

Tickhill Castle.

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CURIOSLY enough, there is no mention of a castle at Tickhill in the great Domesday survey made in 1086, but obviously the great mound and bailey which still remains is of the type of castle constructed during the Conquest, and although the subjugation of the Midlands was not complete until some time after Senlac, we may be certain that these earthworks are datable to very early Norman times.

During the reign of the Conqueror, the great landowner hereabouts was Roger de Busli, a Norman hailing from Builly-en-Brai in Normandy and some sort of connexion of William's queen, Matilda. Little is known about him except that his share of the spoil of the Conquest was estates of sixty knights' fees spread over five counties, and mostly centring in this neighbourhood. He also had something to do with the foundation of the great Benedictine abbey at Blyth. The value of a knight's fee varied, but it averaged about £20 a year—probably equal to about £1,000 in our day—and instead of paying rent the knight undertook to attend his lord to war, fully armed and attended for forty days in each year. Busli was therefore at the head of a regiment of sixty fully-armed knights with a very substantial backing of pages and men-at-arms. All these knights' fees were concentrated into a great Honour of Tickhill, and this castle was the caput or head of the Honour.

Here was the principal residence of Roger de Busli, and here it was that the court of the Honour was held, according to tradition, in the great hall, which stood where the present residence is erected.

No doubt to this period of Tickhill's history we may assign the great mound and the outer earthworks with their wet moat, a portion of which still remains.

The next date in Tickhill's story is 1103, when Robert of Belesme, Earl of Chester, somehow or other comes on the scene. He was not a nice man. His father had been a companion of the Conqueror, but Robert himself first comes into prominence as a rebel against William and a strong supporter of the insurrection under the Conqueror's son, Robert, in 1077. Later, in 1088, he was prominent in the rebellion against Rufus, but changed sides, and was allowed to succeed to his brother's earldom of Shrewsbury. His earldom was on the Welsh marshes, and his character is well summed up by a chronicler who reports his proceedings against his unfortunate neighbours by saying that "he slew them like sheep, enslaved them and flayed them alive with nails of iron." On the accession of Henry I in 1100, Robert of Belesme sided with the dispossessed Prince Robert, and at the head of an army of 60,000 men made himself a nuisance throughout the land. However, he was cornered here at Tickhill, and besieged by a loyal army under the Bishop of Lincoln, and only saved his life by surrender. Henry was sick of him but did not have him executed, but further proceedings of a shady nature led, in 1112, to his final imprisonment, and there he remained till his death.

When Richard went off to the Crusades, he left his brother John more or less in charge of affairs in England,

and when he returned he found difficulty in recovering his possessions. In 1194, John fortified himself here at Tickhill, and was only ejected with difficulty by another warlike bishop, Hugh Pudsey, Bishop of Durham.

After Robert of Belesme's downfall, Tickhill became a royal castle, and so remained until comparatively recent times. It was frequently included in the dowry of queens, and it is interesting to reflect that at one time or another, it has been in the possession of

Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen to Henry II ;		
Eleanor of Castile	„ „	Edward I ;
Philippa of Hainault	„ „	Edward III ;
Henrietta Maria	„ „	Charles I ;
Catherine of Braganza	„ „	Charles II.

Of the ruins of the castle, little remains. The earth-works with the great mound some 60 feet high probably date from Roger de Busli's time—about 1090. The curtain wall and the foundations of the decagonal shell keep are most likely the work of Robert of Belesme. The gateway, however, is of great importance. In origin it had two segmental-headed arches twenty feet or so apart, and these would be closed by substantial doors secured by draw-bars. It had an upper chamber, but this seems to have been reconstructed in Tudor times. There is a doubt as to the date of this part of the work, but it is Norman, and it is not unlikely that it dates from Busli's time. The portcullis was introduced into England during the Edwardian period, and the Tickhill gatehouse was modernised during the Decorated period. It may be the work of John of Gaunt, who held the castle for a few years from 1372. At any rate, there

is the pointed arch typical of the 14th century, and the chase for the portcullis. The walls, which project beyond the gatehouse, formed a sort of barbican, in the floor of which was the drawbridge.

When Eleanor of Aquitaine, queen to Henry II, held Tickhill, she erected a chapel dedicated to St. Nicholas which, in the fulness of time, passed to the monks of Lenton in exchange for the chapel of St. Mary-in-the-Rocks in Nottingham Park. It is believed that the ancient door with its motto, "Peace and Grace be in this Place," was at one time the doorway to this chapel.

