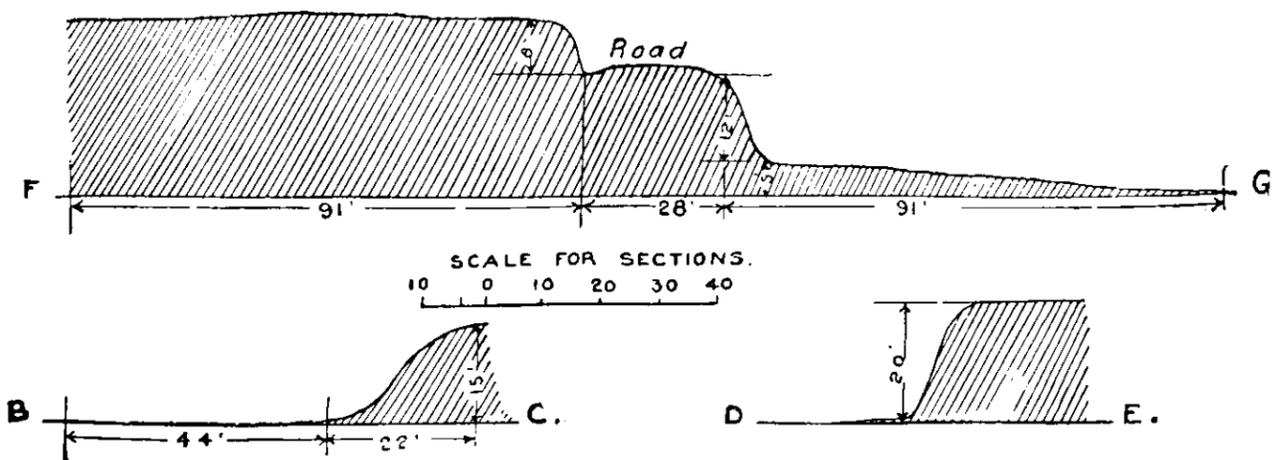


SECTIONS .



PLAN OF KINGSBURY CASTLE.

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Kingsbury Castle.

BY WILLIAM PAGE, F.S.A.

Before I refer to the few notes I have to lay before the Society upon Kingsbury Castle, I want to say a word or two about early castles generally. To most people probably a castle is a great stone building, with massive towers and battlements, walls and gates. This, however, was not always the case; until the end of the eleventh century there were very few, if any, masonry castles in this country. The castles in England before that date, were constructed of earthen banks and ditches defended generally by stockades, but sometimes by water. A castle (*castrum* or *castellum*) meant merely a fortified enclosure, and applied equally to the village or town surrounded by a bank and ditch as to the purely military camp with earthen defences.* In looking, therefore, for Kingsbury Castle, which from the evidence of the St. Albans Chroniclers was certainly built some considerable time before the eleventh century we must not expect to find a building of masonry, but a camp or village surrounded by earthworks.

Of the origin of Kingsbury Castle we have no precise knowledge. It may possibly have been constructed by Offa when he superintended the erection of St. Albans Abbey at the end of the eight century. It is curious that the townsmen of St. Albans, in their disputes with the Abbot in the fourteenth century, pleaded that their ancestors received their privileges from Offa.† Of course, the plea was untenable, but the fact of it having been raised is interesting. The first reference which we have to Kingsbury is in the tenth century, when it is mentioned as a *municipium*, or fortified town or village.‡ It was then inhabited by the King's ministers and fishermen, who plied their trade in the fishpool, "great and deep," which existed to the south of Fishpool-street. It would appear that Abbot Wulsin, the sixth Abbot, who ruled at the middle

*Round, *Geoff. de Mandeville*, p. 328, etc.

†*Gesta Abbatum Monasterii S. Albani*, (Rolls Series) III., 365, etc.
Kingsbury is here (1381) described as *Castrum de Kyngsbury*.

‡*Ibid* I. 23.

of the tenth century, built the town of St. Albans and encouraged people to live there.* It is not until the town of St. Albans comes into existence that we hear anything of Kingsbury. The old-established community under royal patronage became jealous of the new town, which deprived it probably of its trade. The inhabitants of Kingsbury oppressed the household (*famulos*) of the Abbey because they were tenants of the King and proud (*quia regii erant et superbi*).† The term *famulos* probably included the tenants of the Abbot living in the new town. In order to get rid of these proud officers of the King and fishermen, Abbot Wulsin's successor, Alfric, purchased the Fishpool from King Edgar, for a great price, and drained it. The Chronicler remarks that the end of the fishery and the high banks can be seen along Fishpool-street, where there was a way for the fishermen and royal ministers above the bank.‡ Here possibly, is the reason why the footpath on the north side of Fishpool-street stands high above the road, being, in all probability, the path of the fishermen above the Fishpool thus referred to. The Abbot, it is recorded, retained a small fishery, which is now doubtless represented by the Fishpond in the grounds of St. Michael's Manor.

Towards the close of the tenth century, Alfric, the Chancellor of King Ethelred, bought Kingsbury of the King, and taking the habit of a monk at St. Albans, became Abbot.§ Notwithstanding that their living had been taken from them by the destruction of the fishpool, the inhabitants of Kingsbury continued their annoyance to the Abbey. The Abbot, we are told, therefore had the town levelled to the ground except a small bulwark (*propugnaculum*) near to the Abbey, which the King would not permit to be thrown down, in order that some vestiges of his royal dwelling might remain, and the name Kingsbury be retained.|| Thus the main part of Kingsbury was destroyed. The bulwark or little fortified village (*propugnaculum vel municipiolum*) remained till between 1151 and 1154, when King Stephen, being on a visit to the Abbey, and hearing Mass at the Altar of St. Stephen, the Abbot, Robert de Gorham,

* *Ibid* I. 22. † *Ibid* I. 23. ‡ *Ibid*. § *Ibid* I. 32. || *Ibid* I. 33.

prostrated himself before the King, and prayed that the remains of the royal castle (*castris regalis*) might be destroyed. For, said the Abbot, there lay hid in the destroyed castle certain of the King's wardens (*æditui*) of the conditions of serfs, who were harmful and injurious to the Abbey, having apart (*seorsum*) towards the east, a bulwark or little fortified village (*unum propugnaculum vel municipiolum*) for their refuge and dwelling, and who calling themselves the faithful servants of the King and keepers of the peace and of the country disturbed the peace and country and laid themselves open to obtain gain and base profit rather than attend to the maintenance of the peace. The King turned to his nobles, one of whom confirmed the Abbot's words, describing Kingsbury as a thorn in the eye of the holy men of the monastery. Thereupon Stephen ordered that the remains of the castle should be destroyed, and the Abbot caused the site to be levelled, ploughed, and sown, that no vestiges should appear.* This is the last we hear of Kingsbury Castle.

It is evident that the main difficulty was one of jurisdiction. The officers for the preservation of the King's peace came into conflict with those who maintained the Abbot's peace and offenders would escape from one jurisdiction to the other. The same difficulty was occurring elsewhere in the country.

The exact site of Kingsbury Castle has been a puzzle to all who have written on the history of St. Albans. It was known, from the account of its destruction and the survival of the name, that it was situated on the north side of Fishpool-street, but its exact bounds have not been, I fancy, hitherto ascertained. There can, however, be little doubt that the castle, or fortified village, occupied the hill to the west of St. Albans, surrounded approximately by New England Fields, Fishpool-street, Branch-road and Verulam-road. Here must have been a spot well adapted for a Saxon fortified town, comprising a small plateau, rising on three sides about 20 to 25 feet, and in places more, above the surrounding country, and having a gentle slope towards the Fishpool on the south. A few years

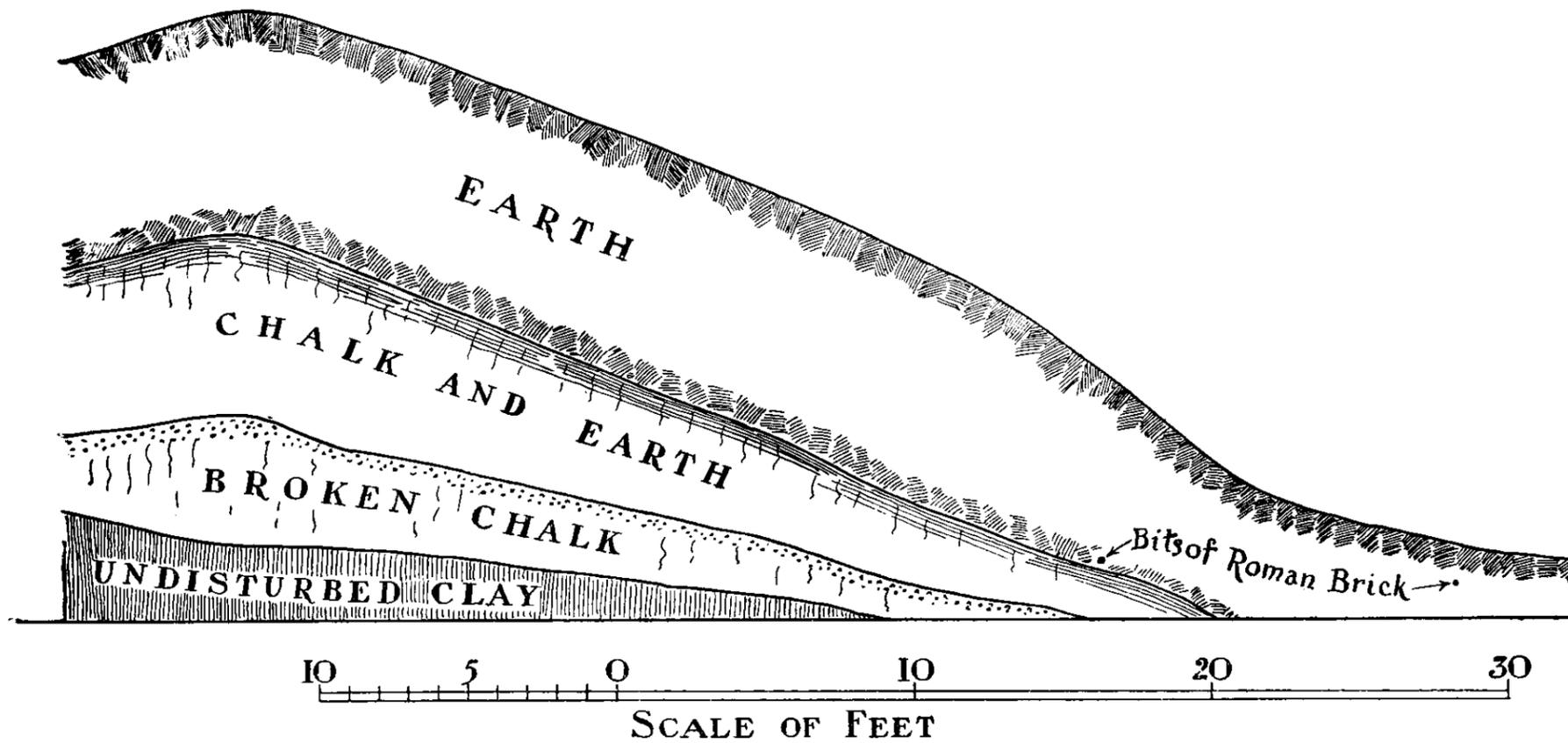
**Ibid* I. 121, 122

ago for the purpose of constructing a new road (now called Kingsbury-avenue) from the Verulam-road to Mud-lane (now Harley-street), a cutting was made through the bank on the south side of the Verulam-road, and the section then exposed clearly shows that the bank is artificial. It also shows that the bank here, and probably all the ramparts or banks around Kingsbury, had not been formed in the usual way by throwing up earth while forming a ditch outside the camp, but were made by lowering and levelling the higher land on the inside and throwing the soil outwards to form a steep bank, about 12 feet to 20 feet in height.* This will be more easily seen from the accompanying section, which shows the undisturbed ground upon which is built up the defensive bank, consisting first of a layer of chalk, then a layer of chalk and earth mixed, and on the top black earth. It is clear from these layers that they could not have been thrown up from the outside, besides which the cutting for the same road further on showed that the natural ground higher up had been cut into.

It may be well to describe the ramparts or banks which form the boundary of the castle. Beginning on the north side, along the Verulam-road, it would seem that if the Clay Pits now called the Victoria Playing Fields are, as by tradition they are said to be, the site of the Roman brick fields† they would have formed a most effective defence, having at the top of their southern side the rampart or bank formed, as before stated, by throwing the earth outwards from the higher land within. Even, however, if the Clay Pits are of a more modern date than tradition assigns to them, the land, in any case, sloped down towards the north, so that an effective barrier would be formed on this side. The upper part of the bank here has clearly been used

*I am indebted to Mr. W. H. St. John Hope for pointing this out. The theory was strengthened by finding in the middle of the site a Roman burial by inhumation only just below the surface, indicating that the surface had been lowered since the burial was made.

†The Clay Pits are marked on Benjamin Hare's Map of St. Albans of 1643. Mr. Woodman informed the Society that when some of the houses on the south side of the Verulam-road here were being built the remains of tree trunks were found in the bank. Possibly these were the stockades defending the banks.



Section through bank of Kingsbury Castle, on west side of Kingsbury Avenue.

to construct the Verulam-road, which was opened in 1833, and stands upon made ground, where it borders upon the Clay Pits. There is a slight dip in the Verulam-road at the point where the new road to Mudlane has been cut, so that the section here obtained shows, the bank probably much in its original condition. The north-east corner of the castle has evidently been much cut into, and altered, probably when the clay-pits in New England Fields were in use, which, I am told, they were at the beginning of the nineteenth century, so that it is impossible to suggest what was the exact course of the bank here.*

The road from Lower Dagnall-street to Mount Pleasant seems to pass into Kingsbury by an original entrance, indication of which will be seen by the curve inwards of the bank on the south side of the road. This is now the only remains of an original entrance and there may have been but one. Southwards from this road, the bank is very clearly defined, and shows a fine scarp rising from 15 to 20 feet from the ground below. It passes in a straight line at the west end of the garden in the occupation of the Rev. Canon G. H. P. Glossop, and through the market garden of Mr. Schoop. In this market garden it takes a turn to the south-east, down to Fishpool-street, just to the east of the bend in that road and then curves round the bend, forming a projecting bulwark or bastion, evidently the *propugnaculum* or *municipiolum* already referred to, which is described, as this would be, as almost in the middle of the street (*in medio fere vici*).†

The only street existing in this neighbourhood in the twelfth century, when the *propugnaculum* was destroyed, was Fishpool-street, and the position of this projecting bulwark gives the reason why the street takes the very abrupt bend at this point. From this bend the bank follows the line of Fishpool-street in a north-westerly direction to the Branch-road. The land within the castle slopes down towards the fishpool all along its southern boundary, but the bank has been somewhat

*The unemployed were set to work to throw down a part of the bank here some twenty winters ago.

† *Gesta Abbatum Monasterii S. Albani* (Rolls Series) I. 122. See A on plan.

destroyed by the gardens behind the houses in Fishpool-street, although it was never as heavy here as on the other sides, the fishpool being considered probably a sufficient defence. The bank can, however, be traced nearly the whole way behind the houses here, its top for the most part forming the boundary of the back premises. There may have been a small entrance to the castle at the lower part of Fishpool-street, as from early times this part of the street has been known by the name of "Sally-path," apparently a corruption of "Sallyport."

The bank is plainly to be traced on the east side of the Branch-road. Here, again, as in the case of the Verulam-road, it seems likely that some of the earth of the bank was thrown down to form this road (which was made about the same time as the Verulam-road) as it will be noticed that there is a drop on the west side and the road appears to be on made ground. In the garden of Kingsbury Lodge, it will be seen the bank has been made into terraces, and I notice that it is becoming less distinct in the gardens of the new houses in the lower part of the Branch-road. The north-west corner is not clear, owing to the buildings of the now disused Kingsbury Brewery.

Whether there was a ditch outside the bank seems doubtful; if it ever existed, all evidence of it is now destroyed on the north, west, and south sides, by the roads, which touch the base of the bank, and on the east by the old clay-pits in New England Fields. At the south-east the only place where the ditch, if it existed, would now remain, there is, so far as I can ascertain, no sign of it; and, having regard to the mode of construction of the bank, it seems unlikely that a ditch can have existed, otherwise the soil thrown up from the ditch must have formed an outer bank, of which there is no indication. The existing bank, when stockaded, would form a very formidable defence, and was probably sufficient without a ditch.

The camp is about 1,370 feet in length and 880 feet in width, and comprises about $27\frac{1}{2}$ acres. It must be admitted that, so far as I am aware, no antiquities of the Anglo-Saxon period have been discovered on the site. This, however, is not surprising, as the Anglo-Saxons left behind them few objects other than those

which have been found in their graves. It is curious, however, that the site of Kingsbury was a part of a Roman cemetery. Roman burials and two coins of Diocletian, were found during the making of the new road from the Verulam-road before referred to, and while the drainage works were in progress some years ago a considerable number of Roman potsherds and urns were found in Mud-lane.

It should be noted also that when Abbot Wulsin laid out the town of St. Albans he placed St. Michael's Church quite outside Kingsbury and within the Roman town of Verulam. The inhabitants of Kingsbury were then the King's tenants, and he was not responsible for the cure of their souls. The old borough boundary also just touches Kingsbury, and originally probably omitted it altogether, indicating that this boundary was defined before the destruction of Kingsbury. It will be seen how the old boundary takes an angle so as to skirt the banks of the camp.