

baronet had dealings with the place, by way of mortgage, in 1743; and his grandson, Charles John Clavering, generally described as of Ridlamhope, sold the property in 1802 to Sir Charles Monk of Belsay. The latter died in 1867 when it descended to his grandson, the present Sir Arthur Edward Middleton, baronet, in whose posterity may it long rest!

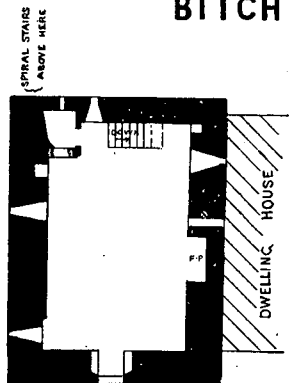
II.—THE TOWER.

By JOSEPH OSWALD and W. PARKER BREWIS, F.S.A.

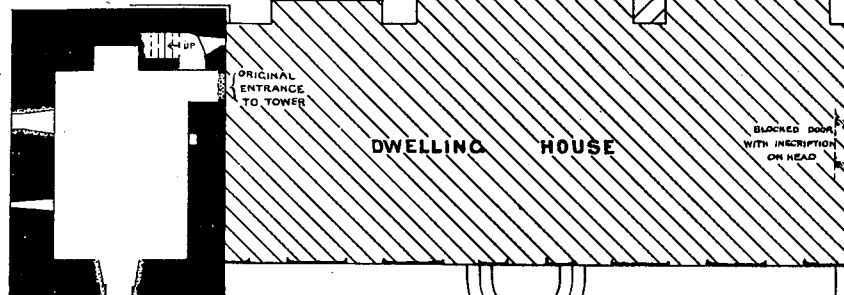
In 'Border Holds,' Mr. Bates includes this tower in a list of those he attributes in a general way to the fifteenth century, in default of documentary evidence relating to their early history.

It is situated in a lonely position, accessible by field roads only, one mile south of Belsay tower. Like the latter and the tower at Halton a later dwelling-house has been built against it. At Bitchfield this is on the east side of the tower and probably dates from the close of the seventeenth century, although differing characteristics of the walling point to more than one building effort. The lower storey of the south front contains an entrance door and three windows on each side of it having architraves and other embellishments of considerable architectural merit. There is some internal woodwork of similar character. The formal garden in front of the house has south, east, and west gateways of some pretensions, the latter two being similar. The coping of the garden wall is somewhat elaborate, consisting of two ashlar courses, splayed, with roll on top. The back of the house has two very massive chimney stacks. Inside the eastern room on the ground floor (now the kitchen) there exists in the east wall a blocked-up door opening with stone head bearing the inscription R F 1622 I F. This stone probably came from an earlier building and was inserted thus for preservation. Sir Arthur Middleton, the owner, says 'against that wall a small

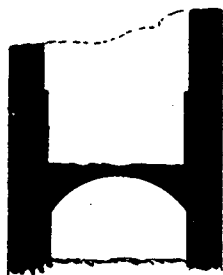
BITCHFIELD : NORTHUMBERLAND .



FIRST FLOOR PLAN
OF TOWER



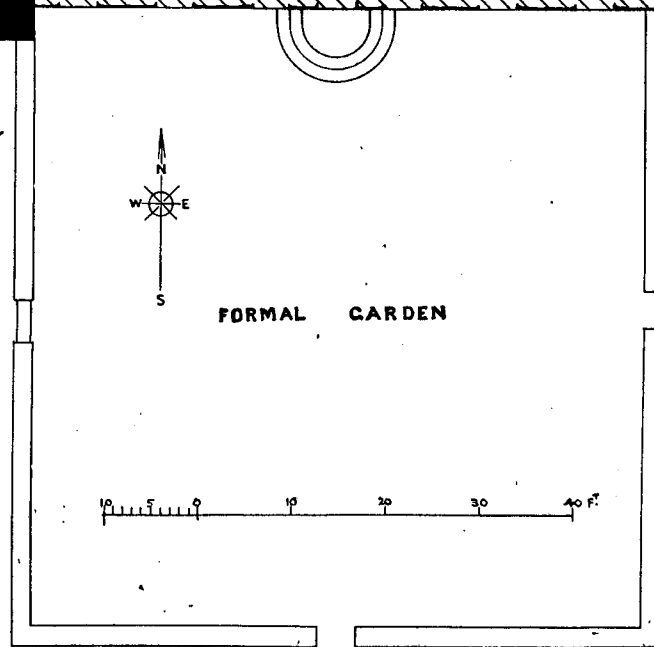
GROUND PLAN
OF TOWER



CROSS SECTION
OF TOWER

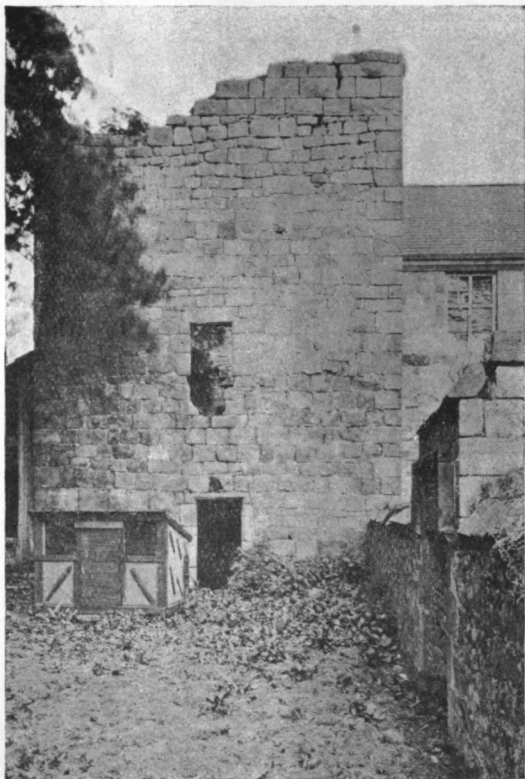
MASONS' MARKS

- A
- B
- C
- D
- E

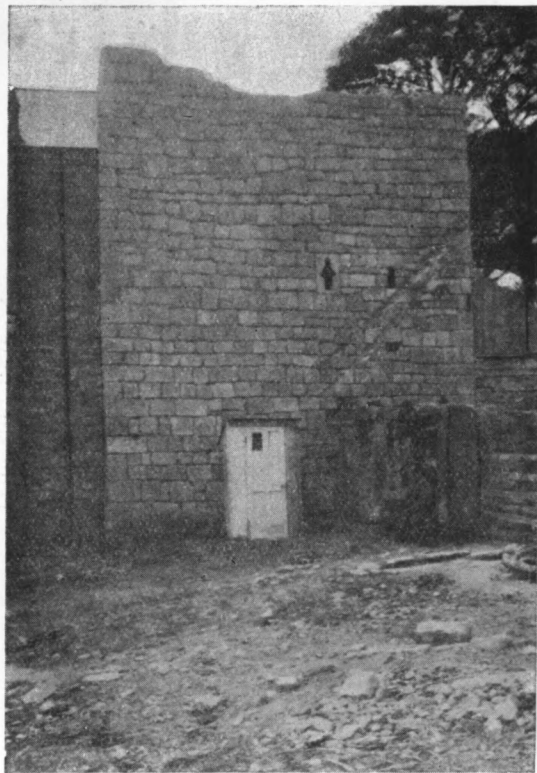


room, with a room above it, had been added (I have understood by Mr. Clavering). The rooms fell into decay and I removed them. The wall is again external.' The kitchen floor is three feet lower than the general level of the ground floor; below the latter are cellars.

The tower measures externally 23 feet from east to west and 31 feet from north to south, nearly the same dimensions as those of Halton tower, but is a storey lower. The roof and upper part of the walls have disappeared. The highest portion left is at the south-east corner where it is about 34 feet high and displays the lower courses of corbelling for a circular 'bartizan.' The ground floor is, as usual in pele towers, occupied by a vaulted chamber, the west wall of which is 4 feet 7 inches thick and the south and east walls 4 feet thick. The north wall is 6 feet 10 inches thick over-all including staircase. On the exterior this wall displays a chamfered plinth at and near the north-east corner. The present door at the south end of the vaulted chamber is, of course, later in date than the wall it pierces. The original entrance was through the east wall, near the north-east corner; the inside of its pointed-arched head is still visible. The stairs ascend from this corner in the thickness of the north wall, as already stated. There is an arched recess utilizing part of the space under the stairs. The vault covering the chamber is of segmental barrel-form, of excellent masonry. There are two 'loops' in the west wall; the northern one has been roughly enlarged. There are loops in the east wall at the foot of the stairs and in the north wall at the top of the stairs; the latter cross-shaped, cut through one large stone in the outer face of the wall. Facing the stairs on the first floor is the door of a small closet (possibly a garde-robe) about 4 feet by 3½ feet on plan and 5½ feet high, covered by a flat stone ceiling. It has a small loop through the north wall which is reduced in thickness at the closet. An

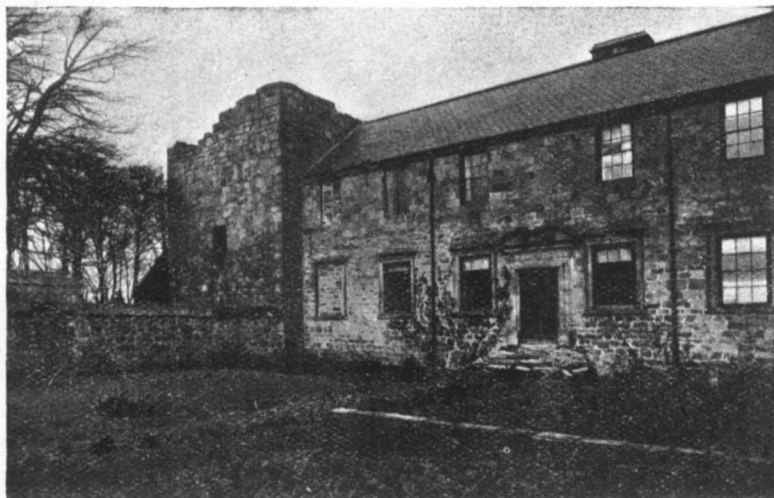


SOUTH SIDE.



NORTH SIDE.

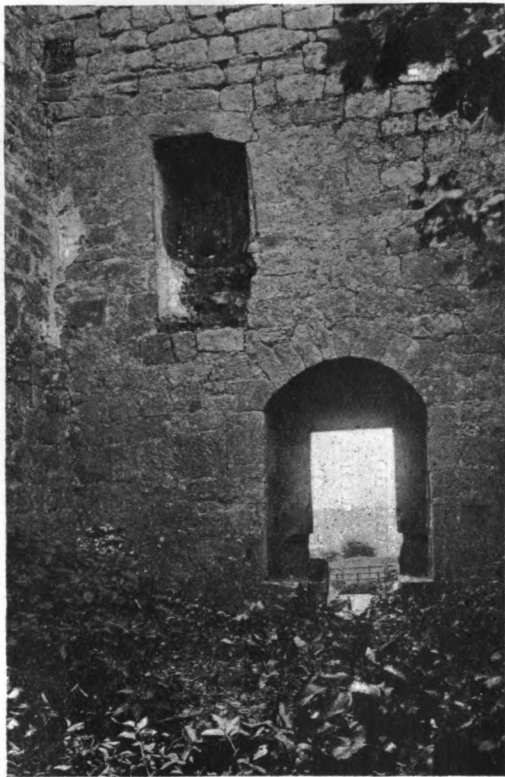
BITCHFIELD.



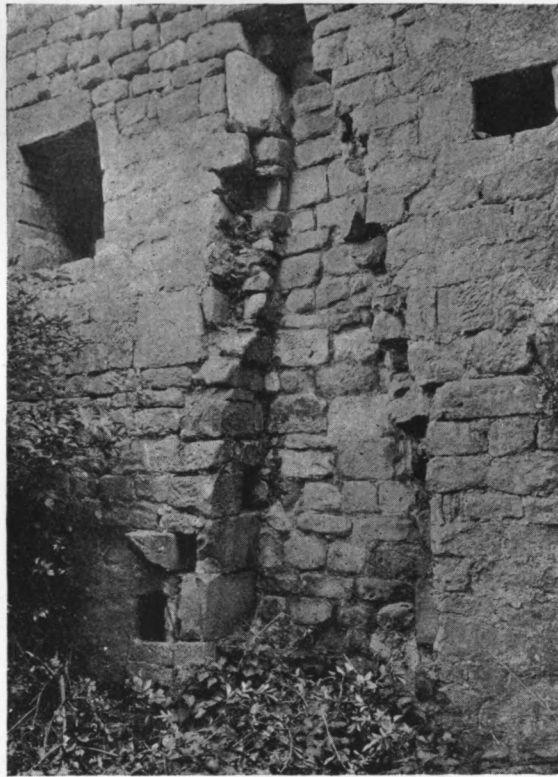
FROM SOUTH-EAST.



BASEMENT OF TOWER.
BITCHFIELD.



SOUTH WALL.



EAST WALL.

BITCHFIELD: INTERIOR ABOVE BASEMENT.

opening has been roughly broken through the south wall of the closet. The apartment on the first floor occupies the whole internal area of the tower except the small closet just described and the stairs. It has a window in the south wall with stone seats against the jambs. The window opening has been a good deal tampered with. In the west wall are two loops and one in the east wall. Near the middle of the east wall is a fire-place; the masonry above it has been torn away exposing the flue. On the north side of the fire-place is a small aperture through the wall, the bottom of which slopes down from the room. It appears to have been a shoot for pouring away water. Above it is a protecting corbel. About eight feet above the floor of this apartment the east and west walls are reduced in thickness leaving a scarcement, on which, no doubt, the timbers of the floor above rested. Of this higher floor no trace remains. It was reached by stone stairs ascending in a parallel rake above those from the ground floor. Higher up, above the small closet at the north-west corner, are the remains of a spiral stair which gave access to the battlements and roof of the tower. The west wall at this part is very ruinous. The apartment on the second floor had a southern window or loop now built up, and a large ambry recess in the east wall towards its northern end, in which remain the grooves made to receive the shelves. There are several smaller recesses at various places in the walls. The walls of the tower vary very considerably in the quality of their masonry. For instance, the south wall for a height of about 22 feet from the ground consists of coursed stones, fairly large and rectangular, above which come 5 or 6 feet of irregular stones which have been levelled up at the top to receive superior masonry, including at the south-east corner the corbelling previously mentioned. Of this superior masonry only four courses remain, and near this corner only. Internally some traces of wall plaster remain in the first floor apartment near its south-west corner.



FRONT OF 17TH CENTURY HOUSE AND GATE-PIERS.



FROM THE NORTH-EAST.
BITCHFIELD.

As to the tradition that there was a chapel at Bitchfield, Sir Arthur Middleton says 'the chapel was built up against the north face of the tower; it is now all gone.' There are traces of two steep roofs having abutted against the north wall of the tower near to its north-west corner.

Sir Arthur Middleton has thoroughly searched the tower for masons' marks and has found more than fifty. About 47 of them are of the form marked A on diagram. They are all on the soffit of the vault. One (form B) is on the east side of the vault on the third course above the springing line; two (form C), of which one is on a quoin of the window at top of stairs; one (form D) on east wall of the vaulted chamber below the springing at north end; also two (form E) not very distinct. Mr. Bates in 'Border Holds'¹ figures two of the forms enumerated by Sir Arthur Middleton.

Mr. Parker Brewis, F.S.A., besides collaborating in the preparation of this description, has made a series of photographs of the tower, including those reproduced, illustrating the present condition of the ruin.

¹ *Arch. Ael.*, 2 ser. XIV.