

VESTIGES OF ROMAN DOVER.

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I ALMOST regret having adopted the title of "Roman Dover" for the few memoranda I can lay before the Society; there seems an over-ambitious ring and pretension about it. There is so little now remaining on the surface to which I can point in ocular evidence of those Roman days, that I must ask my readers to bear with me while I put them in possession of such facts and objects as I have been able to verify, telling us what little we know of the Dover of Roman days.

Our obvious starting-point is the earth-work crowning the main summit of the Castle Hill, where the chalk cliff begins to fall sharply upon the shore; one of the many minor marks of Roman intrenchment which occur at frequent intervals along the coast between Dover and Lymne,—the Portus Lemanis, the strongest military station and harbour on this shore—with a Roman road striking across the hills direct upon Canterbury. The Pharos, built on this earth-work, is perhaps one of the most genuine examples of Roman work of its rough and massive period. It makes us feel, at once, the presence of the Roman builder, in his accustomed use of his special materials, tufa, concrete of pounded brick, with abundant bonds and dressings of the unique Roman red-tile brick itself. This Pharos connects itself

unmistakably with the foundation of a similar beacon-light, still visible in one of the casemates of the redoubt, on the opposite western hill ; as if a portion of the eastern Pharos had been transported there, tufa, concrete, tile brick, iron-stone, and all ; shewing that a double system of signal-lights was among the first features of the Roman haven at Dover—the first guardians of the navigation of these Channel waters.

The primitive haven of Dover was of very different site and dimensions from the later harbour. It filled a small space bounded by the lower half of S. James Street, Dolphin Lane, and Russell Street, and the east end of Dolphin Lane, through which the waterfall of the Dour made its exit to the sea by about the line of Woolcomber Street and the Imperial Hotel. This space was partly uncovered in excavating for the new Russell Street gas-works, and brought to light many years ago the site and appliances of the old haven,—timbered quays, groins, warping gear, hawser rings, and other remains of a rough mariner's craft, shewing plainly enough where the life and calling of the earlier seafaring population of this ancient port had been.

Connected with this, we find the largest and most important work whose traces the Roman colonists have left behind them. I mean the sea-wall, which protected the southern front of the Roman fortified town. This I have had opportunities of seeing and examining, when it was uncovered at several points in its extent from the corner of Upper Town Wall Street, to the corner-stone in Snargate Street, which marks the ancient site of the Snare Gate. The work lies at but few feet below the street level, and has been kept quite clear of the houses on the seaward side of the street. The material is peculiar ; simply water-worn

fragments picked up as washed along the coast—flints of every size and form, boulders, and nuggets of iron-stone, Kentish rag, with no brick bonding; but the whole mass compacted together by grouting with hot lime, unmixed with anything but the finest possible sharps, sifted from the neighbouring beach. It is like no other material I ever met with, harder than any natural rock, and breaking or throwing off every wedge or tool put upon it. I remember seeing three men once employed for a fortnight in making an opening through it 3 feet deep, and wide enough for about a 10-inch drain pipe to pass through!

Speaking of the Roman Wall especially, as more or less at one with the later mediæval Town Wall, the massive structure seems to have turned at the Snare Gate corner, and to have been carried up the hill to Hadrian's Gate, popularly known as "Above Wall," at the corner of Chapel Place; then to have passed by the Cow Gate and St. Martin's Postern to Canon Street and S. Mary's Churchyard; then to have turned south again to S. Helen's Gate by Stambrook; and then, passing by the future sites of the Fisherman's and Butchery Gates, to have formed the line of Town Wall Street till eastward of the Gate of Severus; which was also known as the Gate of the Merchants' Bench, or the Beggars' Bench, giving the name to Bench Street, abutting on the centre of the southern wall.

This rough outline agrees in position and configuration with the engraving of Dover in Roman times, belonging to the Mayor and Corporation, and hanging in the vestibule of the council chamber. Old engravings, as a rule, are quite untrustworthy, irreconcilable with verified facts; and, in this instance,



the presumed hill of the western redoubt, and the western Pharos upon it, bristle with difficulties in the way of imaginary localities and impossible perspectives. Still, taken in the rough, and as a quasi-bird's eye view, the approximate parallelogram shewn on that engraving, and marked on the reduced Ordnance plan opposite, may be accepted as fairly suggesting the site, figure, and extent of Dover within the Roman walls. I would suggest, as probably original, only the four gates of Roman nomenclature, at the cardinal points of the compass; leading, according to rule, northward by the Great Road to London; by St. Helen's Gate to the eastward; by Severus' Gate to the haven and the shore; by Hadrian's Gate to the hills and west country.

It will be seen that the space thus enclosed was extremely small; small even for the wants of a colonial settlement and port like this. The haven was ill-fitted for the wants of the smallest along-shore trading, for the rudest naval armament; but there was even more to be compressed within the small open limits of the then existing town. The actual remains of the Roman baths, as we have explored them, shew the liberal scale and extent on which they were built for the use of the people, including all grades, occupying nearly all the available space between the lower foundations of S. Martin's le Grand, Canon Street, and S. Mary's. The public works would then have to follow (on a small scale) the palatial arrangements we see in the Castrum of Silchester, between Mortimer and Basingstoke, whether we regard it as a Roman, or an early British, city.

Many things remain unchanged, in their sites and uses, since the Romans occupied the earth-works on

Dover heights; and so probably with the humble ways of the little walled town below. The daily uses of the Central Forum, or Roman Market, still partly survive in the common trade or occupations of our own Market Square—the site itself remaining the same. The Basilica, quite as often on a humble as on a stately scale, with its shops, and trades, and artificers, would be represented by the general commercial centres of trade continuing there as ever; while the Municipal Offices, Courts of Justice, and Official Life, would have passed from the Basilica to the Old Guildhall, so many years the Municipal headquarters, till it was removed to the present Town Hall. These, at all events, must have been the leading features of the public works and public life of Roman Dover, when it was a small fortified parallelogram, less than thirty-six chains by twenty-one (at a rough measurement) within the walls.

The line of foot-way communication, between the Pharos and the haven at the foot of the Hill, seems to have been at all times nearly identical with what it is now. Whether there was any way from the heights of the Deal Road, for getting material and traffic direct within the Castle earth-works, cannot now be determined. But certainly towards the decay of Roman occupation, after the end of the Diocletian persecution at the beginning of the fourth century, another and different step was taken in the primitive Dubrian fortification. There is good reason to think that the massive square tower, the central member of the Church of S. Mary at the Castle, was not originally meant by its Romano-British builder as a church tower, but for purposes of military defence. The foundations were peculiarly laid, having no regard to

intended openings for the four arches of nave, choir, and transepts, but being carried on, in one equal mass, under the whole square of the tower. The adaptation to a cruciform church was an afterthought; the more immediate object and evident purpose being to construct a massive kind of donjon tower, as if to be a keep of the earth-work; commanding, and holding a last resource for, any threatened investment of the place. Defence was also clearly the purpose of that curious feature the double splay, inward and outward, of every window-opening in the building, except in the western gable, where the Pharos masks every possible approach from without. This I believe to have been the first intention of the Romano-British builders in what afterwards became one of the most striking cruciform churches, for character and association, in Christendom. And this simple form of the Lord's Cross bears witness to Rome's guardianship of her little colonial town; while it tells more deeply of the Christianity of England in those early and turbulent days!

And now, having thus far dealt with the matter of localities, it remains that we note something of the means of locomotion, as afforded by the great imperial roads, which form a still conspicuous relic of old Roman Dover. The main highway north-west to London is a marked example of the principles of these most remarkable road-makers of the world. Starting from the great Northern (mediævally called Biggin) Gate, it pursues its way almost as straight as a line can be drawn, along the valley to the waterhead of the Dour; then, scarce condescending to follow the curve of Lydden Hill, it strikes the high table-land towards Barham Downs; passes straight, like an iron

rule, over rise and fall, ridge and valley, just as they happen to cross the line, to Canterbury, where it falls in with another great Roman road from the Portus Lemanis, which follows the high level route by Lymne and Stone Street, and enters Canterbury at Wincheap. Thence the united Roman roads are identical with the traditional and modern mail roads, going straight and unswerving to Shooter's Hill and Blackheath. The ordinary mail journey now (even by London, Chatham, and Dover Railway as far as Rochester) is still upon the old lines of Roman Dover in its day.

There is yet another Roman road issuing from the Dover valley, and connecting it with Richborough. It is one of the very rare examples, we find, of a Roman road having been constructed with due regard to the difficulties of the ground, instead of being carried over all obstacles in direct line across the crest of the hill. This road leaves the valley at a junction near Barton Farm, passing under the Deal Railway, and entering a grassy amphitheatre in the hollow of the hill popularly known as the Cow Pastures. Thence it is carried along a green terrace on the side of the hill, rising by an equable gradient to a small depression, or cutting, through which an old occupation roadway passes towards Guston Church. At this point you command the whole line of the Eastward Road from Dover to Richborough; even now, in spite of all surface changes, a direct and well-defined track, which from this high point can be well seen on a clear day, till it is partially lost in the covert about Eastry, to reappear on drawing nearer to Richborough; thus completing the well-preserved lines of intercommunication which help us to realize



what Dover and its adjacent country was, in days when Rutupian oysters were a delicacy of Imperial Rome; when a Roman exquisite, or gastronome, was expected to discuss the special flavour of "Natives" of these British beds as far surpassing those of the *Ostrearia* of any other waters.

We have now come practically to the limit of this paper, as concerned with the aspect and condition of Dover during the course proper of its Roman days. It is a vague uncertain question where that limit should be fixed. It is difficult to say where the purely Roman period ends, and the Romano-British begins. The masters of the colony did not part from their possession, and cease to possess military occupation of Britain, till towards the middle of the fifth century; but the character of that occupation, with its arts, industries, habits, and common ways of life, had long ceased to be of the pure and original Roman type. I can only regret, as I said at first, my tentative and imperfect sketch of the earlier days—its poverty of illustration and detail. I have longed many a time to get at the wealth of instruction there must be lying a few feet beneath the surface even of the little parallelogram representing to us the site of the primitive Roman town; to have seen the course and extent of the Sea Wall, the real plan and structure of the Public Baths, and the picturesque Estuary and Haven guarded by the two consort lights of the Castle and the Bredengstone hills. But excavations, upon any adequate scale, are ever costly things; with which, moreover, one is seldom satisfied: the necessity as well as the appetite for them growing with what it feeds upon.

I shall be thankful enough to have stirred anew

any spirit of inquiry ; to have invited the attention of perhaps younger Members to some further study and pursuit of the more interesting branches of the subject, beyond what ever-pressing calls and duties permit me to follow out. There must be interest yet unexhausted in comparative views of this ancient town and port as it now is, and as it was from the first to the third century, as a settlement of Imperial Rome.