VII

HALTON CASTLE RECONSIDERED

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TWO MILES north of Corbridge and half a mile to the south of the Roman Wall, the castle of Halton stands on a small plateau overlooking the Cor Burn and the Tyne valley, a familiar sight to travellers on the road from Corbridge to the wall-crossing at Portgate. The oldest parts of the castle are T-shaped on plan: a tower, four storeys in height, lies to the south; from its northern face a linking range of two storeys and a garret runs to join the northern wing, of similar height, whose main axis lies east and west. The angle between this northern wing and the linking range has been filled to the east by a late 17th- or early 18th-century house.[1]

Various accounts of Halton and its history have long been in print; it is the purpose of this paper to show that the phasing and nature of the building have been mistaken, and to propose an alternative analysis of the structure. All interior walls are now plastered and it was thus impossible to examine their surfaces in sufficient detail to identify blocked openings, such as those which must occur somewhere in the eastern wall of the linking range.

HALTON IN 1624

The arrangements in the castle in the early 17th century can be reconstructed with some probability, thanks to the survival of a room-by-room inventory taken at the death of Lancelot Carnaby (see fig. 1).[2] The north wing contained the principal rooms, a ground-floor hall with chambers above. To the west of the cross-passage lay service rooms and kitchen, also of two storeys with upper chambers. To the east of the hall, in a part of the building now demolished, lay the parlour, with Carnaby's own chamber and, perhaps, a closet above. The basement of the linking range is unnamed, and probably was used for storage; above it lay the great chamber. The vaulted basement of the tower, probably another store-room, was not mentioned; each of the three upper floors was used as a bedroom.

The combination of a detailed early inventory and a standing building is comparatively rare in Northumberland, for few inventories in the area name rooms, and of mansions such as Blenkinsopp, Thirlwall or Willimontswick too little survives intact to correlate the structures with the extant inventories.[3] The layout in the northern wing at Halton is quite normal—a hall flanked at one end by a screens passage with service rooms beyond, and at the other by a parlour and upper chamber—though

HALTON IN 1624
Possible arrangement

(kitchen)   'guile-house'
             (brewery)   'kitchen
                                                 chamber'

(buttery)   'butler's
                                                 chambers'

(stores?)   (stores?)   (screens)   'low tower'   'great   'high
                                                  chamber'   chamber'

                                    'middle tower' and   'chamber
Ground floor   'The Hall' 'high tower' above,   adjoining'?
                                    on 2nd & 3rd floors

                                    First floor

0   5   10   40 feet   'Loft above   'Mr. Carnabye's
                                                   Mr. Carnabye's chamber'
0   5   10 metres   'parlor'   chamber'
                                                               'closett'?
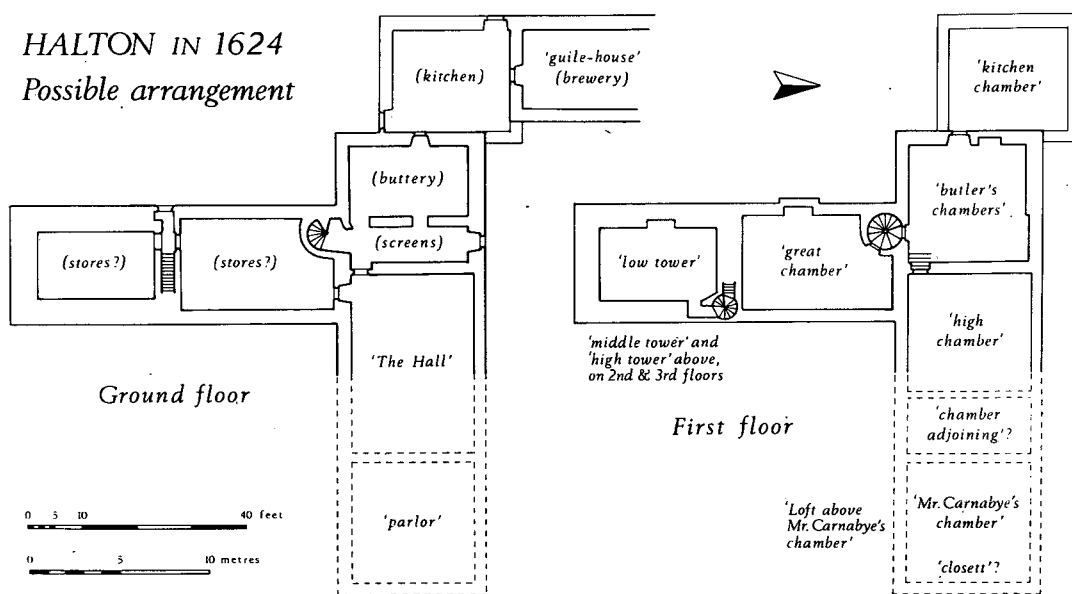
Fig. 1.

it is worth noticing that the hall itself was a single-storeyed room surmounted by chambers, an arrangement generally considered a 16th-century development away from the open hall.[4] Notable too is the positioning of the great chamber in the upper floor of the linking range, and its apparent use solely as a withdrawing room: the inventory lists a table, stools, chair, three cupboards for liveries, and even a pair of virginals, but no bedsteads. Access between rooms, furthermore, was complicated: the principal stair at the end of the cross-passage led to the great chamber and the rooms over the hall, buttery and kitchen, but Carnaby's chamber seems to have been reached separately, from the parlour, and the three upper rooms in the tower were still served by the original newel stair, entered at ground level. Carnaby's house was clearly prosperous and arranged for a large household: the inventory lists no fewer than 23 bedsteads and seven cupboards for servants' livery, and all the named rooms but the hall and the great chamber were sleeping apartments. Some of the furnishings were rich, and the equipment included the virginals in the great chamber and a clock in the hall, neither item to be found at this period in the inventories of the Ridleys, Blenkinsopps, or Thirlwalls.[5]

PROBLEMS OF INTERPRETATION

    An architectural analysis of Halton seems first to have been attempted by Cadwallader Bates,[6] according to whom the castle was built in three stages: a free-

standing towerhouse erected before 1415, a "manor" house [including the northern
wing and the linking range] built against the tower "no long period after", and a
mansion built after 1706. The story was elaborated by the architectural historian
William Henry Knowles, who ascribed the tower to Robert de Lowther (inherited
1345, died 1383), dated the manor house to the 15th century, and suggested, surely
correctly, that the mansion was the work of John Douglas after 1695.[7] Knowles'
plan of the complex, however, attributes both the tower and the manor house to
successive phases within the 14th century.[8] More fundamental problems than this
inconsistency were revealed by survey, for both the northern wing and the linking
range are composed of masonry of several periods (see fig. 4). The north wall of the
former, in particular, shows an obvious diagonal break near the cross-passage door.
To the east of this point the walling is reduced in thickness by over a foot, and is
clearly of later date. The thick wall extends only as far as the north-western corner:
the gable end and first fourteen feet of the southern return are nearly as thin as the
eastern part of the wall. Beyond this point the southern wall is again thick almost as far
as the present east gable, which is a rebuilding probably contemporary with the house
of c. 1700.[9]

The northern wing thus shows signs of at least three major phases of building,
and the linking range, too, is more complicated than Knowles allows[10]: its upper
storey is an addition, marked in the western wall north of the chimney by a rough
horizontal offset at first floor level. Closer examination of the junction of the tower
with the range showed further difficulties, for the masonry of the tower (large coursed
rubble below and re-used Roman stones above) and its stepped plinth continue for
at least 4' 6" north of the tower's north-western corner. This walling has been cut
about by insertions, but it is clear that the projection was about 16' 3" high above
present ground level, for at this point a large quoin marks the beginning of the
tower's proper corner. Investigation in the roof space of the linking range revealed
the roof crease of this projection, a porch or forebuilding whose original width was
about 13' 6", and which was symmetrically placed about the ground-floor door of
the tower.

THE FIRST STONE HOUSE

Knowles' analysis is thus too simple, but too little survives of the earliest masonry
to allow confident reconstruction. The only datable feature is the doorway which
now leads from the cross-passage into Carnaby's hall (fig. 3, a; fig. 4, A). This is
a shoulder-headed opening whose corbels are concave on the soffit. The style is found
in York in the middle of the 13th century, occurs profusely after 1283 in Caernarvon
Castle, whence its name, and after 1305 forms the principal type of doorhead in the
rebuilt portions of Aydon Castle, less than a mile south of Halton.[11] The house
of which this doorway formed part is presumably represented by the thick north
and south walls of the north wing, and by at least the lower part of the cross-wall
in which the Caernarvon-headed doorway sits. The western end of the building was
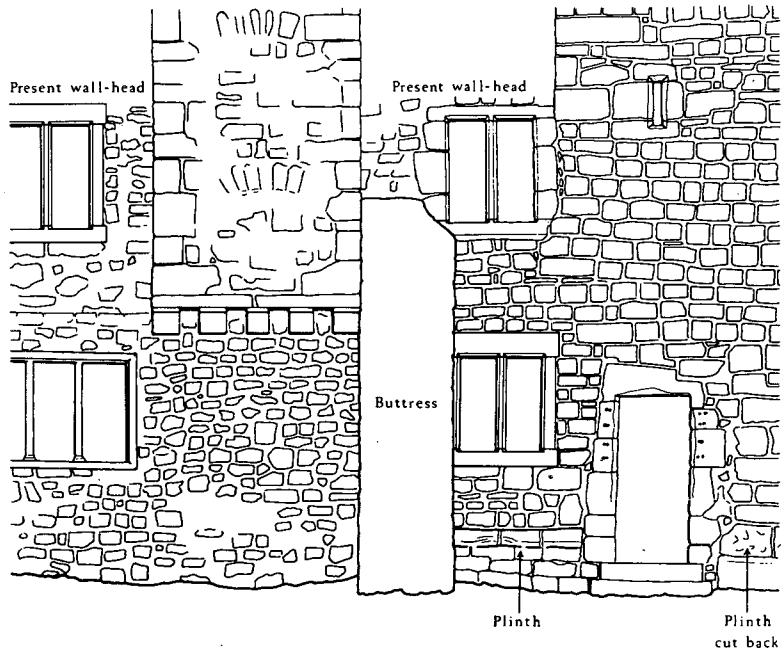
KEY TO PHASING
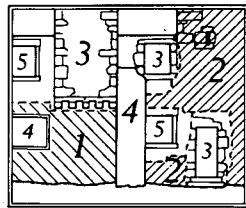
1. [hatch] c. 1300
2. [hatch] c. 1400
3. late C.16th or early C.17th
4. C.17th
5. modern

0   5   10 feet

PART OF WEST ELEVATION   (X—Y ON PLAN)

Fig. 2.

clearly of two low storeys, for an original upper window survives in its northern face. The walls, however, are probably too thin to have carried a major upper-floor hall like that at Aydon, and the central part of the building was perhaps a ground-floor hall.

A capital messuage at Halton in 1287 formed part of the extensive estate of Sir John de Halton.[12] By 1299 the house had been burned and its value halved, presumably during the Scottish invasions of 1296 or 1297.[13] The Caernarvon-headed doorway is of about this time, and the stone house may tentatively be dated

a. Hall door   b. Tower door   c. Tower window   d. Chamfer stop in
                              0   4 feet   cross passage
                              scale for a, b and c.   (not drawn
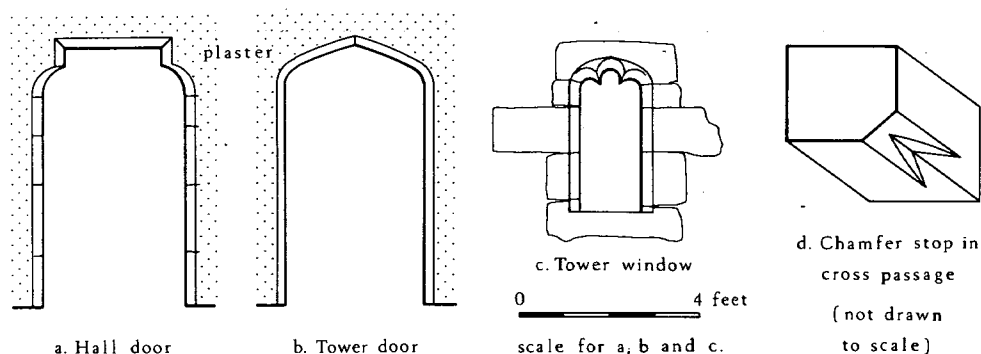   to scale)

Fig. 3.

between 1299 and the eclipse of Sir John de Halton II in 1314.[14] In view of the
later arrangement of the north wing it would be natural to see the Caernarvon-
headed opening at the lower end of a hall, giving access *via* the screens to a two-storey
service block. There is no evidence, however, that the screens passage itself is as early
as the first stone house, and the position of the Caernarvon-headed opening at the
extreme end of the cross wall (precisely paralleled by that of the hall-solar doorway
at Aydon) suggests that this was originally the upper end of the hall, and that the
orientation of the room was later reversed.

The function and date of the masonry which now forms the lower part of the
linking range is quite unclear. Its junction with the tower forebuilding is concealed
by a buttress of probably 17th-century date (see fig. 2); at its northern end it appears
to be earlier than the southern side of the north wing. It may thus belong to the
first stone house, and from its comparatively crude construction and thinness it may
represent part of the enclosure wall of a courtyard attached to the south side of the
hall, such as the walled garden referred to in 1287.[15]

THE TOWER

The architectural detail of the tower is distinctly later than that of the hall doorway.
The doorheads of this period, described by Knowles as "arched" and by Bates as
"pointed-arched", are four-centred openings of good quality, and the heads of the
original windows are four-centred with triangular infill in the spandrels of the cusping
(fig. 3, b and c). The style is much more advanced than that to be found *c.* 1370
at Belsay, and parallels may be seen, for example, in the early work at New College,
Oxford (1379–86) and in the great tower at Warkworth (?1380s); a date for Halton
Tower in the late 14th or early 15th century thus seems appropriate.

Knowles, indeed, was inclined to attribute the tower to Robert de Lowther (died
1383) on the evidence of a panel bearing his arms in its eastern face.[16] Lowther's
arms, however, were adopted by William II, the first Carnaby owner of Halton, and

were used unquartered by him and by subsequent Carnabies of Halton in preference to their own ancestral arms.[17] When William Carnaby II seized Halton in 1382 the building was described as the "house and fortlet" and the first unequivocal reference to the *tower* of Halton is in the list of 1415.[18] Old masonry in the present garden walls has been interpreted as the remains of a barmkin,[19] and it is possible that Halton in 1382 was simply a stone hall within a defensible courtyard, similar to *fortalicia* recorded in 1415.[20] It is worth recalling that in 1385 the manor was burned and William Carnaby was captured by the Scots: his reaction may then have been to secure his future protection by building a tower beside his hall, perhaps during the period from 1390 to 1407 when (as recompense for his losses) he was allowed respite from the Crown rent of £4 *per annum* due from his manors.[21]

THE REBUILDING OF THE MANOR HOUSE

If any 15th- and early 16th-century Carnabies built at Halton, they have left no obvious traces of their work,[22] and the subsequent reconstruction of the northern wing and linking range can be viewed as a single operation, necessitated perhaps by the dilapidations of some two centuries. In order to provide a large first-floor room the northern and eastern walls of the tower forebuilding were demolished and the present east wall of the linking range was built in alignment with the north-eastern corner of the tower. The northern wing was extensively remodelled and an upper floor, reached by an inserted newel staircase, was built over the hall. Datable features are few: the girders and joists of the ceiling over the new hall are elaborately moulded in late 16th-century style; the doors at the head of the newel staircase are ornamented with narrow quirked-edge rolls of a type common in the Border area after *c.* 1550; the surviving upper window of the great chamber resembles those of 17th-century houses in South Tynedale.[23] A date in the late 16th or early 17th century is thus indicated, and the inventory of 1624 makes it clear that the rebuilding had by then taken place. The work is unlikely to have been undertaken by Cuthbert Carnaby, who owned Halton from about 1546 until after 1586, as he was occupied with the rebuilding of his principal seat, Aydon Castle nearby, and the reconstruction may be attributed to Lancelot Carnaby of Halton himself, or possibly to his elder brother Lionel of Halton, a lunatic, who died in 1600.[24]

The financial difficulties of the later Carnabies may have inhibited repair work and improvements, for the construction of the "mansion" *c.* 1700 was accompanied by a drastic overhaul of the now old-fashioned buildings. Such work as seems to belong to the second half of the 17th century suggest only piecemeal adaptation of the medieval arrangements—the insertion of mullioned windows to light the first-floor apartment of the tower and the basement of the linking range. The two upper floors of the tower were abandoned, a new roof was formed above the first floor, and a passage, cut through the tower's newel staircase, allowed direct access from the great chamber to the tower room.[25] After the acquisition of the manor by the wealthy John Douglas the chamber block in the north wing was demolished and the old hall,
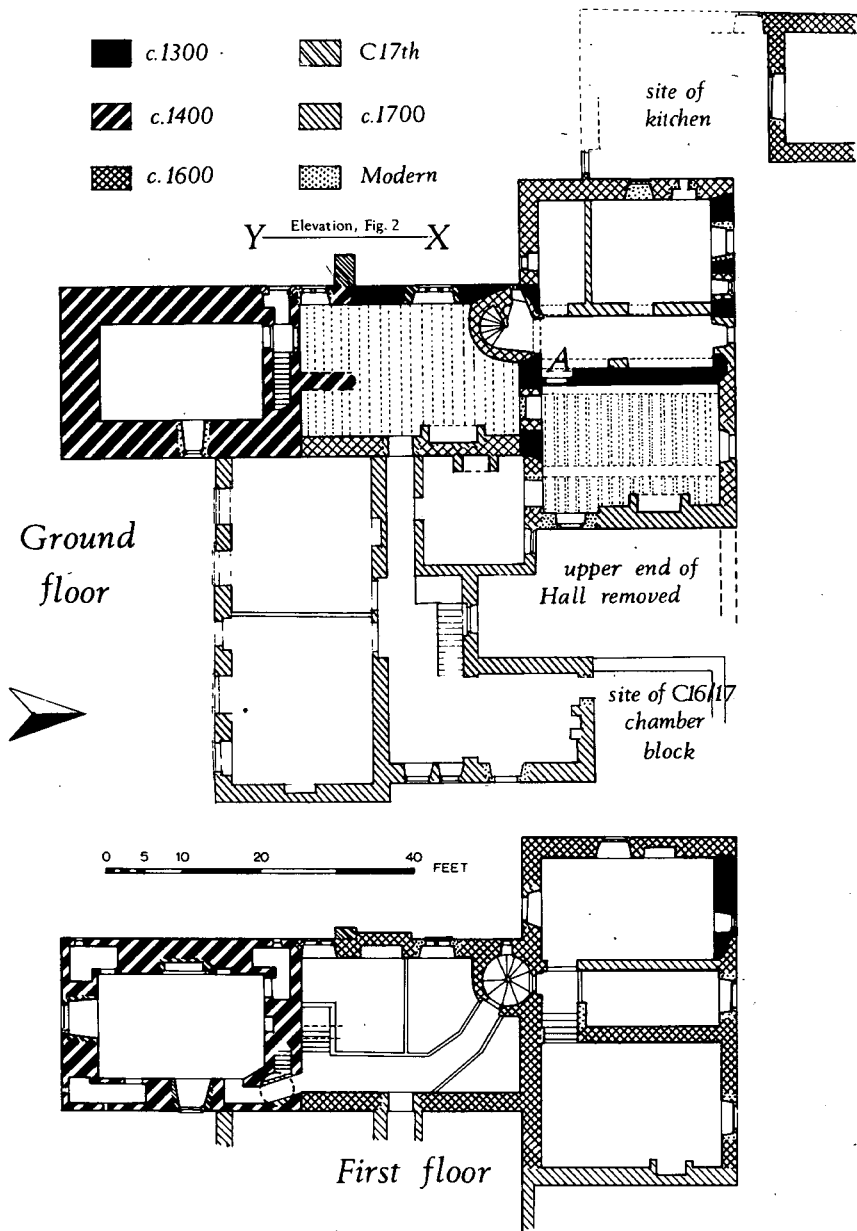
Fig. 4. Halton Castle.

now shortened, was demoted in status to serve as the kitchen. Reception rooms and principal bedrooms were now to be found in the new wing and the old upper chambers, still poorly lit, provided servants' accommodation at first and garret floor level. The tower remained only partially occupied under its new low roof; the roofs of both the linking range and the abbreviated north wing are of *c.* 1700.[26]

THE WIDER SIGNIFICANCE OF HALTON

The unfortified, or only partially defended manor houses built within the Border region before the end of the 13th century have been largely ignored as a group, the result, perhaps, of concentration on the flamboyant military architecture of the 14th and later centuries. Only two of these stone halls, Aydon and Haughton, have received adequate attention,[27] and even these have been regarded as anomalous, without local context. As a result "pele towers" have been seen as *sui generis*, buildings whose origins are obscure, and not as the natural successors, in the changing circumstances of the early 14th century, to the old stone halls.[28] Halton, if built in the first decade of the 14th century, seems among the latest of these stone halls, and its later development is instructive, for its tower was an addition to, and not a replacement for the early hall. Some of the later 14th-century towers, of course, were large enough to contain sufficient accommodation for the household within their walls.[29] The tower at Halton, in contrast, is small: including the vaulted basement its total floor area is little more than 1200 square feet, less than a quarter the size of Aydon and a third that of Belsay. Its function, like that of the Northumbrian towers at Shortflatt, Edlingham, Featherstone or Welton, or indeed Kyme in Lincolnshire or Longthorpe Tower near Peterborough, was not as a self-contained towerhouse, but as a solar tower attached to a hall.

NOTES

[1] We are most grateful to Major and Mrs. Blackett for their permission to examine Halton Castle, and for their kindness during our survey.

[2] Dept. of Palaeography, Durham, Probate 1624: partial transcript in C. J. Bates, *Border Holds* (1891), pp. 318–20 [= *Arch.Ael.*[2] xiv].

[3] *Durham Wills and Inventories* [Surtees Society, xxxviii], nos. 12, 37, 58, 114, 148, 296.

[4] Cf. E. Mercer, *English Vernacular Houses* (1975), p. 20.

[5] Above, note 3; on the rarity of these items cf. F. W. Steer, *Farm and Cottage Inventories* (2nd ed., 1969), p. 20.

[6] *Border Holds*, pp. 311–22.

[7] *History of Northumberland* [NCH], x (1914), pp. 409–13.

[8] *Ibid.* p. 412.

[9] So Knowles, *ibid.* The classical skews, plainer than those of the mansion, are the sole evidence of date here.

[10] See fig. 2.

[11] Clearly seen in Knowles' elevations of Aydon [*Archaeologia* lvi (1898)].

[12] *NCH* x, p. 391 [citing P.R.O., C133, File 47, no. 11].

[13] I.P.M. Sir William de Halton, quoted in *NCH* x, p. 392 [P.R.O., C133, File 87, no. 20].

[14] *NCH* x, pp. 392–3; some of his lands were in consequence alienated in 1318 and subsequent years.

[15] *Ibid.* p. 391.

[16] *Ibid.* p. 409.

[17] *Ibid.* genealogy facing p. 408; the 16th-century Carnaby work at Aydon is marked by a de Lowther armorial identical to that at Halton: cf. *ibid.* p. 364.

[18] Bates, *Border Holds*, p. 18; *NCH* x, p. 395.

[19] *Ibid.* p. 411.

[20] Notably Horton-juxta-mare: *ibid.* ix, pp. 257–258.

[21] *Ibid.* x, p. 396.

[22] Two girders with archaic-looking chamfer stops (fig. 3, d) flank the present cross-passage and may belong to this intermediate period.

[23] *E.g.*, Burnlaw (1662), Hindley Wrae (1669).

[24] *NCH* x, table p. 408.

[25] The round mouldings of this phase are markedly different from those of the "mansion" and suit a date in the 1660s or 1670s.

[26] The present high tower roof is of *c.* 1875; that of the mansion is a modern steel frame, after a recent fire.

[27] *NCH* x, pp. 350–366; *NCH* xv, pp. 211–18; *AA*[4], xxix (1951), pp. 118–34.

[28] We hope to discuss these changes in a forthcoming volume of *Archaeological Journal*.

[29] For example, Langley, Belsay or Warkworth Donjon.