

Earthworks

AT THE "CASTLE HILL," DARROW WOOD, DENTON,
NORFOLK.

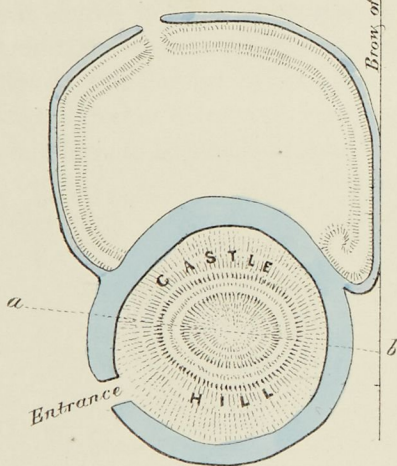
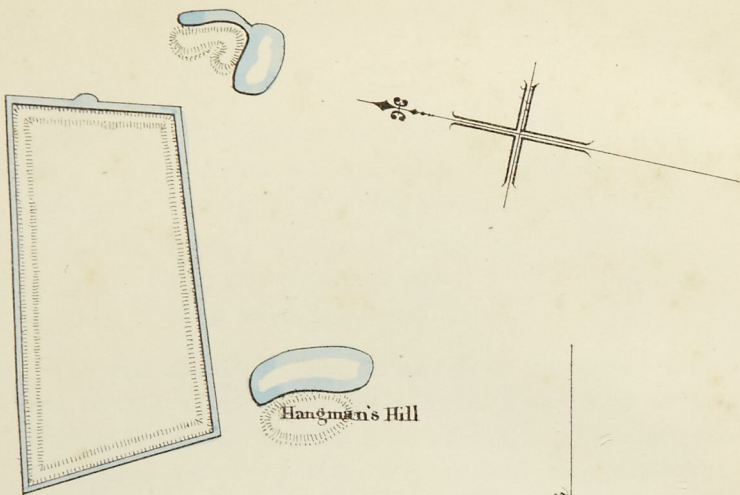
COMMUNICATED BY

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Hon. Sec.

THE earthworks of which a plan is here given are situated at the northern end of the Parish of Denton, in the Hundred of Earsham, very near the boundary of the Parish of Alburgh, and were visited by the Society on July 7th, 1880. Their secluded position, overgrown with wood until about the year 1860, caused them to escape notice by Blomefield and other local observers, and history is completely silent as to their origin. It was not until the year 1850 that Mr. S. W. Rix of Beccles called attention to their existence by reporting to our Society (May 2nd) his observation of them with a brief description of their state.¹ Some notice was also taken of them about the same time by Mr. Greville Chester. Ten years later a correspondent of the *East Anglian* for July, 1860, mentions them, and describes the woods as being then in process of breaking up, to the possible destruction of the earthworks.² A suggestion had been made to Mr. Rix by Mr. Alfred Suckling that they were possibly Danish, and might have served as an outpost to the Danish camp at Earsham. From that time until 1880 no one with a knowledge of the subject appears to

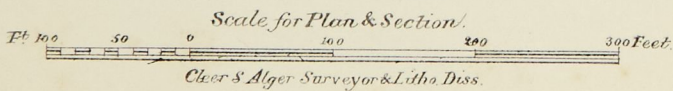
¹ *Norfolk Archaeology*, iv. 346. ² *East Anglian Notes and Queries*, i. 89.



Section from a to b.



EARTH WORKS IN DARROW WOOD, DENTON, NORFOLK.



have seen them or made any report of them. Agricultural improvements have fortunately not effaced them, and it was with much interest to myself and others that a visit to them was at last arranged, during the excursion of July, 1880, in order that their nature and age might, if possible, be settled. Among the visitors on this occasion was Mr. S. W. Rix himself, who had so long ago drawn the attention of the Society to them; and the land being now cleared and laid down for pasture, the whole of the earthworks were accessible without difficulty, and their extent and plan could be readily seen. A very brief inspection was enough to show that their construction is identical with that of hundreds of others in the country, of which the purpose and age are known, and which have received much attention from antiquaries of late years, and I was glad to have the support of Mr. Rix and others who were present to confirm the opinion I expressed in briefly pointing out their character and object.

The remains are on a small scale compared with others of the class to which they belong. There is the usual "motte," or mound, about 150 feet in diameter, surrounded by a ditch on all sides, the contents of which were thrown out to form the mound. The height has probably been considerably reduced, and is now only about 20 or 25 feet: it has a depression in the centre, and is overgrown with shrubs. From the sides of the mound a horseshoe earthwork is carried, enclosing a small court or bailey. The mound is thus placed *upon* the bank, and forms the protection of its western end. This arrangement follows the almost invariable rule in castles of this date. At a distance of rather more than a hundred yards from the mound is a rectangular enclosure, surrounded by a low bank, measuring 260 feet by 130, and forming another yard; and beside it is a small knoll which bears the name of "Hangman's Hill."

To those who have visited and examined many sites of castles throughout the country, and especially to those who have had the advantage of the leadership of Mr. G. T. Clark of Dowlais, at the annual meetings of the Royal Archæological Institute, and have heard his admirable explanations of earthworks and castles, or have read his numerous contributions to their history and construction, such remains as this of Darrow Wood present no difficulty. The vague and confused ideas of the older antiquaries on the subject of earthworks of this character have been reduced by him and others to a clear system, warranted by historical facts, and I endeavoured to sum up the principal points to be observed on the subject in a paper on Eye Castle, contributed to the *Transactions of the Suffolk Institute of Archæology*.³ It is useful to remember that while British earthworks were *tribal*, and constructed for the defence of large bodies on the most commanding summits of high ranges of hills, and Roman works were *military*, and adapted for the encampment of soldiers under well defined rules of warfare, the castles of the chief lords of our English (Saxon or Angle) ancestors (A.D. 500—1066) were *domestic*, and intended for permanent habitation as well as defence. The invaders of Britain from Germany and the north brought with them their habits and customs, their language and names: in course of time the country was well nigh cleared of its British inhabitants, who were driven into Wales; and was parcelled out into settlements,—tons, hams, thorpes, worths, and leys, &c.,—mostly called after the family names of the first settlers. Their laws and institutions were a reproduction of those they were accustomed to on the Continent, and they are the foundation of those under which we now live.

The only part of this large subject with which we are concerned in this place is the way in which the lords

³ Vol. v. p. 104.

of the manors, or *Honours*,⁴ constructed their principal dwellings. As the chief lords and leaders had dwelt in their northern homes, so they continued to live and build here, regardless of the previous occupants or their methods. They cast up a truncated cone of earth, formed out of the contents of the circumscribing ditch, known in our records as the "mota," "motte," mound, or "burh":⁵ upon it they constructed a *wooden* dwelling, defended with stout palisades, and approached by a bridge thrown over the ditch. This was the "aula" of the lord, of which we hear in the Saxon songs, and here he held his court, and did justice, and housed his family and servants. The castle was the "caput" or centre of the estate. Connected with the mound were base-courts for shelter of servants and the offices, and usually a larger enclosure at a little distance for the herding of cattle. In several cases earthworks of earlier date were made use of; and sometimes natural hills were brought into requisition, and scarped so as to save labour; in others, and more frequently, the works were new and artificial from the first. But in all, the principal feature is the conical *mound*: and in a vast number of our old castles this will be found, and is certain evidence of the pre-Norman habitation by a person of distinction, and probably in every case of the lord of the surrounding manor and estates.

⁴ *Honour* is a term "used for the more noble sort of seigniories, whereof other inferior lordships or mannours do depend, by performance of customes and services, some or other, to those that are lords of them."—*Cowell's Interpreter*.

⁵ "Originally the English burh was a fortified house, the 'Domus defensabilis' of Domesday, the 'aula' the German 'saal' of the owner of the surrounding estate or manor, which the tenants were bound to defend; of which the designation may be Norman, but the thing designated is undoubtedly of far earlier origin. The term burh naturally became extended to the cluster of surrounding huts, and a hedge with a ditch was their primary enclosure, the repair of which is provided for in very early Saxon laws."—*Earthworks of the Post-Roman and English Period*. By G. T. Clark, F.S.A., in *Archæological Journal*, xxxviii. 34.

It is evident that no *stone* castle or walls could stand on such a newly-thrown up mound, and as a fact the mound builders did not live in stone castles, but within "wooden walls." Stone castles came in with the Norman conquerors. In their own Normandy the fashion of earthen mounds and wooden castles had prevailed as much as in England, for they, too, were of the same stock—Normans or Northmen—and there are numerous examples there still. But by the days of the Conquest, in the eleventh century, a more advanced method had been learned, which they at once imported. They built square castles on a flat surface, mostly not *upon* the mounds of the English lords whom they dispossessed, but on a natural foundation close by. Sometimes, when a mound was very large and solid, and partly a natural hill top, there was room and security for a square stone castle, as at Norwich; but more often the older works were incorporated in the defences by walls and towers, and the "keep" constructed on a safer site near at hand. Whenever, therefore, we see this mound, with its oval or horseshoe base-court, and other enclosures, and encircling ditch, we may know that such works are not British⁶ or Roman, but English, of the tenth or eleventh century generally; and if we can turn to any records or authentic history of the place, we shall find in many cases the name of the lord and owner in the Confessor's and the Conqueror's time, and the name of the Norman intruder to whom the conquering William made over his possessions.

⁶ A very little reflection is enough to make it evident that a conical mound, a few yards square at the top, with no building upon it, would be a perfectly useless kind of defence to a *British tribe*. Only a few score persons could stand there; and in many cases, fewer still. The mounds were not intended to be used as bare hill tops, as we see them now; but to have a large wooden building erected upon them for permanent habitation; and the people who adopted this custom were Northmen and Old-English. Great circumscribing earthworks, enclosing a large space, as at Old Sarum, are British or Celtic; but the *conical mound*, protected by banks and ditches, as at Thetford, is English and pre-Norman.

The evidence for the English origin of these castles does not rest wholly on the works themselves. A large number are mentioned in the chronicles, with the names of the founders, and the date of their construction, and of these a good many can be clearly identified, and exist to this day: as Bamborough by Ida, in 547; Taunton by Ina; Bourn by Morcar, 870; Tamworth, Stafford, Eddisbury, Warwick, Chisbury, Warburton, and Runcorn, all by Æthelfleda in 913; Maldon by King Edward, in 920; Stamford, 922; Bakewell, 924; &c., &c.⁷ In the Bayeux Tapestry the taking of Dinan is represented, where the castle is "a timber building on a conical hill, which two men are attempting to set on fire, whilst others are ascending the mound by the steep bridge, reaching nearly to a gateway at its summit."⁸ A contemporary account, of the end of the eleventh century, quoted at the last reference, describes the process of erecting such castles.

In Norfolk there are remains of a considerable number of these English homes and fortresses. They may all be distinguished by the high conical mound and base courts, although sometimes they are mixed with earlier or later work. We do not look for such mounds at a Roman camp, which never became an English seat, as at Caistor by Norwich; nor within the moats of a fortified manor-house of Plantagenet days, as at Caister by Yarmouth. The two largest and finest in the county are Norwich and Thetford. These were both the residences and strongholds of the Kings of the East Angles. It is not unlikely that Norwich was constructed by Uffa in 575, probably on the site of a British camp; it was certainly the castle of King Anna in 642.⁹ Thetford, one of the largest mounds in the kingdom, was probably also the work of Uffa. Although Thetford was burnt by the Danes in 870 and 1004, we are

⁷ *Archæological Journal*, xxiv. 102.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹ Blomefield, ii. 4.

to understand that the buildings destroyed were of wood, and if they occupied the earthworks, as they doubtless did for many years, it would be in timber structures re-erected, and there is no reason to attribute the earthworks themselves to the Danes.¹

The other English (*i.e.*, pre-Norman) castles in Norfolk are at Castleacre, Mileham, Horsford, Middleton, and Wormegay. Weeting does not appear to be earlier than Norman. Castle Rising and Buckenham have stone castles defended by large surrounding earthworks, but no central conical mound: and these are precisely the two Albini castles that were erected after the Conquest;² although possibly on old British sites.

Denton Castle is the smallest and most decayed of all. It never had any stone buildings upon the site. About thirty or forty years ago Mr. Middleton, then tenant of the property, found a large piece of old oak buried several feet in the ditch surrounding the mound, at the spot where

¹ There are instances in the country, as at Tempsford in Bedfordshire, of Danish earthworks; and perhaps those at Warham in Norfolk may be their work, for they also were northmen, and mound builders; but wherever there was the "caput" of an English lord, and earthworks remain, these earthworks may mostly be attributed to them, and not to the Danish invaders of a later day.

² Mr. G. T. Clark, in *Archæological Journal*, xxxviii. 267, mentions "Haganet, a Norfolk castle taken by the Earl of Leicester and his invading Flemings, and utterly destroyed." But this is Haughley in Suffolk, also called Haganeth, the seat of an honour. The Norman buildings upon it were destroyed in 1173, but the fine mound and banks still remain. He also mentions Burghwood as an adjacent castle to that of Mileham; but they are one and the same. He describes the ditches of Norwich Castle as "concentric," as they used to be given in old maps, but Mr. Harrod has completely disproved that view. (*Castles and Convents*, p. 124.) Tateshall and Marnham (p. 268) are in Lincolnshire, and Kenninghall was a post-Norman fortified manor-house.

The following English earthworks in Suffolk may be usefully compared with those of Norfolk:—Bungay, Clare, Eye, Framlingham, Haughley; also those at Cambridge and Ely.

the entrance now is. This was probably part of the timber structure upon the mound, or of the bridge that gave access to it. Its history is lost. It is probably one of those cases in which the new lord who had a grant of it at the Norman Conquest had a larger and better manor and castle elsewhere, and accordingly abandoned it to the slow and silent overgrowth of the forest, and the abode of deer³ and small game, its existence unnoticed but by the woodman and the hunter, and the only tradition of its former purpose preserved in its name of "Castle Hill," recorded in charter or court-roll. In confirmation of this opinion I find a possible clue in the mention by Blomefield⁴ that the chief manor of Denton, (in which the Castle Hill is situated) was held of Bishop Stigand by Alfriz in the Confessor's time, and by Eudo son of Spiruwin at the Conqueror's survey; and that when granted by the Conqueror to William de Albini, a great lord of many other manors and honours, *he joined it to his manor of Buckenham Castle, "with which it passed many ages."*

³ Deerhaugh = Darrow Wood.

⁴ Vol. v. p. 402.