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SALT HILL: A LOST CANTERBURY TUMULUS

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IF there were no building at all on the site of Canterbury, the place might yet be remarkable for a group of tumuli. The most conspicuous of this group is of course, the Dane John Mound. There are, or have been, several others. No effort is undertaken in these notes to assess the archaeological significance of such of the group as are known burial mounds, but an attempt is made to compile a list of mounds of which the existence at some time or other is established, and a case is stated for the addition of a further mound, "Salt Hill," to the list.

I. Dane John Mound, or Greater Dungeon.¹

II. A crescent-shaped mound outside the City wall on the site of Canterbury East Station. It was destroyed in 1860 during the construction of the railway. Upon this mound, if the map of Canterbury in the 1825 edition of Gostling's *Walk* is to be trusted, there stood a smaller mound.

III. The Mound upon which stands St. Mary Bredin's School. It was lowered in 1783 and flattened to accommodate a building. A Roman cremation burial was found in it.

IV. Little Dungeon (Dungill). This is mentioned by William Somner in 1640,² and it remained until the nineteenth century. It stood just within the City wall (St. George's Terrace) between Ridigate and Newingate, and from what Brent says³ it was at the parish boundary St. George—St. Mary Bredin. This boundary cuts the Terrace at a point 55 feet north of its junction with Gravel Walk, and thus indicates the site. Quite a considerable part of the mound still appears to exist. The destruction of the houses on the Terrace by enemy action has disclosed a mass of earth (much cut about by excavations for cellars) projecting here, and only here, from the inner side of the rampart. If this does in fact represent the remains of Little Dungeon, it shows that this mound must have stood in the same relation to the City wall as its greater counterpart, the Dane John Mound, abutting directly on to it.

V. Oaten Hill. This was in existence as late as 1825. Executions were conducted here until 1799.⁴ The hill was of no small size. It was lozenge-shaped, with a longer axis of as much as 150 feet, lying at

¹ For a discussion of I-IV, see *V.C.H. Kent*, III (1932), pp. 77-8 and *Arch. Journ.*, 2nd series, xxxvi (1930), 236, 272-5.

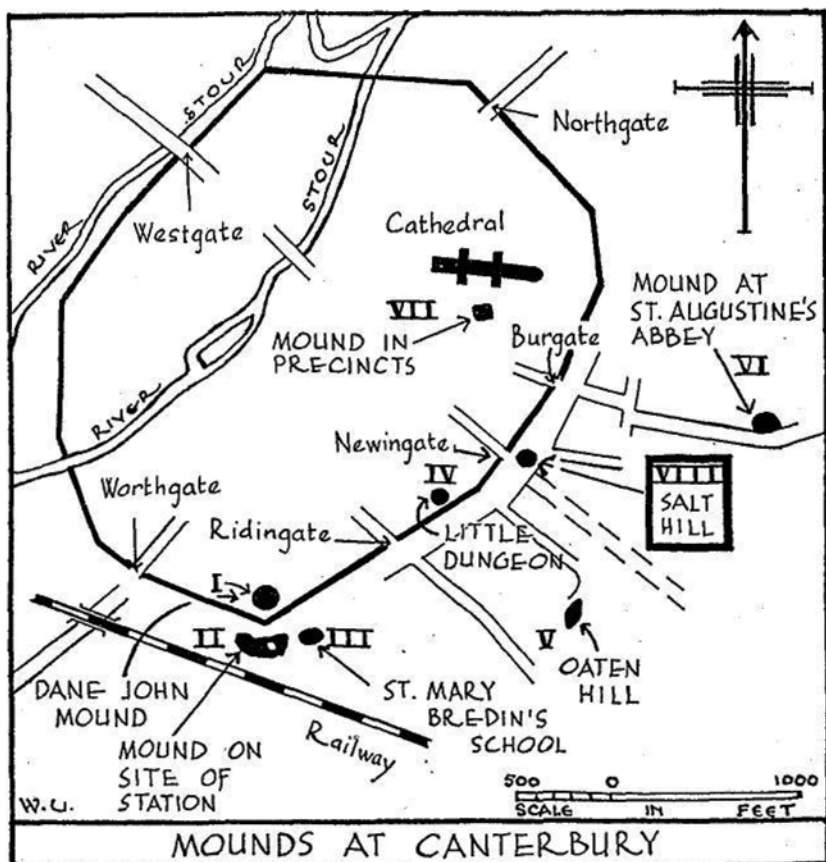
² *Antiquities of Canterbury*, ed. 1, p. 21.

³ J. Brent, *Canterbury in the Olden Time*, ed. 2, pp. 12, 143.

⁴ Gostling: *Walk* (ed. of 1825), p. 28, n. 2.

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about 15° from north. The northernmost part occupied the triangular space in front of Messrs. Scam's Garage at the end of Oaten Hill Place; the hop-oast covers the site of the southern section. The mound in its later stages is shown in the various printed plans of Canterbury as somewhat eroded away on the east; this was probably due to the



passing London and Dover traffic. Like Little Dungeon, Oaten Hill also served as a parochial boundary-mark; it defined the extreme southern corner of St. George's Parish, and their use in this way would point to the fact that the mounds are of ancient date, for both parishes had been delimited by the twelfth century.

VI. The mound in the grounds of St. Augustine's Abbey. Little is really known of this mound. It is depicted in the plan of Canterbury by Andrews and Wren (1768), which shows that it cannot have been formed, as has been stated, from earth dug out during excavations

for the foundations of the Hospital. In its present state it is of considerable size and it was until some years ago much larger. The wall which retained it along Longport collapsed after heavy rain, and during subsequent alterations when the road was widened, a good deal of the earth on the street side of the mound was scarped away. Roman deposits seem to occur in the mound.

VII. Mound in the Precincts. This was in existence by c. A.D. 1160. A representation of it, perhaps the earliest diagram of a tumulus in England, is shown in the *Canterbury Psalter*.¹ Upon it stood the Cathedral campanile which fell down in the earthquake of 1382. The mound is shown quite clearly at the bottom of the tower. Excavation is required to determine the exact nature of both this mound and the preceding.

VIII. "Salt Hill." At Oaten Hill, William Somner tells us, "was that commodity of oats sometime vented: as in the same place before Salt was sold, whence the place was called Salthill."² He gives as reference *Rentale vet. Ecclesie Christi Cant.* The archives of Canterbury Cathedral are peculiarly rich in ancient rentals, and several references to Salt Hill can be discovered. The hill meets two requirements for an identification with Oaten Hill; both are in the same parish (St. George's) and the same ward (Newingate). However, upon further investigation difficulties in this identification appear.

The first occurrence of the name Salt Hill so far noticed is in a rental which can be dated from internal evidence to within a couple of years of 1165. The cellarer of Christchurch receives a rent of 2s. per annum from John, son of Roger Cook for a plot of ground lying in *Salthelle*.³ This ground, so it is stated, had belonged to Winede Oxe, and lay "without Newingate towards the east, next to the land of St. Augustine's held by Hamo son of Roger." In the next holding to the south dwelt Alderman Alan.⁴ If Salt Hill were to be identified with Oaten Hill, this property would lie near the junction of Chantry Lane, Oaten Hill (the street of that name), and Dover Street, that is, two streets and 800 feet away from Newingate. It is quite clear from the context, however, that it must be opposite the Gate, and that there is little in between.

If we assume that the line of houses in Upper and Lower Bridge Streets between Ivy Lane and Dover Street lay on the same frontage in the twelfth century as at present, we ought to look in this neighbourhood for the holdings under discussion. This is an ancient built-up area. Many houses dating at least to the fifteenth century stood on

¹ MS. Trinity College, Cambridge, fol. 284b. The volume was published in facsimile in 1934.

² *Antiquities of Canterbury*, ed. 1, pp. 148-9.

³ Chapter MSS., Canterbury, Rental 31, col. i, para. 91.

⁴ *Ibid.* para. 92. The wording as to the position of Hamo's holding is ambiguous. See note 3, p. 144.

this line until within recent times, and we are probably quite safe in the assumption that they lay on the same frontage as their twelfth century predecessors. St. George's Place is, of course, a comparative newcomer and dates only from the end of the eighteenth century.

Another rental relating to Canterbury in the Cathedral archives is incorporated in Register H, and was drawn up at the very end of the twelfth century.¹ We will refer to it for convenience as H2. It deals *inter alia* with the same row of plots as does Rental 31.² These have naturally undergone changes in tenants since the compilation of the survey of c. 1165. Alderman Alan's heirs now occupy his holding "in front of Newingate"; an extra tenement in the possession of one Lambert has intruded itself between those of Alan, and Hamo son of Roger; this must be due to subdivision of the one or the other. The holding of John is now in the possession of Simon Chig, and has become Cathedral property,³ while beyond John, and south of "Lodderelane" lives Elviva widow of Pardich, paying 25d. at Midlent, and 7d. at the feast of St. Peter *ad Vincula*. There is no mention of Salt Hill. The rental "H2" is a very remarkable document in that it comprises an extensive, detailed, and where it can be checked, extremely accurate survey of Cathedral property in Canterbury held by Gavelkind tenure, thus providing a remarkable picture of an English borough at the beginning of the reign of King John.

Another rental, at the beginning of the same register,⁴ here called H1 for brevity, was drawn up a little later than the last mentioned, perhaps just before or just after the great exile of the monks, 1207-1213. It does not provide as much detail as H2, but we find that the heirs of Pardich (altered in another, later, hand to Richard clerk of Milstead) pay 25d. at Midlent for land at Loddereslane "towards the south, at Salt Hill."⁵

The holding of Alderman Alan, discussed above, can be fixed approximately as it is described as opposite Newingate. It must therefore have been at or near the beginning of the present St. George's

¹ Chapter MSS., Register H, ff. 218a-229b.

² *Ibid.* fol. 222a.

³ Due to ambiguity in Rental 31 above, it is possible that the holding of Hamo was north of that of John, son of Roger, in which case two tenements have intruded themselves. Subdivision and amalgamation of tenements went on constantly. Strictly speaking the tenant of the soil at the lowest level was the owner. The vendor sold for an initial lump sum (*gersuma*), retaining a small annual rent. Property was sold and resold, so many individuals and institutions might claim an interest in one holding. Perhaps in this case both Churches, St. Augustine's and Christ Church, drew rent simultaneously.

⁴ Register H, ff. 1a-15a.

⁵ *ibid.* fol. 4b. A point of topographical interest provided here is the fact that a cross stood in the roadway, in what would be now the centre of the cross-roads. Alan's holding, before which it stood, is said to be in the hands of one Adam at Cross.

Place. To the north of that holding was a tenement of 14 feet frontage, according to the rentlist H2, in the hands of Lambert, while next door dwelt Simon Chig enjoying a frontage of 22 feet ; giving a combined frontage for these last two of 36 feet. Beyond Simon, and south of Lodderelane, dwelt Elviva widow of Pardic, occupying a piece of ground 27 feet in frontage. The Lane was therefore sited 63 feet north of the Alderman's holding. One of the outstanding facts brought out by a study of these early rentals is that in a great many instances the ancient property boundaries can still be traced upon the ground plan of modern Canterbury. The frontage of Elviva was, as has been shown, 27 feet, and the combined frontage of her two neighbours to the south 36 feet. These are the dimensions of two adjacent premises at the required point in Bridge Street to-day.¹

If the identifications are accepted Alan's dwelling is then placed almost exactly where we should expect ; it covered most of the breadth of St. George's Place and the premises on the northern corner.

A difficulty is raised by a relevant group of deeds in the Cathedral archives. The deeds fall in date just after the first compilation of H1, and before the revisionary notes were added ; one of them records the sale by Walter son of Robert Sheepshank (*Szepeszange*) of Dover to Walter son of Roger of Iffeld of land at Salt Hill "without Niewingate" which belonged to Elveva of Salthelle widow of Randulf.² The frontage is given as 35 feet instead of 27, though it is clear from rents and names specified that it is the same piece of property as that held by Elveva in H2. Another³ deed concerns the further sale of this property at Salthill outside "Neuhingate" from Richard son of Roger of Hiffeld to Richard the clerk, son of Martin of Milstede. The same measurement, 35 feet, is given as the frontage. In both cases the boundary to the north is given, not as Lodderelane, but as the holding of Robert Pret. The explanation might be that the frontage of 35 feet includes the width (8 feet) of the lane, which was some sort of private alley.

It now remains to determine the nature and precise site of Salt hill. It was not a natural feature. There are no hills worthy of the name for half a mile or more. It was fairly small, it is clear, as it acts as a land-mark in a quite closely defined position, and as far as can be judged from available evidence (as given below) it lay between the town wall and a row of houses not more than 120 feet away, in which distance considerable space must be allowed for the town ditch. Its name

¹ The more northerly (Elveva ?) is a bombed and derelict 17th century building (divided into three shops) with a mansard roof. The other (Messrs. Twyman's newer department) seems to represent the holdings of Lambert and Simon.

² Chapter MSS., Charta Antiqua, No. C. 1190. Elveva's complete title, assembled from all the sources must have been : Elveva of Salt Hill, widow of Randulf Pardic.

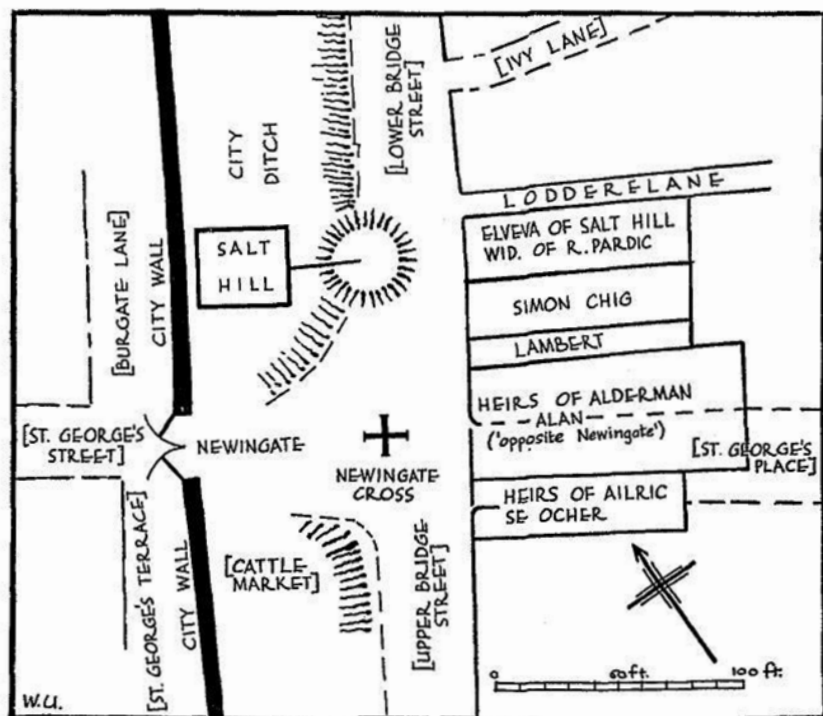
³ Charta Antiqua No. C. 1191.

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indicates very clearly that it was a mound of some sort, and, since small natural mounds are not met with in this locality, we may infer that it was artificial. The word "hill" is applied regularly to the Canterbury mounds.

The first element in the name is correctly explained by Somner. The register of St. Augustine's Abbey places a Martin the Salter (*Sæltre*) here in the thirteenth century.¹

We can perhaps decide the site of Salt Hill with more precision. It lay sufficiently near Elveva's holding to supply her with a surname.



Environs of Salt Hill, Canterbury, about A.D. 1200, reconstructed from Register H, Canterbury Cathedral.

To the north of this, and perhaps incorporated in it, lay a narrow lane, while beyond this was another holding, that of Osbert Pret. It seems improbable that the hill lay in this direction. It is very unlikely indeed that it lay behind, to the east of, the row of dwellings. It did not lie to the south of say the Alderman's house as there was a continuous

¹ *Black Book of St. Augustine's*, ed. Turner and Salter, p. 186, in a Canterbury Rental transcribed into the volume. The names of citizens occurring indicate the date.

frontage of tenements stretching to, or almost to Dover Street.¹ The only likely site is therefore in the street, before Elveva's house, that is in what to-day is Lower Bridge Street, at a point about 70 feet from the corner of St. George's Place. We may imagine it as standing at the edge of the town ditch in the same manner as the mounds without the wall at the Dane John (Nos. II and III above).

“Salt Hill seems to have survived till as late as 1430² but had disappeared by the seventeenth century, and there could have been no living memory of it at that date or the learned and industrious William Somner, who searched for antiquarian remains “as narrowly as for Ants-paths” would have heard of it, and not have identified it incorrectly as he did with Oaten Hill.

As stated above we propose to leave the archæological implications to the specialist, but it is well to draw attention here to the fact that on the very site of Salt Hill as suggested on manuscript evidence, a remarkable Roman inhumation burial was discovered in the Canterbury drainage operations of 1867-1868. At the upper end of Lower Bridge Street, 6 feet from the existing surface, and but 3 feet from some earlier surface, came to light a leaden coffin 4 feet 8 inches in length; it had a decorated lid, and contained the remains of a girl of 12 or 13 years of age.³ Students of the history of the Dane John group of mounds will at once recall the “corse closed yn leade” dug up by treasure seekers early in the sixteenth century in a tumulus near Baron Hales' house.⁴ It seems possible that the Bridge Street burial was in fact connected with Salt Hill, and that Salthill was one of the group of Roman tumuli, the significance of which has been discussed elsewhere. When perhaps late in the Middle Ages, the mound was destroyed (it must have been an awkward obstruction in the roadway) the removers excavated down to the road level of their day, but failed to dig low enough to reach the coffin.

The engineer in charge of the drainage operations of 1867-1868, James Pilbrow, placed before the Society of Antiquaries in 1869 a very bare account of discoveries made in the excavations. The report was most unsatisfactory, and so were the precautions taken to prevent the loss or destruction of objects found. The leaden coffin which might have served as a principal exhibit in the Canterbury Museum had by March, 1868, been broken up and sold for scrap metal.⁵

¹ Register H, fol. 222.

² B.B. St. Aug., p. 180.

³ *Archæologia*, XLIII, 160-161. *Archæologia Cantiana*, XIV, 35, where an illustration is given. The lid was in the shape of a parallelogram, with diagonal rope-moulded lines crossing from corner to corner. At the point of intersection was a flower in the form of a rose with four petals; half way between the centre and each corner on the lines was a plain circular ornament.

⁴ Leland: *Itinerary*, ed. Toulmin Smith, vol. IV. p. 70.

⁵ *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1868, i, p. 369. The centre ornament of the lid, and one of the others, survived and were exhibited by Pilbrow at his lecture (*Archæologia*, vol. XLIII, p. 161).