the second earl of Westmoreland (1426-1484).

Hall and Homberston, in their Survey of Bywell, taken on the 30th of May, 1570, after the attainder of Charles, Earl of Westmoreland, for his share in the rising of the previous year, tell us:—'The towne of Bywell ys buylded in lengthe all in one streete upon the Ryver or water of Tyne on the north and west parte of the same and ys devyded into two severall paryshes and inhabyted with handycrafts men whose trade is all in yron worke for the horse men and borderers of that countrey or in makyng byttes styroppes buckles and such othere wherin they are very experte and conyng and are subiect to the incursions of the theaves of Tyndale and compelled wynter and sommer to bryng all there cattell and sheepe into the strete in the night season and watche both ends of the strete and when thenemy approachith to raise hue and cry wher upon all the towne preparith for the rescue of there goods which is very populous by reason of their trade and stoute and hardy by contynuall practyse agaynst thenemy. . .

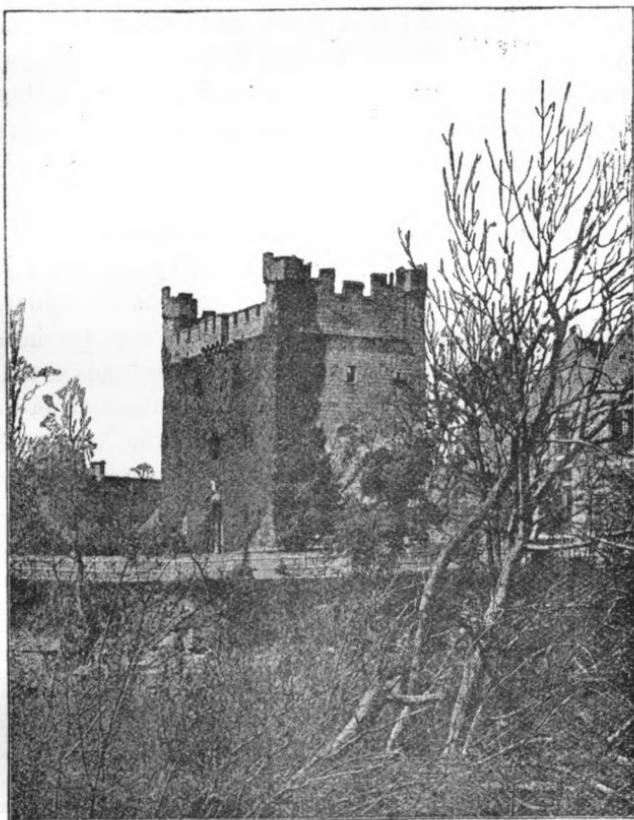
'Also in Bywell towne on the north side of the ryver of Tyne thauncestors of therle of Westmoreland buylded a faire towre or gate howse all of stone and covered with leade meanyng to have proceeded further as the foundacions declare beyng the heyght of a man

¹ See above, p. 21, n. 125.

² See above, p. 256

'above the ground which were never fynshed and the said towre
'is a good defence for the towne and will sone decay yf yt be not
'mayntened.'³

About the same time, the notorious Sir John Forster, being warden
of the Middle Marches, and having 'the quenes stafe in his hand,'



BYWELL GATE-TOWER FROM THE S.E.

seized by force on the fishery in the Tyne at Eltringham, which
belonged to John Newton, a child of six or seven years old. Newton's
stepfather, Arthur Lee, in order to maintain his rights, set on a boat
and net in his name, and Sir John, when he said that he would not

³ *Homberston's Survey*, vol. i. p. 365, P.R.O.

leave off fishing, caused Cuthbert Radcliff, who was officer under him in Bywell lordship, to seize Lee and immure him for twelve days or more in Bywell Castle, till his friends loosed him on his entering into recognizances to fish there no more.⁴

The Survey of 1608 has:—‘There is standing at the east end of ‘the towne of Bywell upon the North side of the river of Tyne the ‘walls of a faire large and high Tower but the leade all taken away ‘within these xvj yeares by one Anthony Felton gent. by what warrant ‘we knowe not and since the taking away of the sayde leade the ‘tymber is all rotten and most of it fallen to the ground soe as at this ‘present ther is noe parte of it habitable or fitte either to keepe his Ma- ‘jestie’s Courtleetes in for the whole mannor, or for any other service. ‘*Item.* There hath been a forrest of redd deare within the said Barrony ‘well replenished with game within these xxx^{tie} yeeres and lesse, now ‘utterly destroyed but by whose means it appeareth not unto us.’⁵

Sir David Smith, writing about 1810, says in his invaluable collections, ‘Bywell Castle is situated upon the north side of the River ‘Tyne, a little to the East of Bywell. The Gunhouse is in the S.E. ‘corner, and the Dungeon in the S.W. corner of the Courtyard. The ‘Dungeon is about 26 links square, and the curtain wall between the ‘square tower and the Gunhouse is 125 links.’⁶

The situation of the castle is very singular. It was at the extreme east end of the village, which formerly extended to a considerable distance to the west of the two churches,⁷ and yet it did not command the old bridge, which was still further to the east again, almost half way between the castle and the modern bridge. No advantage, too,

⁴ *Arch. Ael.* N.S. xiii. p. 124, extracted from the Hodgson MSS. in a paper on Bywell by the Rev. A. Johnson.

⁵ *Survey*, 1608, in Land Revenue Record Office, Whitehall.

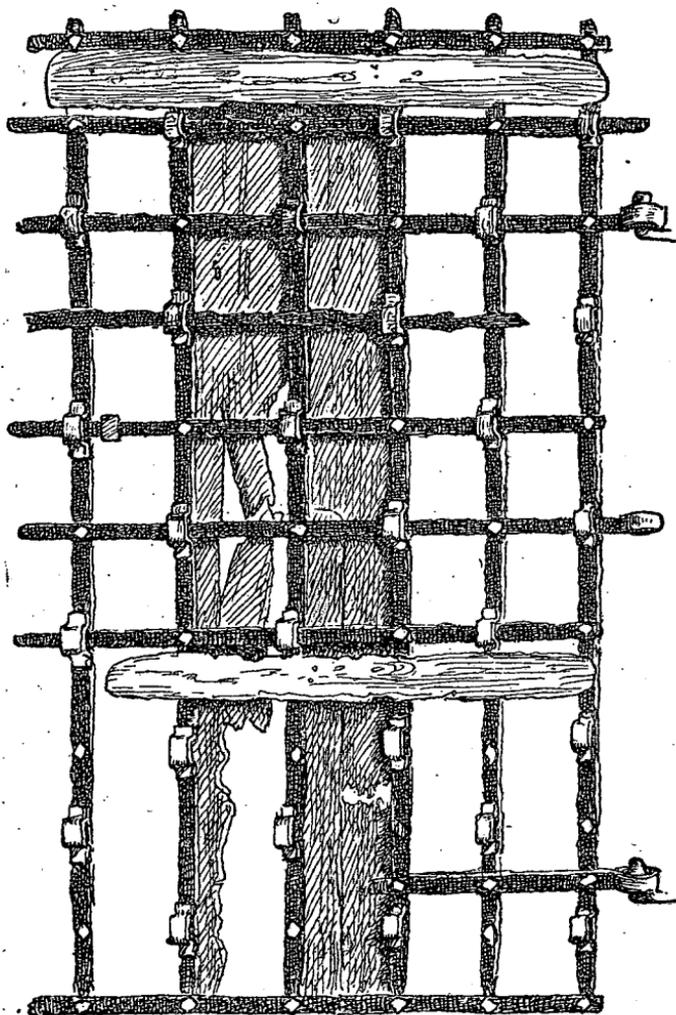
⁶ *MS. Collections on Camps and Castles*, Alnwick Castle Library.

⁷ The house of the bailiff of the lady de Valence at the time of the conflagration of 1285, was, we are expressly told, on the west side of the village. This man had feathered his nest by dishonest practices, but being suddenly taken ill, he had only time to make a few specific bequests, when being questioned by the priest as to the disposal of the residue, he replied *Si qua plura supersunt Sathanae commendo*, and expired. As the funeral was on the way to the church of St. Peter, on Friday, the 22nd of June, and the bailiff’s family were preparing refreshments, the house caught fire, in consequence, it was doubtless believed, of the residuary legatee appearing to claim his own. The flames, fanned by a strong west wind, ran along both sides of the street, and mass was barely said and the bailiff consigned to his grave, when both the church of St. Peter and that of St. Andrew, *ecclesie parochiales magna et pulchrae*, were burnt with the rest of the village.—*Chronicon de Lanercost*, p. 119.

BYWELL CASTLE.



BYWELL CASTLE—DOOR AT STAIR-FOOT.



BYWELL CASTLE—IRON GRILLE INSIDE DOOR AT STAIR-FOOT.

was taken of the rising ground immediately behind it. The idea seems to have been to merely enclose a large irregular-shaped barmkin with high walls for the purpose of protecting the flocks and herds of the villages from cattle-lifters, and nearly the whole architectural skill of the builder was lavished on the gate-house. Dunstanburgh, Bothal, Tynemouth, and Willimoteswyke are all of them strongholds in which the gate-house was made the dominant feature of fortification, but at none of them does a castle consist in such a degree of a gate-tower and little more as at Bywell, and there is no reason to suppose that it was ever intended to be much otherwise.

This noble gate-tower, the walls of which are standing almost intact, is a rectangle of about 59 feet long by 38 feet deep. It faces the Tyne, just sufficient space for a road intervening between the arch of the ivy-clad front and the steep bank of the river. The gate was protected by a portcullis, as may be seen from the groove, and also by the battlement over it being machicolated. The original oak gate still remains. It is in two halves, with a small door in the western. The roadway through the tower is 10 feet 8 inches wide. Towards the inner end of this passage two doors, confronting each other, open into the large vaults that occupy the remainder of the basement. The western vault has a square closet in the south-west corner. On the west side of the passage, close to the jamb of the archway into the courtyard, is the door of the stair leading to the first floor. This ancient door, with its grated iron frame, is a good example of English workmanship, the uprights being all in front of the horizontals, riveted and clasped alternately, and the spaces between the perpendicular bars being filled with oak planks. The Scottish mode of construction, it is said, was to make the bars interpenetrate one another, and this is adduced to show the little intercourse that existed between the two sides of the Border.⁸ Other examples of the English make of *grille* are to be seen at Corbridge, Naworth, Dalston, and Burgh-on-the-Sands.

The straight stair, behind the *grille*, ascends to a small square landing on the first floor. We enter a room 23 feet 2 inches broad

⁸ See a paper on the Iron Grated Doors of Castles, by Dr. David Christison in the Proceedings of the Scottish Society of Antiquaries, 1882-83, p. 98, by whom the accompanying illustrations are kindly lent; and a paper on Bywell by the Rev. B. E. Dwarrris, in *Arch. Ael.* N.S. xi. p. 17.

from north to south, and 29 feet 11 inches in length to a partition on the west side, which may or may not be an insertion. There is a window of two cusped lights, unusually large, to the west of the fireplace, in the north wall. In the floor of the recess of this window the shaft of a *meurtrière* threatens the head of any enemy coming up the stair. A similar perpendicular window in the south wall, with a charming view over the river, has a smaller square-headed window on the right. In the south-west corner of the room is a garderobe, and in the centre of the west wall a hole has been broken into what may have been intended for a window or a chimney. The inner room entered at the south end of the cross wall, measures only 17 feet 6 inches from east to west. There are a square-headed slit and a fireplace in the north wall, while a perpendicular window of two lights overlooks the Tyne, and there was once no doubt a window in the centre of the east wall. Both the eastern angles are provided with closets. The height of this storey from the original floor level to the plain chamfered string-course running along the north and south walls was 13 feet 6 inches.

The stair is continued by a narrow newel to the second floor. This was undoubtedly occupied by a single room nearly 50 feet long, with a perpendicular window at the west end of the north wall, then a fireplace, the head formed of two converging stones, then another window, and at the east end a fireplace with a roughly-shouldered head of one stone. The south wall has windows at both ends, and there are square-headed windows in the centre of the east and west walls. The north-east and south-west angles contain square closets.

Instead of ending in the usual umbrella vault, the newel stair is carried up past the roof level in rude steps that come to an abrupt termination against the flat stone that covers in the turret. This and the other three square turrets at each corner of the building are cleverly converted into octagons by having their battlements supported on long stones overhanging the angles. They are approached by straight external stairs resting on the east and west main walls respectively, the battlements of which are carried to a great height in order to screen the stairs. The flat roofs of the turrets are all pierced by *meurtrières* on the three sides facing the field. The main building has had a flat-pitched roof. The battlements of the south and east

sides are complete. Machicolations project over both the outer and inner gateways. The embrasures are placed at 3 feet 6 inches above the walk, and are 2 feet broad by 2 feet 8 inches deep. Both these and the merlons are moulded externally at the top. There is a chimney shaft in the thickness of the west wall.

A considerable piece of the curtain-wall, with two slits in it, is still left between the gate-tower and the modern house to the east, the cellar of which, vaulted from north to south, was the basement of the old gunhouse.