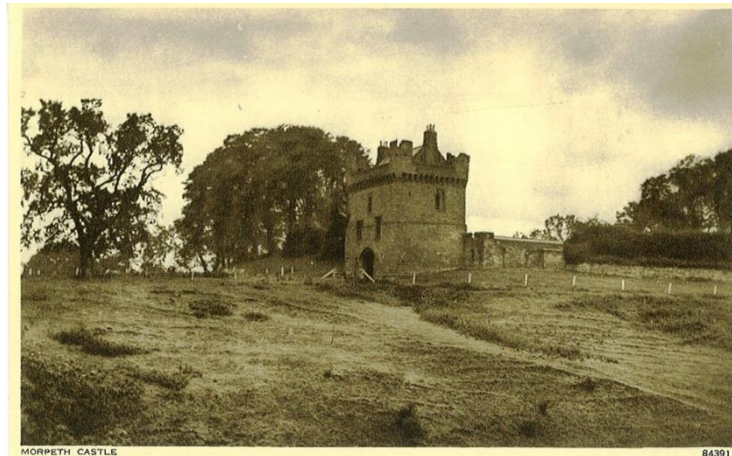


The Landmark Trust

MORPETH CASTLE History Album



Researched and written by Clayre Percy, 1991

Re-presented in 2015

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

Bookings 01628 825925 Office 01628 825920 Facsimile 01628 825417
Website www.landmarktrust.org.uk

BASIC DETAILS

Built: late	11th century
For:	William de Merlay
Gatehouse added:	c1350
Remodelled:	late 1600s
Repaired by	the Earl of Carlisle: 1860
Acquired by the Landmark Trust:	1988
Form of tenure:	Leasehold
Architects:	Stewart Tod & Partners
Builders:	Bowden & Co., Newcastle
Furnished and let:	October 1991

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Summary

The building now known as Morpeth Castle was originally a gatehouse, added in about 1350 at the entrance to the castle proper. It probably replaced an earlier gatehouse which had been there for a hundred years or more. There has, in fact, been a castle in Morpeth since the Norman period. The first one stood to the North of the present site, on Ha' Hill, but was destroyed by King John in 1216. The second, where you are now, was built soon afterwards, still in the 13th century. The castle had a stone keep, or great tower, in the centre of a courtyard or bailey, protected by the existing curtain wall. This keep is shown on the earliest map of Morpeth, dated 1604 and it would have dwarfed the gatehouse.

In 1271 Morpeth passed from its first owners, the de Merlays, to the Greystoke family. They had other castles, and Morpeth Castle seems to have become a centre of administration, in local government and the law, only visited occasionally by its owner. It would have been under the control of a Constable, living there with his household, and a small garrison. There was, no doubt, a Steward or Bailiff as well, with a clerk, to oversee the management of Lord Greystoke's property in the area.

It is possible that the lodging for one or these important officials was on the upper floor of the imposing new gatehouse, built by William Lord Greystoke, the Good Baron, between 1342 and 1359. On the first floor, however, there was just one large chamber, but with two doorways and, possibly, a free-standing screen in the position of the present partition. This unusual arrangement suggests that it was a Courtroom, in which justice was dispensed. The gatehouse is strangely lacking in defensive features, such as a portcullis, and this also suggests that the building was intended mainly for ceremony and show, rather than military strength.

In the early 1500s the castle was, for a short period, occupied by its owner, now the Lord Dacre. Here in 1515-16 he entertained Margaret, sister to Henry VIII and widowed Queen of Scotland, one of many Royal visitors to Morpeth over the centuries. His house was adorned with tapestries and there were vessels of silver to eat from. By the end of the century, however, the castle was described as "mightily decayed".

The one great military event in the history of the castle was yet to come. Border raids had been an ongoing occupational hazard, but there is no record of the castle ever having been involved in serious warfare until 1644, and the Civil War. Then, in spite of grave doubts as to its strength, a Parliamentary garrison of 500 held the castle for 20 days against Montrose's Royalist force of 2,700. When the Parliamentarians finally marched out, in full honour, it was discovered that they had only lost 23 men, as against 191 men of the besieging force.

By this time Morpeth belonged to the Howard family, who became Earls of Carlisle. For the next two hundred years the castle was largely abandoned, providing a useful source of building stone. The gatehouse, however, was lived in, and seems to have been partly remodelled in the late 1600s when an attic floor was inserted. Early 19th-century engravings show it becoming more and more dilapidated. Then, about 1860, the Earl of Carlisle repaired the gatehouse, as a house for his agent. The parapet was rebuilt and new windows were inserted. Inside, there were new partitions and stairs.

The gatehouse resumed its position as an important building in Morpeth until its sale in 1916. In 1946 it was bought by the Borough Council and became for a while a very unusual council house. By the 1980s, expensive repairs were needed, particularly to the roof. The gatehouse fell vacant, and quickly became derelict. A new solution for its future was urgently sought by the Borough Council. In 1988 the Council granted a lease to the Landmark Trust. The restoration of Morpeth Castle as it had come to be known, was completed in the autumn of 1991.

A Tour of Morpeth Castle and Details of its Restoration

In the restoration of Morpeth Castle, the Landmark Trust set out to recover a little of the tower's medieval layout, but also to retain something of the later dwellings that were made within it in the 17th century and especially in 1860. The long history of the building is therefore visible, perhaps for the first time.

Outside the tower

The tall windows, the corbelled parapet and the corner turrets, which make up the front of the tower, all date from the Victorian rebuilding, but its appearance in the Middle Ages was not much different. The design of the windows has changed, but they occupied roughly the same positions as now. Passing through the stone arch, the rooms on either side were the guardrooms, watching over the entrance to the castle. Once inside the gate, there are stables and outbuildings on your right. These probably date from 1860.

The entrance

The ground level inside the castle has risen over the centuries, so that it now slopes up inside the gate, almost to the level of the main door to the upper floors of the castle. This was probably reached originally by steps at the side of the building. The door surround itself is Victorian, but it is in the same place as the medieval entrance. The Landmark Trust removed a single storey extension added on this side of the tower in about 1916.

Inside the tower - first floor

Opening off a passage to the right are two doors, of which the second, although much altered, was originally the grander. When this floor was used as a courtroom, the first door was for the prisoners and guards; the second for the justices. A free-standing screen in the position of the present partition probably divided the room, so that the sitting room, in the larger end, is much as it was in the Middle Ages. Ahead of you when you enter this room is a cupboard, or aumbrey, in which the seals and paraphernalia of justice would have been displayed.

Both ends of the room had fireplaces. That in the sitting room, however, has been much hacked about in recent years and has lost its original mouldings. Also at both ends are garderobes, or privies. The walls have been re-plastered and limewashed, and nearly all the joinery is new, including the oak-boarded ceiling.

The second floor

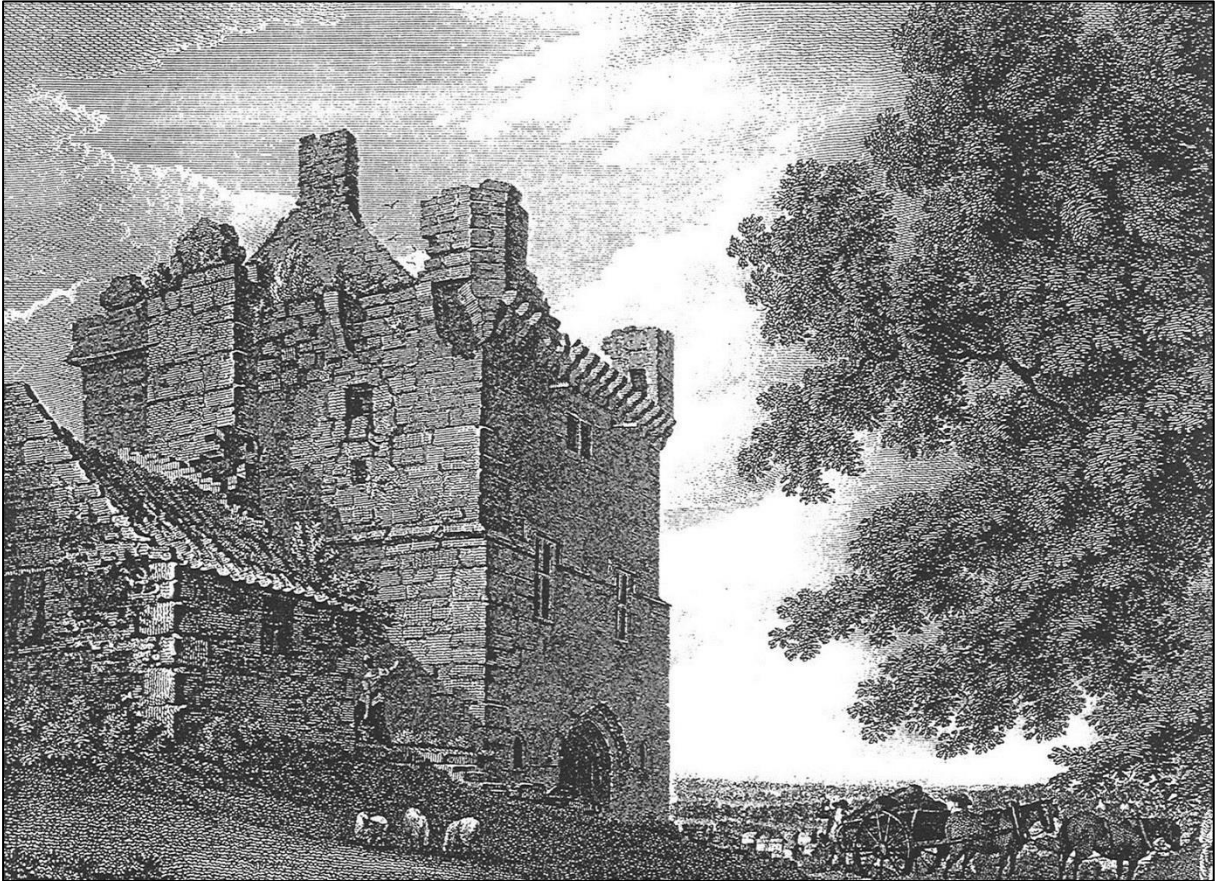
The decision to reinstate the original newel staircase caused a minor problem because either in the 17th century or in 1860, the level of the second floor had been lowered by about two feet. Landmark decided to keep to the existing, lower, floor level, so some steps had to be built to bridge the gap between it and the threshold of the medieval door. Under the threshold two 19th-century shoes were discovered.

The second floor was probably always divided into two or more rooms. The present arrangement of the partitions is almost entirely new, however, as are the floorboards. There is another garderobe in the corner of the large bedroom, like those on the floor below. In the bathroom the window sill contains a stone sink, or slop-stone, showing that this floor was always domestic. It possibly formed a self-contained apartment or lodging for one of the castle officials.

The roof

The Landmark Trust put back local stone slates of the kind that would have covered the roof originally. They came from Ladycross Quarry near Allendale, south west of Hexham. The lead was also renewed and the wall-walk itself paved with York stone slabs.

The restoration of Morpeth Castle was carried out under the supervision of the Edinburgh architects, Stewart Tod and Partners. The builders were Bowden & Co of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Archaeological investigations, and the recording of the castle's structural history, were carried out by Peter F. Ryder, of Riding Mill. These were funded by English Heritage, which also gave a grant towards the cost of the repairs.



Morpeth Castle in 1784

History of Morpeth Castle

When the border wars were at their height, during the reign of Henry VIII, Morpeth Castle was at the hub of events. It was the seat of the Wardens of the Marches, its role a combination of palace, court of law and prison. Henry VIII's sister Margaret sought refuge there from the Scots and for one winter Morpeth Castle was an address well known in the courts of England and of France. The second time it played a small part in our national history was when, in 1644, it was beleaguered by Montrose during the Civil Wars and became one of the last castles in England to fall by siege.

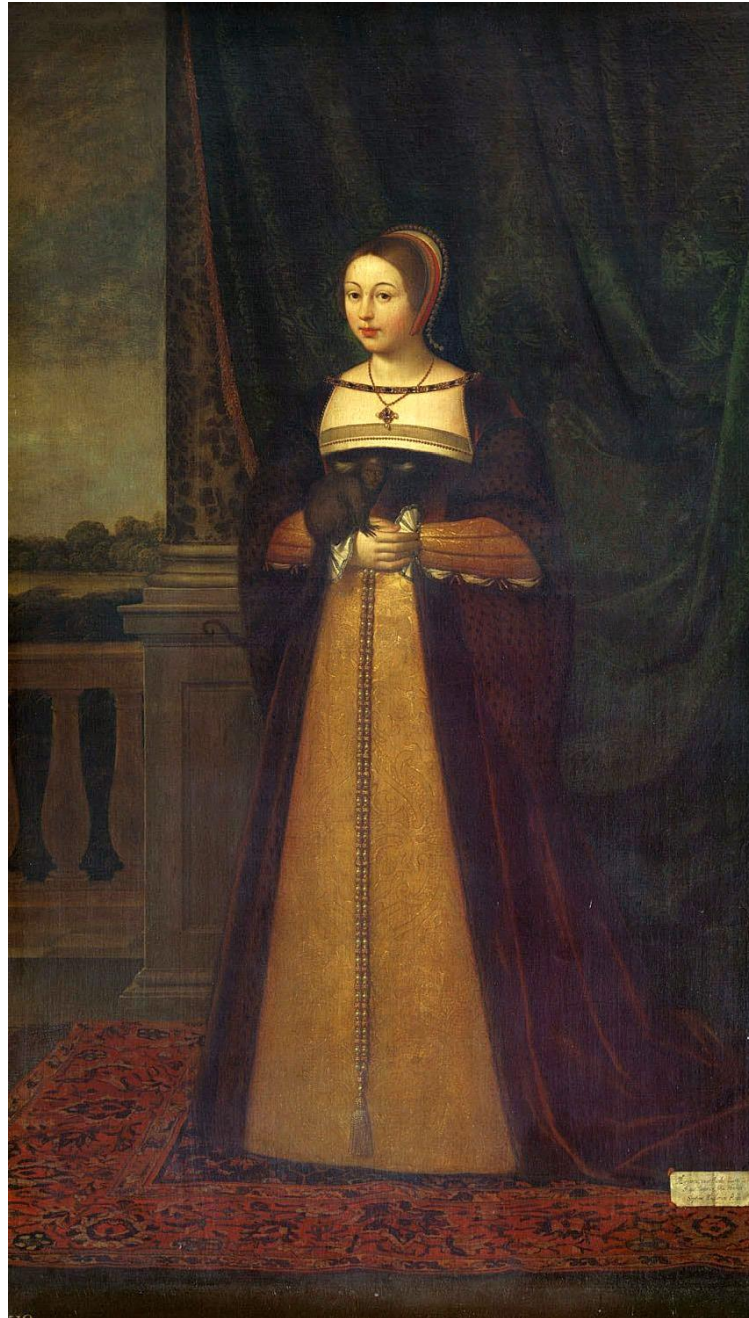
Both these events came late in its history. The first Morpeth Castle was built by the De Merlay family soon after the conquest and was probably made of wood. It is mentioned in 1135 as a 'strong castle which stood on a hill above Wansbeck', and was taken by William II in 1095, when the De Merlays, with other northern lords, rose against him. It stood on Ha' Hill, the little hill to the north of the Castle Gatehouse, that you can see very well looking out of the window in the main, north bedroom on the second floor.

At some stage, perhaps after it had been burnt by King John in 1216, when he was quelling another rebellion in the north, the Castle was built, or rebuilt, on the present site, in stone, a square fortress with two baileys. The only picture we have of this building is the tiny drawing in the map of 1604, in which the Gatehouse also appears, looking very small compared with the main keep.

The Gatehouse was built in about 1350 by William Greystock, a predecessor of whom having married the De Merlay heiress. It is not a particularly strong building from the military point of view and it seems likely that, the Greystocks often being appointed Wardens of the Border Marches, the Gatehouse was built from the beginning as a courtroom, where the Warden could deal out rough justice and keep the peace between the reivers, or cattle thieves, both Scots and English. Another Landmark gatehouse, Cawood, near York, was also used as a courtroom: it was quite a common combination.

In 1506 the Greystock heiress, Elizabeth, married into another family of Border grandees, the Dacres. Thomas Dacre, known as Lord Dacre of the North, was no backwoods peer; he was Henry VIII's envoy to the Scottish court, as well as Warden of the Marches, and was in constant correspondence with Cardinal Wolsey. He fought at the battle of Flodden, about twenty miles north of Morpeth, in 1513, and it was he who, after the battle, identified the body of James IV of Scotland, killed in the fighting.

Two years later, James IV's widow, Queen Margaret, took refuge with Lord Dacre in Morpeth Castle. As mother of the baby King, James V, she had been made Regent, but with England once again the enemy, she was, as sister of Henry VIII, in a difficult position. When she rashly married the young Lord Angus, she was deposed as Regent and the Duke of Albany, a Frenchman, was appointed instead. Her position in Scotland became more and more dangerous and, when she ran out of money, impossible. She fled, leaving her two sons behind, but her flight was complicated by being pregnant and she was also suffering from what was probably an arthritic hip. Her first stop over the border was Harbottle Castle near Coldstream, where she gave birth to a baby daughter. In November 1515 she and the baby arrived at Morpeth Castle. Though no longer Regent, as mother of James V, Margaret was still an important piece in the diplomatic power game that was being played between England and France, with Scotland as pawn. The Duke of Albany wrote to her constantly and her



Margaret Tudor as a young woman by Daniel Mytens

Scottish supporters came down in droves. Lord Dacre complained about the expense, and said that Morpeth Castle was turned into an inn.

Lord Dacre lived there in some style: the Castle was well furnished, hung with tapestries, the sideboard laden with gold and silver plate, and the food lavish with plenty of wildfowl from the Wansbeck Dacre wrote saying that Margaret refused culies (broth) morteis (meat hash), almond milk and pottages, food thought suitable for an invalid, and would only eat roast meat with jellies and that very scantily. She seems to have been a demanding guest, but she was in great pain. Henry VIII confirmed his support for her by sending up to Morpeth a pack train bearing jewels, ermine, cloth of gold and silver, velvets and tinsell braid. 'Her Grace was borne in a chair out of her bed-chamber into the great chamber, to the intent that her Grace would see all such stuff as your highness had sent her' wrote Sir Christopher Garneys, King Henry's envoy, staying with Lord Dacre. She had the cloth made into gowns and 'she will have them held before her twice a day to look at'.

At last on 8 April 1516 Margaret left Morpeth for the court in London and the Castle reverted to its old role as a border fortress.

In 1535 Morpeth Castle was broken into by thieves from the north Tyne, who rescued their kinsman, Coke Charlton, a renowned cattle thief who was imprisoned there.

In 1569 the last of the Dacres was killed aged six, by a fall from his rocking horse, and the Morpeth estates went to Lord William Howard, who had married the little boy's sister, Elizabeth. The Howards, later Earls of Carlisle, did not live at Morpeth, but at Naworth, another Dacre castle in Cumbria, and by 1640 Morpeth Castle, apart from the Gatehouse, was in a ruinous state.



Margaret Tudor and the Earl of Angus (artist unknown). From *The Sisters of Henry VIII*, by Hester W Chapman, Jonathan Cape, 1969, London Library

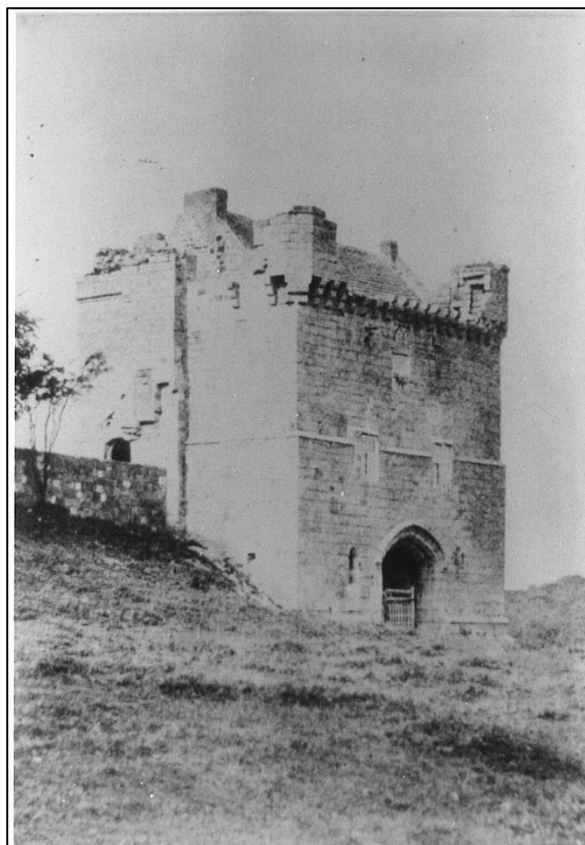
In 1644, at the beginning of the Civil War, General Leslie, commander of the Scottish troops supporting Parliament, marched south into England and left a company of 500 men, under Lieutenant Colonel Somerville, to garrison Morpeth Castle. Somerville was loathe to defend it, saying it was 'a ruinous hole, not tenable by nature or art;' however, he obeyed and held it for twenty days against 2,700 royalist troops, led by the marquess of Montrose. There is fortunately a blow by blow account of the siege in *The Memoirs of the Somervilles* quoted, in slightly shortened form, in John Hodgson's *History of Morpeth* which is in the bookcase.

As soon as he realised he would be attacked, Colonel Somerville dug a deep trench in front of the Gatehouse and filled the entrance with earth and sods so that the gate could not be blown up with petards. He and his men withstood the first attacks, but when Montrose brought up canon capable of demolishing the castle from a barn nearby they were forced to capitulate. The remains of the barn may perhaps be the wall with buttresses that can be seen to the south east of the Castle. Towards the end of the battle it sounds as though the vaults of the Gatehouse were used for shelter. Somerville surrendered with honour, having lost 23 men against Montrose's 191.

After the siege the central keep was in ruins and by the time John Hodson wrote his *History of Morpeth* in 1832 there was nothing left of it at all: it had been used as a quarry by the town. The Gatehouse, however, survived, and perhaps because the keep was no longer habitable, and a living place was needed, at the end of the seventeenth century, the windows were enlarged and it was made into a dwelling. But then it seems to have been abandoned. There is little change in the structure between the engraving of 1784 and the photograph taken about 1860; in both it looks equally uninhabitable.



Morpeth Castle from a painting by Luke Clennel (1812)



Photograph of about 1860

Sometime after the siege a cottage was built beside the Gatehouse, perched up against the curtain wall. By 1812, the date of the next engraving, the cottage was disintegrating and by the 1860's it had fallen down and the curtain wall where it had been was repaired.

About 1860, at the time of the great rebuild in Northumberland, when money from coal was pouring in, and landowners were renovating their old farm buildings and building new ones, the Earl of Carlisle restored the Castle Gatehouse as a house for his agent. The stable wing was probably built at the same time.

In 1916 the castle was sold to Mr. Charles Alderson, a solicitor, and sometime after 1922 either he or his daughters, who inherited it, built on a single storey extension to the south east, beyond the front door. In 1946 it was bought by Morpeth Borough Council and let to Mr. and Mrs. Paul Shrubsole who stayed there till 1968. They kept horses in the stables and used the paddock for grazing. In 1972 Mr. Bell, a builder, took it on a long lease and made some more alterations.

By the 1980s, expensive repairs were needed, particularly to the roof. The gatehouse fell vacant, and quickly became derelict. A new solution for its future was urgently sought by the Borough Council. In 1988 the Council granted a lease to the Landmark Trust. The restoration of Morpeth Castle as it had come to be known, was completed in the autumn of 1991.



1943

THE JOURNAL Wednesday February 22 1967

An Englishman's council home is his castle



MR. PAUL SHRUBSOLE can safely claim to be the tenant of one of the most unusual council houses in the country.

Since 1946 he has been resident in Morpeth Castle, a 900-year-old building owned by the town council. For an annual rent of about £200 he has been able to look down from his tower, above, and command a view right to the Cheviots, much as warlords of the past must have done.

Mr. Shrubsole, a naval architect and business management consultant, said yesterday he enjoyed the life of a "king of a modernised castle." But there were a lot of problems.

"When my wife and I first came to Morpeth the castle was semi-derelict," he said.

By our Morpeth Staff

"It was impossible to consider living in it at first but with the help of some friends we set about renovating it, one room at a time.

"The council have carried out all the external repairs so the castle could be preserved as an ancient building; and between us we have made it into a comfortable, if unusual, home," he said.

HUNTERS

"We chose the castle because we needed somewhere to live, and it happened to be available at the time."

"The walls of the castle are scored by the cannon balls and sling shot of Scottish marauders. A short distance

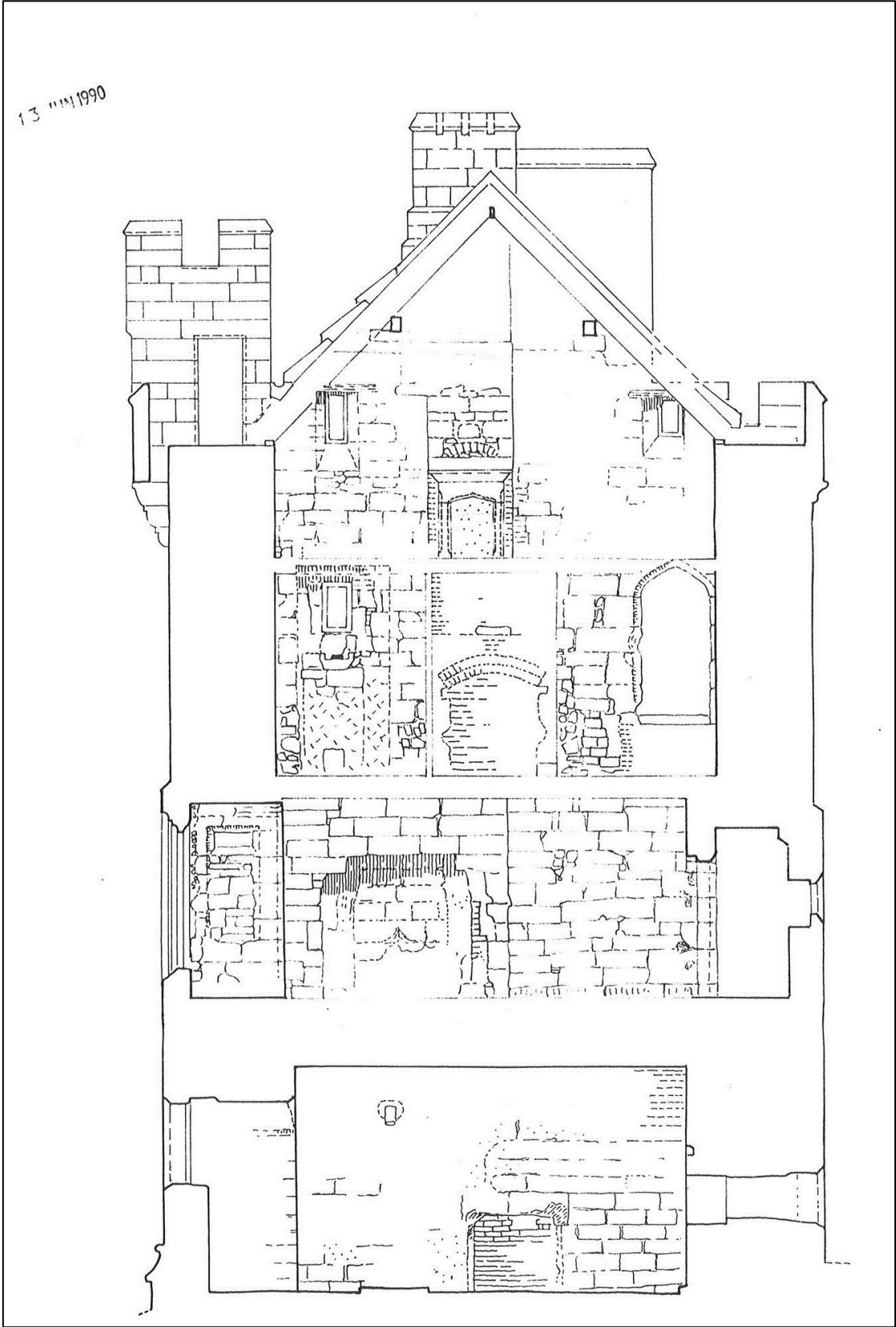
from the postern there is a hill which was constructed by attackers so they could gain height alongside the walls," he said.

"There are authentic records which claim there was a fortress built here as far back as 1095. It was destroyed, and since then there have been a succession of fortresses.

"My wife and I feel firmly installed in the place, and we love the historic atmosphere which it creates."

Mr. Shrubsole also breeds thoroughbred hunters. "At the moment we have three horses in the stables. There is plenty of room in the grounds for them to exercise.

"It is nice to be able to say that my home is indeed my castle," he said.



Internal elevation of south wall

The Building

A detailed report on Morpeth Castle was made by the archaeologist and historian, Peter Ryder, in 1990, and published in *Archaeologia Aeliana* in 1992. A copy of this article is at the back of this album. The following is a brief resumé of past alterations, with a description of the Landmark Trust's restoration.

Late 17th-century alterations

The two lower windows in the engraving of 1784 are still recognisable as medieval, even if slightly altered. The upper window had clearly been partly blocked, its sill lowered, and one or more casements fitted. This probably happened in the later 17th century when, some years after the siege, the gatehouse was made habitable.

At the same time, a new attic floor was inserted, which cut across the head of the second floor window. Looking at the Castle Gatehouse from within the bailey, you can see the two small windows at the very top of the building below the parapet. These were discovered, blocked up, when the ivy was removed from that side. They look late 17th-century, and were presumably made to light the new attic. They are innocuous, but English Heritage was reluctant for them to be opened up because they are not medieval. A curious compromise was reached by which half of each window is open and half left blocked.

Inside the building, a more radical alteration was the lowering of the second floor by more than 2ft, made necessary by the insertion of the attic. This meant that the medieval door from the newel stair was left way above floor level, but whether there were steps, as now, or whether an alternative staircase was made at this date, we don't know. There was never a door from the newel stair into the attic, which may have been reached by a ladder stair.

Mid 19th-century alterations

By comparing the earlier prints of the gatehouse, and the photograph of c1860, with the building as it is now, it is easy to see the principal changes. The Gothic windows were put in; the parapet, which had gone, was replaced, some of the corbels renewed and the embattled tops of the turrets or bartizans were rebuilt. On the south side, the main door was re-made. The gatehouse was reroofed in slate.

Inside, the floors were entirely rebuilt, though probably at the existing, 17th-century levels, to provide three floors of accommodation. These were linked by a new staircase. That from the first to second floor was placed in the middle of the house, dividing each floor into two rooms of roughly equal size. A further stair led up to the attic. The door to the spiral stair was blocked up at second floor level, if it had not been earlier, so that it now only gave access to the roof.

It is not quite clear when the stable block was added, but it appears on the sale notice in 1916, and Lord Carlisle's agent would have need somewhere to keep his horse, so it was probably built when the gatehouse was restored.

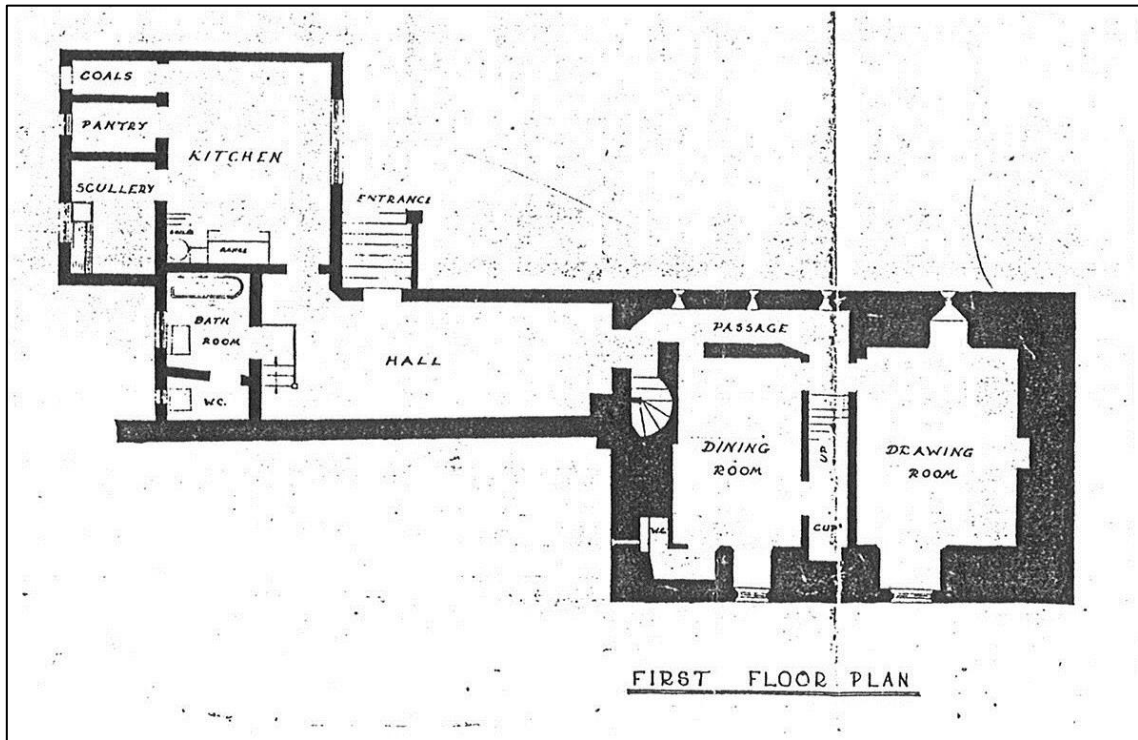
Mid 20th-century Alterations

To the south of the gatehouse, against the bailey wall, a single story extension was made in the 1920s-1930s, consisting of an entrance hall, kitchen, bathroom etc. The garderobe at the south, present kitchen end of the first floor was turned into a WC. These alterations can be seen on the plan made by the Borough Surveyor, probably when Morpeth Borough Council bought the castle in 1946.

Sometime after the 1946 plan the garderobe at the sitting room end of the first floor was opened up, and a new door into it made by hacking through the wall to the left of the fireplace. The garderobe in the north end of the second floor was also opened up.

The window at the north end of the west wall of the sitting room, which appears as a slit in the 1916 plan, was enlarged and an odd V-shaped window was put in. It appears in the 1987 photograph of the east side of the gatehouse.

In 1968-70, Mr Bell carried out some repairs and modernised the services. He also added a swimming pool at the far end of the extension.



Borough Surveyors plan showing 1920s extension

Landmark Alterations 1989-91

The Landmark Trust has kept much of the 19th-century restoration, most obviously the windows - but has at the same time returned the gatehouse to something more nearly like its old medieval lay out.

External alterations

The 20th-century extensions were poor buildings and were removed.

The asphalt within the gateway was returned to cobbles and stone sets.

The Gatehouse was re-roofed with stone slates from Ladycross Quarry near Allendale, south west of Hexham. York paving was laid on the walkway round the roof and the lead was replaced.

Internal alterations

The stairs

The central Victorian staircase was removed and the newel stair, which led only to the roof, was put back into commission. The medieval doorway leading from the stairs to the second floor was reopened. With the change of floor level, the threshold of the spiral stairs at the second floor was 18" higher than the level of the actual floor. Three steps now lead up to it. It was here that two shoes were discovered built into the threshold. Between the first and second floors the door leading out onto the walkway round the top of the curtain wall was replaced with a fixed door with a window, the curtain wall having crumbled, it lead out onto nothing. A new staircase was put in between the second and attic floors against the south wall, and the old one, against the east wall was removed.

The first floor

In medieval times, before the Victorian staircase was put in, the whole of the first floor seems to have been one room, divided by a screen, and the Landmark Trust has returned it to this plan. The reason for thinking the first floor of the Gatehouse was a courtroom is the passage with its two doors: the first, smaller one, opening onto one side of the screen, for the prisoners and guards, the second, grander one, for those administering justice, opening onto the other. Both ends had a fire. The aumbrey, or cupboard alcove, straight ahead of the main door would have held the seals and paraphernalia of justice.

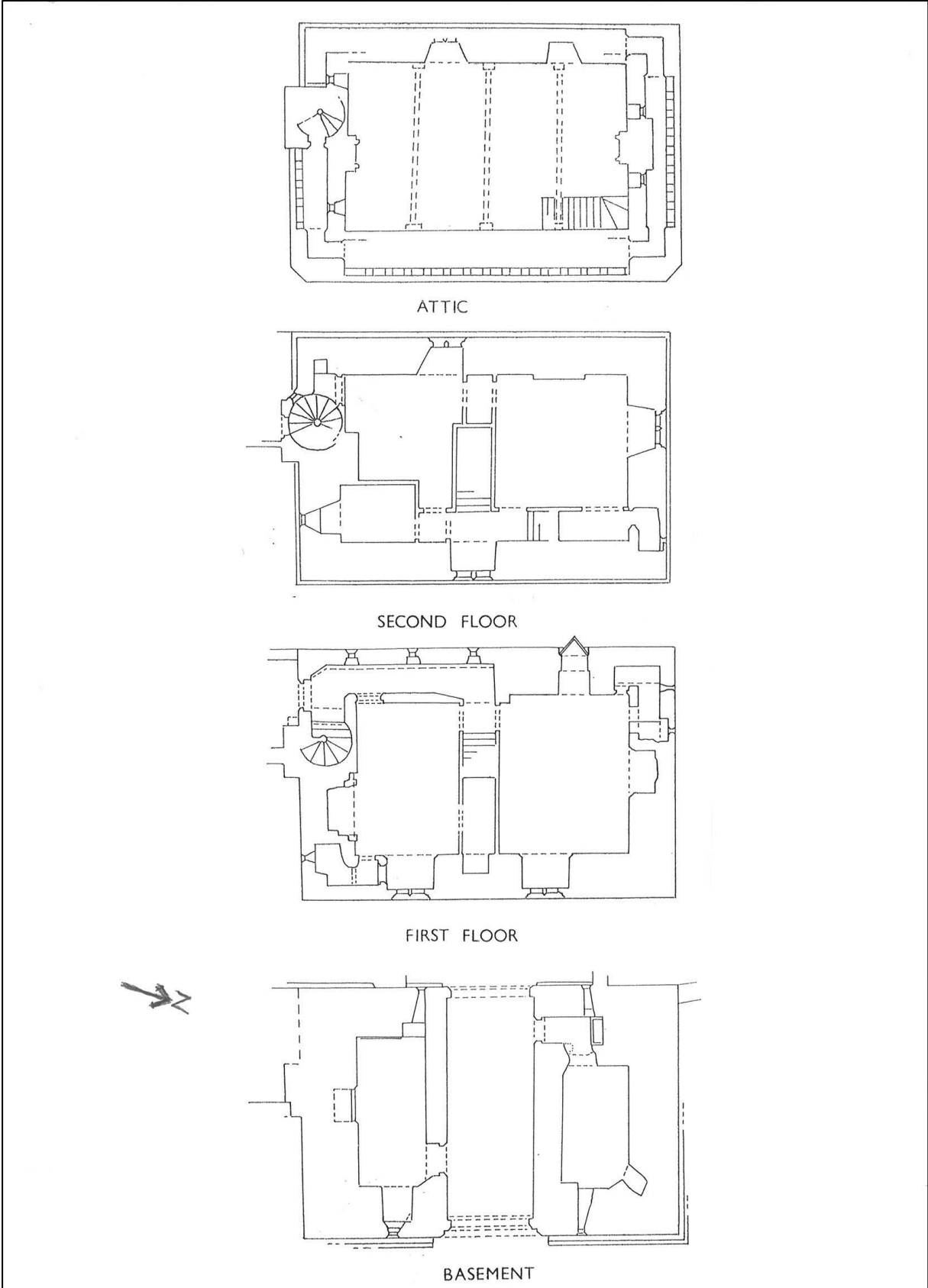
The fireplace at the north, sitting room, end of the room is original but has been badly hacked about and shorn of its mouldings. The new opening that had been made into the garderobe to the left of the fireplace, has been built up and the original door to the garderobe, to the right of the west window, opened up. The garderobe at the south, kitchen end of the room was entered by a door opposite you as you came into the room; the original door was discovered in the wall at right angles to the window, and was reopened, the new one, blocked. The V shaped window at the north end of the west wall has been re-made into an ordinary mullion window. The metal frames of the gothic Victorian windows had to be repaired or re-made.

The second floor

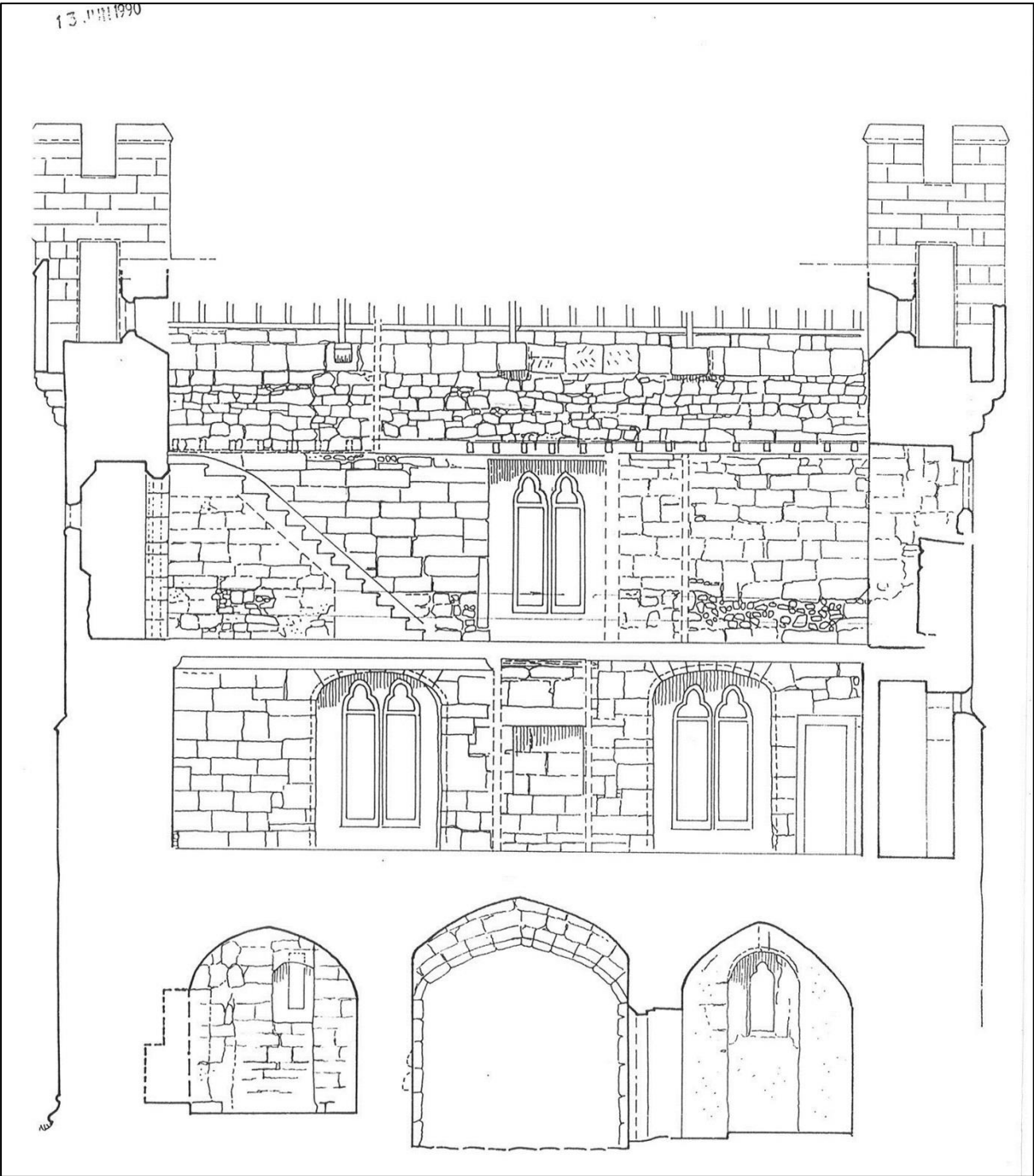
The partitions in this floor and the one above were altered, with the removal of the central staircase. The bathroom was already where it is not, but was renewed.

The attic floor

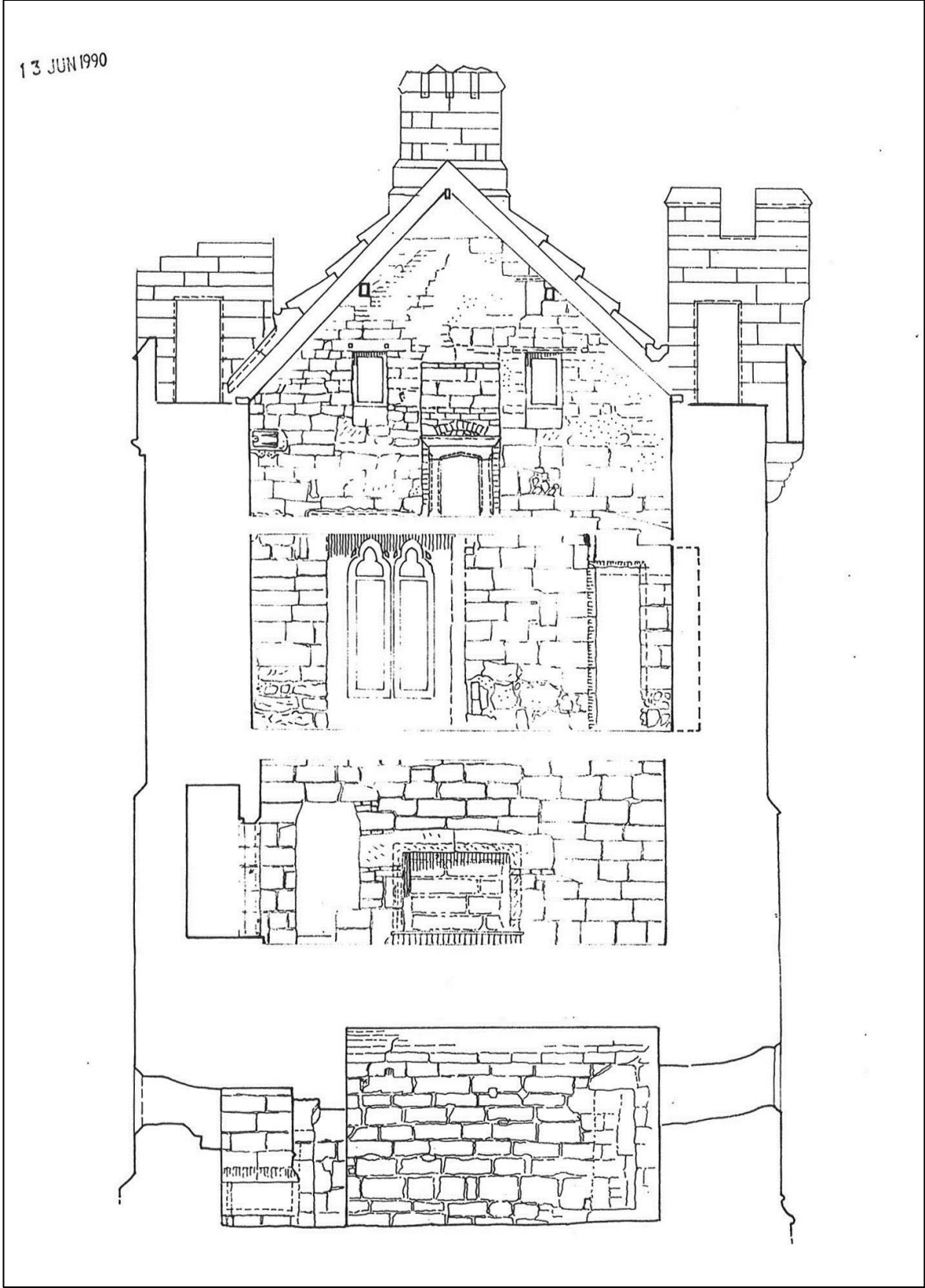
The two small 17th-century windows were partially unblocked and repaired and the sky lights were renewed.



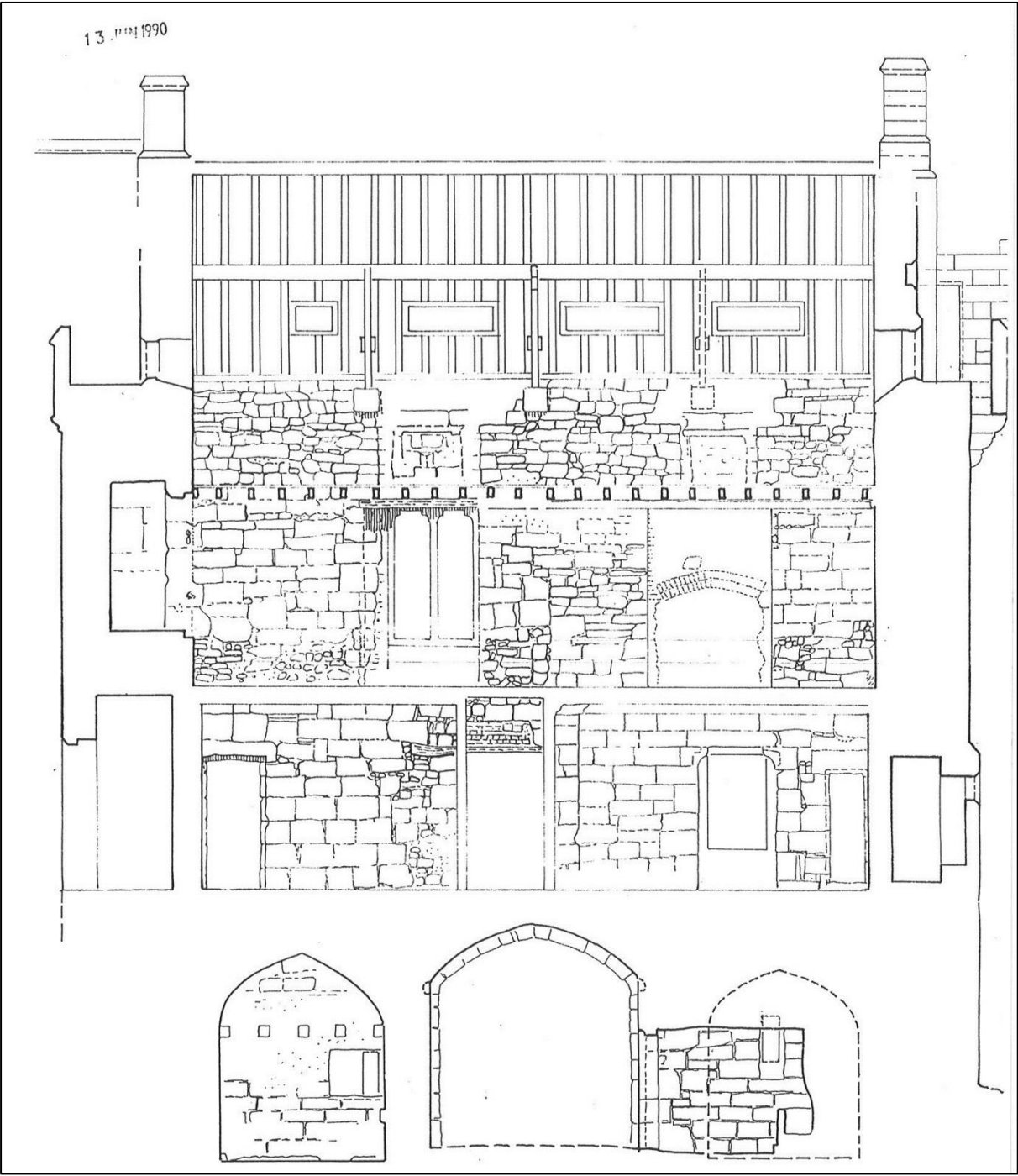
Plan of the castle in 1989



Internal elevation of east wall



Internal elevation of north wall



Internal elevation of west wall



The east side in 1986



The west side in 1986



The archway showing the asphalt in the courtyard. 1986



The stable buildings in 1986. The washhouse in the centre has been removed.



The extension in 1986



The south side with extension in 1986



Detail of the extension in 1986



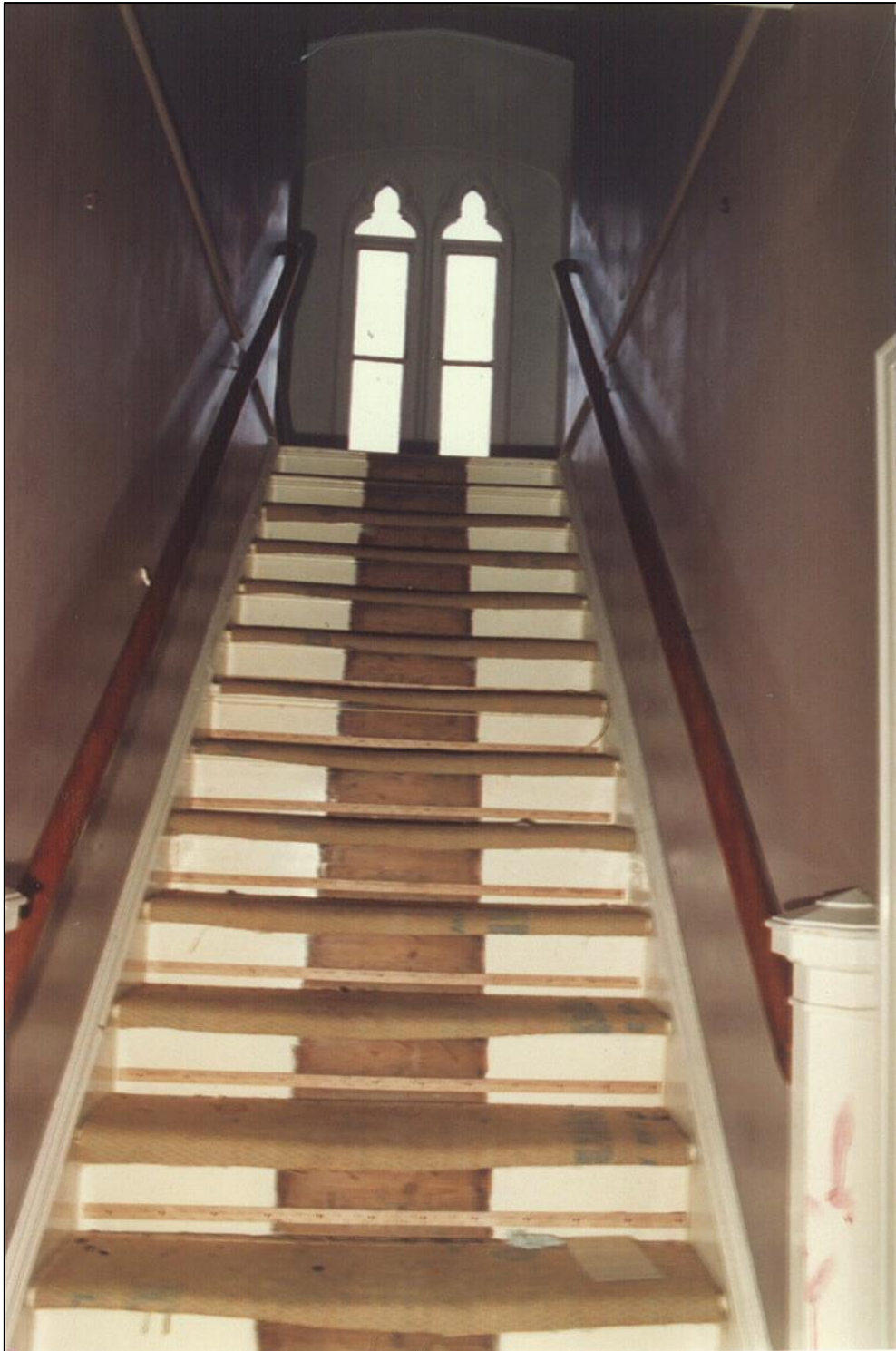
The Hall in the extension and present front door



Opening made in 1960s into garderobe on north end of first floor, now built up.



Shows cabinet in present bathroom and old stair (19th C) up to attic.



The 1960s staircase



Outside the stables showing original cobbles



Practising laying a cobble pattern



Open day, summer 1990, with roof stripped



The sets laid out before being put into position



Stone slates for the roof came from Ladycross Quarry near Allendale, Hexham.





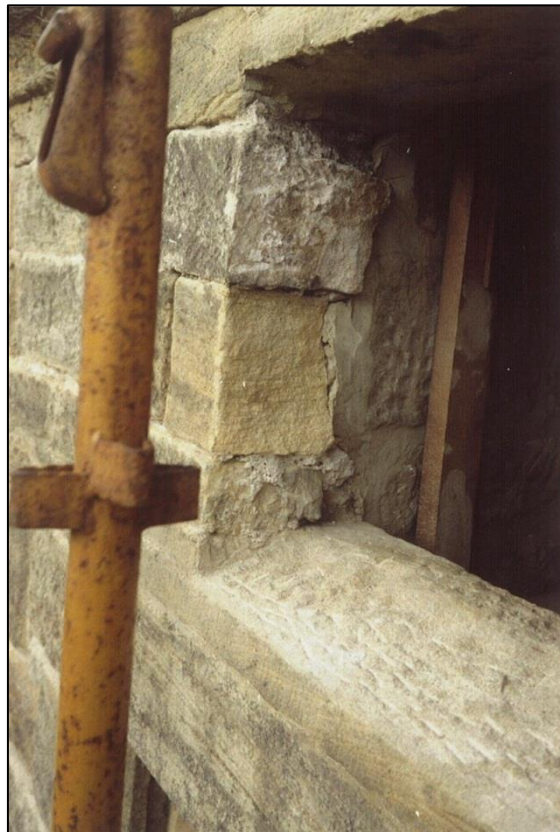
The stone slates for the roof arriving in October 1990



Fixing the last of the stone slates to the roof



The 17th century windows as they must have looked. Here they are mock-ups made of cardboard.



Finding the 17th-century windows in the attic.



The south extension being removed





First floor, kitchen end before restoration. The door led into a wall in the garderobe.



Kitchen end during restoration



Discovering the original garderobe in the kitchen, to the right of the window.



Window onto the second floor passage. The level of the original floor is shown by gaps in the stone work.



Opening the original doorway from the spiral stairs to the second floor, December 1990.



The spiral stair doorway completely open. This is where the shoes were found hidden in the threshold.



The last of the scaffolding coming down.

From Northampton Museum, Belt and Shoe Collection, March 1991:

Shoe 1 (with the shoe lace)

Man's leather latchet tie shoe, possibly for military or court dress wear as shoes of this style in our collection testify (see illustration). Latchets are extensions of the quarters (sides) which are fastened by either, buckles, ribbons or laces, in this case a silk lace has been used.

The square toe style is indicative of the 1840's/1850's but the sole appears to be 'straight' i.e. neither right nor left although this shoe has obviously been worn more on the right foot.

There is a one-lift leather heel and the sole has been repaired (half-soled), both stitched and riveted: the rivets in the heel and the toe now rusted.

I would guess that the shoe is a working or middle class 'Sunday best' because it has been well made and very well repaired. It would not, I think, have belonged to a more wealthy person as the latchet tie with a square toe was beginning to be a thing of the past in the 1850's.

Circa 1855 is a fairly accurate date for this shoe.



Shoe 2

Man's leather lace-up derby shoe. Once again with a square toe, a two lift heel and a half-sole repair. This shoe however is not a 'straight', it is almost certainly the left shoe.

This shoe is more in keeping with traditional concealed shoe superstitions, i.e. it is badly worn. I have already mentioned the half shoe repair (which incidentally, has been riveted) but there is also the worn down sole and heel and the hole in the vamp at the little toe joint. This tells us that the shoes have been treasured by the wearer, either for their comfort or more likely because new shoes were too expensive.

The general style and shape of this shoe suggests a date close to the other one, possibly c.1860.

Works consulted on the history of Morpeth Castle:

John Hodgson *History of Morpeth* (1832)

For Margaret Tudor's stay in the Castle:

J.S.Brewer, *Reign of Henry VIII* (1884)

Hester Chapman, *Sisters of Henry VIII* (1969)

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James 11th Lord Somerville, *Memorie of the Somervilles* (1815)

For the description of the building:

Peter F.Ryder *Morpeth Castle Gatehouse, Archaeological Survey and Report*
(June 1990).

For the description of the Landmark Trust's restoration:

Vivienne Tod of Stewart Tod and

Partners gave essential information and advice.

Clayre Percy

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THE GATEHOUSE OF MORPETH CASTLE, NORTHUMBERLAND



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The Gatehouse of Morpeth Castle, Northumberland

Peter F. Ryder

THE RUINS OF Morpeth Castle stand on the southern of a pair of narrow ridges running parallel to the main Wansbeck valley, c. 200 m south of the medieval bridge over the river. The narrower northern ridge ends in the Ha' Hill, thought to be the site of the first Norman castle. The underlying geology is sandstones and shales of the Coal Measures, capped by alluvial sands and gravels.

The first castle was probably built in the late 11th century by William de Merlay, first Baron of Morpeth, who had fought with the Conqueror at Hastings. As a result of the de Merlays backing Robert de Mowbray, the rebel Earl of Northumberland, the castle was taken by William Rufus in 1095, although it was later returned to the de Merlays. In 1216 the castle was burned by King John on his campaign against the rebellious Northern barons; the de Merlay estates were confiscated, but returned to the family in 1218. The de Merlays are thought to have rebuilt their castle on the present site. Their estates passed by marriage to the Greystoke family in 1271.¹ It was never one of the largest castles in the area, being referred to in 1310 as a "turriolum" and in 1343 as a "turellus".² William ("the Good Baron") Greystoke (1342–59) is recorded as having built the "turre de Morpath", usually identified as the present gatehouse.³ Although Lord Dacre of Gisland is known to have resided in the castle in the early 16th century, by 1596 it was described as "mightily decayed". In 1644, although described as "a ruinous hole, not tenable by nature or art", it was held for Parliament by a garrison of 500 Scots under Lieut-Colonel Somerville, who had been appointed governor, against a Royalist force of 2,700 led by General Montrose. A detailed

account of the siege survives;⁴ it ended after 20 days when the garrison, who had lost 23 men in contrast to the besiegers 191, surrendered and were allowed to march out with their arms.

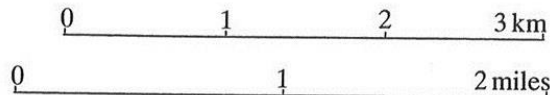
The castle buildings suffered badly in the siege, and large parts of the fabric seem to have been demolished soon afterwards, including the great tower or keep shown on a 1604 map of Morpeth.⁵ A 1741 plan in the Earl of Carlisle's papers⁶ shows the site very much as it is today, with only the curtain wall and the gatehouse surviving. In the late 18th century a cottage (shown on several engravings of the period, and on an 1825 plan)⁷ was built against the external face of the curtain wall immediately south of the gatehouse, which was in a ruinous condition. In 1852 the Earl of Carlisle carried out some excavations, and is said to have uncovered "the basements of several apartments, about 3 or 4 feet high" "immediately on the left on entering the gateway, on a level with the sill";⁸ these are no longer visible.

The gatehouse, which, apart from the curtain wall of the inner bailey and a fragment of that of the outer, is the only remaining part of the castle, has had a chequered history over the last 130 years. It was apparently in a more or less ruinous condition when the Earl of Carlisle restored it (1858–60) as a residence for his agent. Unfortunately no architect's name or drawings for this work have been traced; the estate cash book⁹ records a payment of £1-2s-8d (April 4, 1860) for "taking down an old building"—presumably the late-18th century cottage on its south side. In 1872 plans were prepared by the architect Robert Johnson¹⁰ for a new lodgings block adjoining the gatehouse to the north-east but this was never con-



Fig. 1 Area Map

1. Morpeth Castle
 2. The Ha' Hill
 3. Parish Church
 4. Newminster Abbey
- ⋯⋯ Approximate limits of built-up area



structed. In 1916 the Castle was sold by the Earl to Charles Alderson (a Morpeth solicitor) for £2,400, who commissioned the local architect C. Franklin Murphy to make plans, which appear to relate to a re-ordering of the attic floor.¹¹ At some date after 1922 Mr. Alderson added a flat-roofed domestic wing to the south-west of the gatehouse, originally consisting of an entrance hall and later extended to include a kitchen. Following the 1946 sale of the castle to Morpeth Borough Council it was occupied by a series of tenants, one of whom carried out quite considerable internal alterations (in the 1960s?) resulting in the destruction of medieval fabric and features. Later the building was left uninhabited, and virtually gutted by vandals.

In 1989–90 the gatehouse was repaired and remodelled internally by the Landmark Trust with grant aid from English Heritage, the 20th century additions being cleared away; architects for the project were Steward Tod & Partners of Edinburgh. The account of the

gatehouse below is based upon archaeological recording carried out during these works, again with the support of English Heritage.

Description of the Castle

Morpeth Castle consists of an irregular enclosure or bailey ("The Curtain" on the 1741 map) most easily regarded as a rectangle c. 70 m north–south by 63 m east–west, with its south-west corner canted to fit onto the ridge-top. The gatehouse stands at the north-east corner of the enclosure, facing eastwards. There is a deep ditch (now occupied by an approach drive) on the west; a further ditch cutting the ridge c. 70 m further west is said to be part of the 1644 siegeworks. No ditch is now apparent on the east, although the curtain south of the gatehouse stands on a raised scarp. The largely-natural scarps of the end of the ridge define the eastern enclosure shown on the 1604 map, and a narrower platform at a



Fig. 2 Morpeth Gatehouse from a sketch by Luke Clennell, c 1810

slightly lower level to its north-east, shown on the 1741 map as “Castle Yard” and “Bowling Green” respectively.

The circuit of the curtain wall is relatively complete, except for a gap at the south end of the west side. Much of the walling stands to a reasonable height, but its facing stones have mostly been robbed away, and few architectural or structural features are visible.

A short length of wall, with remains of two large external buttresses, remains on the east side of the “Castle Yard”; this has been identified (on what grounds it is not quite clear) as part of a barn that figures in the records of the 1644 siege. It seems more likely to be part of an

outer curtain wall, although it may well have been incorporated in a later barn.

The Gatehouse

The gatehouse consists of a rectangular block 13.2 m north–south by 8.8 m east–west. The external elevations of the building are constructed of squared and coursed sandstone blocks; on the east (front) elevation the masonry is of near-ashlar quality, and more irregular on the west. Attached to the north-west corner of the gatehouse, and extending for some distance to the west, is a range of late 19th century single-storey outbuildings.

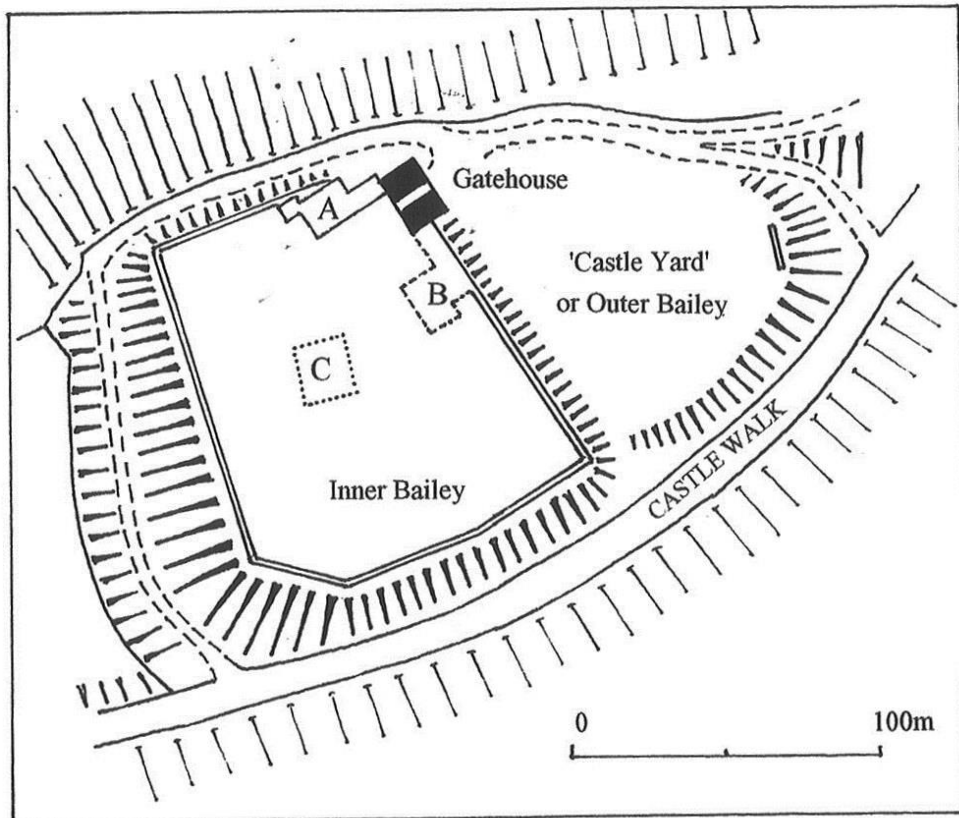


Fig. 3

MORPETH CASTLE: SITE PLAN

Key

- A: Late C19 outbuilding range
- B: Post-1922 wing demolished 1990
- C: Approximate site of Keep shown on 1604 map

EXTERIOR

East Elevation

The east elevation has a stepped and moulded plinth, interrupted by a central archway with a flattened four-centred head. The arch is of two orders; on the jambs these are simply chamfered, but on the head the inner order has a double wave moulding and the outer a hollow chamfer; in addition there is a hollow-

chamfered hoodmould. To the south of the archway is a small window with a trefoil-arched head; at some stage its sill and the masonry below have been cut away (a doorway is shown here in the 1785 engraving by Thornton)¹² and replaced by later stonework still pre-dating the c. 1860 restoration. To the north of the arch, and set a little higher in the wall, is a square-headed chamfered loop; the stonework of this seems to have been wholly renewed in the 19th-century restoration.

At first floor level are a pair of two-light

THE GATEHOUSE OF MORPETH CASTLE, NORTHUMBERLAND

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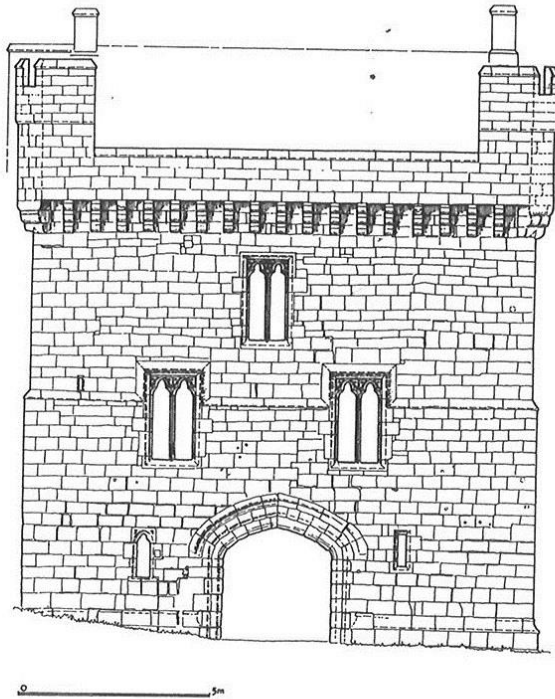


Fig. 4 East elevation

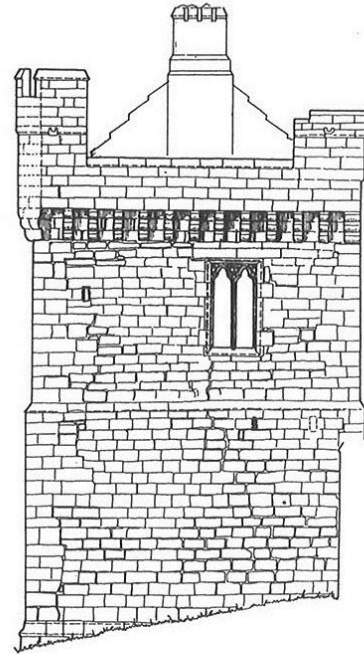


Fig. 5 North elevation

windows, with steeply-pointed trefoiled arches to the lights, under square heads. A chamfered set-back runs round the building at this level, and is stepped up over the window heads. At second floor level is another similar window, set centrally. All the stonework of these windows is of c. 1860; all three replace earlier openings in approximately the same positions. Although there are a number of pre-restoration illustrations of this face of the gatehouse, unfortunately they do not make the original detail of these windows very clear. The chamfered set-back was stepped up over the first floor openings as it is now, but their sills seem to have been at a rather higher level; the openings seem to have contained post-medieval casements. A pre-restoration photograph of c. 1860¹³ shows the upper window as retaining its original head of two arched lights with sinkings in the spandrels; the upper part of the opening was blocked, and the lower, which had lost its mullion, had its sill set

considerably higher than that of its successor. Some of the old illustrations appear to show two separate windows here, as if the medieval opening had been sub-divided so as to light both 2nd and attic floors.

The parapet, with taller bartizans at the angles, is carried on a range of boldly-projecting triple-stepped corbels (most of which are original); those at the corners of the building are broader and set diagonally. The present embattled tops to the bartizans are of c. 1860, although their lower parts are medieval; the parapet between them (now with a flat coping) is all restoration; all the old illustrations show it as having fallen.

North Elevation

The north elevation of the gatehouse is relatively plain; there are a number of breaks in the coursing that are difficult to explain. Near

the west end of the wall and immediately below the chamfered set-back are two small chamfered loops lighting the first-floor garderobe. At second floor level is a two-light window, set slightly west of centre, dating to the mid-19th century restoration and precisely similar to the three on the east front; to its east a tiny loop lights a garderobe. Sopwith's early 19th century drawing¹⁴ shows a plain square window to the second floor and a smaller but similar window above interrupting the line of the parapet corbels; most of the present corbels here are restoration, as is the parapet and the north-east corner bartizan.

South Elevation

The south wall of the gatehouse has a projecting rectangular stair turret set somewhat west of centre, to which the east curtain wall is attached. The chamfered set-back only extends along the section of wall outside the curtain; immediately above it is a small chamfered loop lighting the first-floor garderobe, whilst further

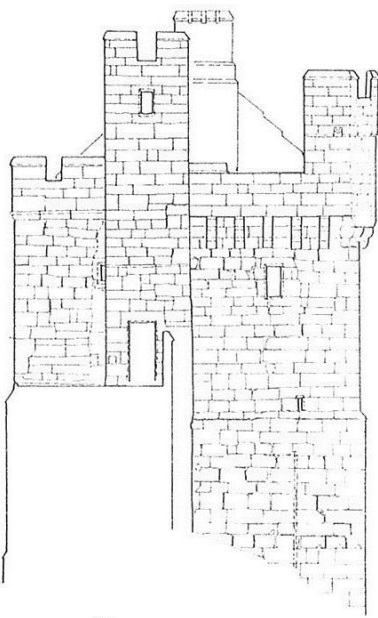


Fig. 6 South elevation

up the wall is a larger chamfered square-headed window to the second floor. As with the set-back, the parapet corbelling only extends as far as the stair turret, which rises considerably above the parapet (although this top section is entirely of c. 1860; old illustrations show it as ruined down to the main parapet level).

The lower section of the turret and of the wall to the west were covered by the 20th century domestic wing, now removed. The west part of the wall contains what appears to have always been the only entrance to the upper floors of the gatehouse, although in its present form (a chamfered shouldered arch with angular rather than curved shoulders) is clearly mid-19th century. The c. 1860 photograph shows a large ragged hole in the wall in this position. Access to this opening was formerly by a flight of stairs starting outside the castle and rising through a gap in the curtain between the gatehouse and a late-18th century cottage (cf. Hearne's drawing of 1784).¹⁵ Above and to the east of the doorway, the south-west angle of the stair turret is carried on a stepped corbel which seems to be medieval, at least in part.

At a higher level a square-headed doorway, 19th-century work in its present form, provided an external access to the turret stair from the wall walk of the curtain. The c. 1860 photograph seems to show a blocked feature in approximately this position. The re-entrant angle between the turret and the west part of the wall is bridged by oversailing masonry containing a small loop lighting the newel stair within, a rather rough-and-ready arrangement perhaps necessitated by a planning error.

West Elevation

The west (internal) elevation of the gatehouse has a simple chamfered plinth which steps up five courses half way between the central archway and the south-west corner; the plinth continued along the wall of the domestic range beyond (the lower part of which has been retained), suggesting that older masonry may

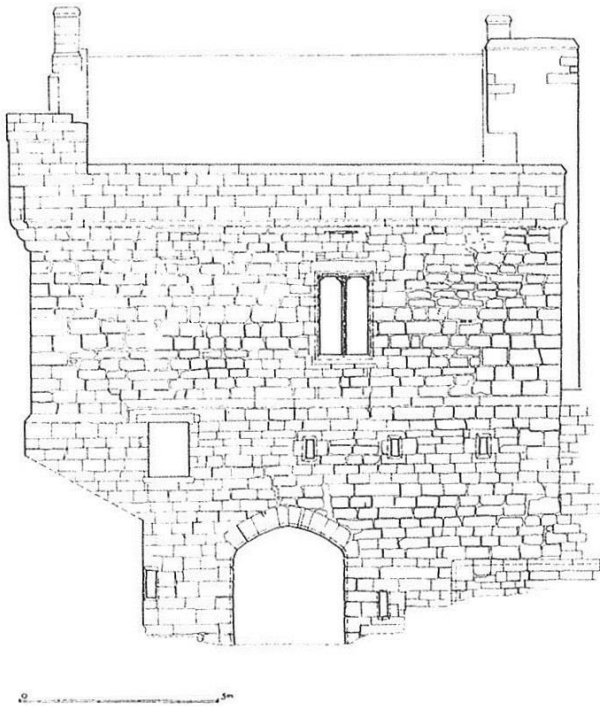


Fig. 7 West elevation

be incorporated in this structure; another related structural puzzle here is that the angle quoins of the gatehouse only commence three courses above plinth level. The face of the northern section of the lower part of the wall is hidden by a range of mid-19th century out-buildings, and is covered by plaster; this is particularly unfortunate as the plaster conceals any evidences for the former junction with the curtain wall here implied by the 1761 map.

The central archway has a four-centred arch like that on the east, but this time with only a single chamfer to the jambs and head. To each side is a square-headed chamfered loop lighting the basement chambers. At first floor level are three chamfered rectangular loops, and at the same level further north a larger square-headed window of c. 1960, replacing another chamfered loop (shown on the 1916 architect's drawings) that was set rather higher in the wall than the other three. Above these loops is a chamfered set-back which steps down to a lower level beyond the northernmost window.

At second-floor level is a single large square-

headed window with two shoulder-arched lights; all its stonework is mid-19th century work, except for the lower two-thirds of its chamfered south jamb which must survive (or have been re-set) from an earlier opening. At a higher level, immediately below the moulded string-course which runs below the parapet, is a low square-headed window, blocked since at least the mid-19th century but re-opened in 1990, lighting the attic or third floor; the opening may have originally formed the upper part of a tall second-floor window (prior to the insertion of the attic floor). Further north is a second recently reopened third-floor or attic window, a low square-headed opening formerly of two lights.

Whilst parts of the moulded string-course appear genuine medieval work, the flat-coped parapet above is wholly restoration. The gatehouse has a pitched roof carried by gables (each with a chimney stack) set back from the parapet of the north and south walls, so as to allow a parapet walk which passes through low square-headed doorways in the bartizans and is only interrupted by the stair turret. All the external stonework of this superstructure, including the small windows in the gables which light the present attic, and the chimney stacks, seems to date from the c. 1860 restoration, although following the general form of the previous attic/roof or "caphouse". Pre-restoration illustrations show that at least the southern of the old end-stacks was of brick.

INTERIOR

Basement

The gateway passage is roofed by a plain vault which follows the same four-centred form as the archways at either end; there are no signs of any openings in the vault, or of any portcullis slot. Similar but rather more steeply-pointed vaults cover the two guard chambers which flank and run parallel to the passage.

The southern chamber is entered from the east end of the passage by a doorway with a

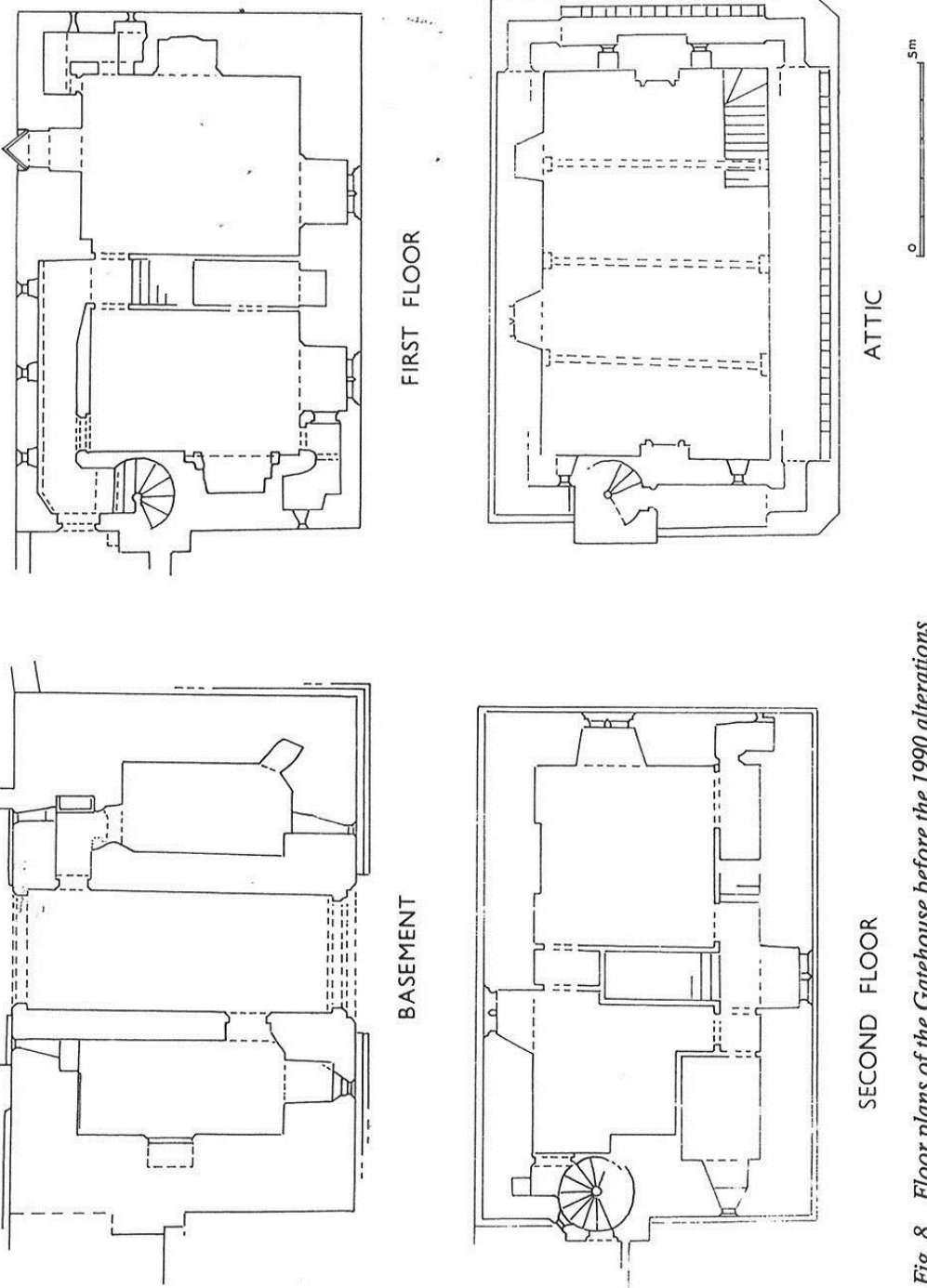


Fig. 8 Floor plans of the Gatehouse before the 1990 alterations

four-centred arch having a continuous hollow chamfer to its head and jambs. In the centre of the south wall is a small fireplace that appears to be medieval; its jambs are chamfered, but its lintel has suffered too much damage to ascertain its original form. On the west and western part of the south walls a small off-set 0.09 m above the present cement floor may indicate the original floor level. At the west end of the north wall is a projecting block 0.56 m above the present floor, of uncertain function. A former loft beneath the vault is indicated by a series of joist holes in the west wall 1.83 m above floor level; these may be secondary, although lofts of this type do occur in the basements of some medieval buildings (e.g. East Kyle Tower).

The northern chamber is entered by an L-plan passage opening from the west end of the gateway passage by a doorway similar to that of the southern chamber; a second similar doorway from the passage into the chamber has been partly cut away. At the angle in the passage, facing the first doorway, is a recess containing a stone trough that is clearly an insertion. The chamber itself is 1.0 m shorter than its southern counterpart, leaving a block of masonry 2.8 m square at the north-west corner which might conceivably have contained some feature (garderobe?) no longer evident. Other features whose purpose is not immediately apparent are a short diagonal passage at the north-east corner of the chamber and a rectangular projection at the south-east corner.

First Floor

As already mentioned, the only entrance to the first floor of the gatehouse is the restored doorway at the west end of the south wall. This opens into a lobby with on the east the foot of a fairly commodious newel stair (diameter 1.9 m) to the second floor (the foot of the stair had been closed by a 19th century doorway but was originally open) and on the north a mural passage running half the length of the west wall; the width of the passage necessitates an

internal thickening of this section of wall. Both lobby and passage have stone slab roofs, that of the passage being carried on the west by an oversailing chamfered course.

The mural passage has two separate doorways giving access to the first floor of the gatehouse. The first, close to the entrance lobby, has a chamfered surround and a square head; the second, at the north end of the passage, has been destroyed by the rebuilding (in the 19th century?) of the northern section of the wall between the passage and first floor room. Only the "ghost" of its cut-away north jamb survives; the extent to which the wall has been rebuilt above the present timber lintel spanning the opening hints that this doorway may have had a taller and more elaborate arch than that further south. The passage is lit by the three small rectangular loops.

In its 19th century form the first floor of the gatehouse was divided into two equal-sized rooms, divided by a central stair rising eastwards from a lobby entered from the enlarged opening at the north end of the mural passage. Doorways from this lobby gave access to both rooms; the first doorway in the passage was also retained, although its medieval character was concealed by a Victorian wooden architrave. The Victorian stair has now been removed, and the chamber is now divided into two rooms by a screen.

Plaster stripping revealed no evidence of any medieval structural division or partition at this level, despite the provision of the two separate doorways. The internal wall faces are of coursed and well-squared sandstone; as in the external wall faces, the occasional break in jointing and L-shaped block does not appear to have any structural significance. The chamber had been lit by the two two-light windows on the east, which retain their original elliptical-headed rear arches, with a continuous chamfer of head and jambs. Midway between these windows is a square-headed recess or cupboard 1 m high and wide, 0.67 m deep, and 0.8 m above floor level. On the west was a smaller window (enlarged in the 1960s) which retains its original shouldered rear arch.

The first-floor chamber had been provided

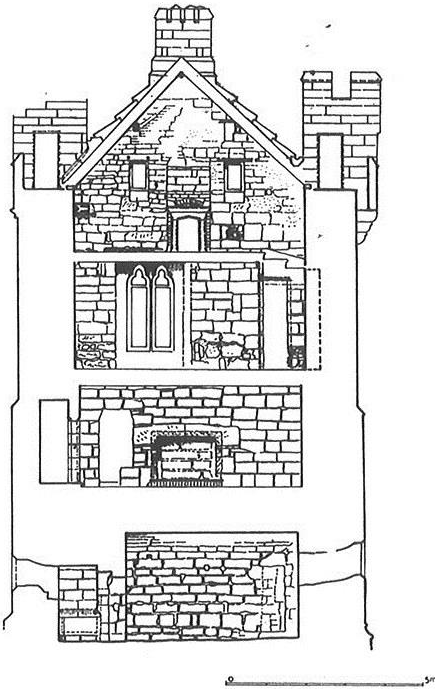


Fig. 9 Internal elevation of North wall

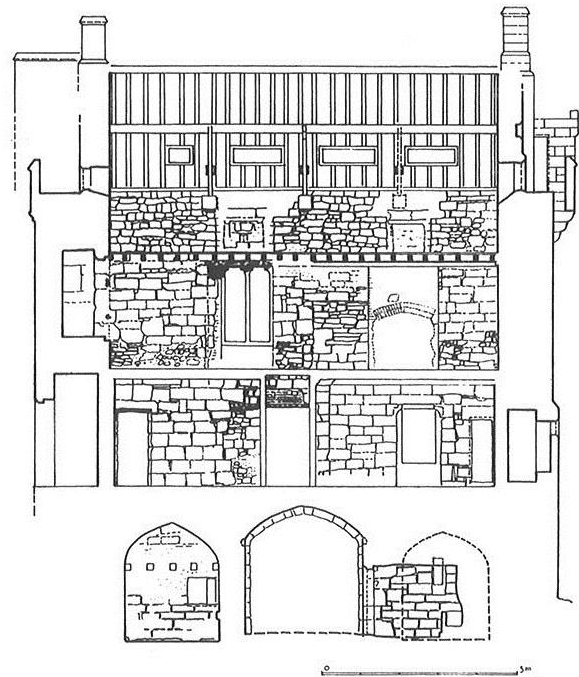


Fig. 10 Internal elevation of West wall

with fireplaces in both north and south walls. The northern fireplace retains its original opening, although this was so heavily re-cut in the 1960s that traces of the original mouldings are only visible on the west jamb. The opening is now square-headed; in its original form it may have had an elliptical or four-centred arch. The southern fireplace is now just a ragged hole in the wall; only the walling of its flue suggests that it is an original feature. The remains of a 19th or 20th century successor were removed by vandals in 1989.

In the south jamb of the southern window a blocked square-headed and chamfered doorway, its sill 0.75 m above the present floor level, gave access to an L-plan garderobe in the south-east corner of the tower. In its medieval form the window sill was stepped up 0.75 m above the general floor level, and it was from this sill that the garderobe opened. At some more recent date the garderobe floor level had been reduced to that of the main floor,

although its original function had been retained (admittedly with up-dated sanitary arrangements) and a new doorway had been cut through the east wall of the room at its south end; the original doorway and floor level have now been reinstated.

A second garderobe is situated in the opposite north-west corner of the tower. This was originally entered by a similar doorway at the north end of the west wall, although in this case there was no discrepancy in floor level; this doorway had been blocked in the 19th century (or earlier?) and the garderobe opened up again in the 1960s by the breaking of a large and rather shapeless hole through the north wall; this hole has now been blocked again, and the original access to the garderobe restored.

The medieval second-floor level was c. 1.0 m higher than at present. Evidence for the flooring arrangements has been complicated by the fact that there was an internal set-back on all

four wall faces at second-floor level, and when the floor level was lowered the resulting step at the foot of the second-floor walls was cut back flush with the wall-face above; accordingly the lower 0.8 m of each wall face is now largely rubble (and brick) patching of the exposed wall-core. Mid-way along the west wall there is a feature at this level defined by a pair of straight joints 0.3 m apart; this may have been a socket for a transverse beam. Removal of a couple of stones here disclosed a small cavity to the south, apparently heavily sooted, which may extend above the slabs roofing the first-floor mural passage; its purpose is obscure. A corresponding socket on the east, may be indicated by a cavity in the internal north jamb of the window there, infilled by a 19th-century block of timber. There are less certain traces of further beam sockets at this level in the east wall south of the window (a straight joint) and in the south wall below the north jamb of the doorway from the newel stair to the 2nd floor (a shallow cavity infilled with bricks).

Second Floor

The medieval access to the second floor was by a doorway opening from a small recess or lobby on the west of the newel stair. The lobby has a square-headed recess, probably for a lamp, on its west side; the doorway has a hollow-chamfered four-centred arch of the same type as those in the gateway passage. As it opened 0.9 m above the later second-floor level, it had been blocked up, probably in the mid-19th century, but it has now been reopened, and gives access to the floor via a small platform.

The internal stonework of the newel stair provides many good examples of mason's marks. A stone built into the wall 0.7 m above the end of the fifth step below the lobby seems to bear the remains of an incised pattern of some sort.

As on the floor below, the internal divisions at second-floor level had been re-planned in the mid-19th century, and the medieval arrangements are difficult to reconstruct. The

two-light windows in both east and west walls appear to occupy old openings, although considerably altered. The internal north jamb of the window on the west is cut straight through the wall, rather than splayed. This would appear to be a medieval feature (by contrast, the stonework of the splayed south jamb is much more roughly hacked) and would imply an internal division at this point.

At the east end of the north wall is a small garderobe, entered by a chamfered square-headed doorway (now of somewhat abnormal proportions due to the lowering of the floor level). The single-light window near the east end of the south wall is set in a recess extending the full height of the wall, and has a well-preserved stone sink or slopstone forming its internal sill; this drains to a small hole immediately below the window.

On the west side of what is now the northern room is a shallow brick projection with a 19th-century fireplace. Immediately south of this is what appears to be an infilled square-headed opening with its head 1.7 m above the present floor level. Its south jamb is immediately adjacent to the possible infilled

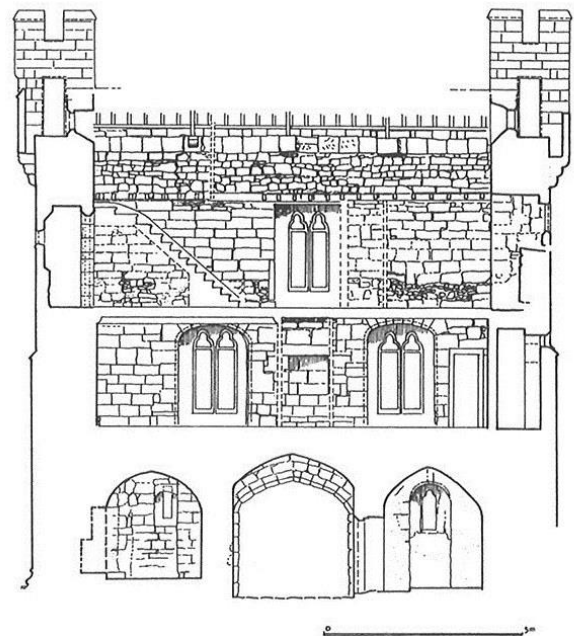


Fig. 11 *Internal elevation of East wall*

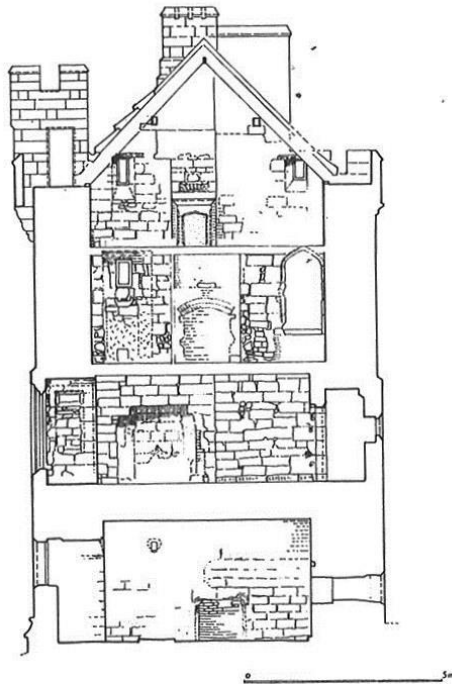


Fig. 12 *Internal elevation of South wall*

beam socket already described, and its north jamb is presumably concealed behind the fireplace projection. The infill of the opening (thinly-coursed rather irregular stone) is very different in character from both the coursed sandstone of the original wall faces and the rubble of the cut-back section. The coursed stonework above the head of the opening (which may have originally had a timber lintel) is also rather dissimilar from the larger and more typical medieval stonework to either side. The position of the opening suggests that it post-dates the change in floor level; beyond this, it is difficult to suggest either its function or date.

The Attic Floor

The stair which until recently rose to the attic from the first-floor stair head lobby was clearly later than the mid-19th century restoration, as the sawn-off stubs of 19th century floor joists were exposed alongside the stair well; the

insertion of this stair was presumably part of the 1916 works. It is not clear what sort of access to the attic there was prior to these alterations; the stair has now been replaced by a new one rising alongside the south wall from the platform in front of the 2nd-floor doorway from the newel stair.

The stoothing partitions which sub-divided the attic may have been of the same date as the stair; they have now been removed. The large squared blocks which make up the majority of the internal wall facing of the floors below only appear in the lower sections of the gable end walls; the upper sections of the walls, and the majority of the side walls, are of much poorer-quality fabric consisting of roughly-squared stones laid in irregular courses. Towards the top of the east wall is a course of large almost square blocks, quite different from anything else seen in the building.

Set against each gable end wall is a projection with a small 19th or early-20th century Gothic-arched fireplace. The small chamfered single-light windows in the gable ends (two on the south, and two with two even smaller ones above, the western bricked up, on the north) all appear 19th century externally, but those on the south have internal splays whilst those on the north are cut straight through the wall. In addition, the original sill of the window at the east end of the south wall can be seen to have been at a lower level originally, suggesting that this at least is a pre-19th century feature. The wall thickness at this end of the attic is irregular (0.78 m at the western window, 0.67 m at the eastern), also suggesting that older masonry has been retained although the wall has been re-faced externally at this level.

In the west wall are the splayed recesses of the two re-opened post-medieval windows, spanned by timber lintels (with dry rot, now removed). Ragged joints in the internal jambs suggest that the stonework of the external frames has been renewed at some time.

The mid-19th century roof structure consists of three raised queen-post trusses; with "short" principals which are carried on large projecting block corbels, except for that over the stair which has a shaped corbel.

THE STRUCTURAL HISTORY OF THE GATEHOUSE

The bulk of the fabric of the gatehouse appears to belong to a single medieval build. The surviving architectural features of the building all tally well with the mid-14th century date usually ascribed; in particular the distinctive corbelling of the parapet is almost identical to that of the Prison (1330–2) and Moot Hall at Hexham. The ruined curtain wall is said to be earlier medieval work; the junctions of this with the gatehouse have suffered too much disturbance to allow any useful comment to be made upon their relationship.

Prior to the recent removal of plaster, the mid-19th century restoration had imposed its character on the 14th century building to such an extent that virtually all evidence of any intermediate structural phases had been concealed. However, the recent removal of plaster, coupled with a consideration of historical evidence, now sheds a little more light on the post-medieval history of the gatehouse.

16th and 17th century references to the castle being in a state of decay, coupled with the sparsity of buildings on the site shown on the 1604 map, suggests that considerable parts of the castle had already been demolished by the end of the medieval period, if indeed it ever consisted of much more than keep, curtain walls and gatehouse. Erosion of the stonework of the internal wall-faces at what is now second-floor level (particularly noticeable alongside the attic stair) suggests that the gatehouse stood as a roofless ruin for some time; it doubtless suffered further damage in the Civil War siege, although its walls would seem to have remained fairly intact. Some degree of reconstruction would seem to have taken place in the late 17th or 18th century, when it was converted into a dwelling house. The attic floor may well have been inserted at this time, cutting across the tall second-floor windows on both east and west walls. The level of the first floor may well have been lowered at this time as well, to judge from the blocked opening in the internal face of the west wall which looks pre-19th century yet seems to relate to the

present rather than the medieval floor level.

The Function of the Gatehouse

The original form of the 14th century gatehouse raises several interesting questions. Unlike other contemporary castle gatehouses in Northumberland, such as Bothal, it is a relatively weak structure; there are no projecting towers or turrets, it has exposed corners which could be susceptible to mining, and the usual appurtenances of portcullis slot and murder holes in the passage vault are conspicuous by their absence. Whatever function its construction served, it was not one of enhancing the military strength of the castle.

A clue to the use of the building may be found in the unusual plan of its first floor. This would appear to have contained a single lofty chamber, entered by two separate doorways; the builders have taken considerable trouble in the construction of the mural passage to ensure that the second doorway entered at some distance beyond the first. This separation of doorways must have been occasioned by some form of custom or ceremony connected with the use of the chamber. It is tempting to see the apartment as a courtroom, bearing in mind the medieval tendency to site such chambers above gateways (cf. Hexham Moot Hall, the Hawkhead Court House (Cumbria), the Bolton Percy Gatehouse (N Yorks) etc.). The way in which the garderobe at the south-east corner is set at a higher level to the main floor suggests that there was an area of raised flooring or dais (presumably of timber) at this end of the chamber.

The width of the newel stair, and the manner in which it rises straight up from the entrance lobby, also suggests that the second-floor apartments were quite prestigious. They may however have been lodgings (cf. the warder's lodgings on the second floor of the Prison at Hexham); the slopstone implies some domestic function.

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APPENDIX: A SMALL EXCAVATION

In May 1990, as restoration of the gatehouse proceeded, part of the timber floor of the 20th-century entrance hall was removed (prior to the demolition of the hall) and an area beneath cleared of debris. Exposed features

were recorded but no structures or deposits were disturbed, as it was understood that there would be no further disturbance.

An area c. 4×2 m was examined, in the angle between the west part of the south wall the gatehouse and the inner face of the curtain wall. Immediately in front of the doorway into the gatehouse proper the footings of two stone steps were revealed; these presumably dated from the c. 1860 restoration, and had been approached by a gently-sloping ramp first surfaced with cobble setts, and later with concrete (this ramp has now been reinstated). To the east of this surface, and overlapped by the concrete, were the footings of the west face of the original curtain wall, 0.8 m in front of the present wall which at this point is a mid-19th century reconstruction considerably thinner than the original.

Adjacent to the gatehouse the medieval footings were cut into by a large rubble-filled cavity, spanned by the reconstructed curtain

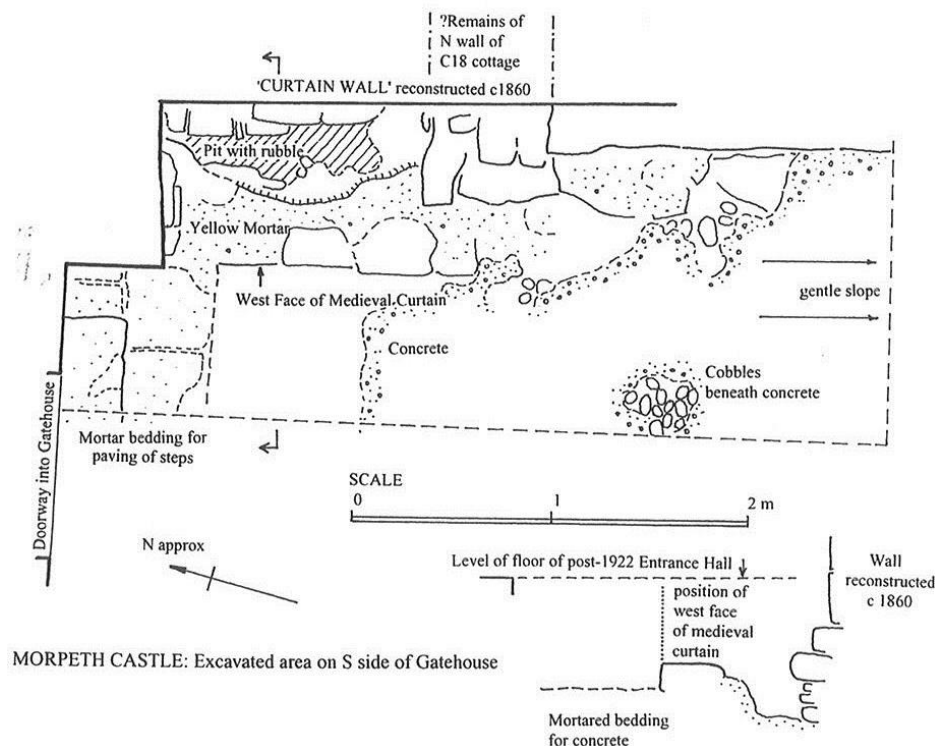


Fig. 13

wall. This feature would appear to relate to the flight of steps shown on early illustrations, rising westwards between the south face of the gatehouse and the north end of the 18th-century cottage. On the south of this gap a few stones aligned east–west may have represented the stub of the north wall of the cottage.

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NOTES

¹ Blair, C. Hunter “The Early Castles of Northumberland” *Archaeologia Aeliana* 4th series XXII (1944) 150–2.

² Bates, C. J. “The Border Holds of Northumberland” *Archaeologia Aeliana* NS XIV (1891) 11 footnote.

³ Hodgson, J. *History of Northumberland* Pt. II Vol. II (1832) 384.

⁴ *Ibid.* 385–8.

⁵ Map in Howard papers at Naworth. 1844 copy in Dept of Palaeography & Diplomatic, University of

Durham, in Howard of Naworth provisional papers map no. 65.

⁶ “Map of the Castle Farm, 1741”. Department of Palaeography & Diplomatic, University of Durham. In 1756 Valuation of Morpeth Castle Lands, M 68a 52/28.

⁷ Bowman’s plan of Morpeth Castle & Environs 1825, in Dept of Palaeography & Diplomatic, University of Durham. Howard of Naworth plans, prov. no. 119.

⁸ *Proc Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle* New Series XIV (1889) 108.

⁹ Cash book of Northumberland estate of Lord Carlisle 1854–60. Dept. of Palaeography & Diplomatic, University of Durham. Shelf 18.

¹⁰ Plan of Morpeth Castle additions 1872, in Dept. of Palaeography & Diplomatic, University of Durham, Howard family papers A 68a 100/6.

¹¹ Copy of plan with Castle Morpeth Borough Council, Planning Dept.

¹² MS volume *Morpeth Collectanea* (Northumberland County Record Office Ref. M16 B5, 102). A near-identical print is reproduced in Graham, F. *The Castles of Northumberland* (1976), 240.

¹³ *Morpeth Collectanea*, op. cit. but volume M16 B9, 256.

¹⁴ Hodgson, op. cit. facing p. 384.

¹⁵ Print reproduced in Graham, op. cit. 239.