

## SHOEBURY CAMP, ESSEX.<sup>1</sup>

By F. C. J. SPURRELL.

Some ten years ago, it became clear that the outline of the Camp or Bury constructed by Hæsten or Hastings at Shoeburyness, was rapidly becoming obliterated. So in September and October of 1879, I made a plan of it and cut a section through the only small piece of the wall and ditch, which remained whole. But I *was* able to trace out the wall and ditch the whole distance, with one small exception, where a gravel pit had interfered with it. A large part of the ditch, too, had been recently levelled for tennis grounds, but luckily for me so recently, that the settlement due to the former existence of the ditch enabled it to be distinctly traced. The Government has built a wall along the bank of the northern half, and beyond the ditch runs Rampart Street.

On the southern part, a powder store and an enclosure runs along the wall. I was able to get the exact width of the centre of the wall and the outer edge of the ditch where these were cut by the cliff, and in the centre of the western side was able to get a good measurement by digging, &c. The wall was here preserved by a thick underwood and some trees, and seemed to have suffered remarkably little.

Certainly, the Camp was not very strong work and probably was occupied for a very short period, as will be seen by the following account taken from the Saxon Chronicle.

A.D. 894. "Hasten had come to Beamfleet, with the band, which before sat at Middleton (Milton next Sittingbourn) and the great army was also come there which before sat at Apuldre, near Limenemouth (Appledore, Kent). The fortress at Beamfleet (now Benfleet) had

<sup>1</sup> Read at the Monthly Meeting of the Institute, December 6th, 1888.

before this been constructed by Hæsten, and he was at that time gone out to plunder" when a very strong body of the English people who were sent eastward by King Alfred, together with the townsmen of London, and also aid from the west, marched to Bemfleet.

Hæstens' "Great Army" was at home in the camp. Then came the army from London and put Hasten's army to flight and stormed the fortress, and took all that was within it, as well the property as the women and the children, and carried the whole to London; and all the ships, they either broke in pieces or carried to London, or Rochester.

And they brought the wife of Hasten and his two sons to the king, and he afterwards gave them back again, because, one was *his* godson and one Ethered's the Earl-dorman. But as soon as the wife and sons were given back, Hæsten repaired the Shoebury fortress. The armies of Hæsten after the flight from Bemfleet, drew together again, at Shoebury in Essex, and there constructed a fortress. After which they went up the Thames, to the Severn; where, having been beaten and dispersed again, they returned to Essex. It is not clear where they went, apparently to Mersey Island, though, probably Shoebury was not quite abandoned.

At the time mentioned, in 894, the coast was different to what it now is. The camp by its own shewing was an inland camp. I mean that the ditch did not then impinge upon the sea. Had such been the case it could not but have happened that the muddy sea water would have invaded it, the bottom being only now about 3 ft. above high water mark which would certainly have been washed by high tides and in stormy weather, but there is no evidence of this in the section by the sea or in my excavation; and, moreover, the muddy water would have left a sediment, and none of the well-known mud of that coast was found, nor shells.

Besides this, in accordance with the general mode of fortification at that time both by Danes and Saxons, the camp was an irregular kind of square in form, and it will be seen by the plan that if the present lines be carried round, enclosing about as much more land or sea as remains still; the coast must have considerably extended

eastward. The waste of the coast here during the last thousand years cannot have been less, and was probably more than half-a-mile. I should feel within reason if I said a mile full. Again, there is a road here along the sands from Foulness to Wakering Stairs which probably represents an ancient coast road now gone to sea. This road which runs about a mile from the present land, some sixty or seventy years ago appears to have extended to Shoebury, though it is now obliterated. This is somewhat interesting though no proof of date, for the road may have been a road situated well inshore at the time of the Romans' occupation of the site of the camp. But the wear of the coast here must have been much greater than there is any need to doubt will allow of the assumption that the camp was well inland.

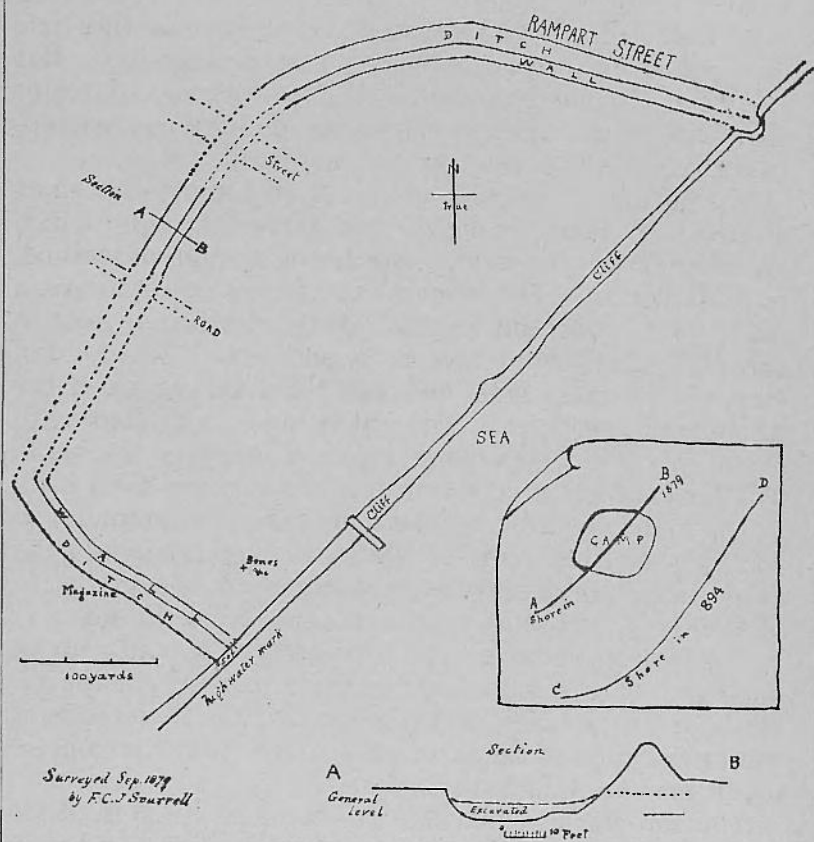
The outline is irregular, seemingly constructed in short stretches of nearly straight lines joined by angles which are very obtuse; an evidence of haste, though of method, in construction. The dimensions of the camp wall are, a ditch 40 ft. wide and 8 to 9 ft. deep, of which at least in one place about 2 ft. have to be subtracted for a kind of step on the inner side, and one third the width of the ditch (*vide* section). The ditch was half filled with earth, part of which must have fallen from the bank. The land which is very level, had been raised for a bank to the height of 12 ft.; on the inner side, the ground was 3 ft. higher than outside the ditch—gradually sloping away—some of this may have been the result of degradation of the bank, but some may be considered as intentional.

The area enclosed by the camp was apparently about one-third of a square mile, perhaps more; from the inclination of the walls, which are away from each other at the intersection of the beach, the widest part has gone to sea, it may be inferred.

The top of the cliffs here is about 12 to 13 ft. above high water mark. They are of quaternary sand and very loose, so that the ditch could not have held water, as the whole area is much of the same as to level and quality.

Roman remains have been found in the district, outside and inside the camp graves have been found at the southern extremity close to the sea, from which a gold coin of Probus got into the possession of a man who still

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it ten years ago still. I was told, also, a ring was found. Pottery and bones of the same age are not scarce. Just outside the camp a stone faced well of hexagonal form was discovered of Roman make.

Great quantities of bones were found, more especially near the sea, which was once the middle of the area; nothing of Teutonic art has been found I believe, which is well in accordance with the story told by the *Saxon Chronicle*.

The outlook from these parts is dreary and is only now noted for long range practice, and the site of the deposit of Metropolitan Sewage. Formerly, according to tales and tradition, a city stood somewhere on the Maplin sands; but the name of Maplin is without a meaning or history now. Shoebury has been suggested to mean a horse-shoe shaped burg, but this, though applicable now-a-days was not so at its foundation, and no plausible suggestion is now possible. The area of the camp is covered with Government buildings and ranges, and for some distance around it. Since the railway has been carried there, great changes have happened, and the place is populous to a surprising extent, for a spot so out of the world.

In making this plan I was very kindly assisted by the officer commanding the station. In the little sketch appended to the plan shewing the probable shore line in A.D. 894, the scale may approximately be seen by comparing the small outline of the camp with the larger one.