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Early Mediaevalism: 'To have built in heaven high towers' — the castle as a theme in English architecture before the Gothic Revival

by Timothy Mowl

I will open with some blank verse which may be familiar to you:

This fortification
Grew from the ruins of an ancient abbey:
And to yond side o'th' river lies a wall,
Piece of cloister, which in my opinion
Gives the best echo that you ever heard;
So hollow, and so dismal, and withal
So plain in the distinction of our words,
That many have suppos'd it is a spirit
That answers.

This is a singularly perfect and mature expression of the Gothick spirit. It has antiquarian observation, the picturesque effect of ruins and a light toying with ghosts and echoes. Asked for the author you would hesitate to suggest a really early 18th century versifier like the Countess of Winchilsea, but perhaps a mid-century poet like Blair or Warton could have penned it.

In fact it is from Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* and was written before 1614. That is the essence of what I have to convey. Mediaevalism was never wholly a revival, but a continuous feeling. As prestige symbols, the great structures of the Middle Ages were so vertiginous and inescapable that the architectural currents of the Renaissance never wholly absorbed or subdued them. Henry VIII's redistribution of wealth by the dissolution of the monasteries left England with a surplus of churches and a shortage of great houses, so for the next two hundred years most manifestations of mediaevalism were inevitably domestic rather than ecclesiastical. This paper must, therefore, centre upon the castle as an enduring architectural tradition.

As early as the 1530s a conscious historicism seems to be at work. Functional castles were still being built. Henry himself built twenty-two coastal artillery forts: low squat structures with central citadels and semi-circular casemates within a deep moat. Several of these like the fortification Webster describes actually 'grew out of the ruins of an ancient abbey' — Netley from Netley Abbey, East and West Cowes from Quarr Abbey, Hurst Castle from Beaulieu, so Webster was probably lamenting an actual case of desecration somewhere on the south coast. But while these functional and unromantic adaptations of the castle form to the new power of artillery were going up, the aristocracy were still adding tall, impressive, many windowed and quite unfunctional towers to existing houses and castles. The Spy Tower at Warwick Castle and the prospect room at Melbury in Dorset, both pre-1540, are instances of this.¹

There follows through the remainder of the 16th century a chain of great houses built with no serious defensive intention but conceived in contented, conservative acceptance of a towered profile and a castle image.

Thornbury Castle in Gloucestershire, begun in 1511 and left unfinished by the execution of the Duke of Buckingham in 1521, can be considered as the first of this chain, and Hardwick Hall in Derbyshire of 1590-97, as its triumphant climax and ultimate expression. Thornbury and Hardwick are both designed to impress tower power upon the approaching visitor and then to negate this power by a glittering display of windows which left them

quite indefensible. Buckingham was quintessentially of the old nobility with as fair a claim to the crown as Henry VIII himself, so the new wealth and the new names of the Tudor period had good aristocratic precedent for clinging to the image of non functional towers.

Michelgrove of 1536, Mount Edgcumbe of 1546 and Wollaton of 1580-8 form a variant sequence as they all affected outwardly the profile of a higher keep within an enclosing square of towers, though in their actual ground plans they were moving away from Thornbury's straggling courtyard scheme towards a logically integrated series of reception rooms.

A civilised Renaissance palace is implicit in Wollaton and even more so in Hardwick and Barlborough, Derbyshire of 1583-4 which have both dropped the pretence of central keeps; but all three houses express this neurotic insistence on towers which are embarrassingly irrelevant in structural design, unless we assume that they housed a regiment of idle womenfolk all eager to peer north, south, east and west from a great height in spaces hyperheated in summer and draughtily refrigerated in winter. Two views of Barlborough illustrate how two towers which look credible enough when viewed from the entrance front are reduced to clumsy stage scenery when seen side on.

This Early Mediaevalism, like the later true Gothic Revival, is open to binary explanation. Either these towers can be interpreted aesthetically as part of an urge to explore space and diversify profile, which is a theme I shall be returning to shortly when I discuss Vanbrugh's castle works, or they can be seen as a neurotic and unreasoning regression to a known past out a fear of an unknown future.

Elizabethan and Jacobean mediaevalism has elements of both the aesthetic and the neurotic. No major royal palaces were built between Henry's Nonsuch and James's Whitehall Banqueting House so the aristocracy were left unguided to construct their own psychological display charts. Longleat of 1567-80 is the perfect expression of reason, an unguarded palace spread confidently over an indefensible site. Hardwick is the archetype of neurotic show, a huffing and puffing of towers high on a hill glaring across a few miles of country to a similar sham at Barlborough. The unexpected chronological fact is that Renaissance Longleat was begun twenty-three years before retardaire neo-mediaeval Hardwick. Perhaps the two houses, southern Longleat and northern Hardwick, exemplify the cultural gap between the two halves of this country. Certainly Bolsover, a still later house of 1612-21 suggests the Middle Ages even more imaginatively than Hardwick, and Bolsover is another northern Derbyshire house. But here I am making dangerous suppositions. Perhaps England was not ready for Longleat's Renaissance openness and reason, perhaps it is an unhelpful simplification to talk of an Elizabethan Renaissance. Is it not more realistic to speak of the period as a fertile interface between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance? That is a matter of taste. Our presence here today is a testimony to the attraction of an illogical revivalist style.

At this point it becomes profitable to consider the aesthetic images current in contemporary literature. Longford in Wiltshire, a castle-like house completed in 1591 by Sir Thomas Gorges, one of Spenser's patrons, seems to have been described approvingly by Spenser as the Castle of Temperance in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*:

The frame thereof was partly circular
And part triangular — O work divine.

So a mediavalist building, by its sheer potential geometrical diversity of ground plan and form, had advantages not possessed by a functional rectangular box.

But an even more impressive indication of the age's fixation upon the castle form has been much less noticed perhaps because it is so often noted in other contexts. Shakespeare greeted the accession of James I and reflected the tone of Jacobean taste by *Hamlet*, 1603, *Othello*, 1604, and *Macbeth*, 1605. All three, if they had been written one hundred and fifty years later would have been classed as pure Gothic dramas. They are set in castles, they feature barbaric goings-on in remote dark ages, women are threatened with violence in gloomy halls, ghosts and spirits are a commonplace and they explore symbolically the hidden complex depths of the human psyche.

Some of the stage sets for this period, notably one for *The Release of the Daughters of the Moon* for a Jonson masque of 1611 is as crudely Gothic as the plays and could have been designed by Sanderson Miller, but was in fact produced by Inigo Jones.²

The same stagey mediaevalism pervaded Walton Castle, near Clevedon in Somerset, built 1615-20 by the first Lord Poulett and a likely candidate for the title of the first English folly as it seems never to have been completed and certain to have proved uninhabitable if it ever had been completed. Walton combines the tradition of the mediaeval keep in encircling walls with the later structuring of the coastal castle. Each of the casemate towers is supplied with a fireplace, so it seems to have been conceived as a Jacobean hotel with the guests wining and dining in the central keep, but sleeping off the effects in the privacy of separate bedroom towers. For its date Walton is an astonishingly mediaeval response to an architectural demand, even if that demand was, as seems likely, only for a hunting lodge or an aristocratic bordello. Bolsover was infinitely more ambitious and sophisticated than Walton, but it was conceived in the same spirit of fantasy, an expression of the spirit that enjoyed Elsinore and Dunsinane.

The aristocracy which expressed its taste in full blooded romanticism at Bolsover, Lulworth and Ruperra, in half-hearted retardaire gestures like the battlemented parapets of Fountains and Chastleton, was creating status symbols dangerously out of tune with the reality of its time. Hankering after the Middle Ages, it failed to see that power was the result of a reasonable compromise between the new and the old propertied classes and had to be accepted as such by a ruling elite. It is a significant coincidence that the Earls of Pembroke, who had gone Palladian as early as 1636, never joined in the Civil War to support their royal master even though they had been a notable example of a family which had risen through royal favour. Instead they went on quietly through the war years and the King's execution completing Palladian Wilton.

Wilton was the prototype for the house which the Whigs were to make the standard power symbol of the next century. The Whig Palladian house impresses by its balance and proportion; it contains and satisfies rather than stimulates emotion. A mediaevalist house is essentially Tory in its aesthetic philosophy. It suggests organic growth, an exciting natural disorder, fantasies expressed overtly and aesthetic shape adventurously explored.

Ruperra Castle, Glamorgan (1626) was the last of the sequence of Elizabethan and Jacobean houses in the castellated tradition which I have been discussing. It should be bracketed along with other four-square tower houses like Lulworth of 1608 and Plas Teg, Clwyd of 1610. Though fallen now into deplorable decay, it represents the weary end of a tradition. It is confined and repetitive in its design and it enjoys none of the variety of profile which towers can give. Logically Ruperra should be my last mediaevalist structure. The future should lie with houses like Wilton and Lees Court, Kent, an architecture of peace for a peaceful country. In a Europe preoccupied with the baroque there should have been no place for mediaeval revivals even in insular conservative England.

But then in 1642, just as the architecture of the civilised classical palace house should have become established, came the Civil War. During the next seven years many of the greatest houses of England suffered siege and military violence. In events like the defence of Basing House or Raglan Castle, the architectural bluff of the last hundred years was being called. Houses which had pretended to defensive qualities by their towers, but had undercut these qualities by their fenestration, were revealed for the vainglorious shams that they were as the cannon balls came whizzing through their wide Tudor dining room windows while their owners sat at meat.

The logical architectural response to this demonstration of the indefensibility of a castle type house should have been a general acceptance after the Restoration, of a wholly unmilitary kind of gentleman's great house like Roger Pratt's Coleshill. But human reactions to violent events are rarely wholly logical, and in fact the first two decades of the Restoration witnessed a minor revival of the castellated house.

The key to this patchy and unpredictable mediaevalism seems to have lain in the personal experiences of the house owner. For instance, Henry Mordaunt, 2nd Earl of Peterborough, had added a remarkably impressive embattled wall with turrets and a gate tower to Drayton House in Northamptonshire at some date after 1660 but before 1676,³ and he could be described as almost addictive in his militarism. He fought in the Civil War for both Parliament and King, was then Governor of Tangier and later fought the Dutch under the Duke of York. The Protestant mob which attacked Drayton during the Glorious Revolution must have assessed Mordaunt's character very exactly because they found arms and munitions for two hundred men when they drained the fish pond.

But an even more notable victim of this architectural neurosis for the symbols of military mediaevalism was King Charles II himself. Merry Monarch he may have been, but his rebuilding of Windsor Castle under the supervision of Hugh May between 1675 and 1684 was a bewildering contradiction of the relaxed, sensual and francophile image with which History generally credits him.

Hugh May's Windsor Castle is rarely given its due significance in architectural histories, partly because it was so individual a conception and partly because the whole vast scheme was so disliked by later monarchs that only two windows of all its elevations survive in Henry III's tower in the Lower Ward, and even these have been Victorianised. They are round-headed openings adapted cleverly to light both first floor and mezzanine. Their broad concave surrounds of quadrant section owe nothing to contemporary Versailles, the palace which Charles might have been expected to copy, nothing to the modest classical compromises of John Webb and Peter Mills. What I am suggesting is that they are no more and no less than the survivors of an experiment in revived mediaevalism which can only be classed as Stuart Norman.

Views of the north and eastern elevations of Charles's castle-palace by Paul Sandby and Jeffry Wyatville indicate its extraordinary severity and restraint.⁴ On the East Front, there was an unwelcoming absence of doors above the steps — the doors were set in the sides of the projecting towers. There was some feeling for symmetry but there remained a disturbing irregularity in the window rhythms. And all these melancholy and eccentric round-headed windows it should be remembered took the place of a previous mediaeval Gothic facade. The north elevation looking out over the Thames savoured a little more of the 17th century palace. This was where the Star Building was added by May, but even this was sparing in decorative relief, irregular and unpleasing in its massing.

The inner courts of this strange composite of castle and palace, Norman and Classical, show how conscious was the mediaevalising. One of Wyatville's drawings in the Royal Collection shows May's Inner Front of the South Wing of the Upper Ward, and above it how Wyatville felt called upon to enliven, enrich and gothicise what were described in 1824 as May's 'Saxon' elevations (Saxon at that date signifying Norman).⁵ The great round-headed windows gave unity to all May's facades. The Gothic Spicery Gatehouse was retained but drawn into the round-headed overall design, while from its mound the genuine Gothic keep looked down and suggested with its cannon ports, the keynote upon which May based his curious new palace. Two further 1824 drawings show May's north and south outer elevations to the Upper Ward with Wyatville's horrified response to their austerity set above them.

That was Carolean Windsor, a prodigy of a wholly unpredictable kind. The questions must be: who inspired it in this form, and what later influence did this prominent and very expensive royal castle-palace have on later architects? It should be remembered, of course, that the actual interiors of Charles's remodelled Windsor were conventional pieces of Italianate classical splendour painted by Verrio, gilded by Cousin with carved work by Gibbons and Henry Phillips. The contrast between luxurious interior and austere exterior may give a hint as to who inspired this Stuart Norman.

Charles spent very little on Windsor until 1668 and only two Garter installations were held there, one in 1661 and one in 1662, until Prince Rupert succeeded Lord Mordaunt as Constable of the castle in 1668. It was after Rupert took up his quarters there that Charles, despite his consistent financial embarrassments, spent huge sums of money to make Windsor a fitting setting for the ceremonials of the Order of the Garter and a centre piece for lavish military tattoos

John Evelyn was struck by the contrast between Rupert's decoration of the Keep and Hall with 'Pikes, Muskets, Pistols, Bandiliers' and his private rooms 'hung with tapisserie, curious & effeminate Pictures, so extreamly different from the other, which presented nothing but Warre and horror, as was very Surprizing and Divertissant'.⁶ (This seems to foreshadow the contrast between May's harsh military exterior elevations and the rich classical interiors, so Rupert may have inspired the form of the rebuilding.

Whatever the source, Windsor was the only palace which was completed in Charles's lifetime. He built Windsor before the more conventional mini Versailles which Wren devised for him at Winchester. So May's Windsor has to be seen as the epitome of Stuart taste at this period and clearly it is a taste half way between Mediaeval and Classical.

There are possible reasons for this curious compromise style. Windsor had a Norman origin which the Stuarts, parvenus from Scotland, might have wished to emphasise, but once again insecurity rather than historicism is likely to have lain behind mediaeval revivalism. Charles's father lost his head for want of a standing army and his son probably appreciated the fortress aspect of Windsor, an essentially military establishment with a strong garrison. In August 1674 the castle was the backdrop for an elaborate restaging of the siege of Maestricht produced by the Dukes of York and Monmouth. Evelyn recalled that:

Greate Gunns fir'd on both sides, Granados shot, mines Sprung ... all without disorder, or ill accident, but to the greate satisfaction of a thousand spectators, when being night it made a formidable shew, & was realy very divertisant.⁷

It is against this growing military consciousness at the end of the 17th century that the next episode in the castle style should be seen. The Guards regiments were founded in Charles's

reign and once William of Orange came to the throne in 1688 England was to be embroiled in essentially military, not naval, adventures for the next twenty-six years until the Peace of Utrecht.

These were wars of long manoeuvrings between the allied coalitions and the French, a time when militarism became a profession and perhaps an obsession, but when the long diamonds of Vauban-style fortifications and outworks had become at least as acceptable a castle symbol as the old style battlements and machicolations. Vanbrugh's castle air has to be understood against this background. It explains some of the rather cursory short-hand symbolism of the period's mediaevalising.

In fact there is a gap in castle style buildings between 1684, when Hugh May's Windsor was completed, and 1707, when Vanbrugh urged the 'Castle Air' of May's Windsor to his patron, the Earl of Manchester.⁸ The castellated Kimbolton which resulted from this letter is perhaps Vanbrugh's weakest design: an inappropriate cake frill of battlements atop uninventive classical facades, that to the west with slightly projecting wings. Kimbolton's importance is simply that it was built. Vanbrugh's most effective mediaevalising is always found in small designs for buildings which he funded himself — Chargate of 1708-10, Vanbrugh Castle of 1717-18 and the other buildings on his Blackheath estate. This suggests that the castle air was a personal obsession which he occasionally contrived to sell to a patron, rather than part of a national fashion, and I will consider the aesthetic implications of his mediaevalising presently. But I want first to mention two buildings which suggest that Vanbrugh was not quite alone in his feeling for the castle style at the start of the new century's second decade.

Lord Coningsby's mediaeval home, Hampton Court, Herefordshire, was given after 1706 and before 1717 a symmetrical castellated north front possibly based on an original idea by William Talman.⁹ (Plate 1.) Although the resultant hunchbacked design was only a reshaping of an existing towered facade, it certainly accepted the mediaeval style of the original house. Once again a castle design can be linked to a highly aggressive and military-minded patron. Coningsby actually staunched the flow of blood when William of Orange was wounded in the crossing of the Boyne, and later turned his combative instincts into litigious attacks on most of his unfortunate neighbours.

Biddesden house in Wiltshire has a neo-mediaeval turret of 1711-12 incongruously attached to a house of mild baroque manner; here again there is a direct military link as the tower was built by General Webb to house a spoil of contemporary war — a bell trophy taken after the capture of Lille.

Vanbrugh's mediaevalising detail is far more subtle than these examples and I have only mentioned them to suggest a thin supportive strain in the contemporary background. When Vanbrugh employs castellated detail it seems to me to be always a side product of his basic drive towards lively profiles and a rich spatial depth for his house designs, and never primarily part of an attempt to mediaevalise. Classical designs were in essence too calm to satisfy Vanbrugh's aesthetic urge.

Chargate, which he designed for himself in 1708, exemplifies this restlessness and the almost accidental nature of its mediaeval detail. In amongst the embattled forms of its parapet there are three classical pediments and four tall chimney pots as well as two small side towers. Clearly shapes and outline are being pursued for their own sake, there is no breath of authenticity. The Middle Ages simply offered a variant skyline. The facade surges in and out at every excuse but none of the projections can honestly be classed as towers.

Let us take Blenheim Palace itself. (Plate 2.) Hidden away in the Kitchen Court there is an embattled parapet on each side of the generous classical pediment and the arches beneath, being unkeystoned, can be granted a Norman air; but these two mediaeval features never nearly approach a mediaeval whole. And on the main entrance front the towers are only part of Vanbrugh's obsession with diverse shapes and forms, part of that wonderfully fertile inventiveness of detail which spurns the repetition of any motif on more than three occasions. In his determination to invent he carries one storey round on a quadrant curve, while the storey above slams across the same corner in an abrupt right angle to reach a tower of bewildering and certainly unmediaeval ingenuity. When funds for towers run out Vanbrugh is satisfied with flying chimney pots; when these elude him he can ridicule sober Kings Weston with a row of smaller chimney pots doubling as battlements. His own Vanbrugh Castle (Plate 3) has been called the first Gothic revival house, a title which I shall shortly dispute. It certainly surges with restless invention in profile and spatial ingenuity, but what will, I think, be readily accepted looking at its south front, is that though the round windows are without classical keystones, and though this one suburban facade packs in two square towers, one round tower and machicolated battlements, nothing could look less authentically mediaeval. It is a gaunt tenement designed by an 18th century cubist.

Vanbrugh Castle was probably begun in 1717 and this brings me to the final, frankly puzzling and most contentious stage of this paper. It is here in the fifteen years between 1715 and 1730 that the true, conscious and deliberate Gothic Revival was born, and when uncertain early Mediaevalism ends. What I want to suggest now is that it was born in one of three wholly dissimilar buildings, none of them very precisely dated. The question is, which and when? The other question, why?, I hope I have answered by the trail of influences which I have just outlined.

The three buildings are Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire, the inner line of defence walls to Castle Howard and Clearwell Castle in Glos. A tentative dating for these would be 1716-25 for Shirburn, post 1719 for the defence walls and post 1728 for Clearwell.

If it were simply a matter of visual impact there would be no question as to which of these three buildings was the most significant. Shirburn is an idealised image of the Middle Ages. (Plate 4.) The swans in the wide moat, the raised drawbridge, the four round towers and the gate tower compose to make a perfect home for the Lady of Shalott or Gawaine's Green Knight. Shirburn is a house to capture the romantic imagination of an age. If it could be dated and given an architect this would be where the Gothic Revival began. Unfortunately it has to be said that the swans are modern, the drawbridge is Regency and the towers are in dispute. But I will return to the towers shortly.

If the inspiration for the inner defence walls of Castle Howard came from Vanbrugh, they are an amazing change of style from the boxy ingenuity of his bijoux castle-villa. (Plate 5.) Their walls and towers amble with a casual and completely convincing air for five-eighths of a mile along the contours to each side of the very cubist and quite unmediaeval Pyramid Gate. By their texture and rough design they could easily be taken for genuine 14th or 15th century work around a small mediaeval town. Judging by Vanbrugh's instructions to Etty, the clerk of works at Castle Howard, concerning the finishing of the towers on the lines of those on the mediaeval walls of Chester, this seems to be what Vanbrugh intended.¹⁰ The Pyramid Gate has the date 1719 carved on it and it is assumed, no more, that these Cestrian-style walls were built in the ensuing five years. The outer line of defence walls, probably by Hawksmoor, are quite different, essentially contemporary in their military models. For all their battlemented tops, they have gun ports and a return to the harsh geometrical experiment of the Pyramid Gate half a mile up the hill. So the inner,

Chester-style, walls remain a puzzle, isolated behind these toy fort playthings, but they should be noted as the very first scholarly work of mediaeval revivalism, conceived and executed in a spirit which is not to be found again until the next century.

Clearwell must not detain us too long. It is now widely accepted and indeed advertised as the oldest Georgian Gothic house standing.

Howard Colvin's discovery of Roger Morris's estimate in the Dunraven papers 'corresponding to the building as erected' dated December 1727 and January 1728,¹¹ while not dating the actual work, certainly establishes Clearwell as an entire concept and creation somewhere in this early period. It is, frankly, an ugly house, though the stable range is more satisfying. It has none of Shirburn's poetry, none of the Castle Howard defence walls' authenticity of design. It is exactly what might be expected in an early essay from the architect who went on to perpetrate Inveraray: thin Gothic detail shackled to timid symmetrical planning.

The similarity between Clearwell and a sketch by the 2nd Duke of Montagu from the collection of his drawings at Boughton is self evident and makes a valuable point about a paradox in Gothic design at this early period — this is the fact that a line of defence walls could be built so convincingly and yet a house could only be designed as if by an uninformed and unimaginative child. There are other drawings from the Duke's collection — a scheme for a farm in castellated form to be erected on an old moated site, (Plate 6) and ideal reconstructions of the ground plans of mediaeval castles, most of which are satisfactorily asymmetrical. An elevation projected from one of these ground plans would have looked convincingly organic had the Duke ever got round to building it. Yet the only Gothic house he ever constructed was one for his steward within the ruins of Clitheroe Castle, and this was so crude as to make Clearwell look positively lyrical by contrast.

This brings me back to Shirburn. If Shirburn can be accepted as essentially a work of these key fifteen years, then it is in a completely different bracket of aesthetic achievement to Clearwell or Montagu's crude sketches. It is significant though, that Montagu seems to have toyed with the idea of turning a genuine mediaeval castle ruin, Barnwell, into a residence. This would have been in keeping with his projected castle farm and was, in fact, just what the Earl of Macclesfield had done a few years earlier at Shirburn. At this initial stage of the Gothic Revival an existing building, Windsor, Barnwell or Shirburn, seems to have been a necessary launching platform for an 18th century neo-mediaeval building scheme.

Shirburn's first importance is that it achieved, in the very early days of the movement, the final and mature aim of the Gothic Revival — a poetic fantasy place of exotic charm. Its second importance is the prestige of its creator. The owner of Clearwell was a mere country gentleman, Shirburn was the work and the seat of the Lord Chancellor of England, Thomas Parker, first Earl of Macclesfield, the trusted favourite of King George I. Had Parker's fortunes endured, Shirburn could have set a mediaeval fashion for the Whig aristocracy to rival Campbell and Burlington's Palladian villas.

In fact it remains even now one of the least known of English country houses. In 1725 Macclesfield was impeached for receiving bribes considered excessive even in that corrupt age. All ninety-three of his fellow peers found him guilty and he was thrown into the Tower of London until he had paid an enormous and crippling fine. His son improved the tarnished image of the family by becoming President of the Royal Society, but the family has, from the time of the first earl's resounding disgrace, kept a low profile. Lord Torrington was twice refused entry¹² and it remains difficult to view the outside, almost

impossible to enter. Its interior is a mystery only scantily photographed. Our architectural historians have never digested it, viewing it as a wholly genuine mediaeval building or as a product of the Jacobean castle style in the Lulworth line. Its fenestration and the record of Parker's expenditure contradict this.¹³

For perhaps nine years Thomas Parker, styled by Bishop Warburton as 'a real Maecenas', was a very rich man.¹⁴ £82,000 was later considered only partial compensation to those who had suffered from his financial corruption. In 1718 alone the King made him a present of £14,000 to persuade him to accept the Lord Chancellor's office.

The castle itself cost him £7,000, the total cost of the land around was £42,297, but the Earl felt obliged to buy this on a twenty-three year mortgage.¹⁵ So though by 1725, at the very lowest estimate, he had accumulated £96,000 and only spent £7,000 on the existing structure of the castle, he had no ready cash to extend the estate and develop the park. This suggests that he had spent extensively on reshaping the castle. The extent of Georgian brickwork there confirms this view. Much less than a quarter of the whole fabric of Shirburn is mediaeval, but that fraction inspired Parker's rebuilding.

The south west tower, (Plate 7) with its chequer patterned stone, is mediaeval, though of course the fenestration is Georgian. The core of the gate-tower may be presumed to be old though wholly refaced. The south east tower (Plate 8) retains mediaeval rubble work at its base, and here Parker's original pattern of fenestration can be clearly seen. Everything else: the top three-quarters of this tower, the whole of the north east and north west towers and the ranges between were Parker's work.

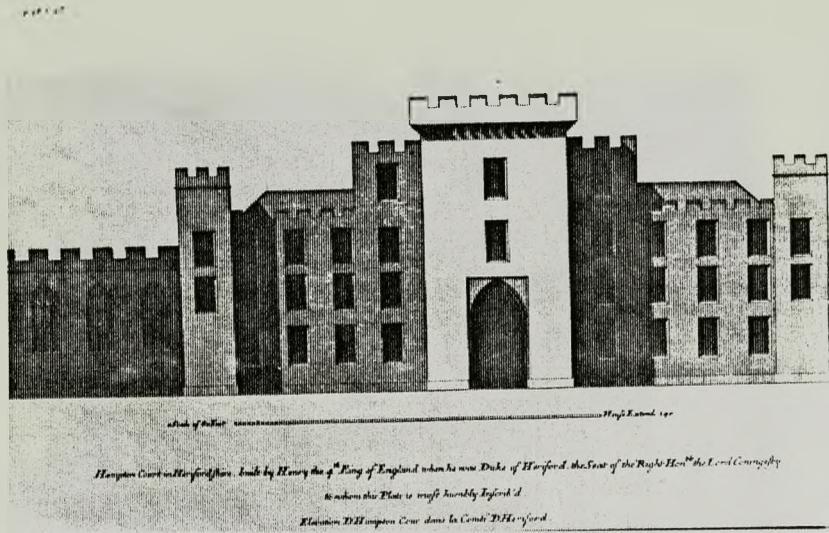
Examination of the Skelton view of 1823¹⁶ (Plate 9) shows that the round windows which now survive chiefly on the west front originally extended around all the four facades and the five towers. Many were given segmental heads in 1830.

It is these round windows which have denied Shirburn until now its correct place in the Gothic Revival. I am suggesting that the essential motif of revived mediaevalism was not the window, but the tower; that feature which classical architecture cannot easily provide. Like Hugh May's Windsor and like Vanbrugh Castle, Shirburn was a deliberate attempt to suggest a mediaeval castle in the stylistic terms of the early Georgian period — that is in round-arched terms, but towered and battlemented. When these years are examined for the origins of the movement we are here to consider today, our blindness will come from looking for the Gothic Revival through Batty Langley's spectacles. The ogee and the pointed arch are a delight of the Gothick but not its essential.

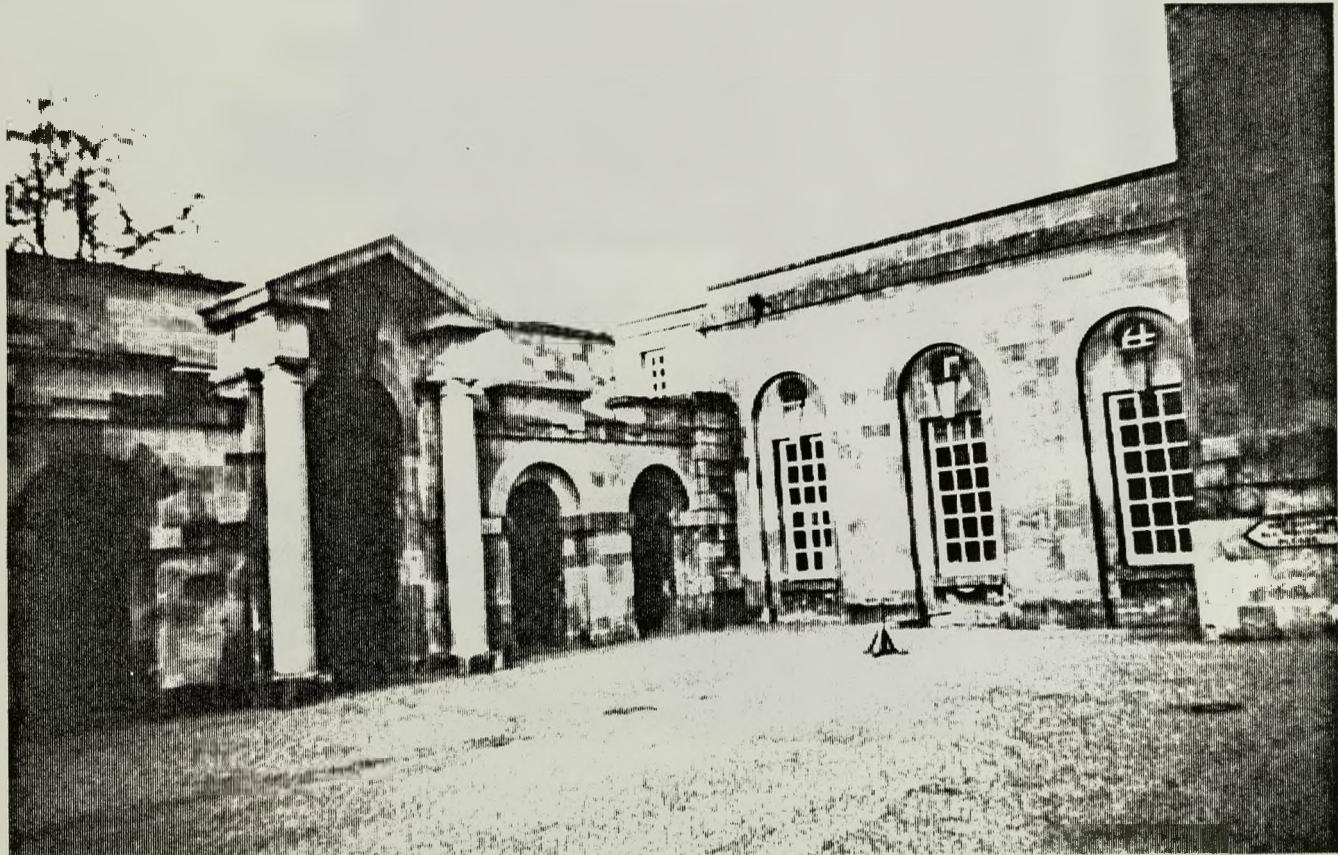
Milton was quite clear in his imagination about the skyline of the palaces of Heaven. Classical architecture was for Hell. His angel architect, Mulciber, had, before his fall, 'built in heaven high towers' and it was the evocative symbolism of the towers of the Middle Ages which was the underlying theme and aspiration of all early mediaevalism.

Notes

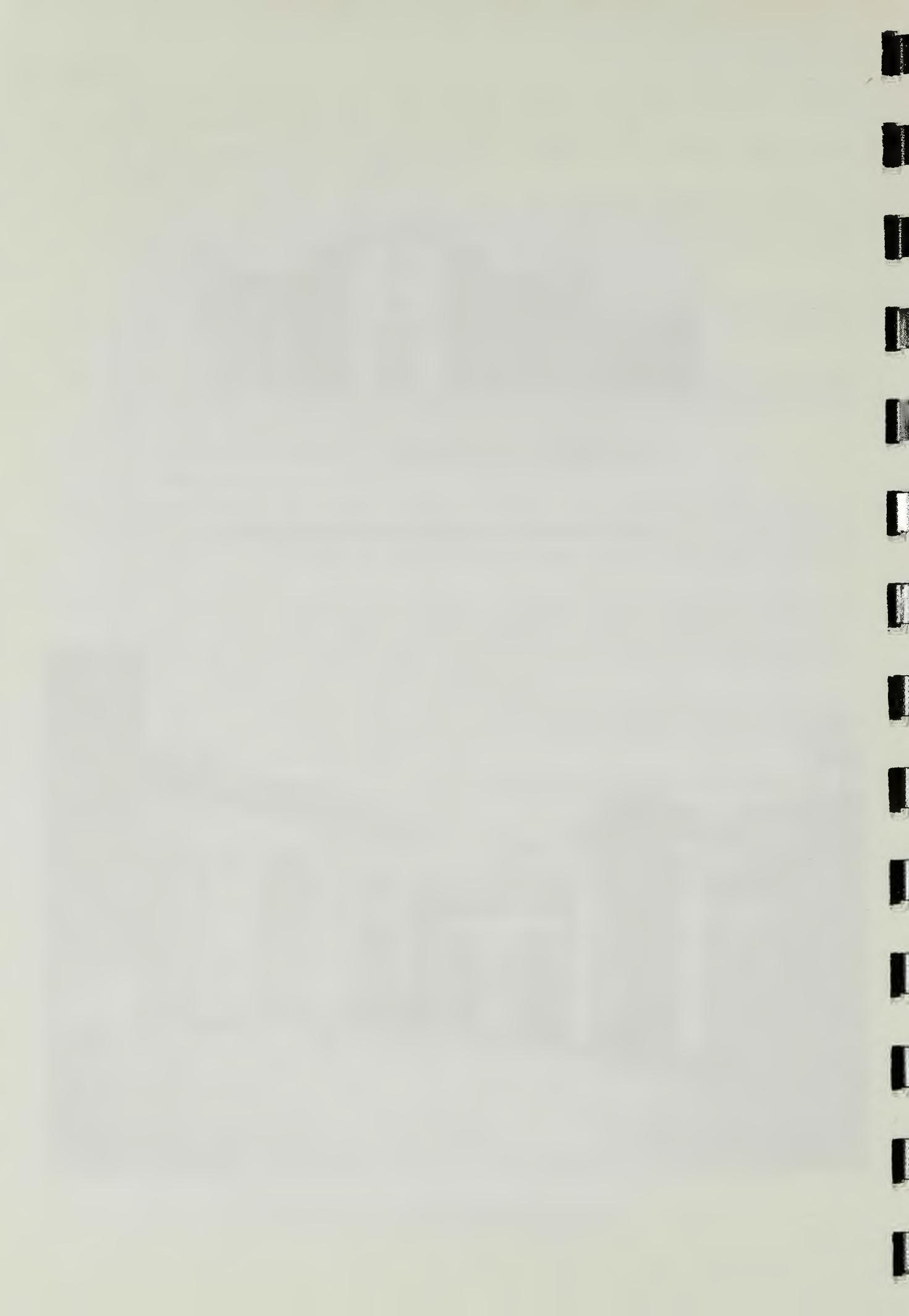
- 1 For further information on such look-out towers, see Mark Girouard, *Robert Smythson and the Architecture of the Elizabethan Era*, 1966, 87.
- 2 For Jones's neo-mediaeval masque designs, see John Harris, Stephen Orgel & Roy Strong (eds.), *The King's Arcadia*, 1973.
- 3 A contract at Drayton, dated 1676, states that Richard Warner of Weldon, a stonemason, agreed to 'erect, build, compleate and finish a certaine piece of building on either side of the New Gate according to a design by Isaac Rowe'. Quoted by John Cornforth, 'Drayton House, Northants.', *Country Life*, 20 May 1965.
- 4 Views of the May work at Windsor by Paul Sandby and Jeffry Wyatville can be found in H.M. Colvin (gen.ed.), *The History of the King's Works*, vol. v (1660-1782) and Derek Linstrom, *Sir Jeffry Wyatville*, 1972.
- 5 Sir Joseph Yorke reminded the House of Commons which was debating the cost of the 1824 rebuilding scheme that 'the second Charles had altered all the windows to the Saxon arch'. Quoted in Linstrom, *Wyatville*, 167.
- 6 E.S. de Beer (ed.), *The Diary of John Evelyn*, 1959, 545.
- 7 Ibid., 602.
- 8 Vanbrugh writes: 'As to the Outside, I thought 'twas absolutly best, to give it Something of the Castle Air, tho' at the Same time to make it regular... This method was practic'd at Windsor in King Charles's time'. Quoted in Kerry Downes, *Vanbrugh*, 1977, 48.
- 9 The north front as built does not appear in William Whittall's plan of 1706 but is illustrated in the second volume of Colen Campbell's *Vitrivius Britannicus* of 1717. The leadwork on the towers is dated 1710. Talman's possible authorship is discussed by John Cornforth in *Country Life*, 1 March 1973.
- 10 In a 1724 letter, Vanbrugh writes: 'a Cap is all that those sort of Towers shou'd have, and I have seen one upon a round Tower on the Walls of Chester that I though did extreamly well'. Quoted in Downes, 101.
- 11 H.M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects 1600-1840*, 1978, 561.
- 12 C.B. Andrews (ed.), *The Torrington Diaries*, 1934-8, vol. i, 237.
- 13 For a more comprehensive account of Shirburn see Timothy Mowl and Brian Earnshaw, 'The origins of 18th-Century Neo-Medievalism in a Georgian Norman Castle' in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of the United States*, December 1981, vol. XL, no. 4, 289-94.
- 14 The following biographical information on Thomas Parker is taken from the *Dictionary of National Biography*.
- 15 A collection of documents relating to Shirburn at this period is in the Bodleian Library, MS. Top. Oxon. c206.
- 16 Joseph Skelton, *Engraved Illustrations of the Principal Antiquities of Oxfordshire*, 1823, Pirton Hundred, plate 1.

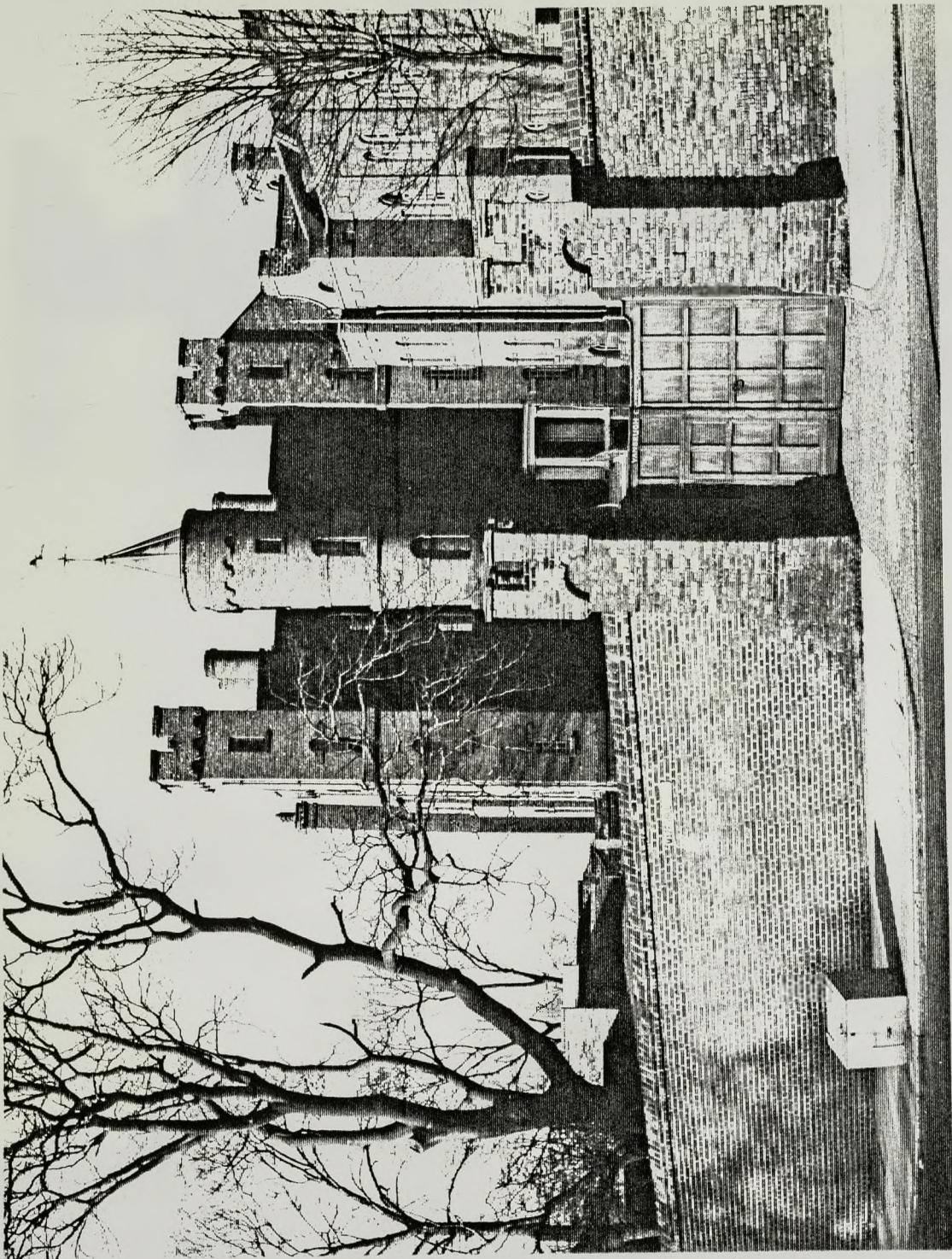


1. (top) Hampton Court House, Herefordshire (from *Vitruvius Britannicus*)

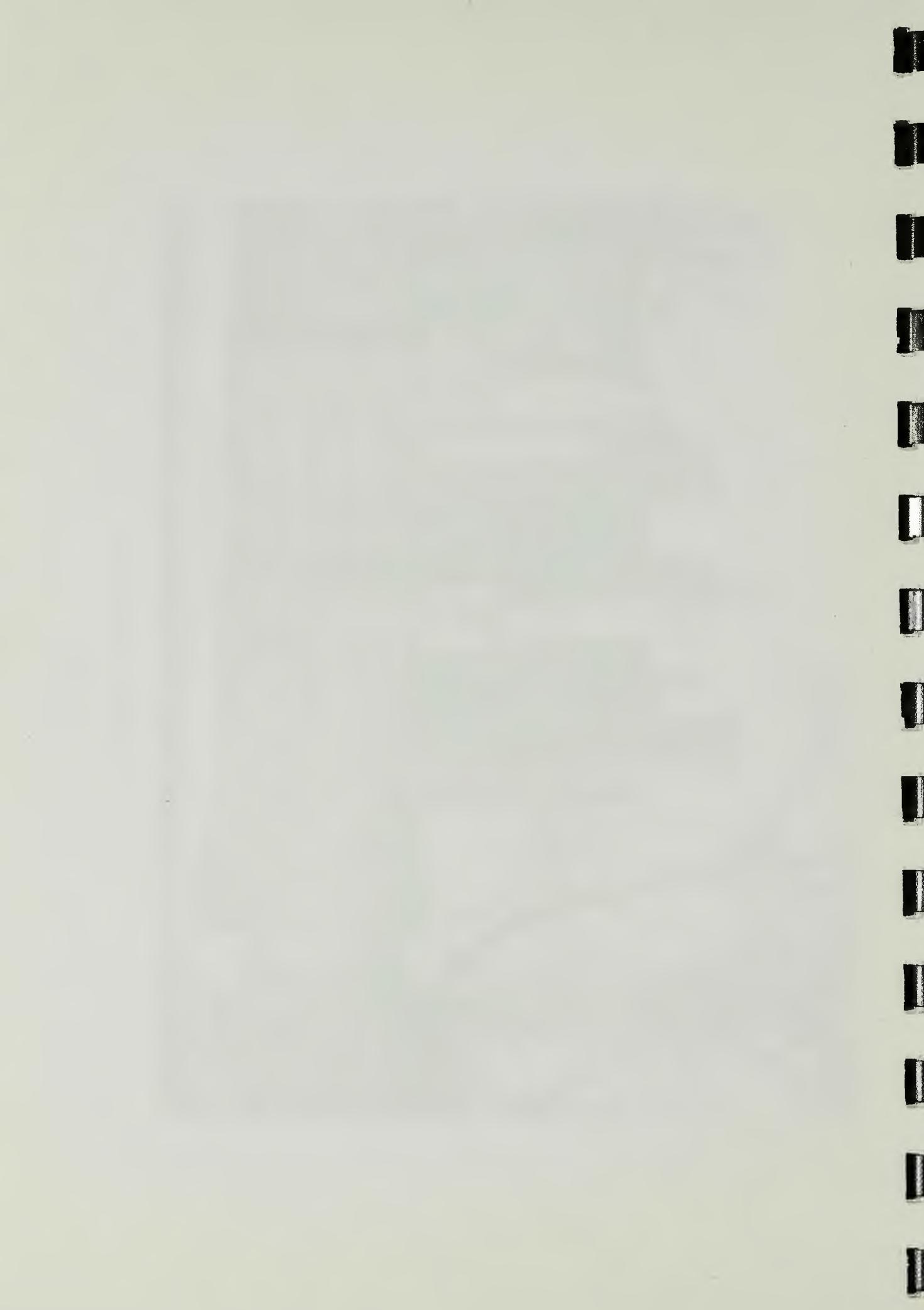


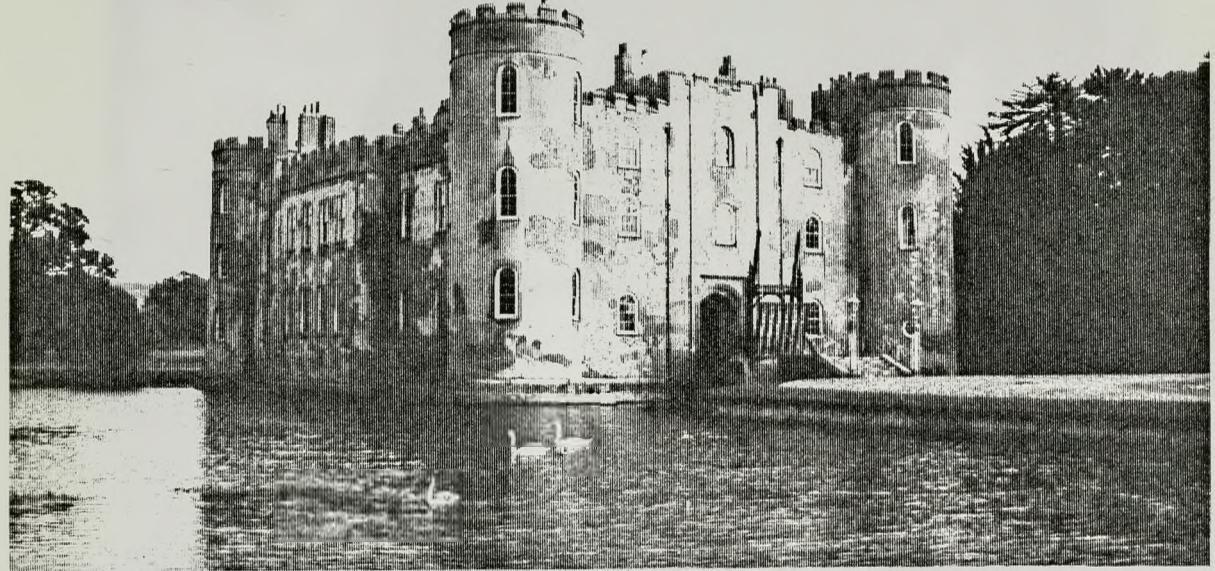
2. (bottom) Blenheim Palace, Oxfordshire: the Kitchen Court



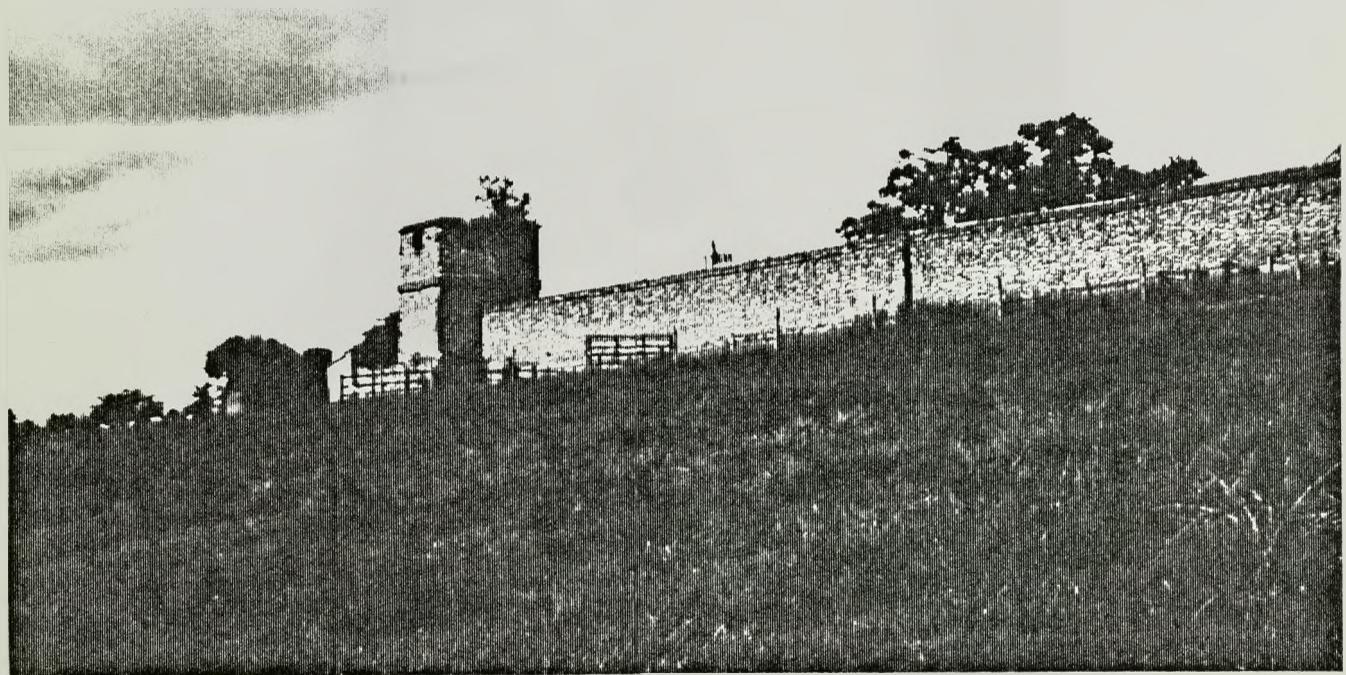


3. Vanburgh Castle, Blackheath, London

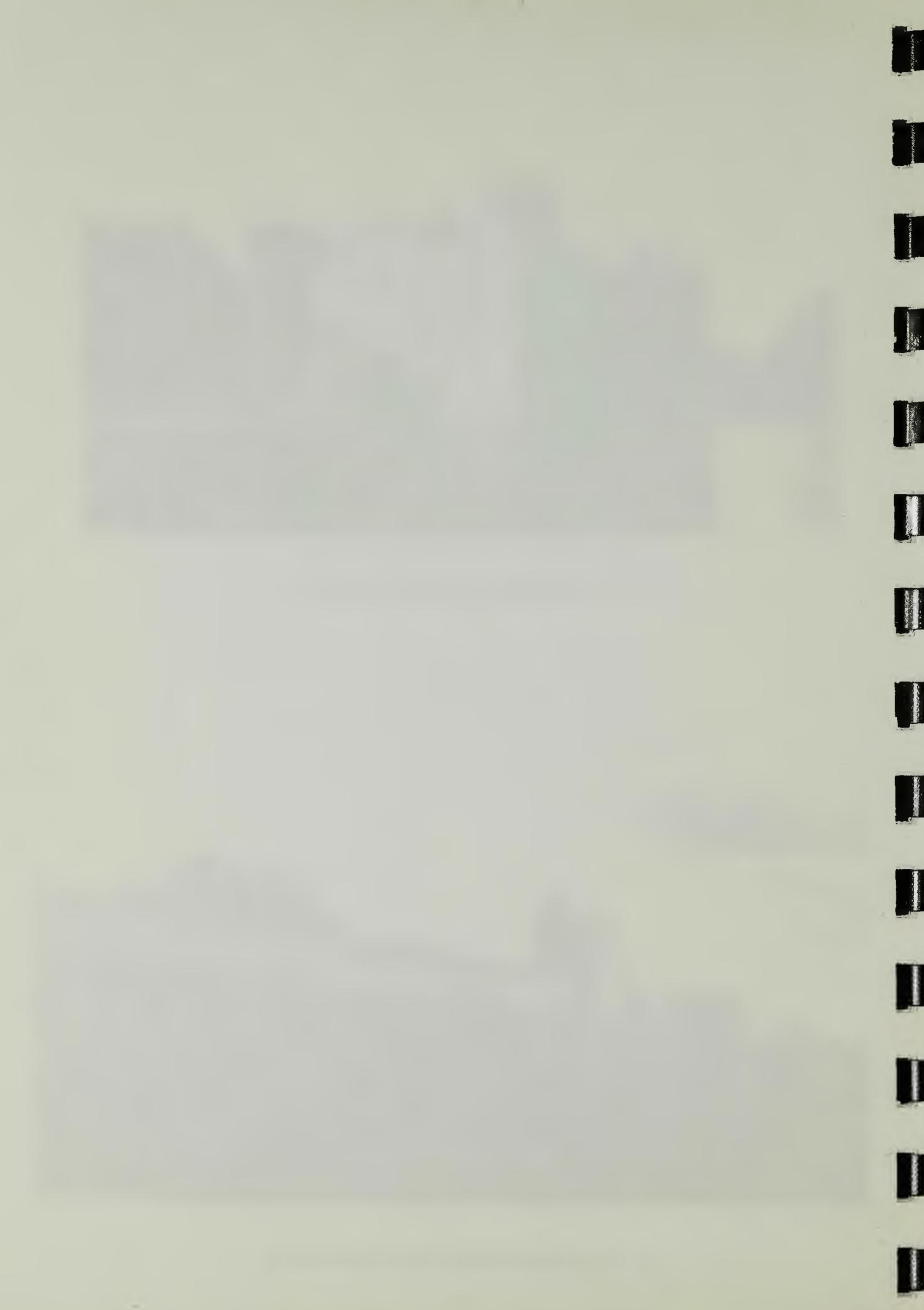


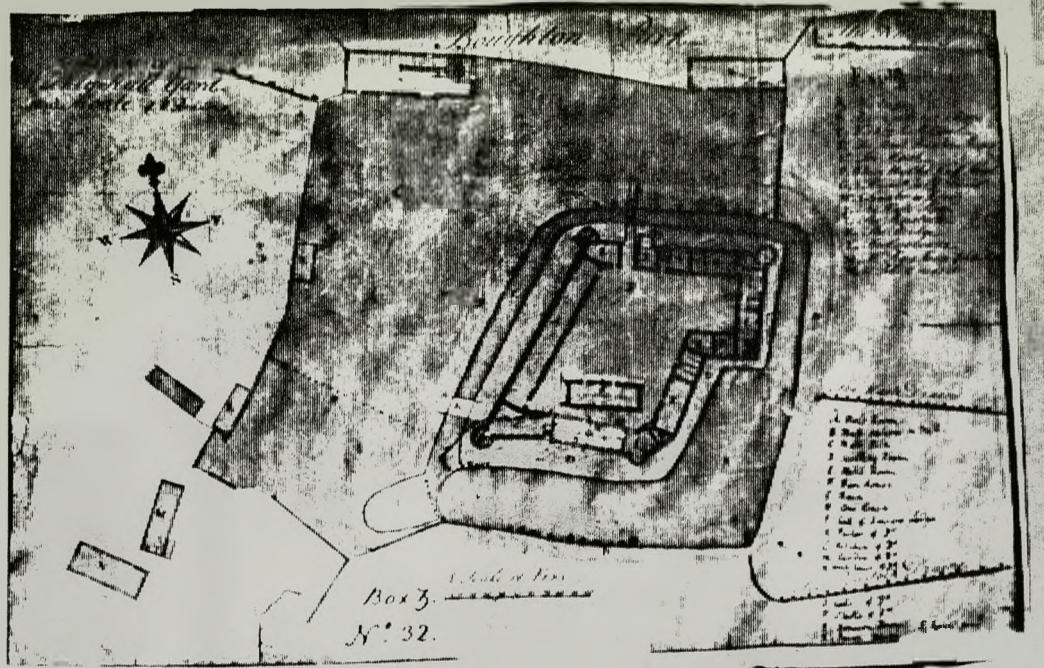


4. (*top*) Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire: the west front

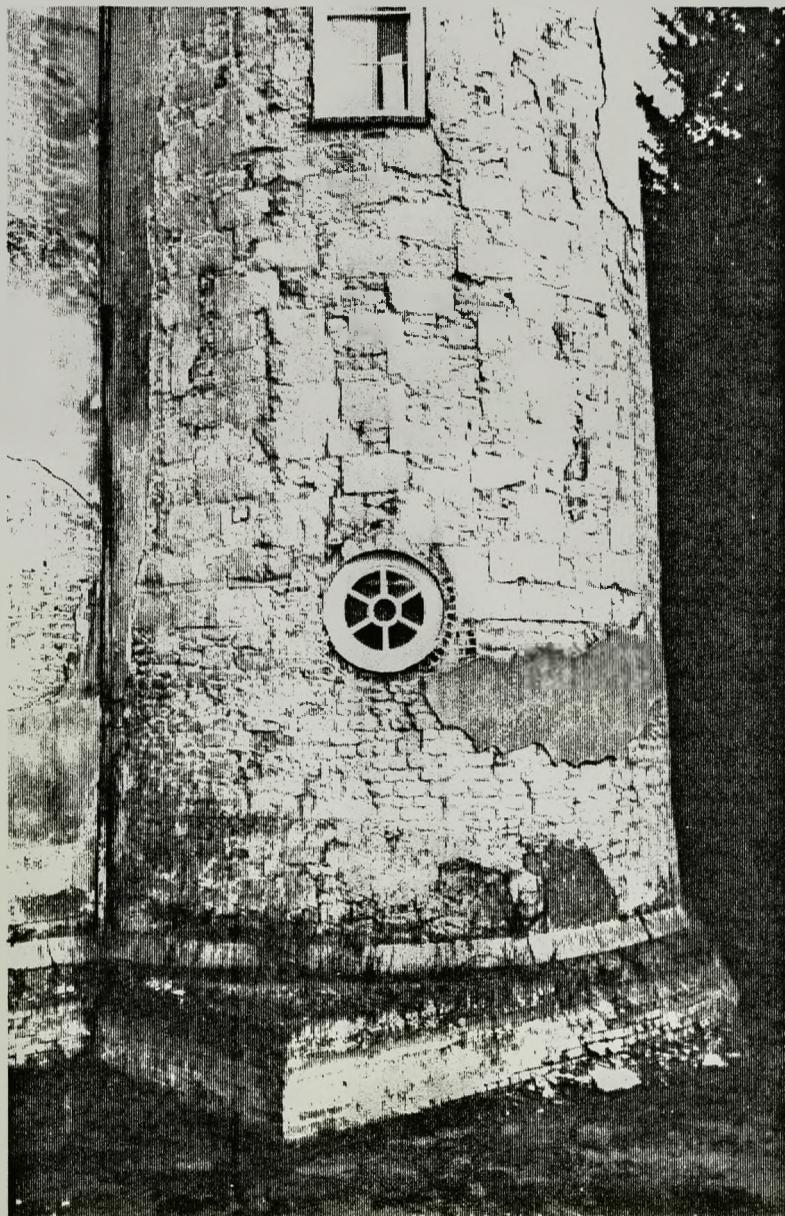


5. (*bottom*) Castle Howard, North Yorkshire: inner defense walls



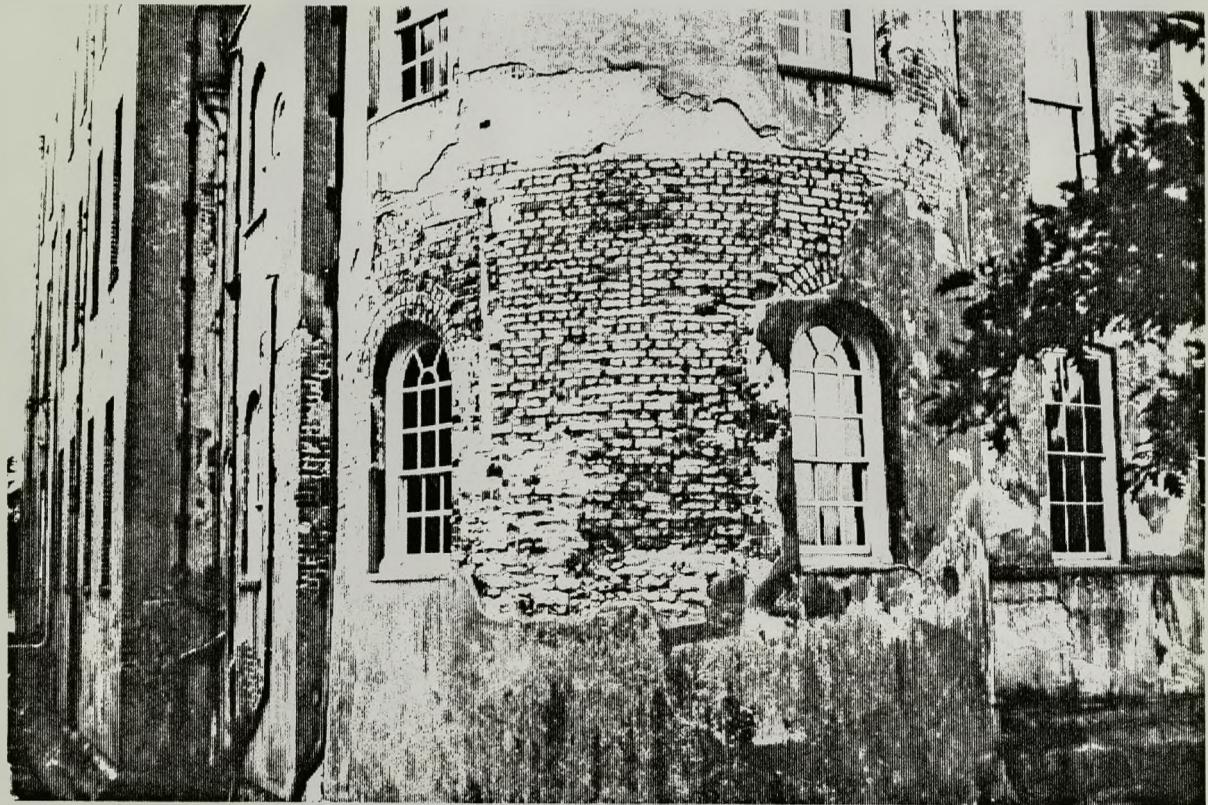


6. (top) Weekley Farm: design by the 2nd Duke of Montagu
(by kind permission of the Duke of Buccleugh and Queensbury K.T.)

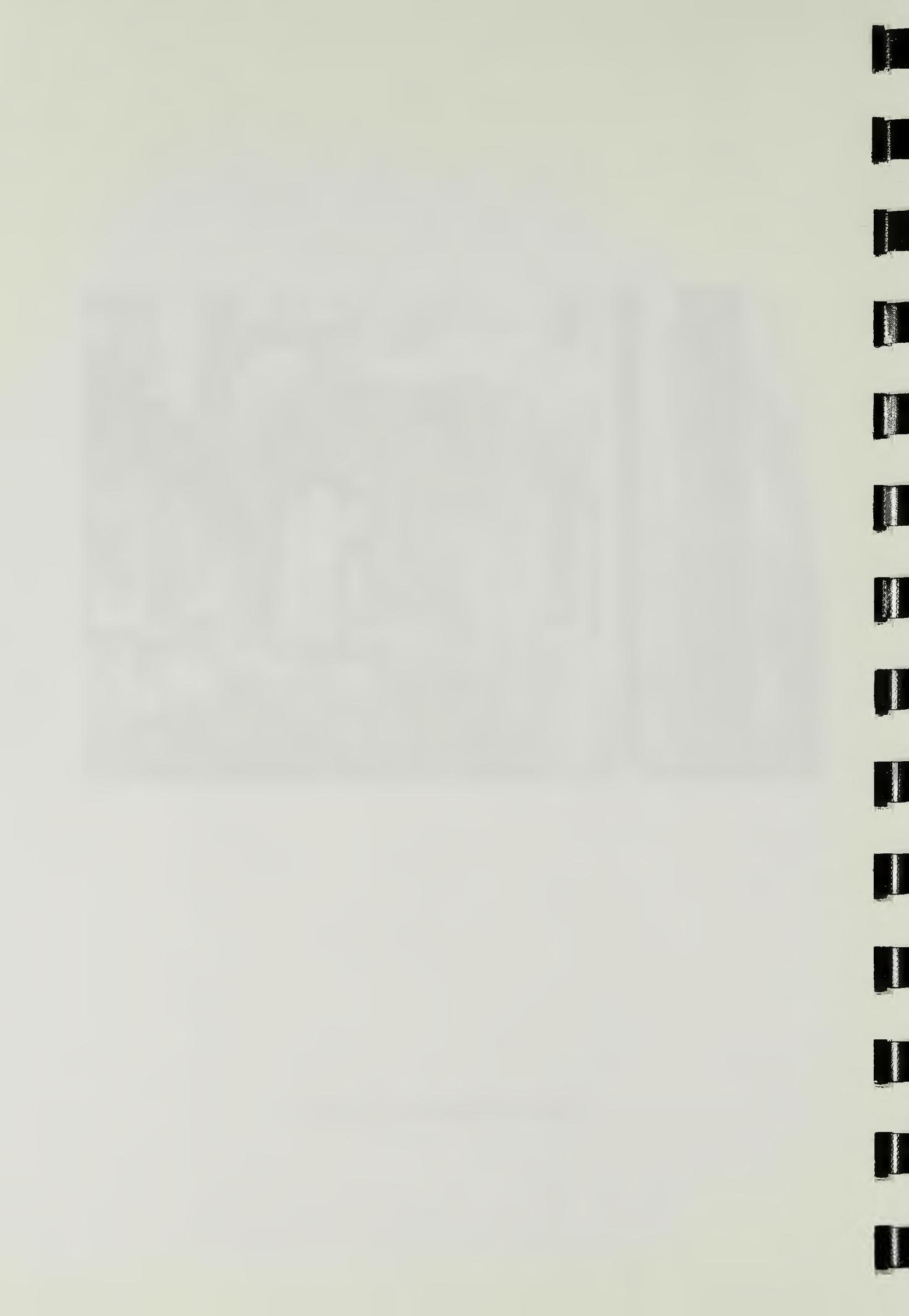


7. (bottom) Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire: south west tower





8. Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire: south east tower



9. Shirburn Castle, Oxfordshire: the Skelton view of 1823

