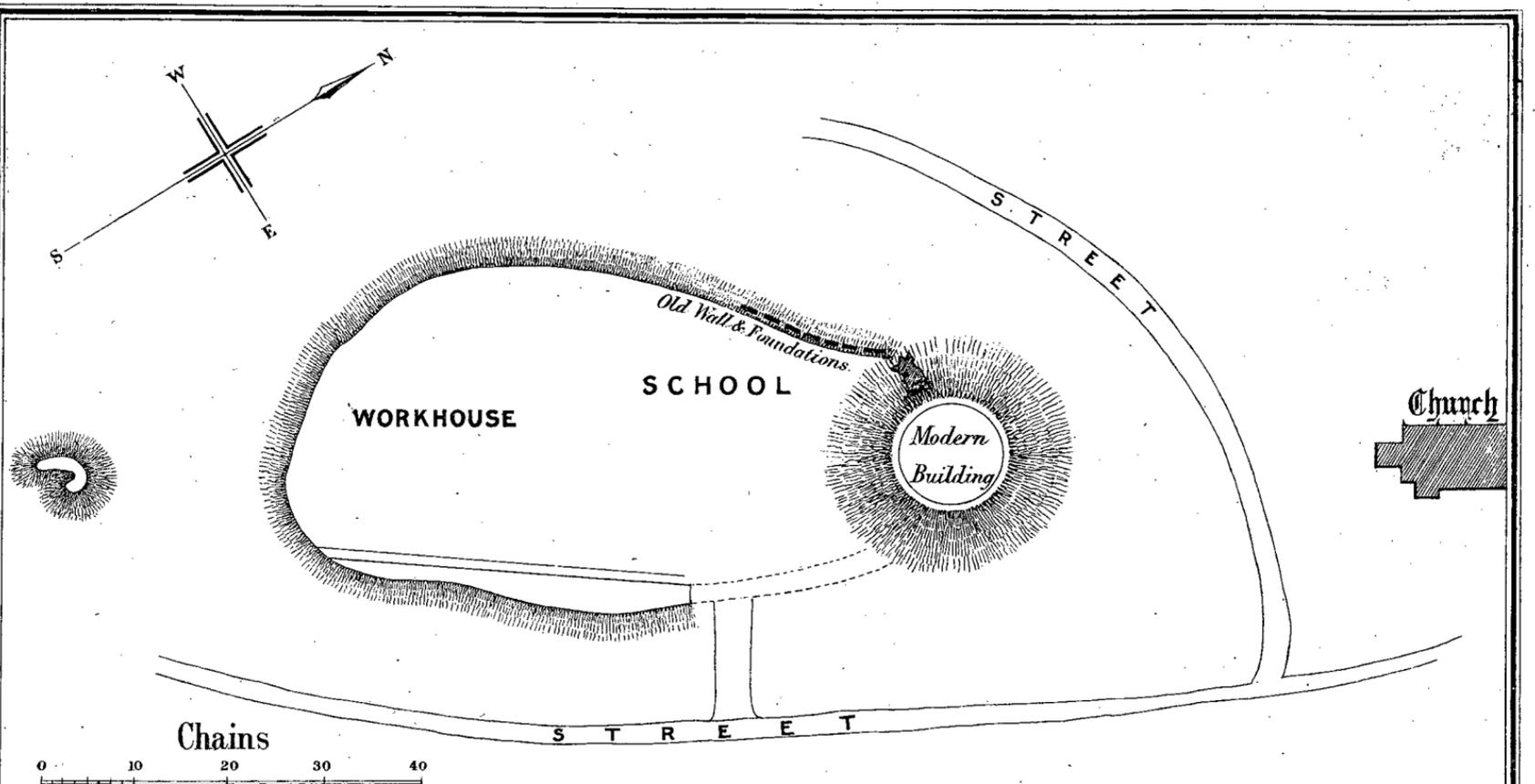


## EYE CASTLE.

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It is now just twenty years since our late valued member, Mr. Creed, contributed an historical notice of the Castle and Honour of Eye to this Society; and his Paper is printed in the 2nd Volume of our *Proceedings*.\* Since that time considerable progress has been made in the study of the antiquities of our land, and it would be no discredit to an archæologist of that time, to be able now to point out errors and misconceptions arising from the imperfect *data* on which opinions were then based. I can make but little pretence to superior information on this occasion, nor am I about to attempt to upset, except in one particular, the conclusions of an antiquary whose information and judgment were much higher than any that I can claim. But as it is probable there are many present here to-day who do not know the meaning of such ancient remains as we have before us, and do not see them with the understanding of more practised eyes, I have ventured, with all diffidence, to respond to the invitation that I should be the spokesman on arriving at the old Castle of Eye, and endeavour to set before you its origin, and perhaps to clear away some misunderstanding of this and similar antiquities. My only object, therefore, will be to supplement Mr. Creed's account, with reference to the *age* of this Castle, bringing up our information upon that point to the present state of our knowledge. With the rest of its history, and the families who owned and occupied it, I am not now concerned. Some persons, I believe,

\* P. 117.



E Y E C A S T L E .

have supposed this earthwork to be pre-historic, or at least to belong to the somewhat cloudy atmosphere of the days of King Arthur: while I have heard of a local guide who informed a visitor that it was the work of Sir Edward Kerrison's grandfather. Between these two extremes I think we may find some solid ground: and I hope to convince you that there is not much difficulty or mystery in the matter. The subject of military architecture, and of earthworks in connection with it, has been so fully explored of late, especially by the researches of French and German antiquarians, and in this country by Mr. G. T. Clark, who gave the admirable lecture on Framlingham Castle at the visit of the Royal Archæological Institute in 1869, that the origin of places such as this is now much more clear than it was. And we have nothing here other than is to be seen in a hundred such ancient sites. You see before you a considerable mound of earth, of circular or conical form, rising to a height of about 60 feet: and to the west of this mound, issuing, as it were, from its sides, a somewhat irregular earthwork, oval in its general shape, about 400 feet from east to west, and 250 from north to south. In the plan which Mr. Creed gives, the form of the whole earthwork is a long oval, with the sides quite parallel: but in the one I now exhibit, enlarged from the Tithe Commutation Map, the banks are seen to be by no means so regular, but more in the shape of a horseshoe. Also, the bank does not run *round* the mound, as you may see in the gardens at the east end, but enters it, as it were, on each side, the mound standing half in and half out of the enclosure. The present Union Workhouse stands within this bank, not far from its western end. Earthworks of this character are not at all uncommon in this country. In many cases they exhibit a more complicated series, apparently of different dates: succeeding occupants having added to them, according to the requirements of the warfare and defensive operations of their times. There is one at Haughley, not far from hence, very similar. In all to which I refer, the conspicuous feature is the lofty conical mound. We

naturally enquire, To what date are we to ascribe these works? Are they British, Roman, Saxon, Danish, or Norman? Mr. Creed has apparently given his adhesion to the view that these at least at Eye are Roman. As this is the only point on which I venture to contradict him, and I do strongly hold that nothing we see here is of Roman date, I think I may occupy your time properly for a few minutes in considering what the old earthworks we meet with are, and the grounds on which we may ascribe them to certain periods.

It has been held by some, that mounds of this character are *British*. There is no doubt that the British defended themselves, in cases of attack, by making earthen entrenchments, and sheltering themselves within them. Such earthworks exist, but they are chiefly found on the summits of high hills, and points of land overlooking the surrounding country. There they could construct fastnesses, tolerably secure from an invader. I do not imagine that the Iceni, in their mostly flat country, had many resources of this kind. Tacitus indeed mentions that the people of this tribe prepared to defend themselves against the forces of the Roman Governor, Ostorius Scapula, in a place which they had enclosed with ramparts of earth, with a narrow entrance to hinder the approach of cavalry; \* but that it was of little avail, and a few cohorts of auxiliaries attacked them, made a breach, and defeated them with great slaughter.† But we have no reason to think that they would, in such a case, erect a mound like that before us, which is more suitable for the permanent habitation of an owner or lord than for the stronghold of a tribe. The Britons in this part of the country would rather protect themselves in woods and marshes, and on the approach of danger, send their women and children to some strong fortress, as at Norwich, or Colchester, and fly there themselves, as a last resource, if they could. *Here*, we have rather, the signs of settled habitation: and a defence

\* Annals, xii., c. 31.

† Wright's Celt, Roman, and Saxon, p. 23.

from foes, it is true, but only so with the addition of stone or wooden walls, and a more advanced system of warfare. Besides, wherever there was a strong British fort, in a central position, the Romans are almost certain to have occupied and made use of it, and converted it to their own purposes. But here we see nothing of a quadrangular bank, such as the Romans would have added. It is simply the earthen substructure of a keep, with the addition of a base court, to contain other outbuildings and walls. It is well to remember that the Britons lived together *as a tribe*, not a private family. Hence their defences must be sought for where a tribe would take refuge; hence the names of separate places are *seldom* British: they had nothing like our Saxon Hundreds and parishes: while the names of conspicuous natural objects, as hills and rivers, are *almost always* British. The tribe settled or wandered, as occasion required, but had no marked divisions of land to leave their names in: had little or no *system* of fortifications, as of an united empire: *that* appeared as soon as the all-powerful Roman introduced his Imperial rule: and had no personal habitations, or municipal divisions: *they* appeared when the Northman and Saxon came in, and marked out his shire and hundred: *hemmed* himself within his "ham" or home, as at Mendlesham: enclosed his "ton," as at Bacton and Cotton: strengthened himself in his "burgh," as at Finborough: cultivated domestic arts at his "worth," as Brayesworth: or his "stead": built, if he were a lord of manors, his aula or "hall": and, as here, made it secure, and took advantage of ground rising out of water, at his "Ea." There may, no doubt, have been found some British remains, as urns, in the neighbourhood: but that is no uncommon thing, and can in no way prove the earthworks before us to be of so early a date. Probably no one here considers them so, and I need not detain you with the question any further.

Next, if not British, are they Roman? Mr. Creed appears to lean to that opinion, although his words may admit of a different construction. He speaks of the mount

as the hill "upon which in Roman times the watch-tower was erected," and the base court as a "constabulary": and at the same time says if it be not Roman nor British, the few remains of walls show the presence of *Norman* builders, which is true enough, but a long jump in history. He passes over the period of Saxon occupation, which to me is the most important. Roman camps were of three principal kinds: of none of which is there any appearance here: exploratory intrenchments for surveying; temporary summer camps for a season of invasion; and permanent stations for holding in subjugation, like Burgh Castle, or Caister by Norwich.

There is no need to enter now into a long account of the Roman system of castramentation. The chief thing to be borne in mind is that in a Roman camp we are not to look for a *tribal* fastness, as in more primitive times, nor for a fortified *home*, as in later days, but for one of a series of defensible positions having relation to an *empire*; a link in a chain of such camps, occupying and overawing the whole country. Mr. Creed did see this, or thought he did, at Eye. Had there been here a quadrangular earthwork, with other proofs of Roman occupation, it would be easy to draw a line from Colchester to Norwich, and to say with some show of probability that it must have passed through Eye: or any other spot on the way where it might be desired to locate or camp, to suit a theory. But although there may be instances of irregularly-shaped Roman earthworks on hill tops, and in British sites, I venture to assert that had the Roman General planted a camp at Eye, it would surely have shown all the usual signs of one, in its systematic form and regular outline, with no steep mound at all. Roman coins, and a hypocaust, have also been found at Eye, but of course nothing can be asserted as to the age of these earthworks from so frequent a circumstance. Dr. Maclear, in his very clever and valuable lecture, "Peeps at Eye in the olden times," \* makes perhaps rather too much of the find-

\* *Bishop. Eye, 1862.*

ing of some hundred gold Roman coins here in 1781. I possess 10 of them. But of what reigns are they? They belong to the times of Gratian, Valentinian, Theodosius, Arcadius, and Honorius. At that time the Roman empire in Britain was at the last stage of decay. The last legion left soon after the year 400 A.D., and it was Honorius who in 410 sent letters to the cities of Britain, \* exhorting them to provide for their own safety, as Northern invaders were beginning to make inroads, as they were doing in Gaul. These coins were found in a leaden box at Clint Farm, and are quite fresh. If they prove anything, it is that they were hidden for safety when a Roman fled from the Northmen. A camp of soldiers removing would probably have been able to take them with them. The Romans were everywhere, more or less, in Britain, for 400 years. We must take surer ground before we can establish any claim for the earthworks at Eye to have been fashioned by Roman spades.

Holding, then, the opinion that there is nothing here of the British or Roman age, may we entertain the belief that Eye Castle is the work of the settlers from the Continent, --Angles, Saxons, or Danes,—who poured their families into Britain in the succeeding centuries, and so completely made it their own that it has ever since been *England*? Perhaps some would say that this is taking too early a date, and that there is nothing here but the work of the Norman. I venture, with all diffidence, to consider that these earthworks *are* Saxon, adapted to Norman use. We all know that from the days of Hengist and Horsa, the nations of the opposite shores of the Continent became the gradual possessors of Britain. They came, as soon as a peaceable settlement was assured, with all the laws and customs of a nation, with family names, and with what has set so distinct a mark upon their life, a strong love of *the home*, so that wherever they settled they called the lands after their own names, and set bounds and divisions which denote their

\* Zosimusvi., c. 10. Wright, p. 385.

habitation to this day. These are our own ancestors. They were the "English," and from them the greater part of our present national and municipal life has its origin. We still call ourselves by the same names: our villages still express the family name of the first owners: our numerals, the days of our week, and all common objects of the farm and field and country, are scarcely altered: and the language is virtually the same. What was then *new* is now only *old England*: and long may it so remain. When the country became tolerably settled, and the manors duly bounded, the owners would need no more protection around their home than such as was afforded by a wooden stockade or paling, together with the natural defence of wood and water. But the chief lord, the holder of a great lordship, or *Honour*, such as this at Eye (which means a lordship having manorial rights over other lordships and manors) would surround himself with stronger defences; and as a matter of fact we know that such was the custom with the Saxons. I cannot follow a better authority on this subject than that of the best living exponent of military antiquities, Mr. G. T. Clark. In a valuable paper printed in the 24th volume of the *Journal of the Archæological Institute*,\* he observes that "these earthworks occur in most parts of England, and especially in those provinces north and east of Watling Street, so full of Danish names and traditions, and they are found still more commonly in Normandy, where they are the known strongholds of Barons of Danish or Norwegian descent. On the other hand, they are by no means unknown in Saxon England, and in the south and west, and upon the Welsh border, where the Saxons are known to have penetrated. Many of these works also, in England, are recorded in the Saxon chronicle as the work of Saxon monarchs, and they were certainly, in the centuries preceding the Conquest, the seats of Thanes and Earls of Saxon and Danish blood. Sometimes further to complicate the question, they are found mixed up with Roman works, so that they have in part been regarded as

of Roman origin. These earthworks may thus be described. First was cast up a truncated cone of earth, standing at its natural slope, from 50 feet to 100 feet diameter at the top, and from 20 feet to 50 feet high. This was usually, perhaps always, formed from the contents of a surrounding ditch, now often filled up. Connected with this mound, or *motte*, was a base court or enclosure, commonly oval, but now and then circular, or even rectangular, contained within a high bank of earth, outside of which was also a ditch. Usually the mound was near one end of the enclosure, in a focus of the ellipse, but not unfrequently it stood on the line of the bank, at one end or in one side of the enclosure (as it does here), and thus formed a part of the outer defence. The entrance was by a notch in the bank, usually at the further end from the mound, and the approach wound round the exterior of the ditch, so as to be commanded from the bank. Outside this base court or ward, but applied against it, and often covering the entrance, was generally a second enclosure, also within a bank and ditch, and in many cases, on the other side of the base court, a third enclosure. Sometimes all three were in a straight line, the mound being in the central space, and sometimes they formed a sort of triangle. These works were very rarely indeed concentric. The earthworks are all of the original fortresses that now remain to us, but there is not wanting evidence of the manner in which they were completed. Upon the mound was the house of the lord, of timber, approached by a steep bridge, laid across the ditch, and extending some way up the mound. Around the base court, ranged along the scarp or inner edge of the ditch, and upon the bank, was a strong and close palisade of wrought timber; and within this were the timber houses and sheds for the dependents and the cattle. Probably the outer defences were less strongly defended, and intended to contain cattle alone. The palisade was reinforced by occasional wooden turrets. The Scandinavians disliked enclosures of masonry, and were not adepts at its construction. With the use of timber their seafaring experience had made

them familiar. These works are often so complete" (in Normandy) "as to tell their own story, but M. de Caumont" (in his lectures on military architecture), "cites a contemporary account, written about the end of the 11th century, which places the whole arrangement graphically before us. The author is a certain Colmin, Archdeacon of Terouane, in his life of S. John, a canonized prelate of that Church. 'The rich and powerful,' he intimates, 'first secure a strong place for their personal safety, and the keeping of their prisoners and their wealth. They commonly throw up a mound of earth, surrounded with a deep ditch, upon the inner edge of which they establish a stout palisade of squared timber, strongly bound together, equal for defence to a wall, and strengthened by turrets or towers. Upon the centre of the mound is placed the residence, only to be approached by a steep bridge across the ditch.' This description is illustrated by the Bayeux tapestry, upon which is represented the taking of Dinan. Here is seen the conical hill, surmounted by a timber building, 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. Such having been the nature of a Northman's or Saxon's castle, it may be readily understood how they came to be so rapidly constructed, and so readily destroyed." Mr. Clark gives a number of instances, from the Saxon Chronicle, of the record of the construction of such castles. The earliest recorded is Bamborough, thrown up by Ina in 547, defended originally by a hedge and afterwards by a wall. Ina also constructed Taunton Castle, destroyed by Queen Ethelburga in 722. Merca was the Saxon lord of Bourn in 870, where part of the mound remains. In 913 King Edward constructed the northern fortress at Hertford, the southern fortress south of the Lea, and fortified Witham, where the earthworks yet remain: in 920 Maldon: in 922 Stamford: in 924 he threw up a fort near Bakewell in the Peak. Many other strong places correspond in position to the aulcæ of Saxon thanes recorded in *Domesday*. "When, therefore,

(adds Mr. Clark), we are told that the Conqueror found no castles in England, and that *Domesday Book*," (20 years after), "enumerates but 49, we are to understand that this limits the term to towers of masonry, such as had come into use in Normandy: for it is very certain that every Honour and almost every Soke and large estate had its fortified aula, and probably the residences even of its ordinary thanes were entrenched."

With these facts before us, and knowing that Eye was the seat of an Honour in the time of Edward the Confessor, were we to come as strangers into the place, we might do so with the full expectation of finding at Eye just such a mound and bank as we have before us, and I think I am justified in asserting that this is the old residence of Edric, Falconer to Edward the Confessor, and probably of his predecessors, afterwards held by grant of the Conqueror by the family of Malet, who no doubt erected a more substantial stone building on the mound, which in its turn has fallen to decay, and disappeared, except a few traces of masonry of that or a later date, still to be discerned. "It is this grafting of the Normans upon the Saxon seats," as Mr. Clark observes, "which has preserved and enhanced the name and fame of the latter. In Normandy," (where there are found very numerous earthworks exactly resembling these, and we must remember that the Normans were themselves *Northmen* of an earlier stock, with similar habits and traditions as our own ancestors), "the lords of the castles spring from those who actually constructed them and inhabited them from the commencement: whereas in England the corresponding families were extinguished, and their places taken by Norman intruders. As the Saxons, like the Normans, upon their permanent settlement in a country, and their acquisition of landed property, erected their estates into a manor or lordship, and attached this to the residence of the lord, it became very much the interest of the Anglo-Norman who got a grant of Saxon lands, to place himself as far as possible in the very place of the Saxon thane, abiding in the 'aula,' which was

the social and judicial as well as the military centre of the fief, and to which the tenants were accustomed to look for protection and justice. Hence it is that the castles of almost all the earlier Norman barons show evidence of a pre-Norman occupation, and have a Saxon history. Where this is not the case, as in the later and often inferior castles, the grand characteristic—strong earthworks,—is wanting, and their place supplied by defences of masonry, and a ditch of moderate dimensions.”

To suppose that de Malet, who held the Honour of the Conqueror, himself erected these works at that time, would be quite a gratuitous assumption, when we know of previous lords in Saxon times, and can point to no other residence in the neighbourhood, likely to have been their seat. It seems to me fair to conclude that we have here the old earthworks of the Saxon lords, a thousand to twelve hundred years old, but little altered by time, and we may hope, long to last still in proof of the antiquity and importance of this ancient town. The subsequent history of the descent of the Honour through many families of rank to the present owner, Sir E. C. Kerrison, is so fully given by Mr. Creed in the paper already referred to, that I need not repeat the particulars again. The many other associations of the times during which the old mound has stood here, resisting all change, have been admirably brought out by Dr. Maclear in his lecture; and these also I will not take up more time by recalling.

C. R. MANNING.