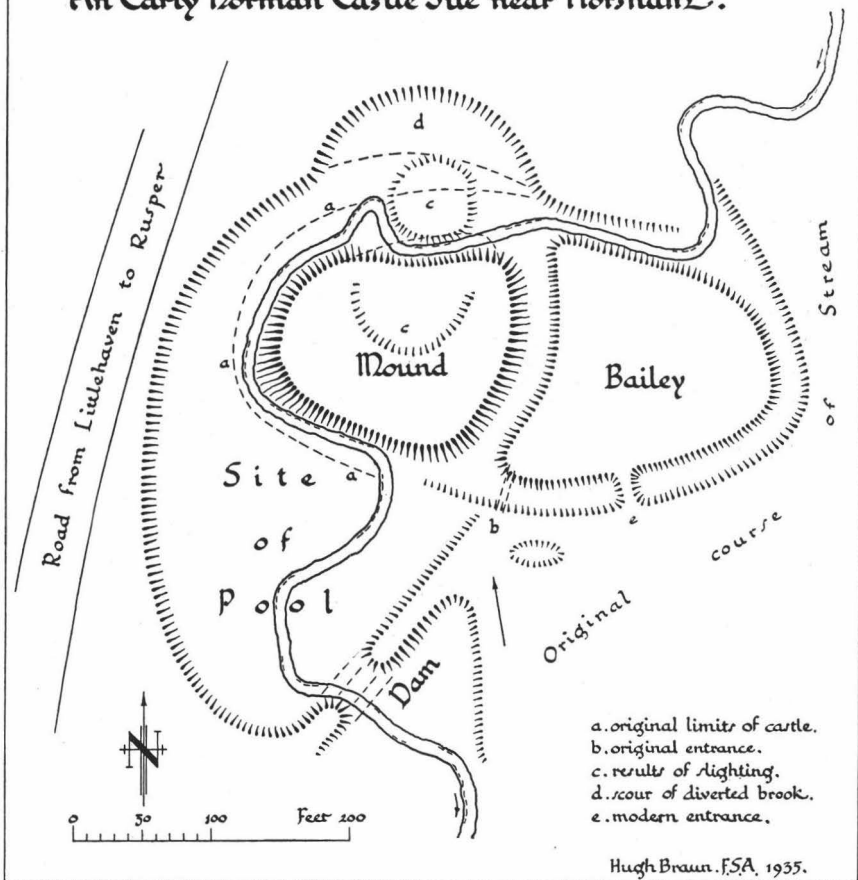


An Early Norman Castle Site near Horsham.



AN EARLY NORMAN CASTLE SITE IN NORTH SUSSEX

BY HUGH BRAUN, F.S.A.

POSSIBLY not many Sussex archæologists are aware that an early Norman castle site of more than usual interest is to be seen less than two miles to the north-east of Horsham. The nearest habitation is a farm known as Channellsbrook Farm, which is situated a quarter of a mile NNE. of Littlehaven Halt on the branch of the Southern Railway which joins Horsham and Three Bridges Junction. The castle site is about two hundred yards to the north of the farm, and lies beside the little stream known as Channellsbrook, one of the head-waters of the Arun, and close to the by-road from Littlehaven to Rusper.

The site is that of an early residential castle of the end of the eleventh century, presumably constructed by William de Braose or Philip his son some time before the latter's banishment in 1110. It forms the northernmost of the string of castles (Bramber, Knepp, and Sedgwick being the others) which occupy the long strip of the Rape of Bramber. The castle is on the northern fringe of St. Leonard's Forest, which was at one time the hunting park of the de Braoses.

The plan of the castle shows it to have been of later construction than most of the fortified residences erected immediately following the Conquest. These almost invariably consist of a roughly elliptical enclosure, either a ring-work or a low mound to which has in most cases been added a small outer bailey or barbican to protect the outer end of the wooden entrance bridge.

The Channellsbrook castle, however, follows the plan, common on the Continent, but almost unknown in this country, of an attenuated oval cut into two by a curved ditch to make the inner side of this into the mound area and leaving the outer spade-shaped portion as a bailey.

The employment of this better planned type in this country suggests a less early, more leisurely origin than may have been the case with the castles planned as a simple enclosure with the bailey added later.

The Channellsbrook plan follows the usual lay-out of the type. A long ellipse is set out with its long axis normal to the line of the stream and up the hill-side above it. The curved ditch cuts this enclosure into two and itself encloses the upper portion, this becoming a low, broad, mound, the usual form of the inner enclosure of a Norman castle. The entrance is usually on the down-stream side of the castle and crosses the bailey ditch where this is met by the cross ditch.

The remarkable feature of the Channellsbrook castle is, however, that it has been at some period subsequent to its foundation converted to water defence. The hill-side to the west and south of the mound has been excavated and a dam constructed to form a pool into which the stream has been diverted so as to improve considerably the defences on the uphill side of the motte. The bailey ditches were at the same time re-cut and now show the broad square section of a water-holding ditch instead of the usual V-shaped section of the ordinary Norman dry ditch. A remarkably close analogy to the resultant plan is that of Saltwood Castle, in Kent, where the vulnerable flanks of the mound have been protected in exactly the same way by constructing a dam and forming a pool.

The entrance to the Channellsbrook castle was apparently at the point where the line of the dam meets the ditch of the bailey, the approach being from the south. A small pit at this point appears to represent part of the defences of the entrance.¹ It is of interest to note that the castle at Knepp, although its water defences are of quite a different type, is approached along a causeway, which is in this instance, however, not a dam.

The Channellsbrook castle would appear to have had but a brief life. Constructed possibly as late as the last quarter of the eleventh century it does not seem, despite

¹ The present entrance to the bailey appears to be modern.

its impressive water defences, to have ever had its timber hall or palisades replaced in masonry.

There is clear evidence as to its having been slighted at an early date and never rebuilt. The northern side of the mound has been shaved away and its soil spread beyond its foot at this point. The stream so diverted has swept in a newly scoured semicircular channel until it has succeeded in wearing away a gap in the *déblai* from the demolition work. The breach in the dam is most noticeable and was presumably effected when the castle was slighted. This may have been at the time of the banishment of Philip de Braose in 1110, or, more probably, after the Treaty of Wallingford in 1154, which was the cause of the destruction of a large number of these little earth and timber castles.

It is curious that nothing appears to be known of the history of this nameless Sussex castle, and, indeed, even its site does not appear to have been previously noticed. It is not mentioned in the *Victoria County History of Sussex* and the few indications of earthwork shown on the 25-in. Ordnance Survey are very slight and incomplete.

It is to be hoped that some references to the castle may some day turn up, so that at least its name may be discovered.