CAWOOD CASTLE, NR. SELBY, NORTH YORKSHIRE

This 15th-century gatehouse, with a domestic wing to one side of it, is all that remains of Cawood Castle, the principal palace of the Archbishops of York from the 13th century until 1646, it was destroyed by Parliamentarians during the Civil War. The flat landscape seems an unlikely site for a fortified building, but this was an important cross-roads with a ferry over the Ouse on the road to York and another running east-west along the riverbank. As a staging point for the North, the Castle witnessed many royal as well as episcopal visits and events. Henry III, Edward I and his wife Margaret, Edward II and his wife Isabella, all stayed here, Edward II on his way to disastrous defeat by the Scots at Bannockburn.

Archbishop John Kempe built the Gatehouse, using the creamy-white stone from a quarry at Huddleston, owned by the Cathedral. The son of a Kentish gentleman, Kempe rose swiftly through political and religious ranks. Henry VI declared him to be "one of the wisest lords in the land". He was appointed Bishop of Rochester, then of Chichester and of London, and finally Archbishop of York in 1425. He was proud to become a cardinal in 1439 and the Cardinal's hat appears on several of the finely-carved stone shields over the archway. It is likely that Kempe also built the surviving range to the east as it is bonded in with the Gatehouse. Cawood Castle was by now more palace than castle. Kempe's successor, Archbishop George Neville, celebrated his installation in grand style. John Leland described the feast he threw in every sumptuous detail. Provisions included 400 swans, 104 oxen, 2000 pigs and 4000 venison pasties, a feast that resounds through the years.

In 1514, Thomas Wolsey became Archbishop of York. He never came to Cawood until 1530, by when he had fallen from power and had been forced to surrender all his offices except the Archbishopric of York. It was here that Wolsey was arrested by the Earl of Northumberland for alleged treason at Henry VIII's command, a scene vividly recounted by his devoted official and biographer, George Cavendish. Ordered to London under custody, Wolsey died on the way in Leicester.

In 1541, Henry VIII stayed at Cawood Castle for two days on his progress with his latest wife, eighteen year old Catherine Howard. In her retinue was her supposed lover, Thomas Culpeper. Catherine, Culpeper and several others were beheaded at the order of the jealous king the following February. Further royal intrigue occurred here in 1568 when the 'Rising in the North' plotted to bring back the Catholic religion and replace Queen Elizabeth with Mary Queen of Scots. It ended with the execution of the Earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland and 400 of their followers at York.

During the Civil Wars of the 1640s, Cawood changed hands three times. Originally garrisoned with Royalist troops, they mostly deserted when faced by 600 Parliamentarian foot and cavalry soldiers in October 1642. But by June 1643 the castle had been recaptured by the Royalists, who held in for one year until it was retaken by Sir John Meldon for Parliament. At the end of the war. Parliament decided that Cawood, together with seven other castles in the north should be "slighted" or made impossible to defend. Most of the castle was demolished, including the crenelated parapet on the Gatehouse.

The Gatehouse continued in use by the Archbishops of York as a local or 'leet' court, and towards the end of the 18th century, the second staircase was built to enable the judge to

enter the court room by a different stair from the prisoners. In 1932, the courtroom was turned into a sitting room and during the Second World war it was used as an Officers' Mess and also by the Home Guard. More recently it contained a full-sized billiard table, which was still there when the Landmark Trust finally acquired the Gatehouse in a decayed condition in 1985.

THE REPAIR OF CAWOOD CASTLE

Surprisingly, the Gatehouse survived the demolition of the Castle relatively unscathed. The only serious change in the five centuries since it was built was to the roof line. The crenelated parapet had been removed and a pitched roof had been substituted for the original flat one. Happily, a small part of the original parapet still existed in the 1980s and so it was possible to replace it exactly, using a similar magnesium limestone from Cadeby, near Doncaster. The Welsh slate roof was removed and the Gatehouse given a flat one once more, although this time of York stone laid over concrete rather than lead as the original would have been.

The original stone springers of the medieval roof vault to the spiral staircase still existed and so the internal dome was re-formed using oak ribs. The oak roof was repaired and given a new lead covering, with a wheat sheaf crowning the turret as a tribute to Archbishop Kempe on whose armorial bearings it appears. Half the original timber gate was lying below the arch and this was mended and fsreplaced.

Inside, the problem was how to obtain a kitchen, bathroom and cloakroom with the minimum of alteration. In the end, our neighbour allowed us to truncate his house by some five feet to make a cloakroom and kitchen on the first floor, and a mezzanine bathroom between first and second floors. The kitchen is lit by a new inconspicuous window made in the south wall.

The ceiling of the sitting room is new as the old one had fallen in. Cement render on the walls was removed and redone with lime plaster and limewash. The original lime ash floor had virtually disappeared, and so the remaining patch was covered and the whole repaved with Cadeby stone with slate inserts. Concrete in the bay of the north bay window was left for fear of damaging the cantilevered structure. The bedroom floor was replaced and a later inserted floor which cut across the windows was removed. The window tracery and glazing were restored throughout. More recently, the worn stone treads of the spiral stairs were boxed in for more even passage and an iron handrail installed to replace the 1980s rope rail.

The huge range east of the Gatehouse was in use as a barn in the 1980s but was once a fine banqueting hall with two storeys (it is clear a floor has been removed). It is of similar mid-fifteenth century date as the Gatehouse, and fine medieval details can still be made out. The eastern end was rebuilt at some stage. The north side was blocked by undistinguished farm buildings which Landmark demolished to reveal the medieval construction. A wide opening for farm vehicles that had been knocked through between the third and fourth buttress was blocked up and its window restored. On the south side, three windows that had been blocked up were reopened, and the fifth buttress put back as it had been removed when a farm building was placed against the wall. The whole of the roof was retiled and some of the timber structure repaired. Finally, a brick wall that ran along the side of the pavement was removed to improve the view from the street, for Cawood's castle has always been squarely part of the village.

Most recently, with help from the Cultural Recovery Fund during the Covid-19 pandemic, the banqueting hall has again been re-roofed, the exterior of the stair turret repaired, rainwater goods overhauled and renewed, and the heraldic panels cleaned and restored.