

Structural Notes on Taunton Castle.

BY J. HOUGHTON SPENCER.

WHEN the Somersetshire Archæological and Natural History Society agreed to purchase Taunton Castle in the year 1873, that portion of the building to the west of and adjoining the inner gate-house was occupied as a private dwelling-house, and the eastern portion as a private school for boys; while the Great Hall was let from time to time for various public purposes.

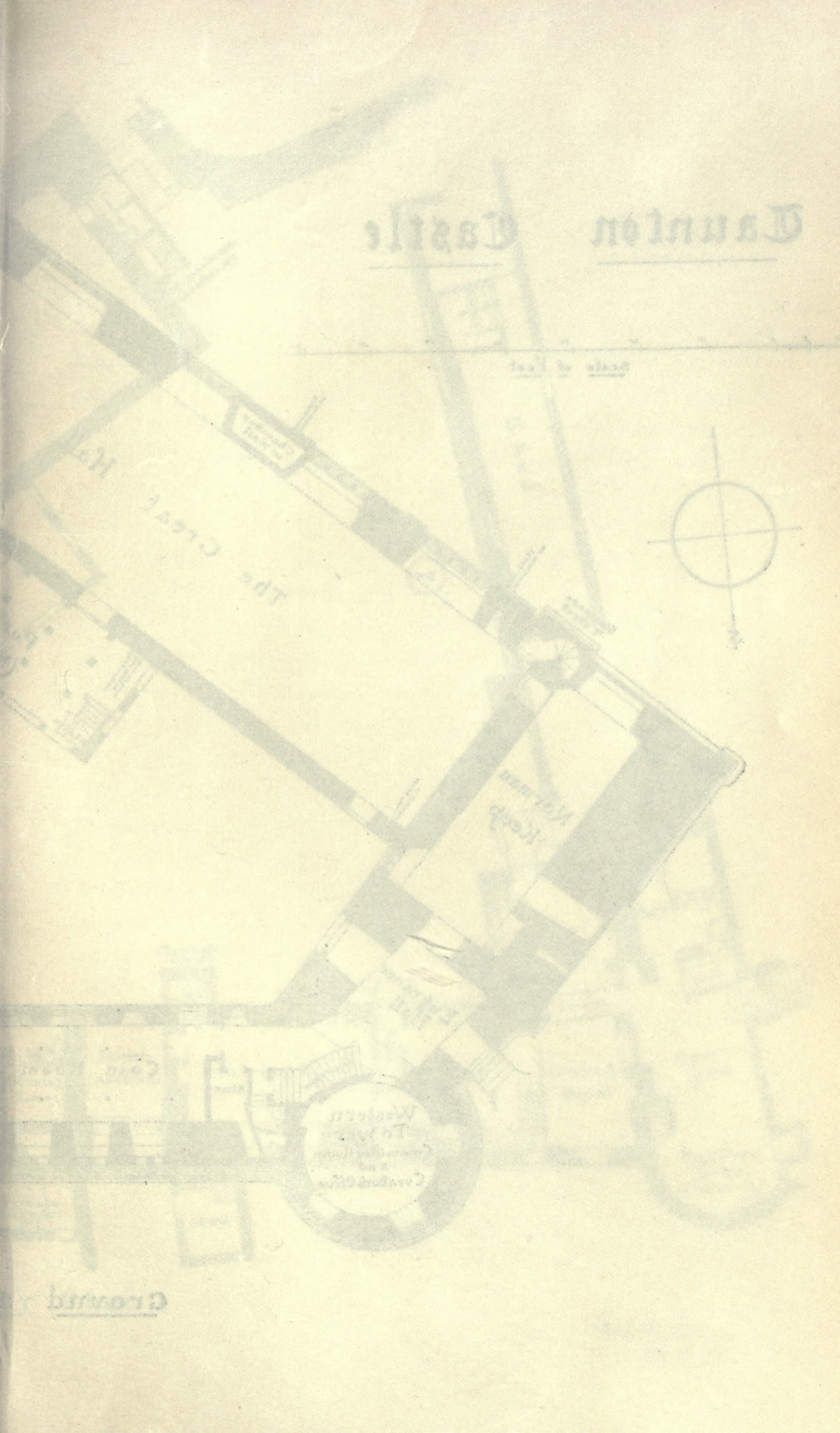
The first act of the Society, upon the completion of the purchase, and taking possession of the Castle in 1874, was to make the interior of the western part, by the removal of modern partitions, etc., suitable for a Museum; leaving a sufficient number of the rooms of the dwelling-house for the occupation of the Curator.

The entrance to the Norman Keep was at that time restored, and a Ham stone window substituted for a modern one, and two more windows were inserted in other parts of the building as hereafter more particularly described. The arched entrance to the Geological Room, now the Somerset Room, was also formed. The staircase turret of the Inner Gate House was rebuilt at the cost of Col. Wm. Pinney in 1883; a new roof was added to the Geological Room in 1884, when the attics in the old roof, which had been occupied by the Curator, were removed, and bedrooms provided for him by sub-dividing the drawing-room, now the Library, over the Coin Room.

Two Early English windows in the north wall of the Geological Room, which had been blocked by modern work,

Barrington Castle

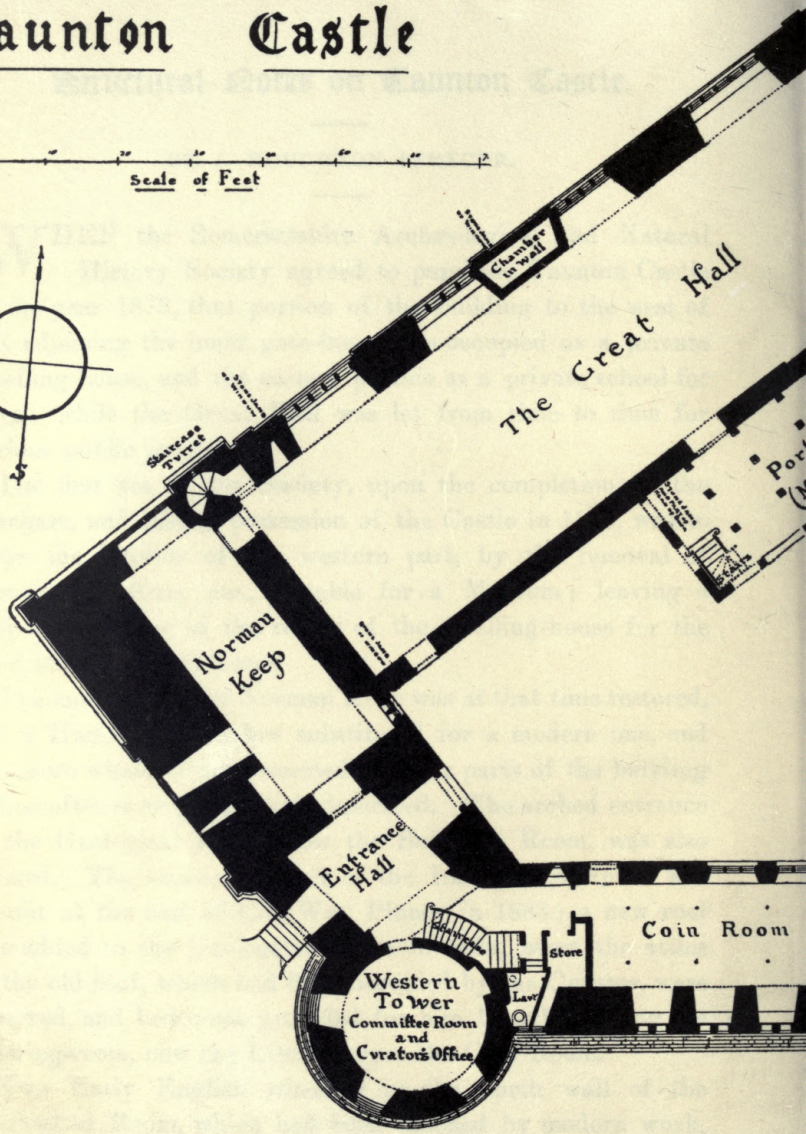
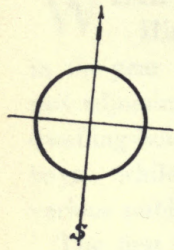
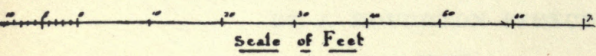
Scale of Feet



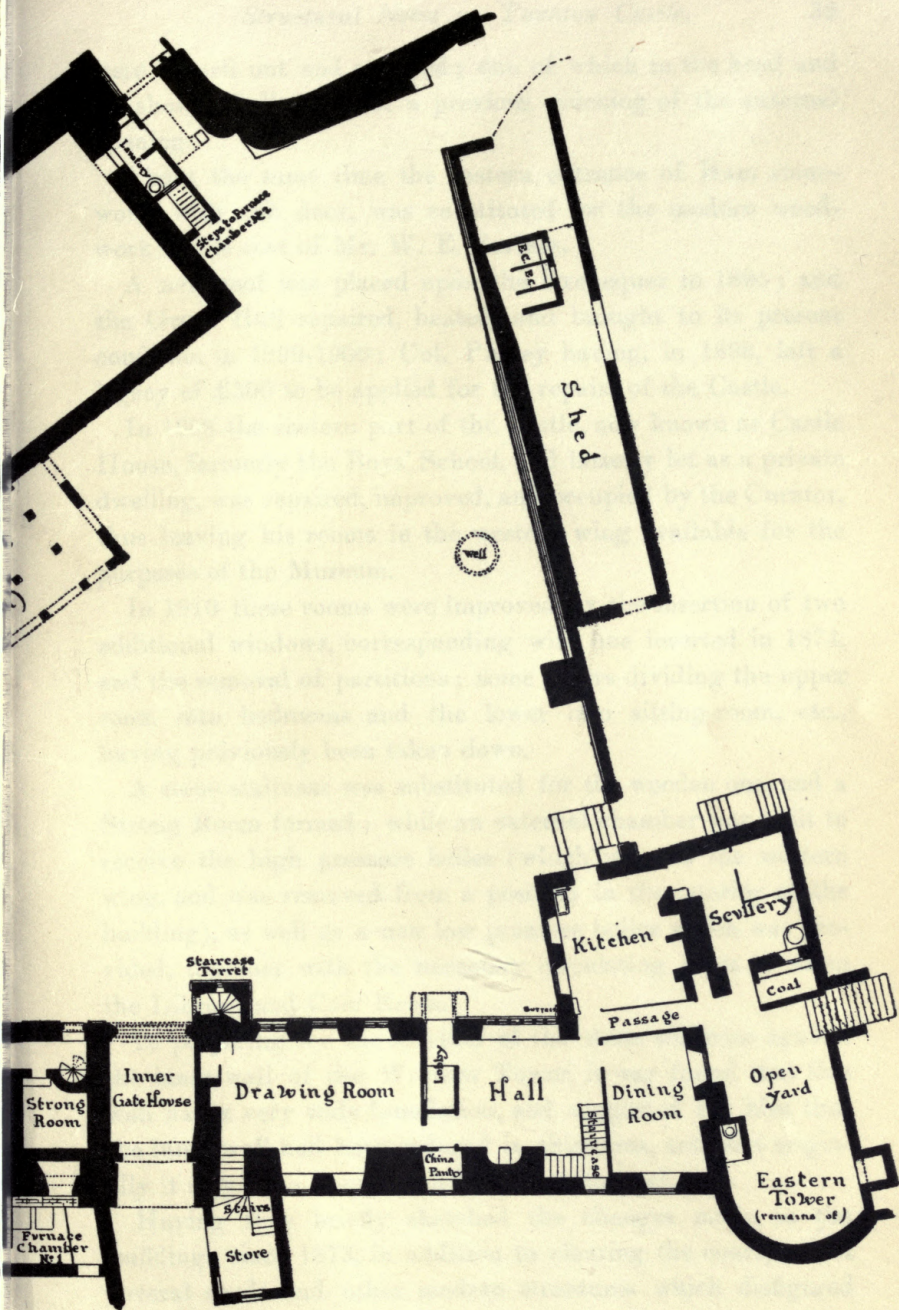
Western
Tower
To the
Castle
and
Round
Tower

Ground

Taunton Castle



Ground



Floor Plan

*J. Houghton Spencer
August 1910*

were opened out and restored ; one of which in the head and sill showed indications of a previous widening of the external opening.

About the same time the eastern entrance of Ham stone-work, with oak door, was substituted for the modern wood-work at the cost of Mr. W. E. Surtees.

A new roof was placed upon the Exchequer in 1895 ; and the Great Hall repaired, heated, and brought to its present condition in 1899-1900 ; Col. Pinney having, in 1898, left a legacy of £300 to be applied for the repairs of the Castle.

In 1908 the eastern part of the Castle, now known as Castle House, formerly the Boys' School, and latterly let as a private dwelling, was repaired, improved, and occupied by the Curator, thus leaving his rooms in the western wing available for the purposes of the Museum.

In 1910 these rooms were improved by the insertion of two additional windows, corresponding with one inserted in 1874, and the removal of partitions ; some others dividing the upper room into bedrooms and the lower into sitting-room, etc., having previously been taken down.

A stone staircase was substituted for the wooden one, and a Strong Room formed ; while an external chamber was built to receive the high pressure boiler (which warmed the western wing, and was removed from a position in the interior of the building), as well as a new low pressure boiler which was provided, together with the necessary circulating pipes to warm the Library and Coin Room.

In preparing for the erection of the stone staircase against the inner wall of the Western Tower, it was found that this wall had a very wide foundation, and suggested the idea that the inner wall had been reduced in thickness, and that originally it may have been as thick as the outer wall.

Having thus briefly sketched the changes made in the buildings since 1873, in addition to clearing the courtyard of several sheds and other modern structures which disfigured

the original buildings, it is now proposed to consider more in detail some of the architectural features of the work.

When, in 1874, the modern doors and partitions were removed from the Norman Keep, an old archway, between it and the Entrance Hall, was laid open. The original springing stones of the arch were found *in situ*, so that it was an easy matter

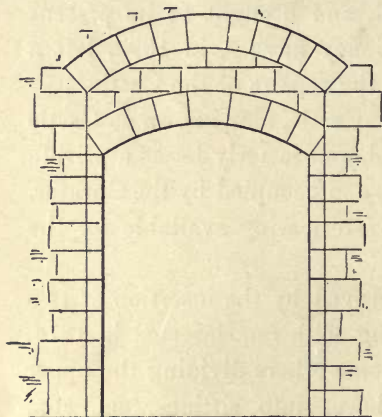


FIG. 2

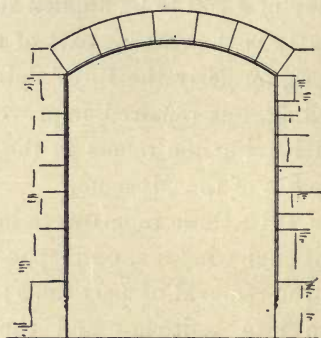


FIG. 3

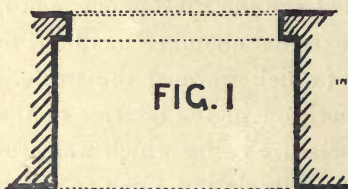


FIG. 1

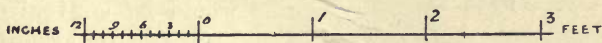
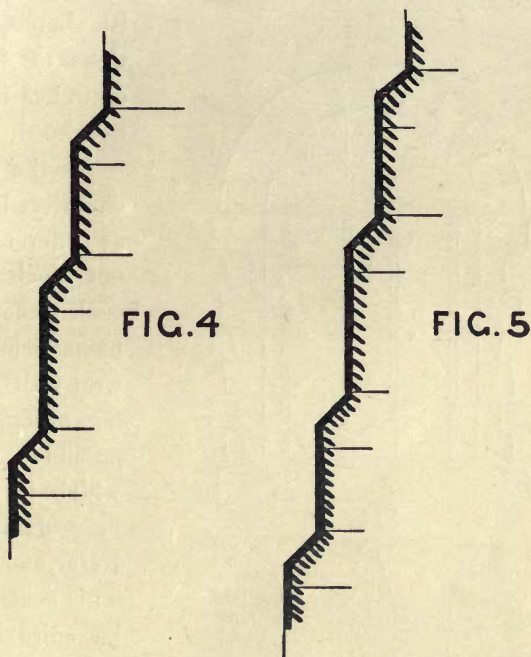
INCHES 7 8 9 10 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 FEET

Figs. 1, 2, and 3. Plan, inner and outer elevations of arched entrance to Norman Keep, which is probably one of the oldest features in the masonry of the Castle.

to restore the arch to its original condition. Fig. 1 shows a plan of this archway; Fig. 2 the elevation towards the Keep; and Fig. 3 the elevation towards the Entrance Hall. These diagrams are taken from the working drawings prepared at that time for the purpose of the restoration.

This segmental archway, with plain chamfer on the side

towards the Entrance Hall, is of the same form as the present outer doorway of the Coin Room, as well as the gateway at the north-east angle of the Great Hall, which gate, from its proximity to the mill-stream, with which it may have been



Figs. 4 and 5. Sections of base courses of wall on east side of Court Yard, which were formerly concealed by modern buildings.

connected by a short channel, was, it is suggested, a Water Gate.

These three archways are regarded as some of the earliest features in the masonry of the Castle.

Running up from a point near the Water Gate, towards Castle House (now occupied by the Curator), is an old wall

with a series of plainly chamfered base courses. These are shown by Figs. 4 and 5.

The wall is built of sandstone, grey in colour, different to the stone used in other parts of the Castle, but similar to that used in the old towers of Taunton St. Mary Magdalene and St. James, and in portions of several other churches in the neighbourhood.

As the two series of chamfered courses are at different levels, and not precisely similar to each other, they may have belonged to the west wall of *two* buildings of some importance, possibly the Chapel, which is said to have been dedicated to St. Peter, and the Granary. This central site would be suitable for both, while the latter being near the Water Gate would be conveniently placed with regard to the Mill. If a line is drawn eastward at right angles to this wall to

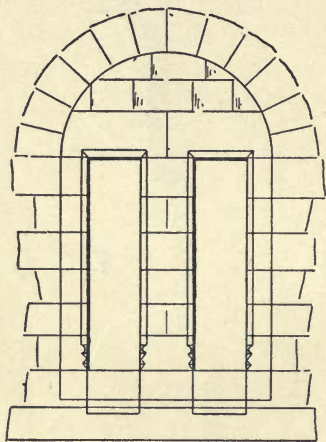


FIG. 7

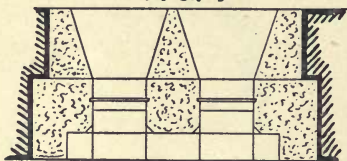
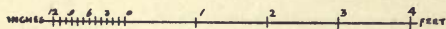


FIG. 6



Figs. 6 and 7. Plan and elevation of window inserted in existing opening in east wall of Norman Keep.

represent the axis of the supposed chapel, it is found to agree very closely in direction, viz., to the north of east, with the orientation of St. James' Church; and it may be noted that the three ancient churches within the borough are all oriented to the north of east, the axis of St. Mary Magdalene pointing

a little more to the north, and that of St. George, Wilton, a little less, than that of St. James. Adjoining this wall is a square block of masonry, which may have been the foundation of a staircase leading from the Courtyard to the higher level of the chapel; near the wall is a well 5ft. in diameter, and 15ft. deep to the deposit on the bottom. It is domed over with modern bricks, and lined with bricks, apparently, of the same character. There were $4\frac{1}{2}$ ft. of water when it was measured in July, 1910.

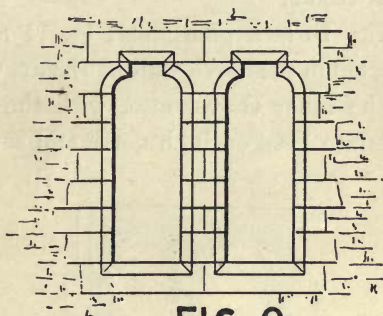


FIG. 9

To return to the description of the work carried out when the Society took possession of the Castle, it was at that time decided to insert three windows; two in existing openings, and the third in a recess where at one time there was probably a window, to mark the three chief periods, viz., Norman, Early English merging into Early Decorated, and Perpendicular, during

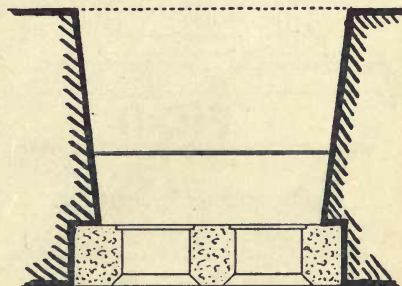


FIG. 8

INCHES 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 FEET

Figs. 8 and 9. Plan and elevation of window inserted in 1874 in an existing recess in the south wall of Curator's sitting-room, now the eastern part of Coin Room. (Two similar windows in corresponding recesses have now been added.)

which the Castle was built and materially altered. These windows are shown in Figs. 6 to 11, and are taken from the working drawings which were prepared for that purpose.

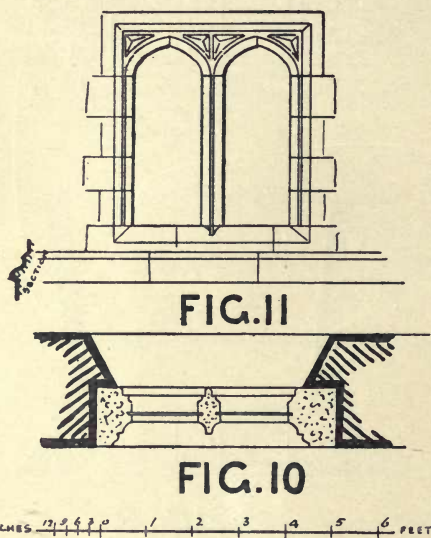
Fig. 6 is a plan and Fig. 7 an elevation of the window inserted on the east side of the Norman Keep. Fig. 8 is a plan and Fig. 9 an elevation of the window inserted in the south wall of the sitting-room, now the eastern part of the Coin Room.

Fig. 10 is a plan and Fig. 11 an elevation of the window inserted in the north wall of the drawing-room of Castle House.

The inner Gate-house, with the arms of Bishop Langton, and date 1496 on both north and south fronts, was partly built

by that prelate, and it is quite evident that he did more on the north than on the south side, for the former is rebuilt from the ground, while the latter has the earlier arches remaining.

It seems clear that he built the north wall from the junction of the passage wall, outside the Strong Room, with the wall of the Coin Room, to the point where a buttress is in great part concealed by the more modern wing of Castle



Figs. 10 and 11. Plan and elevation of window, corresponding with adjacent older windows, inserted in north wall of Castle House in place of modern cupboard.

House. The base mouldings can be traced throughout this length of wall, and the blue lias masonry is of the same character from point to point. Fig. 12 shows the buttress referred to, if restored, and there are traces in the front of Castle House of two other buttresses, of similar height, having been removed.

The mouldings of this buttress are similar in character to those of the buttresses in the towers of St. Mary Magdalene's and St. James' Churches, and of many other churches in this neighbourhood of the same period, and therefore mark this north front as being built in the time of Bishop Langton. And his work appears to have extended westward, even further than is indicated by the blue lias masonry, for upon removing some tiles from the roof of the Library, it was found that above the panelled barrel ceiling of plaster, which is considered to be the work of Sir Benjamin Hammet, *circa* 1790, there exists a moulded oak roof.

Fig. 13 shows a half section of this roof as it probably appeared in Bishop Langton's time, and Fig. 14 is a section of the moulded ribs and principal rafters, which latter seem to be placed about 5ft. apart from centre to centre, with three curved but plain intermediate rafters.

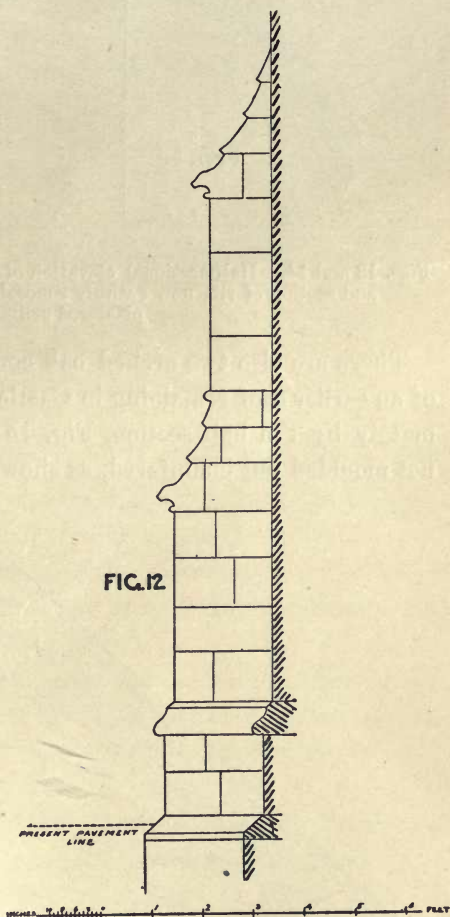
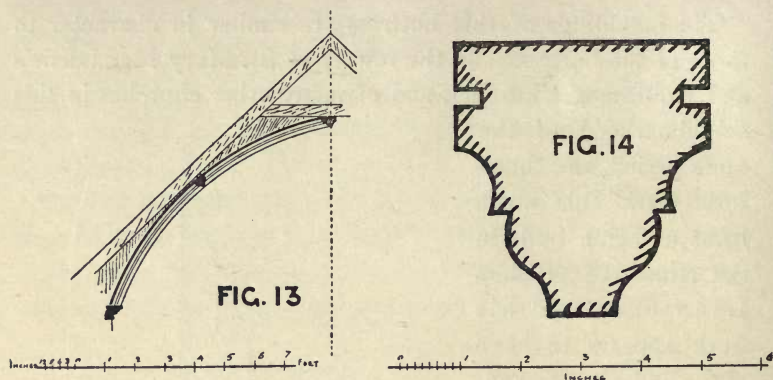
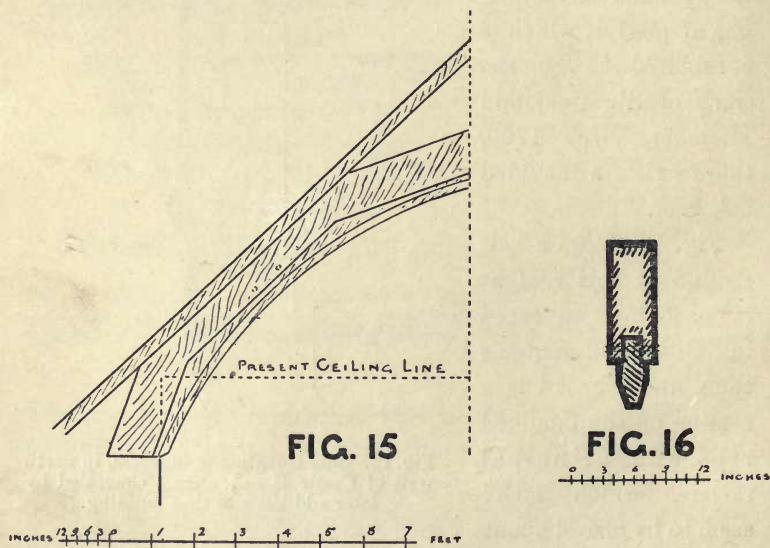


Fig. 12. Side elevation of buttress, in north wall of Castle House, almost concealed by later additions to that building.



Figs. 13 and 14. Half-sectional elevation of XV Century roof over Library, and section of rib, now entirely concealed by late XVIII Century plastered ceiling.

There are also two arched oak couples, from 6 to 7 ft. apart, of an earlier roof remaining in Castle House, as shown approximately by the half-section, Fig. 15; the ribs in this case are not moulded but chamfered, as shown by Fig. 16.



Figs. 15 and 16. Half-sectional elevation of roof, and section of chamfered rib over a bedroom of Castle House, almost entirely concealed by later plastered ceiling.

The feet of these couples, in an imperfect condition, can be seen below the ceiling of the bedroom over the drawing-room, adjoining massive horizontal beams forming part of a later reconstruction. The Exchequer, which can only be approached by the door at the foot of the staircase turret, was formerly accessible by means of a staircase now blocked from the ante-room of the Library on the first floor, on the west side, and on the east by means of a doorway, since built up, which connected a room over the drawing-room of Castle House with the staircase turret.

The roof of the Great Hall is apparently the work of Sir Benjamin Hammet; under it can be seen at its west end the remains of the drip-mould of an earlier sharp-pitched roof which sprang from lower walls than at present.

Above this drip-mould is a small doorway, which was no doubt blocked when the walls were raised to receive a flatter roof. This doorway apparently led from the chamber above the Norman Keep, now the Somerset Room, to the gutter behind the parapet on the south side of the Great Hall.

There are only two old windows remaining in the Great Hall; one of five lights the other of four lights, and these are in the north wall towards its west end.

There is a small chamber or chambers in the thickness of the north wall, now built up, which were formerly lighted by two small semicircular-headed windows, as illustrated in Vol. IV of the Society's *Proceedings*, part ii, p. 29.

In a north-east view of the Castle in Mr. H. Franklin's possession,—being one of a series of six aquatints,¹ signed C.C., which were probably executed at the end of the XVIII or beginning of the XIX Century,—two small two-light square-headed windows are shown, near the position where subsequently a large four-light window was inserted. Very slight traces of either of these small windows remain, and there is

1. Photographs of these aquatints were presented to the Society in 1902 by Mr. Franklin.

now no entrance to the chambers, which probably were two in number, visible.

A little to the west of the entrance to the Great Hall, under the portico, are the remains of an earlier doorway, consisting of one jamb and half the head, as shown in Fig. 17. The head seems to have been formed of two stones with a central joint. It is, constructionally speaking, a lintel, not an arch, but is shaped to represent a flat arch of late character.

It is difficult to distinguish between the work of Bishop Langton and that of Bishop Horne; both are said to have been engaged in partially rebuilding and repairing the Great Hall.

Its north wall was largely repaired with blue lias stone, and

that is the material used in Bishop Langton's work, which was dated 1496. By comparing the remains of the doorway (Fig. 17) with the work of 1496, it seems more probable that it was erected by Bishop Horne, some of whose work is dated 1577, than by the former Bishop.

It is not unlikely that this entrance was protected by a porch, and this suggestion is supported by the fact that, in

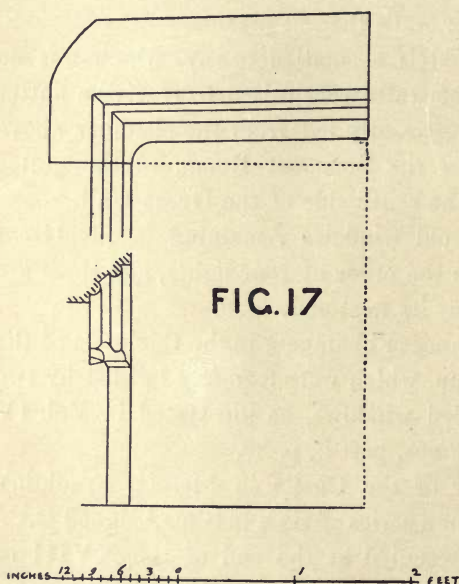
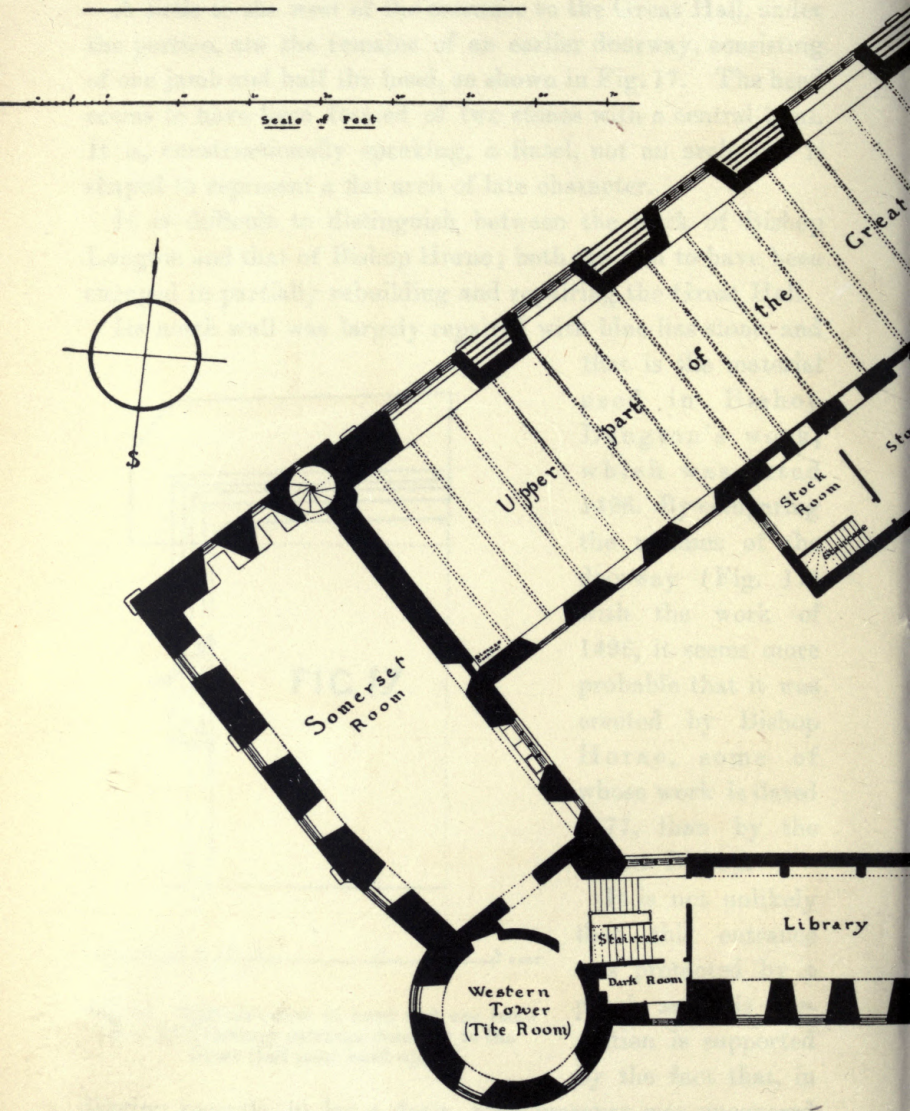


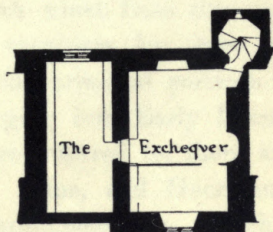
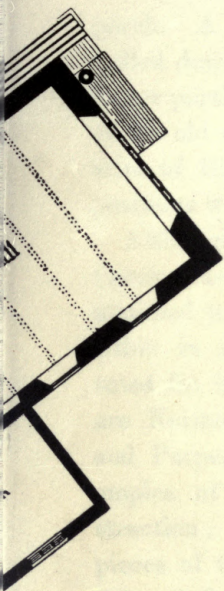
Fig. 17. Half-elevation of head and one jamb of a XVI Century entrance-doorway to the Great Hall (now built up).

digging recently to lay a drain, some masonry was uncovered which might have been the foundation of the west wall of a

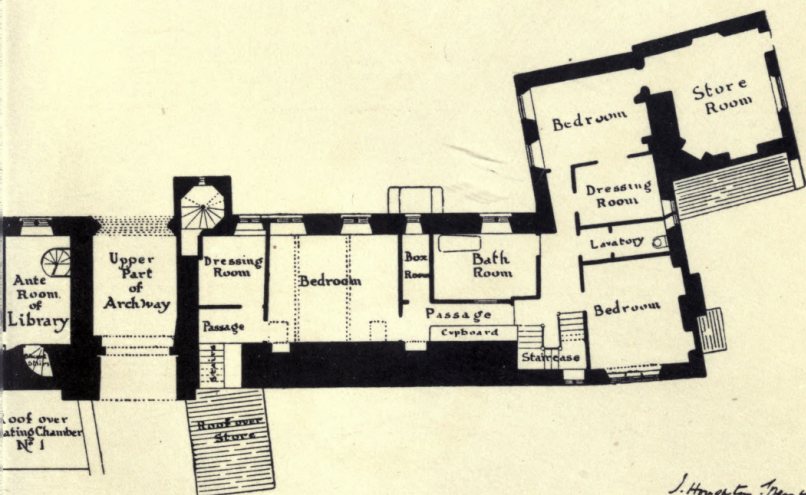
Taunton Castle



- First Floor



— Rooms over Ante Room of Library —
and Archway



*J. Houghton Penistone
August 1910*

porch. A further suggestion is that Sir Benjamin Hammet pulled down the porch in order to make room for the present larger portico with rooms over it, and in rebuilding made use of the old materials from the porch and elsewhere, placing the arms of Bishop Horne and three Ham stone windows in the positions which they now occupy.

Although it may be regretted that so much of the original Castle has disappeared, still there is an historic interest attached to the variety of the work which from time to time, either in partial rebuilding or repairing, has been substituted for it; for in addition to the principal portions which are Norman, Early English merging into Early Decorated, and Perpendicular work, as before referred to, there are examples of Elizabethan, Queen Anne, and Georgian construction; the latter including specimens, *e.g.* the chimney pieces of the Library and Tite Room, of the style known as Adams', from the brothers Adam who introduced it.