

## Dr Sharp's History of Bamburgh Castle

- Volume NRO452/J/10, lockable leather bound

Cover inscribed "Very important memoranda in this Book respecting Bamburgh Castle-Ancient and Modern"

Handwritten in Dr Sharps hand

We are told by the Saxon Historian that Bambrough Castle was built by Ida the first King of North'd who set up for himself in the year 549. I mean by the Castle all the outworks except the Great Tower, which is undoubtedly of much earlier date than all the rest of the buildings and bids fair to have been Roman as it has most of the marks of a Roman Fabrick. 1<sup>st</sup> All the Arches in it were either flat or semi-circular. 2<sup>nd</sup> There is a fine Doric Base around the bottom. 3<sup>rd</sup> It is much of the same shape with the Great Tower in Dover Castle which is allowed to be Roman. 4<sup>th</sup> There is nothing Gothic in the whole structure even in the least degree. 5<sup>th</sup> The well within the Tower seems to have been a Roman work, having been sunk through a whinstone rock 75 ft thick, which must have been a most laborious work, when we consider it was done before the invention of gunpowder and therefore more likely to have been executed by the Romans than by any other people whatsoever.

All the stones of this Tower were brought from a Quarry 3 miles off at Sunderland Sea and are all small except some few lintels: and the latter not large.

They were probably brought on the back of the Soldiers, which if true will account for them being no larger. By crumbling some of the old Lime I find that fragments of shells were used in making it up instead of sand: which makes it bind stronger than the sharpest sand; and by little bits of Charcoal found in the Lime, it seems likely that the Lime was burnt with wood instead of Coal. Whence we may conclude that it was built at a time when there was plenty of wood in the Country but no coal mines discovered. I must indeed allow that it wants one mark of a Roman Tower viz. that there was no brick found in it was generally used in pinning the arches of such buildings; but as great plenty of a thin-bedded slaty stone found in a neighbouring quarry, much more convenient for rough penning than bricks are; we cannot suppose that the builders, whoever they were, would put themselves to the expense of brick when they had at hand a substitute much cheaper as well as more convenient for the purpose.

If this Tower, from the presumptive proofs aforementioned, should be allowed to be Roman; it must consequently have been built before Severus' Wall, in the last year of the Emperor Titus, Julius Agricola then Prefect in Britain is said to have built a Chain of Forts in proper places from the Tyne to the Tweed. It became probable at least, that Bambrough from its commanding situation may have been one of these and is the only one on the Northumberland coast where any vestiges of the Roman architecture are still to be found. The walls on the Front side are eleven feet thick and 9 feet on the other three sides. They have been built with regular scaffolding to the heath of the first storey to that height the fillings in the inside were mixed with Whinstone which was probably what came off the rock in levelling the foundations;

but there are no whinstone fillings higher up; and the walls above have been carried up without scaffolding; what the masons call overhand work; the consequence of which is, that all the walls overhand a little, the Tower being few inches broader on every side at the top than the bottom.

The original Roof was placed no higher than the top of the second storey. But the reason for the side walls being carried so much higher than the roof might be for defence, or a better look out on both the sea and the land. The Tower was afterwards covered in at the very top, probably in the Saxon times. There were no chimneys in the Tower, the only fireplace was a grate in the middle of the Great Room as appears by the stones being burnt red in the middle of the floor which is stone and supported by arches, over this fire there must have been either a cupola or hole in the roof to let out the smoak. Tis probable that charcoal only was made use of, or wood. This seems to have been the Guard Room and had a window in it near the top, 3 feet square, being the only room in the Tower that had a window in it that could be properly so called; all the other rooms having only crevices(?) or slits in the wall 6 inches broad, except in the gables of the roof in each of which was a window one foot broad.

Tis said the Romans had a kind of officers called Cornites Littoris Saxonici. It is probable that one of these presided in every Fort of importance near the seaside; that this place may have been the place of residence of one of them. But this is only offered as a conjecture. However it is certain that all the other ruins are of a much later date + in a very different style. The windows large; the tops of the windows and doors have the pointed or Gothic arch. And almost the whole built of a very different stone from that of the Tower. For when the Castle was added to the Tower it was necessary to make a ditch. In sinking this ditch after they had got through the whinstone rock, they came to a large seam of Freestone which was either unknown till then, or at least could not be wrought till the whinstone was first removed. Therefore the sinking of the ditch into the freestone rock, furnished them with stones for the building of the Castle which in general is built of much larger stones than the old Tower, though of an inferior quality + some of them more liable to waste with the weather.

There are large chimneys in all the Principal rooms. In the Kitchen which is 40ft by 30 are three very large chimneys and 4 Windows. Over each window is a stone funnel like a chimney open at the top, intended I suppose to carry off the steam. It cannot be expected that many coins should be found in a place that has so often been besieged and sometimes pillaged by soldiers. I met with 3 Roman Denarii; one of them a Vespasian. A brass coin about the size of a farthing or a (?). On one side a Rude Head full faced surrounded by a border of pellets. A copper coin of the same size but thinner. On the anterior side a Lion Rampant Reverse a cross fleurie with two pellets in each Quarter. Both sides surrounded with pellets. There was no inscription on either coin, nor ever had been any for they are both in tolerable preservation. A blank of Copper, the breadth of a half penny but thin; on which there had never been any inscription - this was probably struck in the time of a siege. Some few Scotch, Norman or old french coins were likewise found, but very few.

In a narrow passage near the top of the Old Tower, we found above 50 iron heads of arrows, rusted together into one mass. The longest of them about 7 ½ inches long. 'Tis likely they had all originally been of the same length. Some painted glass supposed to have originally belonged to the Chapel windows. The glass was not stained but the colours were rudely painted upon it. The Chapel was only discovered this last summer on throwing over the bank a prodigious quantity of sand. The length 100 feet. The Chancel is now quite clear. 36 feet long + 20 broad. The East End semi circular. The alter which we have likewise found, did not stand close to the East End but in the centre of the Semicircle; with a walk around it of 3 feet broad. Along which 'tis supposed, the Priests used to carry the Host in procession around the alter. The font is still remaining, all over carved. There appears nothing Gothic in the whole building, therefore it must have been a Saxon Church. And probably dedicated to St Peter; for the Saxon Historians make mention of such a Church within the Castle, and the coin found with a key on the reverse as mentioned above, seems to strengthen the conjecture.

The repairs of the Tower were begun in 1757. The draw well was accidentally found in Dec 1770 in sinking the floor of the Cellar. Is 145ft deep Rock all the way. The Castle stands on a rock about 150 ft high above the watermark. The Castle stands on rather more than 6 acres of ground, according to a late Survey.

Books in which B.C. is mentioned

Magna Britannia 2v under Northumb'd p 630

Cambden

Mr Pennats Tour

Echards....History of England

Wallis's History of Northumb'd

Ridpaths Border History

An account of the uses to which the Old Roman Tower in Bambrough Castle is at present appropriated.

A School for Boys who are taught Greek, Latin and English by the Head Master and Writing, Arithmetick, Navigation and other Branches of Mathmatick, by the Second Master.

A School for Girls who are taught Reading, Palinwork, Finework, Knitting etc by a Mistress and writing and Arithmatick by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Master .

60 Girls and 60 Boys allowed to be taught on the Charity; no more admitted without a particular Order from the Trustees unless paid for by their parents. The number of scholars uncertain but generally near 100, sometimes more. All children are received (till the number be complete) whose parents do not farm above 10 a year or who have not a certain income of ten pounds per annum. Any children that are absent above six days in a quarter without leave (except only in case of sickness or extreme

bad weather are struck off from the list for 6 months. The Head Master and the Mistress have no certain salary but are paid in proportion to the number of their scholars.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Master receives half price for every boy and every girl that he teaches.

A Bell on the South Turret for the use of the schools, which is rung out every morning at six in the summer and seven in the winter and tolled at school hours.

It is also rung out at 8 o'clock at night all year around.

-Habitation for the three Masters

- Habitation for the School Mistress

Beds, Bedding, Tables, Benches and necessary furniture for each, and all their coals gratis

.....  
Two large Granaries for Corn for the Poor  
(Besides two very large Granaries in the town)

A Large Sale Room with Chests for different kinds of corn and for meal to be retailed to the poor. Who are supplied at the following prices (two days in a week) though the markets be ever so high viz Wheat at 4=6 per bushel-Pease and Beans at 3=0-Meal at 4=0-Barley at 2/6 and Oats at 2=0

A Small Jack hoisted on the East Turret on the Sale Days to give notice whenever a person attends to sell corn

2. An iron spout from each granary through which the corn is conveyed to the Sale Room

3. A Crane from the North Turret worked by a horse below, by which the corn is raised to the Granaries

NB In a year when Corn has been dear, this Charity has been extended through a tract of country near 40 miles in length for no persons who are poor to be excluded Sailors and Dragoons are allowed to buy corn whenever they come.

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An account of the Signals Stores and Provisions for Seamen+ Ships or \ vessels in distress having been already printed at the request of the Master of the Trinity House, is not inserted here

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A Court Room where Lord Crewe's Trustees hold their Courts Leet and Baron and Tenants pay their rents

A Dining Room

A Kitchen-

A Brewhouse- for the Court Dinners etc

Rooms for the Use of any of the Trustees

A Large Iron Closet fixt with strong Bolts through a four ft wall, where in the Title Deeds of the Estates, Awards, Securities etc are kept

A strong Chest wherein the plans and Surveys of the Estates, Seals, Weights and Measures, Compass, Theodolite and other Instruments are kept.

A Stone Closet or Repository for letters, Accounts, Receipts and Writings of various kinds belonging to the Trust. As also for the Reception of such deeds as may be deposited there by private persons as in a place of security, the most likely means having been used to secure it from fire and other accidents.

A Set of Standard Brass weights aaand Measures whereby the weights and measures of persons who keep shops or sell ale or other liquors within the Manor are regulated being tried and stampd at the Castle

.....  
Case of Elastic vegetable Bottles fitted up for all the different purposes for which they have hitherto been discovered to be useful

The Ormskirk Medicine for the Bite of a Mad dog constantly kept for the use of all persons who shall apply for it.

The like medicine as prepared for Brutes

A Blue Flag with a Union Quarter hung out whenever the Surgeon attends to admit or dress the patients.

Poor Women (within the Parish of Bambrough) delivered at their own houses on sending half a guinea to the Bailiff at the Castle, to be applied towards paying the Man Midwife. This sum to be always insisted on before the Surgeon sets out, in order that he may not be sent for on every common occasion to the prejudice of the Country Midwives but only in difficult labours

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(Following entry in different hand to Dr Sharp's)

Bambrough Castle on acct. of its situation being appointed by the Coast Committee, the First of the five alarm Posts on the Northumberland Coast, different flags of 32 feet by 18 and a large broad Red Pendant are kept in readiness for making a variety of signals as circumstances may require. By which means 'tis supposed that a signal may be communicated 50 miles to the South in 15 or 16 minutes, and above 20 miles to the North (into Scotland) in less than half the time. For this purpose a day Watch is constantly kept near 8 months of the year; the watchman goes upon the Observatory

once every hour and keeps a journal of all that passes; and one or more armed patrols walk along the coast from 10 at night till sunrise; and speak with the next patrol at the extremity of their District.

A Beacon on the North Turret where two Tar-Barrels are constantly kept, ready to be lighted in case of alarm by night.

Four Swivels, two Wall pieces and a small brass Mortar on the East Turret of the Great Tower, which together with a four nine pounder Two Twenty pounders and a long thirty two Pounder mounted below on the outer wall of the Castle may possibly cover such ships or vessels as shall be driven into shoal water or run ashore under the Castle in time of war; so as perhaps to save them from being cut out or plundered or burnt by the armed Boats of any single Privateer; in case the Enemy have not attempted to land or such landing be not made good.

.....  
(in Dr Sharp's writing) A Barrack with Beds and Bedding and all necessary Furniture fitted up for the reception of Ten Soldiers of War

.....  
Three pages in Latin follow (not Dr Sharp's hand)

.....  
(in Dr Sharp's hand)

### **Account of the Nine Pounder**

This gun belonged to a Dutch 40 Gun Ship which was lost on one of the islands probably.....in the year 1704. Lay 40 years at the bottom of the sea, till the year 1744, when one or two divers (Nm and Richd Evans, Father and son) coming to look for wreck brought it up, along with a brass six pounder, which latter was carried away to be sold or melted down, but this nine pounder being left on the sands near Monks House was in time covered up and forgot, till by an uncommon high tide in 1767, the sand over it being washed away, it was discovered after being sunk in the sands for 23vyears.

The Property was in Mr Green a Lessee of the Islands under the dean and Chapter. He made me a present of it on my paying the expenses of taking it up. It was proved by Mr Wooler (?) the Engineer with 4/16 (lb?) powder and+ brought to Bambrough Castle, and a ship carriage provided for it. It has been hammered to bring off the rust, and has been frequently scaled and painted. Mr Wooler supposes it originally weighed about 1 ton and a half. The Chamber is the smoothest part of the inside; probably owing to it having been charged when it was sunk in the sand, for a charge was found in it. For 13 years past it has been used as a Signal Gun when ships are in distress or driven ashore, and for several other purposes. It has now been loaded with 4lb of powder but generally with 3lb. On Sept 4<sup>th</sup> 1780 it was fired the 118<sup>th</sup> since. I got it this last time with Ball. It has since been sometimes fired with Whinstone to bring off the misting the middle of where it straitest, but without much effect (DN?)

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(DN There follows 20 pages of history in Dr Sharp's hand, relating the Anglo Saxon history of the Castle, until the Wars of the Roses. He quotes his source as F. Grosse, among others. However, the account of the siege of Bambrough in 1464 contains the following account, the part in italics I have never read elsewhere-)

"Sir Ralph Grey knowing that his case was desperate, defended the Castle of Bambrough until the end of July. This Castle was besieged by the 2 Earls, of Warwick and Northumberland, and a Tower of it being beaten down by their cannon, so crushed and stunned the Governor in its fall, that he was taken up for dead, and the Garrison instantly surrendered the Fortress. But, having recovered, he was carried prisoner to York; and judgement being pronounced against him, by the Earl of Worcester High Constable of England; he was executed as a Traitor. NB *Previous to his execution everything was ready for his degradation from Knighthood, and particularly the Master Cook with his Apron and knife, to strike off the spurs close by the heels; but this part of the punishment was remitted by the King, on consideration of his noble grandfather who suffered trouble for the Kings most noble predecessors-* The Earl of Warwick advancing from Bamburgh to Berwick took the town, and laid waste the adjacent country