



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

BOLEY HILL, ROCHESTER, AFTER THE ROMAN PERIOD.

BY THE REV. CANON S. W. WHEATLEY, M.A., F.S.A.

THE present writer recently (Vol. XXXIX) gave his reasons for concluding that the earthwork on Boley Hill was not of Celtic origin, as has been sometimes asserted, since there was proof that, at least as far as the eastern portion was concerned, it was not there in Roman times. The question arises therefore to whom does it owe its origin? A Danish origin has been claimed for it by several writers and the late Mr. G. L. Gomme in an article published in *Archæologia Cantiana* (Vol. XVII), full of interest and almost wayward ingenuity, argued that the earthwork, if not Danish, was yet intimately connected with the Danes. He concluded his article with the triumphant assertion, "one thing I claim to have established, that the history of Boley Hill is the history of a little community different in race from the rest of the citizens." Now it is just this claim which the present writer desires to call in question, and as the matter is naturally of much interest to citizens of Rochester, as well as to many other people beyond its liberties, he proposes to make a survey of the situation in the light of such fuller knowledge as has been obtained. It should be observed at once that the theories of Mr. Clark upon Norman Castles and early earthworks, largely relied upon by Mr. Gomme in his article, are practically discredited by modern authorities, and it may also be said that Mr. Gomme's statement "that all tradition points to the Boley Hill as connected with the Danes" is one for which the present writer has found no foundation, although it is true that certain inferences from the accounts of Saxon chroniclers have been repeated and repeated without critical examination until acceptance of those inferences has become general. That is not, however, "all tradition." The support which Mr. Gomme sought from the derivation of the word "Boley" from the Danish word

"bul"—trunk of a tree, can hardly be considered substantial, and his argument that the origin of a court of "Frank Pledge"—one was held on Boley Hill—is Danish is hardly strong enough to prove that the Hill is also. What are the associations of Rochester with the Danes in historical records? The historical records are almost entirely confined to the most general assertions of the frequency and the cruelty of raids by Danes. In 840 and again in 841 Rochester was ruthlessly raided: in 851 after a Kentish raid, in which Rochester was in every likelihood involved, the Danes wintered in Thanet: in 853, after more raiding, they wintered in Sheppey—these seagirt places suited their tactics and habits well: in 860 another raid in Kent is recorded. Then, and this is highly pertinent to this enquiry, the Danes in 885 besieged Rochester, and their military operations in connection with this siege seem the only basis of the theory of the Danish character of the earthwork of Boley Hill. The learned antiquary, the Rev. Samuel Denne, to whom we chiefly owe the scholarly character of "*The History and Antiquities of Rochester*" (1772), wrote in that work a chapter upon Boley Hill and gave his readers the opportunity of coming to their own decision about the Danes and the earthworks by giving quotations from several Saxon Chronicles, while he himself suspended judgement. These quotations are of such importance that they may well be requoted here.

"Dani de Francia redeuntes, urbem Roffensem obsiderunt, ac 'arcem contra portas construxerunt.'" *Chron. Joh. Bronston*, X Script. coll. 812.

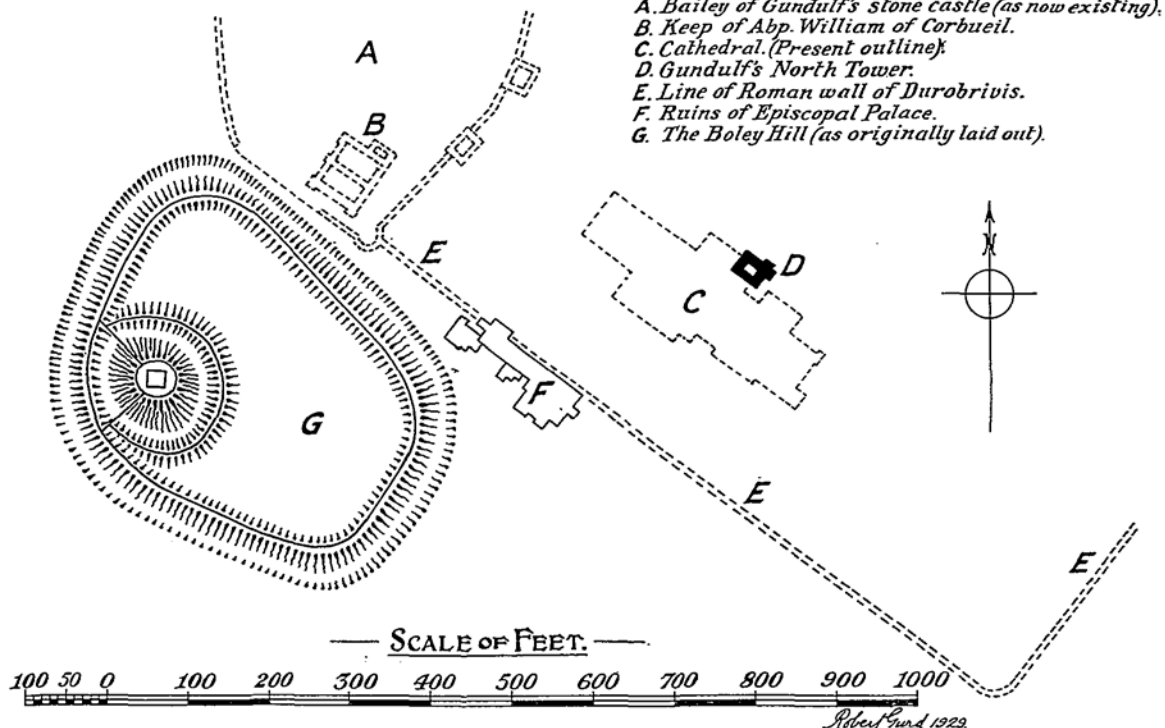
Dani "relicta ibi arce quam ante portas praedictae extruxerant urbis." *Hoveden Ann.*

Dani "Venerunt ad Rovecestriam: et civitatem obsidentes, ceperunt facere ibi 'aliam firmitatem.'" *Huntindon Hist.*

"Altera pars porrexit ad Hrofescaster, obsiderunt autem eam civitatem et ipsi extruxerunt circa eam 'aliud propugnaculum,' cives nihilominus urbem defenderunt, quosque Elfridus rex superveniret cum copiis. Tum se contulit exercitus ad suas naves, 'dimisso monumento.'" *Chron. Saxon* sub. anno 885.

BOLEY HILL, ROCHESTER.

- A. Bailey of Gundulf's stone castle (as now existing).
 B. Keep of Abp. William of Corbueil.
 C. Cathedral. (Present outline).
 D. Gundulf's North Tower.
 E. Line of Roman wall of Durobrivis.
 F. Ruins of Episcopal Palace.
 G. The Boley Hill (as originally laid out).



CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION: 11TH CENTURY.

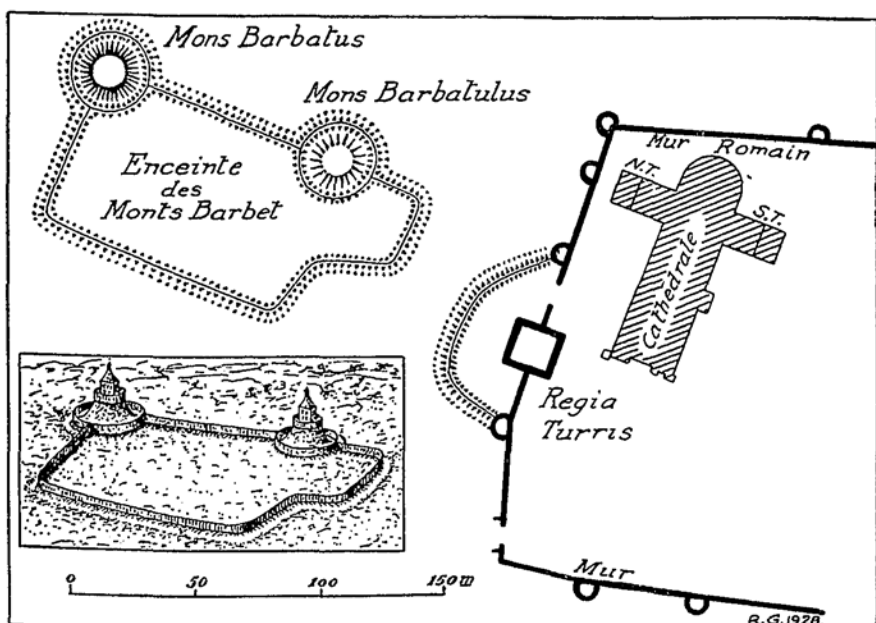
None of these words guide us to the belief that the Danes raised a high mound of earth such as we have on Boley Hill. The translation in the Rolls Series of the phrase used in the Saxon Chronicle, is "and wrought another fortress about themselves" Mrs. Armitage writes "the character of the Danish fortification is clearly indicated in the Chronicle; 'they made a work around themselves' that is, it was an enclosure. They could hardly have escaped as they did, if their camp had been above the bridge, which is known to have existed in Saxon time. But Boley Hill is above the bridge"¹ The expression "ante portas," which is used by two of the Chroniclers, would not apply to a great earthwork constructed some distance from one of the four gates of the walled city. The details of the siege, such as we have, are interesting evidence that the ancient walls of Rochester, like those of other Roman cities had been strengthened by this time to make a stouter resistance than heretofore to these ruthless and daring Danish warriors. The relief of the siege is also an interesting example of the new vigilance of King Alfred, as Prof. Oman writes "Before the siege is many days old the indefatigable King appears with an army of relief," and "at Rochester the Danes abandoned their horses, their stores and all their heavy plunder and sailed off the moment the army of succour came in sight."²

There is no record in history, it would seem, that the Danes at any time settled in or near Rochester. If these things are so, then we cannot accept the Danish origin or character of Boley Hill on historical grounds. To whom then can the earthwork be ascribed? The remains of a mound situated behind Satis House, and crowned to-day with a summer house, seems to assert itself as the remains of a Norman château-à-motte and the ground eastward of it as the former Bailey. The opinions of such notable authorities as the late Sir William St. John Hope, F.S.A., Mr. Harold Sands, F.S.A., the Rev. Canon Livett, F.S.A., Mrs. Armitage and the late Mr. Chalkley Gould, F.S.A., author of

¹ Armitage, *Early Norman Castles*, 1912, p. 49.

² *Alfred as a Warrior*, Charles Oman, 1899, 141.

the article on Earthworks in the *Victoria History of Kent*, all concur in agreeing that this mound is the first Norman castle of Rochester. Somewhat fresh light has been thrown upon the subject by members of the Balliol Earthworks Survey, who visited Boley Hill in 1928. It is to them that the present writer owes the privilege of being able to refer to their opinion about the Hill, and to their suggestive analogy between the fortifications carried out at Le Mans by the



LE MANS : CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION, 11TH CENTURY.

Conqueror and those of Boley Hill and neighbourhood. A report made by them contains this passage, "In considering the origin and purpose of the Boley Hill, it is appropriate to call attention to the remarkable parallel between the castra constructions at Rochester and at Le Mans, the capital of Maine, the small province in the north-west centre of France, which repeatedly comes into prominence during the reigns of William I and II. In both instances, the first castle erected by the Norman invaders in the eleventh century was

a château-à-motte, the site selected being on the rising ground outside the walls of the Roman castrum, contiguous to the cathedral, but dominating the latter. Later in the same century this early castle was superseded by one of stone situate nearer to the cathedral, but bearing the same general topographical relation thereto . . . Both châteaux-à-motte appear to have been abandoned early in the twelfth century" (pp. 6-7). In the neighbourhood of Rochester we have at Allington Castle the same abandonment of an early "motte" for a later stone castle; at Lewes in Sussex another example is afforded, and probably another at Canterbury.

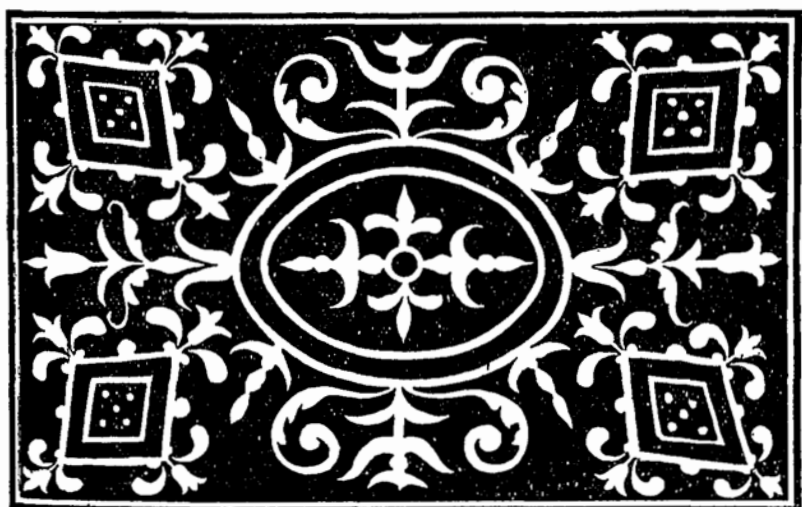
Reference to the plans of Boley Hill and Le Mans, which I am allowed to use by the kindness of the members of the Balliol Earthworks Survey, will show the reader the general character of the motte and bailey type of fortification, lofty wooden tower crowning the mound, strongly defended by ditch and palisade, and the bailey lying beyond, defended in the same manner. The plans will also show the curious similarity of arrangement between the two places, the military work at both being executed by the orders of King William I. The next question that arises is, when was this Boley Hill "motte" and bailey superseded by the stone castle built close to it? The building of the walls of this castle are ascribed to Bishop Gundulf, who was paid, by William II, a sum of money—a singularly inadequate sum it would appear unless it was supplemented by further sums or by some privilege granted to the Church of Rochester—to carry it out. Masonry of this period has been traced by Canon Livett in many parts of the castle wall, and a specimen of it is to be seen above the core of the Roman portion, on a fragment of the castle wall opposite Watt's Baths on the Esplanade. It is a matter of doubt if Gundulf had accomplished this work by the time that King William II, in righteous indignation, besieged his treacherous and warlike uncle, Bishop Odo, in Rochester. Sir James H. Ramsey writes: "Early in 1088 Odo, and the barons who had been with the late King (William I) at his death, came over to England, each man making for his own district. Odo, of

course, re-entered on his authority as Earl of Kent. He established himself at Rochester, where he would have a landing place ready for Robert (Duke of Normandy) when he came. The Count of Boulogne (Eustatius) brought over a garrison to hold the place, Robert of Bellême acting with him. With respect to the fortifications of Rochester, the lofty keep, that still looks down on the waters of the Medway, had not yet been reared. That was to be the work of Archbishop William of Corbeil (1126-1136). Gundulf, the Bishop at that time when Rufus became King, built a certain wall on the lines of existing earthworks. But it is doubtful if that had yet been constructed. If so the defences of 'the castle' would consist of earthworks and a mound."¹ Sir James Ramsey does not seem to note that the city itself was still a "castellum" and would probably be able to hold out strongly against the army of Rufus. The present writer would suggest that Odo and his companions defended the city until, forced from it, they sought final shelter in the motte and bailey on Boley Hill. From this castle they issued when at last they surrendered and were allowed by Rufus, though with great reluctance on his part, to march out with horses and arms, but without the honours of war. Bishop Odo then left England for ever (June, 1088). The next great event in the history of Boley Hill seems to have been the descent upon it of the army and the siege train of King John in 1215, when the city and castle were held against him by the barons. The besieged defended themselves courageously, but after seven weeks they were forced to surrender when, by mining the south-east corner of the keep, a large section of which collapsed, King John successfully bore down the defence. It seems almost certain that Boley Hill played a great part in the siege as the venue of the engineers who carried out the mining operations and as the chief attacking point of King John's heavy siege train commanded by Savaric de Mauleon, who after this siege passed on to attack Colchester Castle. In the next reign the repairs necessary to the castle keep and the castle walls

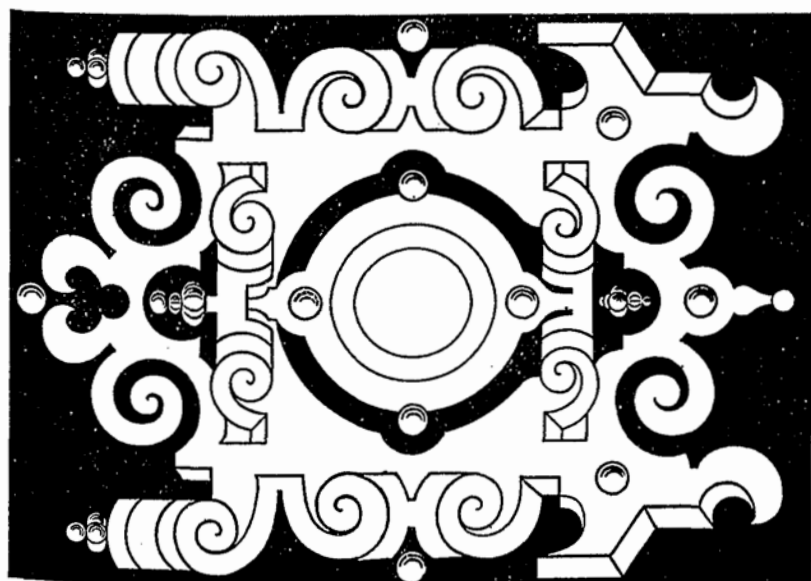
¹ *The Foundation of England*, 2 vols., 1898, p. 159 and p. 161.

were undertaken. The south-eastern corner of the keep was rebuilt, and the keep was protected by the building of a wall some feet southward of it and the erection of a massive drum tower at the intersection of this wall with the eastern one. It would appear, however, that Boley Hill itself was involved in the new military works. Canon Livett, writing on the subject, says: "The enclosure of Boley Hill within the defences of the city naturally suggested itself to the engineers of Henry III. Perhaps the bretashes and drawbridge mentioned in the Close Rolls were intended to form means of communication between the castle and this newly-enclosed area on the south. How far Henry III strengthened the hill by new walls it is impossible now to say. There is a line of half-buried masonry in the grounds of Satis House which looks like the remains of an enclosing wall on the riverside. The terraces of the mound are retained by walls composed of old material of various kinds. There is a large amount of it, and it is not likely that it was brought from any distance to serve its present purpose."¹ The old motte was probably reduced in height at this time and the eastern portion of the hill raised as it remains to-day. In support of this theory, of the inclusion of Boley Hill as a sort of outer bailey of the castle, at this time, there are the facts of the removal of the south gate from the old Roman site to a site further south, with the making of a new road (St. Margaret's Street) in place of the old road, which passed over the eastern portion of Boley Hill to Love Lane, as was shown on the plan illustrating the writer's article in Vol. XXXIX. Civil war again brings Boley Hill into prominence, when, in 1264, Simon de Montfort determined to get possession for the barons of Rochester Castle, held for the King by Roger de Leybourn. De Montfort's army attacked from the Strood side and eventually succeeded in crossing the river, seizing the city and the outer and inner bailey of the castle. The army of De Clare, co-operating with him, attacked from the south, coming from Tonbridge, and one can picture the

¹ *Arch. Cant.*, XXI, "Mediæval Rochester," by G. M. Livett, p. 55.



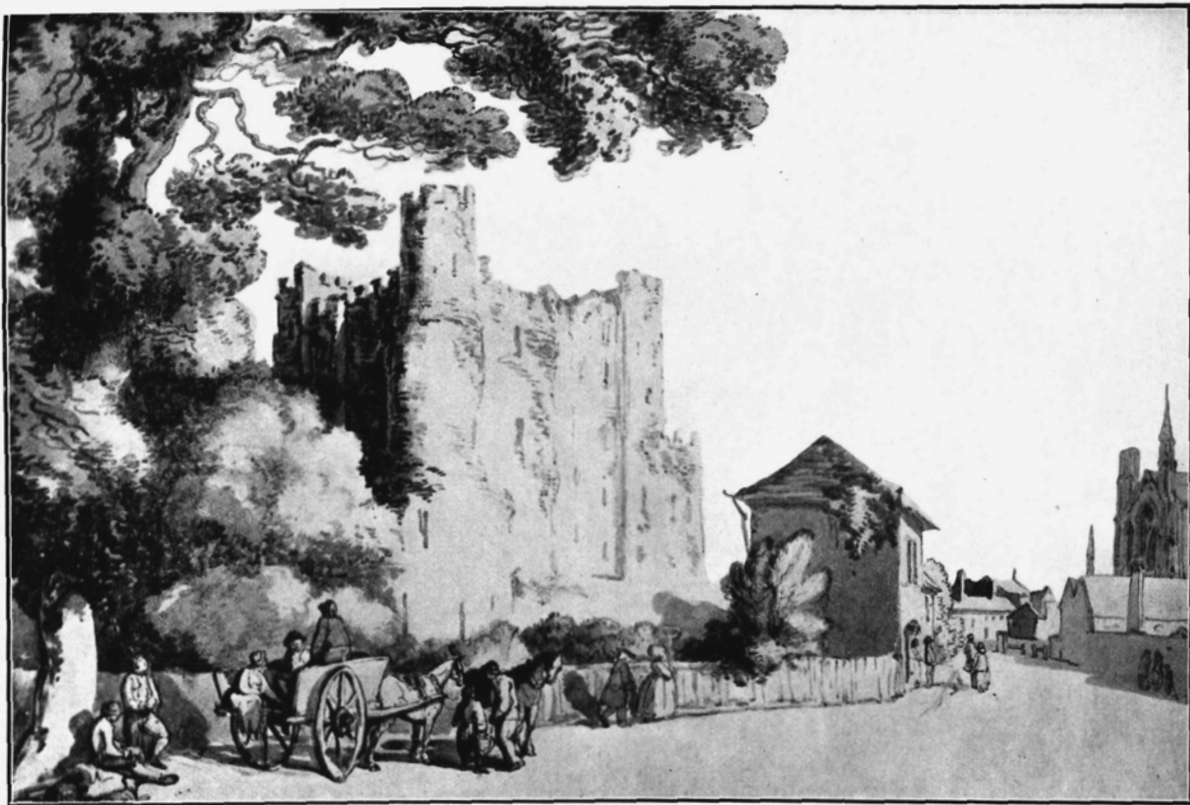
ONE OF FORTY-TWO PANELS IN LONGLEY HOUSE,
FORMERLY PART OF SATES HOUSE, BOLEY HILL.
DECORATED IN TEMPERA, PROBABLY LATE ELIZABETHAN.



ONE OF A NUMBER OF PANELS IN TREVINE,
BOLEY HILL.
DECORATED IN TEMPERA, PROBABLY LATE ELIZABETHAN.

violent struggle made to overcome the defences of the new outer bailey of Boley Hill, and the pressing forward to contain on the southern side the keep and its gallant defenders. King Henry's rapid approach with his army upon London forced De Montfort to march off to oppose his advance, and so the siege of Rochester had to be abandoned. From this date Boley Hill does not seem to figure as a military work, sharing the rapidly decaying importance of the castle. Not long after this date, it may be legitimately surmised, the Hill must have begun to adopt its new character as a residentiary suburb of the crowded walled city.

It seems right to consider now the questions raised by Mr. Gomme as to the origin of the name of the hill and as to the significance of the special jurisdiction carried on there. Two derivations seem to fit in with the history just recorded, viz, "Bailey" Hill because the bailey of the château-à-motte covered the site, or "Beaulieu" because that was a favourite Norman name for a castle or residence. Professor Hales, whose name carries weight in such matters, favoured the first of these derivations. Mrs. Armitage has pointed out that courts were often held on sites of old castles, just because these had been the seat of jurisdiction. The term Baron of the Bully must be Norman in its origin—no such title was used by Danes. We have its use in Barons of the Exchequer and Barons of the Cinque Ports, and the office formerly of military significance might well be used for a new officer of a manorial district, such as Boley Hill, after its military purposes were done, seems to have been regarded. The court of pie-powder again is essentially an institution of Norman creation. They were, according to a recent writer in *The Times*, "ancient courts of record attached to the fairs and markets of England. The Steward of the lord of the manor, or the owner of the tolls, was normally judge. These courts were instituted to administer justice in all commercial injuries done in that fair or market only, and not in any preceding one. The two most commonly accepted derivations of the title of these courts are given in the following quotations from Blackstone (*Comment*, Bk. III,



ROCHESTER CASTLE KEEP OR DONJON.

With the so-called "Justice-tree" on the left, c. 1800.

From a sketch by Thomas Rowlandson in possession of Capt. Desmond Coke.

ch. 2):—‘The lowest, and at the same time the most expeditious court of justice known to the law of England is the court of *piepoudre*, so called from the dusty feet of the suitors: or, according to Sir Edward Coke, because justice is there done as speedily as dust can fall from the foot.’ ” (*The Times*, Oct. 11, 1928.)

Can we judge approximately when this court was established and why Boley Hill was chosen as the site? If we can, it will help still further to release us from the theory of Danish origins and the presence of an alien race. The first mention of a fair being allowed to the citizens of Rochester is in the Charter of Henry III, and the first grant of a market is made in the Charter of Edward IV; these dates might well help to fix the establishment of this court on Boley Hill, and the hill was chosen almost certainly for its convenience. It was convenient because it was a comparatively short distance from the market place, which was opposite the Cathedral then, and not as now on the Common; and it was convenient because, being outside the old walls, it still had a certain seclusion about it, and a certain dignity of law and order attached to it that, with a fine elm tree as a central spot, made its selection eminently natural and suitable. It might not be amiss now to consider the history and names of the residences on this hill and the later vicissitudes of its defences. On the eastern part of the mound are now two residences, one called Boley Hill House and the other called Trevine, and in their names there is cause for caution, since the house now called “Trevine” is the house, now deprived of an eastern bay, which was formerly called Boley Hill House. It would appear from the earliest records of residences on this part of the mound of Boley Hill that there were, in the sixteenth century, two tenements, as now, for John Sedley, of Northfleet, Gent, one of the auditors of the Exchequer, sold them in 1519 to John Plummer, citizen of London and draper. In readapting the house called “Trevine,” the present owner, Mr. David Anderson, has revealed some old oak beams belonging to the former house and also has discovered a large portion of decorated panelling of the

greatest interest. By the kindness of Mr. David Anderson, a reproduction of one of the panels is given. The residence eastward was built after 1796, and after some mutinous soldiers from Chatham had destroyed by fire, so it is reported, the east bay of the Boley Hill House of that day. At what time the old tenements gave place to the one large house called Boley Hill House the present writer has not been able to ascertain, but the property passed from Sedley to John Plummer in 1522; from him to one Meopham in 1539; and through a daughter and a son-in-law—John Note—in 1583, to Richard Badock. Henry Hall, or Haule, of Maidstone held it in 1597 and then Ralph Yardley, of the city of London, merchant tailor, in the same year secured it. This Ralph Yardley may have been related to the Chatham family who were inter-married with the Petts of Chatham. William Streeton—probably the Streaton repeatedly Mayor of Rochester—held it in 1599 and after him Roger Henry Young in 1608, who bequeathed it to St. Thomas' Hospital, London. The well known Rochester family of Gordon lived here as tenants; their monuments are in St. Nicholas Church. In the new Boley Hill House—built after 1796—lived the Rev. William Conway, Vicar of St. Nicholas, afterwards Canon of Westminster, whose son, born in this house, is our esteemed President, Sir Martin Conway, M.P., F.S.A. On the monument of Canon Conway in St. Nicholas Church, there is a fine bust-relief by Belt. In 1924, St. Thomas' Hospital sold this property, the new Boley Hill House eventually being bought by Trustees for the use of the Christian Science body, and the remains of the old Boley Hill House, now called Trevine, becoming the property of its present occupant, David Anderson, Esq.

Westward of this property there is a delightful group of gabled houses which seem to date from either the late sixteenth century or the early seventeenth century. They bear names which need some comment. The first is called The Old Vicarage: it should rather be called the "newer" Vicarage, for in King Edward's Road there is the "newest" Vicarage of St. Nicholas. The "old" Vicarage was in the

High Street, by the east corner of what is now Theobald's Square. This Boley Hill Vicarage had been the property of Thomas Stevens, of the city of Rochester, brewer, in 1780, and it became the Vicarage in the time of the Rev. George Harker (1826-1853) and remained so until the newest Vicarage was built about 1860. This house incorporates the former stables of Boley Hill House and it is of especial note as having a small vaulted stone undercroft of the thirteenth century, which suggests that a former house, perhaps connected with the defences of Boley Hill, stood here, and near it may have been the drawbridge that spanned the castle moat. The next house bears the fanciful name of the "Old Priory" and the next one the seemingly fanciful name of the "Old Hall"; part of the latter is fairly modern. These three houses seem at one time to have been one, and as in the Old Hall there is an ancient coat of arms in stained glass of the Skipwith family, it might be conjectured that this family lived here in an earlier house. In 1516, by her will, Jane Skipwith, widow, of Bolly Hill, desires to be buried "before the rode" in the Cathedral Church. Nothing in the title deeds of these houses, nor in old plans, suggests that they formed part of Satis House, as is commonly reported. Immediately westward is the well known house called "Satis," radically rebuilt since the days when Mr. Richard Watts, the contractor, sometime Member of Parliament for Rochester and founder of the "Six Poor Travellers," had the honour of giving lodging and hospitality to Queen Elizabeth in 1573. It is far from picturesque now, and the pedimented porch is not made more pleasing by being crowned with a "lifeless" bust of Richard Watts. In one of the two north wings of old Satis House, which were made into a separate house called Longley House in the early part of the nineteenth century, there remain a number of panels finely decorated in tempera, an illustration of which is given here, and one may justly imagine that the eyes of the masterly maiden Queen may have regarded them with satisfaction during her visit. Satis House has passed through many hands since its sale by the trustees of Watts' will.

Among other names are the following: Henry Greenhill of Co. Middlesex and of Portsmouth, Co. Hants, Esq. (1699); Alderman George Woodyer of Shorne (1732). Mr. Thomas Brooke possessing it later, handed it on to his son Philip, who purchased from the owner of the castle (Wheldon) the portion of the moat opposite his property (1722). Joseph Brooke, Esq., Recorder of the City of Rochester, then inherited Satis,¹ and in 1803 it was purchased by John Longley, Esq., Recorder of the City and father of Archbishop Longley, who was born in this house. Mr. Longley added, to the kitchen garden southward, the little property called Marion's Hole, which lay in the former ditch of Boley Hill, and "squared off" his estate nicely with the pathway to the river on the south-western side. The Baker family later purchased the property and held it until by sale it passed to the Foord family (1867), and it remains in the hands of their trustees now. Mr. Samuel Baker is commemorated not only by a monument in the Cathedral, but by the paths which he "made up" with pleasant shrubberies in the old castle moat. While the doing of this was a great disservice to archæology—a fortifying wall was partly destroyed and all the military significance of the site removed—yet the public have greatly appreciated the generous kindness of Mr. Baker's deed on their behalf. These paths passed into the hands of the City Corporation about 1905. From this family comes Sir Herbert Baker, the architect, of whom the late Prime Minister, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, recently said, "His work was known throughout the Empire," and of his Rhodes House, Oxford, "The miracle of the work of that great architect, that genius." The arts of peace are therefore happily associated with Boley Hill as well as the arts of war. It has been noted that the adjacent house, Longley House, is made from wings of old Satis House. The next house to that is known as "The Friars," and behind that is one known as "Whitefriars." How did they come by their strange names? There never were

¹ He seems to have "filled up" a large portion of the moat north of his house and made the lawn now in front of "Satis."

any friars resident in Rochester ; our monks of St. Andrew's Priory saw to that. The explanation seems to be that when Mr. Richard Watts lived at Satis House, a Mr. John Fryer lived here next to him : we know this from Mr. Watts' will. When this house was refronted and altered (c. 1800) another house was built behind it with a bay facing the Medway, and as houses are sought after more eagerly when they have suggestive names, they became, owing to the name Fryer, "The Friars" and "Whitefriars." The interesting line of houses which now fringe the castle moat, from Henry III's drum tower to the little cemetery of St. Nicholas, are at the southern end perhaps little more than a century old ; but those at the northern end are much older. These newer ones are "the Quaker Settlement" mentioned in *Edwin Drood*, and among these Quakers at one time seem to have lived Charles Downman, Clerk of the Survey at Sheerness, who was married to Anne Player of Town Malling, and who had for his nephew and occasional guest John Downman, A.R.A. That the famous Thomas Rowlandson was attracted by the picturesqueness of Boley Hill, with the fine old elm still standing—it was cut down in 1831—under which the Piepowder court was held in days of yore, and with Quaker Row not yet built, is shown by the beautiful sketch reproduced for this article. For the privilege of being allowed to do so, the writer owes to its owner, Capt. Desmond Coke, his hearty thanks. In conclusion thanks are accorded also to Miss Graham for her skilful drawings of the decorated panels, to E. H. Elliott, Esq., for allowing Miss Graham to sketch the panel in Longley House, and to Mrs. Shinkwin for granting most readily access to Satis House and grounds.