

## VIII.—EMBLETON VICARAGE.

BY H. L. HONEYMAN, A.R.I.B.A.

[Read on 25th April, 1928.]

The vicarage at Embleton contains only a small amount of ancient work, but its plan is of historic interest because it expresses in stone and lime five centuries of progress in the social and financial position of the clergy of Northumberland. First, in the old wing or "tower" we find traces of the sturdy fortlet where a celibate vicar sheltered his small household from the weather and the Scots. Next we may trace the successive effects of peace and matrimony: larger windows were inserted in the stark walls and an annex was added south-westward. Later a new wing was built still farther to the south-west. Then the old tower was re-roofed, and its interior modernized. Finally, in the reign of George IV, the vicarage became too mean for its vicar, part of the earlier work was removed, part re-faced, and a vast new wing, containing nine rooms, a main staircase and a conservatory, was constructed. To-day *tempora mutantur*, no provision was made for contraction of the expanded building, and it is said that when last the charge was vacant a prospective vicar of Embleton came, saw the vicarage, and immediately departed!

### HISTORY.

It has been stated in printed accounts of Embleton that

the old wing is a pele<sup>1</sup> tower and was erected in 1395<sup>2</sup> at a cost of £40.<sup>3</sup> In neither plan nor construction does it resemble a normal Border "pele"; it is too elongated in plan, and its walls are too thin, while it does resemble the "solar" of an early mediæval country house: it was certainly not erected as a complete whole in 1395, and I can find no record of its cost having been £40. I venture to put forward the following as a tentative history of the structure:

No record has been published of the thirteenth century dwellings of the parsons of Emyldon, or Elmsdene as it was often called, but as many of them were non-resident, their official residence, if any, was neglected and seems to have been in bad repair in 1332, when the long-disputed patronage quarrel between Merton College and the earls of Lancaster ended in a victory for the former. The benefice, previously rectorial, became a vicarage, and the college agreed, among other things, to provide quarters for the vicar wherein he might "live suitably and entertain visitors decently,"<sup>4</sup> no such accommodation being apparently then available. In 1341, after a fresh dispute with the earl, the College Proctor took formal possession of the *mansum ad habitationem et usum rectoris (sic) dicte ecclesie*.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, between 1332 and 1341 a vicar's house had been built or rebuilt. We know by analogy that the house would consist either of a hall with domestic offices at one end and a narrow oblong *camera* or solar at the other—the whole plan resembling a squat capital letter

<sup>1</sup> Tomlinson, *A Comprehensive Guide to the County of Northumberland, brought up to date by R. J. Charleton*, Newcastle on Tyne, c. 1920, p. 451.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Northumberland*, Vol. II, Newcastle on Tyne, 1895, p. 80.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59, quoting and translating "Merton College Deeds." I am indebted to the County History for this and subsequent references to these deeds which I have not been able to check, and must therefore refer to as "E. and O. E."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

H—or the *camera* might be erected alone as a self-contained structure as in the house erected by sir John Bishopsden at Lapworth, Warwickshire, in 1314, where the plan and dimensions were almost identical with those of the two lower stories of the old wing at Embleton.<sup>6</sup> Attached to the house were at least two walled or paled enclosures, the base court (*fosse basse*) with its still existing well, and the garden. Both are referred to in mediæval documents, and both, after many modifications and enlargements, survive in the plan of the present vicarage.

In 1385 Embleton parish was laid waste by a Scots army and the vicarage may have been injured. Certainly in 1393-95 £2 6s. 5d. was spent on repairs to the *mansi*, and in 1395 the newly-appointed vicar received £13 6s. 8d. in cash and XL marks worth of corn by agreement *pro suo novo edificio*.<sup>7</sup> This new edifice I take to have been all that upper part of the tower which is faced with ashlar, and the narrow square-headed openings which both lit it and served as loops for defence. The placing of these loops near the angles of the tower allowed one man to fire on two fronts without changing station, but they gave no facilities for volley firing, and in the reign of Edward IV (1441-83) the vicar, Thomas Eland, was granted licence to crenellate the tower as an additional protection.<sup>8</sup> The vaults and fireplace may also be his work. In 1403 work was in progress on the hall, and in 1416<sup>9</sup> £1 10s. was expended on "mending the walls of the vicar's hall." In 1425<sup>10</sup> a "place of ease" cost 3s. 4d., a stone wall round the dovecot 16s., and repairs to the enclosures of the vicarage and base court cost £1 19s.

<sup>6</sup> J. H. Parker, *Some Account of Domestic Architecture in England*, 2nd Ed., Oxford and London, 1882, Vol. II, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> *A History, etc.*, p. 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73, quoting Archdeacon Singleton writing in 1828, the original document has been lost, but presumably existed a hundred years ago.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67. In the previous year "Turris de Emyldon" appears in a list of fortified houses in Northumberland, quoted by C. J. Bates in *Border Holds*, Vol. I, p. 13.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

The solar as reconstructed formed a complete dwelling, and it is unlikely that the attached hall—assuming that it existed—was rebuilt if it had been destroyed by the Scots. The vicar was no worse off for house room than most of his neighbours in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a period when perpetual warfare reduced Northumberland to a lower level of comfort and culture than it had known since the generous policy of Richard I gave peace to the Border. An interesting list of plenishings<sup>11</sup> inventoried on the death of William Ward, vicar 1428-31, has been preserved, and indicates that his accommodation did not require much furniture. The "Hall" referred to in the list was quite probably one of the rooms in the tower and not a separate unit of the plan.

The large mullioned windows can hardly have been inserted before the strong government of the Tudors provided comparative security for Embleton, and the first protestant vicar, Thomas Benyon, 1565-1605, is a likely person to have added them. At any rate, the report of the Royal Commission on the Border in 1583<sup>12</sup> does not include the vicarage as a tower of defence, although it was included in Leland's list in 1538,<sup>13</sup> and this seems to fix the period of its demilitarization.

In place of Thomas Eland's terrace roof, whose position is marked by the ledge remaining on the north-west and north-east parapets, a gabled cape house was erected in the seventeenth century, the parapet walks were lowered, and the parapet over the north-east buttress was set forward on corbels so as to give room for a chimney stack behind it. It may have been at this time that the whole buttress was built to accommodate a fireplace on the first floor, unless it represents the shaft of the garderobe built in 1425. Also in the seventeenth century, or very early in the eighteenth, stone fireplaces were inserted in the two upper stories of the tower and the

<sup>11</sup> *A History, etc.*, p. 66.

<sup>12</sup> C. J. Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

octagonal room finished. Vincent Edwards<sup>14</sup> (1680-1713) was almost certainly the vicar responsible for this work.

Late in the Georgian period the brick-built south-west wing and kitchen were added, and the whole building was plastered or "harled" externally. Some part of this, together with the present tower roof, was no doubt the work of James Boulter (1811-22) who, after his death, was judged so severely by Archdeacon Singleton in his visitation of 1828.<sup>15</sup>

Either in Boulter's time, or more probably early in the incumbency of his successor, the back stair was formed, the top floor of the tower sub-divided into two rooms, and all this part of the building replastered.

In the time of George Dixwell Grimes, 1822-30, some parts of the later additions were taken down, the south-west end of the tower was refaced, and a large new wing erected facing the garden, which was also altered and extended. All this work was designed by John Dobson of Newcastle, and it is very advanced for its date, so much so that but for Archdeacon Singleton's evidence I would have credited Grimes with the back stair wing only, and attributed the extension to George Rooke (1830-74), in whose time Dobson rebuilt the north transept of Embleton church and lengthened the nave aisles westward to embrace the church tower,<sup>16</sup> or even to bishop Mandell Creighton (1874-84), the best known vicar of Embleton, where for a time he was tutor to the future viscount Grey of Fallodon.<sup>17</sup> Archdeacon Singleton is very severe on

<sup>14</sup> He was a patron of architecture and a generous benefactor to the parish, whereas his successor, Richard Parker, the essayist, seems to have expended his energies less commendably.

<sup>15</sup> "Mr. Boulter put a new roof on the house, but never paid for it. The more recent additions have been in pitiful taste, and the rooms are so low as to be hardly wholesome." The Archdeacon thought poor Mr. Boulter was the worst type of even college-appointed vicar, but had a high opinion of Mr. Grimes. *A History of Northumberland*, Vol. II, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> F. R. Wilson, *The Churches in the Archdeaconry of Lindisfarne*, Newcastle on Tyne, 1870, p. 134.

<sup>17</sup> The two best known *natives* of Embleton parish are, of

Boulter and very full of praise for his successor, but a good many of us nowadays would rather live in Boulter's refined but homely little rooms than in the more palatial but gloomy chambers of Grimes.

### DESCRIPTION.

The positions of the various parts of the building and their dimensions are indicated on the plan (Plate XXXI). The following portions most deserve to be placed on record: the stone masonry of the old tower, certain of its internal finishings, and the joiner work and wrought iron work of the Georgian wing. The remaining portions may be of interest a hundred years hence, and a complete plan has been added to the Society's collection of records.<sup>18</sup>

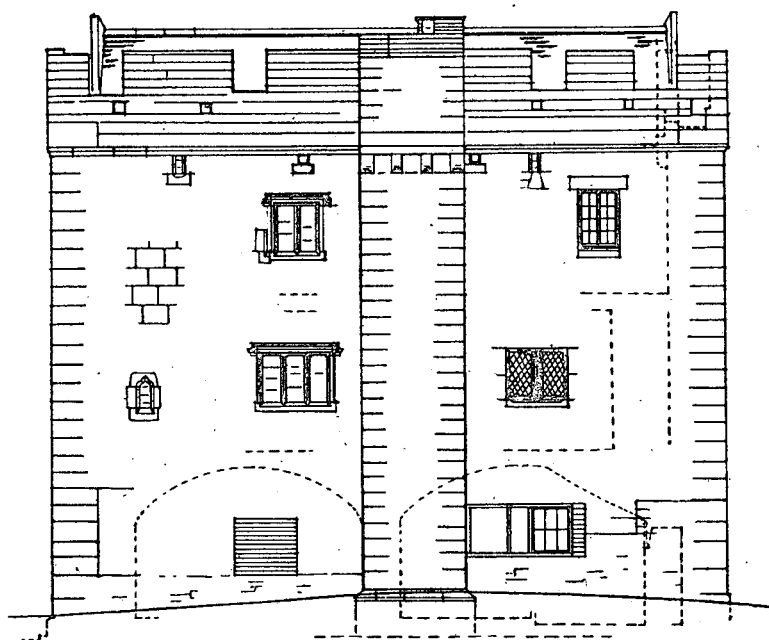
The "tower" forms the north-east wing of the existing building; it measures 19 feet 10 inches by 40 feet 8 inches externally and is three stories in height, crowned with a parapet and roofed with a cape house. The north-west elevation is partly concealed by a modern addition, but traces of an opening can be seen on the first floor, it has been built up with ashlar similar to that surrounding it and equally weathered; and there are two small windows to the second floor which seem to have been formed by enlarging ancient loophole windows. To a height of about 6 feet the building is faced with rather irregular rubble having large quoins; above this the facing is in courses of dark red sandstone ashlar blocks in varying heights; the propor-

course, Duns Scotus, the famous mediæval philosopher, and W. T. Stead, one of the few Northumbrians to whom public monuments have been erected both in London and New York. But the connection with Merton College and the former importance of Dunstanburgh have given Embleton acquaintance with many learned scholars and great men, of action too numerous to refer to.

<sup>18</sup> It is much to be desired that plans of churches and vicarages before alterations should be preserved in some such place of comparative safety.

tions of the blocks<sup>19</sup> suggest a date between 1300 and 1500. The north-east elevation (Fig. 1) is more interesting, though much obscured by remains of "rough-cast" and ivy: it has a central buttress with a 6 inch splayed base 3 feet above ground floor level of the main building (which I am taking as a datum) but now half buried by the soil which has risen here by overflow from the

*Embleton Vicarage.*



*North East Elevation.*  
Scale of 1/4 inch = 1 foot.

Fig 1.

churchyard. On each side of the buttress are windows and loopholes of various dates and in varying states of completeness, as indicated on the drawing. The head of one loophole on the second story appears to have had a

<sup>19</sup> For a note on this subject see F. R. Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 192.

trefoil arch cut out of it, but is too much obscured by mortar and too badly weathered for certainty. On a higher level are two built-up loops with chamfered jambs and with their heads cut off by the splayed corbel course supporting the parapet. One has a roughly-weathered sill, but the other, instead of a sill, has an inverted wedge-shaped stone such as might be used to block up the fish tail of a fish-tailed loophole. Below the battlements are also two plain stone brackets which carry sheet lead spouts from the outlets of the present lead gutter. The highest point of the parapet is 35 feet above ground floor level. The lower part of the wall is faced with rubble, and the remainder, including the buttress, with square ashlar, as already described. The parapet is corbelled out over the buttress and there encloses a low brick chimney head with four flues. The buttress is incompletely bonded with the walling and has been patched with brick.

The south-east elevation has been entirely refaced in the nineteenth century. It has a modern splayed base, a coarsely detailed modern "Elizabethan" window in the centre of each of the upper floors, and two rectangular panels on each upper floor which have replaced loop windows, traces of which remain internally.

The south-west elevation is almost entirely covered by the adjoining building which connects it with the main block of the vicarage. The south-east exposed part, 6 feet wide, has been refaced and has a modern splayed 3 inch offset 16 feet 8 inches above ground floor level. The north-west portion, 4 feet 11 inches wide, has one opening which will be referred to hereafter. The corbel table of the parapet on this side is raised above its level elsewhere.

Twenty-five feet north-west of the tower, in the present back passage, is a well, no doubt of great antiquity. As it is only 4 feet from the churchyard, which is here about 5 feet above passage floor level, the water would, to many of us, seem too "full-bodied" to be potable. A well or spring is often found beside a churchyard; a water



supply was one of the essential requirements of an early Christian settlement and the first missionaries could not anticipate the size to which their little burial ground would ultimately grow.

About one hundred yards north-west of the tower is a brick pigeon house of eighteenth century type. It is not certain whether it stands on the site of the dove-cot referred to in the Merton College records as existing in 1425. An older, stone-built pigeon house stands in a cottage garden three hundred yards east-south-east of the vicarage.

Turning to the interior: the old wing is entered from the present back staircase lobby; its floor was originally more than 12 inches higher than the lobby floor, but has been sloped down, except in two portions where stone paving remains, so that the entrance step is only about eight inches high. The doorway opens on a lobby containing three doors. The door to the left belongs to a room 15 feet by 14 feet 4 inches, part of which has been cut off to form a larder and part for the entrance lobby. The room is covered by a three-centred barrel vault 5 feet 6 inches high at the springing and 9 feet 6 inches at the crown, whose axis is at right angles to the long axis of the room, an unusual plan adopted for two good reasons: first to allow of windows on two sides of the room, second because the outer walls of the tower had to be thickened to resist the vault's thrust and to thicken the shortest walls was not only cheapest but interfered least with the shape of the rooms. On the south-west side of the room is a recess which appears to have been a window inserted when there was no adjoining building. At the north-west end are two small recesses, both about two feet deep, and between them is a large stone fireplace (Plate XXXII, Fig. 4). Though very simple its lines are clean and good, and its setting out exhibits some geometrical peculiarities which seem to be intentional and which I have indicated by thin lines on the drawing. The chimney is now blocked by a stone slab about 5 feet 8 inches above present floor

level. A slice 3 feet wide has been cut out of the west corner of the vault for a purpose not now ascertainable, and the lower part of a window, which will be referred to hereafter, opens from the gap so made. The thrust of the vault thus concentrated on the already weak (owing to the fireplace) centre part of the wall is pushing out the north-west end of the tower and cracking the side walls. To check this an elaborate and unsightly iron bridle has been rigged up near the top of the tower. Apart from its being in the wrong place its tie rods run in the wrong direction—at right angles to the thrust of the vault—and do more harm than good.

Returning to the lobby we find its south-east side is part of a central cross wall which divides the ground floor into two parts and supports the vaults, and it is here almost entirely occupied by two doorways 2 feet 8 inches wide with stone dressings and pointed arched heads of 1 foot 6 inches rise. The right-hand door opens towards the lobby and reveals a closet 2 feet 10 inches by 2 feet 11 inches with a paved floor and a roof formed of two 14 inches wide stone lintels, each set 9 inches above the other, step-wise, beyond which the vault has been cut away exactly as in the other room, but with less danger as a wall supports the cut edge. Loose stones in the floor of this closet are said to mark the entrance to a subterranean passage leading to Dunstanburgh Castle! If a passage exists it is more probably a drain or the cess-pit of a garderobe: J. H. Parker<sup>20</sup> and C. J. Bates<sup>21</sup> have both pointed out that such was the purpose of most of the "secret passages," "bottle dungeons" and "pits" reputed to exist in old castles.

The other door opens into a room 14 feet 1½ inches by 13 feet 1½ inches, covered with a similar vault to that in the north-west half of the tower and now much obstructed by brick partitions and wine bins. A built-up window on its north-east side has been made into an aumbry, and

<sup>20</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 19.

<sup>21</sup> Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

another aumbry has been cut out of the south-east end, after the vault was erected, and is surrounded with a sliding hatch frame having early renaissance laurel leaf carving in low relief.

The two pointed arched doorways in the centre cross wall are probably among the oldest parts of the building, but they have been mutilated, and there have been alterations to the adjoining walling. The doorways have raised stone thresholds and rebates for 2 inch doors. The fact that one has its rebate on its outer face is of interest if this is original: before the fifteenth century entrance doors frequently opened outwards,<sup>22</sup> this arrangement obviously placing a visitor at a disadvantage if the occupier made a sudden sally. The present ledged doors are masterpieces of joinery; made of planks less than half an inch thick, they have neither shrunk nor warped and are as smooth as drawing boards. They have good wrought iron hinges and appear to be sixteenth or seventeenth century work.

Before leaving the ground floor attention may be called to a thick piece of wall between the present kitchen and entrance hall, and containing a cupboard of peculiar shape with a small grating in its floor. Some fragment of earlier work may be embedded here or possibly a dis-used cellar stair is hidden in it.

The present back staircase, a pleasing piece of simple late Georgian joinerwork, gives access to the first floor of the tower which contains three rooms and a lobby. On the far side of this staircase one of the Georgian rooms still remains unaltered with a very refined fireplace and hob grate (Plate XXXII, Fig. 2), enriched plaster cornice, and elliptical wrought iron balconies guarding its two tall windows. The southernmost room is an irregular octagon. On its west side is its entrance door, on its north side a stone fireplace of "Queen Anne" type (Plate XXXII, Fig. 3); semi-circular niches in its south

<sup>22</sup> Bates, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

and east sides, and a window on its south-east side. On its south-west side is a door only 2 feet 2 inches wide, but considered of sufficient importance to justify setting back the adjacent side at an angle of less than 45 degrees. This door is built up, cannot have been to a mural stair as the wall is less than three feet thick, probably communicated with an adjoining building or turret, but is in front of the existing wall of the back staircase and servants' hall block. The flooring and ceiling of this room are early nineteenth century, the joiner work late seventeenth or early eighteenth century and good.

Opposite the entrance to the tower is the door of a second room, now used as a bathroom. On its north-east side are the remains of a much mutilated Tudor window and, separated from it by a story-post carrying the end of one of the roughly-trimmed tree trunks which act as girders for the floor above, a modern cast iron "mantel-register," over this grate is 6 feet 5 inches of a roughly rounded stone string course 4 feet 8½ inches above floor level and with the wall face set back 4 inches above it. Here may have been the principal fireplace of this floor before the octagon room was constructed. The north-west side of the room has in it a doorway raised on a high stone step and forming the entrance to a stone stair not "mural," but built within the outer walls and upon the vault which has been distorted by its weight. The stair is now blocked by the nineteenth century floor of the top story, but that it was still in use in the eighteenth century is proved by the fact that its door has a *chatière* similar to that in the door of the room. The stair was inserted either with or after the vault. Beside the stair is a secret closet about 3 feet 6 inches square, revealed by the plan but to which I have not yet found an entrance. Part of the flooring in the room is old and in planks of 9 inches average width.

The remaining room on this floor measures 6 feet 6 inches by 10 feet 6 inches. In the centre of its north-west wall is a mullioned window of sixteenth century type

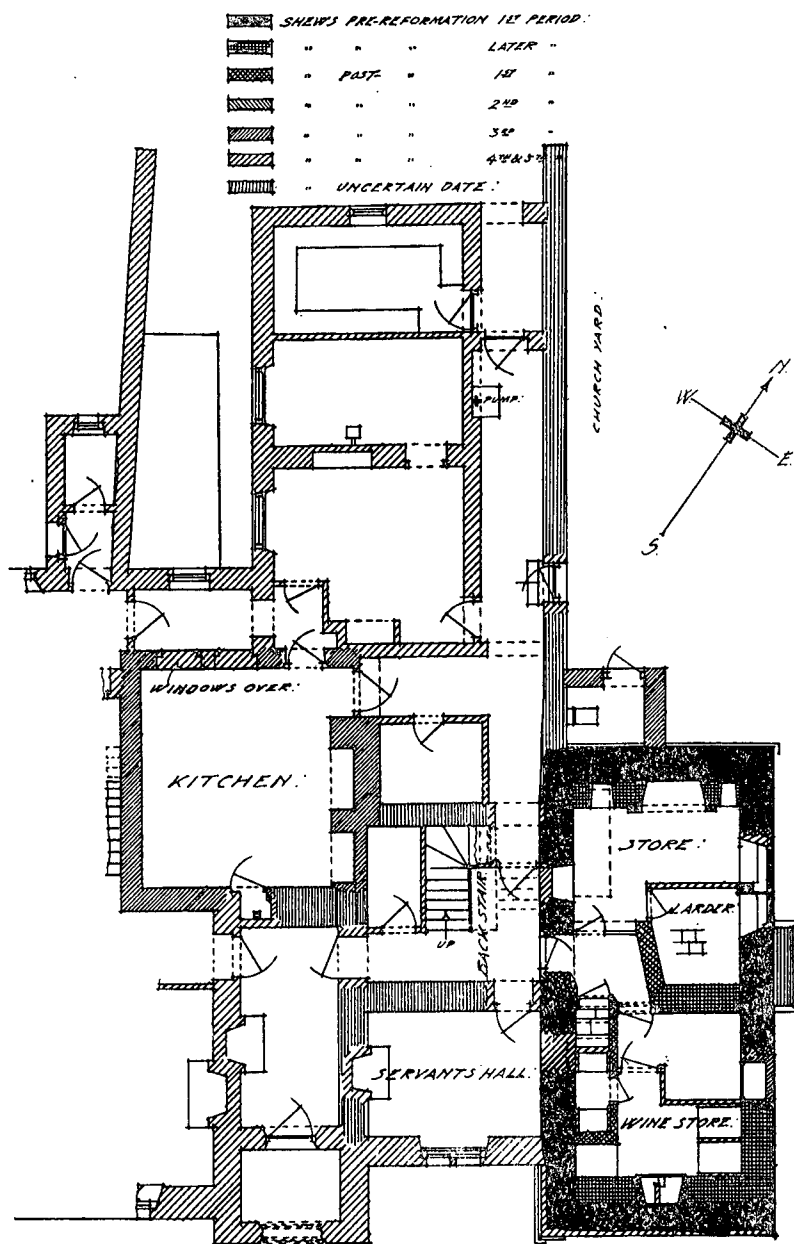
which has been blocked up when an opening was made in the wall to give access to a small closet and lobby in a Georgian addition. The south-west wall of the room contains two very puzzling openings. One of them, now blocked, measures 3 feet 2 inches wide by 5 feet 2 inches high and slants through the wall so as to come just inside the north-west wall of the back staircase. On the room side it is obstructed by the story-post supporting one of the ceiling girders. The other opening, placed in the corner of the room, slants in the opposite direction to a window 1 foot 3 inches beyond the outer face of the back staircase wall. This window is 2 feet wide, rises 3 feet 9 inches above floor level and extends below floor level so as to throw some light into the north-west cut in the ground floor vault. Externally it is provided with a 4 inch chamfer, the "rybats" of its jambs are bonded into the adjoining walling, and its dark lilac stonework is no less weathered than that of the surrounding work. The present back wall of the staircase is of nineteenth century appearance, but these openings suggest that it had a predecessor.

The top floor is entered from the back staircase by a door immediately above the blocked-up opening on the floor below. The door opens into a short passage lit by a loop window at its north end and giving access to two rooms. The northernmost is lit by two windows and has a pretty little stone fireplace of "Queen Anne" period (Plate XXXII, Fig. 5). The other room has a modern window at its south-east end, an early nineteenth century stone fireplace, and on each side of the window a recess about 2 feet wide by 1 foot 6 inches deep and 3 feet 6 inches above the floor. These recesses correspond with modern panels on the exterior of the wall and represent disused loops. Until the nineteenth century the whole of this floor appears to have formed a single room with the "Queen Anne" fireplace near the centre of one side. When the present partitions were erected the old fireplace was moved farther

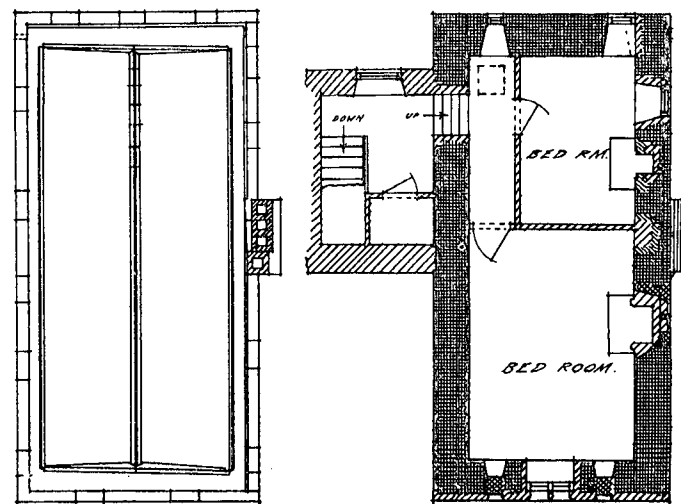
north, its flue being taken up in a projecting breast formed above it, and the other fireplace inserted and connected to the chimney stack by large fireclay pipes, part of one of which is visible externally. All round the walls of this story, immediately below the ceiling, runs a row of rounded stone corbels 12 inches high, 8 inches projection, and from 9 inches to 14 inches in breadth. Their purpose is to support the walls of the cape house, and they were inserted when it was built. On the south side of the modern partition between the two rooms runs a row of similar corbels made in plaster, but these are, needless to say, quite useless. The flooring is modern, the finishings and plasterwork similar to those of the back staircase.

Access to the roof is by a hatchway in the passage ceiling. The roof forms a "cape house" within parapet walks. It has stone gables at each end, is covered with Welsh slates, has plain stone ridging, and is of lower pitch than either its gables or its principals, the latter which, like the purlins, are of hand-wrought native timber, have been cut down and adapted when the pitch was lowered and the new slating and common rafters provided, which is known to have been between 1811 and 1822. The roof rests on low walls which are carried partly on the walls of the tower and partly on the stone corbels already referred to. The gables, 1 foot 4 inches thick, which are much weathered and curiously introflexed by settlement, are verged with triangular "spandrel stones" only 5 inches thick and reputed in this district to indicate that the original roofing was of thatch. The gables of the "cape house" are parallel with each other but not with the surrounding parapets. The parapet walks average only 1 foot 9 inches in width and the battlements average 5 feet 6 inches in their present height, are 11 inches in thickness, are pierced with crenellations about 2 feet 4 inches wide and 2 feet 6 inches high, project 3 inches on a plain splayed corbel table, are much weathered, have no coping, and except the lower part of the north-west parapet are

Embleton Vicarage.

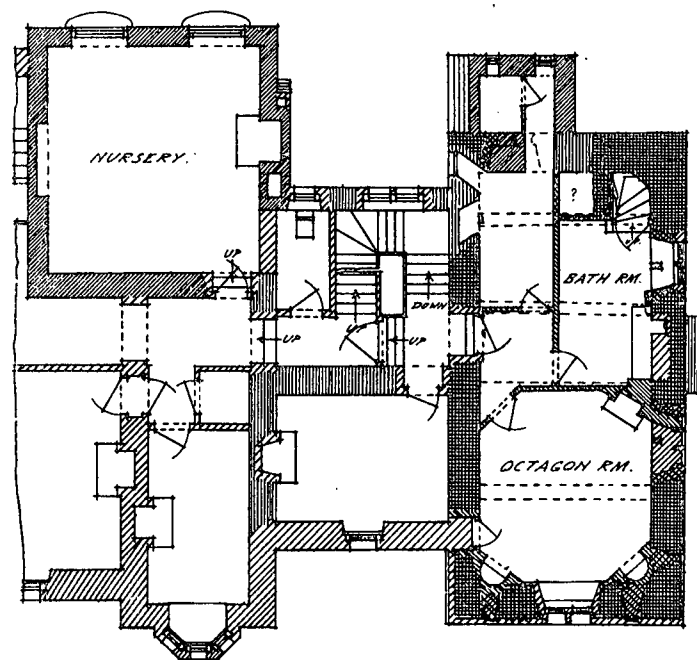


PLAN OF GROUND FLOOR.

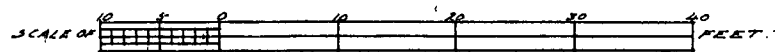


ROOF OF TOWER.

PLAN OF 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR.



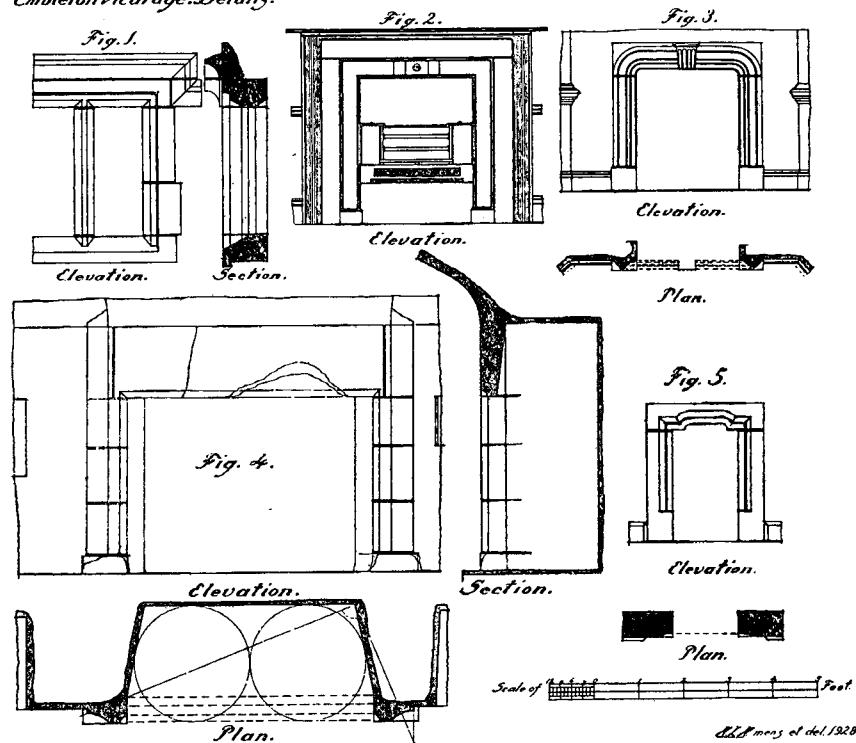
PLAN OF FIRST FLOOR.



H. L. H. mms et al. 1927.





*Embleton Vicarage. Details.*

## EMBLETON VICARAGE.

DETAILS. FIG. 1. Window on first floor. FIG. 2. Fireplace in Nursery. FIG. 3. Fireplace in octagon room. FIG. 4. Fireplace on ground floor. FIG. 5. Fireplace in small bedroom on second floor.



formed of very thin courses of lighter pink stone than the lilac-coloured ashlar in the lower part of the tower. The lower part on the north-west and north-east sides is about 4 inches thicker than the upper part, the intake being marked by an irregular ledge which is horizontal on the north-east but on the north-west falls considerably towards the south-west. Immediately above the ledge are some through holes about 7 inches square.

Evidently we have here evidence of successive alterations. First a breast wall resting on the corbel table and cutting across the two older loopholes shown on the north-east elevation, this rampart enclosed a flat platform roof or fighting deck which had a slight fall towards the south-west. Second the insertion of the cape house and probably a reconstruction of the upper part of the parapets and a demolition of the chimney from the ground floor fireplace. Third the lowering of the roof pitch. Fourth the rebuilding of the south-east battlement when this side of the tower was refaced in the nineteenth century.

The drawings show the buildings as existing in December, 1927, and I have attempted to indicate by hatchings the approximate order of construction of the different parts of the work; to fix the exact dates of all by documentary evidence would require a visit to Merton College and more research than I have yet had leisure to undertake.