



The History of Diserth Castle

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THE site of this ancient castle is both romantic and commanding, situated as it is on a steep hill, flanked on the north by Talar Coch Mountain, on the south by Moel Hiraeddog and Cwm Mountain, and having on its eastern side the great artificial mound above Newmarket, called "Cop y Goleuni," or the "Mount of Light," and the high tableland of Flintshire, which stretches from this point right away to Hawarden.

The castle, which occupies the summit of the rock (the sides of which are cut steep to render access more difficult), seems to stand out a little westerly from the line of the neighbouring hills, and commands a splendid view of the Vale of Clwyd, of the high lands above Abergele, with the Carnarvonshire mountains in the distance, and of the coast line as far as the Great Orme's Head. Probably it was originally a British fortification, the last of the chain of British forts on the Clwydian hills. At present very little is known of its early history. Its existence as a castle of any pretension was of very short duration.

Situated as it is in that part of Flintshire, between the Rivers Dee and Clwyd, which at an early date fell into the hands of the Cheshire Normans, they doubtless availed themselves of its commanding site, as they did of

so many of the British fortifications within their reach. The proximity of the great fortress of Rhuddlan would, however, render unnecessary any great fortification at this point, beyond an out-post. We have, however, clear documentary evidence that Henry III. erected here a building of some size, as in the entries to which I shall presently refer, the word "castle" is used. It will be seen, however, that this castle was in existence for only about twenty-two years. The remains, which have recently been brought to light, are evidently the ruins of the castle built by King Henry, as their architectural character is of the Early English of that period.

The entries which I have mentioned are to be found in the Mostyn copy of the *Annales Cestrienses*, or Chronicle of the Abbey of S. Werburgh at Chester, printed in 1887 by the Lancashire and Cheshire Record Society, having been edited, with an introduction, translation, and notes, by Mr. R. C. Christie, late Chancellor of the Diocese of Manchester, and President of the Society. The entries are as follows:—

"1241. Also Henry III., King of England, came first to Chester about the Feast of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin [August 15]; and having entered Wales at Rhuddlan he remained for eight days. The lord of the land, David, son of Llewelin, came to him there, restoring the land to him, and placing himself at the King's mercy; and he gave up to him [Henry] Griffin, his brother [whom he had imprisoned.] Also the King built a Castle at Disserth (*Item rex construxit castellum apud Dissarth*), and caused the foundation of Mold to be laid."

"1263. At the same time Llewelin, the son of Griffin, and Griffin, son of Madoc, by the command of the Barons besieged the Castle of Disserth during five weeks, and having captured it the day before the Feast of S. Oswald, King and Martyr [August 4], they razed it to the ground."

The last entry seems to confirm Pennant's theory that the castle was overthrown by mining, as the ruins lie

in large masses. Mining was a common method of besieging very long before the use of powder.

Among the Royal Letters at the Public Record Office there is one from King Henry, dated about 1260, to John de Grey, Justice of Chester, ordering the removal of the wooden fences of the buildings around the Castles of Chester and Diserth, and directing him to "re-edify" the stone walls around them. Mr. Cox has explained how wooden palisades were first made use of by the early Normans, which subsequently were replaced by stone walls. This letter of King Henry shows that there was an outer stone wall around Diserth Castle.

I have not had an opportunity of searching at the Record Office for entries relating to the Castle; probably something may be found there, but, as previously stated, from the fact that its life as a castle was so short, we must not expect very much.

The following tale respecting a Constable of the Castle is told by *Pennant*, on the authority of Llwyd's Itin. MS., and Leland's Itin. VI., 23, viz. :— .

"In a field a little to the south of the castle is a ruinous building, called "Siamber Wen." This is said to have been the seat of *Sir Robert Pounderling*, once Constable of the adjacent castle, a knight valient and prudent, who had one of his eyes knocked out by a gentleman of Wales, in the rough sport of tournament; but being requested to challenge him again to *feates of armes*, on meeting our countryman at the English court, declined the combat, declaring that he did not intend that the Welshman should beat out his other eye."

The ruins of Siamber Wen still remain, and are the property of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, who would do well to take more care of them than they do at present. These ruins appear to be more those of an ecclesiastical building than the home of a soldier.

We must all congratulate ourselves that the Diserth property has been recently acquired by Mr. Leonard Hughes, a Welshman, and an artist of no mean order, under whose fostering care the remains of this ancient fortification will be protected. The situation is an ideal one for an artist. The scenery is bold and romantic. On the summit of the rock, quite close to the house, stand the ancient ruins of the castle, and in the grounds below meander the stream which flows from the Holy Well of St. Asaph, which springs hard by.

