

NOTICE OF

Excavations made at Burgh Castle, Suffolk,

IN THE YEARS 1850 AND 1855,

At the Expense of Sir John Peter Boileau, Bart.,

BY

HENRY HARROD, F.S.A.

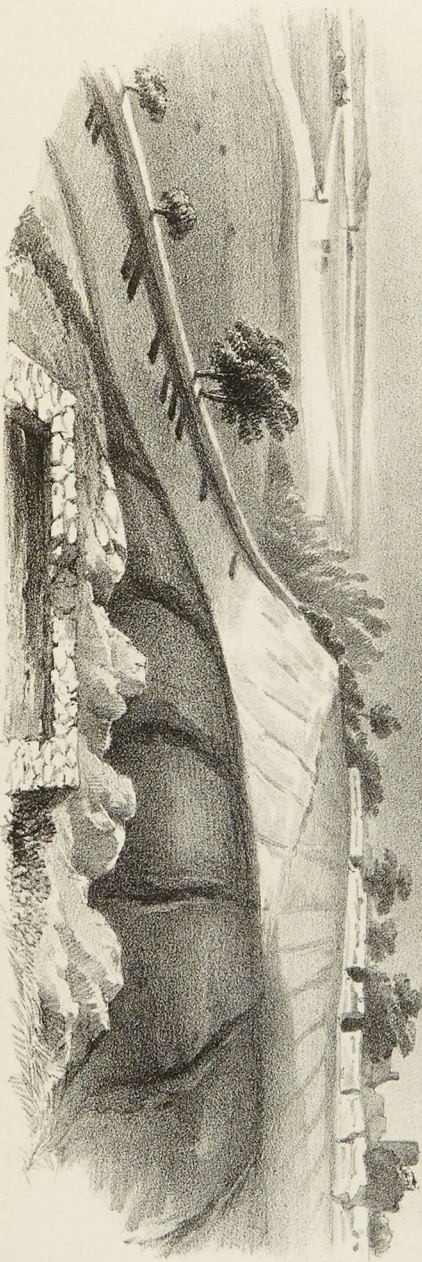
[Read at the Meeting of Society of Antiquaries, November 29th, 1855.]

THE site of the Roman Station at Burgh Castle near Great Yarmouth was purchased some years since by one of the Fellows of our Society, Sir John Peter Boileau, Bart., in order to preserve it from destruction; and I have since, at his request, made occasional visits to it, and directed a few excavations, an account of which I now propose to do myself the honour of laying before the Society.

Before doing so, however, it will be necessary to say a few words as to the position and history of this station.

It occupies a commanding position on the high ground to the East of the large tract of marsh land through which the waters of the Yare and Waveney flow to the sea. The present channel of the river Waveney runs from 150 to 200 yards to the West of it; and at no very great distance from it the Waveney falls into the Yare, which then spreads out into a large lake called Braydon, whence the waters are carried to the sea by the channel known as Yarmouth Haven, between Yarmouth and Gorleston.

View from South Hill, JERICHO CASTLE, looking North West



Dugéon del. & sculp.

The outlet of the waters from Braydon has been many times changed. The oldest outlet of which any record exists was known as "Grubb's Haven," and lay considerably to the North of the present haven, and between Yarmouth and Caister. It was silted up in the fifteenth century, and all trace of it is now obliterated. After this, numerous ineffectual attempts were made, at vast cost, until at last the present channel was decided on and constructed.

Mr. Ives, in his account of Burgh Castle, published in 1777, maintained the claim of this station to the name of Garianonum. Sir Henry Spelman was strongly in favour of Caister, to the North of Great Yarmouth, being the station so called; and though no trace of any walls now exist there, he expressly states there were remains of walls in his time. Gorleston, too, has been named as having strong claims to the designation.

May not the name, however, have been assigned to a group of fortresses around the mouths of these rivers?

Tradition states the whole extent of the valleys of the Yare and Waveney to have been *once* open sea; and in 1826 a gentleman who pressed geology into his service, boldly stated this to have been the case in *Roman times*,* and, notwithstanding the weakness of his arguments and their complete refutation by Mr. Richard Taylor, the idea became so firmly rooted in the minds of very many, that it is generally looked on as an established fact, which it would be folly to doubt about, that during the occupation by the Romans these valleys were open sea.

* *The Eastern Valleys of Norfolk*, by J. W. Robberds, Jun. I do not complain of the use of geology or any other science to assist in the elucidation of truth; Dr. Mantell and others have rendered great service to archæology by such means: my complaint is, that in this instance geology and archæology were *misused*, and a state of things assumed to be the fact which the followers of neither science recognised.

It is very certain that these marshes were not, in those times, in the firm, well-cultivated state into which they have now been brought by the aid of embankments and draining mills. They were doubtless then immense tracts of bogs and swamps, the resort of innumerable water-fowl, and liable to frequent complete submersion. Even in the present day inundations occasionally occur on very high tides: so recently as the present autumn, I saw the meadow at the foot of Burgh Castle covered with water for two days. I do not believe, however, that these valleys were ever open sea since the country round has been occupied by man.

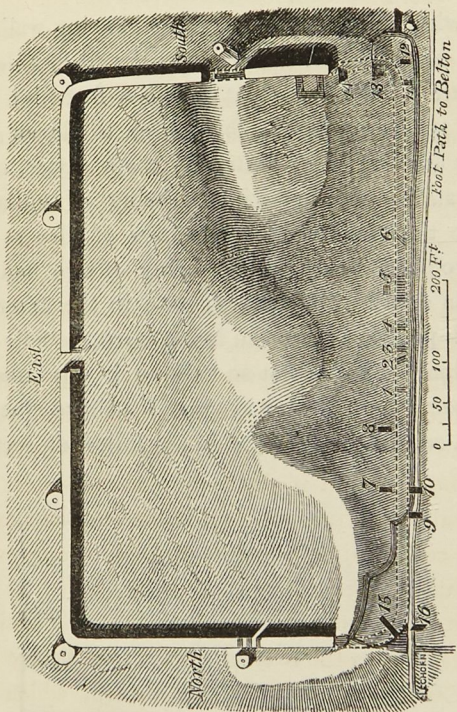
On the meadow at Norwich, where the Eastern Counties Railway Station has been built, was a fine tumulus, which was opened by the late Mr. Woodward (I think in 1826) and found to contain British urns of rude fabric. A tumulus would hardly have been made in "open sea," in the midst of an "estuary," or of a "tidal river." Roman remains have also been found on the river banks, and also on the banks of the Waveney, in spots where they could not possibly have been placed if the height of the waters had been very different to the present level;* and my late excavations will also, I conceive, be found to furnish strong evidence in favour of this conclusion.

The Plan on the opposite page shows the position of the Castle, and indicates the several excavations I have made.†

There is one peculiarity in this station, which it has in common with one of the other stations on the Eastern shore, "Richburgh:" it has but three existing walls. That on the Eastern side is about 640 feet in length, and the North and

* A large number of Roman urns have recently been found in a meadow closely adjoining the river at Ditchingham near Bungay, 1855.

† The Committee beg to acknowledge the courtesy of the Council of the Society of Antiquaries in permitting the use of this plan and the section of a trench at p. 158.



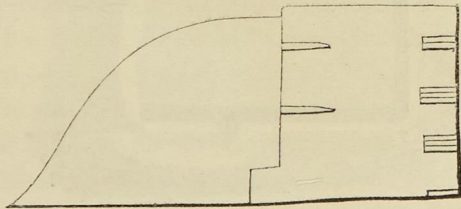
PLAN OF THE STATION AT BURCH CASTLE.

South walls about 300 feet each ; and these latter each terminate abruptly near the edge of a steep hill towards the river. Of the Western wall there is above ground no indication whatever, and to ascertain the truth of the commonly-received opinion, that no fourth wall ever existed, was a main object of my visiting Burgh Castle.

I began with an examination of the existing walls and the area of the camp, the results of which I will first detail.

The existing walls are about fourteen feet high and nine feet broad, spreading at the foundation to eleven or twelve feet. They are formed of flints and chalk stones, embedded in a very strong mortar, with a facing of squared flints bonded into the main work by courses of tiles at intervals of about two feet, some courses being of two and some of three tiles in depth. The mortar used in the external work is made with pounded tile ; the inner mortar is not.

The original wall was not so lofty as it was subsequently made, by some four feet, and was, I believe, the exterior facing of an earthen rampart, as in the following section.



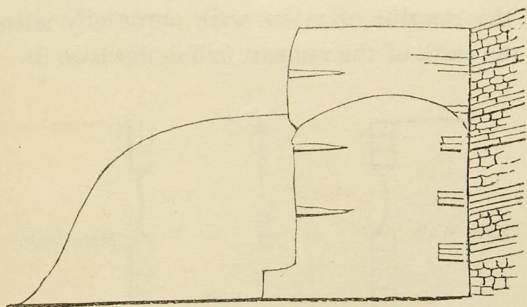
How long after it was so built, it is of course now impossible to guess ; but an addition of four feet was subsequently made to its height, and solid towers of fifteen feet diameter were placed at intervals. Though built against the wall, these towers were not bonded into it, except in the upper four feet. The section will better explain this :



SOUTH EAST TOWER .

BURGH CASTLE .

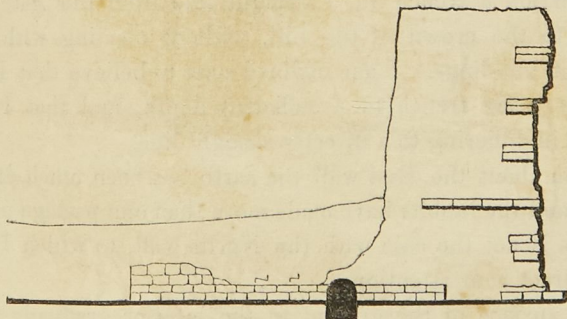
Lay & Son, Lith'rs to The Queen



The South-east Tower has fallen a little away from the wall, carrying with it a large piece of the upper part into which it was bonded. (See view.)

The view of the North Tower shows a similar result still more strongly.

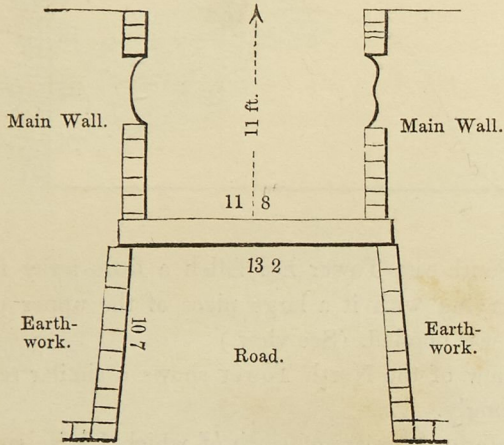
The interior rampart of earth of which I have spoken has been levelled in the course of agricultural operations, but the appearance of the surface of the walls seems to me to indicate the original existence of this, from the coarse, rough character of the work; and an arrangement disclosed by the



NORTH SIDE OF EAST GATE.

excavations at the East Gate appears to confirm this conclusion. Within the East Gate, on each side the roadway,

I found the remains of a low wall, apparently intended to prevent the earth of the rampart falling down on it.



GROUND-PLAN OF EAST GATE.

I found no trace of outworks to this gate, but just within the wall a narrow trench of fifteen inches in width seems to have had a square timber threshold.

I carried a trench in a straight line from this gate due West to the crown of the hill, without meeting with any trace of buildings. I am inclined now to believe that I did not carry my trench to a sufficient depth, and that I was wrong in adhering to a directly straight line.

From about the East wall the earth has been much drawn away, and the rabbits have made more than one passage under it: this is not the case with the North wall, to which I will now direct your attention.

The surface of the ground in the interior gradually rises from the North-east corner, where a dog can creep under the wall, to the Western end, where a trench of thirteen feet deep was required to reach the foundation.

At 150 feet from the North-east angle of the exterior com-



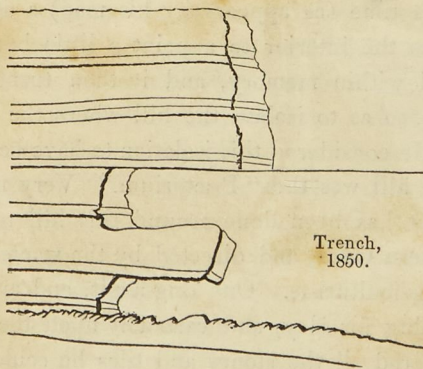
EXTERIOR. NORTH GATE .

Drawn by Wm. H. Sturges

mences a mound of earth, heaped up against the wall, from that point to the Western end, and the North gate is completely buried up by it. This would appear to have been done to prevent the North tower and wall from falling. (See view of the tower at the North gate.)

Mr. Ives, in his plan of the station, places the North gate on the East side of the tower; my excavations proved it to be West of it, and but five feet wide.

The West end of the North wall is within a few feet of the edge of the hill, and has usually been considered the termination of the Roman works in this direction. Careful inspection of the work would, I think, convince most persons to the contrary without excavating at all. The jagged surface and the broken bonding courses sufficiently indicate that the wall must have extended beyond that point. The state of the wall beneath the surface was, however, still more decisive—an enormous mass had been torn away from beneath the exposed part of it.



At the depth of thirteen feet I came upon the flint pavement which forms the usual foundation for the upper walls; this I traced some seven feet Westward from the present end, and it seemed to be gradually descending the hill. I tried

to reach it again amongst the roots of the trees on the side of the hill, but was unable to do so.

The South wall is very perfect for about 140 feet from the South-east angle, although a good deal out of the perpendicular. The outer facing has suffered but little, and a very good idea may be formed from this portion of what the external appearance of the walls originally was: the facing in most other parts where it could be reached from the ground or from a cart has been carried away for buildings or roads.

At 150 feet from the South-east angle the tower which formerly flanked the South gate lies prostrate, but unbroken, at some distance from the line of wall. It still shows, as in Ives's time, the circular hole two feet deep in the top of it; but the accumulation of soil and the growth of underwood and grass prevent our seeing for ourselves what Mr. Ives saw at the base of it: "broad hollow lines crossing it, being the marks of the planks on which it had been set."

For about forty feet at the point where the South gate must have been, the wall has been completely destroyed; and in Ives's time (as appears by his map) a deep cutting extended into the interior to a point a little beyond where a pit existed within memory, and it then turned and ran directly west, so as to isolate the hill where the South wall now ends. He considered this isolation to have been original, and that the hill was the "Prætorium." Very much, however, of what has been done around this hill must be the work of modern times, and directed by the wants or caprices of modern agriculturists. One dug a pit, and another filled it up; one dug for clay, and carted it upon the meadows; another gathered all the stones and tiles he could find scattered about, to build lodges or throw upon the roads; others brought in fresh soil, built up stout banks, filled up ditches, and levelled the surface of the land.

I cut a trench directly across this hill, beginning at the West end of the wall and extending it North-east. This

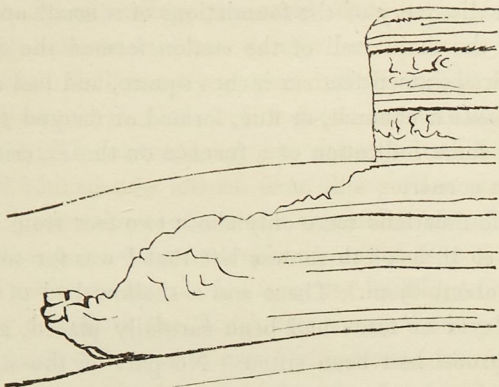
led to the discovery of the foundations of a small apartment, of which the main wall of the station formed the Southern side. It was sixteen feet six inches square, and had along its Southern side a channel, or flue, formed of flanged tiles, and there was some indication of a furnace on the exterior at the South-east corner.

These foundations were only about two feet from the surface, and so little of them was left that I was for some time in doubt about them. There was a shallow bed of clay, on which a layer of flints had been carefully placed, and over this *fine gravel* had been sifted. No part of the wall itself remained, except near the junction with the main wall of the station, and there a large fragment of the West wall was found, with some of the plaster or cement with which the inside of the walls had been covered still adhering to it.

This exposed position must have been a most dreary one in winter; but one advantage probably counter-balanced all disadvantages: it commanded a view up the marshes and rivers to Yarmouth. (See view.)

It has been said that the South wall is of nearly the same length as the North one, and the indications of its having extended further West are very much of the same kind. The section of a trench I made on the incline of the hill about thirty feet West of it, although it showed no remains of the wall itself, displayed considerable indications of its having once existed. The wood-cut on the next page exhibits the present termination of this wall above and below the surface of the ground.

I now turn to the main object of my inquiry, the existence of a Western wall. It will have been seen that operations at the West end of the North and South walls were attended with much difficulty, and the surface of the hills immediately under them seems to have been usually selected for the digging of clay, sand, &c. One old labourer remembered hundreds of loads of clay being carted from the hill on the



North, immediately on the line, I conceive, the wall originally ran; and ditches have been made and filled up again, within memory, under the Southern hill.

On my first visit, in 1850, I made a series of trenches in the low ground on the West side of the field, near an old fence which divides it from a meadow. Under this fence, on the outer side, a footpath to Belton runs. My idea naturally was, that if any trace of a wall was there to be found, it could be at no great depth from the surface, which was but little above that of the adjacent meadows. The deeper I went, however, the heavier the work became, and at three to four feet from the surface the clay was hard and compact and free from broken tiles and pottery, and appeared like the deposit left after a series of inundations. After this was very unwillingly cut through by the men to the depth of from eighteen inches to two feet, a large quantity of broken mortar, forming in some cases a layer of several inches in thickness, was disclosed, beneath which were flints, tiles, and broken mortar in great abundance.

I was still in doubt about what I had lighted upon, (for in most cases the stones and tiles were very wet and broken) when my attention was called to one of the trenches, which

was much less wet at the bottom of it than the others, to see a layer of stones placed on clay, *with a thin layer of gravel over it*, which, it will be remembered, attracted my attention to the foundations on the South hill.* I subsequently traced these foundations through the trenches marked 2, 4, 5, and 6 in the plan, but no solid mass of the wall could I find; all was ruin. The stratum of broken mortar seems to lead to the conclusion that the flints and tiles of a serviceable kind had been carefully picked out and carried away for building materials. The church at Burgh Castle is certainly built of materials from the station.

Some thirty feet into the field from the fence, in the trench No. 5, I met with a mortar bed, which must have been in use shortly before it was buried up. The floor was pink with the pounded tile, and the refuse lime (the "lime cobbles," as the hard round lumps are called in these parts) was swept into a corner and there remained. This was about three feet from the surface, and the ground about it was gradually on the ascent.

Some doubt having been cast upon my conclusions, it was stated, I believe, that my "zeal" or "enthusiasm" had led me to fancy a wall out of a few loose stones. I determined, when opportunity offered, to submit them to a public test.

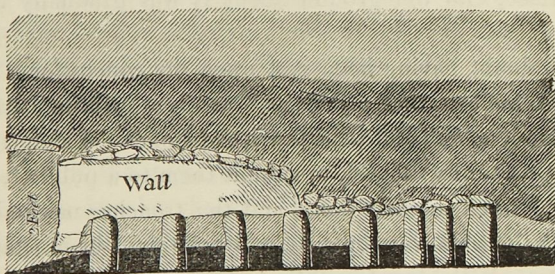
This I have recently done, and the trenches marked 1, 3, and 6 in the plan were opened, and have since been examined by many gentlemen of practical experience and undoubted sagacity.

That numbered 6 had, at four feet nine inches from the surface, a double layer of large flints placed upon a bed of very compact clay, which had been so firmly beaten down as to twist and break the tools of the workmen when excavating

* This coincidence was first detected by James Kettle, a gardener from Ketteringham, a most intelligent man, but for whom this fact might never have been brought to my notice.

it. I went down nearly six feet into it, without reaching the bottom of it, and as the trench was narrow and already over ten feet deep, I was obliged to give over the attempt to go deeper. I have no sort of doubt that this bed of clay was formed to carry the wall over this part of the ground.

The trench No. 3 presented at first nearly the same features as the other trenches, until at nearly four feet from the surface I reached a fragment of the wall *remaining in situ*; on the inner side the surface was quite smooth and perfect, but five feet from the inner side it was broken away, and the soil and stones beyond for several feet very wet; penetrating through this debris I came upon a number of oak piling, on which the wall had been originally built. They were very much decayed, and at eleven feet from the inner surface of the wall they ended. The following section will explain the character of this discovery.



SECTION OF TRENCH No. 3 ON PLAN.

In the trench No. 1 nothing was found until about five feet from the surface, when loose flints and large fragments of mortar were plentifully mixed with the clay, and, just when they assumed a more compact shape, the workmen again struck upon the piling. I made this trench sufficiently large to examine the piling carefully. It was found *precisely in the line* of the foundations in the other trenches, and extended to

exactly the necessary width (eleven feet). They were about a foot apart, and had clay, chalk-stones, mortar, &c. very firmly rammed in between them to the depth of about eighteen inches, after penetrating which, black mud was thrown out, speedily followed by the water, which then rose to a little above the top of the piling, and, as I judge, to the level of the water in the adjacent drains.

This examination has borne out my previous conclusions, and there remains no doubt on the minds of those who have examined these excavations with me, that we have succeeded in establishing the original position of the West wall of the station, for about two hundred feet along the centre of it.

For the reasons I have stated, it may be a difficult, perhaps impossible, task to attempt to find traces every foot of the way to the North and South walls. In the trench marked 15 on the plan a solid mass of mortar was found *at seven feet below the Belton footpath*, the rising of the water prevented my examining it to the extent I wished, and the danger of leaving open a deep trench by a public path has prevented my resuming the examination of it at present.

Sufficient evidence has, I venture to suggest, been already obtained to establish the fact that at Burgh Castle there can have been no very great "depression of the waters" or "upheaving of the land," and that the West side was not left open, either on account of its being washed by the open sea or because the steepness of the hill protected it from assault.

The reason it has so nearly disappeared, whilst the other walls are in so good a condition, is also, I conceive, equally clear. Constantly subject to inundations, it was gradually undermined, and at length fell outwards. In the course of years continual moisture acts even upon Roman mortar, and in this case there may have been centuries of saturation. At so short a distance from the river, and building material valuable, a very much more extensive wall might have been readily disposed of; and when most of it had been carried off, the

clay and soil washed from the hills above, with a little help from the agriculturist, have combined to complete the obliteration of this line of defence.

I have only further to add, that the fragments of pottery found in these excavations were of a very plain and common kind, and that nothing but these, and a few small coins of the Lower Empire, now and then a boar's tusk, or a knife handle of buck's horn, and occasionally the bones of men, horses, and sheep, were found during my examination of the site.

November, 1855.

