

NOTES ON THE EXCAVATION OF TEMPLE HILL,
DUNWICH. DECEMBER, 1935.

By HAROLD E. P. SPENCER.

Temple Hill, so named from its proximity to the establishment of the Knights Templars, is situated at the Dunwich end of the remains of Pales Dyke, and it is now clear that it was a look-out post, or possibly a beacon connected with the defences of the city. Major E. R. Cooper informs me that before the trees of the wood were planted a very extensive view could be obtained from the top which is twenty feet above the general ground level.

The mound is now situated at the extreme edge of the sea cliff and will undoubtedly be largely destroyed when the next fall occurs; but, as will be seen from the tracing of an old map (probably circa 1300, which shows the former extent and populous nature of this one time important city), this relic of ancient Dunwich was formerly about three miles from the sea.

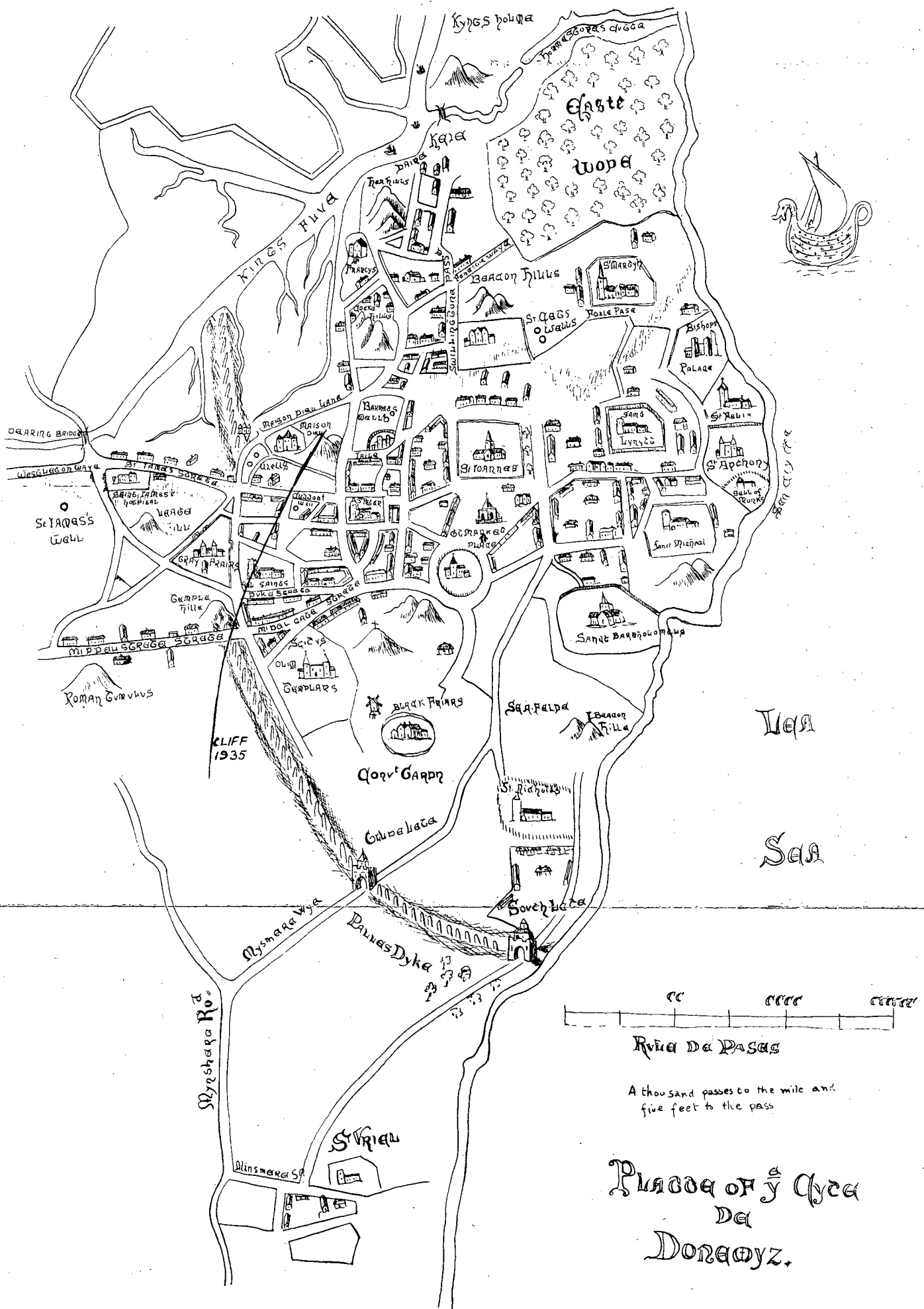
Suggestions having been made that the hill might be a tumulus, Captain M. Barne, in whose grounds it is situated, approached the Ipswich Museum authorities for advice and assistance, and following upon an inspection of the site by Mr. J. Reid Moir and the Curator, Mr. G. Maynard, the writer's services were, with the approval of the Chairman of the Museum Committee, Alderman W. R. Elliston, loaned to Capt. Barne in connection with the excavations which he proposed to carry out.

A Section appears herewith showing the structure of the hill.

At two feet from the top just under the humus is a layer or platform of yellow chalky boulder clay about four inches thick, six feet wide and eleven feet long, having uneven edges.⁽⁹⁾ It is surrounded by a trench 18 inches wide and one foot deep. The clay rests on a lenticle of gravel, four feet thick in the middle and filling a hollow about 14 feet in diameter; nothing was found in this material.⁽⁸⁾

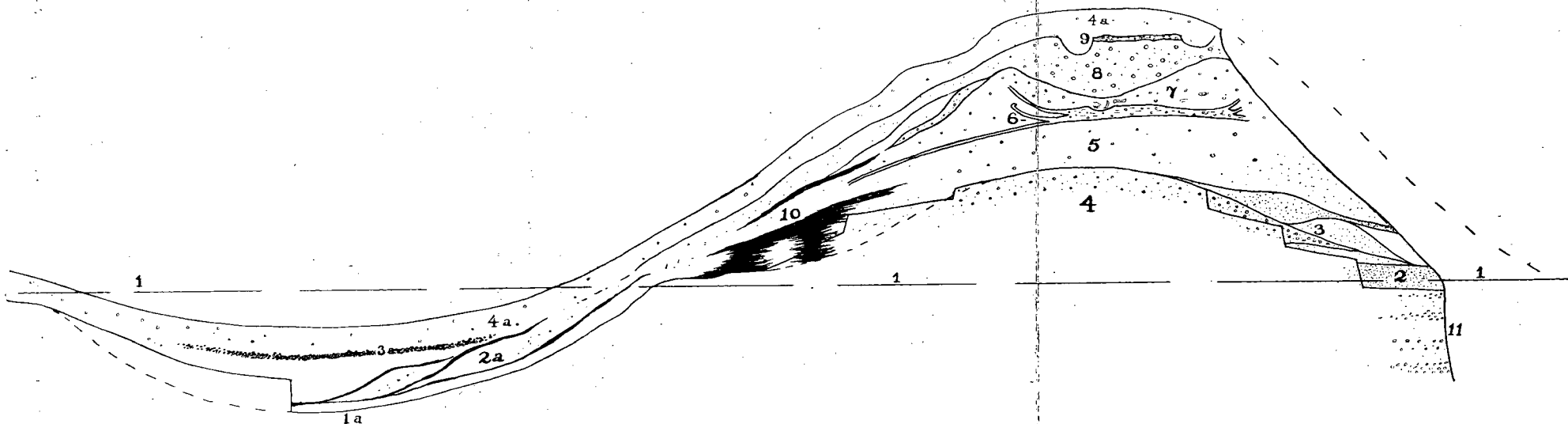
The soil forming the hollow is a hard grey earth, rich in bones, oyster and periwinkle shells, fragments of pottery and small pieces of burnt clay.⁽⁷⁾ In the middle of the depression, where the grey earth is only eight inches thick, was found part of the skull of a horse (or ass), bones of sheep (or deer) and ox, phalanges of large and small mammals and a few vertebrae of mammals and fish. Most of the pottery is coarse grey or brownish ware but a few fragments of finer ware with green and other glazes also occurred, all typically mediæval and of 13th—14th century date.

Underlying the soil just described is a second layer of clay, from seven inches to one foot thick with very ragged edges (see section⁽⁶⁾);



From a tracing of an old map of Dunwich by Hamlet Watling, date unknown, but probably about 1300, as St. Anthony's Chapel is shown which was destroyed in 1330.

"Where the original "Platt" mentioned by Agas is deposited I am unable to say; but Vertue had seen on a large skin of vellum, a plan of the Town and boundaries of Dunwich with its churches, adjacent villages, etc., and several remarks made by Radulphus Agas in 1589." (H. Watling).



SECTION IN DITCH.

- 1a. Bottom of ditch covered with fine hard grey sand.
- 2a. Patches of fine sand, separated by and resting on carbonaceous sand.
- 3a. Stratum of pebbles.
- 4a. Humus.

SECTION THROUGH TEMPLE HILL, DUNWICH. DECEMBER, 1935.

- 1. General level of cliff top.
- 2. Dark ferruginous sand.
- 3. Grey stoney earth.
- 4. Gravel core of hill, probably representing Pales Dyke.
- 5. Hard grey earth with bones, etc.
- 6. Lower layer of yellow chalky boulder clay.
- 7. Grey earth with bones, pottery, etc.
- 8. Gravel filling hollow in grey earth.
- 9. Upper layer of clay with trenches.
- 10. Black carbonaceous sand.
- 11. Present face of sea cliff.

thinning and sloping slightly towards the sea. Below the middle of the hollow referred to above, there is a shallow hole three inches deep in the section shown and two feet across, but in the opposite side of the excavation, about five feet away, it was rather more than twice this depth; possibly this was a trench designed to drain the hollow. Circumstances, however, did not permit this to be investigated.

The clay rests on grey earth⁽⁵⁾ similar to that in which the hollow is formed but so hard that it was impossible to dig, and a pick had to be used, so that the bones, etc., were generally broken. This earth is abundantly sprinkled with small black specks, which, to judge from a few larger fragments, appear to be charcoal. There were no signs of hearths found at any point during the whole of the work, but evidence was not wanting that fires had been made on or near the site over a long period. This earth passed downward into dark and light mottled sand which continued to the base of the hill on the east side, where it lies on a dark ferruginous sand⁽²⁾ in which an axis vertebrae was found. The core of the mound⁽⁴⁾ is gravel as is also Pales Dyke which will be described later.

The west or landward side of the hill exhibits a marked difference in structure. There is a mixture of earths and sand, the latter predominating, with a general slope toward the outer edge of the hill. Here are several streaks and patches of black material⁽¹⁰⁾ which has subsequently proved to be a mixture of sand and carbonaceous matter, probably wood ashes thrown from the top of the hill. This side of the mound slopes down to the bottom of a ditch which was originally about 10 feet deep, but has been filled to six feet from the bottom; it is forty feet wide, and the distance from the outer edge to the present cliff top is 100 feet, the present diameter of the hill being 60 feet.

At the bottom of the ditch the filling consists of very hard and compact grey sand with an occasional bone or potsherd^(1a); over this is a thin layer of blackened sand on which rest patches of sand separated by streaks of black material obviously thrown or drifted down from above, where it occurs in large quantity (see section)^(2a). At the point where the black carbonaceous sand is shown in the section as a mass⁽¹⁰⁾, the base rests on fine sand but the edges became covered with the sand, possibly by wind action; this process was repeated over a long period of time for the combined thickness of the layers is about four feet, while at the top the material is spread over a considerable area, the extent of which it was not convenient to investigate. That this was not the site of fires is borne out by the total absence of pieces of charcoal which would be found if this was the place where fires had been made.

Near the top of the ditch filling is a stratum of small pebbles about nine inches thick resembling a road bed^(3a), but it does not seem likely that it is a road as there is known to have been a road or track on the other side of Pales Dyke. However, it seems that the stones must have been deliberately put there and it would be interesting to investigate further before the ditch disappears down the cliff.

Pales Dyke was an earthen bank or rampart surmounted by a palisade which extended from the sea at Minsmere to the Kings Flue or river and formed the defences of the city on the land side, of which only about one hundred feet is left between Temple Hill and the sea cliff. This part that is left is composed of gravel; it appears to have passed through the hill which indicates that the hill was constructed somewhat later, certainly later than the Charter granted by King John in 1199. The length of the Dyke in March, 1752, was 133 poles 13 feet; old inhabitants of the district remember it with a hedge and large trees on top. A long stretch of the rampart to the north of Temple Hill was demolished by the Greyfriars, who obtained licence to do so.

The burnt clay which is scattered throughout the upper part of the mound is in small pieces, very few being as large as two inches square; these larger fragments are smooth on one side and dark in colour on the surface, while the remainder of the mass is red; it also contains crumbs of chalk. Possibly these are remains of a hut floor which was either burnt down: or on the floor of which a fire was habitually made.