

3. "BAMBURGH'S CASTLE" AND TOWN WALL, DUNBAR.

In 1925, when the Royal Commission on the Ancient Monuments of Scotland published its Inventory of the ancient monuments of East Lothian, nothing could be seen of any part of the old town-wall of Dunbar. In April 1951, however, information was received from Dr J. S. Richardson that a fragment had come to light at 24 High Street, and the Commissioners accordingly instructed me to examine the remains and to publish these notes regarding them.

In his *History of Dunbar* James Miller quotes (p. 233) from the journal of a medical officer attached to the Duke of Cumberland's army in 1745.² "This Dunbar is a pretty large town, upon the Sea coast, and hath been fenced in with a stone-wall of great strength, though by the frequent batteries it hath of late years received, it is much impaired and gone to decay." So, too, Defoe, in his *Tour* published in 1769: "This town of Dunbar . . . hath been fenced in with a strong Stone Wall: but that is now decayed." Commenting on the first account Miller says: "The 'strong stone-wall' alluded to, was probably less for martial purposes than to keep out predatory wanderers. . . . Every town, however, had its ports or gates for the receipt of customs, etc. Three arches of the town gates were standing in 1768 . . . The first stood at the east entry to the high-street; the second at the west end of the west-port; and the third on the North-side of the foot of the high-street, leading to the harbour." On the previous page he had mentioned: "Among the old houses was a tenement called Bamburgh-castle, which latterly stood near the head of the high-street, but one time was probably detached. Tradition affirms that it had a subterraneous communication with the castle. This tenement and the lands adjoining, belonged to the Knights Templars."

The newly discovered fragment was located in the close on the east side of Mr G. Grant's premises at No. 25 High Street; old residents refer to this close as Bamburgh's Close. About half-way down, the close is divided by a cross-house running from side to side parallel to the High Street, and comprising a basement, an upper floor and an attic. The walls are of red freestone, covered with harling, and the roof is pantiled. The house was oblong in the first instance, and since it occupies the full width of the close, a pend runs under its north end for access to the part of the close farther east. North of the pend, and entered from it, there is a vaulted cellar lit from the gable and both sides. On the south side of the pend there was originally a single vaulted cellar, entered from the east and lit from both sides; it is now divided in two, one part being entered from the pend and the other from the west. In the gable there is said to be a fireplace. At the south-east corner there is a recess with a lofty ceiling, not unlike an old kitchen flue that had been cut off; but high up in the back of the recess there is a small built-up window. The primary part of the basement looks like sixteenth-century work.

¹ George Wood, *Liberton in Ancient and Modern Times* (1893), p. 127.

² Reprinted in *The Contrast; Scotland*. . . 1745 . . . and 1819.

Later in this century, or possibly in the century following, at the south-east corner of the main block a wing was added in alinement with the south gable; there seems little doubt that the wing is an addition, although on its south side there is an identical "recess with a lofty ceiling," which indeed may be a continuation of the one previously referred to. Be that as it may, in the re-entrant angle formed by the wing and the main block there was built a stair-tower containing the entrance; to get head-room at this entrance the stair had to rise anti-clockwise. Whether this stair-tower replaced an earlier one, or a forestair, is uncertain. Above the vaults the building has been modernised, and the only feature of special interest that has come to light is a section of a modelled plaster frieze, late sixteenth or early seventeenth century in date. This was discovered in the existing lobby at the head of the modern forestair which leads to the upper floor.

Abutting the west side of the building, and in alinement with its south gable, there is a stretch of substantial walling still 18 feet high. Presumably this ran generally west to meet Miller's "first town gate," not necessarily continuously but linking up the gables of intermediate buildings. Then, abutting the east side of the cross-house and generally in alinement with the wall just mentioned, the much-reduced remains of another wall run roughly east to Church Street, where there is a narrow gateway, once arched. Both stretches of walling are no doubt part of the "stone-wall of great strength" seen in 1745 (*supra*). This "stone-wall" would have been constructed at some time after 1503, when an Act of Parliament decreed that the Forth seaports should build walls of stone and lime right down to the sea.

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