NORWICH CASTLE.[1]

By ALBERT HARTSHORNE, F.S.A.

It is quite obvious that there is nothing that can interest us, or help in the elucidation of its history, in the exterior of Norwich Castle. We are, therefore, constrained to do what we do not usually, namely, inspect the Castle from the inside alone. Here, at least, if we have nothing else, we have plenty of room, for I suppose there are few keeps of this magnitude which are so singularly clean swept of all the internal walls. We will presently see what these main walls have to tell us, but before doing this we must touch a little upon the earlier history, and first deal with certain fictions that have so long hung about and haunted the Castle that they almost seemed to become part of its veritable history. It is to be hoped that these fancies are now finally given up. But it must be remembered that there is nothing so difficult to eradicate as misleading statements that have long been in print, and especially if they have a tinge of romance, and the case becomes more charged with difficulty when the statements to which I shall refer have been made concerning this Castle in works of consideration like Blomefield's History, and the *Archæologia* in its less learned days, (1796) and emphasized by plans of admirable execution.

I am fortunately not called upon to reconcile the conflicting opinions as to the site of Venta Icenorum; there must be very few who now think it was Norwich. We are primarily here not to speculate about the Roman, but to inspect the Norman Castle and I need only say, on the first count, that Roman coins and urns have been found in Norwich, and perhaps some day we may have further

[1] Read at Norwich Castle, Aug. 8th, 1889.

evidence for a Roman station of some kind on this very spot. The importance of holding such a position was hardly likely to escape the eye of the Roman looking out from his stronghold at Caister. On the other hand it is desirable that we should first consider the place and then see how Norwich Castle has grown up, as most castles strictly so-called have, from rude beginnings, and, finally, make a closer examination of the details that have been spared of the present building.

Whatever there may have been here in Roman time is now quite out of sight and in its place we have a late Saxon mound surrounded by a single ditch. On the south side is a semi-circular enclosure approached by a bridge over the ditch known as Castle Fee, and on the east a horse-shoe shaped enclosure called the Castle Meadow. Both areas are comprised within earthworks which rest upon those of the inner ditch, and, although now nearly destroyed, portions can still be traced, and it should be noted that the course of these ancient earthworks is still represented by the lines of the streets and buildings. This was the Saxon *burh*,—a moated mound—the hill of the burh—with one or more oval or horse-shoe courts attached to it. There is nothing unusual in the plan. We have it with variations at scores of places, and always with the same dominant idea of protection and shelter for cattle and garrison. In this particular instance the mound is placed at the side of the entire work in order that its power as an exterior defence may best be brought into play.

Now, one can only be surprised, with the knowledge we have at the present day, that the extraordinary plan which Wilkins (led astray by Blomefield) published in the *Archæologia*, in 1795, should have been accepted as correct until as late as 1858. Mr. Harrod then grappled with the difficulty and came to the rescue. He cleared away the two banks and three ditches which Wilkins had constructed from such slight evidences and quite irrespective of the lines of the streets, which in such a case would be the surest test of truth, and from the same material evidence. backed by the irrefragable testimony of a vast quantity of original documents, Mr.Harrod built up the new plan, or rather re-discovered the old one, which

appears in his admirable account of Norwich Castle and which carries conviction upon its face.

It would be difficult now to go minutely into the details of these two plans; they are here exhibited to a large scale and speak best for themselves. But it is interesting to compare them, and quite possible, without explanation, to realize how the outer circles of Wilkins may, in the hands of a man not exactly knowing what he was looking for, have grown up out of the remnants here and there of the real semi-circular and horse-shoe enclosures. It will be borne in mind that there has been a great deal of filling up and levelling of the earthworks and in fact "we cannot see the town because of the houses."

Having now established ourselves on the ground the first question that arises is—what is the date of the mound, the hill of the burh, on which we are standing? We can only obtain this information relatively. From its nature the mound varies but little through a long course, and for the same reason it is a nice question to date any that are not mentioned in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* as are, for instance, those at Cambridge and Thetford, of the 9th and 10th centuries. The hill of the burh, as was often the case, is here partly natural and partly artificial, and it seems to have been artificially raised, and fortified with its ditches and enclosures in the 9th or 10th century. Upon this mound there must, then, have been a castle or strong place of wood, with a palisade, or hedge, or both, on the banks of the two enclosures. The ancient church at Greensted gives an idea what these wooden buildings were like, and the *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* shows how the military events of the 9th and 10th centuries led to the erection of a multitude of these English earthworks and how rapidly the "geweorc" was successively wrought, attacked, stormed, burnt, and restored. Possibly in the middle of the 9th century the Norwich burh received its finishing works for that was a busy and eventful time in East Anglia. It may, indeed, have been first thrown up in the middle of the 7th century, and in connection with this period it is recorded that certain lands granted by Etheldreda to her monastery at Ely were charged with the service of Castle Guard to Norwich Castle.

We have no further evidence that there was a castle here requiring guard in the 7th century or any other example of military service so early. But I see nothing extraordinary in it. The system which was common in the 10th may easily have originated in the 7th century and, indeed, I see no reason why military service in some form should not be as old as warfare itself, for it savours in its nature of prehistoric and primitive times.

For the history of the Castle until the Conquest we have no certain information, but it is said to have been utterly destroyed by the Danes under Sweyne in 1004. This implies that the wood and stone castle on the mound was burnt and the encircling palisades and possibly stone walls thrown down. It is improbable at this time that, with the example of the Roman so near, and numerous stone churches with their carpenter-like details arising, the military works were still entirely of the more perishable material. The science of construction was advancing and castles were not likely to be behind churches in this respect; moreover, the mounds and earthworks were solidifying and were ready to receive the stronger stone castles, the keeps, with their concentrated weight, and the walls of the Norman, which were already springing up in Normandy.

We now emerge into the light of day and we find it stated that the Conqueror built a castle at Norwich. This means not necessarily that a new castle like the Tower of London was constructed, but rather that the Norman strengthened himself within the old enclosures by palisading and probably also walling the earthworks and setting up a shell keep of masonry on the mound. This was the usual policy of the Conqueror for securing himself in his new possessions, and it will be remembered that the castles of his time were of two kinds—the old strongholds hastily strengthened by timber and stone work, with occasionally a shell keep on the mound,—and the new rectangular keeps slowly and scientifically reared upon new sites. The transition from one style to the other was very gradual and not more than a dozen castles exhibit masonry of the 11th century. It was the natural result of circumstances.

Ralph de Guader, Earl of Norfolk, was made Constable

of the reinforced Castle of Norwich. It must have been a strong place, but strong with a different kind of strength to the Castle which came later, because it stood a siege of three months on the revolt of Guader in 1074. With scant gallantry Guader fled, and left his wife the valiant Countess Emma,—of whom we hear so much and know so little,—to defend the Castle. It was assaulted by all kinds of military engines, and when it surrendered to famine—for it was not beaten down,—it was at once fit for the occupation of a garrison of 300 men-at-arms, *loricati*, *i.e.*, men in mail hauberks, cross-bowmen, and engineers. On the death of the Conqueror in 1087 Roger Bigod espoused the cause of Robert Courthose; he seized Norwich Castle and held it against Rufus to whom he subsequently submitted. In 1120 Hugh Bigod succeeded Roger, and in 1135 was holding the castle and only surrendered it to the new King in person.

The exigencies of the military and political situation,—the war between Stephen and Matilda,—seem to have at once placed Hugh again in the castle to hold it for the King, and, perhaps in order to propitiate a restless and powerful noble, Stephen created him Earl of Norfolk, as, with the same views, Alberic de Vere was made first Earl of the long line of Oxford, and some other leading men similarly forwarded for the same reason.

With the death of Stephen's son Eustace in 1152 the way was prepared for a settlement and Henry, son of Matilda and Geoffrey Plantagenet, was acknowledged as Stephen's successor. Towards the end of his reign Stephen seized the castles of Norwich and Rising and gave them to his son, William Earl of Mortaigne, together with Castle Acre, Lewes, Bungay, and others, and in the last year of his reign, in 1154, at the Conference of Dunstable, it was agreed that the multitude of unlicensed or adulterine castles that had arisen since the death of Henry I. (1100) the evil buildings of lesser barons, should be destroyed. At least 140 were so dealt with in 1155. In the general submission to Henry II. Mortaigne's castles were included and thus the larger strongholds regained their importance and value. That Norwich was very important we may judge from a solitary entry on the Pipe Rolls for 1157, that £51 12s. 0d. was paid by the Sheriff

for wages of the soldiers who kept the King's Castle of Norwich—a sum equal to at least £1,100 of our money.

The above is a sketch in the fewest possible words of the early history of Norwich Castle, and it would not be easy even in a full account, to disentangle it from the mazy labyrinth of rapid events and transactions of the first half of the 12th century. As to the building itself authorities have not shrunk from putting a date to it ranging from the time of Knut downwards. I am not so bold as Gurdon, King, Blomefield, Wilkins, or Woodward. Like the earthworks the case of the castle has been prejudiced by wild imaginations. Now, we have the building before us, and I think it speaks plainly for itself, and I claim no earlier date for what I can see than 1120 and no later one than 1140. There may well be work of the 11th century hidden by the deep rubbish in the basement and I hope it will be looked for. At present we cannot perceive it and are not concerned with it.

In giving Norwich Castle this date I compare it only with three other castles of the same period—Hedingham built by Alberic de Vere in the first quarter of the eleventh century; Rochester, built by William de Corbeuil, between 1126 and 1139, as was conclusively proved by my father at the Meeting at Rochester in 1863, and Castle Rising built by William de Albini who died in 1176. No one who has seen these three great towers can doubt that they are of the same period. Hedingham is, if anything, a trifle earlier than Norwich, Rochester is of exactly the same time, and Castle Rising is immediately after, and is no doubt, the work of the same architect or "ingeniator" as Norwich. The keep of Norwich Castle is therefore the work of Hugh Bigod, and the conduct of the man no less than the style of the architecture leads us to the same conclusion.

We have now arrived at the period of the building of Norwich keep, and with its later ancient history I do not propose to deal. It will suffice to say that its turbulent builder took part in the rebellion of 1173, when Prince Henry confederated with the king of France. His strong hold of Framlingham—built by himself and the chief of his castles—and Bungay Castle, gave him much power and influence, and with Flemish mercenaries he attacked

Norwich in 1174. But the tide turned in the king's favour and Bigod surrendered his castles; his power was broken, we take leave of the great castle-building period, and we hear no more of him.

In its subsequent history Norwich Castle was held for Louis VIII against King John, but surrendered to Henry III in 1217. It played no part in the Barons' Wars, and, though kept to a certain extent in repair as a royal castle, it seems to have been already a state prison in 1220. As the city became enclosed with walls, which were begun in 1294, the castle gradually ceased to be its principal defense.

There are entries from time to time on the Pipe Rolls concerning the state and repairs of the Castle until the end of the reign of Edward III, from which period it slowly sank into the condition of a county gaol. In order to better fit it for this purpose, the keep was gutted at the end of the last century and filled with brick buildings for the safe keeping of the evil doers of East Anglia. In 1805 George III gave the Castle to the county; in 1824 large buildings were added on the East side; in 1825 Wilkins "restored" the fore-building, and in 1834 the keep was faced as we see it at present. By the new Prisons' Act the Castle came into the hands of the Government, who, on the building of the new prison, sold the ancient fortress to the city. It has again been cleared, and we have now to see, as I said in the outset, what the dishonoured walls have to tell us.

And first as to what we expect to find in a keep of this period and size. There are some features that are constant; such are:—The *Well*; the *Oratory* or *Chapel;* the *Kitchen*, often difficult to identify; the *principal stair;* the main Entrance, usually covered by a *Fore-building*: the *Hall*, and the *Garderobes*. All these are the necessary attributes of a rectangular keep, not meant primarily for a residence, but to retire into during a siege or blockade, the spare room in the basement being reserved, not for prisoners but for stores; the strength of the building alone formed its defence. It was not a place to make sorties from, it was a place of refuge until relief or starvation came. Such a building the keep of Norwich strictly was.

Of features not constant, but varying according to the nature of the building are:—The means for defending the

entrance; the character of the openings for light; the passages threading the walls; the stairs leading from floor to floor and down to the basement; the mural chambers and the fireplaces. As to the arrangement of a Norman keep, speaking generally, it consisted of a basement, always for stores, and two or three floors, of which the first usually contained the principal rooms, such as the Hall and Chapel. The entire area was divided by a cross wall, ascending to the second or third floor, according to the number of such floors in one or the other space, pierced with arcades, arches or doors, and carrying the two high pitched roofs which, at Norwich, ran east and west within the parapet.

At Norwich the basement is said to have been vaulted. It is very improbable that such wide spaces as thirty-two feet were originally vaulted in stone before 1150. They were not, indeed, required for protection; but perhaps certain small areas were so treated, as at Castle Rising, and further vaulting inserted later—a common practice. It is said that there was no direct outer communication with the basement. This seems most unlikely inasmuch as, with such an arrangement, all the stores must have been taken up through the fore-building to the first floor and then passed below.

More particularly as to the constant features:—the *Well:* King tells us that this was in the partition wall itself; it is so placed at Rochester and Rising communicating with each floor. In the late excavations this well has not been found, and King's statement is accordingly disputed. The existing well is clear of the wall and seems to be modern. The custom in Norman keeps was either to protect the access to and keep open the communication with the well, by forming the shaft or tunnel in the thickness of the cross wall, with openings at each floor, or to enshrine it in a side wall, as at Kenilworth. The well was of course of the first importance, and the same care for it obtained in France, as for instance, at Coucy, Roquetaillade, Chateau d'Arques, Blanquefort and Fargues. In later and concentric castles in both countries, when the keep ceased to be the actual citadel, the well was safe in the inner ward, which was, in fact, the expansion of the earlier keep. *The Chapel*:—This was no doubt in the south-east corner, in connection with what is called the oratory. The

chapel at Rising is in the same position. Then we have a long room with a fire-place on the south side, perhaps the lodging of the constable; there is the same thing at Rising. The *Kitchen*:—As I have said, is often difficult to identify, but here it must have been in the north west corner, again as at Rising. There has been a curious and interesting change of plan at this point, not quite easy to explain. It appears that the north-west newel stair from the level of the first floor was converted into a fireplace, the chimney of which takes the place of the stair, and starting in the form of a groined cone is drawn into a triple flue and so passes up. It is a curious and unusual piece of construction. I have at present no explanation to offer of the work that some partial excavation has revealed in this corner at the existing basement level. The principal entrance, the *Forebuilding*, was so much restored by Wilkins, that there only remains as original work, the groining beneath the upper landing. The *Hall* occupied as at Rising, the whole of the space on the north side of the cross wall, and the *Garderobes*, much altered, and now called the Archery, are placed, once more as at Rising, on the west front.

I think it is due to my hearers to say that my opportunities for studying this keep have been of the very slightest, and it is quite possible that I have, as a stranger, omitted many important points. But any notes upon a castle in England would surely be incomplete without a cordial acknowledgment to Mr. Clark, for, although he has not particularly described Norwich Castle, I need hardly say that it would have been difficult for me to have even attempted it, without the general and special information he has brought together upon such buildings.

Norwich Castle is now, for the first time in its long history, in the hands of the citizens of Norwich, and I am glad indeed to know that Norwich men recognize that the best way of showing their appreciation of it is to put it to some harmless, rational, use. To roof it and fit it—not in sham Norman—but in a simple unpretending way, for the purposes of a museum,—as has been done at Colchester and Taunton,—would at once preserve its grave, solid, and majestic character, and maintain in security these venerable and historic walls for the contemplation and study of antiquaries of the future.