

ST. ANNE'S HILL, MIDHURST.

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THIS elevated piece of ground is situated a little to the back of this ancient Borough Town, on its eastern side; and from it is to be obtained one of the most beautiful of the views with which Midhurst and its neighbourhood abound. The summit of the hill is not of large extent, not exceeding, perhaps, half an acre in the whole. On its western side it does not rise much above the level of the adjacent houses of the town; but on the eastern the ground falls very precipitously to the lowlands of the river Rother, which here flows at its base. It must be pronounced to be, by all who are acquainted with it, one of the most extraordinary mounds occurring in this undulating part of Western Sussex. There are trees standing on its summit, which, judging from their size, must have been planted many years.

On this hill stood the Castle of the Bohuns, Lords of Midhurst. I had the pleasure of going over it on the 8th of August last—the day of the Annual Meeting of our Sussex Archæological Society at Midhurst—with Sir Sibbald D. Scott, Bart., and Alexander Browne, Esq., who are both of them well acquainted with Midhurst and its antiquities, and particularly this hill, over which Mr. Browne's residence looks; and to them I am indebted for much of the information which this memoir contains. Mr. Browne informed me that, after a very dry summer, foundation walls are very

plainly to be traced by the burnt state of the turf over them. No attempt, as far as I could learn, has ever been made to uncover them. I cannot, therefore, describe the internal arrangement of this ancient stronghold of the early lords of Midhurst; but of its external walls sufficient traces still remain to enable the curious in such matters to arrive at a tolerably accurate judgment of the ground it stood upon by the fragments which are here and there to be observed of its massive external structure. And this has been facilitated by several of the group of trees which stand upon it having, within the last few years, been blown down, thereby exposing to view, by the displacement of the earth, occasioned by the upheaving of their roots in their fall, foundation walls, which would not otherwise have been visible. The remains of such walls are now very distinctly to be traced in different places on the eastern side of the hill-top. In one spot a continuation of stones *in situ* are to be seen for the length of about two yards, the outer facing of the wall being very perfect. On the south side the surface of the ground is very uneven; but no traces of walls are to be discovered. On the western side are the remains of a fosse, which Mr. Browne considers to have been a wall-ditch; its width is about six feet, and when in a perfect state, its depth was probably considerable. It is, however, now nearly filled up. This evidently was the most assailable side of the castle. The tradition of the country is, that, for greater security, this and other ditches about the Castle could at any time be filled with water from the river running below it. But that this could never have been the case must be manifest to anyone standing on the castle mound, and taking a survey from thence of the adjacent country. This could not have been accomplished without putting the town of Midhurst under water; and there were in the days of the Bohuns no hydraulic engines to raise water to the top of this hill. If, then, this ditch was ever filled with water, the means by which it was effected must continue to be a mystery. Mr. Browne, is, I have no doubt, right in supposing it to have been a dry fosse; it could not, indeed, have been otherwise. On the eastern bank of this ditch slight traces of walling are to be found. On the northern side of the summit is a deep, sloping trench—now

used as a footpath through the castle grounds. This continues on two sides of the castle bank, and may, possibly, indicate the two entrances to the castle grounds; one from the north-east by a road elevated somewhat above the level of the river, and the other at the south-western side, on a level, or nearly so, with the ground on which the houses nearest to the castle stand. This probably was the principal entrance, and the other a means of escape from the castle in case of danger. At the north-west entrance to the hill, at a level very much below the castle, and running across the present footpath, are the remains of a wall, on which, Mr. Browne thinks, a sallyport once stood, and there was probably another at the entrance from the town; but of this no visible indications now remain.

The small field to the west, or town side of St. Anne's Hill, is likewise elevated, and is called "the court green." This, then, was doubtless an enclosed court of the castle, and into this court all the occupants of the houses situated just without the castle walls, who, in feudal times might have been retainers of the Lord, had the privilege of bringing their moveable goods and chattels for safety in case of danger; and which later occupants would have continued to exercise, had not the introduction of less ambitious and more peaceable times, happily, been the means of doing away with the castle, and of rendering such security unnecessary. The back doors, or garden entrances, still existing from this green to the few remaining houses here, are, Mr. Browne informs me, the only remaining traces of this privilege.

At the north-west corner of this courtyard, on a site now within Mr. Browne's pleasure grounds, the chapel of the castle, which was dedicated to St. Anne, stood. There is some high brick-walling on the spot, consisting principally of modern work, raised on a much more ancient foundation of the same material. I cannot, however, think that any, even of the older part of this wall, could at any time have formed a portion of St. Anne's chapel. At the back of this wall, in the more modern part of the structure, the stone framework of a window, minus its arch, has been introduced. This, too, judging from the cursory inspection I was obliged to make of it, could not have belonged to the chapel. The

material of which the chapel would have been built was, doubtless, stone. The only part of this wall which fell under my observation, as likely to have been a portion of the ancient chapel, is a few stones which now project from it near its western end, which are evidently the remains of a wall running at right angles to the brick wall in the direction of Mr. Browne's house. This I consider to have been a very small remnant of an angle of some old building, and most probably of St. Anne's chapel. Time would not, I regret, admit of my making an underground investigation of the foundations of this brick wall. For had I been able to do so I might, and possibly should, have discovered that it had been erected on the basis of this chapel.

The way from the castle to this chapel was by a raised causeway on the north-western side of the courtyard, which still remains. In proof of the antiquity of this causeway, at the castle end of it, stand two ancient oak trees of immense size, the one nearest to the courtgreen being considered the largest in the neighbourhood of Midhurst. They are trees that must have stood there two centuries, if not more, and are an evidence as well, that, previous to their existence, this causeway had been abandoned as a means of access to the chapel, and the chapel discontinued as a place of Divine worship.

Of the date of the erection of this castle we have no certain knowledge. History is silent on the subject, as well as on the date of its abandonment as a baronial residence. On both these important points a tolerably accurate hypothesis may be arrived at. As the first of the de Bohuns, Barons of Midhurst, was Savaric, it may reasonably be presumed to have been erected by him, early in the reign of Henry I., in whose favour this King created four and a half Knights' fees in Midhurst and its neighbourhood; and to have continued the stronghold of himself and his descendants, until about the commencement of the 16th century; when the Midhurst estate passed to Sir David Owen, by marriage with Mary, the last of the De Bohun family, and the erection of Cowdray House. (See Vol. V., p. 177.)

It may be interesting to mention, in conclusion, that the beautiful piece of water which forms the southern boundary of

St. Anne's Hill, and on which you look down from its summit, was formerly an ornamental lake belonging to the pleasure grounds of Cowdray House, and connected with it by means of a broad pathway, then and still called "the Close walk." This pathway runs at the foot of St. Anne's Hill on its eastern side; and it was in an open circular space in the centre of this walk, which still exists, that the sumptuous out-door entertainments took place, which Lord Montague gave to Queen Elizabeth and her numerous retinue of lords and ladies, upon her honouring him with a visit of a few days at Cowdray in 1591; and this lake was probably "the goodlie fishpond" spoken of by Scarlet in his account of this "honourable entertainment," written and published the same year, and which was the scene of the last day's pageant; when an angler is described as coming forth to make to her Majesty a fulsome complimentary speech; and on the banks and in the water of which naiads and mermaids splashed and gamboled about, to the no small delight of the Royal visitor.
