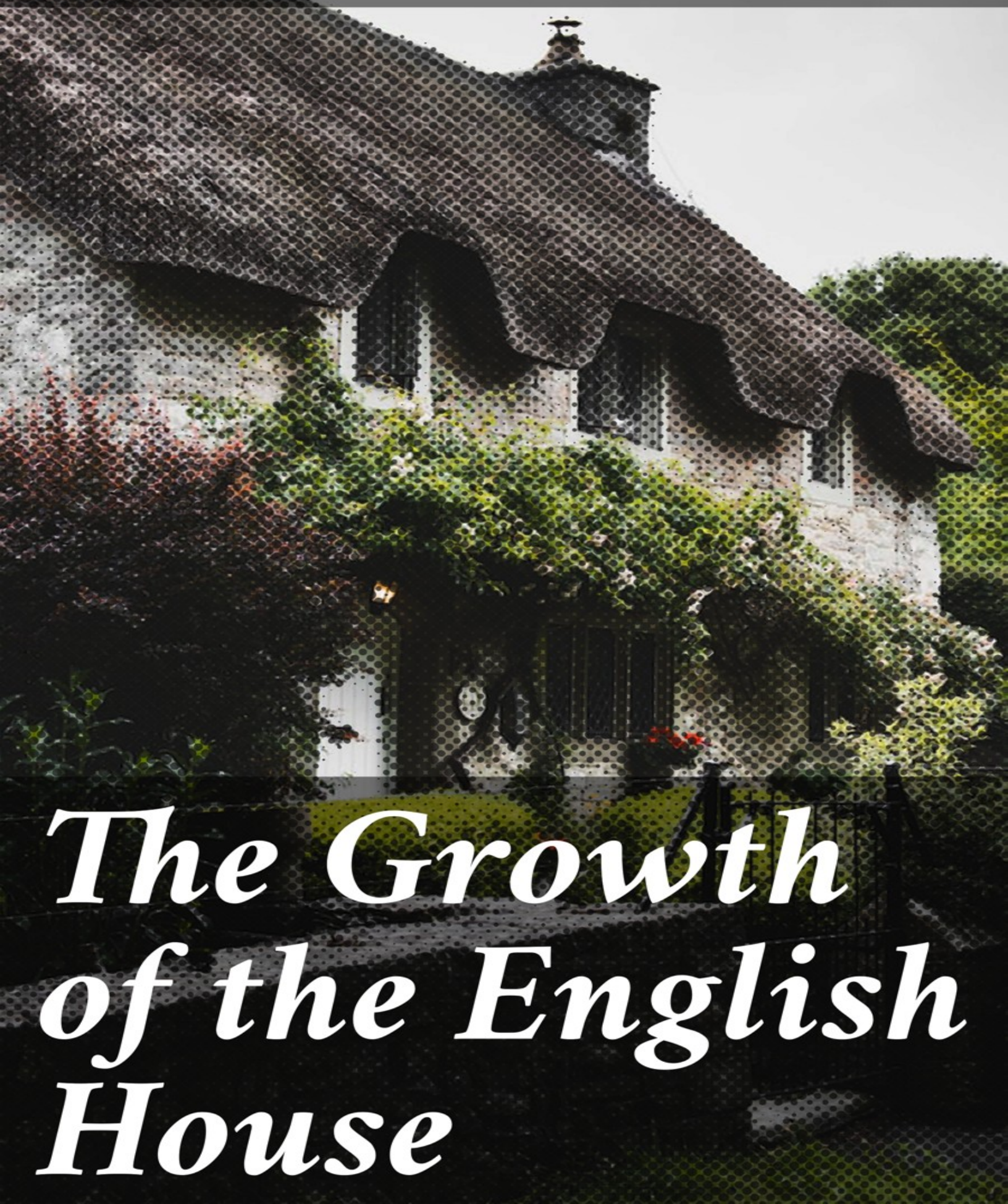


J. Alfred Gotch



*The Growth
of the English
House*

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The Growth of the English House

A short history of its architectural development from 1100 to 1800



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

[PREFACE.](#)

[CHAPTER I. Introductory—The Norman Keep.](#)

[CHAPTER II. The Keep Described.](#)

[CHAPTER III. The Fortified Manor House of the Thirteenth Century—The Dominance of the Hall.](#)

[CHAPTER IV. The Course of Mediæval Building in the Fourteenth Century.](#)

[CHAPTER V. The Later Manor House of the Middle Ages.](#)

[CHAPTER VI. Mediæval Domestic Features—Doorways, Windows, Fireplaces, Chimneys, Roofs and Ceilings, Staircases.](#)

[CHAPTER VII. Early Sixteenth Century—Coming of the Italian Influence.](#)

[CHAPTER VIII. Late Sixteenth Century—Symmetry in Planning.](#)

[CHAPTER IX. Elizabethan and Jacobean Houses—Exteriors.](#)

[CHAPTER X. Elizabethan and Jacobean Houses—interiors.](#)

[CHAPTER XI. Seventeenth Century—Personal Design—Transitional Treatment.](#)

[CHAPTER XII. Classic Detail Established—Influence of the Amateurs.](#)

[CHAPTER XIII. Eighteenth-Century Exteriors—The Palladian Style.](#)

[CHAPTER XIV. Late Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries—Interiors—Details and Features.](#)

[CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF CASTLES AND HOUSES.](#)

[GLOSSARY.](#)

[INDEX TO ILLUSTRATIONS.](#)

INDEX TO TEXT.

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

The object aimed at in the following pages is to tell the story of the growth of the English house from its first appearance in a permanent form down to the time of our grandfathers, when it lost much of its interest. Although it is a history of domestic architecture, no deep architectural knowledge is required to understand it; technical terms are avoided as far as may be, and of such as are used a glossary will be found at the end of the volume. The reader unacquainted with architecture will be able to follow the story without difficulty; but he who already knows something of our English buildings will of course be better able to link it up with the general development of English architecture. It is the main stream of progress which is followed, but there are many pleasant backwaters and interesting tributaries which it is impossible to explore in the space at command. Those who are desirous of pursuing the subject more minutely will have no difficulty in finding books dealing with particular periods—Mediæval, Tudor, Early Renaissance, or Late Renaissance. Hitherto, however, the panorama has not been unrolled from end to end in one volume.

To render the subject intelligible numerous illustrations are essential, and thanks are due to all who have kindly contributed in this respect, especially to the publishers, Messrs Batsford, whose assistance in this and other respects has been invaluable. In view of the many admirable books which appear from year to year, it becomes increasingly

difficult to avoid familiar ground; indeed the mediæval period presents very few fine examples which have not at one time or another been figured. The reader is therefore requested not to be impatient if he meets with a number of old friends in the early part of the book, and to be equally considerate if, in the periods where examples are more abundant, he misses some of the best-known houses, inasmuch as the aim has been, so far as was compatible with the proper treatment of the subject, to illustrate the text with unfamiliar buildings.

In order not to distract attention, footnotes and references have been avoided, and with a view to help those who are not conversant with the subject, there will be found, in addition to the short glossary, a chronological list of the principal buildings tabulated under the reigns of the English monarchs.

J. A. G.

WEEKLEY RISE, *near* KETTERING,
September 1909.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY—THE NORMAN KEEP.

Table of Contents

Those who, in the course of their wanderings through the remote districts of England, whether on business or on pleasure bent, have seen the lonely tower on the hillside, or the grey ruins of some ancient dwelling gleaming through the spaces of encircling trees, have no doubt often speculated as to the precise significance of these remnants of antiquity. They may have dismissed them from consideration as being relics of a past order of things having no connection with the concerns of the present day. Yet to the dweller in a modern house these maimed survivals have as much interest as have his own ancestors; and the home to which he returns after his travels can trace its descent step by step from those rugged masses of stone which roused his interest as he passed them by.

It is not difficult for any one to trace a likeness between the house of to-day and that of, let us say, the time of Elizabeth; but the resemblance between an Elizabethan manor house and a Norman castle or a Northumbrian peel-tower is not by any means so obvious, yet the descent of one from the other can be clearly established. It is the object of the following pages not only to show how this can be done, but to trace briefly the continuous changes which have transformed, in the course of some seven or eight

centuries, the gaunt and desolate keep into the comfortable mansion or villa of our own experience.

Everybody knows that an Englishman's house is his castle, but it should also be remembered that in early times an Englishman's castle was his house. Castles were not necessarily military strongholds; many of them were so, but many of them, again, were nothing more than fortified houses, and it is in these fortified houses that we must seek the first germs of our own homes, the earliest evidences of domestic architecture.

In this inquiry we need not trouble ourselves about Roman villas; they were exotic, and there is no reason to believe that they had any influence on English houses. Nor need we spend much time on the centuries which elapsed between the extinction of the Roman civilisation and the Norman Conquest. The country was widely populated during those years, but any one who has climbed the bleak downs whereon its inhabitants clustered, or scrambled up the vast earthworks which were the strongholds of its chieftains, may well wonder how the race survived. Some kind of shelter from the weather there must have been, probably in the shape of wooden buildings. But such primitive structures cannot be considered as architecture, and we will now concern ourselves only with buildings of a permanent nature on which a certain amount of trained skill has been bestowed, buildings, in fact, which convey definite information as to their arrangement, and may be classed, more or less, as works of art. Such buildings—at any rate so far as they are dwellings—are not to be found of a date prior

to the Conquest, nor, with few exceptions, for more than half a century later.

The “castles” of the Conqueror were probably merely the huge earthworks which he found scattered throughout the land. Any new works which he caused to be made were probably of wood. It was not until the middle of the twelfth century that stone buildings superseded to any great extent these wooden structures; at least few existing remains can be dated earlier than then; and it is in the midst of the great ditches of these earthen “castles” that many of the stone keeps of that time were built, the encircling outer mounds being further strengthened by stone walls.

The few remains of the stone castles built during the reigns of the Conqueror and his sons do not provide us with any definite link between themselves and their predecessors of wood, although it is probable that they embodied in a permanent form the kind of accommodation previously provided in more perishable materials; the most important part of this accommodation being the hall. They certainly do not seem to have had any long ancestry on the other side of the Channel, for it is doubtful whether any building of this nature in Normandy can be dated prior to the Conquest. But although the exact causes which determined their shape are still to seek, it is clear that the fashion became established of erecting stone castles, wherein the keep was the principal building.

The keep was the domestic part of the castle; it contained the rooms used by the owner and his family. Surrounding it at some distance was the outer wall strengthened according to circumstances by projecting

towers and entered through a fortified gatehouse. The extent and intricacy of the defences varied according to the importance of the castle; but these matters belong rather to military architecture than to domestic, and all that need be said is that those retainers who overflowed from the towers and other permanent buildings were housed in temporary wooden buildings within the courtyard.

Wooden buildings were indeed the ordinary dwellings of the time. There must have been many more people outside than inside the castles, even if we regard the castles which have survived as only a small part of those which actually existed. The ordinary manor houses, as well as the homes of the peasantry, were built of wood and have in consequence entirely disappeared. It is true that there are many wooden houses (or houses of wood and plaster) still to be found in all parts of England, but they are all of a much later date. It is doubtful if a single specimen of the twelfth century survives. It must also be remembered that not infrequently the inferior rooms of a stone house, such as the kitchen, were built of wood.

The keep, then, is the earliest form of English house built in permanent fashion. It was not, as some suppose, a prison or dungeon, or even the last refuge of a beleaguered garrison; it was the ordinary home of the family. In examining the ruins of a castle where the keep is the principal remnant, it is not necessary to postulate a vast array of other buildings, and to wonder what they were, and whither they have disappeared. It was probably the only considerable building, the remainder of the establishment

consisting of a wall of enclosure and various minor buildings, mostly of wood.

What, then, was the accommodation in these keeps, these homes of our ancestors of the twelfth century, of the men who slew Thomas à Becket, of the barons who revolted against Henry II.?



1. Castle Rising, Norfolk. The Keep.

The keeps were massive rectangular structures several storeys in height, with walls of great thickness. Their size varied according to the requirements of the owner. Some were about 90 ft. square, others but 30 or 40 ft. They were not necessarily exactly square, but, as a rule, their sides were of nearly equal length. The White Tower

of the Tower of London, begun by order of the Conqueror in the later years of the eleventh century, measures 118 by 107 ft. The keep of Rochester Castle, built about 1130, is 70 ft. square. Castle Hedingham in Essex, built about the same time, is 60 by 55 ft.; the keep of Dover Castle (about 1154) is 90 ft. square; Castle Rising (Fig. 1), probably a few years later in date, is 75 by 60 ft.; Kenilworth, dating from the third quarter of the century, is 87 by 54 ft.; while the Peak Castle in Derbyshire, erected about 1176, measures some 40 by 36 ft. These are all outside measurements, and as the walls were very thick, seldom less than 8 ft., and sometimes as much as 16 or 20 ft., the available space within them was much less than their total area. Nevertheless, after deducting the thickness of the walls, there remained in the largest such huge rooms as that in the Tower of London, 90 ft. long by 37 ft. wide; in the medium-sized, such as Hedingham, rooms 38 by 31 ft.; while in the smallest, such as the Peak Castle, the space was 22 by 19 ft., equal to the drawing-room of an ordinary house of the present day. But although the rooms were spacious, they were few in number, and badly lighted. As a rule there was but one room on each floor; some of the more important, however, such as Rochester and Castle Rising, had two large rooms on each floor and one or two smaller, but this was the exception rather than the rule. Occasionally a chapel was added;

sometimes it occupied part of the floor space inside the walls; sometimes, as at Coningsburgh, it was contrived within the thickness of the wall itself, augmented by hollowing out one of the huge buttresses. But the chapel was always small—space was too valuable for it to be otherwise; and it was used not only for sacred purposes, but also not infrequently as a private room for the lord.

There are many examples of Norman keeps remaining in various parts of the country, but it will be sufficient to describe two of them as being typical of their fellows. One, although not of the largest size, was yet a fine building; it is Hedingham Castle in Essex: the other is small, the Peak Castle in Derbyshire. The former is among the very few of existing keeps that can be dated earlier than the reign of Henry II. who came to the throne in 1154. The chaotic times of his predecessor, Stephen, saw the erection of many castles which became the scenes of frightful oppression and outrage; but after his death they were razed to the ground, and apparently with great thoroughness, since no examples, it may be said, are to be found which can be safely dated between the years 1135 and 1154, during which period he nominally reigned over England.

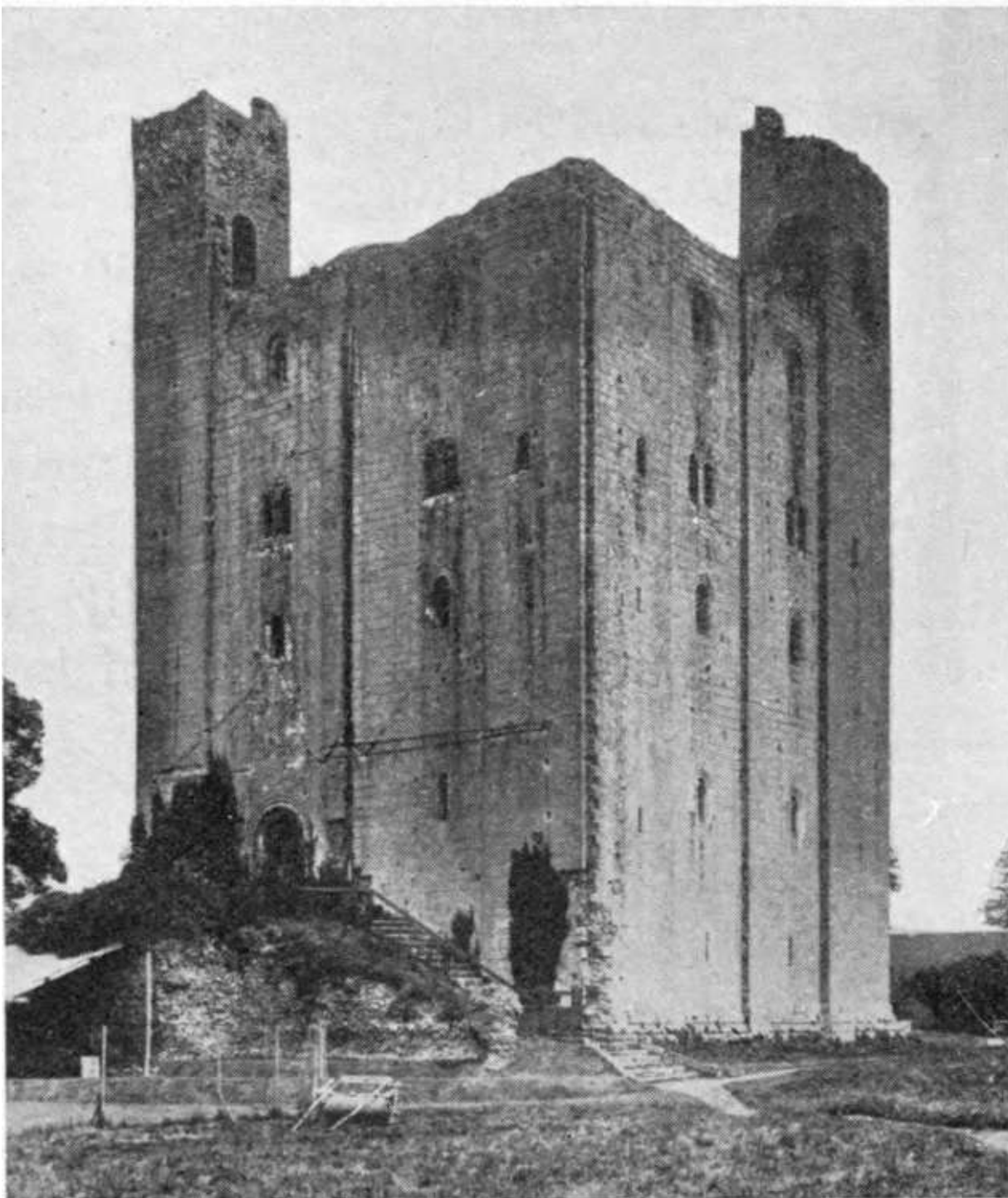
CHAPTER II.

THE KEEP DESCRIBED.

[Table of Contents](#)

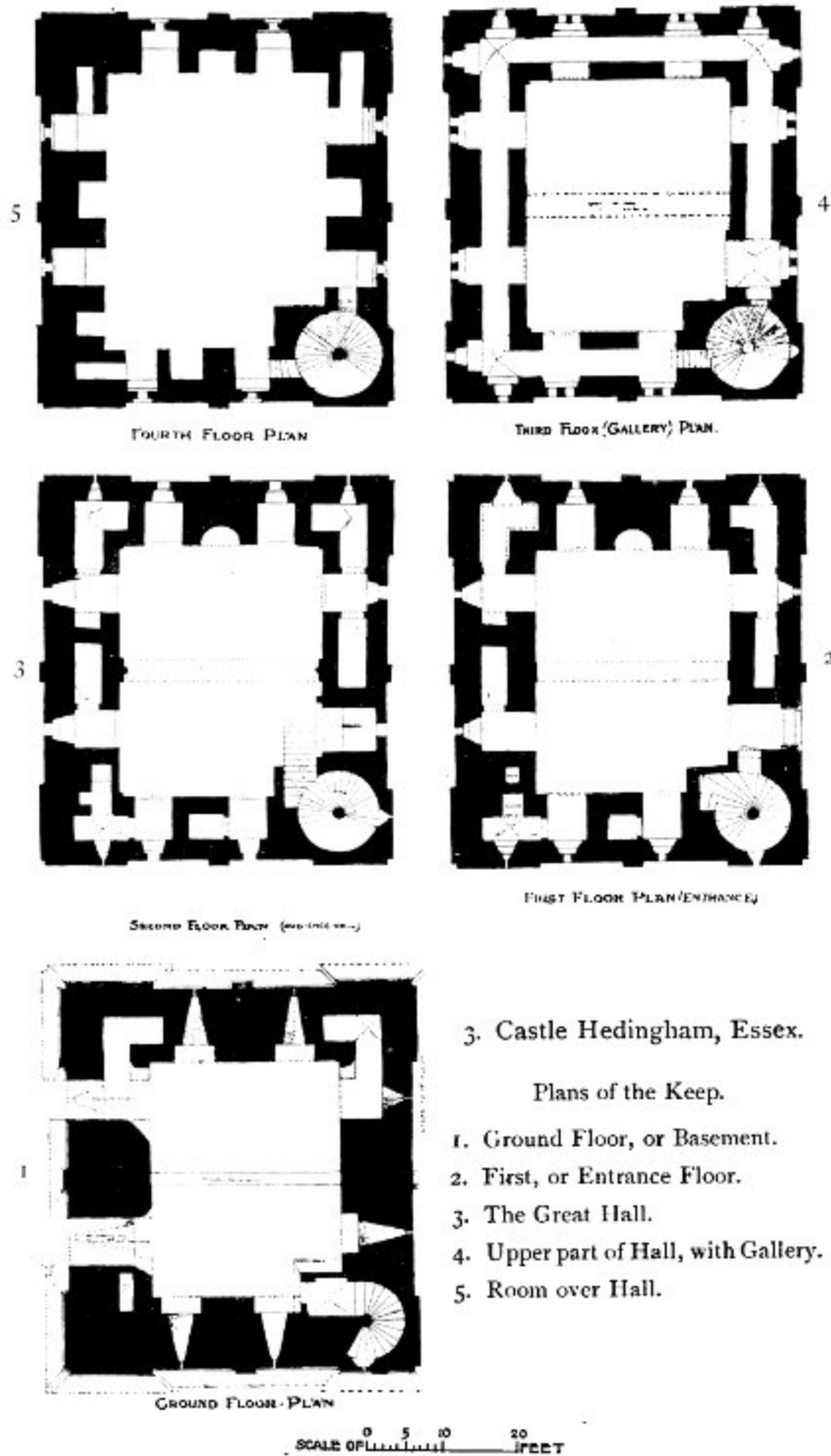
The great keep at Castle Hedingham is a fine specimen of the work of the twelfth century. Its exact date has not been ascertained, but its arrangement and its architectural detail point to the same date as Rochester Castle (about 1130), and good authorities go so far as to suggest that the same designer was employed on both. It has all the characteristics of an early keep; a vast, plain mass of masonry, slightly broken by the long vertical lines of shallow buttresses and angle turrets, and pierced at each floor with small windows—smallest near the ground where most accessible (Fig. 2). The entrance, as at Peak Castle, and all early keeps, is some feet above the ground, and in this case is approached by a flight of steps; it leads into the first floor, below which at the ground level, or thereabouts, is the cellar or store-room, approached only from the room above it. The plan is quite simple (Fig. 3), consisting of a large room (38 by 31 ft.) on each floor, enclosed by thick walls which are honeycombed with mural chambers and recesses. Some of these chambers are *garde-robes*, others were no doubt used as sleeping places by the family and principal guests. Over the entrance floor were two others; first the hall, a room with two tiers of windows, the upper of which gave on to a gallery or triforium which made the circuit of the building in the thickness of the wall: above the hall another room very similar to that on the entrance floor.

Then came the roof, round which was a rampart walk protected by the battlements, and leading to the four angle turrets which rose above the general mass of the building. Access to these various floors was given by a commodious circular staircase more than 11 ft. in diameter. There were thus four main rooms; the basement, the entrance floor, the hall of two storeys, and the room over it. All these, except the basement, were warmed by a large fireplace, and lighted—if lighted it can be called—by eight small windows. The hall had in addition eight two-light windows in the triforium. There is no room which can be identified as the kitchen; there is no indication that the windows were glazed.



2. Castle Hedingham, Essex. The Keep (*cir.* 1130).

The head of the entrance door is visible on the left: the opening on the right is modern.



3. Castle Hedingham, Essex.

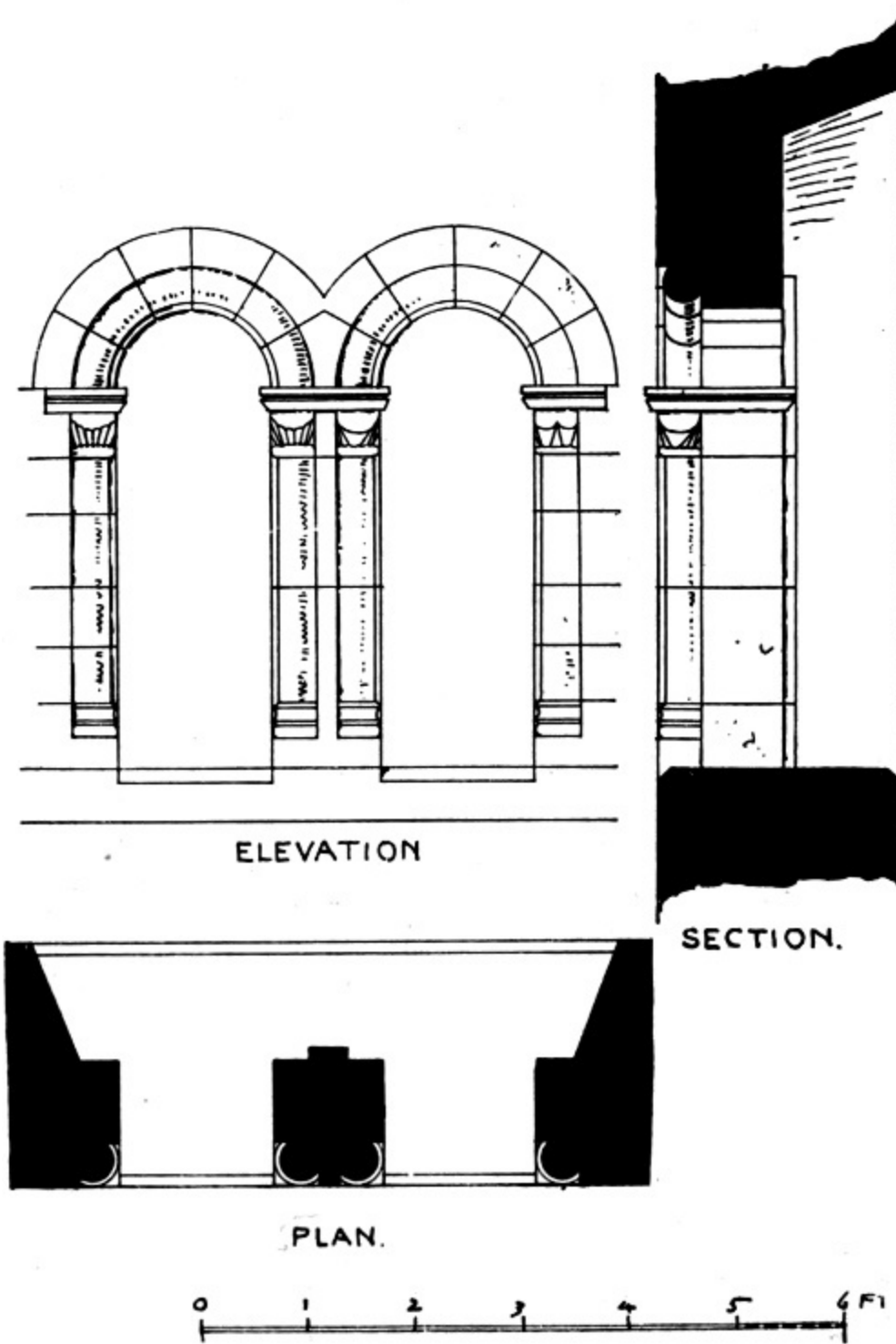
Plans of the Keep.

1. Ground Floor, or Basement.
2. First, or Entrance Floor.
3. The Great Hall.
4. Upper part of Hall, with Gallery.
5. Room over Hall.

3. Castle Hedingham, Essex.

Plans of the Keep.

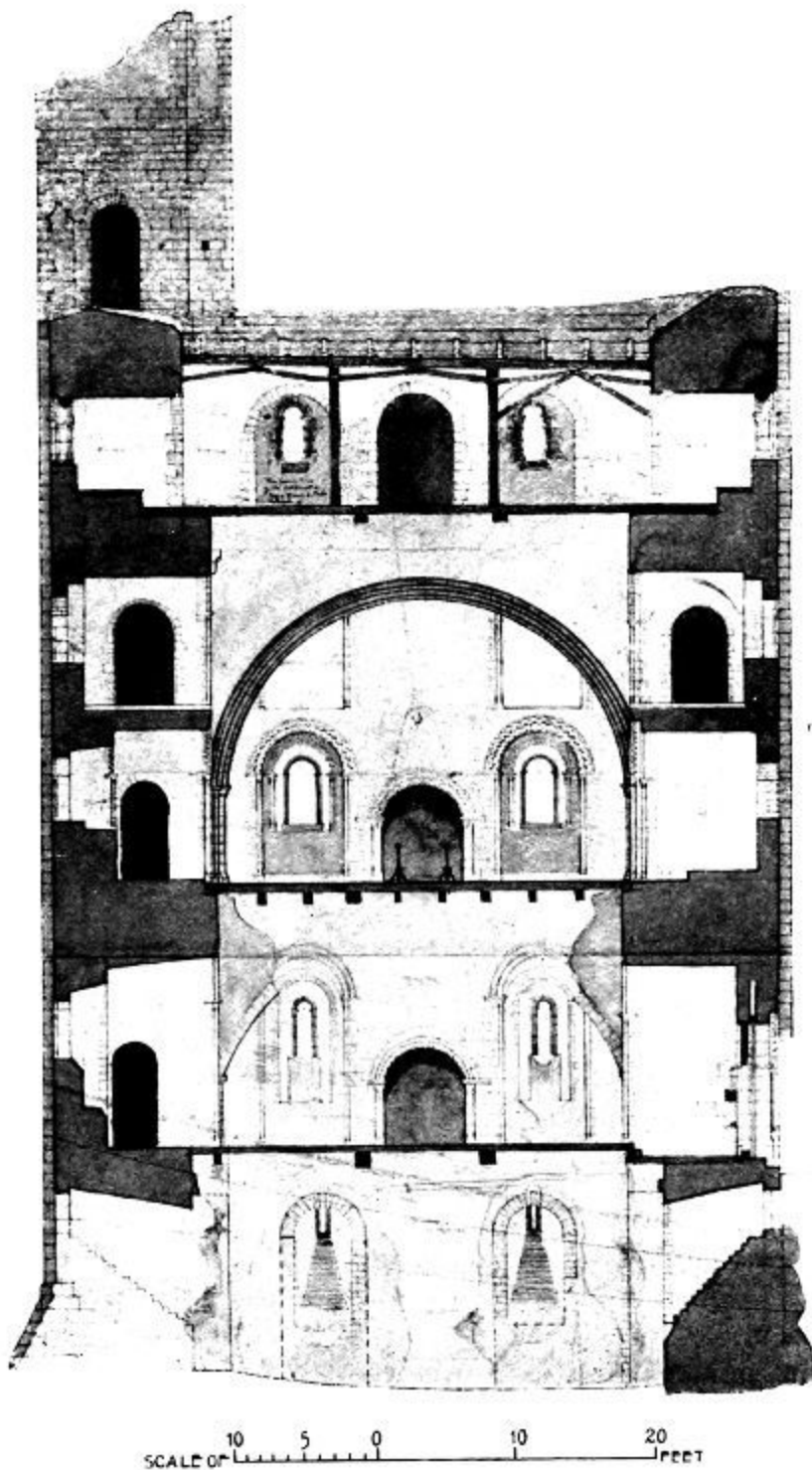
- 1. Ground Floor, or Basement.
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4. Castle Hedingham, Essex.

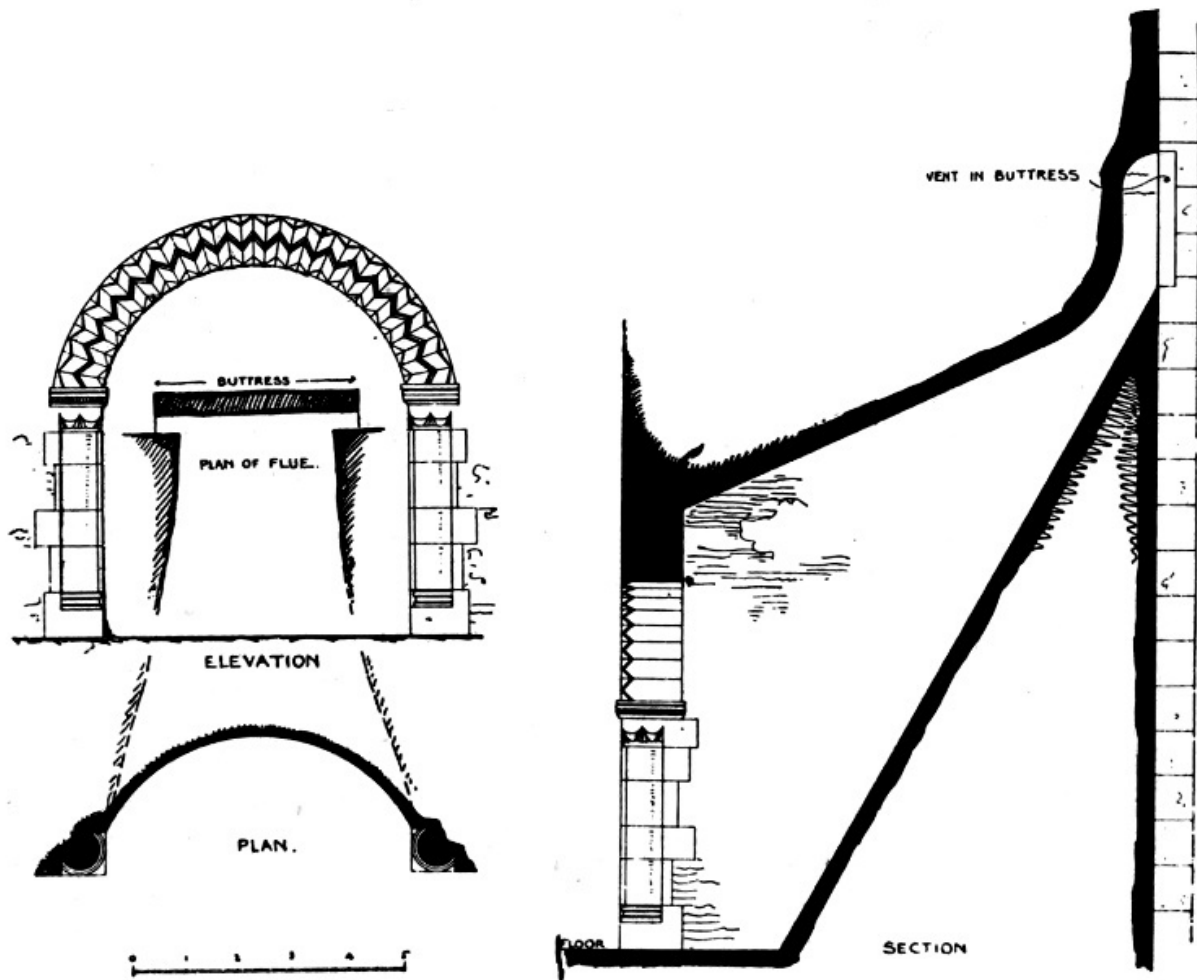
A window of the gallery in the hall.

Against the means of attack which were then available this place was impregnable, but the safety thus assured must have been both gloomy and draughty. In its way, however, it was a lordly residence; the main rooms were spacious, the smaller rooms were considerable in number, the staircase was of ample width. The gallery must have afforded a certain amount of quasi-privacy to those who were not privileged to occupy the mural chambers. The architectural detail of the doorways, windows, arches, and fireplaces is good (Figs. 4, 5, 6). Across the middle of the entrance floor and of the hall is thrown a fine bold semicircular arch, of nearly 30 ft. span, to carry the floor of the room over (see section, Fig. 5); the whole treatment is simple, sturdy, and splendid, as befitted the chief stronghold of the race for whom it was built, the De Veres, Earls of Oxford.



5. Castle Hedingham, Essex.

Section of the Keep.



6. Castle Hedingham, Essex.

A Fireplace. Showing the short flue leading to a vertical vent in the face of the wall.

The fireplaces had not a flue such as we understand it, that is a long shaft running up the whole height of the building and crowned by a chimney; instead of this they had a short funnel contrived in the wall, and leading almost directly to small vertical openings in the face of the wall, cleverly concealed in the angle of a buttress (Fig. 6). The fireplaces,

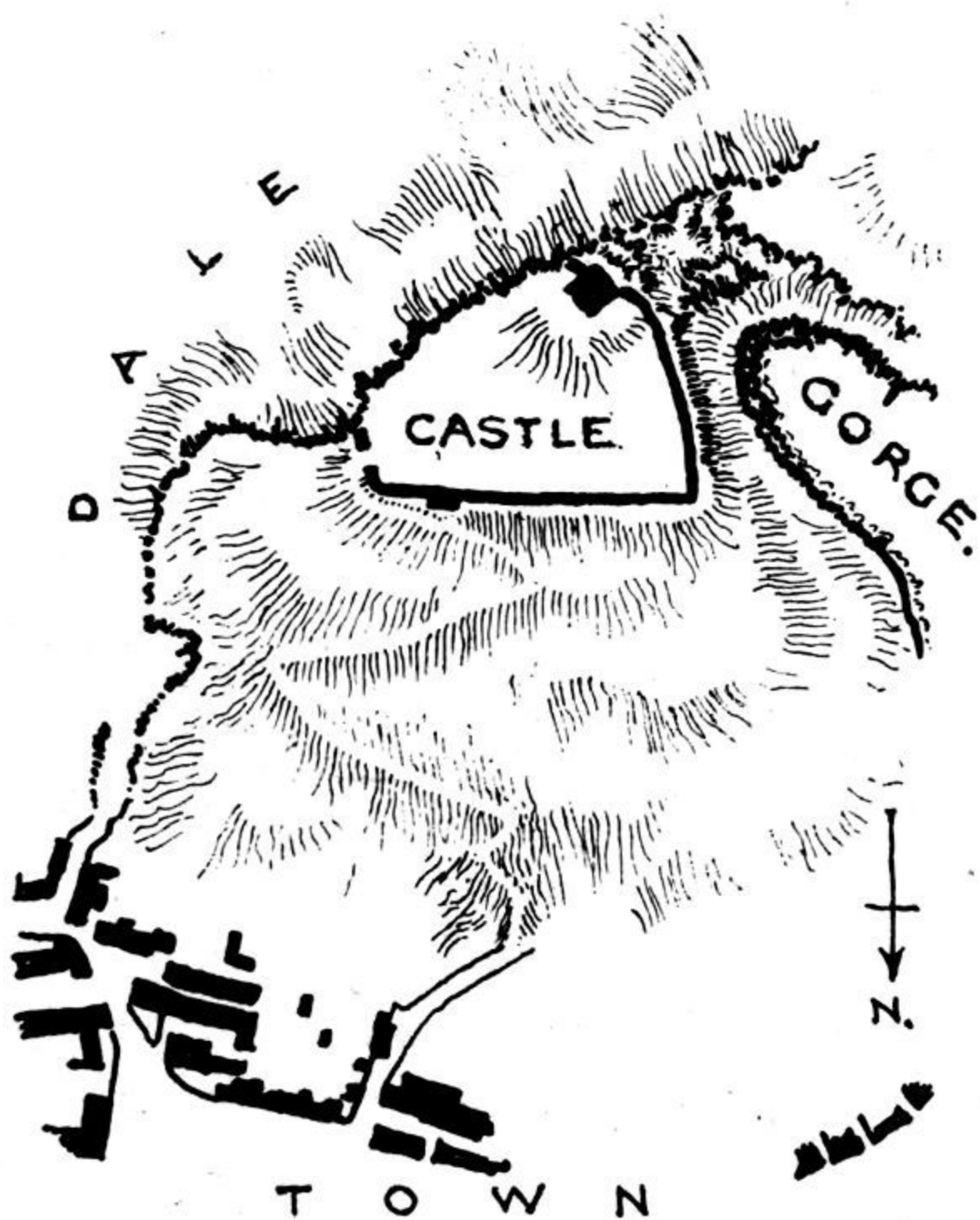
moreover, were mere recesses in the wall surmounted by round arches; there was no attempt at a projecting hood or any such ornamental feature as we are accustomed to think of as a chimney-piece. These things were to come later. They were, however, of generous size, as indeed they might well be, for it must be remembered that the windows were not glazed, and although they were too small to make the place cheerful, they were quite large enough to make it cold, and as each side of the room had an outside wall, the wind, from whatever quarter it blew, would find its way in. It is true that there were wooden shutters to the windows, which could be shut at night, but in spite of this there was every inducement to maintain a large fire; the volume of the flame may have overcome the disadvantage of the short flue, but the smoke must have had difficulty in escaping through the small vents, and doubtless much of it eventually found its way out through the open windows.

The sleeping accommodation was very meagre. The lord, and perhaps some of his family, had separate retiring places; they could not be called rooms, for they were only such chambers as could be contrived in the thickness of the walls; and in point of size, although not at all in point of luxury, were comparable to a sleeping compartment on a modern *train de luxe*. The household, men and women, old and young, slept in the great hall, a custom which conduced neither to comfort nor the observance of the proprieties. In

the same room the whole establishment had its meals. During the greater part of the day the men, at any rate, were occupied with outdoor pursuits.

The Peak Castle, at Castleton in Derbyshire (Fig. 10, p. 19), is an extremely interesting example of an early dwelling. Its situation may be described as highly romantic, although that adjective of course expresses a sentiment which is of comparatively modern origin. Up to about the middle of the eighteenth century, travellers regarded such desolate places as Old Sarum, or ruins so difficult of access as the Peak Castle, with feelings approaching to horror. It was only towards the end of that century, or in the early years of the nineteenth, that the romantic aspect was appreciated. It is tolerably certain that romance had no part in the selection of this site for a dwelling, but rather the assurance of security which it offered. An extremely steep spur of the rocky hill which forms one side of a precipitous dale—one of the dales for which Derbyshire is famous—is deeply bitten into by a gorge which almost severs it from its parent ridge (Fig. 7). An irregular triangle of rocky ground is thus formed rising steeply from its longest side up to the opposite angle, and bounded on one side by the precipitous slope of the dale, and on the other by the sheer descent of the gorge. No site could be better protected by nature. The side next the gorge is absolutely inaccessible. The side next the dale offers interesting hazards to good climbers. The remaining side is a grass slope steeper than most modern roofs, and traversed by a zigzag path up which the breathless visitor toils painfully. The town lies at the foot of the slope; the castle, of no great extent, is placed at its

summit. The keep is built in the extreme angle, where the gorge desists from finally biting its way through the side of the dale and leaves a narrow rugged strip of rock to connect the almost detached triangle from its parent hillside. A stone flung from one side of the keep would fall sheer down the gorge; flung from the opposite side would drop some 40 or 50 ft. on to the steep slope of the dale, and thence descend with huge and rapid bounds to the bottom.



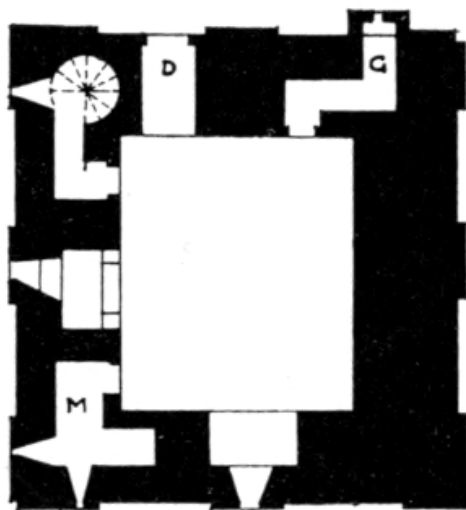
7. Peak Castle, Derbyshire.

Plan of the Site.

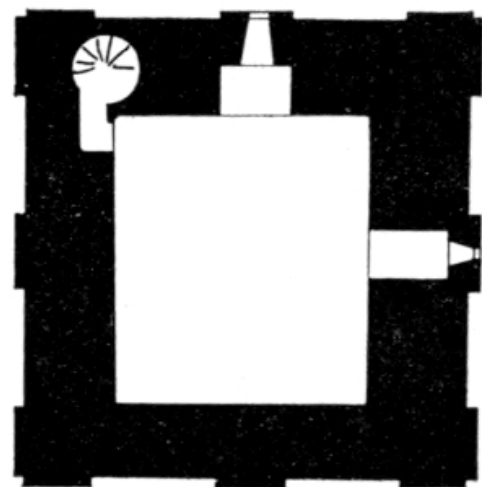
The summit of the triangle was enclosed by a wall running from the gorge to the dale, thus forming a good-sized courtyard. It was of course on the slope, and to make it rather more level, the lower part was raised, partly it would seem on vaulted chambers, partly by filling up earth against the wall. These chambers have never been explored, but workmen who have repaired the wall bear testimony to their existence, and if the description they give of some of the articles found in them has been rightly interpreted, it would seem that the Romans had made use of them. This is still a matter for conjecture, and so is the exact arrangement of such buildings as were adjacent to the wall.

There were apparently two entrances to the courtyard. The chief of these was adjacent to the dale, and from the remains of the arch stones would appear to have been some 5 or 6 ft. wide. Here is said to have been the porter's rooms, and if this were the main entrance, custom would place the porter there. At the other end of the wall, against the gorge, are the remains of what has been called the sally-port; but the work has been so much defaced as to render its purpose obscure. Between these two features there is a rectangular buttressed projection which may have contained rooms, while overlooking the gorge is a recess in the wall which seems to have been a window. It is said—but the statement has not been properly verified—that there are remains of the foundations of a structure which carried a drawbridge across the narrow upper end of the gorge; and it is almost

certain that an ancient track leads along the hill on the further side of the gorge in the direction of the castle. All these points are of interest, and are worthy of further investigation; but that part of the ruins which most readily repays a visit is the keep. This has been described as merely a prison or a watch-tower; but from the carefully selected position of the castle, from what is known of its history, from the fact that the little town of Castleton clusters at its foot, and from a comparison with other castles, it would seem that the tower is the small keep of a small castle, and was its most secure dwelling-place. References in the great Roll of the Pipe show that a considerable number of soldiers were accommodated here; it is also recorded that in 1157 Malcolm of Scotland made his personal submission to Henry II. here, and that that king was again here in 1163, when the castle must have had even more restricted accommodation.



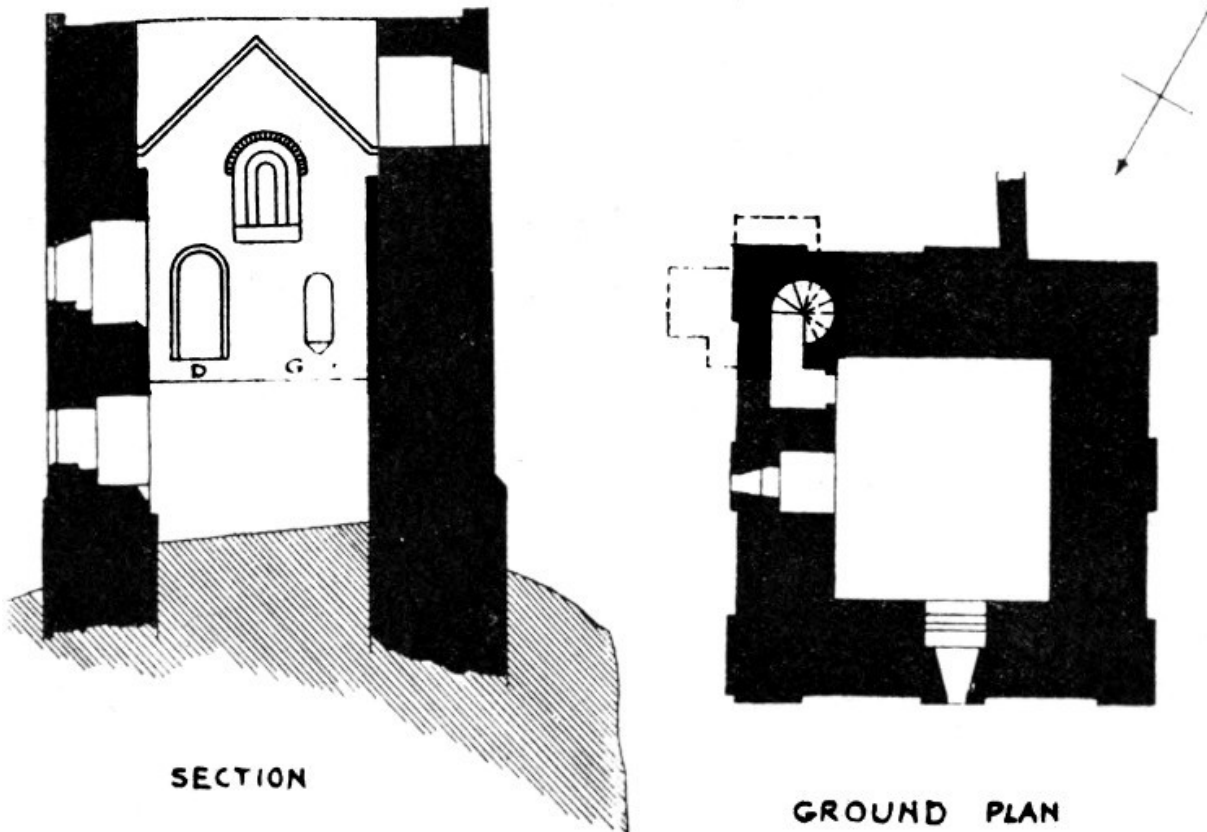
PRINCIPAL FLOOR



UPPER PLAN

8. The Peak Castle, Derbyshire (1176.)

Plans of the Keep.



9. The Peak Castle, Derbyshire

The keep itself, which was built in 1176, is very similar in arrangement to the peel-towers of the Scottish border and to the towers which elsewhere formed the nucleus of many fortified houses. It probably represents the first step in domestic planning, and may be regarded as one of the earliest ancestors of the great houses of later centuries.

It consisted of two main floors (Figs. 8, 9); beneath the lower was perhaps a store-room, although this is not certain. The debris with which the lower part of the building is filled has not been investigated; excavation might determine whether there ever was a cellar, and also whether there was