

Dunster Castle gatehouse – mismatched windows, the wrong coat-of-arms and a lost lower ward

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† Sadly Isabel died before this article went to press. She was a highly valued member of the early Dunster team and her presence will be very much missed (Mary Ewing)

DUNSTER CASTLE GATEHOUSE – MISMATCHED WINDOWS, THE WRONG COAT OF ARMS AND A LOST LOWER WARD

ISABEL RICHARDSON†

INTRODUCTION

Dunster is a small town in West Somerset, set just inside the boundary of Exmoor National Park. It owes its existence to the remarkable tor, and the castle on it, that sits between the uplands and guards the north-south road across the south-west peninsula from Exeter, and the coastal route along the southern side of the Bristol Channel. The River Avill flows round the east side of the tor. The small early-medieval settlement was granted by William the Conqueror to one of his major supporters, William de Mohun, who built a castle on the tor. This was kept as the ‘caput’ of the vast lands the family held; the keep with living accommodation was on the top, with the chapel of St Stephen. A gateway was added with the curtain wall round the lower ward by Reynold de Mohun in the mid 12th century. Over time

more buildings were erected in the lower ward, including residential provision at the east end. The castle was sold to the Luttrell family by the wife of the last de Mohun and they finally gained possession in 1404. Sir Hugh Luttrell built the gatehouse 1419-21 beside and partly above the earlier gateway (Fig. 1). It was not until 1617 that George Luttrell had the present castle building constructed, and Anthony Salvin altered and enlarged it in 1868-70; since then little has been changed. In 1976 Lt-Col G. W. F. Luttrell gave Dunster Castle, with 48 acres of ground, to the National Trust.

The castle is built at the east end of the Lower Ward on Dunster Tor, with the gatehouse and gateway forming the entrance to the lower ward or Green Court on the north side of the hill (SS 9920 4349). Access is from Dunster up the steep slope of Castle Hill running approximately



Fig. 1 Dunster Castle Gatehouse west elevation approached from the town (photo: Tony Harding)

east-west, through an arched carriageway in the gatehouse and then a right hand turn south between the gateway towers (Figs 1, 2). From there a flight of steps gives foot-passengers access to the lower ward and the castle. Although known as the gatehouse and therefore assumed to be defensive, the 15th-century structure was primarily built as a block of lodgings, whereas the earlier inner gateway was definitely built for defence. Today wheeled traffic goes round the Tor on a clockwise road from Castle Hill to the door of the castle.

The gatehouse of Dunster Castle has been described in the early 1980s in a paper in this journal by J. H. P. Gibb (1981) and an entry by the Castle Studies Group in 2010-11 (Guy *et al.* 2010-11), but these left several questions unanswered. As it is one of the oldest buildings in Dunster it was considered appropriate to include it in the work of the Early Dunster Project, set up in 2018 under the leadership of Mary Ewing, (for the project's background see Ewing (this volume)). The National Trust, the owner, was fully in support of the survey.

There were several questions to be answered – were the two towers of the 13th-century gateway built at the same time; are the windows of the 1420 gatehouse original; why is the coat-of-arms on the gatehouse not that of the builder; and how did people access the castle when the level of the lower ward had been altered and the gates permanently closed in the 18th century?

To produce a report on the two phases of the gatehouse complex, volunteers of the Dunster Project drew plans of the buildings at 1:100; structures and features were recorded and photographed in 2018. Research into published history was carried out in 2019-20, a key source being Maxwell Lyte (1909).

LISTING

The two buildings of the gatehouse complex are included with the Castle as Grade I on the National Heritage List, list entry no. 1057643. The list description of the gateway and gatehouse is as follows:

Built originally by William de Mohun in the 11th century, of the Norman castle no trace remains, the oldest surviving feature is the 13th century Gateway flanked on either side by a semi-circular tower with a vaulted chamber at ground floor level lit by arrow loops. Adjoining the gateway is the Gatehouse erected in 1420 by Sir Hugh Luttrell, the first of the family to live at the Castle. The heraldic panel over the entrance was set up in the 16th century. Two buttresses were added to the east wall in 1428. In 1764 the level of the lower ward was raised, submerging the first two storeys, the upper part was enlarged by the addition of two battlemented polygonal turrets on the west side, pierced by arrow loops.

PLAN

The 13th-century gateway has two D-shaped towers with the gates hung between them (Fig. 2). The west tower is now single storey; the east tower is two storey with additions to the rear and to the east connecting it to the north-east corner of the castle.

The 15th-century gatehouse is three storey (Fig. 1), approximately rectangular in plan but the south side is angled and follows the line of the curtain wall. The south-east corner overlies part of the west gateway tower. It is essentially a residential, not a defensive, building. Although the gatehouse is angled north-east/south-west it is described below as though the long axis is north-south. The carriageway through divides the ground floor into two unequal parts, with access to a stair turret on the north-east corner. There is an 18th-century door on the top floor between the two turrets on the south elevation opening onto the Green Court. The roof is pitched with chimneys in the east and north walls.

THE GATEWAY – EXTERIOR

The two towers of the gateway are similar in shape but of differing builds (Fig. 2). They are D-shaped in plan with the straight back walls once forming part of the curtain wall round the lower ward of the castle. They are connected by a flattened pointed arch and support heavy paired doors, the west one with a wicket gate, these guarded the original entrance to Dunster Castle. When constructed the towers were at least two storeys high (Bucks' engraving 1733; Fig. 3); now only the east tower has a second storey. Both towers are set on a chamfered plinth. There is no evidence for a portcullis in the gateway. The reference to 'le Portcoleys' in Maxwell Lyte (1909, 357) is to a building on the top of the Tor; this was demolished in 1646 with the keep and the other stone buildings there as a result of the Civil War.

It is possible, even likely, that a barbican existed in front of the gateway, giving added protection. The wall would have branched north down the slope from the curtain wall, probably on the same line as the current gatehouse archway, and right-angled up to the north-east corner of the present line of the castle. If this was so then the present line of the west and north walls of the gatehouse were already established and would explain its peculiar positioning in relation to the gateway.

The west tower of the gateway is constructed of small sized local sandstone, possibly waterworn, tightly laid horizontally, set on a chamfered plinth of the same stone but with two courses of long squared stones, up to 65x19cm in size, forming the chamfer. Above this is a single course of rectangular stones between 75x19cm and 32x19cm in size. A few of the higher courses are

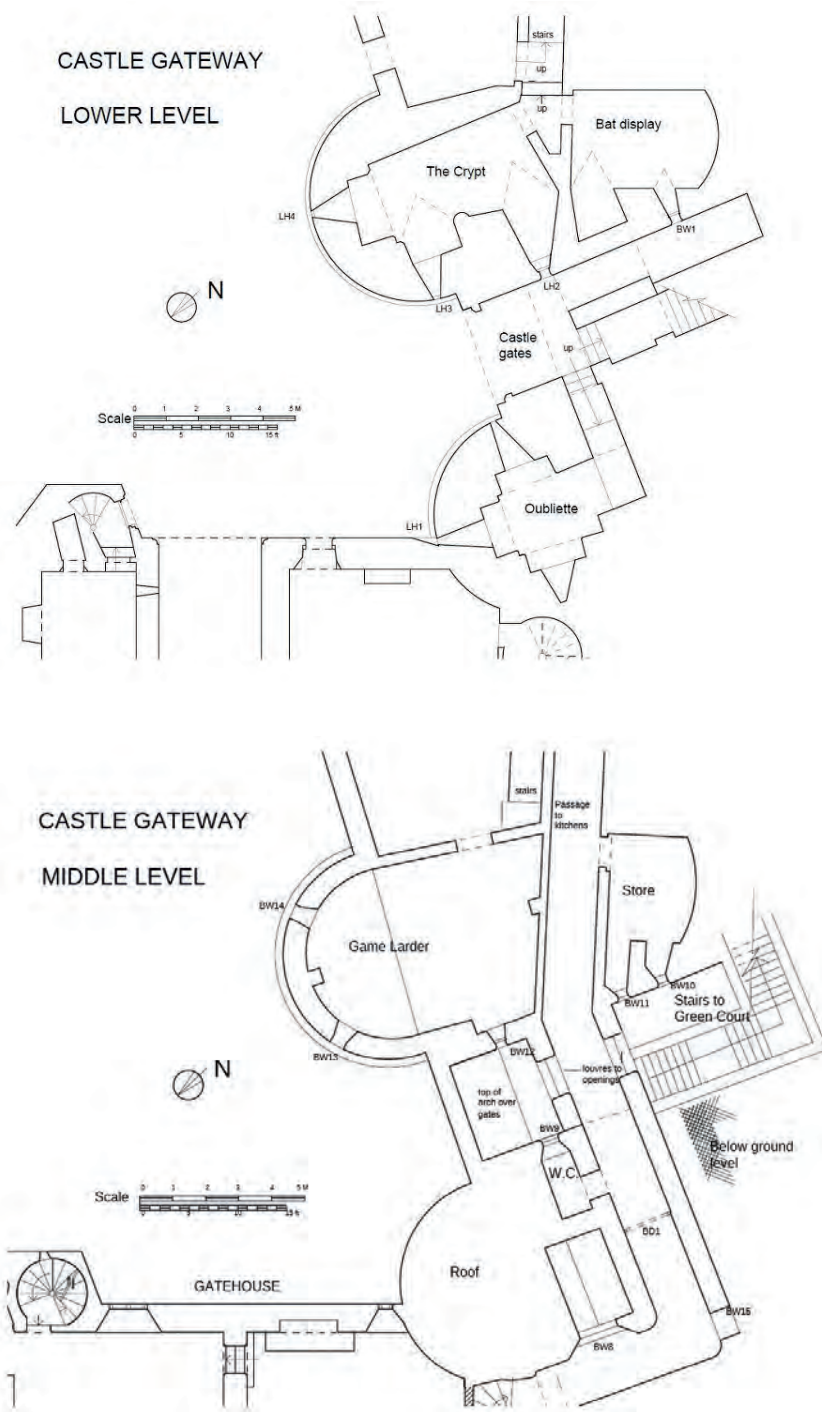


Fig. 2 Castle Gateway plans prepared by the Early Dunster Project 2019

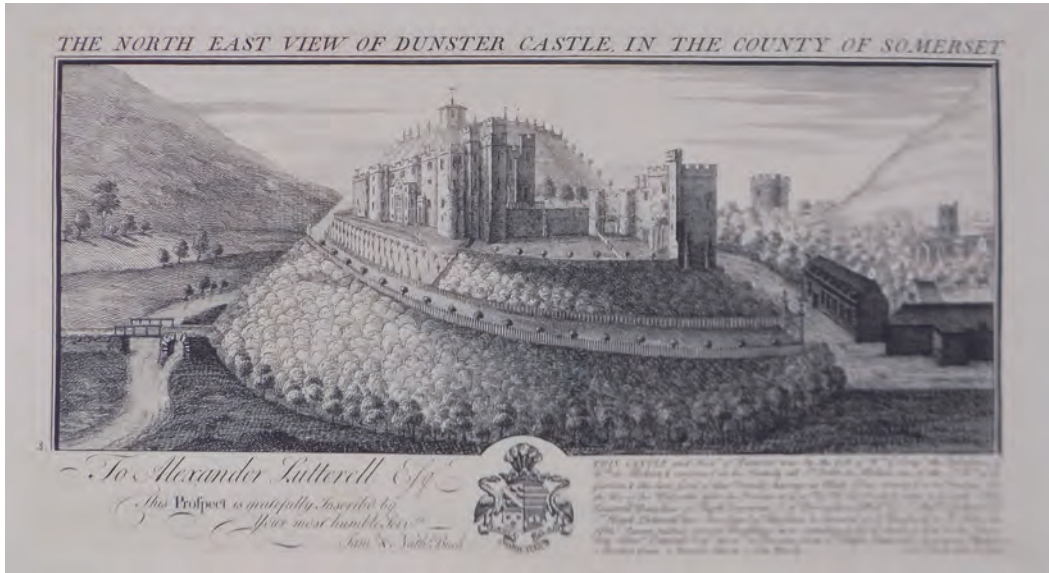


Fig. 3 1733 view of the Castle and Gatehouse by the Buck Brothers. Note that the gateway towers are two storey and that the north end of the gatehouse is higher than the south (SANHS)

of larger stone, roughly squared. There are three, cross-shaped, slit windows, very worn, one overlooking the doors (BW3) and another (BW2), facing roughly north, part covered by the added gatehouse. The third (BW1) can be seen from the interior of the building and faces west, but was blocked when the gatehouse was built (Fig. 2). The jamb stones of the doorway are built against the east window, which therefore has only the vertical and the northern arm of the cross shape. It is designed to look directly along the closed doors. The roof is a sloping cement construction.

The east tower is similar but not the same. It is set on the line of the curtain wall. The stonework is noticeably different, roughly squared and coursed local stone but not as neat as that of the west tower. The course of squared stone above the chamfered plinth varies between 25x19cm to 59x19cm; these are smaller than those of the west tower. The stones forming the chamfer are 27 or 29x19cm, again smaller, and are set lower than those of the west tower. As the chamfer runs round to the east it now disappears into the ground, where steps and a doorway link with 19th-century additions give access to the kitchen wing of the castle. The two windows (BW6 and 7) are straight slits with square jambs; the stonework is not worn and is probably replacement. The first-floor wall is set back about 10cm and the two windows at this level are Gothic, arched, single-light constructions (Fig. 2; BW13 and 14) with stone jambs and arch (1870). There is a crenellated parapet above.

The doors are held between the two towers with two courses of voussoirs forming a flattened pointed arch, with soldier coursed brickwork above. The jambs are paired and chamfered, irregularly sized stones and are very worn; the chamfers are not stopped, the east one is possibly rebuilt. A groundfast stone on the west side prevented wheels hitting the door jamb that side, but was not really necessary on the east. The carriageway through is lined by parallel walls of local stone: on the west side largish squared coursed stone, on the east smaller, more rubbly, stone, partially coursed, probably dating to Salvin's alterations (1868-70). The passage leads to steps for access by foot on the right hand, west side, to the Green Court (lower ward) and the castle; the left side ends in a blank stone wall supporting the depth of soil added in 1764 by Thomas Hull.

The doors are massive in their construction (Fig. 4). Thick vertical planks have on the outer face a grid of iron bars, the vertical set into the timber under the horizontal ones, with the latter fastened to the planks by huge, diamond headed nails, set three to each four inch square. Three of these bars end in hinges; they are right-angled round the door to pitch onto the three large pintles held in the stonework behind the stone jambs. The small wicket gate is part of the design of the iron support system as the two lower hinges have flanges protecting the top and bottom of the little gate. It has a large lock on the reverse; this cannot be photographed as this door is permanently open. The rear of both doors



Fig. 4 The Gateway Towers with paired doors, the steps beyond lead to the Green Court (Lower Ward)

is reinforced with a grid of square cross-section timbers, which are matched by the iron supports on the front. On the east door there is a large iron knocker. There is also a large stocklock set on the reverse of this door between the sixth and seventh horizontal timbers (from the base of the door) and over the two outer vertical struts of wood. The keyholes are apparent on the outer face of the door. The lock has not been used for some time and the covering of wood has suffered from damp in the past. It is hoped to obtain a dendrochronological (tree-ring) date for the doors. If this is possible it will confirm or otherwise whether they date, as reputed, to the 13th century.

THE GATEWAY – INTERIOR

The west tower is entered from a passageway behind the doors, which has a door jamb apparent in the north wall, and a brick roof which strongly suggests that it was altered by Salvin. At the west end of this passage and providing light to it is a grille set in the ground above (i.e. the surface of the Green Court) and a two light window (BW8) which allows some daylight to enter the area (Fig. 2). The guard chamber itself has a vaulted stone roof which was constructed to accommodate light from each of the three original cross-slit windows. They

all have window seats in front of them. In 1420 the window facing west (MW1) was completely blocked by the gatehouse and the north one (MW2) partially so. The walls are very thick, 2m maximum, with each window opening framed by a chamfered Gothic arch. The stonework of the windows is very weathered. The lintels over are solid blocks of stone which support the walls above. The sills of the north and east windows are red ten-inch tiles; the west window has twelve-inch tiles, all added in the mid 19th century. The floor comprises stone slabs in the entrance and on the steps but in the chamber it is of six-inch red tiles, again mid 19th century.

There is no evidence for a fireplace and the oubliette found under the floor in the 19th century was closed off during the work carried out in this period (NT notes).

The East Tower is accessed from a doorway in the wall connecting the tower and the north-west corner of the castle. The doorway leads firstly into the cellars built about 1870 by Salvin, when he was altering and increasing the kitchen provision for the castle. A further doorway to the right gives access to the ground floor of the tower; this has a barrel vaulted brick ceiling supported by a round pier of painted brick, also by Salvin. The third window (BW5) is two light, likely to be 19th century, and looks into the passage behind the main doors. The north window opening (BW4) is not

centred under its stone lintel, but is skewed towards the north-east. The sills are cement. The mass of masonry on the west side of the guard chamber has good, squared stone in the quoins; it supports the large east door. The floor is of ten-inch red tiles (19th century). Much of this tower has been rebuilt by Salvin, as an 1845 drawing shows both towers one storey high (SANHS collection, Somerset Heritage Centre, <https://somerset-atswheritage.org.uk/records/A/DAS/1/146/8>), but it also appears to have been reconfigured in the 16th/17th century, possibly to create an artillery-bearing bastion above (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.).

The door that gives access to the guard chamber also opens onto a flight of stone steps that lead up to the first floor of the 19th-century kitchen range. From here the west door opens into the meat larder that is the first floor of this tower (Fig. 5). The walls are built of large rubble stone and are heightened by concrete infill to the

ceiling, except the south wall, which is brick. There is a skewed brick support on this wall with a blocked double brick arch on the west side of it but the arches do not continue to the east. Metal tracking remains round the walls, presumably for hanging meat. The north-east window (BW14) has zinc mesh still in it from the room being used as a meat larder, both windows have shutters. There are two horizontal slits in the north wall, 45x8cm, 2.06m above the floor, their purpose is not clear. The floor is ten-inch square red tiles, stepped up at the north end of the room (19th century). The tower now has a concrete roof.

The stone steps that enable access to the first floor of the tower show heavy wear and it is possible that they were reused from the stair that allowed foot passengers into the Lower Ward after the levelling of 1764 had taken place. The huge amount of soil that infilled the area at this time was supported by a wall

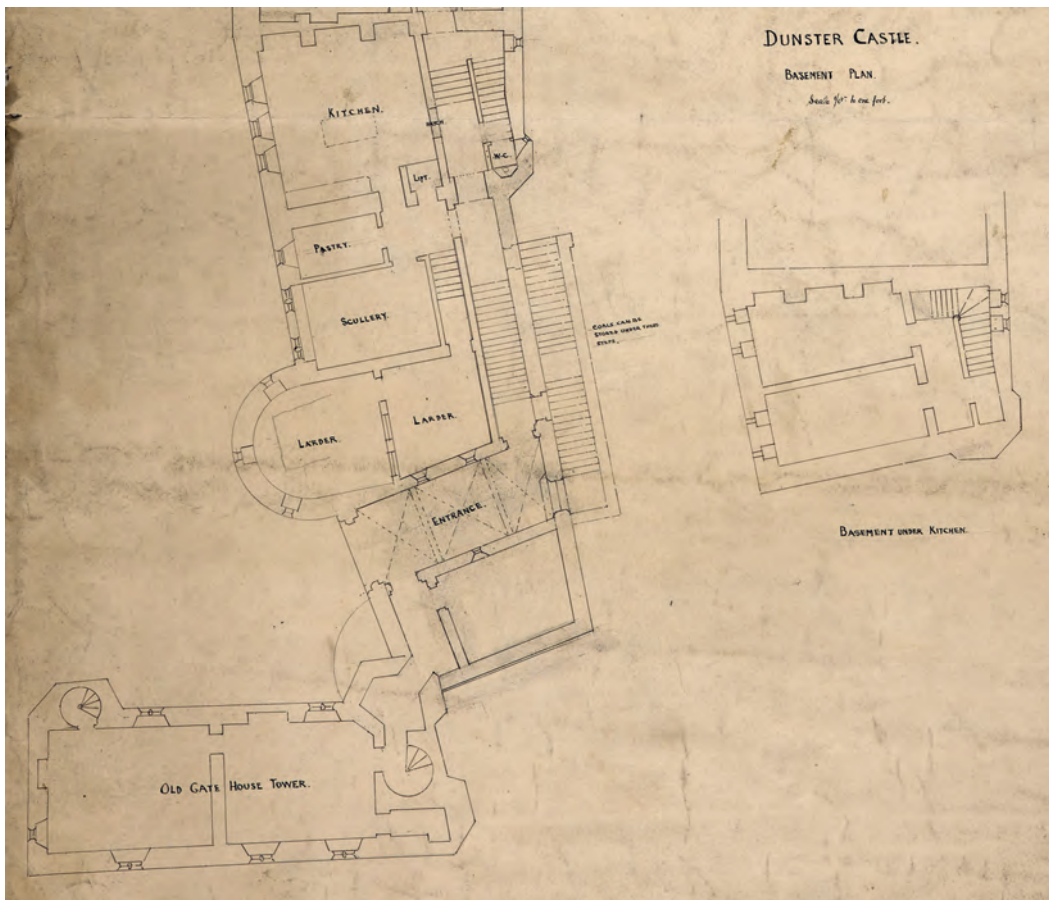


Fig. 5 Salvin plan of 1868, showing the steps to the Green Court (RIBA Collections)

built behind the doors, probably continuing the line of the curtain wall. This closed the historic access to the Castle but for foot passengers only a door was cut in the curtain wall and a straight flight of steps was built against the south side of the wall, giving access to the Green Court (the lower ward). Salvin replaced this flight by the steps used now (Fig. 5), and possibly reused the stone treads inside the building (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.).

THE GATEHOUSE – OVERVIEW

The gatehouse has three sides forming a rough rectangle in plan but the south wall was angled to align with the curtain wall. There is a stair turret on the north-east corner and polygonal turrets at each end of the south elevation. It has three storeys with a carriageway through the ground floor. It overlies part of the west tower of the gateway (Fig. 2), and its peculiar position can best be explained if the west and north walls and the western gateway already existed as part of a barbican protecting the 13th-century gateway. The likelihood of this being the reason for the otherwise awkward site has been discussed above; it is also possibly suggested by the survival of squared and coursed stonework in the lower part of the west wall, different from the rubble and more random stonework above the level of the ground-floor window lintels (Fig. 6). The pintles for doors to close the west archway survive. It is possible that a narrow walled passage, a mantlet, ran on down the slope with a forward entrance; this would have regulated access to the barbican and gateway (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.).

THE GATEHOUSE – EXTERIOR

The gatehouse is approached from below. The west front, of three storeys with a crenellated parapet hiding the roof, dominates the visitors' access route to the castle from the town (Fig. 8b, below). There is a small turret on the north-west end of the roof and the south end is dominated by the south-west turret. The west wall has two windows on the ground floor, either side of the open carriageway, and three windows on each of the first and second floors (Fig. 1). These are at two levels on each floor, as when built the northern ones were higher to allow for the throughway. The dressings of the gatehouse are limestone, likely to be Dundry stone (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.) as it is recorded that the freestone was brought by sea from Bristol in 1420 'and the carriage of the same by sea and lastly by land' (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 358).

Two buttresses support the wall: the lower one has a chamfered plinth, possibly dating its origins to the 13th

century, while the upper one is partially buried in the bank. The opening to the carriageway has a series of mouldings which are wider than the opening, and two large pintles each side for the original doors. Above is the coat-of-arms of Sir Hugh Luttrell, died 1521 (Fig. 6), the great-grandson of the Sir Hugh, died 1428, who was the builder of the gatehouse 1420-26. It is quite likely that the original coat-of-arms was replaced by his descendant (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.). In fact, close-up photographs show a shorter moulding under the base of the stonework which would have fitted an earlier carving.

There are relieving arches over all the windows of the west front except the top-floor north opening (TW1); this suggests it is a later addition (Fig. 1). There is some discussion as to whether the existing windows are original or later replacements. As nearly all the relieving arches are smaller than the present openings it strongly suggests that the original windows were mainly single light, whereas the present cinquefoil headed frames are mostly two light with wider jambs (Fig. 6). In 1420 the Receiver's account for Sir Hugh Luttrell mentions '2379lb of iron bought and wrought, that is to say for hinges (gumphis), 'kacchers' for 'lacchis' for doors and windows, and also for putting ironwork in the lights (*illuminaribus*) of the windows, 14l. 17s. 4 1/2d' (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 359). Unfortunately this record does not help to determine the size of the original windows. These were probably altered to the present mullioned and transomed openings or two-light casements after changes of ownership. Most of the windows have square heads with a dripcourse and labels; the upper lights have a cinquefoil head with a quatrefoil in each of the spandrels. This is consistent with a date range c. 1480-1520; similar style openings are found at Selworthy Church, Cleeve Abbey, Old Cleeve, Bowhill, Exeter, and Christ Church College, Oxford (I am indebted to Dr. Blaylock for these comparisons). Sir Hugh Luttrell, great-grandson of the builder of the gatehouse, inherited Dunster in 1485 when King Henry VII released the estates from attainder. Hugh is recorded as repairing the chapel on the Tor and maintaining the north-east part of the castle (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 364). It seems extremely likely that he put in the larger and more decorative windows and marked this by inserting his and his wife's coats-of-arms over the gatehouse entrance. He died in 1521.

The east front is similar to the west but has an original stair turret on the north-east corner with an entry door (GD3) near the east opening of the carriageway (Fig. 7; see also Fig. 9, below). The mouldings around the latter are simple and do not match those of the west front. There was originally a window in the east side on



Fig. 6 Carriageway with coat of arms of Sir Hugh Luttrell (died 1521), great-grandson of the builder

the ground floor but this was converted into a doorway (GD2) before the Bucks' drawing of 1733 (Fig. 3). The wall part-closes the north cross-slit (BW2) in the west tower of the gateway and is built over the ground floor of the tower – when constructed it would have returned to the three floors of the south face but since the infilling of the lower ward in 1764 it ends at the south-east tower built by Thomas Hull.

There are five windows in the facade; four of the relieving arches are smaller than the openings. The south mid-floor window (MW5) is the exception and is single light, the same width as the relieving arch, the upper stone of the visible north jamb is large but below it are small stones lengthening the jamb to give a larger opening, suggesting strongly that it has been extended downwards.

The surrounding stonework of the windows is of large cut limestone whereas the rest of the wall is local rubble sandstone, purple, green and some red. High up at the south end there is a patch of larger local stone, including limestone, probably resulting from a repair or rebuild; this may be related to the Civil War. The freestone in the later south-east turret is smaller in size. There is an inserted slit window (GW4) in the north wall of the throughway. It is difficult to understand its function as it is set too high for anyone in the apple store to see out from it; the stonework below it is disturbed. The crenellations along the roof are the same as those of the west front.



Fig. 7 The east wall of the Gatehouse

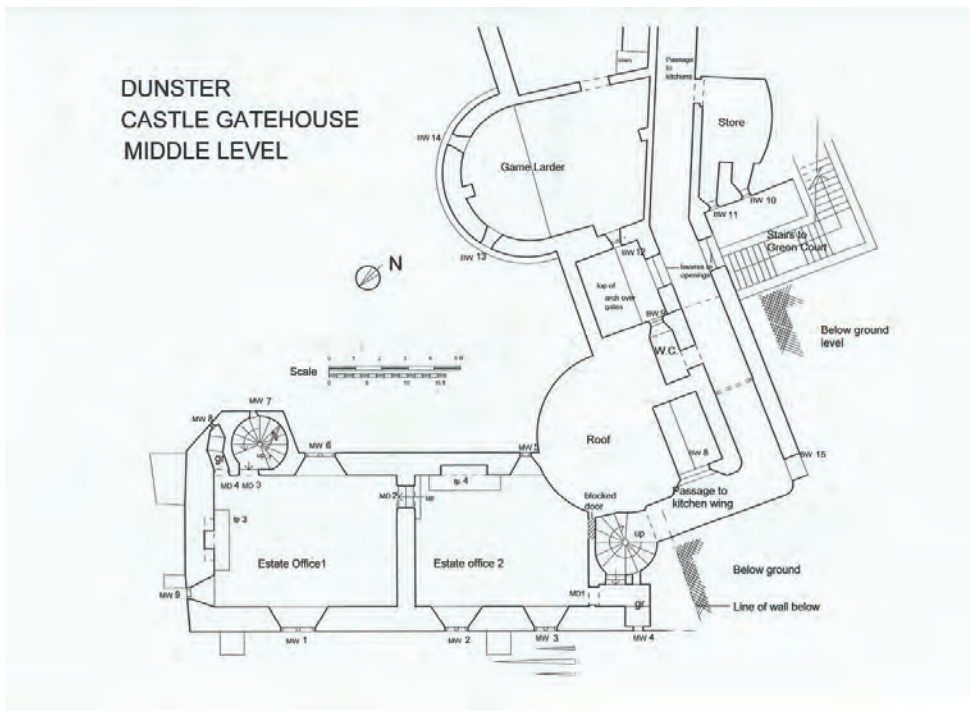
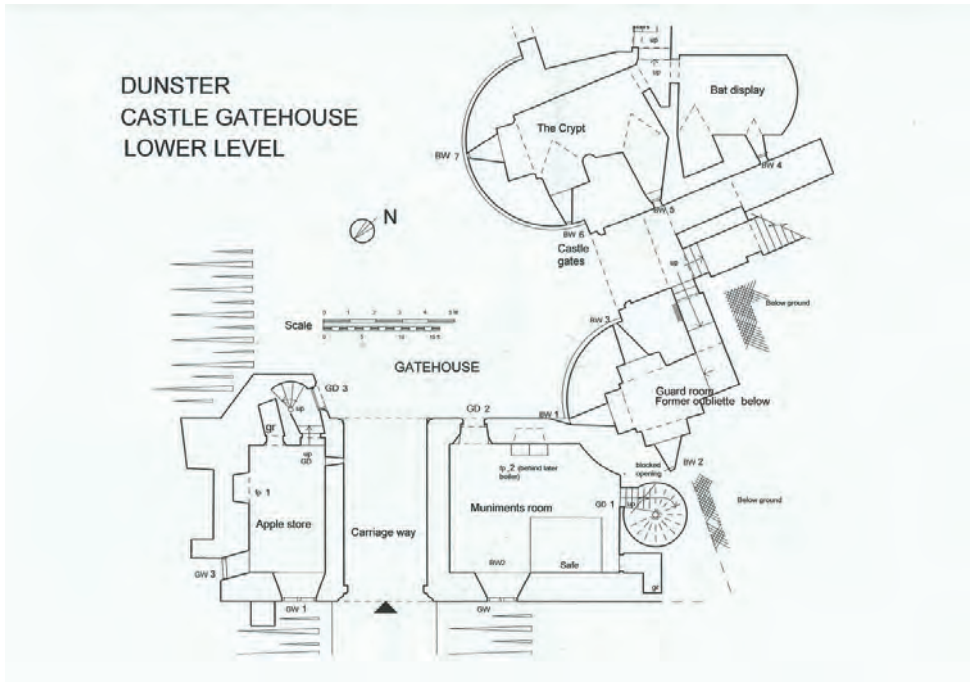


Fig. 8a Castle Gateway lower and middle level plans prepared by the Early Dunster Project 2019

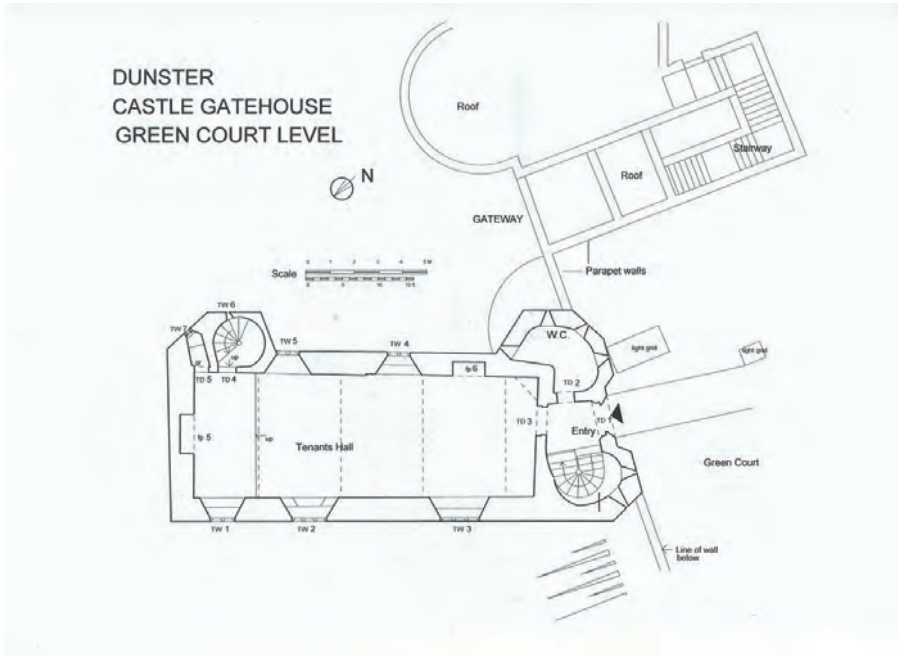


Fig. 8b Castle Gateway upper level plan prepared by the Early Dunster Project 2019

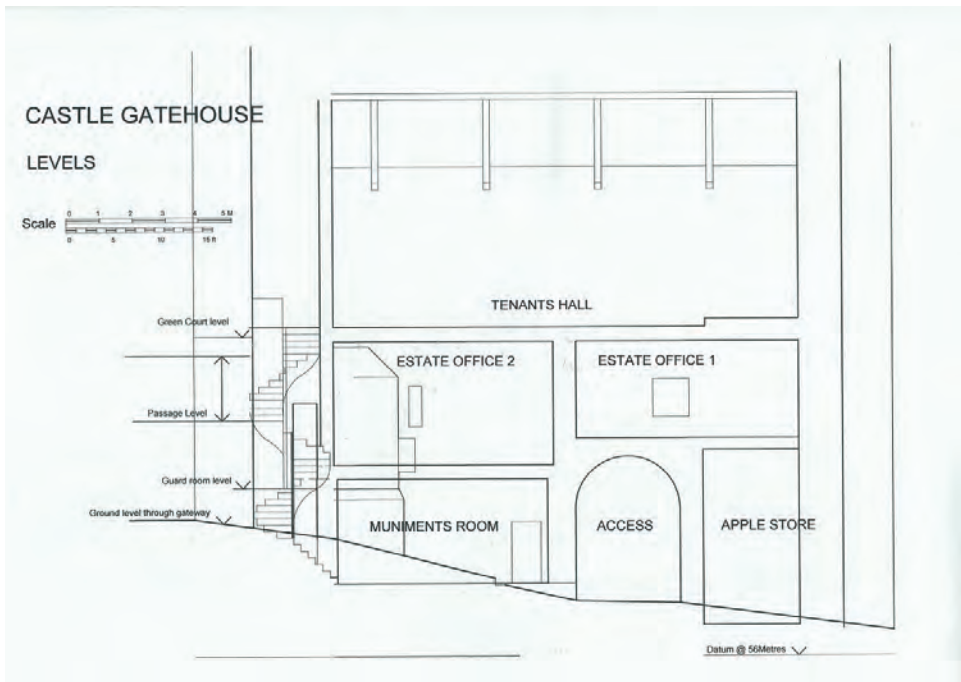


Fig. 9 Castle Gateway cross-section plans prepared by the Early Dunster Project 2019

The north wall is of similar construction with two windows, both single light with cinquefoil heads. Both have relieving arches and jambs of large limestone blocks. There are two strap ties with splayed ends at the levels of the first and second floors, and two buttresses supporting the wall; this is not surprising as it is built above a very sharp drop to the valley floor. These are possibly the buttresses recorded in 1430 (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 361), as they are additions of different build from the wall. They are of somewhat similar build but are different in size; the north-east one is much wider at 1.5m, the other being 0.83m in width.

The south wall was rebuilt in 1764 when Thomas Hull was engaged by Henry Fownes Luttrell to level the lower ward and the two lower floors of the south face of the gatehouse were buried below ground level. He added a tower to each corner of the new south wall and the original central spiral stairs were altered, so that access to the middle storey was by steps down from the top floor instead of up from the ground floor. The towers had two layers of slit windows and a crenellated parapet (Fig. 10). The original way into the ground-floor south room (the muniments room) is not sure, but was probably by a central doorway from the lower ward; later it was also possible through the east doorway (GD2), according to the 1733 Bucks' drawing (Fig. 3). Access to the top floor in 1764 was provided by Hull through an inserted doorway (TD1). The jambs are early 16th century and probably reused from elsewhere in the castle, but they are damaged near the ground. The arch is not consistent with the base; it is not Romanesque although semi-circular in shape (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.). Above it are two slit windows similar to those in the towers, all referring back to the Gothic of the medieval buildings (Fig. 10). The roof is slated; it was retimbered by Salvin in 1870 over the whole area of the top floor when he removed the dividing wall and created the space known as the Tenants' Hall.

THE GATEHOUSE – INTERIOR

Walls

The thickness of the walls varies between 0.70m for some of the internal partitions and 1.3m for the north wall. There are two rooms on the first two floors, but the two units of the top floor have been a single space since they were combined by Salvin in his 1870 alterations.

Each of the six original rooms had a garderobe opening from it and also an independent access from the outside by an internal stair. However when the lower ward was levelled and the door to the south front opened



Fig. 10 The south wall with the two towers, built by Thomas Hull in 1764

into the top floor the route to the southern apartments had to be altered, access being downwards by the spiral stair west of the new doorway.

Floors

Appreciation of the heights of the rooms is important for the understanding of the building. The rooms in the northern part of the gatehouse are higher than those in the south, as the ceiling of the ground-floor room (the apple store) is at the same height as the stone arch over the carriageway (Fig. 9). This means that on the middle floor the north room (Estate Office 1) floor is 0.75m higher than that of the south room (Estate Office 2) with four steps down between them. On the top floor Salvin lowered the northern end of the floor after removing the central partition, creating one space (1870). The windows at the north end are therefore set high in relation to the present position of the floor. Their relationship with the southern windows is clearly seen in the east and west elevations of the building (Figs 1, 7).

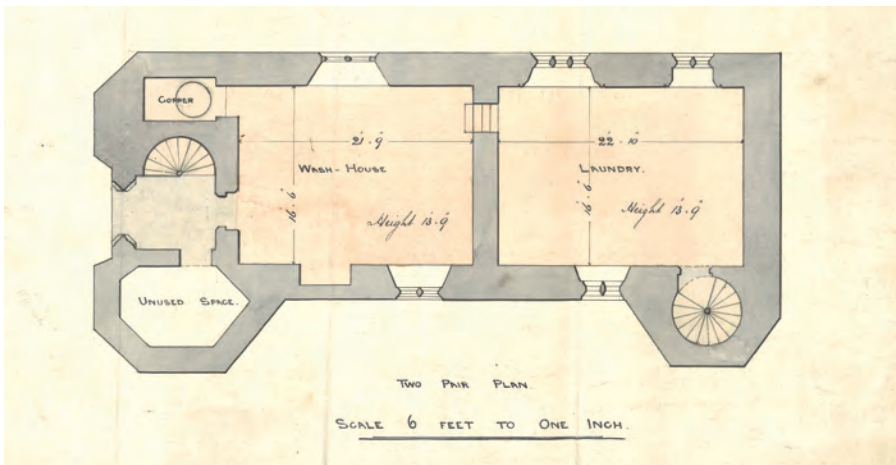
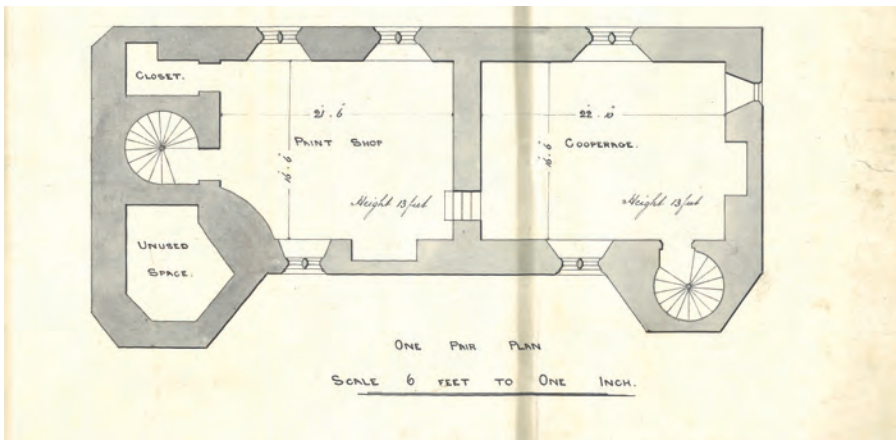
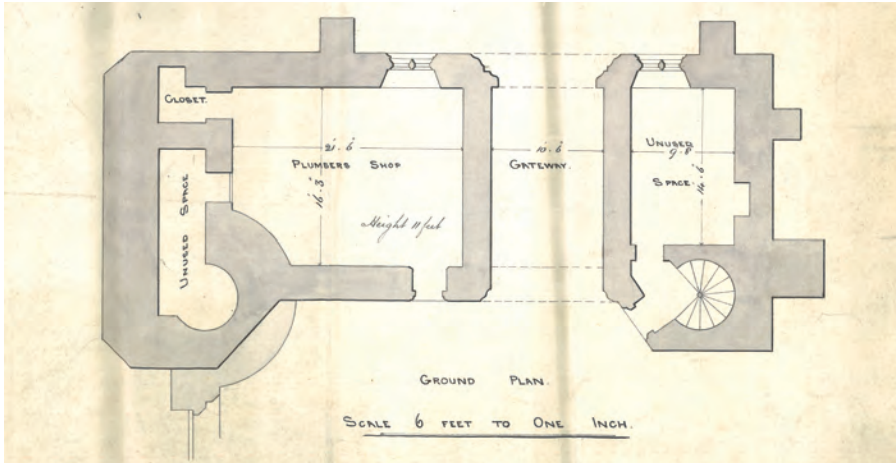


Fig. 11 Thomas Hull's plans of the Gatehouse 1763 (SANHS)

Windows

The windows in the main part of the building are either one- or two-light casements or mullioned and transomed, but all are essentially the same design. They have a cinquefoil head with quatrefoils in the spandrels; the mullions and transoms are the same limestone as the jambs and lintels, but many have been renovated in the 19th century. The sills are plaster or cement. The lights have diamond-shaped leaded panes tied to saddle bars and, as the fasteners and stays, are 19th/20th century. In the north-east stair turret and the garderobes the windows are small single Gothic-arched lights of limestone with two pintles for a shutter (15th century), and diamond glazing with margin lights (19th century). In the southern two turrets and above the Tenants' Hall door they are straight slit windows (18th century) with weldmesh in them (20th century).

Stairs

The stairs in the north-east turret form a continuous spiral from the floor of the apple store to the roof (Figs 8a, b). These are cut stone, mostly a single triangular piece with the narrow end shaped to form the newel, but the occasional tread was two pieces. One or two of the treads have been mended in the 20th century but they are basically original. The muniments room has a stone flight to the middle floor from the centre of the south side. These connect with winders giving access to the South Estate Room 2, but the latter have been rebuilt so that they block the original doorway. At the top they give access to the passage to the kitchens of the 19th century, so dating this alteration. A further flight, partially in the west turret, gives access to the top floor near the Tenants' Hall entrance. These are also likely to date from the 1868-70 alterations by Salvin, and probably show reuse of the earlier more central steps to the top floor shown on Thomas Hull's 1763 plans of the gatehouse with his intended alterations (Fig. 11).

Fireplaces

Each of the six rooms was provided with a fireplace when the gatehouse was constructed in the 15th century; all of these survive. The apple store's fireplace (fp1) is in the north wall (Fig. 8a, upper). It has a heavy stone lintel with a quarter round moulding; the jambs are one long and one short stone each side with a stop that on the west side, though worn, seems to be a pyramid. The rear is rubble stone over horizontally set flat stones, with a break which could indicate the earlier existence of a bake oven. The hearth is now tiled, as is the floor, with

red six-inch (15cm) tiles, probably from the second half of the 19th century (Fig. 12).



Fig. 12 The Apple Store fireplace (fp 1)

The Muniments Room (fp2) has a similar stone lintel, which, with the stones of the north jamb, are visible in the east wall, but most of the original fireplace is hidden by a brick stove (Fig. 8a, upper). This has metal flue doors that were provided by 'Garton and Kings, Manufacturers, Exeter'.

Estate Office 1 (fp3) fireplace is in the north wall of the mid floor (Fig. 8a, lower); the opening was large but has been much reduced, with added blue and white tile infill on both sides. The moulding is a step, a half round with a larger quarter round along the soffit; these run down the jambs to possible, but worn, double runoff stops. The grate in the reduced opening has four plain bars. The hearth tiles are red and black, surrounded by a stone kerb.

Estate Office 2 (fp4) has now three stones forming the lintel on the east wall (Fig. 8a, lower), but they may originally have been one; the north one has two bits gouged out of it, the reason for this is not apparent. The moulding is a step, a half round, and a small hollow chamfer, and runs down the jambs to pyramid stops. The right hand jamb is similar to the Estate Room 1 fireplace with an extra round; the opening is reduced with red and black tiles and the grate and the hearth are the same. The ashpan survives (Fig. 13).

Tenants' Hall (fp5) on the top floor is set in the north wall (Fig. 9, upper). It has a straight stone lintel with a hollow chamfer; the jambs are a single stone on the west side but two stones on the east. The chamfer continues down to large pyramid stops. The rear is brick but the fire-hearth is narrow brick with a log-burner set on it. The tiling in front is red, black and yellow. This fireplace has been lowered when the floor was levelled by Salvin c. 1870.



Fig. 13 Fireplace 4 (fp4) in the Estate Office 2

Tenants' Hall (fp6) is in the east wall and two large stones form the lintel with a single stone in each jamb (Fig. 8b). The moulding is a hollow chamfer which runs down into step-runout stops. The rear is rubble stone, the hearth narrow brick; the hearth in front is as fp5. The six fireplaces seem to be contemporary with the building (1419-21) as the variations in their mouldings and stops are all compatible with an early 15th-century date.

Doors

The two doors that are most important are at the entrance to the north-east turret (GD3) and the southern access to the Tenants' Hall (TD1) (Figs 8a, 8b, 10).

GD3 is three plank with hollow chamfered applied battens, a rounded head to fit the opening, flat iron hinges bolted on and square headed nails holding the three horizontal battens. The fastener has been removed.

TD1 has five planks with applied moulded battens both vertical and horizontal, forming rectangles 7x5 inches (0.18x0.13mm) in size; they also frame the outside edge of the door (Fig. 10). There are horizontal boards lining the reverse side. The hinges are very large strap hinges on pins. There is a large iron bolt and a drop handle; the lock has a large wooden case. This door was probably reused from elsewhere in the castle precinct when it was first inserted in the south wall of the gatehouse by Thomas Hull in 1764.

The access to the southern ground-floor room, the Muniments Room, is from the eastern face of the gatehouse, near the doors of the gateway (Fig. 7). This doorway (GD2) has been cut through a previous window as the remnants of the sill are apparent in the room. This door is shown on the 1733 Bucks' drawing of the Castle (Fig. 3), but it is not known how long before that it was inserted – possibly after the slighting of the castle in 1646 when the residential building in the lower ward (the present castle) and the

gatehouse were saved from being demolished.

The other doors are mostly 19th-century replacements, probably dating to the Salvin refurbishment of c. 1870.

Roof

The original roof was at two levels, the northern part was about 0.75m higher than the southern part. This shows clearly in the engraving of the castle and gatehouse by the Buck brothers (Fig. 3). It was possibly slated with Treborough slates in 1426: 'In two thousand tile-stones (*petris tegulinis*) bought of Henry Helyer, 20*d*. In the carriage of the said stones from Treburgh to Dunster Castle, 3s 4*d*...' (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 357). This shows that slates were carried from the quarry to the castle, they were also purchased from Cornwall (*ibid.*, 358). The line of the roof was altered to one level by Thomas Hull during the works he did in 1763-64, when he added the two south turrets and a doorway to the top floor of the gatehouse, after levelling the lower ward. He also added the north-west turret to keep the symmetry of the outline of the roof.

The present roof structure dates to the alteration by Salvin of the top floor of the gatehouse into one room about 1870; this involved lowering the north room floor and replacing the 1764 roof. The visible timbers show a five-bay roof with four trusses, purlins and rafters, but the ridge is hidden. The trusses each have two queen posts supported by the tiebeams; they are strengthened by arch braces which probably connect to the ridge. Corbels in the walls support arch braces to the tiebeams and short vertical timbers which end behind the wall-plates. The single set of purlins is substantial. The rafters are angled at about 30cm above the wall-plates and are pegged, as are most of the timbers. The queen posts however are bolted to the tiebeams. The roof timbers finish against the gable wall at each end of the building. There is plaster between the rafters (Fig. 14).



Fig. 14 The roof structure over the Tenants' Hall, 1868-70

NOTES ON THE HISTORY

Gatehouses were known in the Anglo-Saxon period (*burgh-gates*, the gate to the enclosure) and were built by kings and landowners of high rank to protect and control access to their residence. They thus became a symbol of status.

The Normans continued this tradition, and in the 11th century a single tower with a central entrance was the usual form for a gatehouse. Twin towers guarding the opening between them are thought to have a Roman derivation, as at Pevensey in Sussex. By 1200 this form of gatehouse, with square, semi-circular or polygonal towers, was being constructed across England (Goodall 2012).

The history of the castle at Dunster is long and complicated. The castle is mentioned in Domesday Book, under the land of William de Mohun: 'He holds Dunster himself; his castle is there. Aluric held it before 1066' (Thorn and Thorn 1980, 25.2). He held 69 manors from William I and was Sheriff of Somerset. His castle was on the top of the tor. His son, also William, supported Mathilda in the civil war with Stephen, and was reputedly made Earl of Somerset by her. Two more Williams followed, and the next heir Reynold de Mohun came of age in 1204 and is recorded fighting with King John on more than one occasion. He died in 1213, leaving an underage heir, Reynold II, who finally received his lands in 1227 from Henry III. He was appointed by the king Chief Justice of the Forests south of the Trent (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 19) and lived until 1258. He married Hawis le Fleming as his first wife; she brought him considerable wealth and is thought to be the reason for the naming of the Fleming Tower, also called 'Dame Hawis's Tower'. This is recorded as part of the stone curtain wall he built round the Lower Ward of the Castle with three towers, the Fleming Tower being a prison, also a granary (1266 extent; Maxwell Lyte 1909, 353). It is likely that these walls replaced an earlier enclosure on the north side of the tor as the area of the keep on top was not large and room for men, horses and equipment was needed by the de Mohuns, who were military leaders and served under the kings or the great magnates of the realm.

HISTORY OF THE GATEWAY

There is no direct documentary evidence as to whether the 13th-century gateway was built by Reynold de Mohun II or by his grandson John de Mohun II. The reference to the curtain wall and three towers has been generally taken to mean that Reynold II was responsible. Certainly twin towered gatehouses with semi-circular towers were built in the country from around 1200 onwards. The gatehouse of Tonbridge Castle in Kent, dated to around 1250, is a well-known example (Goodall 2012), with two semi-circular towers and the central opening having similarities in the arch to that at Dunster,

but it is much higher and more complex. Reynold II would have travelled across the country frequently; he held lands in Normandy and fought alongside the king several times (Maxwell Lyte 1909). He would have been aware of gatehouse development in England.

The Dunster gate jambs and arch are also similar to those of the Trematon Castle Gatehouse, Cornwall (Guy and Higham 2018/19; R. Higham pers. comm.), but the latter are set in a rectangular tower with the passage through the middle. Trematon is dated to 1270-80 and could have acted as a template for the Dunster example in the time of Reynold's grandson, John II, who acquired his lands in 1269 after a minority of 15 years. He died aged 30 in 1279.

It is possible that Reynold II started the gatehouse and that it was completed by his grandson, as the design of the two towers is the same but the details, such as the stonework and the slit windows, are not. The west tower is essentially unchanged but the eastern one was altered in the 16/17th and 19th centuries, so it is difficult to compare the two. The neat stonework and symmetry of the west tower suggests this was built first. If a dendrochronological date can be obtained for the doors then this may help to define the dating of the gateway. Practically, it is unlikely that the two towers were built eleven or more years apart as the gates could not have been hung and the lower ward would therefore have been indefensible. It seems on balance that the gatehouse is probably mid 13th century, built by Reynold II when he constructed the curtain wall round the lower ward of the castle.

It is worth noting that none of the other castles along the coast, from Barnstaple to Bridgwater (which did have a water gate) had a gatehouse. Taunton Castle did, but was a religious holding by the 13th century, and so did Exeter, but that dates back to 1067. Dunster's gatehouse gave protection to the castle but it was also a statement emphasising not only the local importance of the site but its status nationally.

After Reynold de Mohun's death in 1258 all the de Mohun holdings were in wardship, held by Queen Eleanor. The castle was, however, taken over by Sir Adam Gurdun, probably in 1263, and became the centre of a south-west rebellion against the crown. Simon de Montfort's leadership seems to have been the reason for Gurdun's appropriation of the castle, but it was regained by the king after the defeat of de Montfort at Evesham in 1265 (Ridgeway 2016); Gurdun survived.

There is no evidence in the gatehouse for a portcullis. The only evidence for a moat is 'Casteldichepasture' mentioned in 1430 and 'la Baleye' between the ditch and the king's highway (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 362). In the late 12th century the first barbicans are recorded. The word derives from *bab* (gate) and *khan* (courtyard or enclosure), both Arabic. It is likely that returning soldiers from the Crusades adopted the idea of a

defended area in front of the gate to a castle (Goodall 2012). While again there is no documentary evidence known of a barbican at Dunster, the peculiarity of the position of the 15th-century gatehouse suggests that it is built on the walls of an earlier construction. This is made more likely when the peculiarity of the differences in the mouldings around the outer and inner openings of the later gatehouse are taken into account, and the tighter build of the lower part of the wall on the west face.

While the towers were two storey in 1733 (Fig. 3), it is possible that they were three storey and thus more imposing, but their original height is not known. There was most likely a room over the gate, even possibly a second storey, as was common for gatehouses then, with windows on the south side looking onto the lower ward, but nothing remains now to confirm this. Their 19th-century use by Salvin is described below.

THE LUTTRELLS AND THE GATEHOUSE

The fifth John de Mohun inherited the Dunster lands in 1341; he married Joan de Burghersh, whose father was his guardian during his minority. He fought at Crecy in 1346, with the Prince of Wales in 1359 and with the Duke of Lancaster in 1373, and was one of the original Garter Knights. However he had no male heir, and as he had large debts Lady de Mohun sold the reversion of the Castle and Manor of Dunster, of the Manors of Minehead and Kilton and of the Hundred of Carhampton, to Lady Elizabeth Luttrell in 1374. John V died in 1375. The properties had been settled on Lady de Mohun for life, with the reversion to Lady Luttrell. As Lady de Mohun lived until 1404 she had a very good bargain, having received a payment of five thousand marks. Lady Elizabeth died in 1395, so never possessed the properties. It was her son Hugh Luttrell who inherited the Dunster lands when Joan de Mohun died, and he immediately began to record payments for work on the towers and other buildings on the Tor and in the Lower Ward: 'In a key bought for the door of the tower over the gate, 2*d*' (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 354).

In 1417 the accounts record 'To a carpenter on the repair of the gates of the Lower Castle, for seven days at 3*d*. by the day, 21*d*. Also in iron work for the same gates, viz. eighty-seven pounds at 11/4*d*. by the pound, in nails, plates and bands (*vinculis*), 9*s*. and 3/4*d*.' (*ibid.*, 356). The ironwork is probably that still existing on the outer face of the doors. That the gates were repaired suggests that they were old by this time.

In 1420 the receiver's accounts refer to the gatehouse: 'The new building in my lord's castle ... with the purchase of free stone at Bristol and the carriage of the same by sea and lastly by land'. The angle of the gatehouse to the earlier gateway seems very

awkward, but this was probably dictated at the time by the existence of a barbican enclosing the existing towers and doors. If this projected from the curtain wall and joined on to the north-east corner of the castle itself it would have provided a dead area in front of the doors that could be defended. A stub of wall remaining on the north-east corner of the gatehouse may be related to this, or may be support for the north-east corner of the building. The west entrance through the gatehouse was possibly already in existence in the barbican wall and this would explain the differences in the mouldings and sizes of the two carriageway arches (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.).

It is possible that the approach to the gatehouse was protected by a mantlet wall running down to the position of the present stables. Sir John Luttrell had served with John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, who had built a new gatehouse at Dunstanburgh Castle in the early 1380s. The Great Gatehouse doorway there was blocked and a 9.4m long barbican was built leading to a new gatehouse two to three storeys high. Beyond this a mantlet wall about 6m high protected the inner bailey. It is possible that Sir John Luttrell used at Dunster his experience of the duke's castle improvements at Dunstanburgh.

The position of the new gatehouse over the access to the castle meant that it was constructed partly over the western tower of the earlier gateway, covering the west window completely and partly obscuring the northern one. The tower was still at least two storeys high. The bulk of the walls of the gatehouse are local sandstone; payments are recorded 'to Thomas Hydon, mason, for making walls in part payment of a greater amount, 11*l*. Also paid to William Boulond, freestone mason beyond 100*s*. received by him from Thomas Hody, as appears in the account of the same Thomas Hody, in part payment of a greater amount, 20*l*.' The dressings of the Gatehouse are limestone, so the likelihood is that they are Dundry stone from near Bristol, as noted.

The building was constructed so that there were two parts to it, with a transverse dividing wall separating the northern and southern halves. The height of the carriageway on the northern side meant it was higher than the south; this is clearly shown in the Buck brothers' engraving (Fig. 3). In each side there were three separate lodgings, each room being provided with a good sized fireplace and a garderobe, and with access to the exterior that did not go through any of the other accommodation. The north stair turret survives as built, apart from one or two minor repairs, but the southern stairs were rendered ineffectual by the 1764 changes. The ground-floor flight survives on that side but the mid- and top-floor stairs have been altered. The windows were constructed with relieving arches, seven

on the west front, one on the north and five on the east (the ground-floor one on the east side was turned into a doorway (GD2) before 1733, as shown on the Bucks' engraving). It is not known whether there were any in the south wall as it was completely altered in the 1764 works, though it is likely that there were. It is probable that there was an opening into the ground floor of the south side of the building from the lower court before the 1764 changes, as there is now no evidence for an original access into this half of the building.

The size of the relieving arches suggests that originally the windows were mostly single light and that the larger openings that can be seen now are a later alteration (Fig. 15).

Sir Hugh I died in 1428. He had constructed a three-storey building guarding the access to the castle, but its main function was not defence, as there were too many openings in the front facade for that, but provision of comfortable and accessible lodgings for the many guests that he may need to entertain. 'Gatehouse' is in some ways a misnomer for this building, but like the de Mohuns 200 years previously, its existence was a statement of his power and importance in the country. It was built at a time when the country was stable under Henry V and Henry VI and the desire for a status symbol incorporating useful spaces for visitors could be combined.

He was followed by his son John, who only enjoyed the estate for two years but who is recorded as having added two buttresses (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 361), usually thought to have been the ones on the north wall where the hill is very steep; these are different in size but are definitely additions. The two on the west front are, as far as can be ascertained, identical; the lower one has a chamfered plinth and could therefore be 13th century, but the dating of the buttresses is not secure.

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The present windows with cinquefoiled heads fit the dates from c. 1480 to 1520 (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.), and therefore are almost certainly the work of Sir Hugh Luttrell II, great-grandson of the builder of the gatehouse. He inherited from his father James who had been wounded in the second battle of St Albans and died in 1461, attainted as he supported Lancaster in the Wars of the Roses. Henry VII did not release the estate to Hugh until 1485; by that time the buildings had fallen into disrepair as they were held by an absent landlord, the Earl of Huntingdon. Hugh is recorded as repairing the 'north east of the court of it.' - John Leland writing in 1542 on visiting West Somerset (Maxwell Lyte 1909, 363-64). It is therefore extremely likely that he replaced the windows with the fashionable cinquefoiled much larger lights that we see today (Fig. 15), and then had his own coat-of-arms inserted where his great-grandfather's had been to record the considerable amount of work he had completed on the gatehouse. Its position above the

entrance is ideal for display, and as the bottom moulding of the visible stonework is shorter than the present carving, it suggests it is a replacement. It displays both his arms and those of his wife Margaret Hill (Fig. 6).

His son, Andrew, is recorded by the same author as building a new piece of the castle wall to the east. There is a possibility that the east tower of the gateway was altered during the 16th/17th century as it has additional and different stonework in the guard chamber and may have been strengthened to support a bastion for artillery above (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.).



Fig. 15 Window TW2 with narrow relieving arch visible above (photo: Tony Harding)

In 1617 George Luttrell (died 1629) commissioned William Arnold to create a mansion where the cluster of medieval buildings were at the east end of the lower ward, and the outline of the present castle was the result, despite owner and architect falling out. His son Thomas Luttrell died in 1644 during the Civil War, having originally held the castle for Parliament, but his cousin Colonel Wyndham took control of Dunster Castle for the king from 1643 to 1646, while George, the heir, was underage. The castle was besieged by Parliament during 1645-46 and was finally delivered to Colonel Blake on 19 April 1646 (Lee 2014). As a result, the Council in London decreed that the castle should be slighted and all the buildings on the tor, including St Stephen's Chapel, were destroyed. The western towers and the curtain wall were also reduced to rubble, and it was only a further order from London that saved the castle and gatehouse. The castle was

then garrisoned by Parliamentary forces, although it seems that George Luttrell was allowed to live in his house. It may be that it was during this period that the east window of the Muniments Room was altered into a doorway (GD2). It is shown in the Bucks' drawing of 1733, and gave access to the southern part of the ground floor from the possible barbican (Fig. 3).

George died in 1655. His brother Francis Luttrell succeeded him, but died in 1666 and was followed in turn by each of his three sons; Thomas died underage and Francis took charge. In 1688, having been one of the first to support the Prince of Orange against James II, he raised a company of foot which eventually became known as the Green Howards. He died in 1690. His younger brother Alexander inherited and it was his widow who had the road built round the north side of the tower in 1720, the 'New Way', to make access to the castle easier. It branched off to the north opposite the access from West Street, and came round the hill to the western end of the Castle. It was still very steep.

The Luttrell heir in 1737 was a daughter, Margaret. In 1747 she married her second cousin Henry Fownes, and the family name became Fownes Luttrell. Henry used his money to carry out several improvements to the castle and grounds. In 1763-66 he employed Thomas Hull, a surveyor, to alter the lower ward. The south side along the tower was cut away and huge amounts of soil were barrowed in by workmen in 1764 to build up the north side until the ground was level. The old gates were shut permanently and a wall was built behind the gateway to hold back the earth, which was eventually 18 feet (5.4m approximately) deep against the south wall of the gatehouse. This meant that the access to the southern rooms was blocked, so Hull built a new south wall with a turret at each corner and a door (TD1) opening into the top storey from the altered lower ward (also referred to as the Green Court). The wicket gate in the 13th-century gateway could still be used by foot traffic as a door was provided in the wall behind the gateway and a straight run of steps against the wall gave access to the lower ward and the castle (see Fig. 5). Horses and wheeled transport had to go round the road. Most of the surviving curtain wall was hidden by the piled up earth (Fig. 16).

Thomas Hull reused part of an early 16th-century doorway and an old door to make the new access to the top floor of the gatehouse from the new Green Court. The original south spiral stairs seem to have been central, as shown on Thomas Hull's plans. Strangely he did not show any on the ground floor, but it seems that there must have been a flight from there to the mid floor, and, before the change in levels, also a door on the ground floor which opened onto the lower ward. Hull levelled the north and south roofs of the gatehouse and removed a turret above the north-east stairs, but nothing remains of his roof construction.

Over the next hundred years little was done to the castle, until in 1867 Anthony Salvin was asked to update it by its new owner, George Fownes Luttrell. To do this the architect made considerable alterations to the castle itself, but he also brought the gateway back into daily use and the gates were opened. This was done by building a flight of steps back from the gates which were angled to give easier access to the lower ward (Green Court). It still only served foot visitors, but was a much more open approach in front of the main building. These steps are still in use by the site's many visitors (Fig. 4).

The gatehouse was altered so that the ground-floor room in the northern half was used as the apple store, while on the south side a large safe was put in and it became the Muniments Room, for the storage of estate archives. At some time the fireplace there was blocked and a boiler constructed in front (both the safe and the brick stove still exist). Steps (not shown on the Hull plans) lead up to the middle floor, where both rooms were used in the running of the estate, with large cupboards in which to store the paperwork. These also still survive. The south doorway to the spiral stairs was blocked and the steps rearranged to enable access to the corridor which passed behind the two towers of the gateway and on to Salvin's provision of the rooms suitable for the effective functioning of a large Victorian kitchen (Fig 8a).

The top floor of the gatehouse was converted into one room, by removing the central partition, lowering the floor at the north end and completely reroofing the whole building. This became known as the Tenants' Hall (Fig. 9). The alterations also involved repositioning the north fireplace so that it was level with the platform provided at the north end; this was doubtless to give sufficient prominence to the landlord on rent paying days and at tenants' dinners. The original position of the north end floor is shown by the doors to the garderobe and stair turret in the north-east corner, and the higher level of the sills of the windows at that end of the hall. The spiral steps down to the mid floor were moved into the south-west turret built by Thomas Hull, thus opening up the approach through the south doorway into the Tenants' Hall, making it more dramatic.

Salvin's changes also altered the first floor of the east tower of the gateway as part of his provision of food preparation rooms for the castle. It was fitted out as a meat larder and connected with the ground floor by internal steps (Fig. 5). The treads of these are very worn and possibly were reused from the 1764 access to the lower ward (R. Higham and S. Blaylock pers. comm.). Salvin probably rebuilt the first floor of the eastern tower, as there is no firm information as to when the gateway towers were reduced to single storey. They are shown as two storey in the 1733 Bucks' engraving and a 1735 George Wood depiction. However, in an 1845 drawing they are shown as single storey (from the Braikenbridge Collection, Bristol, artist unknown).



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- 1 The Castle
 - 2 The tower part of a Tower of the old Castle
 - 3 The Gatehouse
 - 4 The Ruins of an old Tower
 - 5 Walls on the south side the Deigned Leeson which can not be taken away
 - 6 The Stables
 - 7 The wall against the Hill
 - 8 The flat of ground that Tho: Hull Proposes to lay on a changing level for a Leeson on these articles & to have wheelbarrows found him 2 to have all the Timber and Stone of the old Castle that lay under the level of the Deigned Leeson that is of use removed at Masters Expence & Tho: Hull to have one Hundred and thirty Pound paid him for leveling the flat of ground, as marked on this Plan & 8, The money to be paid him on this manner thirty Pounds when he begins, fifty Pounds when the ground is half leveled and the other fifty Pounds when its all leveled
 - 9 the old Castle gate, which must be walled up at Masters Expence
 - 10 The Reservoir that must be removed at Masters Expence
 - 11 The wall against the hill whose foundation is not so deep as the level deigned to that there must be something left in the Rock to keep this wall up
 - 12 Tho: Hull is to leave all the Stones he diggs that is fit for use on the ground leveled

Fig. 16 Thomas Hull's plans of the Lower Ward 1763 (SANHS)

INTERPRETATION

The gateway was built as a defensive structure in the mid/late 13th century. The two D-shaped towers on the line of the curtain wall of the lower ward of the castle supported two massive doors with a wicket gate. There is nothing to suggest a portcullis ever existed in the gateway. It does, however, seem fairly certain that the gateway was protected by a barbican on the line of the west and north walls of the later gatehouse. There is no surviving evidence for further defences, though there are one or two references to a 'castle ditch' at the foot of the Tor. The function of the two towers has changed over time, from being guardhouses and possibly prisons (the west tower is reputed to have had an oubliette under the guardroom) to being open, under National Trust ownership, to visitors.

The gatehouse was built in 1419-26 by Sir Hugh Luttrell, probably on the west and north barbican walls, apparently as a defensive structure, but its real function was to provide residential accommodation for visitors to the castle. Hence the six rooms were all provided with a substantial fireplace, a garderobe and direct access from the outside, making them self-contained lodgings. The provision of windows, particularly on the west front, one to each lodging and two for the mid-floor south unit, clearly argues against a military function. The peculiarity is that while the three southern units opened onto the lower ward with access directly to the castle, the three northern ones opened into the barbican and access to the residential part of the castle had to be gained through the gates, and so was more regulated. Subsequent use of the building was interrupted by the Civil War, but the gatehouse was saved from demolition by an Order from Council, as was the house. The major change in use came in the 19th century when, after Thomas Hull's alteration of the Lower Ward in 1764-66, Salvin removed the internal cross wall and created the Tenants' Hall out of the two top rooms and reroofed the building c. 1870. The mid-floor rooms were used by the Luttrells as the centre of the management of the Dunster Castle Estate.

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 Salvin's plan of the steps to the Green Court 1868

† *Sadly Isabel died before this article went to print. She was a highly valued member of the Early Dunster team and her presence will be very much missed. (Mary Ewing)*