

III.

SKIPNESS CASTLE. BY ANGUS GRAHAM, F.S.A. SCOT., AND
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I. INTRODUCTION.

Skipness Castle (fig. 1) is familiar to antiquaries as an interesting and well-preserved example of a castle of the second rank. It was fully described and illustrated, over thirty years ago, by MacGibbon and Ross in their monumental *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, vol. iii. (1889) pp. 64-75, which may be taken as the standard account, and is indeed the only one hitherto attempted. The present writers, working under the advantage of greater visibility and ease of accurate measurement due to the removal by the late R. C. Graham in 1898 of the farm-buildings which, since the eighteenth century, had encumbered the site both inside and out, have found it necessary to abandon so many of their predecessors' conclusions as to demand a restatement of the whole case. Plans on a large scale, and more accurate than any previously made, were therefore prepared, and a thorough study of the remains undertaken, in which the authors were fortunately able to enlist the help of skilled architects; a number of new facts came to light, and the following paper was written.

Skipness Bay¹ is a slightly concave stretch of shingle about 1500 yards long, extending from the rocks of Skipness Point to the west end of the village; a large burn enters the sea at the west end of the beach, and a smaller one about the middle. The beach terminates in a gravel bank, behind which the ground was in ancient times probably swampy. Inland the ground rises gently; on the west to join the general eastward slope of the Kintyre peninsula, on the east to form a small triangular plateau at an altitude of about 150 feet, lying between the village, pier, and Point of Skipness.

The immediate site of the castle is a gentle slope of successive raised beaches with a general south-south-west aspect. The castle stands 230 yards from the sea at an elevation of 40 feet; the artificial terraces lying to south and west were made in the nineteenth century. From the top of the keep there is a perfect view of the beach, Kilbrannan Sound, with both its Kintyre and Arran coasts, a portion of the sea between Arran and

¹ See O.S., Scotland, 1-inch sheets 20, 28, 29; 6-inch, Argyllshire, sheets CCXIII. N.E., S.E. A general description of the district has been given by the first-named author in the *Proceedings*, vol. liii. pp. 77-80.

Bute, and, on the inland side, up to $1\frac{1}{2}$ mile of the old road from West Kintyre. The only direction in which observation is bad is the north, but there is not enough dead ground to cover the movements of a hostile force within 550 yards of the castle in any direction. The smaller burn above mentioned, which is practically never dry, flows within 60 yards of the castle, and was always within easy reach except during an actual siege.

The lower course of this burn runs between artificial banks, and

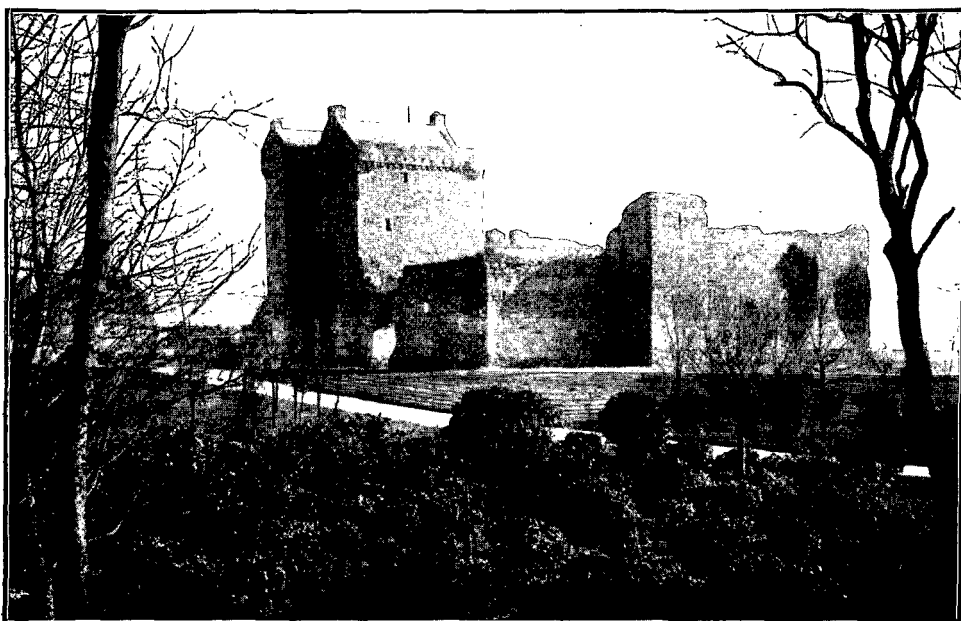


Fig. 1. Skipness Castle from the North-west.

may once have given rise to a little marshy ground on what is now its left bank, about 100 yards from the sea; but this is too far from the castle to be a real defensive feature under archery fire, and could always have been turned, out of range, on the east. MacGibbon and Ross speak of a ditch and mound to north and a moat to south; but of these there is nowhere a trace, and the evidence which they quote does not suggest that traces were ever visible.

The flat ground about the present village must even in ancient times have been agriculturally valuable, and the mouth of the larger burn would always provide shelter for a few small boats, though otherwise the beach is exposed and there is no safe anchorage. The very place-

name, however, points to the existence of a sea-faring population here since before the beginning of the Middle Ages.¹ The strategic value of the site is small, and its military aspect may be summed up by saying that the castle is capable enough of looking after itself but does not appear to be looking after anything else.

The buildings, alterations, demolitions, and rebuildings of perhaps eight centuries, of which the erection of the farm-steading late in the eighteenth century was certainly the most destructive, have left a fabric which was never planned as a whole and does not afford sufficient data for a complete reconstruction of the castle as it stood in any single period. The stead-building in especial, though handsomely complimented by a contemporary writer² on *The Beauties of Scotland*, destroyed every vestige of the buildings which till then had stood round the inside of the courtyard, cutting the partition walls back flush and covering the detail of masonry with plaster or a thick tenacious whitewash; and since the whole has been built without underground foundations, the plan cannot be recovered by excavation, though this was attempted by the late owner. The whole structure, therefore, is now reduced to a bare enceinte with a keep in its north-east corner. These are, fortunately, in very good preservation, standing their full height almost everywhere, and under close inspection yield enough evidence for a conclusive reconstruction of the stages by which they have been built, and even for some attempt at dating each individual phase of this history. In the absence of written records bearing on the fabric, the authors are not inclined to attach great importance to their attempts at solving the second of these problems. Since excavation has proved fruitless and early descriptions are wholly lacking, the attempt to make the existing walls tell their own story is the only means by which that story can be determined; and it is therefore unlikely that any materials better than those now at hand will ever become available.

II. THE REMAINS.

The castle as it stands to-day is an oblong enclosure of about 27 by 40 yards, the regularity of whose plan is disturbed by three projecting

¹ O.N. Skipa-nes, ship-point; corrupted early to Schepehinche (1261), Schyphinche (1262), Seybinche (1265), Skipinche (1495), Skippeneische (1620), and other forms still represented by the modern G. pronunciation, Sgiobanis (=Shkeependish). The modern written form is a recorruption of this, originating perhaps with the Skibbenes of T. Pont's map (1600), and established certainly by 1756. Port Sgiobanis, in Colonsay, retains the correct G. spelling of the same name.

² ". . . (barracks) now converted, with great propriety, into a handsome court of offices. These, with other improvements both within and without the castle, have a very pleasant effect; exhibiting to the eye, at one view, modern elegance and ancient grandeur happily combined together."—Forsyth, *Beauties of Scotland*, Edinburgh, vol. v. (1808) p. 451.

towers, namely at the north-east and south-east angles and near the centre of the west side. Ignoring these projections, the external measurements of the enclosure are: north side 82 feet 8 inches, east side 132 feet, south side 78 feet 9 inches, and west side 119 feet 6 inches. The north-west corner alone is a true right angle, the north-east being 87°, the south-east slightly less, and the south-west 94°. The thickness of the curtain-wall is fairly constant: on the north it is uniformly 6 feet 3 inches, on the east about 6 feet 10 inches; the south curtain diminishes from 7 feet 8 inches at its east end to 6 feet 10 inches at the south-west corner. The west curtain for two-thirds of its length preserves a thickness of about 7 feet 3 inches, but north of the west tower it is only 6 feet 7 inches. The east curtain stands 32 feet high to the parapet-walk; the others, while not so well preserved, seem to have always been a foot or more lower. The embattled parapet was 6 feet high and 2 feet 4 inches thick; each battlement measured about 3 by 5 feet on the east, though elsewhere they seem to have been slightly larger. The whole castle is built of local mica-schist, with quoins and details of red sandstone probably brought from the north end of Arran.

The castle was entered through a gateway in the south curtain, whose centre is some 30 feet from the south-west corner. The entrance, which is 9 feet wide and 9 feet 10 inches deep, is pierced through a gateway-tower projecting some 2 feet from the face of the wall. From a chamber above the gate the portcullis was operated, and was defended by a machicolation; lateral windows of cruciform design served to enfilade the curtain-wall from the same chamber. Another entrance was by a postern in the east wall; the archway in the centre of the north wall is modern.

The north-eastern corner of the enclosure is occupied by the keep. This is a tower measuring externally about 32 by 36 feet, consisting of a vaulted basement, three upper storeys, an attic whose floor no longer exists, and a parapet-walk with a capehouse. The basement is entered by a round-headed door 2 feet 10 inches wide in the centre of its south side. Opposite this is a loophole 8 inches by 10, opened in the back of a recess which represents a walled-up square window. Another square window, also walled up, is externally visible in the east wall; inside only the lower part of its jambs can now be seen, the upper part being covered by the vaulting. There has also been a window, measuring 6½ by 8 inches, high up on the west side; this also is now blocked by the vaulting. Below the springing of the vault on the west side the wall batters strongly, its footing being 2 feet in advance of the springing, though only 4 feet below it; this batter, as we shall see later, is a plinth dating from a period before the keep was built. In

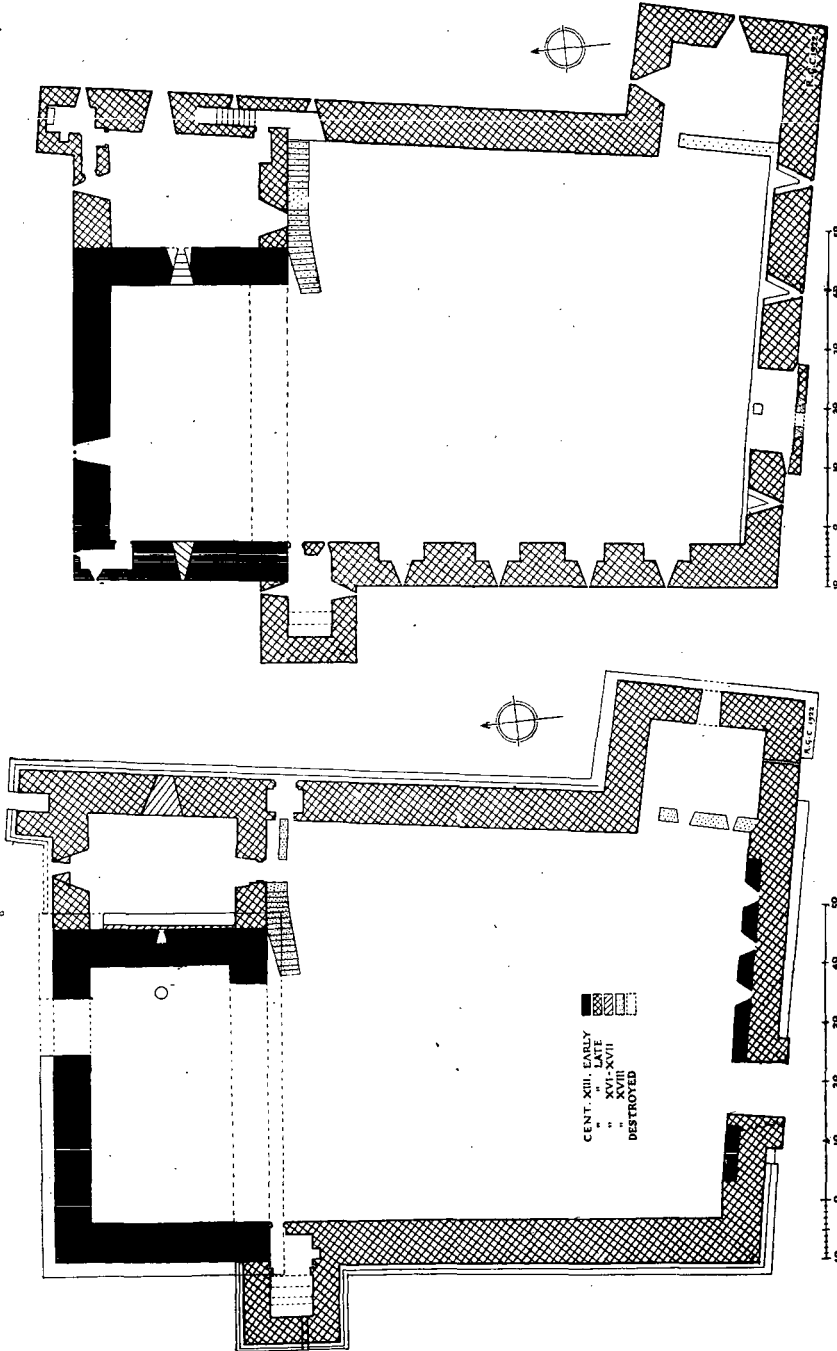


Fig. 3. Plan of First Floor.

Fig. 2. Plan of Ground Floor.

the north-west corner a shoot 3 feet 4 inches wide leads to the room above. It is clear that the small west window is the oldest of all these apertures; that the door and the two square windows were opened at some late date when the room, hitherto a mere cellar, was converted to more domestic purposes; and that the blocking of two windows by the insertion of a barrel-vault and the reduction of the third to the size of a musketry loophole represent a still later alteration.

The first floor of the keep is entered by a door in the south-east corner, reached by an external staircase. Staircase and door alike are modern, and the original entrance was probably by a door where the tall window now is in the south wall; in old photographs, and to a certain extent even to-day, traces of plaster show where an external stair has led up to this opening in a line parallel to, but west of, the modern external stair. The first-floor room is the same width as the basement, allowing for space taken up by the springing of the vault on either side; but it is 6 inches longer owing to an offset in the south wall, designed to carry the floor before the basement was vaulted. In the west wall there are traces of two windows, one above the other, and both now built up. The lower window came down to floor-level and rose to a height of only 3 feet 9 inches. The walling-up masonry is only 1 foot thick, and the window can therefore be studied from outside. It is a round-arched opening 4 feet 2 inches wide and 8 feet 3 inches high, with a sill 9 feet 9 inches above ground. In width it narrows towards the interior of the keep; but 3 feet in, the upper part of the side-cheeks begins to splay outward again, the lower part continuing to contract as before. The result is, that the lower part, by the time it penetrates the wall, is only 8 inches wide, and forms the small west window above described in the basement; the upper part, widened to 4 feet 6 inches, forms an embrasure of that width at floor-level in the first-floor room of the keep. This curious feature can only be explained as having been originally a window 8 inches wide opening eastward in an earlier building standing west of the present keep. It was a first-floor window, the floors of this early building being lower than the corresponding floors of the keep. When the keep was built the lower part of this window was turned into a window for the new cellar; the upper part was adapted for use as a first-floor window by cutting out in its sides a splayed embrasure facing west, and inserting sill, lintel, and wooden window-frame. Sockets for these, and the plaster of the cheeks, are still visible.

Above this is another walled-up window, originally a rectangular opening 9 inches wide and 4 feet or, probably, more in height. Its sill is 8 feet 6 inches above the floor, and the jambs and sill visible

inside the keep are clearly the outer opening. The head, now gone, may have been a straight lintel or an arch. The inner opening, a pair of jambs 4 feet 1 inch apart with the ends of window-seats showing between them, can be seen on the outside of the keep; indicating that we have here a second-floor window of the same early building whose first-floor window has just been described.

In the north wall a narrow window has been pierced, and from an arched opening in its eastern side a mural passage 8 feet long leads to a garderobe in the north-east tower, with a window in its eastern side and an aumbry in its western. More direct access to the same garderobe is obtained through a door in the corner of the room; but this is a late addition to the plan, put in perhaps when the window was fitted with a chimney-flue for the insertion of a brazier or other heating apparatus.

The east wall has a large square window, obviously a late addition, and in the south-east corner is a recess in which is the door leading to the straight mural stair going up to the second floor. The modern entrance to the keep is at the foot of this stair.

The second storey consists of a single chamber the same size as that beneath it, entered by a door at the top of the mural stair. The doorway has originally been a pointed arch 4 feet 2 inches wide, but this has been narrowed to a square-headed opening 2 feet 9 inches wide. The passage into which this door opens has been cut off from the stairs by a door placed exactly at the stair-head, and opening into a recess cut in the east wall, over the upper steps. It seems probable that this door was dismantled when the former doorway was narrowed and a door hung there in place of a mere curtain. The passage is lit by a small window, south of which a red stone quoin runs right through the wall and seems at first sight to be one side of a larger window; but it is actually one end of a battlement now incorporated into the wall, since this floor of the keep is on a level with the parapet-walk of the curtain-wall. At the north end of the passage a newel stair begins, giving access to the third floor.

The second-floor room has windows at the south-east and north-west corners, and formerly had a cruciform window in the north wall, opening by way of a mural passage into a garderobe in the tower, like the corresponding window below; but the passage has been blocked up and the window turned into a fireplace. The garderobe has three cruciform windows, and a shoot from the garderobe above, in the form of an oblong pier of rough masonry, fills its north-east corner and is an obvious addition to the plan.

Externally the north wall of this room shows two built-up openings,

one on each side of the cruciform window. At first sight these seem to be square windows, in spite of the absence of lintels; but there are no internal jambs, and one of them would only have lit the mural passage, which, when the square windows were being built, was apparently already blocked by the flue from the room below. The openings in question thus cannot be windows, and are in fact embrasures between battlements which existed here before the keep was built.

The third-floor room is entered by a pointed arch from the newel stair, and is 1 foot wider than those beneath, its floor being carried by an offset in the east wall. A square window in the south wall has been converted into a fireplace; a west window, with seats, is still open; and a north window, with mural passage to the garderobe, is partly blocked by chimney-flues from below. The garderobe has one window, facing north.

From this floor a ladder gave access to an attic in the gabled roof, lit by a small south window. The floor of the attic has gone, but the state of the walls sufficiently shows that it cannot have been reached by a door from the stair.

The tower is crowned by a parapet 1 foot 6 inches thick, corbelled out about 6 inches over the edge of the walls, and extending into bartisans at three corners and in the centre of the south side. The fourth or north-east corner, being the top storey of the garderobe tower, is separately roofed to form a capehouse, with an aumbry in its west side, another in its south-east corner, a fireplace in the north wall, and a garderobe corbelled out to the north-east.

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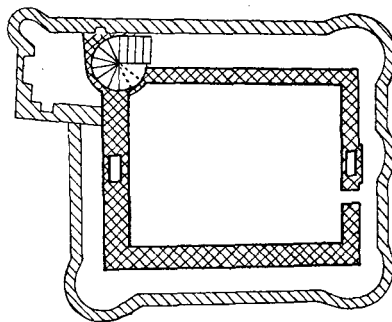
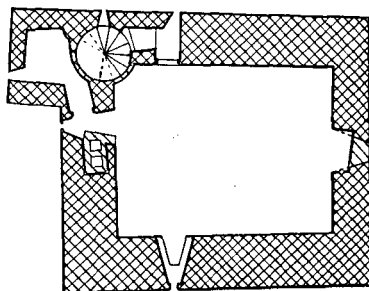
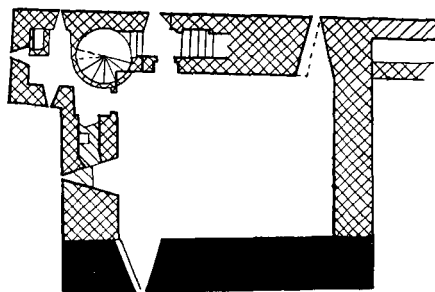


Fig. 4. Second and Third Floors and Parapet-walk of Keep (north to the left).

The exterior of the keep shows unmistakable signs of having been built at different periods. Apart from questions of style, which would place the main fabric early and the square windows, corbelled parapet, and gables late, these signs are as follows:—(1) Battlements incorporated into the wall at second-floor level; (2) windows in the west wall originally designed to look eastwards; (3) quoins *in situ* about 6 feet from the west end of the north and south walls, with which must be associated the plinth inside the basement and a continuation of the same plinth along the western end of the north and south walls, together with the broken-off end of a wall running westward from its south-west angle.

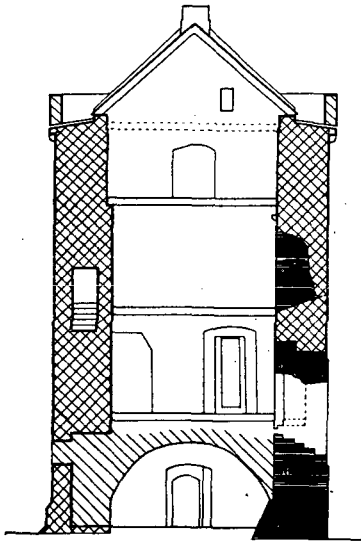


Fig. 5. Section through Keep.

Of these evidences, (1) shows that the keep was built upon a pre-existing curtain-wall; (2) and (3) show that it was built up against the east wall of a pre-existing building to the west of it, which was dismantled when it was built. This building was not only earlier than the present keep; it is also shown by the quoin at its own north-east angle to have been built before the curtain-wall was contemplated. We thus get a series of structures, each of which constitutes not only an addition but an afterthought:—

- (a) A building lying west of the present keep;
- (b) the curtain-wall, of which the garderobe tower to second-floor height forms part;
- (c) the keep.

The east curtain south of the keep is a plain wall crowned with battlements. These seem to be smaller than those elsewhere remaining, and are of local mica-schist instead of red sandstone; these peculiarities are probably due to repairs rather than to original diversity of structure. The wall is pierced by a postern 3 feet 4 inches wide, a square-headed door with a chamfered lintel, now gone, and a relieving arch above. Inside the door-jambs the doorway expanded to 6 feet wide, thus forming a small mural chamber. The features of the postern are late, apparently seventeenth century or not much earlier; but the existence of an early postern here is suggested by the presence of a window of early type directly above it, being the only window in the east curtain, which may have been reached by a wooden gangway from the door of the keep and used for defending the postern. It is, however, possible

that this is the only surviving window of a building which, before the present keep was built, occupied its site and extended a little way further south. That there was such a building is suggested by the existence of the garderobe tower; and it seems best to suppose that the window in question is a relic of it and is unconnected with the postern, which is therefore an addition of perhaps the sixteenth or seventeenth century.

The parapet-walk was reached by a stair at the south end of the curtain, of which the topmost flight of seven straight steps is still visible; the lower part may have been a newel stair, and traces of it perhaps exist in an irregular block of masonry at ground-level.

The south-east tower has been a three-storey building 19 feet 8 inches long internally from north to south. Its breadth is doubtful. The existing partition-wall, which makes it 14 feet 10 inches, is probably modern; and the shape of the south window on the second floor suggests that the original width, at this level at any rate, was 9 feet 9 inches. The basement was provided with a water-conduit cut through the south wall, the plinth outside being cut away to allow a cart to approach and discharge water into a basin, from which it flowed into the castle. As there are no signs of a water-tight cistern, the water was probably stored in butts. The first floor has windows facing north and east; the second floor has them facing north, east, and south, the last having window-seats and having its western cheek cut off by a right-angled face instead of continuing its oblique angle to the end, which suggests that it here came into contact with the fourth wall of the room. The suggestion is borne out by the position of the entrance to the garderobe in the north wall, which is unnaturally forced eastward in order to bring it within the same line. The garderobe consisted of two parts: the garderobe proper, now blocked up, and a little anteroom lit by a separate window. The rather large windows and good masonry of the south-east tower suggest that it contained some of the best rooms in the castle.

The south-east tower, together with the south curtain as far as the gateway, shows certain peculiar features. It has plain windows 6 inches wide and chamfered externally, instead of the 3-inch cruciform slits usual elsewhere; its plinth is a plain slope of mica-schist instead of the stepped red sandstone plinth which is normal in the curtain-wall; and it meets the east curtain in a straight joint which proves it later in

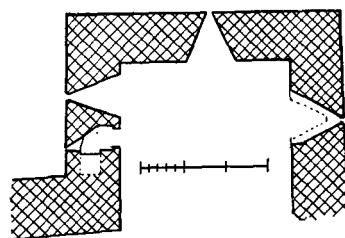


Fig. 6. South-east Tower, Second Floor (north to the left).

date than the curtain. On the other hand, the rest of its architectural details are of the same period as those of the curtain-wall generally, and therefore, though it is probably an addition to the original plan, it is one made very soon after the main building.

The south curtain, omitting the gateway, which has been described above, is remarkable for the presence of three round-headed arches, resembling walled-up windows, on its inner face at ground-level. Excluding the two late square openings in the keep, there are no other ground-floor windows in the castle, and never have been; moreover, these show no external jambs, and their sides if produced would meet at considerably less than half-way through the wall. That they are windows and not recesses, but windows in an earlier and thinner wall, is proved by the discovery of red sandstone quoins in the right position for their outer jambs on the supposition that they pierced a wall about 2 feet 6 inches thick. This has been an earlier wall incorporated in the south curtain of the castle. It can be traced for a length of 54 feet 6 inches, beginning close to the south-east tower and ending at a well-marked angle in the face of the curtain 6 feet from the south-west corner. The wall so traced has clearly been the south wall of an isolated building. Beside the three windows, one jamb of the door is still visible west of the gateway. It seems clear that the line of the enceinte was deliberately drawn so as to incorporate the south wall of this building, which explains the irregularity of the angles. It is also noteworthy that this wall shows a style of building unlike the usual style of the curtain-walls and more like that described below at the north-west angle (p. 277, 12 lines from bottom).

A range of buildings ran right along the south curtain. East of the gateway their first storey was lit by two 6-inch windows with seats; west of the gate, by a single cruciform slit also with seats. The portcullis-chamber above the gate formed part of the first-floor buildings, from which it seems to have been entered by two wide pointed arches and not shut off by any kind of doorway. Above this level ran the usual parapet-walk with battlements, whose red sandstone quoins are still visible.

The west curtain falls into two parts, separated by the west tower. The southern part, 70 feet long, was furnished with a range of buildings lit on the first floor by a series of four similar windows, all 3-inch cruciform slits without window-seats placed in recesses about 3 feet deep and 7 feet 6 inches wide, the measurements varying only slightly from window to window. It is tempting to identify these as the windows of the great hall; but this would give a hall of unnatural length for so small a castle—72 feet as against 65 feet at Bothwell and 72 at Kildrummie—and the position of the gateway makes anything like a commensurate

breadth impossible. If this was the hall, it was probably subdivided by wooden partitions.

The west tower, like that on the north-east, is merely a garderobe tower. It contained three garderobes, echeloned with the lowest inside and the highest outside. At ground-level there is an aumbry in the south wall, and beyond this a corbel at each side supported the ground-floor garderobe fitting; a vertical slot in front of each corbel being evidently designed to hold a board on edge. Immediately behind these corbels are the springings of an arch, now broken away, which once supported a cross-wall 2 feet thick. On this wall the first-floor garderobe was mounted, and behind it was a shoot about 1 foot 10 inches deep and extending the whole width of the tower. Beyond the shoot and at a higher level the springings of another and similar arch are visible; this supported a second cross-wall which served the second-floor garderobe, and beyond which was a similar shoot. Finally, at the foot of the west wall a drain 10 inches wide carried off liquid matter through the wall. The second-floor garderobe, it should be observed, opened on to the parapet-walk and rose like a turret above the general level of the curtain.

It has been mentioned that one end of a broken-off wall is visible at the south-west corner of the keep. The other end of the same vanished wall can be seen immediately north of the doors which give access to the ground floor and first floor of the west tower. It is clear that this wall was once continuous, and enclosed an area of 43 feet by 23 feet 6 inches, lying to the north of it. The walls surrounding this area were uniform in several ways. They were all between 6 feet 2 inches and 6 feet 7 inches thick; they were all built on a plain sloping plinth 2 feet to 2 feet 6 inches wide and topped with a course of red stones; their windows have round instead of pointed internal arches; and their masonry, so far as it survives, has a character of its own, being coursed alternately with thick and thin stones, the thicker courses often packed with small flat stones set vertically. All four corners of this enclosure are visible: the north-east and south-east in the walls of the keep, as already described, the north-west standing free, and the south-west at first-floor level inside the western tower. We have now to describe the west wall of this enclosure. It presents no features except a walled-up window on the first floor, of the same type as that directly opposite to it in the west wall of the keep, and a garderobe of rough workmanship and perhaps of late date in the north-west angle. But both here and in the north curtain and in the west wall of the keep a 3-inch offset can be seen 8 feet 6 inches above the ground, showing that this enclosure had floors at that level; and traces of a second offset, together with the upper window in the keep, indicate a second storey at 21 feet.

The north curtain, except for the modern gateway, is simply the north wall of the same enclosure. Its only remarkable feature is a first-floor window which now looks like a single round-headed opening, but on closer inspection is seen to have contained two pointed lights elegantly moulded and divided by a slender mullion.

III. HISTORICAL CONCLUSIONS.

The above description of the remains makes it impossible to accept the only account hitherto published of the castle's architectural history, namely, that of MacGibbon and Ross. By them it was supposed that the original castle consisted of the southern two-thirds of the enceinte; that the north-west corner was added later and the keep built last of all. Had this been so, the unmistakable proofs that the keep is built upon a pre-existing curtain-wall, and that the north-west corner was built not only before the keep but before the southern part of the enceinte, would have been absent. In point of fact they were not noticed by those authors; who also missed the significance of the blocked windows in the south curtain, and through failure to plot them correctly imagined that they could have penetrated the existing curtain. Again, if their view had been correct a number of features would have existed which are absent: the wall from the postern to the west tower would have been constant in thickness and style and would have had a plinth to northward; quoins would be visible in the east wall 6 to 8 feet north of the postern, and so on.

The only theory that can be made to square with the facts above set forth is as follows:—There were originally two buildings close together, a small castle and a non-defensive building a little south of it. These were then linked up by an enceinte-wall—the present enceinte—in which the original small castle—the present north-west angle—acted as keep, the southern building being demolished except for its south wall. Afterwards the original castle also was partially demolished, and the present keep built upon its east wall and the north-east angle of the enceinte. The details of this process will now be stated, together with their historical context so far as that can be made out.

The earliest castle, of which remains are now visible, was an oblong enclosure 42 feet 10 inches by 23 feet 8 inches internally, with walls from 6 feet 2 inches to 6 feet 7 inches thick. These walls were solidly built with excellent mortar, and were so far homogeneous in style and fabric that their remains are clearly recognisable in the west wall of the keep and the north-west corner of the enceinte. The castle was probably entered from the south. Robert Forsyth, in *The Beauties of*

Scotland, vol. v. (1808) p. 451, describes the south wall as still existing in his time "with a large gate in the middle . . . in the Gothic style," and this may well have been the gate of the original castle. In any case, the gate would naturally be on the south, because an enceinte added to an existing castle would naturally be drawn on the same side as the entrance. Three first-floor windows and one on the second floor still exist, and are rather remarkable for the good style of their work; and the offsets show that the floor-levels were at 8 feet 6 inches and 21 feet above the ground. There is no positive proof of a third storey, and the walls may have terminated in battlements about 35-40 feet from the ground; but from analogy and from the relation of the building to the later enceinte we should expect a third storey.

This was an isolated building, without even a moat round it; but 20 yards away to the south was another smaller stone building overshadowed by it and of a very different character. This was a long and perhaps narrow building, low in the roof, and having thin walls and several windows low down: it was well built and plastered internally, and was therefore neither a defensible point nor any kind of mere farm-building. It can only be explained as a chapel; the more so, as it was entered by a door at the west end of its south wall and had windows grouped about its east end. East of these windows again there is still visible something that may be the remains of a piscina; but it is too much weathered for safe identification. In any case, it seems clear that we have here an early chapel of a familiar type, with windows like those of Keils, Kilmory, and other well-known sites, which though showing Norman influence need not be placed as early as the Norman period, but only in a period before the Early English pointed arch had penetrated to these parts.

If MacGibbon and Ross are right in maintaining that the use of mortar was introduced into Scotland about 1200, these two buildings cannot be earlier. Apart from this, however, the architectural features would lead us to a somewhat early date, preferably in the first half of the thirteenth century, and perhaps in its first quarter.¹ At this time,

¹ Mr G. P. H. Watson, to whom the authors are indebted for kindly reading their paper in their unavoidable absence, has further increased their debt by making certain criticisms upon its substance. Of these, the most important is the suggestion that the original building was a tower of the fourteenth century, to which in the fifteenth century stone curtains and out-buildings were added; that the north-east tower, which the authors have called the "keep," seems to be a sixteenth-century building whose upper storey was altered in or about the seventeenth century, and that the castle of 1282 was probably a structure of wood and earth.

As one of the authors is abroad, and the paper is required by the printer too soon after the receipt of Mr Watson's valuable criticisms to permit of any revision, the authors' original views have been allowed to stand. They were led to these views by the thirteenth-century style of the arches and mouldings connected with the curtain, which they felt unable to place as late as the fifteenth century.

Argyll and Kintyre were not under the control of the King of Scotland. In the middle of the previous century Somerled and the Norwegians divided the "Isles" among themselves after a good deal of fighting, and down to 1221 his sons and grandsons sheltered the King's enemies and made war on him from time to time as equals. In 1210 Reginald, son of Somerled, died, and Kilbrannan Sound became the boundary between his sons' possessions, Kintyre and Islay going to Donald, and Bute and Arran to Roderick. Now Roderick was a turbulent person, and his immediate neighbour might well feel safer in a solid, if small, stone tower than in a house of sods and wattles. Such a state of things, when Kintyre was in some danger from Bute and Arran, would exactly suit the requirements of the erection of a castle at Skipness, and a small tower would be the kind of castle which we should expect—not one like the large castles which great nobles, abreast of the architectural fashions of the day, were building at the same time.

The tower and chapel might thus have come into existence about 1220, if not earlier; or again, they might have been built after 1222, when Alexander II. defeated the grandsons of Somerled and gave their lands to people who had not taken their side in the war of the preceding year. Such a person might easily build a small castle as a means of securing his own person and planting his foot firmly upon land which, if secured to him by a royal grant, was yet hardly reconciled to his presence.

In 1247 the first name comes to light: it is that of Dufgal, son of Syfyn. That Dufgal lived in our tower is possible; for even in these parts private castles were now becoming common: in 1249 Eoghan, a descendant of Somerled, held four in the Treshnish islands and elsewhere of the King of Norway. In 1261 Dufgal presented the Chapel of St Columba, "close to my castle of Schepehinche," to Paisley Abbey (*Regist. de Passelet*, pp. 120, 121, quoted in *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, vol. ii. p. 27, and in full by Captain White, *Archaeological Sketches in Scotland*—"Kintyre," pp. 182, 183, Edinburgh, 1875). This is the first mention both of Skipness Castle and of Skipness Chapel; and it has long puzzled antiquaries to observe that the well-known Chapel of St Brendan is here, by a very unclerkly slip of the pen, ascribed to St Columba. But St Columba has traditional associations with Skipness; and all is explained if we suppose that Dufgal lived in the tower, and that the Chapel of St Columba was the building whose south wall is still visible in the south curtain of the castle.

At a date not very long after its first erection this original tower was enlarged by the addition of an enceinte on its south and east sides. This enceinte was so built as to include the area of the chapel and to

incorporate its south wall: the great gateway was actually built on the site of the chapel door. This shows that the demolition of the chapel was an integral part of the plan; and as the chapel belonged to Paisley Abbey, compensation was necessary. Accordingly the new and larger chapel of St Brendan was built 340 yards to the east-south-east and nearer the shore. It was a more commodious building, 82 feet long instead of 56, and in a more up-to-date style of architecture, with pointed windows and a two-light east window which belongs to the fully developed Early English style, and can hardly have been built here till after the middle of the thirteenth century.

The new enceinte began with 20 feet of curtain-wall east of the original tower, and then the wall turned south; in the angle were buildings, and connected with these a garderobe tower projected from the wall. The first-floor garderobe was reached by a mural passage from a north window, an arrangement still visible in the first-floor plan; the second-floor garderobe opened on the parapet-walk, projecting above it like a turret and pierced on three sides for archery fire. The plan at this level is shown in fig. 7. South from here ran the east curtain to the point where the south-east tower now projects, and perhaps beyond in a straight line, almost or quite joining the east end of the chapel. At the same time another curtain was built south from a new garderobe tower of similar design at the south-west corner of the original tower, and buildings behind it. The south curtain, with its gate tower, followed the south wall of the chapel, thickened and heightened into a proper castle wall. By the time the builders began work on the south-east corner, left perhaps to the last because the chapel filled the gap, they had decided to build here a tower containing good-sized rooms, which therefore made a straight join with the already built east curtain.

So enlarged, the castle had become a totally different thing; it was no longer the smallhold of a petty chief, but a fortress capable of accommodating a respectable garrison. It is necessary to consider at what time in the later thirteenth century such a change could have come about.

In 1262 a new lord came to Skipness. This was the Earl of Menteith, who appears to have been one of the most important men in Scotland. The time was one of changes. In 1236 Alexander II. had offered to buy

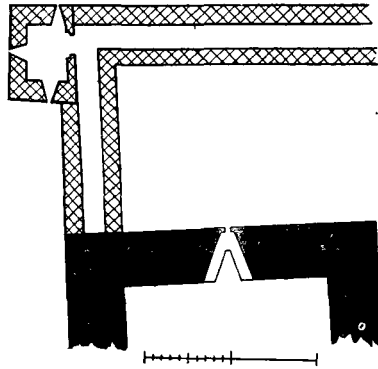


Fig. 7. North-east Corner before the present Keep was built (north to the left).

the Norwegian Hebrides, but this attempt to acquire them peaceably was no more successful than that to gain them by force in 1249, which was cut short by his death. But in 1261 Alexander III. reopened the question, at first diplomatically, then in 1262 by harrying some of the northern islands; with the result that in 1263 the King of Norway retaliated and came to grief at Largs. In the following years Alexander III. devoted his attention to organising and consolidating his conquests. A large castle built in this district late in the thirteenth century inevitably connects itself with these events; and it is natural to suggest that the King pitched on the little castle at Skipness as a place which might be enlarged and held in his interest by a powerful tenant, and selected the Earl of Menteith for this express purpose.

It is curious that no mention appears in the records of Paisley Abbey of the fact, if, as we suppose, it is a fact, that the abbey was dispossessed of the Chapel of St Columba and recompensed by the building of the new Chapel of St Brendan. That such an event should have been passed over in silence is, however, less unnatural if the change was part and parcel of a scheme carried out for reasons of high policy, and at royal command, by an exalted person who was, or appears to have been, a patron and supporter of the abbey. In such circumstances the abbey doubtless saw reason, and was induced without difficulty to accept a better chapel in place of the original gift.

Some time after this the original tower was demolished, except for its walls, and a new tower, the present keep, built in the north-east corner of the castle. When and why this was done we cannot say. But the original work of this keep, as opposed to the later additions and insertions on the one hand, and the earlier curtain, incorporated in it, on the other, suggests a date not long after the erection of the curtain, and decidedly earlier than the insertion of the square-headed windows. Probably the Earl of Menteith found the original tower for some reason inconvenient and out of date. How the new alterations were effected we can, however, say with certainty. The space between the original tower and the east curtain was enclosed by building a wall on its south side, the only one open. The second floor was laid level with the top of the curtain and the first floor inserted below; from the existing parapet-walk a mural stair was excavated downwards to connect the two, and the walls were heightened to another storey, reached by a newel stair. The battlements were not uniformly levelled but in some cases simply incorporated in the wall; and the parapet-walk, where it was not retained as a mural passage, was merely filled up, leaving a visible mark on the south face of the keep. The first and second floors were supported on corbels let into the wall, for this was less troublesome than cutting offsets; but

on the new south wall an offset was made for the first floor, and another on the east wall for the third floor, this being well above the height of the old curtain. The windows of the original tower were blocked up except where it was found convenient to adapt them to the use of the new keep; and the garderobe tower was heightened by one storey which required the insertion of an extra shoot in the storey below. Finally, the keep was no doubt crenellated and provided with a parapet-walk reached by the same newel stair. All the work done at this period appears to the authors to be thirteenth-century in style, and brings the castle to the culminating point in its history.

After about 1300 nothing seems to have been done to the castle for a long time. For this, the reason may be that during his exile Robert Bruce spent much time in Kintyre and the Isles, and when in later years he began to consolidate the power of the Crown in these parts, his local knowledge led him to choose Tarbert as the best site for an advanced base. Hence, from the time when Bruce began building at Tarbert in 1325, that castle supplanted Skipness from the position assigned it by Alexander III. in 1264, and it ceased to be a place of more than local interest, for which it was too large, and very likely fell into disrepair.

The next alterations are of a wholly new character. At some date after Renaissance models had fixed themselves in people's minds, some owner decided to convert the castle into a peaceable dwelling-house, and this he did by opening out large square windows in the keep. Two, as well as a door, were introduced into the basement, which was thus converted from a cellar into a pleasant ground-floor room, well lit but incapable of defence. Other square windows were inserted in the other rooms of the keep, extending right up to the third floor. It is significant that nothing outside the keep was touched; the other buildings, suitable enough for an earl's fortress of the thirteenth century, were useless except as farm-buildings to any humbler lord.

It remains to ask when this happened? By 1493 the Lord of the Isles appears at last to have filled up the cup; James IV. forfeited him and came down to Argyll in person to organise government. In 1494 he repaired Tarbert, garrisoned Dunaverty, and crushed any small Macdonalds who might still be giving trouble. The establishment of a new overlord at Skipness in 1495, Sir Duncan Forestare, seems likely to be connected with this policy of pacification, and is in keeping with the measures introduced in 1496 for suppressing murder throughout the kingdom. In 1499—another step, perhaps, along the same road—all charters in the west were suddenly repealed and the land put under the immediate superiority of the Earl of Argyll; the charter

which established him at Skipness (cf. *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, vol. ii. p. 29) is dated 1502. Skipness may have recovered some of its ancient importance in the early sixteenth century, as the regulations of 1499 specifically except North Kintyre and Islay from the rest of the lands, which were to be let on lease; and between 1513 and 1519 Skipness was in the hands of the Earl's brother. In such strong hands, and with the country pacified and in a fair way towards a new prosperity under the Campbell régime, it is not incredible that an optimistic laird may have decided to invest in ground-floor windows. It cannot have happened before about 1520, nor after 1543, when the country definitely became unsettled once more: between 1542 and 1600 there were five plundering expeditions in Argyll and Bute of sufficient gravity to find their way into history books. But between 1520 and 1543 a certain degree of peace was maintained. Alexander of Islay rebelled in 1528, but the matter was settled without fighting, and peaceful royal visits to Argyll in 1532 and 1534, and the planting of royal garrisons in Islay and at Campbeltown, led up to the "inalienable annexation" of Kintyre to the Crown in 1540—a climax which may have seemed like the inauguration of an age of peace.

Such hopes were doomed to early disappointment, and it cannot have been long before the ground-floor windows were walled up, one being significantly turned into a very convenient loophole for musketry. The only two further alterations which we have here to record are the vaulting of the basement and the addition of the gables with their attic, the corbelled parapet-walk with bartisans, and the capehouse. Both these are changes in the direction of further strength; and occasions for such changes were common enough in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Of the date of the vault nothing more can be said; it belongs, however, with absolute certainty to this period, since earlier writers in ascribing it to the Middle Ages have failed to observe that it blocks and is subsequent to a square window of sixteenth-century type (fig. 5). The gables and bartisans at the top of the keep are confidently classed by MacGibbon and Ross as belonging to the seventeenth century; and a suitable occasion for their building is after the repulse of the Macdonald invasion of Kintyre in 1615. The Earl of Argyll was then made lord of the whole of Kintyre, and as he had every reason to expect further trouble of the same kind—Macdonald of Islay and Coll Ciotach having both escaped alive—he would have been not unwise to improve the defences of Skipness. In this connection it may be observed that the castle lies conveniently on the flank of a force moving up West Loch Tarbert from Islay to attack the main stronghold of Tarbert; troops could leave Skipness in the

morning and fight the same day somewhere north of Dun Skeig with ease. Another possible occasion was in 1652, when the appointment of "six lieutenants for the shire of Argyll and Tarbert" seems to indicate an effort for stronger government. On the other hand, Montrose's invasion of Argyll in 1644 happened so quickly that no fortification could have been undertaken to meet it, and Argyll's rebellion in the covenanting interest in 1684 was an offensive movement which would not have called for defensive work in the district from which it started.

During the revolution of 1689 Argyll appears to have remained quiet, and the history of the castle here comes to an end. It was abandoned as a dwelling-house about the end of the century, and the peaceful state of the country did not demand its employment as a refuge. Late in the eighteenth century it was converted into a farmstead, a phase of its history which came to an end within recent years, leaving it to enjoy the dignified ease of an ancient monument.

NOTE A.—BOAT-LANDING.

A block of buff sandstone of irregular shape, about 26 by 20 by 8 inches, like the stone used in the work at the castle ascribed to the seventeenth century, lies at high-water mark on the shore in the little bay marked on the O.S. map as Brann a' Phuirt, 700 yards east-south-east of the castle. (A large-scale map of the south end of this bay, contoured at intervals of 1 foot 3 inches, is appended as fig. 8.) The bay terminates southward in a steep-to rock whose top would serve as a quay along which a cart could be led, while at its edge there is water alongside for a boat drawing at least 3 to 4 feet every high tide. That it has been used as a boat-landing is shown by the fact that the bottom bears traces of artificial clearing and deepening, all large stones having been removed and a channel 1 to 2 feet deep cut in the rock, and also by the presence at the edge of the rock of three drilled holes to which boats could be moored. Such a harbour would be quite safe in the prevailing west winds, and would be dangerous only in an easterly gale; on these occasions the boat could have been brought further in round a corner of the rock, the artificial channel being prolonged in this direction, and if necessary beached where the channel runs up to dry land. It is at this point that the block of stone lies, whose preservation is due to its lying above the normal action of the tides; such a soft stone, if it lay much below high-water mark, would soon be destroyed. The stone is shown by a square mark on the plan (fig. 8), and the drilled holes by three circular marks.

The landing is one very suitable for any kind of vessel up to about 30 feet long and not exceeding 3 or 4 feet draught; its only drawback is, that it cannot be entered except at high water. It has not been used in recent times, though there is a tradition that "the Campbells," the last of whom left Skipness in 1843, kept a small yacht there and drilled the holes in the rock. But it is hardly likely that the mooring of a small yacht would have worn the holes to the extent to which they have been worn, or that so much labour would have been expended on making a landing for a yacht which was available only at high

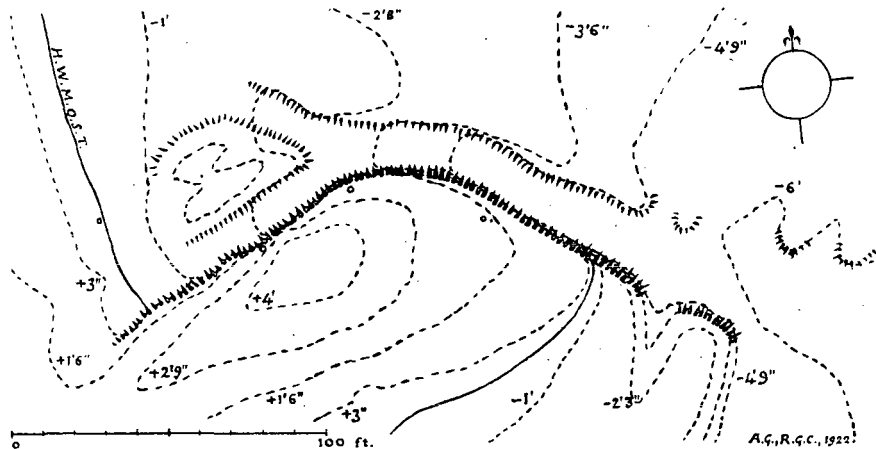


Fig. 8. Boat-landing.

water, and consequently unsuitable for pleasure sailing. It is more probable that the landing was designed for small trading craft, that could come in with the tide and discharge cargo while lying dry. The block of sandstone indicates that the landing was used in the seventeenth century for the import of building materials; but we cannot say whether it had been so used earlier, as, for instance, for the red sandstone used in the thirteenth century, which must also have come over the sea.

NOTE B.—OBJECTS FOUND.

A small number of objects have been found in or near the castle, which deserve description:—

(i) A thin slab of green slate, indistinguishable from that of Cumberland but unlike the black slate of Argyll. It was originally a circle, radius 1 foot 2 inches, but has now lost two segments, one of these having gone since it was discovered. The thickness varies between

$\frac{3}{4}$ inch and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Both faces are flat and have been produced by riving; they show no sign of grinding. The edge has been knapped to its circular form by blows of a hammer delivered on both faces. The stone was found at a depth of a few inches in the floor of the keep basement. The floor deposit, consisting of gravel mixed with charcoal and broken bones, suggested a kitchen, and the stone had no doubt been used as a girdle.

(ii) A rotary quern of grey granite 7 inches high, with grinding cavity $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. It stands on three squat feet, is unornamented and rather roughly made. The grinding-stone is missing.

(iii) A mortar of pinkish crystalline stone: height 1 foot 2 inches, diameter 1 foot 8 inches, diameter of cavity at top 1 foot 1 inch, depth of cavity in centre 9 inches.

(iv) A ball of iron $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches in circumference, weight 1 lb. 10 oz., much rusted. This was found in or near the castle at some time, but its history is not known.

(v) A pump-tree 6 feet 1 inch in length, 1 foot 3 inches in external circumference, $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bore. It is made of a log of Scots pine, with sapwood and bark, and was originally bound with two or three bands of iron, of which one $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches broad now remains. It was found in the well in 1898. Though much decayed, it may very probably not be more than eighty or a hundred years old.