LONDON'S FIRST CASTLE

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Immediately after the crowning of William the Conqueror in Westminster Abbey Church on Christmas Day, 1066, the new king's chronicler, William of Poitiers, tells us—"*Dies aliquot . . . morabatur Bercingis dum firmamenta quaedam in urbe contra mobilitatem ingentis ac feri populi perficerentur.*"[1] Although this is perhaps hardly a flattering description of the population of William's new capital city, there can, of course, be no doubt that it would have been highly unwise for him to remain in or about the city without some kind of *firmamentum* to protect him from any possibly hostile section of the populace.

The site adopted by William and his followers when laying out a castle within a walled town was usually an angle of the defences, which would be isolated from the rest of the town by a curved ditch, behind which the timber castle could be safely erected. This plan may clearly be seen at Rochester, Chichester and Lincoln, for instance, which at that time still had their Roman walls, as had the deserted site at Pevensey. Wallingford and Wareham were surrounded by earthen ramparts; within an angle of each town, William built a castle.

It will be appreciated that this building of castles *within* towns involved the destruction of the houses of those townspeople who were so unlucky as to happen to be living on the desired site. Although they were doubtless in most cases recompensed, there must have been some heartburning over the business.

When we consider, therefore, the sites of the two

castles—"The Tower" and "Baynard's Castle"—which were built in the east and west angles of the City of London, next the river, we may wonder whether William, his coronation as King of England duly accomplished, immediately set to work to pull down and remove several score of the dwellings of his new subjects, in order to build his two *firmamenta*. If so, one can hardly blame the ejected residents from feeling rather *feri* about it.

It is perfectly clear, of course, what William did about it—"*morabatur Bercingis*," says the chronicler—"he was waiting at Barking while the castles were being completed." Let us endeavour to ascertain just where he was waiting, and whether he was protected, during his temporary sojourn, by any kind of fortification.

Leaving London for a while, and turning to other cities in the neighbourhood, it will be appreciated that London was not the only place which had to be efficiently subjugated by means of castles. William had to make sure of the safety of his communications with Normandy. He had already erected castles at Hastings[2] and Dover,[3] and, probably, though not for certain, the deserted *castrum* of Pevensey had early received its castle.[4] There were, however, two important cities, both on the line of Watling Street to the coast, and both, with their Roman walls, a potential menace to that line. One might well suppose that William would have lost no time in throwing up castles at these two places, Rochester and Canterbury, and, as we know that, during the three months which elapsed between his coronation and his return to Normandy, he paid a visit as far afield as Winchester, he doubtless at that time[5] secured this ancient city also, with a castle.

These three cities of Rochester, Canterbury and Winchester still retained their Roman walls, and, although William might not require a dwelling-place within them, he would, at least, want to secure each place by building a castle. An extra-mural castle

would serve his purpose well enough, and such, in each of these three cases, he did actually build.

At Rochester he chose the highest—south-west—side of the Roman circumvallation, and, at its higher end, next the Medway, laid out a roughly rectangular castle against the Roman wall.[6]

At Canterbury the site of the first castle is known,[7] but has now utterly vanished beneath the railway station. It was against the highest—south-west—side of the Roman town. Its plan is now lost, but it was presumably also a rectangle.

At Winchester the castle was laid out as a rectangle against the Roman wall on the highest—the western—side of the circumvallation, and at the higher southern—end. The plan of the castle is now undiscoverable, but it is shown quite clearly on old maps.[8]

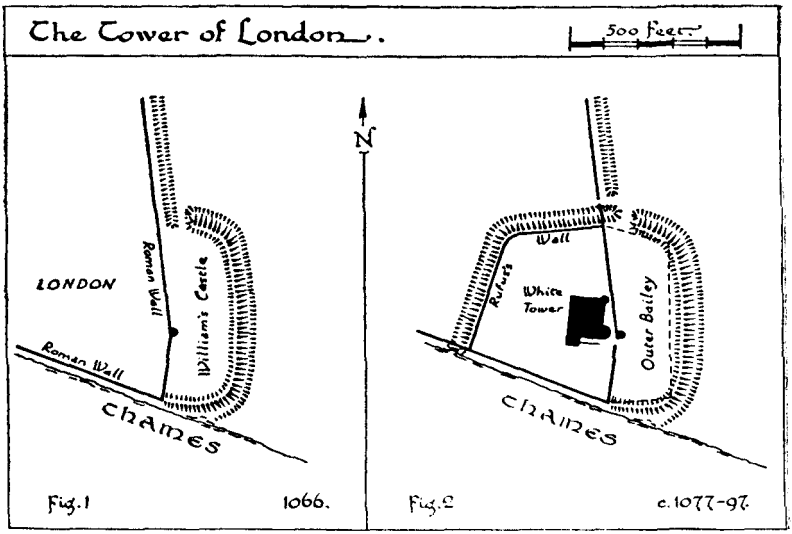
Returning to London, we find that the obvious place for the first extra-mural castle would be at the highest—eastern—side of the Roman circumvallation, and, for better protection, as at Rochester, at the river end of that side. The hill at this end of the city seems to have been known at the time as "Barking Hill," the name still being preserved by Barking Church (All Hallows by the Tower).

Was it this hill of Barking upon which William waited while the two intra-mural castles were being constructed? If so, can we find any trace of a castle there?

It has been seen that the two castles at Rochester and Winchester were laid out as rectangles against the Roman wall. The eastern two-fifths or so of the present Tower of London is just such a site. I would suggest, therefore, that here was the first castle of London. The area would be approximately that contained within the limits of the inner curtain, east of the Roman wall, and the Roman wall itself.

Fig. 1 shows approximately the suggested plan. The Roman ditch would probably have been filled in so as to bring the wall within the castle defences. The

lines of the "rectangle" would probably have been sweeping so as to facilitate the construction of the palisades surmounting the surrounding bank. The position of the entrance is, of course, quite imaginary, but it would seem the best place for it to have occupied, protected as it would have been by the wall. The river-bank may have been too marshy for an entrance at the other end. (Rochester and Winchester had their entrances in analogous positions.)



Let us consider the probable growth of the Tower of London from this beginning. William, once safely established on Barking Hill, would then supervise the clearing of the adjacent intra-mural sector, as well as that at the opposite end of the city, where "Baynard's Castle" was being built. (Winchester Castle never encroached into the city, remaining, until its destruction in the last century, on its original extra-mural site, but Rochester and Canterbury both followed the—presumed—example of London and expanded into their cities.)

The intra-mural castle of London completed, it presumably retained the original enclosure as an outer bailey (as at Rochester and Canterbury). If so, the entrance would have been through the Roman wall, near where the remains of the Wardrobe Tower may still be seen. Some time after 1077, Gundulf of Rochester started the building of the great keep, to-day known as the "White Tower," within the new bailey, and probably adjoining, and protecting, the entrance thereto from the—supposed—outer bailey. After the keep was completed, William Rufus, in 1097, organised a wide effort among the "shires owing works to London," and built a stone wall,[9] presumably on the line of his father's palisades, round the sides of the castle next the city, thus completing the perimeter of the Tower's stone defences. The masonry of the Wardrobe Tower seems to be of this period, but wall-towers were unknown at this early date, so Rufus may have restored the bastions of the Roman wall, as was done at Pevensey about this date.

These suggestions as to the origins of the Tower of London raise one interesting problem, hitherto apparently ignored by its historians. This is the matter of the sites of the various entrances to the citadel of London. At present there is no gatehouse of earlier date than the fourteenth century. Although it is fairly certain that the entrance followed the present route as early as the seventies of the thirteenth century,[10] it could not have done so until the construction of the first wharf at the beginning of the century,[11] and probably, in actual fact, dates from the period of the remodelling of the defences and the construction of the lists, some time in the last quarter of the century say, 1280.

Before there were lists, and before there was a wharf, the masonry defences must have consisted of a curtain wall, probably *temp.* Richard I,[12] on the line of Rufus's wall, most probably also continuing round the—supposed—outer bailey, on the line shown broken on Fig. 2.

Where was the gatehouse connected with this curtain? It must have been removed at the late thirteenth-century remodelling—but where *was* it? Traces of an early curtain can be seen all round the main ward of the Tower, except on the west, where it appears to have been rebuilt when the present gatehouses were constructed during the fourteenth century. Was the early gatehouse in this wall, facing the city?

If the theories set forth in this paper are correct, the Tower was entered, originally, from outside the city. It was so at Rochester, probably so at Canturbury, and at Winchester it remained so until the end, although at Rochester, after the outer bailey had been included by Henry III in the town defences, it was later abandoned, the old entrance beside the keep being deserted for a new gatehouse erected next the city.

If the writer of this paper may be considered to have established his theory of the existence of an original extra-mural entrance at London, comparable with that at Rochester, the problem then is—at what period was the entrance to the Tower made intra-mural? The position of the keep (nearly always built to overlook the entrance) suggests that the contemporary entrance was next it, through the Roman wall—again, as at Rochester, although the keep there was built half-a-century later.

The next important stage in the development of the castle was the erection of curtain walls, probably at the very end of the twelfth century. It would be of interest to be able to ascertain the position of the contemporary gatehouse, and any later ones which may have replaced it before the present route was adopted at some time during the thirteenth century. We might then be able to deduce the period at which the King of England felt sufficiently sure of the loyalty of his citizens of London to consider it safe for him to entrust to them the defence of the entrance to his castle and tower.

NOTES.

1. William of Poitiers. *Gesta Willelmi Ducis.*
2. Bayeux Tapestry.
3. William of Poitiers, *v. sup.*
4. Wace, *Roman de Rou.*
5. William of Poitiers, *v. sup.*
6. "Boley Hill."
7. Somner, *Antiquities of Canterbury*, and Clark, *Arch. Cantiana*, xv, 344, give notes on it.
8. See Godson's plan, reproduced in *Early Norman Castles*, Armitage, p. 234.
9. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.
10. The "bulwark" or barbican ditch was being completed in 1274. Clark, *M.M.A.*, Vol. II, p. 266.
11. A gate was, in fact, built (fell and was rebuilt) on the river front on the castle in 1240, but it was probably either a gate to the wharf or a watergate, probably a predecessor of St. Thomas's Tower.
12. The Bell Tower and portions of the south curtain adjoining it are supposed to be his work. The bases of Broad Arrow and Martin Towers, portions of the lower courses of the east curtain, and portions of the north curtain, also show similar masonry to that of the Bell Tower.