

SOME REMARKS ON THE PFAHLGRABEN AND SAALBURG  
CAMP IN GERMANY, IN RELATION TO THE ROMAN  
WALL AND CAMPS IN NORTHUMBERLAND.<sup>1</sup>

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At the annual meeting of the Institute appointed to be held at Newcastle-on-Tyne in July of the present year the members will visit the eastern portion of the Roman wall, the barrier constructed by Hadrian as a defence against the tribes of Caledonia who had not been subdued into the condition of safe neighbours to the conquerors of the south. Those of our members who were present at the Carlisle Meeting in 1882, will remember the western portion of that wall and the camps of Chesters, Housesteads, and Birdoswald. This line of defence existing in our own country is well illustrated by an analogous work in Southern Germany, constructed also by the Romans against the unsubdued northern tribes the Catti, and known to German antiquaries as the Pfahlgraben, one of the most striking points of which is the Saalburg camp. That work is not unknown to the Institute, but as many years have passed since it was brought specially to our notice, I have thought that the present time is opportune for reviving the information we, as an Institute, possess, and for drawing the attention of our newer members to what was published concerning it some thirty-two years ago; as well as to point out where the most recent information may be found and examined.

In the first of the two volumes published by the Institute in 1852 recording the Proceedings of the Newcastle Meeting held in that year, there is an elaborate paper by the late Mr. James Yates, on the "*Limes*

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, March 6, 1884.

*Rhaeticus* and the *Limes Transrhenanus* of the Roman Empire." He gives a particular account of his visit to that locality where the Pfahlgraben barrier appears in remarkable prominence, a few miles from the now fashionable watering place of Homburg in Hesse. Since the period of his visit the Local Society, the Taunus Club, has devoted much care to the exploration and preservation of the Roman remains in that district, and especially to the neighbouring camp, the Saalburg; interesting particulars have been published at Homburg, in English, with a preface by Mr. Thomas Hodgkin of Newcastle.

By far the most important essay on the whole subject is also by Mr. Hodgkin, it is published in the "Archæologia Æliana" of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, vol. ix, pp. 73-161, for the year 1882.<sup>1</sup> In the summer of the past year (1883) I made several visits to the locality, it is within a pleasant day's ramble from Homburg. I propose, with these three publications before me, and using my own observation, to offer some remarks on this German-Roman barrier viewed in relation to the English-Roman barrier in Northumberland, both having been constructed for a similar, if not for the same purpose. The latter work is literally a wall built with stone, it is too carefully described by Dr. J. Collingwood Bruce in his great work, to need any detailed account here, we will, therefore, pass on to notice the former.

The Pfahlgraben was an earthwork without any stone masonry or work in the nature of a wall in its construction, it was strengthened at intervals by watch and signal-towers, and at certain places by forts and fortified camps which were built with stone, and in this respect they resembled the Roman wall across England. It extended from the river Danube, at a point about sixteen miles above Ratisbon, to the Rhine some distance below Coblenz; it followed a very irregular course between these two points, the straight line would be about 220 miles, the actual length 300 miles or more, passing through the territories of Bavaria, Würtemburg, Baden, Hesse - Cassel, Darmstadt, and Nassau. It was the "*Limes*," the boundary line and barrier between the Roman possessions on the south and the unconquered

<sup>1</sup> In the library of the Royal Archæological Institute.

tribes on the north and east who were for the most part included under the name of the Catti or Chatti. As is the case with the wall of Hadrian, so this German barrier was adapted to the rough features of the country, requiring many deviations from the straight course, passing up and down the steepest declivities which aided the defensive works, it traversed uninhabited lands and mountains covered with forests, avoiding low-lying lands and rivers, and other local features likely to cause destruction. It appears from ancient authorities that at many places a palisade, or stockade, or hedge, was added to the earthwork, either set upon it or constructed in front in a parallel direction. In the word Pfahlgraben may be recognised its derivation, the Latin word *palus*, the English *pale* or *pole* may be traced in the German Pfahl, and that syllable, and graben a ditch may be traced in many local names<sup>1</sup> in Germany; this additional defence, fence, or hedge was constructed on the side towards the hostile tribes; again, when the natural features of the country were strong, there were intervals without either rampart or hedge.

The sculptures on the Column of Trajan at Rome show the soldiers engaged in the construction of stockade and palisade defences: and the words of old Roman authors plainly describe them. The frontier defences of the Nervii are thus described by Cæsar (*de bello Gallico*) Book II, cap. 8. "The inhabitants [*i.e.*, of the present Hainault] prevented their neighbours from making inroads into their country, by a fortification of young trees which they split in the middle, and bending down the boughs on either side, filled up the vacancies so close with thorns that it served them instead of a wall, which could neither be passed or seen through; whilst therefore the progress of our army was stopped by this bulwark," &c., &c. (the narrative proceeds to tell of the consequences of the obstruction), we do not know that the Romans added a hedge to their wall across England, but it is supposed to have been a frequent feature of the Pfahlgraben when traversing the forest country. I shall have to refer again to this hedge.

The Taunus mountains rise conspicuously in the rear of

<sup>1</sup> See p. 103 of Mr. Yates's paper in the Newcastle volume before quoted.

Homburg, a fine road leads up to the lowest part, or pass into the country beyond, anciently occupied by the hostile Catti; the point is about 1,300 feet above the sea, the country to the south being fairly level from Homburg to Frankfort on the river Maine and from thence to the Rhine. At this pass over the mountain ridge, we find the remains of what was the most important fortified camp along the whole barrier, the local name whereof is the Saalburg; and at about 600 yards distance in the thick forest to the north runs a portion of the Pfahlgraben, the two, although near, are not combined with each other. The latter may be followed to the right or left for a long distance without difficulty, it is about six feet high from the bottom of the ditch, and is probably much worn down by the growth of trees, rain, and other obliterating agencies, it is clearly only an earthwork. The camp itself was indeed the Roman fortress and it evidently occupies an important military position. It is pretty well identified with the ancient Artaunum<sup>1</sup> (*Αρταύνον*) of Ptolemy. It was originally built by Drusus in 11 b.c., and having been destroyed by the Germans it was rebuilt and strengthened by Germanicus the son of Drusus. It has its representatives in the Northumbrian camps, in its leading features of stone walls, rectilinear plan with the four angles rounded off, and in its proximity to the barrier. History tells but little of the events which took place at the Saalburg. The remains now to be seen afford evidence of a long occupation by the Romans, not enjoyed, however without fighting in its defence, and its loss and recapture more than once repeated. On the fall of the Roman power towards the end of the third century, it was devastated by fire and finally destroyed as a fortress. It remained for nearly fourteen centuries as a ruin, being freely used as a quarry for building stone, especially for churches, and the rebuilding of the Castle of Homburg after its destruction by the Swedes in the seventeenth century. It became overgrown by the natural forest which concealed it from notice and only diggers after hidden treasures, tramps and robbers found here on the cross roads so near the boundary lines between Homburg

<sup>1</sup> According to Ortelius, the city of Würzburg is the Artaunum of Ptolemy. It is possible that the same name was given to two different places.

and Nassau, a very convenient resort which permitted a speedy change of residence from one principality to another. During the past forty years considerable sums of money were expended in clearing out this camp, supplied chiefly by the "administration" of the gambling establishment (now abolished), and later by the Emperor of Germany, and by the Taunus Club who conduct the explorations; and the repairs which followed, notwithstanding all that might be said in condemnation of such work, were really much needed to assist a due appreciation of the features of this ancient fortress.

The wall of the camp is about six feet high on a raised earth rampart, a double ditch being on the outside in front, the principal one and the widest, opening to the south, the country possessed by the Romans; each gateway was furnished with square towers, the lower parts of which are in good preservation; the area of the camp is covered with the foundations of buildings such as the prætorium, dwellings, store houses, &c., and one deep well is still perfect and supplies good water. There are the ruins of another well at the northern end of the camp, and baths with a heating furnace in the north-eastern part, and a drain therefrom at the angle. Outside the camp on the south stood a villa in which the Emperor Caracalla is supposed to have sojourned, a hypocaust, and many other buildings for the residence of a semi-military population attached to the camp; there was a line of public-houses or taverns, the cellars of which can now be seen ranged at the side of the road leading southward from the camp; a few minutes walk in the same direction leads to the Roman cemetery now much hidden by forest trees. Excavations on the spot prove that cremation was practised, the ashes were deposited in small pits or cists in the ground about two feet in depth. A house of tombs, a "*columbarium*," has been built there, raised on the old foundations of one that was the work of the Romans, imitating in all respects the features of sepulchral structures still surviving in Italy; even the roof tiles are stamped after the manner of the Roman tiles, the inscriptions on them, however, are not likely to mislead, the name and stamp of the modern potter will always attest the genuine recent manufacture. Altogether the remains

of a Roman settlement outside the camp towards the south on the declivity of the hill are very extensive, and the relics discovered show that the Roman occupation may have lasted for nearly 300 years. The latest coin found there is one of Claudio Gothicus, A.D. 268-270.

The dimensions of the camp are 300 paces from north to south and 200 from east to west; the superficial area is about seven English acres, rather smaller than the principal Northumbrian camps. The garrison on a war footing is calculated to have been about 1100 men. There is one spot within the camp on the north side of the prætorium, oval in shape and depressed all around, where the soldiers are supposed to have had their games, under the inspection of the commandant if desirous of overlooking them without the trouble of leaving his own verandah, while in front of the prætorium the military exercises were performed. The large space devoted to the commandant's residence is very striking and leads to the conclusion that all other parts of the camp must have been very inconveniently crowded. The rampart and wall have been repaired, and the foundation spaces of the gateway towers and other buildings have been cleared of growing trees and accumulated rubbish caused by mediæval destruction. The top of the existing stone rampart, and of the low foundation walls rising two or three feet from the surface, have been carefully covered with sods of turf for the sake of protection; this arrangement materially helps inspection of the details; here and there the rampart and ditch have been restored so as to illustrate Roman defensive works as described by the ancient writers. The ruined buildings outside the camp called the "house of Caracalla" have been similarly treated; I observed, however, that while judicious clearances of rubbish were being made, some repairs were being effected by raising the masonry of the walls as much as eight to ten feet above the remains of the original work left by the mediæval destroyers; the modern workmen were using new mortar and the old stones, some of the latter being laid strangely out of place; for instance, some stones exhibiting a calcined surface from their having formed the lining of the hypocaust furnace, were being built in where

no such fire could ever have reached them ; some years hence it will be difficult to distinguish between original work and the new walling ; such restoration is injudicious, to say the least. The cellars already mentioned bear the appearance of having recently suffered similar treatment ; of course the general effect makes a better impression on the casual observer who devotes only a quarter of an hour to the inspection of the whole camp under the directions of an "intelligent" guide. Many hours with a good guide book in hand may be profitably and agreeably spent in the locality, and if repeated more than once so much the better for the careful observer. The camp presents such an appearance of neatness and uniformity as to create an impression that too much has been done for it, a condition never to be observed in the Northumbrian Roman camps.

I have already alluded to the hedge barrier which the Romans adopted after experiencing its effect in Hainault ; the restorers of the Saalburg have with great judgment planted one on the ground south of the camp, in dimensions (I speak without having exactly measured it) about fifty paces long and ten wide and ten or fifteen feet high ; the trees are bent, and tangled together in all directions, impervious to man or horse, and when the foliage is on it is almost a complete screen against observation. I have confined my remarks to the principal defensive structure ; there are many works of minor importance within a moderate distance, such as round earthworks and remains of towers of Roman construction, all more or less hidden by the forest trees and brushwood. I must say a few words about the museum at Homburg ; a large room at the "Kurhaus" contains a collection of objects of Roman origin found in and about the town and at the Saalburg ; every thing is exceedingly well arranged and carefully protected by glass cases, and in that respect it is equal to any museum of similar objects with which I am acquainted. Among the curiosities are some tiles bearing impressions of the feet of ancient inhabitants of the country, made while clay was yet soft, the pig, deer, fox, badger, dog, and the Roman soldier have left their marks ; but these are mere trifles among the extensive collection of pottery, metal objects, coins, personal ornaments, glass, locks and keys,

wine-jars, stove-pipes, I cannot now write a full catalogue from memory.

I must make one more remark on Mr. Hodgkin's paper in the *Archaeologia Aeliana*, it brings together all the authentic information about the Pfahlgraben throughout its course, in a complete and exhaustive manner. It is abundantly illustrated by maps, plans, and woodcuts of the scenery; it is the best and only guide in English, for both the antiquary and the tourist who may desire to undertake an independent exploration of the entire barrier; and I hope that we may hear more on the same subject when we meet again at Newcastle.