

The Home of the Deincourts.

By GEORGE GRIFFIN.

ALTHOUGH it is well known that when the Conqueror proceeded to parcel out the newly conquered Britain amongst his followers he bestowed several manors and their lordships upon Walter¹ Deincourt, or de Ayncurt, North Wingfield being one, and that he, Deincourt, also received the adjacent manors of Pilsley, Williamthorp and Morton, etc. It is not so well known, however, where the residence or castle of the Deincourts was situated. In fact this has been an unsolved problem for quite a hundred and fifty years, if not more, for the late Dr. Pegge endeavoured to locate its position but does not seem to have arrived at anything more definite than that it was called Park House or Park Hall and was described as being near "the dam," though he mentions a field there called Deincourt in his day. The hamlet known as Park House is in North Wingfield parish and township of Pilsley and is on the extreme western boundary of the latter and includes the site of the ancient mill to which the dam formed by the impounding of the infant Rother supplied the motive power. In Dr. Pegge's time not a trace or a vestige of any building remained to indicate its position,

¹ Edmond Deincourt, says Lysons, the last of the elder branch died early in the reign of Edward III. The chief remaining branch had their principle residence at Park-hall in the parish of Morton. John Deincourt married the heiress of Grey of Rotherfield and died 7 Henry IV. His elder son William died without issue 1422 and a younger son Robert in 1442, and thus the male line of the family became extinct. The sisters and coheirs married Ralph Lord Cromwell and William Lord Lovell.

Arms—Sable a fesse dauncettee, between 10 billets, 4 above and 6 below arg.

though the last evidence of a lingering tradition remained in the memory of the oldest inhabitant that a residence of some importance had previously existed somewhere in the immediate neighbourhood.¹ Possibly the following notes may help to shed some light on the problem. In 1867 the Clay Cross Coal and Iron Company commenced to sink the shafts at what is known as Park House Colliery. The site selected being the summit of a small "bluff," or minor escarpment of the coal measures with an abrupt western exposure on the eastern bank of the river Rother.

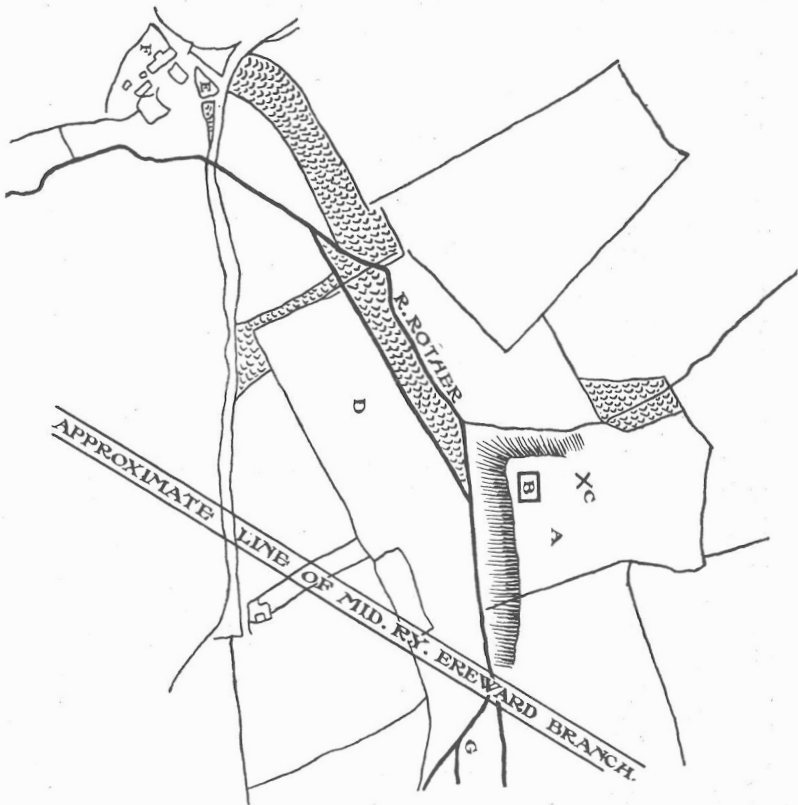
Excavations being commenced, a considerable portion of the surrounding area was found to consist of what is termed "made ground," as distinct from ground in its undisturbed and natural condition, and consisted in great part of material such as the residue from the demolition of an ancient building after all portions worth carting away had been removed and the remainder levelled down.

On proceeding to sink the main shaft, quite near the edge of the escarpment, thick foundations were met with and passed through, as well as the roughly flagged pavement of what appeared to be a cellar floor, and further portions of foundations or cellar walls were exposed to view by the cutting away of a thick slice of the western face of the hill to provide for the position of the retaining wall between the pit bank and the coal loading sidings. The writer of these notes was employed there from shortly after the commencement of operations, and though he did not personally see the remains referred to above, as they were concealed by the brickwork lining the upper portion of the shaft, he frequently heard the matter referred to in conversation among the workmen who had met with them. But the writer remembers perfectly well that it was scarcely possible to break ground anywhere in the immediate neighbourhood of the shaft without meeting with evidences of former occupation, and on the

¹ See Cox's *Derbyshire Churches*, Vol. I, p. 415.

occasion of a trench being excavated quite a quantity of bones and fragments of pottery were unearthed. On two occasions known to the writer the heads of hatchets or axes were found, and on excavating a cavity to be lined with brickwork pertaining to the pumping machinery a large number of oyster shells were thrown out, but these were not like the oyster shells we are familiar with at the present day, being nearly circular in shape and not more than two inches in diameter and having a very low degree of concavity. Coming down to a later period the colliery proprietors (say about 1906) decided to erect an electrical plant and proceeded to excavate for this purpose, expecting to find a suitable foundation at a few feet below the surface. But the subsoil met with was of such a soft and yielding character that a depth of from twelve to fifteen feet was reached before a sufficiently stable and firm foundation was found. Throughout the whole of this soft ground animal remains were found in abundance, including portions of the antlers and jaw bones and teeth of deer, the tusks of boars and numerous other bones unidentified. The query that suggested itself was how to account for this accumulation of remains just in this "pocket" as it were. The writer's explanation is that assuming the western elevation of the building to have been the front, then the eastern would be the back, where the back entrance or kitchen door would be situate, and as this particular position of the remains would originally be a hollow or depression of the surface at a distance approximately of thirty yards in a direct line from the house, this would be the "dump" where all the refuse from the kitchen was disposed of, or in other words, the "kitchen midden," a term well understood by antiquaries in its application to accumulations produced in a similar manner elsewhere. When we call to mind the fact that the greater part of the supplies of food to be dealt with in the kitchen in those early times

would be the result of the chase, there need be no surprise as to the character of the remains found in the "dump." In addition to the evidences of human occupation given above the name of the field itself is significant as though there were no signs outwardly visible of any building ever having stood there, the field had been known by the



- A—Hall Field.
 B—Site of old wall foundations.
 C—Site of "dump" or Kitchenmidden.
 D—Site of Mill Dam now filled up with earth from adjacent railway cutting.
 E—Site of Old Mill.
 F—Site of Cottages known to day as Park Houses.
 G—Tributaries of river Rother.

name of the "Hall Field" from time immemorial, though so completely had even tradition been lost that no one then living knew why it was so called.

Further, we may assume that the principal approach to the castle would be from the eastern side, as in this direction were situate the other manors under Walter Deincourt's authority, viz. :—Pilsley, Williamthorp, Morton, Stony Houghton, etc. In support of this assumption we find not half a mile away to the east is Hall Gate Farm, indicating that the principal entrance to the precincts was somewhere near.

The lane, too, leading from the main road to Hall Gate Farm has been known from time immemorial as Hall Gate Lane.

The castle in the position indicated by the above evidences would agree with Dr. Pegge's information that it was near "the dam," as it would thus be within one hundred yards of the impounded waters of the river Rother but at an elevation of some forty or fifty feet above it.

In submitting the above notes to your readers the writer hopes he is thus able to contribute some little towards the solving of an interesting local problem, and at the same time elicit further information on the matter.

This site has also a further feature of interest as having been associated with a phase of human industry at a time still more remote than the Norman invasion, as a stratum of black slags, the residue of ancient iron smelting operations, in which the fuel used was charcoal or wood, though the outcrop of a bed of coal came to the surface within a few feet. This stratum of slags was buried to a depth of four feet by the levelling down of the debris resulting from the final demolition of the ruins.