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### CASTLE ACRE.<sup>1</sup>

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I have brought the Members of the Royal Archaeological Institute to this rather perilous eminence because from this point we get the best general view of these very large earthworks. From here we can plainly distinguish the work of three periods and three people—the Roman, the Saxon, and the Norman. When we came through the ancient ford at the foot of the hill a few yards more brought us into the precincts of the Roman camp, we then passed into the Saxon burh, and we now stand within the Norman keep.

Now, first, as to the Roman. A camp of this size at once suggests a situation upon a great Roman road; and we accordingly find, leading straight from the north coast, and impinging on the centre of this Roman camp, an ancient route called "Peddar's Way." The subject of Roman roads in Norfolk is at present rather obscure, and proof is wanted, but I see no reason why the way should not be of the age of the camp and the name mediæval.

It will have been noticed, before we came up the hill, that we crossed some level ground skirting the river, and that the whole camp lay before us upon the rising ground. In its integrity the camp consisted of a parallelogram of about 380 by 280 yds., enclosed by a bank and a more or less deep ditch, with entrances on the north and south sides. As we shall see presently, a considerable part of

<sup>1</sup> Read at Castle Acre, August 7, 1889.

this ancient defence has been quite removed. That is to say, roughly speaking, three-fifths of the north side, and one-fifth of the south. This leaves the whole of the west side, and two-fifths of the southern one, in their integrity. There remain, therefore, the whole of the eastern portion, two-fifths of the north side, and the remaining two-fifths of the southern side to be accounted for.

Before we do this let us analyse these Roman defences. Taking advantage of the natural resources of the site, the Roman engineer found that the rising ground was supported on the south side by a broad morass moistened by "the pale waves of Nar," and now level meadow land. On this side he only required a slight bank, with a causeway leading to the ford, or a bridge, over the river. At the south-west angle the bank at once rose, and the ditch deepened. Along the north front, where he came upon level ground, both bank and ditch ran on, and so continued round the north-east angle, and down the slope to the south front on the morass. Such was the Roman camp.

When the Saxon came—I will say in the ninth century—he found the works of the Roman both out of agreement with his mode of warfare and too large for his wants. Yet it behoved him so to deal with it that he could have sole control. He accordingly threw up a mound in the north-east corner of the Roman camp, which he surrounded with a profound ditch, out of which, in fact, the mound was partly formed, and he utilized as much of the material of the eastern side of the Roman bank as he required for throwing out a court on this flank. The court or enclosure thus formed is irregularly broken by some earthworks about half way across it, which seem to indicate the remains of the original Roman defence. The Saxon further formed a second and a larger court in front and southward of the mound, by utilizing and adapting the south-east corner of the Roman camp and striking a new bank, with a deep external ditch, from the south side, running northward, and resting originally upon the mound.

Thus the whole of the Roman earthworks are accounted for, and thus was formed a *burh*—namely, the mound, the

hill of the burh, with two appended courts. Upon the mound was planted the timber dwelling and offices of the chief, surrounded by a timber palisade—a real wooden wall, the courts being further protected by lines of the same defence on the comprising banks. It is improbable that the remaining and larger portion of the Roman camp would have been abandoned to the chance, or rather likelihood, of being converted by an enemy into a sort of *mal voisin*, so this portion would also be taken possession of, and perhaps also palisaded or hedged about, as a refuge for cattle, for the inhabitants of the place, or for men seeking the shelter of the burh from an advancing force. This, then, was the stronghold which Earl Warren found at the *Caput* of his 140 lordships in Norfolk at the time of the Great Survey.

Earl Warren had his castle at Lewes in the days of the Conqueror, and I see nothing here to show that he built a fortress of stone at Castle Acre. He died in 1088, and was succeeded by his son William, who died in 1138, to whom succeeded his son, another William, who died in 1148.

The history of Castle Acre castle has not been prejudiced by much speculation as to its date, nor is there much architectural detail remaining that enables us to fix its precise period. We know that upon such a site as this the shell keep of stone was the usual form of fortress that replaced the earlier structure of timber; but very few remain for comparison of their details, and fewer still of which we know the date. The shell keep of Berkeley fortunately exists, and, more fortunately still, we know the date of it from a charter. It was begun in 1155. On comparing the only remaining ashlar details of Castle Acre castle with those serving the same purpose at Berkeley, namely, the six pilaster buttresses on the outside of the shell, we find that those at Berkeley have a full set-off half-way up, while those at Castle Acre are of the earlier form, namely, simple strips with only a slight break on their faces.

Persons who have studied the growth of buttresses from narrow Saxon strips, to the panelled and pinnacled structures of Perpendicular, will appreciate the value of the slight distinction I have just alluded to, and in a case like this we must make the best we can of the

evidence we have got, without trying to extract more out of it than it properly gives. I think, therefore, we are justified in considering that this keep is at least earlier than 1155, and the evidence of a charter of the second Earl Warren, who died in 1138, in which he speaks of *meum castellum*, seems to imply that this actual stone castle was then existing, inasmuch as the Saxon structure is hardly likely to have endured so late, or to have had such a term applied to it by Earl Warren. I put the date at about 1125. I admit, the actual evidence here for it is slight, but the general history of castle building in the first half of the twelfth century supports it, and it will be remembered that the successor of this William de Warren was in possession only for ten years, and died in 1148. We may take it, therefore, that the second Earl Warren set up the shell keep on the mound, and enclosed the greater court with a curtain wall of masonry. But the mound was not so old, or so firm in its nature, that the Norman builder could be heedless in his work, and we accordingly find that, for greater solidity, the shell was built against the upper part of the mound, the wall showing consequently much higher without than within, and being further strengthened outside, in the north-west quarter only—its weakest point—by the six pilaster buttresses before mentioned.

When my grandfather, Mr. Kerrich, was here, just 107 years ago, he made careful notes and plans of the castle, which were bequeathed to the British Museum in 1828. Great changes have taken place in the last hundred years, but on applying Mr. Kerrich's plans to the existing remains we are enabled, not only to identify the fragments, but to reconstruct a great deal that must otherwise have entirely perished out of knowledge. His plans show four walls, or, as he rightly calls them, "traverses," crossing the ditch and abutting upon the keep. Of these, two were the continuation of the curtain of the large enclosure or lower ward. That on the south-east still remains in part; that on the south-west connected the gateway with the keep, and may yet just be traced up the mound. That on the north-west may still be seen in the bottom of the ditch, and where it joined the second pilaster buttress, and the traverse on the north-east has

entirely vanished. The use and value of these walls in checking the progress of an enemy round the ditches, who might possess the great court, is obvious, and no doubt at an earlier period timber defences were similarly employed. A wall remains, crossing the ditch of the great court on the east side, and there is another crossing the ditch at the south-west corner, of which more presently. It is probable that there was also a wall on the counter-scarp of the ditch of the mound. Mr. Kerrich speaks of foundations on the west side.

He gives a sketch of the gateway as it was standing in his day. It consisted of two half drum towers flanking a round-headed entrance, which ran through like a tunnel for a distance of eighteen feet, divided midway by a portcullis—a defence not common in Norman times. The towers abut right and left against the curtain wall, and are supported on the inside by the walls of the tunnel entrance, 18 ft. long and 7 ft. thick. The whole was solid, and the plan can still be made out, though most of it has fallen down. It was approached by a drawbridge across the outer ditch, and covered by a bastion on the south side. As to the curtain wall of the lower ward, in Mr. Kerrich's time a great part of it was still standing, and he mentions foundations of a tower at each corner, of which the lower part remained at the north-east angle. There was apparently a gateway through it, facing the great gateway, to the smaller enclosure, but no appearance of any wall round that space. Mr. Harrod saw none, but Mr. Hope has just now uncovered a small piece of walling on the south side of the court, and some years ago Mr. Vere Irvine found another fragment on the north; but the whole wall may hardly be taken as proved upon such slight evidences.

More particularly with regard to the keep—the inner ward. It is planted upon the top of the mound which slopes to the south, and we have a good deal of the wall of its original height, with its flint-work parapet and allure. It is very rude work, as these shell keeps usually were, and they had not yet learned to split and square the flints, but the surface is hard and imperishable, particularly outside. The ivy has seized the wall in its deadly grasp, but, happily, draws but little sustenance



from the flinty and rigid mass. It is evident that the walls of the keep were of two heights; about one-third—the upper portion, being ten or twelve feet higher than the lower, the two being no doubt connected by flights of steps from the lower to the upper allure. This outline, with the commanding character of the earthworks, must have had a very fine effect.

As to the details of the inside of the keep, they are rude, but something is to be made out of them. The wall has been much broken down on the east and south sides. First, then, we have at the broken end of the wall, due north, some masonry starting out diagonally, and containing in the angle the end of an arched passage. This is locally known as “Dolly Handle’s Hole,” and is, of course, only the remnant of something much bigger, perhaps a low watch tower; there are the remains of a garderobe below. Working westward we find indications of putlog holes, implying either the requirements of the original construction, or wooden erections planted against the wall, perhaps both. The wall is here of its full height, and the allure quite practicable for hardy climbers. Continuing, we come to the broken end of the wall on the west side. Here we find the remains of a postern entrance, approached, as I take it, by a flight of steps running up the outer side of the curtain wall that connected the keep with the gateway. In the keep wall we have the springing of the vaulted passage in its thickness, and indications of the arched entrance direct into it. The evidences are slight, but it is desirable to seize upon, and not pass over, such an interesting bit of detail, which perhaps a little clearing out might render more intelligible.

We next meet with a fine piece of masonry, broken midway by the end of a wall projecting from it. A few feet above the grass are marks of a low barrel vaulting along the face of the wall, which here is of its full height, and exhibits two original crenelles or openings in the parapet. I think this vault sustained a stone platform and shelter for the guard or watch, the common room being below; they would keep a look-out through the crenelles which covered the gateway.

Now, a very important part of the enceinte is missing. It is inconceivable that a shell keep of this size was merely

entered by a doorway, a hole in the wall, and had no strong ingress. The mass of masonry in the wall at this point, as well as the amount of material that has fallen into the ditch, forbids the supposition that the wall simply ran on, and it appears that the entrance was made, as at Lincoln, between two broad buttresses or masses of masonry, and that a flight of steps descended from the upper ward to a bridge over the ditch. These steps were to be seen in Mr. Kerrich's time.

Within the ward was a strong tower, not, I think, necessarily of the same date as the keep. Mr. Kerrich shows the south and east walls of it in his plans, and Mr. Harrod laid bare the other two, which were of great thickness on account of their nearness to the earthen bank; the whole measured 50 ft. by 40 ft.

In the middle of the outer ward both Mr. Kerrich and Mr. Harrod indicate considerable foundations, of which the outline is perceptible at the present day. No doubt some digging would reveal the plans of a great hall, chapel and kitchen, perhaps of a later date than the keep, in accordance with the not unusual later Norman practice of abandoning the shell keep on the mound as a dwelling place for better lodgings lower down.<sup>1</sup>

A small portion of the wall at the lower end of the outer ward is quite complete, and near it is a low postern, that has had on the inner side a lintol of wood—showing the scarcity of stone of any length, which has left the impress of its ends in the lasting concrete. Mr. Kerrich also mentions a gateway at the lower end of the town, in connection with the wall crossing the ditch at the south-west corner, before alluded to. Mr. Bloom, in his Notices of Castle Acre, says it was precisely like the upper gateway in the street, and that the remains of it were only removed in this century. Both would therefore be Early English, and, as they are placed upon the north and south lines of the Roman camp, they would have been in connection with Norman or Early English defences along those lines, and they further show that the later men were also disposed to fortify, or at least make use of, the whole of the earliest works, as I have supposed the Saxons

<sup>1</sup> In some slight excavations which Mr. Hope has been kind enough to superin-

tend, the later Norman work was at once found.

did. The details of the upper gateway show a re-use of late Norman work.

There has been difference of opinion as to the date of the earliest earthworks at Castle Acre. Mr. Harrod, of whose labours here, and anywhere else in Norfolk, I should wish to speak with the greatest respect, was of opinion that the circular and horse-shoe works were pre-Roman. Many were carried away with this idea who have since abandoned it, and the change is creditable—and I suppose inevitable—for archæology of this kind has made great strides in the last thirty years. The story at Mileham, a few miles off, is just the same; there we have the Roman, the Saxon, and the Norman works quite as distinct as here, and each perhaps individually coeval with that at Castle Acre. Many other precisely similar instances could be adduced.

The written history of the castle is very slight—we know, indeed, the descent of the lordship—but we fortunately still have in mound and masonry these great witnesses of a long life, not silent, but more eloquent than the written record. But slight as the written history is, it is something to know that the great Edward was more than once at Castle Acre, and I am willing to believe that he lodged here, and not at the Priory, in February 1297. At any rate he would have visited the castle—at that time in its prime, and with its Norman defences just then getting a little obsolete; and, no doubt, he came under the gateway that has fallen, and mounted the now vanished steps into the keep which has nearly perished. And, perchance, it was on this very spot, where we are now standing, that he made answer to the deputation from the clergy in the parliament at Bury, who had refused a subsidy to the king:—"From the moment that you cease to bind yourselves by the homage and on the pledge to me for your baronies, I hold myself to be bound in no respect to you." This was bold speech, but I think the king had to give way. Fifty years later the castle was in ruins.