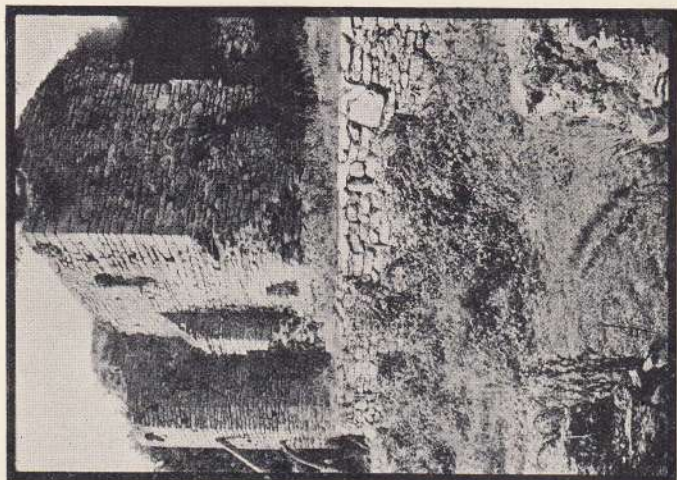
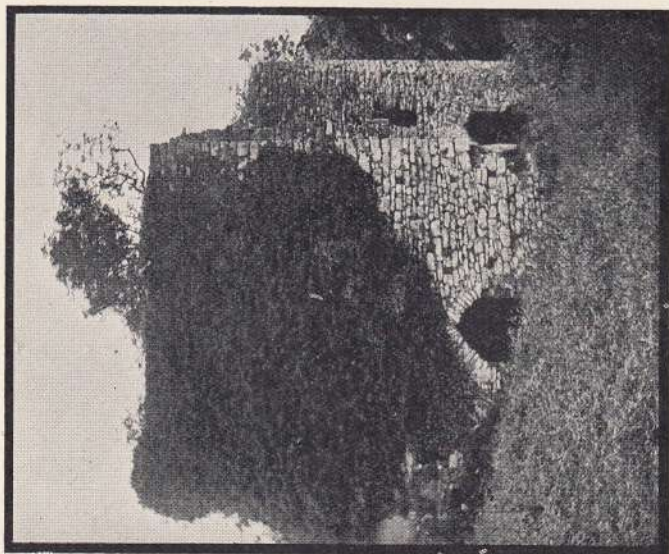


PLATE IV.



*R. H. Worth,*  
EAST AND NORTH WALLS.



*J. S. Amery,*  
GIDLEIGH, SOUTH WALL.

## GIDLEIGH CASTLE.

BY J. S. AMERY AND R. H. WORTH.

(Read at Okehampton, 23rd July, 1925.)

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[*Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature, and Art.* 1925.—Vol. lvii. pp. 267-271.]

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THE wet and stormy month of September, 1918, found us at Gidleigh, where we spent several weeks. During the whole of our stay it was never possible to set a camera on the tripod on the open moor, so strong was the wind.

Days otherwise hopeless we spent in the comparative shelter of the walls of Gidleigh Castle, of which we made a detailed survey. Our Association's meeting at Okehampton affords an appropriate occasion for the publication of the plans.

The Castle is little more in effect than a fortified manor-house, but it has pretensions, which one may well believe its builder intended to be taken seriously. It is much to be regretted that there remains only the tiny keep.

In date it is perhaps absolutely contemporary with the later work of Okehampton Castle, which was probably erected by Hugh, the first Courtenay Earl of Devon, who succeeded in 1292 on the death of Isabella de Fortibus. The building would thus belong to the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century.

POLE writes, "Gidleigh Castell adjoyneth on the south-east part of Dartmoor. Walter Prou held the same in Kinge Henry 2 tyme. This land contynewed in the name of (Prou), unto Kinge Edw. 2 tyme." Whatever castle, if any, Walter Prouse may have held it certainly, on the evidence of the architecture, was not the existing building.

But since, on the 10th January, 1278-9, Sir Roger de Kynemanedune was instituted rector of Gidleigh, the Patron being Sir William le Pruz, and on the 19th June, 1324, Roger Hoche was instituted, the Patron being the Lady Alice de Moelis, the daughter of Sir William Prouz,



it would appear probable that the Castle as it now stands is the work of Sir William,<sup>1</sup> the last of his name to hold it.

There are so many details common to the architecture of Gidleigh and Okehampton Castles that one might well believe the same master mason to have been employed. Thus the lower terminations of the jamb chamfers are of identical form, and further, the stone employed in the dressings comes from the same quarries. This, a sandy magnesian limestone, occurs as a thin bed in the carboniferous series, and has been worked in a number of small quarries along an exposure extending half a mile from east to west, and lying about  $1\frac{2}{3}$  miles S.W. by S. from Hatherleigh Church, at or near Cleave.

The last important use made of this stone appears to have been in the main front of Oaklands, at Okehampton.

In a country atmosphere, at least, it is a very perfect building material, free working and of even grain and bearing fresh impressions of the tool marks after six centuries' exposure to the vagaries of a climate apt to extremes; the sole effect of the weather is to impart a warmer tone to the surface.

We have said that this is a small building; the keep, if it may correctly be so called, consists of a cellar and a solar. The internal dimensions of the cellar are 21 ft. 8 in. in length by 12 ft. 10 in. in width, while the solar measures 22 ft. 7 in. by 13 ft. 10 in., the walls being six inches thicker on the lower floor, where the thickness is 6 ft. 6 in. The building had a low pitched roof, probably covered with lead. Apparently there was a parapet.

The cellar has a door leading into it from the south, and the floor is below the level of the ground without. There is one small window in the north end of the east wall. The cellar is roofed with a pointed vault, supported by three arched ribs. The greatest height to the apex of the vault is 10 ft., the height to springing is 5 ft. Two feet above the apex of the vault is the floor of the solar, and all between and in the spandrils is solid masonry. There is ample evidence that the masonry ribs are true structural features, they are 12 in. deep by about 1 ft. 5 in. in width. These ribs, when constructed, were used as centrings for the vault, lagging consisting of slabs of timber sawn off the outside of the tree, and consequently having rounded

<sup>1</sup> According to Risdon, Sir William Prouse (?) died 9. Ed. II (1315-16).



GIDLEIGH, VIEW OF CELLAR.  
VIEW OF SOLAR.

*R. H. Worth.*



faces, being spread from rib to rib. The form of the timber can still be clearly traced.

Immediately within the door to the cellar, on the left-hand side of the entrance, is a narrow stairway (about 2 ft. 4 in. in width) in the thickness of the wall. This stairway turns sharply to the right and extends up the centre of the west wall until it reaches the level of, and gives access to, the solar. It is lit by a narrow slot window in the south wall and by a rather wider window in the west wall, immediately opposite the door of the solar; this door is square-headed, with a chamfered lintel and jambs, the former in granite, the latter in Cleave stone.

There is another and much more imposing entrance to the solar, by way of a stone newel staircase in a turret on the east side. The diameter of the stairway is a little over six feet, and it formerly extended to the roof. The entrance from without is on the south, through a doorway with a low pointed arch. The stairway is lit by slot windows, one of which is cruciform and elaborately shaped to form an arrow slot, giving command of a wide field (see detail). The steps are made each in two pieces, the newel and about one foot in length of each step being formed in Cleave stone, and the wider part of the tread, which is built into the wall, being granite (see detail). The entrance from these newel stairs to the solar is square-headed after a doorway with a low pointed arch has been passed.

The solar is such an apartment as should probably be considered to have been the lord's room. The dimensions of the floor space have already been given. Whether the room was open to the roof, or whether it was ceiled cannot be determined. In either alternative its effective height must have been about 14 ft. 3 in. In the east wall is the entrance from the newel stairs, immediately adjoining this is a window, the clear opening of which is about 2 ft. 4 in. Following this, the fireplace with an arched head, and corbels, possibly for a hood; then a narrow window, about 9 in. in width by 4 ft. 9 in. in height. The north wall abutted upon other apartments, of which slight traces remain; it contains a doorway, 2 ft. in width, the jambs and lintel chamfered. The only opening in the west wall is the doorway leading to the intramural stair to the cellar, and from this stair a small window facing west.

The south wall has one opening, a window, set high,

8 ft. 6 in. above the floor, the window 4 ft. 9 in. in height and probably 9 in. in width.

The various doorways are provided with sockets in the stonework for bolts, and recesses and sockets for wooden bars. The provision for these fastenings is rather curiously arranged. Between the solar and the further apartments, now lost,<sup>1</sup> in the northern jamb there is a horizontal recess 38 in. deep and  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. in section, into this the wooden bar could be retired; in the other jamb is a hollow 4 in. deep and 3 in. by  $2\frac{1}{2}$  in. in section with which the bar engaged when shot over, this bar was on the side of the door away from the solar, and thus the occupants of the solar could not bar it on their side against those without.

The door from the turret stairs to the solar had a similar bar, and this was on the solar side of the door.

The door leading from the solar to the stairs to the cellar also had a bar, on the stair side of the door.

In the result, any persons occupying the solar could bar the main stairway door against intruders, they could possibly lock the other two doors against outsiders, but could only bar them after abandoning and leaving the solar, thus being able to retreat in either of two directions, and closing effectively their means of retreat after passing through. The outer cellar door could be barred on the inside.

It will be noted that, notwithstanding the great thickness of the walls, there is a weak point in the masonry, and that at an angle, where the stairway passes up from the cellar to the solar, here the outer wall is but 2 ft. in thickness. There is a similar weak point at an angle of the keep of Okehampton Castle, where the drain from a *garde-robe* passes down the wall. Other thin walls are to be found in the turret of the newel staircase, but these were really external to the main building, and their failure would not have been vital.

As at Okehampton, the masonry consists largely of rounded, waterworn stone, small boulders. The use of such material in the inner thickness of the walls shows either a disregard to the principles of construction, or more probably a well-founded confidence in the quality of the mortar employed.

Not many years ago, certainly since 1884, one of us photographed Gidleigh Castle, and at that time there was

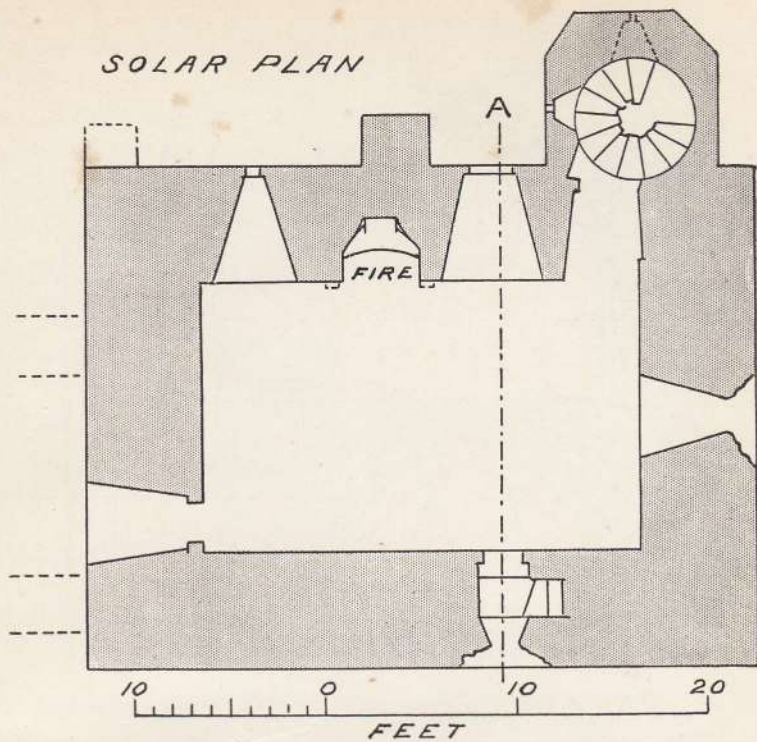
<sup>1</sup> Possibly the women's apartments.



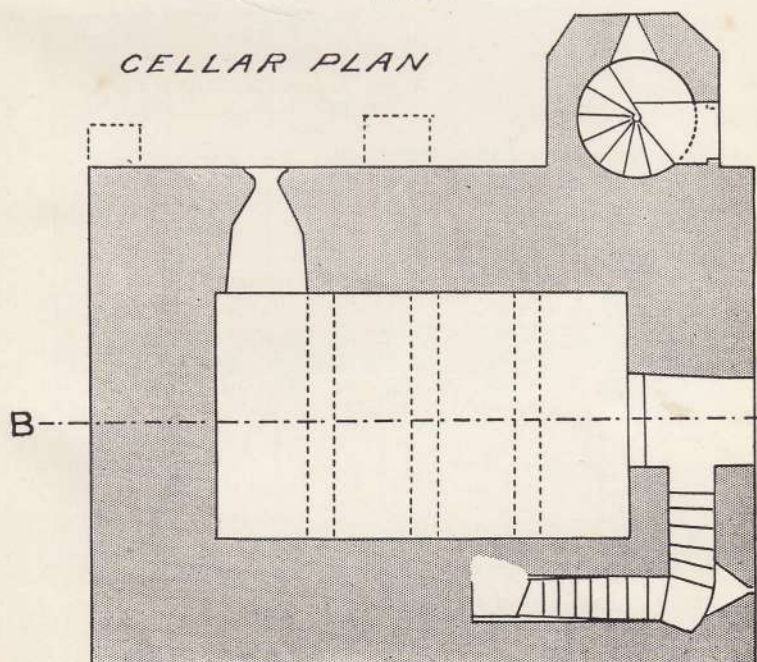
little trace of insecurity in any wall. Most unfortunately, since that date, the ground has been levelled for the garden of a modern house adjoining, and the foundations of the Castle have been undercut. The turret stairway is now a ruin, the walls cracked from top to bottom, and inefficiently propped with a pole. With the opening of the walls the entrance arch has fallen, and the newel of the stair has collapsed. The east wall of the castle has partly fallen in ruin, of two buttresses the extreme top only remains of one ; and of the other, some ten feet six of the upper part, overhanging from the wall and a mere burden on it, the lower part and foundation of the buttress having wholly fallen away.

The Castle may be a mere pocket edition of a fortress, but this recent damage is tragic ; loving care might yet do much to preserve the main structure, but we fear that the turret presents a difficult problem, being amenable to little short of total reconstruction. To preserve at least a record, if the walls must perish, has been our object in offering this paper. We admit a certain sentimental sympathy with the knight, who finding his family estates enhanced by the judicious matrimonial ventures of his ancestors, launched out in emulation of his greater neighbours, and having built such lordly residence as the depth of his purse would permit, went his way, leaving no male heir to continue the name. True, the family of Prouse did not die with him.

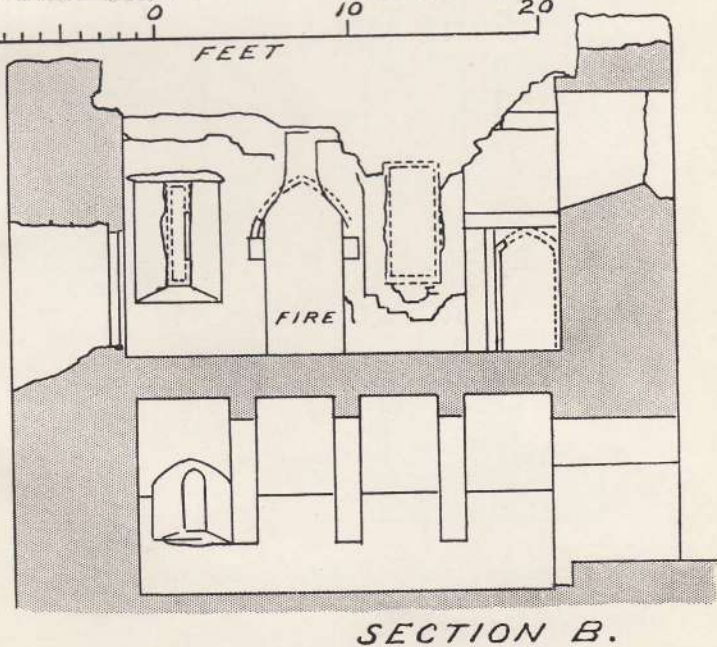
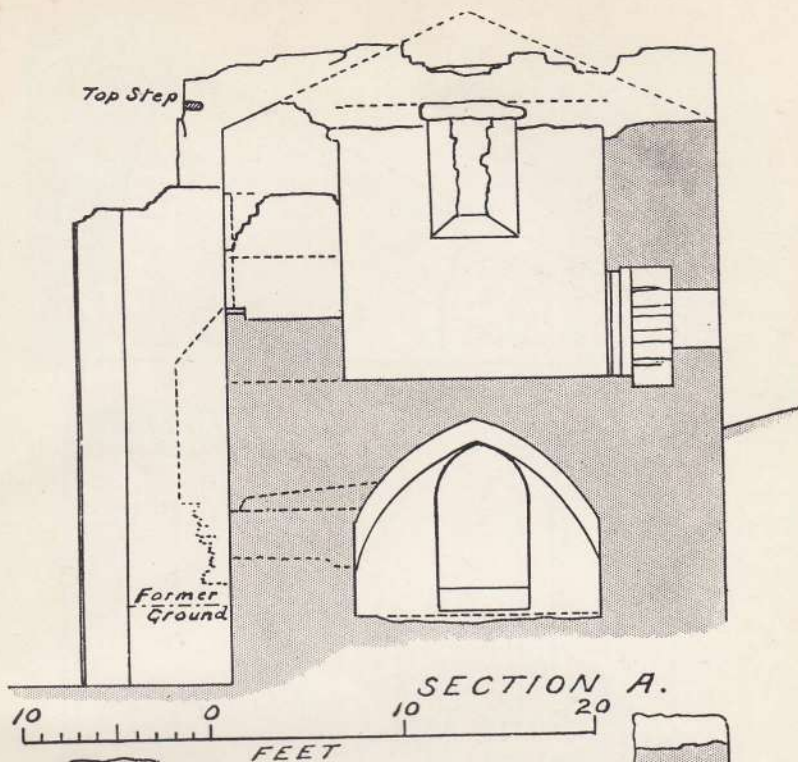
*SOLAR PLAN*

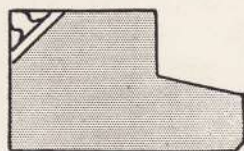
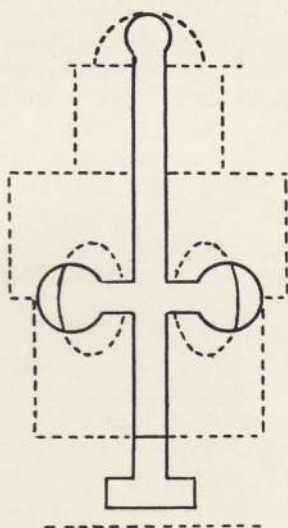
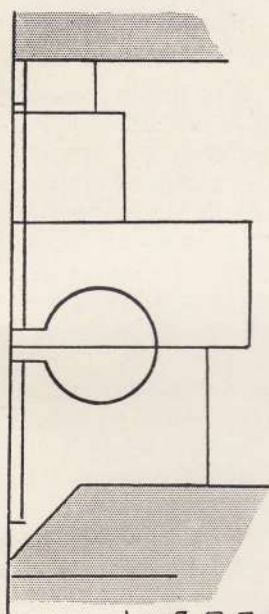
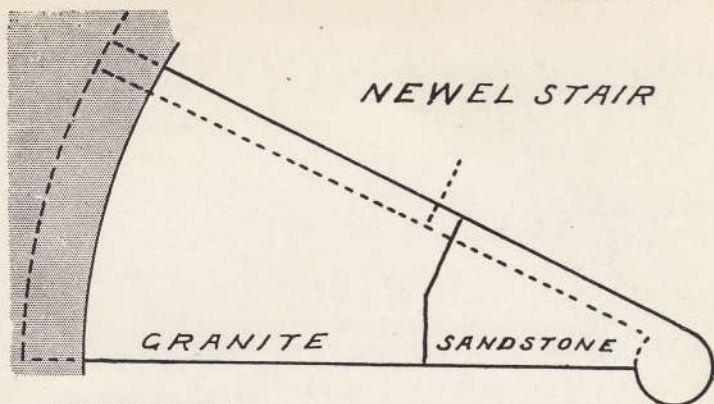


*CELLAR PLAN*









Scale 1 inch to 1 foot