XXI. *A Letter from William Milborne, Esq; of Arniathwaite Castle, concerning the Cells at Wetheral in Cumberland.*

Read April 17, 1755.

MR. Camden, speaking of Wetheral, in the county of Cumberland, says, “ Here you see a sort of houses dug out of a rock, that seem to have been designed for an absconding place.” To which his learned annotator adds, “ If not for some hermite to lodge in, being near the Monastery.” These caves are in a rock of difficult access, and are two rooms one within another, each about five or six yards square.

IN this addition there are some mistakes, which that great author could not have been guilty of, but through misinformation. And as these houses or caves are in themselves curious enough, and you desired a more particular account of them than has yet been given; in compliance with that request, I will give you the best history of them I can collect, both from my own view, and the information of others.

THESE caves are generally called St. Constantine’s cell, and by the country people, Wetheral safeguard. How they received the former name is pretty easy to account for. As the priory of Wetheral was dedicated to St. Constantine [a], it is most likely whatever new building was made contiguous to the priory, either as a place of religion or safety, would be honoured with the name of the tutelar saint of the place. And as for the latter ap-

[a] Denton’s History of Cumberland in MS.

Plan of the Cells at Wetheral.

Scale of feet.

pellation, it seems to prove the conjecture of Mr. Camden, that they were designed for an absconding place; for the story of their being intended for that purpose, having been delivered down to the country people by tradition, would naturally lead them to that name of safeguard.

HOWEVER, both Mr. Camden and the Bishop of London may be right in their several conjectures; for these places might, upon different occasions, serve both for an absconding place, and as a lodging for an Hermit.—Upon any invasion of the Scots, which were frequent in those parts, the prior, or the most considerable of the monks, might retire here, with the money, plate, and valuable effects of the priory, till the danger was over. And in time of peace, some one of the more devout of those days might take it into his head to sequester himself in these solitary caves, more closely from conversation and the world, than he could do in his apartments in the convent.

THE Bishop is extremely right in observing, that they are in a rock of difficult access; for the only way to come at them is by a steep descent of several yards, along a narrow and difficult path, without any appearance of the road having ever been better: But then he has been misinformed, where they are said to be two rooms one within the other; for they consist of three rooms, not one within the other (which is understood to be where one room makes a passage into another), but three rooms, as I may say, abreast, with a gallery in front, which makes a communication to each room, such as the imperfect sketch may serve to explain.

THESE cells are dug out of a rock, at the height of about forty feet from the summer level of the river Eden, which washes the bottom of it, and are of the several dimensions as set down in the table of references. A ledge of the rock, about eight feet below the floor of the cells, serves as a foundation for the wall which is built before the cells, and which makes the gallery; which wall is of good ashler work, and reaches in height a little

way above the top of the cells, to which it was formerly joined by a roof covered with lead or slate; when this roof was in repair, the cells must have been a warm, dry, and comfortable dwelling. The door in the gallery is at one end, and about seven feet above the path leading to the cells; there are no remains of any steps up to it, so that the entrance must have been made by means of a ladder, which the inhabitant of the cells might draw up for his greater security. In the middle of the wall is a chimney; and there are three windows in it, one opposite to every cell, to give light to them.

THERE are no inscriptions to be found in the cells, or on the wall; but upon the same rock, out of which the cells are hewn, a little higher up the river, and about ten or twelve feet from the summer level of the water, you meet with this inscription:

MAXIMVS SCRIPSIT
LEX XX VV COND: CASOSIVS.

WHAT may be the meaning of this inscription you will be the best judge; as for myself, I pretend to very little knowledge in this kind of decyphering. The LEX XX VV COND: might perhaps be read “Legio vicefima Valens Victrix condidit,” and may be supposed Roman; but what the latter part of the inscription, and the awkward figure of a buck or stag may mean, I am at a loss to find out. Whatever the other may be, the “Maximus” “scripsit” seems to be modern; and it must be observed, that it is a yard distant from the other part of the inscription.

A Table of References to the Draught of the Cells.

	feet inch.			feet inch.			feet inch.	
1. Cell, long	22	2	high	8	10	5. Gallery long	26	0
broad	12	4	3. Cell, long	20	00	broad	7	0
high	8	7	broad	9	7	high	8	3
2. Cell, long	21	8	high	8	8	6. 6. 6. Windows.		
broad	9	5	4. Door into the gallery.			7. Chimney.		