

Pinxton Castle.

By WILLIAM STEVENSON.

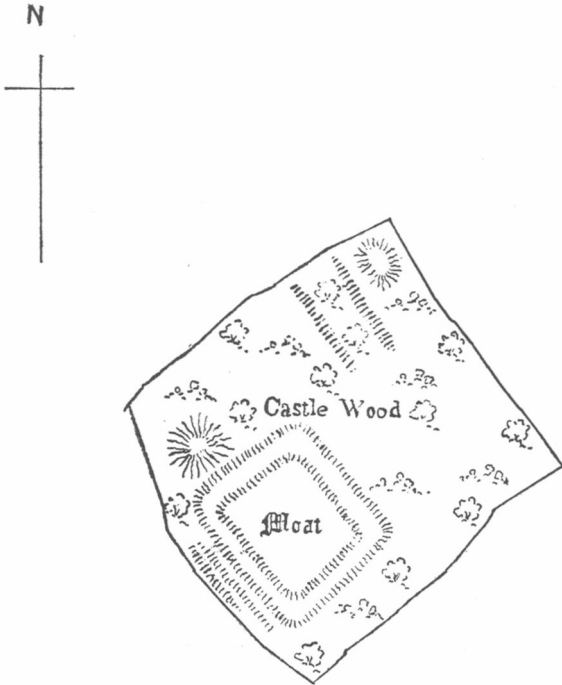
PINXTON Castle in the hundred of Scarsdale, lies on the borders of Nottinghamshire. It is an earthwork of the motte and bailey type—one which, had it been a few yards further east, would have been in Nottinghamshire—as we now have the boundary of that county: its name is local, and its site the “Castlewood,” is on the dividing line between the parish of Pinxton, and the like of South Normanton. There was a time when parishes were not questions in that neighbourhood, for the site around, as demesne of the Crown, was extra-parochial, and part of the Royal Forest of Sherwood, historically known to have extended westward into Derbyshire as part of the old wood or park of Fulwood.

This castle figured on the Ordnance-sheets as “Moat,” is nigh upon the south side of the highway of Mansfield to Alfreton— $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles distant from the former, and 3 miles from the latter, at an elevation of 450 feet above sea level. In part it forms the side of a lane or cartway that leads only to “Range Farm,” which, needless to say, has the old forest flavour of “Ranger Farm,” which pictures the earthwork—latterly hidden by a wood—being formerly utilized as a ranger’s lodge or residence.

It is beyond all this, and down to its military origin that we here wish to travel.

North of this earthwork the land rises for some distance another fifty feet or more. Southward it falls in a stretch of one and a half miles, one hundred and fifty feet into the valley of the Erewash at Pinxton.

The north line of this earthwork is the south line of a catch-water drain in which there is a spring, one that can claim to have been there before the earthwork, and to be the reason of the castle being there placed. Before the Normanton Colliery Co. sank their pits on its eastern side the spring had a strong flow where now it is a weak one, still it is the head or fount of a brook that courses



down the above "one and a half miles," furnishing at half length a lake in the Brookhill estate or park there, the property of the Coke family.

This place-name—in an inverted form—occurs as a family one in an early but undated perambulation of the king's demesne wood of Fulwood as follows:—"The markes and boundes of the wood of our lorde the King

of Fulwood, begyninge at the brooke goinge beside the grounde of Roger of Heilbrookes, and from thence to Seatembriges, and from thence to Crowshaw Thorne, and from thence to Hawkeswell, and from thence to Blackwell-brooke, and from thence to Brooke Grayning where it began" (*Dukery Records*, p. 408). This "Hawkeswell" we take to be the spring-head beside which the above earthwork was wrought.

We have the following from the Close Rolls, Ed. ii :—
 "1339, Feb. 14.—Ralph de Nevill, keeper of the forest beyond Trent, ordered to permit John de Wyne to hold a certain pasture of Fulwode in Penkeston and Normannton, cos. of Nottingham and Derby, &c." (*Dukery Records*, p. 394).

We have a further confirmation of this Fulwood portion of the Royal forest of Sherwood extending westward into Derbyshire and over this earthwork as follows :—Forest of Sherwood, 1538, perambulation "and so about the boundaries of Fulwoode as far as the lane of Noremanton and from the said lane along the hedge of Noremanton field as far as Hawkeswell and thence about the fields of Dyrtye Huknall, &c." (*Dukery Records*, p. 402).

This particular Hucknall, now merged in Hucknall under Huthwaite, was a hamlet of Sutton in Ashfield in the deep valley eroded out of the black-shale which there underlies the permian limestone of the hill immediately eastward—on which Sutton Church and town are situated. "About the fields," here means the "Blackwell brooke," already noted; "dirty," in one case, and "black," in the other being descriptive of the clays and coal-shales which there abound; other topographical terms of this comb or valley are Fulwood, or Suttonwood, and in it the county boundary is a water line which in old times must have been physically impassable. The deepest part of this depression, that drains westward, is only a shade over half a mile due north of the earth-

work under notice, between the two is the high ground (traversed as a ridgeway by the Alfreton-Mansfield road) which there parts the watersheds of the Amber and Erewash, it is a one time wild and still deeply scarred district, which lying under a mile south-east is a brook-line trending north-east to south-west, deeply cut into dumbles and partly enclosed as "Bloomer-wood," and "Fulwood-Fox-Cover," surviving parts of the original forest of Nottingham. A mile or two west is Carfield park and ancient hall, formerly Carnthwaite, which reads Carn's ridding or clearing in the original wood or waste of Normanton. The castle or earthwork itself is an interesting object. It is shown on the Ordnance Map, here given, as of oblong form, the short sides in line with the great high road—one narrow field to the north-west—which it was evidently planned to dominate. The north-west vallum is deeply sunk or cut down, the south-east one is shallow and largely formed by an outer bank. We can learn from this that the bailey was defended by a wet ditch. The ground of the platform is much disturbed, possibly during long residence thereon, and what might easily be viewed as a mound and a cross ditch—developing a first and a second bailey—may be traced.

The motte is a cone of earth—the spoil of the north-west ditch it protects ; it is as usual placed on the highest ground, where its purpose was to strengthen the most vulnerable side of the castle, but it is abundantly clear that it was never perfected, and is little more than the core of an originally projected motte or mound. The bailey or baileys appear to have been hastily made, the greater work of ditching the mound being left to the last, when something appears to have occurred that prevented its completion. It would be easy to picture on a plan what this motte would look like—surrounded by its ditch—with the soil thrown up to cap the present mound, that, with a stockade, watch tower, or fort on its summit

would have proved in all a stronghold of important offence or defence for that wild or forest district.

Historically this earthwork is a broken chain, it is unnoticed or overlooked by the old historians alike of Notts, and Derbyshire, but being situated in the forest of Sherwood it comes within the pale of that history, which forms a long and important chapter in the middle ages. With this aid, and a careful manipulation of the links, we can arrive at the satisfactory conclusion—there are few, if any, of those essential parts missing.

The earliest perambulation of the forest (1218) distinctly states it was “afforested after the first coronation of King Henry, father of the lord King John” (*Dukery Records*, p. 396), which means that it followed on the death of Stephen, and the fall of the last or third William Peverel, in 1154. Except about Pinxton, and South Normanton, its western bounds were those of the county until 1218, when disafforestation reduced the original bounds, Fulwood being then but little disturbed.

Henry II held the forest down to his death, but after 1174, only nominally so on behalf of his younger son John, who became Earl of Mortain, we there see the forest ministers, amongst them Robert de Caus, or Caltz, farmer of the forest in and about 1166, whose family early became hereditary custodians or constables, their caput being Laxington, or Lessington, now Laxton, where they had a motte and bailey castle on high commanding ground—the largest in the county possibly, excepting the Royal one at Nottingham. Its earthworks to-day are immense, efforts at times have been made to lower the banks and fill in the ditches, but beyond making a cartway into the first bailey little has been effected.

After 1218, or after Magna Charter, and the Charter of the Forest, the then contracted area was allowed in some degree to expand, but we need not follow this date, for we know that motte and bailey castle building had then seen the best of its day.

Our interest centres in John, Earl of Mortain, who, on the death of his father in 1189, himself having attained full age, became absolute lord, by grant or confirmation of Richard the first, his elder brother, of the castles and honours of Marlborough, Ludgershall, Lancaster, Bolverton, and the Peak, the town of Nottingham, the county of Derby, the honour of Tickhill and Wallingford, and the honour of Peverel (*Dic. Nat. Biog.*, p. 840). John's return, after giving charters to his men of Nottingham, and the custodian family of his Notts and Peak forests, was a state of warfare with his brother that extended over five years, the main battle-ground being Notts, Derbyshire and South Yorks—or Tickhill way. It was a time of castle building, strengthening, manning, and provisioning, on the part of Earl John, who was master of mid England. We find him castle building or throwing up earthworks in a part of the forest near Tuxford, viz. : at Kingshaugh, and there as at Nottingham, and in other castles seized or in his hands being subject to seige : " The men of Derleton and Ragenell . . . in the wood as they were wont in the times of King Henry the second, and King John, until the said King John made the houses be built and the wood enclosed, and a park made thereof, which was in the time of King Richard I his brother, against whom, when he was Earl John, he made war in this place " (*Thoroton*, p. 387).

Kingshaugh in the eastern part of the Royal Forest was doubly defended by the river Trent, but it fell ere Earl John, who was up to possess the crown (1190-1194), escaped to Normandy. Pinxton Castle, away in the west of the forest, where a natural defence was non-existent, we recognize as a companion fort, one that must have played an equal part, especially so when Derbyshire and its castle of the Peak surrendered to the king, who held them, with others of his outlawed brother's English endowments, until he died in 1199, when John

became the King in earnest though not the lawful heir.

We find some confirmation of this castle building if we turn to the green turf ditch-lines of a forgotten motte in or by the castle wood on Annesley hills, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles direct line south-east of Pinxton Castle, when John was earl (1189-1199), or king (1199-1216), for in 1220, when Hughbert de Burh was regent—the king (Henry III) then aged 12 or 13, an order was issued to four knights to go to the house that Reginald Marc had caused to be erected in the forest of Shirewood at Anelegh, and to certify the king whether it was so strong as to be a danger to the neighbourhood as he was informed it was (*Dukery Records*, p. 400). That castle was evidently destroyed, for four or five years later it was alluded to as “The ould castle of Ansley,” its site or remains being retained as a landmark and a turning point in the second and later perambulations of the forest, which thus kept it in view until A.D. 1662.

The members of this family were strong partizans for John before the Magna Charter date (1215), and were held in such bad odour by the barons that John had to sign as “Item 50” in that deed “We will remove absolutely from their bailiwicks (in addition to eight other persons specified) Philip Marc and his brothers, and Godfrey his nephew, and their whole retinue.” He did not do so, nor did his son Henry III, after he came of age. When we can trace Philip Marc as sheriff of Notts and Derbyshire, 1206-1224, he had the manor of Bulwell in the forest temp John (1199-1216); the manor and castle of Melbourne, Derbyshire, 1224 (Thoroton), 1229 (Lysons); the farm of Bulwell to sustain him as long as he held the manor (Old Nottm Suburbs, p. 184). In this latter he appears as keeper of the hays and parks of Notts forest, all which seem to explain the origin of the strong-house or castle on Annesley Hills.