

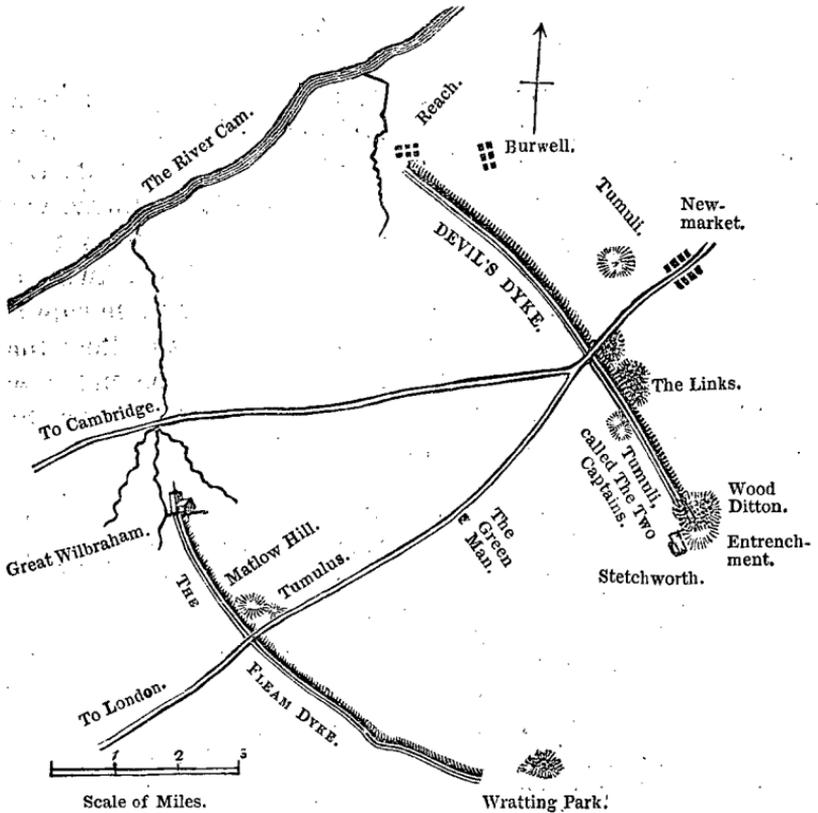
THE DEVIL'S DYKE, NEWMARKET.

[READ JUNE 13, 1850.]

NEWMARKET and its neighbourhood possessed, till within a few years, numerous evidences of the warlike races which antiently occupied our Island; but many of the tumuli which studded the country, with fragments of trackways and embankments, have been cleared away, without, it is much to be regretted, even a note of their contents, form, or precise locality. Most remarkable earthworks, however, extending from the woody uplands on one side to the wide expanse of fen on the other, remain to attest the presence and the labours of contending races. Camden enumerates five almost parallel dykes or ditches. The first, called Brent Ditch, between Melbourne and Foulmire; the second about 5 miles long, running from Hinxton, by Hildersham, to Horseheath; the third, called Fleam (Flight) Dyke, or from the length of its course, Seven Mile Dyke, from Balsham to Fen Ditton; the fourth, the greatest and most entire, popularly called the Devil's Dyke, from Woodditton to Reach, a distance of 7 or 8 miles; and a fifth, the least of all, "shewethe itselفة two miles from hence, betweene Snailwell and Moulton." The courses of the four first of these ditches are shewn on Lysons's map of Cambridge-shire. Brent or Brant Ditch, says that author, is a slight work of the kind, proceeding from Heydon, in Essex, pointing nearly to Barrington, continuing over part of Foulmire, till it ends in a piece of boggy ground. The second ditch is seen about a mile south of Bournbridge, lying upon declining ground between Abingdon Wood and Pampisworth, pointing towards Cambridge. Towards the middle it has been filled up for the Ickneld way to pass over it, which shows it to be older than the road. It is very large and deep, but has no bank on either side. The Fleam

Dyke still remains very entire between Great Wilbraham and Balsham, where it serves as a boundary to the hundred which takes its name from it, and where the works resemble those of the Devil's Dyke, but are not quite so large.

The annexed cut*, copied from the Ordnance map, will give a good idea of the course and relative bearings of the Fleam and Devil's Dykes.

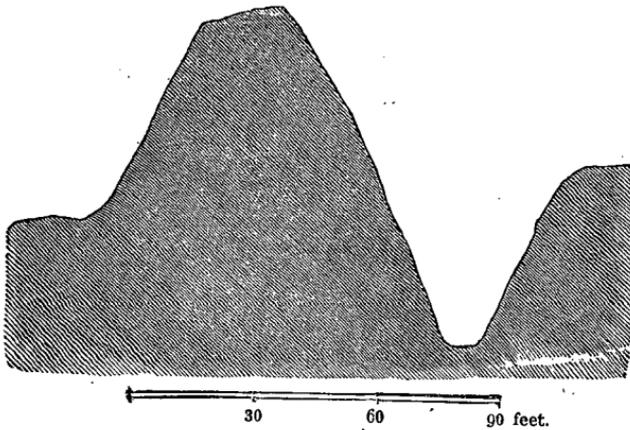


The Devil's Ditch commenced probably at its southern extremity, where the Ordnance map marks the site of an antient entrenched camp at Woodditton (*i. e.* the ditch-town by the wood), and continued northward, across Newmarket heath, in a straight course of eight miles, to a

* For the use of this and the other two wood blocks, the Institute are indebted to the liberality of the proprietors of the Gentleman's Magazine,—a

periodical peculiarly devoted to all matters connected with history and archaeology.

stream near the village of Reach, whose appellation from the Saxon *ræcan* indicates, says the late Mr. A. J. Kempe*, the point to which the dyke reached or extended; so that its right flank rested on streams and marsh lands, and its left on a forest tract. "The vallum being thrown up on the eastern side shews that the entrenchment was intended to secure the plain of Newmarket against an enemy approaching from the westward, by a barrier impregnable if properly defended. Such indeed it must have been, for the escarpment of the rampire from the bottom of the ditch in the most perfect places measures not less than 90 feet, and is



SECTION OF THE FOSS AND VALLUM.

inclined at an angle of 70 degrees. On the top of the rampart is a *cursus* or way 18 feet in breadth, sufficiently wide for the passage of cavalry or chariots. Here Mr. Kempe, in the year 1845, thought he could distinguish faint traces of a parapet of turf. The whole was probably strengthened by a line of palisades or stakes. It will be readily imagined how strong a defence this steep and bristled wall of earth must then have formed. Even now, to ascend its outward base from the bottom of the ditch is a feat of no small difficulty and labour. The excavation for the work was made in the solid stratum of chalk which lies on Newmarket plain next under the vegetable mould; the rampire was doubtless faced with green sods, and nature has continued the surface of sward to this day." Northward of Woodditton are some tumuli, in front

* Gent. Mag. Jan. 1845, p. 25.

of the dyke, called traditionally "the Two Captains". At the spot called the Links, where the high road from London



VIEW LOOKING TOWARDS WOODDITTON.

cuts through it, and the antient Ickneld street crosses it, the bold character of the work is well seen; but on the race-course it has been broken through in order to form apertures for the running horses at places to which the general name of gates (*i. e.* gaps) has been given, and the rains of centuries have had more effect in reducing its features. At Reach it is very perfect for about a mile. Here, according to the measurements of Lysons, the slope of the vallum measures about 52 feet on the west and 26 feet on the east side; and the whole of the works are about 100 feet in width.

At what early period of our history this remarkable work was constructed is a matter of conjecture. It has been variously assigned to the Aborigines, the Romans, the Saxons, and the Danes. We know but too little of the ancient Britons to find much authority for attributing the work to them. From what we do know they appear to have relied more upon their woody heights and marshy forests than upon any extensive range of artificial protection; but the passage of the Ickneld Street across both the Fleam and Devil's

Dykes, is adduced in support of the British origin. The late Mr. North, in a letter to the late Mr. Ashby, of Barrow, commenting on Dr. Mason's Essay on Roman Roads, preserved in a volume of MSS. in the possession of W. Mills, Esq., of Saxham Hall, says it was thrown up by the Icenii against the Emperor Claudius. "What led me to this opinion (he writes) was the strait Roman way from Tilbury on the Thames to Writtle (the supposed Cæsaromagus), thence straight to Braintree, and from thence winding to Haverhill (where another road from Colchester to Godmanchester intersects it.) This seems to be the only route he could take from the Thames shore to the Icenii, for the river Stoure and the woodlands of Suffolk left no advantageous access to the eastward. This answers your observation of it; from which part the enemy was expected by the ditch being made on the outside from the Icenii." A writer in the Gentleman's Magazine for Jan. 1845 attempts to derive the name from *diphwys*, the British word for a steep or precipice, which he remarks is applicable to all the places popularly bearing the name of his satanic majesty; as the Devil's Dyke near Brighton, the Devil's Punchbowl, and the Devil's Den, in Surrey. But unfortunately for this conjecture the prefix is not confined to steep earthworks. Near Boroughbridge, in Yorkshire, are four huge stones of an upright form called the Devil's Bolts or arrows; and three upright stones at Stanton Harcourt, in Oxfordshire, are known as the Devil's Quoits.

Mr. Kempe believed the Devil's Dyke, with perhaps the other lines of a similar character in the district, to have been constructed by the Roman legions at an early period. The covering of a line of country by a long extended vallum and ditch was a tactical practice with the Romans*, and he instances as similar works, the Wansdyke†, in Wiltshire; Watts's Dyke, on the borders of Wales; Grims-

* The Roman stone wall from the Tyne to the Solway has a vallum or turf wall running nearly parallel with it, falling short however of its extent by about 3 miles at each end. It consists of a deep ditch, accompanied near its northern edge by a bold mound, and on its southern by two mounds of earth. These lines of earth-works are always

perfectly parallel with each other, and they are usually found in close companionship with the stone wall. The earthworks are usually ascribed to Hadrian, the stone wall to Severus.—*Journ. of Brit. Arch. Assocn.* v. 201.

† Proved by Mr. Kemble to have been originally called Woden's-dyke.

ditch*, crossing the Roman road from Old Sarum to Dorchester; the great Grimsdyke, in Scotland, thirty miles in length, constructed by Lollius Urbicus, Governor of Britain in the time of Antoninus Pius; and the line of entrenchment, nineteen miles in length, thrown up by Cæsar from Lake Leman to Mount Jura, to check the devastations of the Helvetii. To this is to be added the superstitious belief which attaches to many Roman works, and attributes them to diabolical agency. The common name for the Grimsdyke is the Wizard's Dyke; the great Roman wall upon the left bank of the Danube, which continues in an unbroken line for more than one hundred and fifty Roman miles, and was constructed as a boundary, between the years 276 and 280, is known by the name of the Devil's Wall, and the term Devil's Highway is given to many Roman roads in Britain. Remains have been found in the district, shewing that the Romans had complete possession of the country; but the accounts of those turned up in the more immediate vicinity of the dyke are not so authentic as could be wished. Battely† relates that several Roman coins were found in levelling a passage through it, probably that known as the Running gap; but Mr. Ashby in the MS. volume before quoted, remarks, "who can think that Roman coins are lodged all along a vast bank of seven miles in length? and it was in levelling that to fill up the ditch, or widen a former passage through it, that the coins are said from hearsay to have been found." The additions of Bishop Gibson to *Camden's Britannia* [p. 397], record "that in digging through the ditch on Newmarket Heath, near Ixning, they met with some antient pieces. A late author has affirmed that they bore the inscriptions of divers Roman Emperors, but upon what authority I know not." At a later period, during some improvements in the Exercise Ground in 1827, several tumuli were removed.

* At the meetings of the Archæological Institute, at Salisbury, in 1849, and at Oxford, in 1850, the subject of the various lines of earthwork was brought under notice by Edwin Guest, Esq., F.R.S., who considered that the Grimsdyke was constructed by a tribe living on the north side of it, as a protection against some other tribe which possessed the country to the south of it, and he

showed that the southern side was held for a considerable period by the invading Saxons, and the northern side by the retreating Britons, who by very slow degrees, and after a very severe struggle, were driven into Wales. They were totally routed near Bath.—*Gent. Mag.* Oct. 1849, pp. 405-6.

† *Antiq. S. Edmundi Burgi*, pp. 40-41.

In the centre of one of them was found an urn of rude construction containing ashes, with some beads, two coins supposed to be Roman, and a fragment of a cup of superior ware. Another mound, sixty yards long and twenty-five broad, appeared to have been a funeral pile, the whole of the earth being apparently discoloured by fire, and occasionally presenting in its removal pieces of decayed charcoal.*

Mr. Kempe†, in 1845, observed fragments of Roman tile scattered near the Dyke, and was informed that some years before fragments of the bronze furniture of chariot wheels had been dug up near the line, but he was unable to verify the information‡.

Camden, Lysons, and Ashby, concur in receiving the popular opinion that this formidable vallum and foss was thrown up by the Saxons; but its magnitude, in their opinion, refutes the idea of its having been made as a boundary§ between the kingdoms of East Anglia and Mercia. Camden says, "These great and long ditches were certainly cast by the East Angles to restrain the Mercians, who with sudden inrodes were wont most outrageously to make havocke of all before them." Ashby thinks, from "the bank being entirely on the east side of the ditch, and this must have occasioned much additional labor and expense, it must have been a military work to defend East Anglia, and not a common boundary of two states." Lysons [p. 74.] writes "The Devil's Ditch at present|| serves for the boundary between the dioceses of Norfolk and Ely, and some have supposed all these ditches were originally boundaries of tribes or kingdoms; but, from the strength of the works, which was much more than would have been necessary for a mere boundary, the better opinion seems to

* *Gent. Mag.* 1827, ii. 265.

† *Ibid.* 1845, i. 28.

‡ *Ibid.* p. 25.

§ Mr. Guest considers the more important lines of ditches provided with mounds on one side only as the boundaries of antient tribes. They were not exactly military lines of defence, like the wall of Hadrian, which was provided with a parallel military road; but they were lines of demarcation, fixing the boundaries of territory. Such was Offa's dyke, between the Dee and the Wye;

and such were the ditches of the Belgæ. Sir R. C. Hoare discovered that the ditches with two mounds were not boundary lines, but roads of communication between British villages; they were worn down into hollows by the traffic of a dense population, and may be compared with the hollow lanes of Devonshire and the Channel Islands.—*Gent. Mag.* Aug. 1850, p. 184.

|| Since altered, by the incorporation of the Archdeaconry of Sudbury into the Diocese of Ely.

be, that they were formed for purposes of defence, by the people inhabiting the country between them and the sea; the ditch being on the opposite side from the sea. The situation of the Devil's Ditch and Fleam Dyke were extremely well chosen, and would have secured the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk from incursions from the Midland Counties."

In answer to these authors, the existence of Offa's Dyke, constructed by Offa, king of Mercia, in 780, as a territorial boundary* against the Welsh, and running parallel to Watts's Dyke, as the Devil's Dyke does to the Fleam Dyke, is cited as a proof that the Saxons raised such works for such purposes; but it is admitted that Offa's Dyke is very slight as compared with the one under notice.

By some it has been thought to have been cut by King Edmund the Martyr, to defend him from his implacable enemies the Danes, who ultimately, on his death at their hands, in 870, succeeded in subjecting East Anglia to their power. They destroyed the monasteries of Thorney, Ely, and Soham; and it is recorded that at Balsham, one end of the Fleam Dyke, they halted, and slaughtered the helpless inhabitants without discrimination.

The first mention of the Devil's Dyke in history is found in the Saxon Chronicle, under the year 905, which tells us that the land of the East Angles was laid waste by King Edward, between the *dykes* and the Ouse as far northward as the fens. Fabyan and Holinshed relate that King Edward the Elder was, in 901, crowned and anointed at Kingston-upon-Thames, and immediately after was obliged to follow the East Englian Danes, who sided with Ethelwald son of Ethelbert, uncle to this King Edward, whom they had crowned King, and had carried with them through the countries of the East Saxons and Mercians, whence they returned hither laden with spoil and booty, but in their way King Edward engaged near St. Edmund's Ditch†, where, though he lost the victory, he gained great advantage, Ethelwald aforesaid and Gothrio their Kings (which last was a Dane) being both slain in

* Baldwin's Dyke, separating Flanders from Artois, was the line of demarcation between the two languages, when Sueyro

wrote his *Annales de Flandes*, 1624, pp. 84-5.

† The Devil's Dyke was generally so called by the Monkish writers.

that battle: after which he followed his enemies (who retreated for want of a leader to Thetford city and camp as their great defence), and spoiled all their lands which they held by composition and agreement under King Edward, from the river Ouze to the bordure of St. Edmund's Land (viz., all Suffolk from Devil's Ditch to Thetford).

The description of the dyke by Abbo Floriacensis, who visited Britain in the 10th century, and died in 1003, is remarkable. Speaking of East Anglia he says, "from that part whereas the sun inclineth westward, the province itself adjoyneth to the rest of the Island, and is therefore passable: but for feare of being overrun with many invasions and inrodes of enemies, it is fortified in the front with a bank or rampier like unto a huge wall, and with a trench or ditch below in the ground."

Some later writers, says Camden, state that King Canute, the Dane, was the author of the dyke, notwithstanding the said Abbo, who died before Canute obtained the kingdom of England, made mention of it. "But they who wrote since Canute's time, termed it St. Edmund's limit and St. Edmund's Dyke, and verily think that King Canute cast it up, who, being most devoted to Saint Edmund the Martyr, granted unto the religious monkes of Saint Edmund's Bury (for to make satisfaction for the wicked cruelty of Swain his father wrought upon them) very great immunities, even as farre as to this Dyke, whence it is that William of Malmesbury, in his book of Bishops, writeth thus—'The customers and toll-gatherers which in other places make foule work and outrage, without respect or difference of right and wrong, there in humble mannner on this side Saint Edmund's dyke, surcease their quarrels and brauls.' And certaine it is that these two fore-fences last named—the Fleam and Devil's Dykes—were called St. Edmund's dykes. For Matthew Florilegus hath recorded that the said battell against Aethelwolp was fought betweene the two dykes of St. Edmund."

It appears from the Domesday Book that the Abbot of Bury held the manors of Brome and Arwarton, in Suffolk, and that of Shelfanger, in Norfolk, and probably some others, by serjeantry, viz., by the service of conducting the

foot soldiers of the two counties of Norfolk and Suffolk, for 40 days, at the king's summons, from St. Edmund's Ditch to the king's army in Wales, for which he was to have fourpence each for conduct money, and the rest of their maintenance was to be at the king's cost. These manors were afterwards granted by the abbot to the Dayville or Daviler family by the same service; and a Dayville, one of the rebel barons in the time of Henry III., in 1266, is recorded as having laid waste the county of Cambridge and taken the Isle of Ely. From this family, Mr. North, in the MS. previously cited, thinks the dyke "might assume the name of D'Aviler's Ditch, and then, by an easy transition, to Devil's Ditch." Were this the only instance of the Satanic prefix, such an origin would be most probable; but the common practice of the vulgar in former ages, to ascribe the formation of the most remarkable objects to supernatural agency, is alone sufficient to account for the popular name of this dyke; and tradition relates that the huge mound, at Thetford, visited by the Institute last year, was formed by the devil scraping his shoes after he had dug his dyke on Newmarket Heath.

S. TYMMS.