

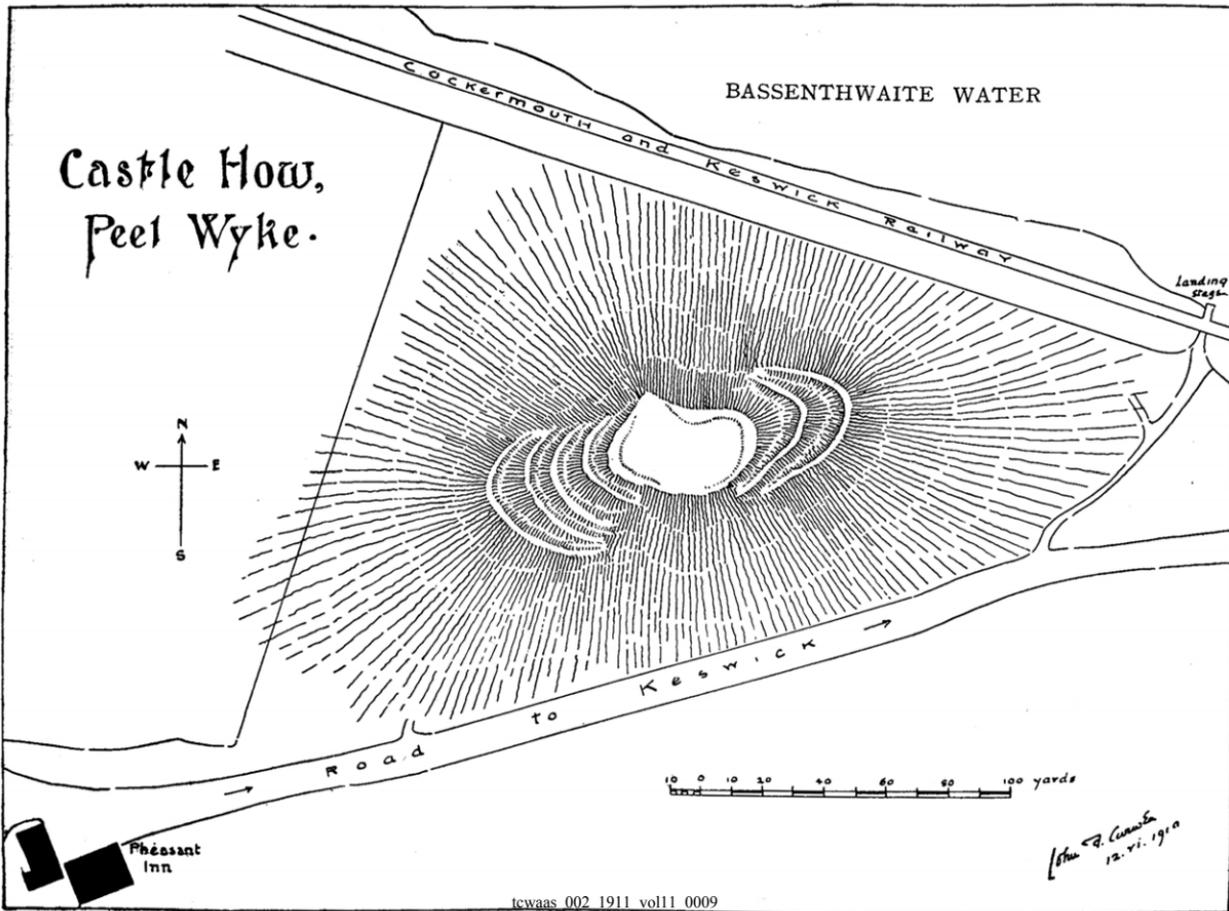
ART. VI.—*Castle How, Peel Wyke*. By JOHN F. CURWEN,  
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*Read at the Site, July 8th, 1910.*

THIS is one of the promontory or spur strongholds of the post-Roman period, at a time when, no longer tied to the irregular contours of the higher ground, experience taught the people that a circular entrenchment—especially when raised upon the top of a ridge or natural rock—was both the simplest and most economical form. The square form which they had been compelled to build for the Romans was too costly for them. For a circular camp of precisely the same area as a square camp is enclosed by a defensive line of about one-third less in length, and this must have been a consideration both as regards labour in construction, and as requiring fewer men to defend it.

These promontory strengths are all alike in relying for defence chiefly upon the natural features of their position. That part of them which is artificial is always subsidiary to that which is natural. Indeed, the less labour required to supplement the "strength" of the natural rock, the more nearly such a fortress approached the ideal.

There is one distinctive feature about them which is remarkable, and that is the entire absence of any containing wall which might safeguard the cattle. Now, since man never voluntarily abandons his possessions, this characteristic suggests at once that either such forts were not intended for permanent occupation, but were rather places of refuge for those who had lost their only form of wealth, or else that they were the work of an earlier people who possessed no weapon for hurling missiles stronger than the sling, a weapon which would be utterly useless to defend an enclosure at the foot of the hill.





We must be very careful, therefore, not to confound these fortified hills with the subsequent Norman mote-hills, for this earlier type never had baileys or outer wards attached to them, they were never surrounded by an artificial ditch at their base, as we invariably find in the Norman type, and lastly they were not intended to be castles for the residence of some one great family. They were simply places of refuge to which the isolated Britons could retire, and readily defend for a day or two, in time of danger.

Now if we examine this "strength" in particular we find a natural ridge of rock like many another of those that bound the margin of Bassenthwaite Lake. No labour was necessary to supplement the strength of the two sides, for nature had scarped them steep enough; but the two ends, as they slope more gently down, needed artificial help. Hence, on the end toward the village, we find four clearly defined crescent-shaped trenches dug out with the earth thrown up on the outside of each to form a breastwork. The other end, being rather more steep, has only needed two.

The summit of the hill stands 135 feet above the level of the lake, which is itself 223 feet above the level of the sea. The plateau, which measures 42 yards by 20 yards (Tower Tye is 50 yards in diameter and Hayton Castle-hill is 40 yards in diameter) is dished out, so that all round the edge the rock crops up to form as it were a sort of breastwork with perhaps the additional help of an oaken palisade. There is no evidence of any masonry and naturally, as the fort was only used for temporary occupation, we find no mention of any bones, pottery or other remains having been discovered here.

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