

ART. XXIII.—*Aldingham Motte and Grange*. By PAUL V. KELLY.

*Read at the site, Sept. 5th 1923.*

THIS is the fourth visit which the Society has made to this interesting place, the last time being so long ago as 1905. On that occasion those who were present were fortunate in having in the late Mr. Harper Gaythorpe one whose ability to describe the Aldingham Mote (as it was then called) was of the highest order. His death in 1909 was a great loss to the Society and to the study of Furness history. In the period that has elapsed since that visit, however, a great advance has been made in the knowledge of earthworks in general, and many of the favourite theories held at that time have been discarded. Despite this general increase in knowledge very little that is fresh has been added to what we already know of this place.

The remains here consist of a series of earthworks, the principal object being a large artificial mound of earth in shape like a truncated cone raised 15 feet above the original surface of the ground, the material for which was obtained from an encircling ditch 10 feet in depth, giving a total height from the bottom of the ditch to the top of the mound of 25 feet. The flat top of the mound has a diameter of 100 feet while the extreme diameter outside the ditch is 210 feet. The mound stands upon the most prominent headland on the coast, on the edge of a cliff 60 feet in height, on which the sea has encroached to the extent of removing the seaward side of the ditch and also a small portion of the mound itself. It would seem that part of the cliff has gone since Close, the editor of West's *Antiquities of Furness*, published his description in 1804. Measurements taken in 1889 compared with Close's shew that the cliff

has lost in that time 20 to 30 feet of the ditch and mound (*V. C. H. Lancs.* ii, 557).

To the north of the mound may be traced the line of a stockade which was evidently continued on the west and south sides so as to enclose an area on the summit of the hill, but all trace of any such stockade on these sides has been obliterated by the plough.

About 120 feet from the north edge of the mound ditch to the north is a portion of another ditch, quite straight, about 250 feet long (the so called fish pond) and abutting with its east end on the cliff. This ditch is 18 feet wide at the bottom with a diagonal passage across it from which a slight artificial scarp or low bank runs parallel to the top of the cliff past the present farm down to a landing place on the beach. Mr. Kendall in his "Muchland and its Owners" was of opinion that this bank was stockaded, but Mr. H. S. Cowper in the *Victoria County History of Lancaster* is doubtful whether either the scarp or the passage across the ditch is ancient. The headland upon which the artificial mound is placed stands nearly isolated, the low ground surrounding it being of a swampy nature except a small portion of firm ground on the northern side. The sides of the hill are steep on the west and north but slope more gradually towards the south. The steep slopes were no doubt covered with brush wood and the boggy ground there gives reason to believe that it was impassable in medieval times.

In the low ground at the bottom of the hill, in the centre of the firm ground already noted, is an enclosure known as the "Grange." This is of a later date than the other works and consists of a small moated island. The area enclosed by the moat is roughly rectangular and measures 90 feet square, with a slightly elevated plot in the centre 50 feet square, not level but rounded and lumpy, sloping in every direction to the edge of the moat. The moat is 30 feet wide at the top and 20 feet at the bottom, with a

depth of six to eight feet. It still contains water on three sides, the other side being marshy, due as Close supposes to its being cut through a spring and would never want for water (*Antiquities of Furness*, 1804, pp. 388-390).

Many and divergent are the theories which have been put forth on the subject of the Aldingham earthworks. West (*Ibid.* 1774, xi) seems to have regarded the mound as an exploratory or look-out station from which signals could be transmitted across the bay to Lancaster and he ascribed it to the Romans; others have assigned to it a Scandinavian origin and considered it to be the Thing-mount of the Norse settlers. Some have questioned whether it might not have a sepulchral origin and pointed to the tradition that at one time Col. Braddyll directed some excavations here in the course of which portions of burnt bones were found. An account of these excavations was read at the Society's visit here in 1887 which the late Chancellor Ferguson described as unsatisfactory and pointed out that no proof had been advanced that the mound was sepulchral in its origin as the excavations had not cut through to the real surface of the ground where the original interment would be, and any interment near the top would be a subsequent insertion; therefore the sepulchral theory might well be dismissed (these *Trans.* O. S., ix, 404).

A theory, which obtained a much wider acceptance than any of the foregoing, was that from the name of the place it was supposed that Aldingham was the principal landing place of the Anglians in Furness who established themselves here and in such places as Gleaston, Bolton, Stainton and Pennington. Mr. Kendall says:—

There were many good reasons why Aldingham should have been fixed upon as a place of settlement by the English immigrants. The first headland high enough to afford shelter from westerly gales projected into the bay at this point while immediately to the north of it was a fine beach admirably adapted as a landing place and as a further advantage the channel up to this

point was navigable at all states of the tide for the class of craft then in use. They organised themselves into a political body for local government with a meeting place at or near the Moat Hill on the headland and this hill they fortified as a place of refuge for themselves and their cattle when attacked by marauders either by land or sea.

The late Chancellor Ferguson was of the same opinion. He said:—

I think that this is the mound, motte, or burh (the mote of our records) of the family of the Aldingas—the fortified home of the Aldingas as the name Aldingham tells. It was probably also their talking place (O.S. iv, 404).

Such was the theory held by most leading archæologists until within quite recent years. But a later school of writers has arisen who have advanced the opinion that these moated mounds are not the work of English settlers at all, but that they originated with William the Conqueror and his Norman followers. Amongst these the arguments of our Vice-President, Mr. J. F. Curwen, are very convincing. In his book on *Castles and Fortified Towers of Cumberland, Westmorland and North Lonsdale* (pp. 34, 471) on which I have drawn largely he has shown that under the tribal institutions of the English who congregated together in villages and towns, what was required for their defensive needs was not a small stronghold, even though impregnable, that could shelter only a handful of men, but a wall of some kind either of wood or stone around their settlements to protect the whole of their townsfolk from the enemy. For that purpose a small moated mound would be useless. It could hold but few defenders, and a town lying at its foot could be sacked and burnt before their eyes. But with the Norman Conquest came the domination of single individuals over vast territories. The barons and manorial tenants were obliged to defend their new acquisitions whilst living among a rough and ever hostile native peasantry. They wanted something which could be thrown up quickly and easily defended by a few men,

so they introduced into England the scheme of an artificial mound strengthened by a deep ditch upon which a timber built citadel could be erected together with an enclosing bailey. These were built primarily as private castles for the protection of the individual as apart from the community and they were typical of the victory of feudalism over tribal institutions. In Normandy these works were known as the Motte and Bailey. They were the forerunners of the baronial castle of a later date. The mound or Motte itself was strongly fortified with close stockades of oak palings pointed at the top and encircling both the base and summit of the cone as well as the outer lip of the surrounding ditch, and the only means of access to the citadel was by a flying bridge or ladder steeply inclined over the ditch. The building on the flat top of the mound was no mere shed but a stout blockhouse built of split trunks of trees set upright and secured at the top and bottom by cross pieces of timber. It was capable of withstanding any assault but that of the dreaded firebrand. The bailey or base court was an area enclosed around the foot of the mound commonly oval in form and containing shelters for the garrison, horses, kitchens, workshops and other necessary equipment.

According to Mr. Curwen this bailey was a formidable affair. A deep ditch encircled it, the material from which was thrown up inside the area so as to form a rampart for the outer stockade while on the counterscarp or outer lip of the ditch was a special defence known as the hericio (hedgehog) from the bristly nature of the thorns and brambles employed in its construction like a barbed wire entanglement. Of these military works there are two types: in one the Motte forms part of the general scheme of fortification and is attached to the outworks of the bailey; in the other the Motte stands free within the bailey. It is significant of their Norman origin that of the 84 castles in England known to have been built in the

reign of the Conqueror and his son Rufus, 71 have or have had Mottes with appendant earthworks.

Here then at Aldingham we have a typical Motte standing clear of its enclosing bailey. If we accept the theory of its Norman origin, then it could not have been erected by the shadowy Aldingas but by that definite historical personage Michael le Fleming. At the time of the Conquest Aldingham was held under Tostig Earl of Northumbria by a Norse thane Ernulf. What became of Ernulf is not known but about 60 years later we find the land of Aldingham in the possession of Michael of Flanders. Who he was or what services he rendered to gain him the manor it is impossible to say. Mr. Kendall assigns the date for the creation of the manor as between the years 1108 and 1111 and from the name of the grantee the manor became known as Michael's land or Muchland. Immediately on taking possession of his new property Michael would at once, after the Norman fashion, set about making himself secure in it. This he did by selecting the highest point upon the coast and thereon erecting his stronghold with its supporting base-court. The mound may therefore be taken to be the remains of the Motte erected by the first owners of the Norman manor of Muchland.

The short straight ditch with the traces of a stockade bank above it to the north formed part of the fosse that enclosed the bailey, but since it must have been filled in from the west end and is washed away at the seaward end it is impossible to tell what direction it may have taken.

It is probable that under the rule of the Flemings the Aldingham lands were early restored to peace and prosperity, as in the years that followed Michael's advent into the district there was much activity in church building, the great Abbey of Furness itself being founded at this time. When the natives had become accustomed to his rule and he had won over to his side the principal inhabitants the necessity for actually living in the fastness on

the hill would not be so apparent. His need would then be for a more commodious dwelling in a more sheltered and accessible position which, if not so strong as the tower on the mound, would be still defensible, and would at least offer larger and more comfortable accommodation. This need was met by the establishment of the Grange, a sort of manorial hall on the lower ground and surrounded on all sides by a deep moat. The square entrenched area which we see near the farm is the site of this moated Grange. It is impossible to assign a date to these works but that they are a subsequent developement of the Motte and Bailey and not contemporary with them is fairly clear. The buildings at the Grange while still being of wood and following the general plan of those on the Motte, would be much less cramped and what they lost in strength of position would be compensated for by the increase in comfort and the general amenities of life. The structure consisted chiefly of one big common room which was of such great importance that the whole building became known as the Hall. There would be a few tiny private apartments for the use of the lord and his lady, but the Hall itself was open to all the retainers.

This then was the *Caput* or capital messuage of the lords of Aldingham. Here they held their courts and received the fealty of their tenants and conducted all the business of the manor and here they dwelt until, as tradition asserts, compelled by the encroachment of the sea, they abandoned this site and sought another further inland at Gleaston; and there they built themselves a castle of stone.

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