

ART. XII.—*The Earthwork on Infell, Ponsonby.* By C.  
A. PARKER, M.D., F.S.A. Scot.

*Read at Carlisle, September 8th, 1904.*

AT the suggestion of Mr. Stanley, the owner of the ground, Mr. Collingwood and I have examined and excavated this interesting earthwork.\* We were fortunate in finding workmen who had known the place for many years, and could give some information about it.

Infell, the last heave of the Ponsonby Fells before they subside into the western plain, is a rounded hill, 562 feet in height, to the east of the high road and three miles from the sea. The top is covered with heather, and the eastern slope, on which the earthwork is situated, is planted with larch, but has never been cultivated in any other way.

The enclosure is five-sided, a rectangular oblong with the east corner cut off, and lies just below the crest of the of the hill, so that the ramparts, even if palisaded, would be out of sight from any part of the plain, and visible only from the heights on the east. It is about 82 yards long by 55 broad, but the tangled boughs of the trees render it difficult to measure, and we were obliged perforce to dig where we best could.

*Defences.*—The defences consist of two parallel earthen banks with a ditch between them. The slopes of the banks fade away imperceptibly to the natural level of the ground, having weathered down, but each appears to have been originally about 15 feet wide at the base. The ditch

---

\* Mentioned by Hutchinson, *Hist. Cumb.*, 1794, p. 26, and other county histories; Chancellor Ferguson's *Archæological Survey of Cumberland*; J. Clifton Ward, these *Transactions*, iii., p. 250; and the present writer, these *Transactions*, viii., pp. 82-84, and *The Gosforth District*, 1904.

is about  $8\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide, and at present varies from 4 to 6 feet in depth below the top of the inner rampart, which is as a rule higher than the outer. On the south-east and south-west sides the distance between the crests of the two banks is 20 feet; on the north-east it is 24. A trench dug at A shewed the inner rampart to be composed entirely of earth, and now about a yard in height above the undisturbed soil. The ditch was probably a foot deeper than at present, and one or both banks palisaded.

*Entrances.*—Original entrances exist at the east and west angles, the two ramparts curving round to join and form sides to the gateway paths, which are 7 feet 6 inches wide. The paths are on the natural level, and both sides of each entrance are now worn away. A trench cut across the west entrance shewed no paving of any kind, simply hard earth; but a sort of core of cobbles was found in one of the sides. Stones are remarkable for their absence, but small pieces of freestone lie about. There is a wide gap in the south-west side which does not seem original, and there are recent gaps in the two banks at the north angle, but not opposite each other.

*Tank.*—Being so near the top of the hill, there is no water supply possible to fill the ditch. Rather nearer to the north angle than the others, and about equi-distant from the sides, is a circular artificial pond, full of rushes and sphagnum, with water underneath. The earth has been thrown out to make a bank round it, forming a circle 45 feet in diameter. I have seen it open water, and the workmen told us there had always been a dub at the east point, where there was a small spring. They also said that when the dub was cleaned out some years ago many thick-stemmed, small-bowled tobacco pipes were found, which they had seen. A trench, 12 feet 6 inches long and 18 inches deep, dug through the bank at its northern point, proved it to be of earth, faced rudely on the inside with large cobbles, with smaller ones roughly packed behind them, the stonework being three feet thick. The

stones appeared to extend into and perhaps pave the pond.

*Roads.*—The workmen drew our attention to what they called “the old road” and “the trench” on the moor.\* From the east entrance “the old road,” which is worn slightly hollow, can be easily traced, winding down the north-east slope to Scar Green Lane, into which it opens through a quaint little gateway of considerable age, only fifty inches wide. From the west entrance “the trench” extends over the top of the hill to the south-west, and then bends to the south, pointing to the hamlet of Ponsonby. After leaving the moor it formerly extended across two more fields, which have been ploughed up. It is a hollow way, about two feet wide and a foot deep, with indications at the sides of earth thrown or kicked out of it, just such a track as would be formed by long driving of stock in the same direction. It is not a water-course. We deemed it to be a stock road, which would join the lane leading from the hamlet of Ponsonby to the main roads.

These roads would render the enclosure easily accessible from any part of the parish of Ponsonby, or from Calder Abbey.

*Conclusions.*—We have here a post-Conquest earthwork, the shape, the double banks, and the corner entrances of which are characteristic of neither Roman, British, or Anglian work. Its position high up at the back of the nearest hill shews that concealment and accessibility were desired, which agrees with the sites of many pele towers; and the well-defined stock roads and large water tank point to its having been a pelegarth, or refuge for cattle and horses against Scotch raids. Such a place when stockaded could stand a siege of a day or two, which would be as much time or more than raiders could spare. It may well date from the time of the great raids (1296-

---

\* These are not marked on the 25-inch Ordnance Map.

1328), and from the presence of the tobacco pipes appears to have been used down to Elizabethan times.

The motive of the double bank is not quite clear. The outer rampart would be useless unless stockaded, and the stockade must have followed the curves at the entrances. Probably both were stockaded, the inner fence being higher than the outer. The defenders would then have a splendid sitting shot at assailants scrambling over the outer fence, and those that got over would still be confronted by an obstacle twelve feet in height.

A tradition in my family states that on the Parknook estate, in the adjoining parish of Gosforth, on a hill once surrounded on three sides by the swamps of the Bleng, there formerly existed "a walled enclosure called Castle Cary, into which cattle were driven when the Scots were over the Border. This was destroyed for purposes of cultivation about 1818." The same story is told of Foldsteads, Kirkbampton, which is a rectangular enclosure with double rampart and double ditch (these *Transactions*, N.S., ii., p. 413).

---

[The nearest analogy to Infell earthwork is the five-sided, double-ramparted Crewgarth near Ousby, described in these *Transactions*, viii., p. 66, where a quern and a mortar were found; part of a quern was also found in 1884 about three hundred yards from the Infell earthwork.\* Now *kró* in Icelandic means a pen for sheep, and Crewgarth shows by its name that it was intended as a fold, and by its nature that it was a fortified fold. Other so-called "camps" in Cumberland with double rampart are Maiden Castle or Caerthanoc on Soulby Fell near Ullswater, Skewhill on the Eden opposite Grinsdale, and the two small round forts on opposite sides of the Irthing at

---

\* In my possession.—C.A.P.

Naworth and Triermain, known as Tower Tye and Watch Hill. Hayton Castle-hill, a mote, has also a double rampart. As Calder Abbey, which suffered so much from the Scots down to the great raid of 1322, is quite close to Infell, it seems natural to suggest that this pelegarth was perhaps made by the abbey as a refuge for their herds and those of their tenants.—[ED.]

---