

## SOUTH MYMMS CASTLE EXCAVATION COMMITTEE

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and  
The Mill Hill Historical Society.

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### A NORMAN MOUND AND BAILEY CASTLE

It is seldom that a hitherto unknown castle is discovered so near London as that at Warrengate Farm, South Mymms, on the northern boundary of Middlesex. It was originally located by the late G. F. Cruickshank, F.S.A., and the late Albany F. Major, F.S.A., who, in

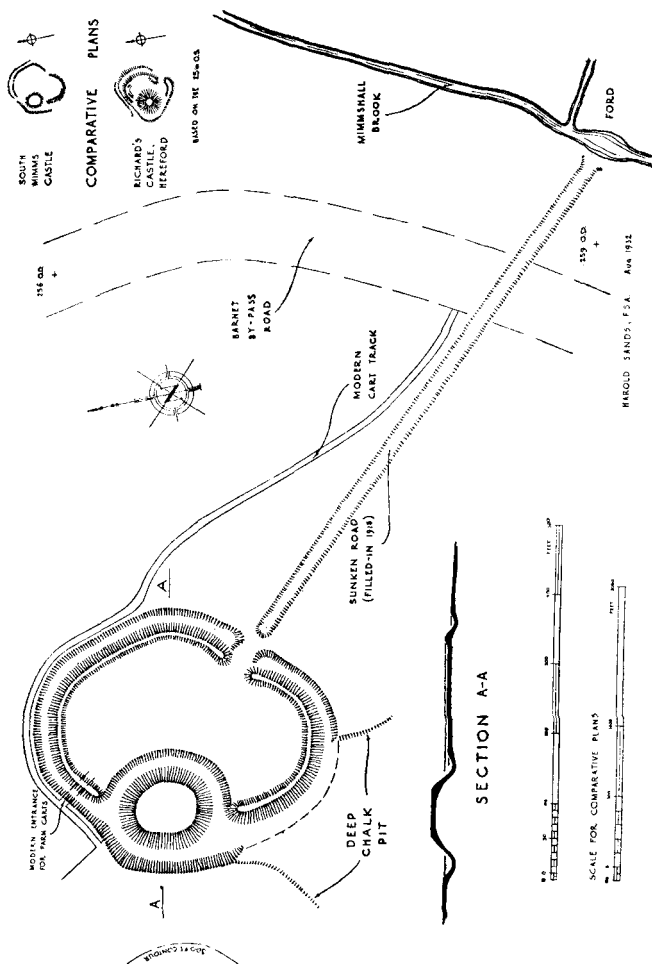
the autumn of 1918, while investigating the course of Grims Dyke, submitted an account and plan of the earthworks to the late A. Hadrian Allcroft as the most eminent authority on that subject. His reply, early in 1919, stated that "it is unquestionably an early Norman mound and bailey castle." The discovery was reported to the Earthworks Committee of the Congress of Archaeological Societies and published in their report for 1918-19, page 10.

Owing to the War, 1914-18, no notice was taken of the South Mymms castle at the time of its identification. Interest in the site has recently been revived, however, due to its re-discovery in 1931 by Mr. C. Lee Davis and his son, Mr. P. Davis, P.A.S.I., of the Mill Hill Historical Society, to whose energetic efforts the present undertaking is largely due.

In his Presidential Address to the Society of Antiquaries in April, 1933, Sir Charles Peers referred to the great need for scientific exploration of the early earth and timber castles and said that "Norman castle mounds whose occupation could be shown to have covered only a few decades, up to the major limit of a century, might yield pottery of eleventh and twelfth century date, which would help clear our ideas on that doubtful matter."

The castle is 14 miles N.N.W. of the City of London, four miles N. of Barnet and six miles S.E. of St. Albans. Standing at the eastern end of a spur of a low range of hills separating the Colne and Mymmshall brook valleys and overlooking the latter, the earthwork consists of an elliptical bailey some 350 by 280 feet with the longer axis north and south. The oval motte on the western side is some 180 feet across and reduces the bailey to about 160 feet; the entrance is from the S.E. rampart and from it a sunken road (filled in in 1918) traversed the 350 yards from the castle to a ford of the Mymmshall brook.

The present condition of the earthwork is excellent,



SOUTH MYMS CASTLE—GROUND PLAN.

although considerably overgrown with trees and undergrowth. The rampart rises some 12 feet above the ditch and the summit of the motte is about 20 feet above the bailey. On the S. the ditch has been encroached upon by two chalk-pits, the larger and older of which is believed to have been the source whence the flints were obtained for building the parish church of South Mymms.

Nothing definite is known of the castle's history, but, as it exceeded in size "Richard's Castle" in Herefordshire, which it closely resembled, it was evidently a place of importance.

At the Domesday Survey the site formed part of the vast estates of Geoffrey de Mandeville and continued in the twelfth century in the possession of the second Geoffrey. In 1142 the Empress Matilda gave him a charter, having among its clauses permission to build a castle anywhere on any of his fiefs: *that this is the missing castle is highly probable*. Geoffrey's revolt against Stephen, and death in 1144, would account for its early abandonment and subsequent decay.

The chief object of the present exploration is an attempt to discover traces of the timber defences. Although hundreds of castles of the type exist, this work has not previously been scientifically undertaken, and practically nothing is known about the subject. As the South Mymms castle is on chalk it is hoped to locate the postholes of the palisades and gate-tower. In addition sections will be cut to determine the exact contours of the original earthwork.

Permission to carry out excavations on the site has been granted by Lord Cranborne, the landowner, and the consent of the tenant, Mr. W. B. Field, has been obtained. The excavations will be made under the personal supervision of Dr. John F. Nichols, F.S.A., and if sufficient funds are forthcoming it is intended to issue a detailed report and plan to all subscribers soon after the work is completed.

The proposed excavations cannot be undertaken without incurring the expense of hired labour, purchase or loan of tools, photography and insurance. To enable this work to be started as soon as possible financial support is immediately required.

Subscriptions received or promised, up to the time of printing, include:—

	£	s.	d.
The British Archaeological Association ..	5	0	0
The London and Middlesex Archaeological Society .. .. .	2	2	0
The Mill Hill Historical Society .. .. .	1	1	0
Allen S. Walker .. .. .	1	1	0
Harold Sands .. .. .	5	5	0
L. Edwards .. .. .	1	1	0
The Vicar of South Mymms .. .. .	1	1	0
D. G. Denoon.. .. .	1	1	0
N. G. Brett-James .. .. .	1	1	0
C. Lee Davis .. .. .		10	6

Subscriptions should be sent to Mr. D. G. Denoon, the Hon. Treasurer, at 18, Langley Park, Mill Hill, N.W.7.

On behalf of the Committee,

HAROLD SANDS, *Chairman*.

D. G. DENOON, *Hon. Secretary and Treasurer*.

*July, 1933.*