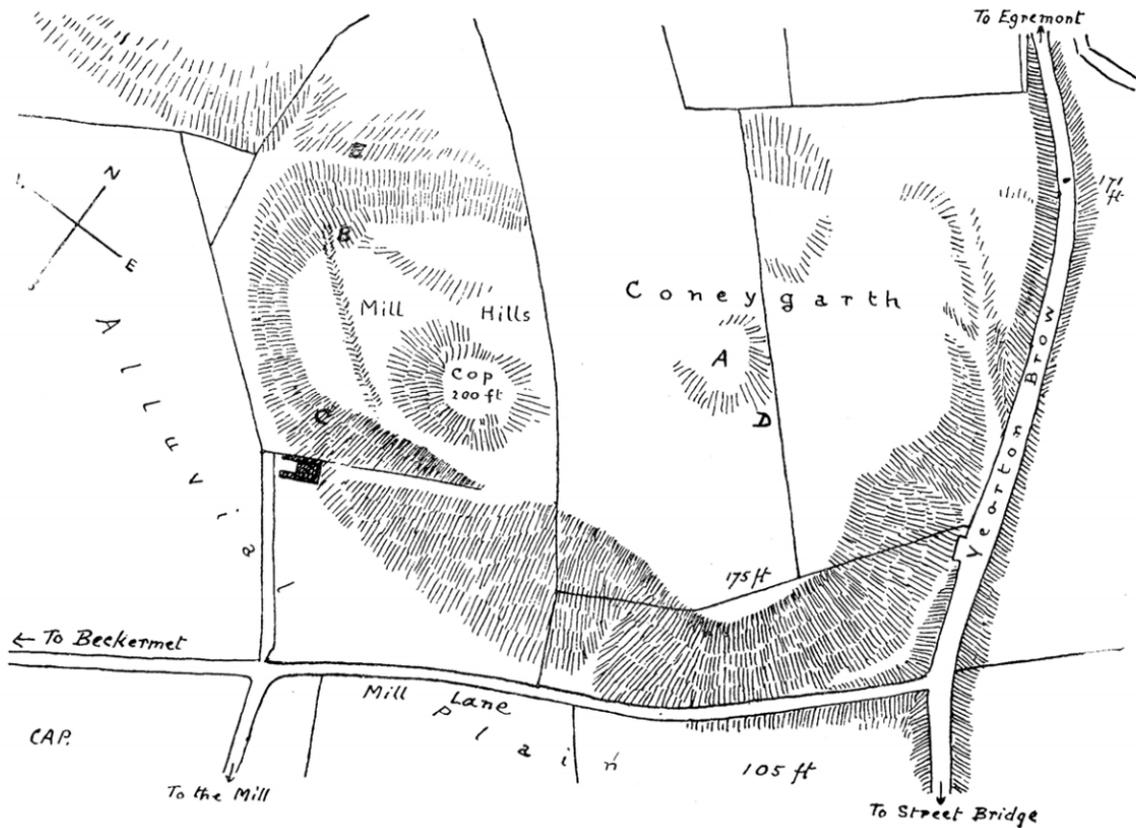


ART. XII.—*Caernarvon Castle, a forgotten Stronghold.*
By C. A. PARKER, F.S.A., Scot.

Read at the Site, June 11th, 1902.

ABOUT a mile north-west of Calder Bridge, the "High Street," as the road is locally called, begins to slope down into the valley of the Kerbeck or Kirkbeck, crossing the stream by Street Bridge. When viewed from below, it is plain to see that the bridge has been built in four sections at different periods. The original arch is almost semi-circular, and nine feet in width underneath. The first addition has been made on the east of this, and further additions on each side have been made at some later date—possibly at the same time. Calder Bridge, before its rebuilding a few years since, was in three sections, and is referred to by Sandford as a "bride" or bridle bridge. It seems probable that this main road, which runs fairly straight from Holmrook to Hensingham, is on the later Roman track, which possibly followed an earlier British way, for this is the natural course to take, keeping on the higher and dryer ground and crossing valleys at narrow points. To the south we find the same road called the "High Street" between Bootle and Millom, and at Streetgate near Dalton; while dedicators of land at Ponsonby, Ravenglass, and Bootle, in the thirteenth century, all bound their grants by "the great road to the south."

To the north of Street Bridge the road, now artificially raised in some parts and sunk in others, runs up what was formerly the steep ascent of Yeorton Brow; Mill Lane turns off on the left and runs directly south-west to the village of Beckermet, skirting a steep grassy eminence divided into pasture fields called Coneygarth and Mill Hills, or Coneygarth Cop. Other fields close by and Mr.



Selkirk's house are also called Coneygarth. The name Mill Hills arises from the field belonging to Beckermet Mill.

There is little here to engage the attention of the antiquary were it not for the account of the place written by Sir Daniel Fleming over 200 years ago, and the allusions to it by Denton. It is marked on some old maps, but the place is so utterly forgotten that it was difficult for me to find even in Beckermet any one who knew where Caernarvon Castle was. "I never heard of it before," was the usual answer.

Sir Daniel* mentions by the Kerbeck the ruins of a notable fort or castle of an oblong square, 100 yards by 90, with great banks and ditches, two entrances, and within the enclosure an artificial round hill, 36 feet high, called Coneygarth Cop, the whole being called by the country people Caernarvon Castle.

The river plain of the Kerbeck is 105 feet above the sea at Street Bridge. From it Coneygarth rises very steeply to 175 feet, the slope being somewhat masked on the east by the embankment of the main road and the end of Mill Lane. The top of the hill is a slightly undulating plateau rising to about 190 feet at A. Given a sufficient force to defend it, the position is very strong on the east, south, and west, and as weak on the north, the ground there being level. Watering places exist at B and C, the water being brought in pipes from the interior of the hill, and at D is a pump. From a gateway on Yeorton Brow, situated at the one point where the road is on its ancient level—*i.e.*, where the embanking ceases and the cutting begins—the hollow way, called by Sir Daniel the main entrance, runs obliquely up the slope and seems to divide at the top. On the west, starting from the barn, an old ramp runs up from west to east. I take this to be Sir Daniel's west entrance, unless he refers to the natural

* *Description of the County of Cumberland, 1671*, Ed. R. S. Ferguson, as No. 3 of the Tract Series of this Society, 1889, p. 6.

hollow on the north at E. If so, the east and west approaches probably met and had a common entrance on the level north side. The ramp is badly set out in a military sense, as an assailant rushing up would have his left, shield-bearing side turned towards the defenders. It agrees, however, with the old account, as "opposite and near ye same, in ye edge of ye mount" is the highest and most conspicuous knoll, Coneygarth Cop. This seems to be more or less separated from the rest of the plateau by a depression. To the west are faint traces of a mound and hollow, which may, however, be an old fence. What strikes one most forcibly is the enormous amount of land and sea that is visible from the cop. Even Ravenglass is in sight.

I fail to make out any certain traces of the trenches mentioned. They have evidently been intentionally filled by levelling the banks, both the cop and the mound A having been dug into to supply earth.

Coneygarth, derived from Cyningsgarth or Konungsgarth, signifies "the King's or chieftain's enclosure;" but Caernarvon, a Celtic name, takes us further back. Mr. John Rogers, of Barrow, says *Ar mhon* (Arfon) means "over against Mona." In Wales *Caer-n-arfon* is "the castle opposite Anglesey;" here in Cumberland it is "the castle opposite Man"—both anciently Mona. "Castle"* was probably added late in its history—perhaps after its desertion, for it seems never to have been a castle in the usual sense of the word. There is a Coneside at Couderton, about two miles away; also a cop.

A Celtic name suggests an occupation of some sort by the Cumbrian Briton, and it may be that there was a "caer" on this high dry hill, in which there is a good water supply, and from which so great an extent of country can be seen. Many stone implements have been found in swampy grounds not far away, but nothing on

* "Castle" is locally applied to almost any building. We have Hardknott Castle, Walls Castle, Starling Castle, Maiden Castle, Cobra Castle, &c.

the hill except querns of uncertain date. Six perfect pairs of these were ploughed up in Coneygarth, and fragments of several others. One pair is at Rheda, another at Springfield, a third was given to Major Fletcher, and the rest are in the possession of Mr. J. D. Thompson, of Barwickstead. What we seem to see clearly is that the Welsh-speaking country folk about there in the twelfth century called the place Caernarvon, and that the Normans adopted the name.

Other races intervened more or less. We should naturally expect the inhabitants of such a place to be dispossessed in the eighth century by the Angle invader, who came creeping along the Roman way looking for fertile lands. Yeorton may be an Anglian name from "heord" and "tun"—the town of herds or herdsmen—but is even more likely to be derived from some Norse form resembling Hjardarholt, such as Hjardartun, Hjardtun, &c., corrupted words which would soon spring up among foreign settlers in England.

The Norseman undoubtedly did come. He seems to have settled three-quarters of a mile away at Godderthwaite, leaving his mark clearly. From the nature of some of the cross fragments at St. John's he seems to have buried his dead there, and given rise to the names Beckermet and Coneygarth. Godderthwaite may be *Godha thveit*—the lawman's cleared land—or from *Gudda* or *Goddi*, short for Gudridr and Gudormr*—Gudrid's thwaite. The adjoining farm Stepney or Steveney, written Stavenerge temp. Henry II.,† may be like Sizergh, Langlifergh, Ninesergh, the sæter or dairy farm of Stephen,‡ or, as Mr. Sargent suggests, from *stefnu*—a meeting place. There is another Beckermet in Yorkshire in a similar position, and to which the same meaning is given.

* Cleasby and Vigfússon, *Dict.*, p. xxxiv.

† Nicolson and Burn, ii., p. 524.

‡ W. G. Collingwood.

Sir Daniel's account accurately describes the arrangement of earthworks formerly thought to denote an Anglian "burh," but now considered to be the remains of early Norman defences, which consisted mainly of palisading. Probably the two were very much alike. The lower plateau or base court of Egremont Castle was, I think, palisaded. Burhs were much built and rebuilt by King Eadweard in the beginning of the tenth century.

According to West, Baldwin of Flanders, of whom Kingsley remarks "he loved to be on the winning side," sent his kinsman Michael, whom he knew to be a valiant man, to assist the English King. Michael le Fleming—the man from Flanders—was sent north against the partisans of Edwin and Morcar, and rewarded with the manor of Aldingham and other estates in Furness. At Aldingham the well-known moat or "mota" and apparently part of the ditch of a base court still remain, once the property of the same family who possessed Caernarvon. Sir Michael lived to an advanced age, and is said to have received from William de Meschines the manors of Beckermet, Frizington, Rottington, Weddicar, Arlochden, Kelton, Salter, and Brunrigg, in Cumberland, all being dependent manors of Beckermet. What happened to Caernarvon in the great raid of 1138, when Calder Abbey and St. Bees were sacked, history sayeth not.

Sir Michael died soon after 1153, and was buried in the abbey of Furness. His second son, Sir Richard le Fleming, Kt., succeeded to the Cumberland estates and some lands in Lancashire, and "was seated at Caernarvon Castle, Beckermet." He acquired the fishery of Thurstan water, died about 1207, and was buried in Furness Abbey. His only son, Sir John le Fleming of Caernarvon, Kt., gave, about 1241, the church of Arlochden and land in Beckermet to Calder Abbey, and at some other date the church of St. John, Beckermet. Dugdale says he was buried in Calder Abbey, and mentions the "fret of six

pieces" on the shield of the still existing effigy there, clothed from head to foot in the chain mail of the period. Below the figure is a stone coffin cut out of a solid block of stone, with separate hollow for the head, which, when accidentally broken into a few years since, disclosed the skull and thigh bones and much dust of the departed knight.

His son, Sir Richard le Fleming, Kt., married Elizabeth, daughter and ultimately heiress of Adam de Urswick, in Furness, a man of Norse descent. By this marriage he got the manors of Urswick, Coniston, Claughton, and Kerneford,* and abandoning Caernarvon and its "burh" built, about 1250, the first Coniston Hall in what was possibly a quieter part of the country. Denton says that after the marriage "this castle was allowed to fall into decay, and at last was demolished. This may be true, but there seems little doubt but that this Sir Richard lies buried in the abbey of Calder." He died about 1270, and at Calder Abbey is part of an effigy which bears carved upon its canopy a crescent and star, which Dugdale says formed the badge of Sir Richard and appeared upon his seal.

The old accounts make no mention of stonework, and the hill is singularly devoid of stone of any kind; nor are there any old stones to be seen in buildings at Beckermeth, though some of the early grave-covers at St. John's are probably from Fleming tombs. The local legend, which assigns the fine thirteenth-century door with monks' heads at St. John's Church to a chapel at Caernarvon, can hardly be believed. The date of the finished architecture precludes it, as at that time the castle was in course of being deserted. It probably formed part of the fine Early English church which once existed on the site of St. John's, and was most likely built after that church was given to Calder Abbey.

* That is, Carnforth. We have here another instance of the termination "ford" becoming "forth," as in the neighbouring parish of Goseford, Gosforth.

So Caernarvon Castle goes out of history. After the sword the plough-share. But the Flemings hold the manor of Beckermet yet, and direct descendants of old Sir John own an estate hard by.
