

ART. XIX.—*Liddel Strength*. By R. G. COLLINGWOOD.

Read at the site, Sept. 11th, 1925.

LIDDEL Strength is perhaps the most remarkable defensive earthwork in Cumberland. Its extraordinary massiveness and the skill with which it has been designed have never failed to impress visitors, and it has long been an object of antiquarian interest, not always well-informed.*

The defences are about four acres in extent, and measure about 150 yards long from E. to W. by about 80 yards broad from N. to S. They form a rough oval, bounded on the north by the boulder-clay cliffs of the river-bank and on the south by an enormous artificial ditch, cut to a depth of 25 feet below the surface of the ground. Within this area are three distinct parts. First, there is an outer bailey on the west, about 85 by 35 yards in length and breadth. This is defended by an earthen rampart and ditch to landward, and a lesser rampart following the edge of the cliff. Its eastern side is formed by an inner ditch, beyond which lies the inner bailey. This is even more formidably defended by an earth rampart 35 feet high, in the centre of which is a gateway. Thirdly and lastly, at the eastern extremity of the whole fortress, is a conical earthen mound rising steeply out of the inner bailey and having on its summit a platform now 35 by 25 feet in extent, but formerly perhaps 35 feet each way, for part of it has perished by a landslip.

* The best account is Mr. J. F. Curwen's in these *Trans.* n.s., vol. x, to which my own debt is too obvious to require detailed acknowledgment. Mr. Curwen gives a plan and photographs.



LIDDEL STRENGTH: MOTTE AND DITCH.

Photo, by Mr. W. L. Fletcher.

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The entrance is in the middle of the south side. Here, at the junction of the outer and inner baileys, is a gap in the encircling ditch and rampart, which opens upon an old road formerly thought, but in all probability wrongly, to be Roman. This gap is masked by a mound of earth which prevents assailants from rushing it in force, and corresponds to the *titulus* or traverse which defended the gate of a Roman marching-camp. A man entering the fortress found his way past this mound, and entered a deep defile leading into the bottom of the ditch, which was dry. From this point he turned to the left and followed the ditch-bottom for 40 or 50 yards, with the outer bailey on his left and the inner on his right; his unprotected right side was exposed to the fire of the defenders lining the steep ramparts of the inner bailey. If he succeeded in running the gauntlet of this fire, he reached the passage leading to the inner bailey, and here, no doubt, found a wooden gate closed against him.

In the absence of evidence from excavation, any account of the origin of this defensive work must rest wholly on its plan. Fortunately, its plan is of such a kind as to make inferences about its origin easy. It is a somewhat complex and highly-developed example of the 'motte and bailey' castle. The Norman-French word *motte*, a clod or lump of earth, was in Anglo-Norman speech a technical term for the small steep mounds on which the earliest wooden castles of the Norman period were erected. In popular English speech this became *mote*, and in the form *moat* signified the ditch, especially but not necessarily a wet ditch, that would almost inevitably surround such a mound, at any rate when, as was generally the case, it was artificially constructed. The word further tended to be confused with *mote* or *moot*, a meeting-place; for since people have at various periods of history held open-air meetings at artificial mounds as well as other obvious landmarks, the two meanings of *mote* have tended to be

confused and it has sometimes been forgotten that the word *mote* in place-names is more often referable to the Norman-French *motte* than to the Anglo-Saxon *môt*, connected with *metan*, to meet. The motte and bailey castle, in its now visible form, consists of a motte or tumulus with a bailey or enclosure leaning against one side of it. The presence of a bailey is not absolutely universal, but its absence is extremely unusual. At Aldingham, a few years ago, we visited a motte without any visible bailey: at Halton, near Lancaster, we lately saw one with a single bailey: here at Liddel Strength we have one with a double bailey.

It is only within quite recent years that the history of these mottes has been placed upon a firm and trustworthy basis. In the middle of the eighteenth century, General Roy, creator of the Ordnance Survey, and author of a magnificent atlas of all the known Roman sites in Scotland, regarded Liddel Strength as a Roman post, and included a beautiful plan of it in his great work. It is important to realise that his only evidence for the Roman origin of these fortifications was the forged work which Bertram passed off under the name of Richard of Cirencester, which ascribed a Roman date both to Liddel Strength and to the road which runs past it. Whether Bertram had any evidence for this ascription I do not know; probably he had not; but even if he had, it was certainly fallacious evidence, for the study of Roman fortifications that has been carried out since his time has proved beyond dispute that the Romans never made works like these. The Roman idea of a camp or fort was a single enclosure with a level, preferably rectangular space in the middle where tents could be pitched or hutments built in a regular chessboard street-plan. No Roman general could have devised a fort like this. Nor is there any evidence, either from the existing remains or from the probabilities of the case, that there were ever any Roman earthworks on this

site. There is a Roman fort a mile away at Netherby, and the Romans were in the habit of planting their forts a day's march apart. It may therefore be regarded as certain that Liddel Strength is in no sense a Roman site, and as practically certain that the road which passes it is not a Roman road.

Nor is it, in spite of a few superficial resemblances, a prehistoric promontory fort or cliff-edge fort. Such forts are not provided with mottes, nor are they divided, as this is, into two baileys; their entrances are quite differently designed, and are almost always at the very edge of the cliff. This then is not a prehistoric earthwork, and there is no sign whatever that any prehistoric earthworks existed here before these were made.

A generation ago, these motte and bailey fortresses were dated to the Anglo-Saxon period. The Normans, it was known, built stone keeps like Carlisle or the Tower of London; and these motte and bailey castles, because they appeared to be the immediate forerunners of the Norman keep, were identified with the *burhs* of which we read in the accounts of the Anglo-Saxon wars. This was the view of G. T. Clark, the great authority on medieval military architecture; and under the shelter of his authority it was, a generation ago, almost universally accepted. But Clark's theory has been proved untenable. We now know that the motte and bailey castle belongs, not to the Anglo-Saxon period, but to the early Norman period. We have unmistakable pictures of such castles on the Bayeux tapestry; there, indeed, they are obviously the regular type of contemporary fortification; they were coming into fashion just then in Normandy, where immense numbers still exist, and they came over here with William the Conqueror.* In the Bayeux tapestry we see large ant-hills, evidently of earth, stockaded round the top and

* A few examples in England date from the partial Normanisation under Edward the Confessor.

crowned each with a wooden tower; we see these castles approached by ladder-like bridges and surrounded by ditches. And when we read of the immense activity of the Norman conquerors in castle-building, we must think of them not as building stone towers but as throwing up earthen mottes and building wooden houses on the top. In fact, the Norman castle was essentially the fortified private house of the Norman baron, in a country potentially hostile to him; whereas the Anglo-Saxon *burh* was not a castle but a town fortified by a king who felt certain of its loyalty to himself.

Liddel Strength, then, is a castle in the proper sense of the word, that is, a fortified medieval private house: and it was never anything else. If we wish to reconstitute it in imagination, as it was originally built, we must think of the motte as crowned with a wooden tower, the baileys occupied by wooden buildings, and the ramparts lined with palisades. The tower on the motte cannot have been large, for the top of the motte can hardly have been more than 35 by 35 feet; the tower, therefore cannot have been more than 25 ft. square, and Mr. Curwen doubts whether there was a tower at all on so small a mound, and suggests that this motte was merely a palisaded retreat for a garrison in case of extremity. But there are undoubted mottes in Scotland no larger than this; and though this is extremely small in proportion to the rest of the earthworks, it can hardly have failed to support a tower, though, no doubt, a small one. On general grounds this is perhaps probable; for the motte was the key of the situation, the *donjon* or *dominium* or 'lord's place,' where the lord sat and watched the doings of his retainers in the bailey and his subjects outside the castle, so that, as Leland tells us, not a bird could fly in the streets of Shrewsbury without being observed from the motte of Roger de Montgomeri.

Thus the tower on the motte of Liddel, though too small to be a self-contained residence for the lord and his

family, may well have been a look-out place as well as an innermost defence; and its smallness seems to be one of several indications which would place the date of the castle late in the motte-and-bailey period.

Motte and bailey castles are common on the Border and in the S.W. Lowlands; for there was a great influx of Normans into these parts even before William Rufus in 1092 took possession of Carlisle. From the Conquest to the 13th century Norman barons were peacefully penetrating the south of Scotland, welcomed by the Scottish kings and enriched by grants of land; so much so that between the 11th and the 13th century most of the principal Lowland fiefs passed into the hands of Normans, who became the founders of such families as Baliol, Bruce, Graeme, Fraser, Ramsay, and indeed most of the Scottish noble houses. It was not till the disastrous breach between England and Scotland at the end of the 13th century that it became difficult to own land on both sides of the Border and do homage to both crowns. After that, a man had to be either English or Scottish; before that, it was easy to be both.

It would therefore be an anachronism to ask whether Liddel Strength was originally an English or a Scottish castle. It must have been constructed late in the eleventh or, more probably, to judge by its very highly-developed earthworks, which suggest a late stage in the development of Norman castles, in the twelfth century, and possibly at no very early date in that century. About the beginning of the twelfth century Ranulph de Meschines held Carlisle, and granted this district to a Fleming called Turgis Brundis: and it is possible that this was the occasion when Liddel Strength was first thrown up, though its design does not forbid a later date. King Stephen gave the district to David of Scotland, as a reward for supporting his claim to the English throne, and in 1174 Ranulph de Soulis, butler to William the Lion, held the castle, which

therefore must have existed by then. In 1217 Henry III called upon Alexander II to surrender Carlisle and all the lands seized by him, and this demand seems to have been carried out, for in the same year the sheriff of Cumberland took over the castle of Liddel to hold for Henry III. Henceforth it was definitely an English fortress, and in 1242, when the king of Scotland renounced all claim to Cumberland, it became *de jure* as well as *de facto* a part of England.

Our first detailed description of the place dates from 1281-1282. It is an inquisition post mortem of the manor of Liddel in Cumberland, the property of Baldwin Wake. We now hear that the castle contained a wooden hall with two solars, cellars, and a chapel, also a kitchen, a byre, a grange and a wooden granary which threatened ruin but might be repaired for five marks. 'Not extended, as they need more yearly keeping up than they can be let for. Total extent, £295 16s. 2d.'

Troublous times were ahead. Baldwin's son John was called upon by Edward I to superintend the repair of the Border castles and to guard the marches. John dying in 1300 was succeeded at Liddel by Sir Simon de Lindesi, of Arthuret, as keeper, whom Edward I charged to repair and maintain the 'pele and the palisades' and to provide for the lodging of the men-at-arms of the garrison. The manor remained the property of the Wake family. But it was not for another half-century that the incident took place which brings Liddel Strength into the history of the Anglo-Scottish wars. It must have seen constant service during the first half of the fourteenth century; but it emerges into the light of history only in 1346, when David II crossed the Border on the expedition which ended in disaster at Neville's Cross. Liddel was then held by Sir Walter Selby, with 200 men-at-arms; and upon him fell the whole brunt of the Scottish attack. The Scots advanced by night and filled up the ditch, and at daybreak

they made a general attack and finally overpowered the garrison. By the rules of chivalry Sir Walter Selby might have been honourably treated as a prisoner of war; but it was considered permissible to deny quarter to the defenders of a castle, who, without hope of actually defeating him, had vexatiously delayed the progress of an invader greatly superior in strength to themselves; and Sir Walter paid the penalty for his gallant stand. After his two sons had been strangled in their father's presence, he himself was beheaded in chains under the eyes of King David.

After this, the castle was repaired; and it may have been at this time that the Wake of the period, Thomas, built the first stone tower, in the fashion of the pele-towers of the age, which was afterwards enlarged into a dwelling-house by a branch of the Graeme family to whom the property passed. Foundations of this house are still visible N.W. of the motte. We find the Graemes in possession in the sixteenth century. In 1553 'Fergus Graeme of the Mote of Lydysdale' received a grant of arms for services to Henry VIII and Edward VI; and a Fergus Graeme, presumably the same man or his son, was still living there in 1583. But after the Union the place fell into decay, for its military strength is its only real value; and now there is nothing to see except these great earthworks and the knowledge that lies buried beneath their turf, awaiting the time when sites like these shall be thought worthy of exploration by the spade.