

A THOUSAND YEARS AGO ....

## A Viking Chieftain Fortifies A French Hill Top and Finds One of History's Great Families

His name was Gormeric, son of Ingvar Ragnarson and younger brother of Hrolf the Ganger. For generations his family of Ylving kings had held sway from Norway and Denmark to the Low Countries. Year after year their viking dragon ships plundered the British Isles and swept deep up the rivers of western Europe.

By the last decade of the Ninth Century the Vikings were no longer raiders in northern France. They had come to stay. Under his brother's leadership Gormeric conquered large areas of what is now Normandy. In 912 the king of the Franks bought off the Vikings, recognizing Hrolf as Duke of Normandy over all the ravaged lands he already controlled. In return the pagan leader agreed to convert to Christianity and to protect the kingdom from any other ambitious raiders from the north.

For his part Gormeric received a fiefdom of vast holdings in what are now the departments of Calvados and Orne. There on a hillock near Livarot, some hundred miles west of Paris, he built a wooden fortress. They called it Mons Gomerici. Gommer's Mount. Montgomery!!

It was this site pictured on the cover of the **Spring 1991 CMS Newsletter**. In its beginning a moat (or motte) was dug around the natural hill and the earth heaped on top to raise and level the crown. At first a log palisade around the rim protected wooden buildings inside the "baillie". Perhaps water was diverted from the nearby stream to fill the motte.

In later generations this wooden fortress may have been replaced by stone walls and keep. If so the stones later were quarried to build other castles and houses in the area.

Historian E. E. Freeman described the site's appearance in 1867:

...high above (two later structures) rose the true castle of Montgomery, the fortress reared on the true Mons Gomerici, no square donjon, but a vast shell-keep on a mighty mound, girded by a fosse worthy of the famous spot which it fences in. Only the faintest traces of the building itself can be made out, but the mound and the fosse are there, to keep up the memory of the great house to which that hill gave its name, and which has, in so strange a way, spread its name over many lands. For the castle of Montgomery enjoys a peculiar privilege above all other castles in Norman geography.....there is only one shire in Great Britain which has had the name of a Norman lordship impressed on it forever.

When did the description of a fort become a family name? Gormeric's eldest son William probably never used the surname; and there is no record that William's son Hugo did. But in the first half of the Eleventh Century Hugo's son is called Roger de Montgomery, the first recorded use of the name. It was his son Roger II who crossed the English Channel with William the Conqueror and continued a thousand years of Montgomery migrations.

Note: Genealogies are drawn from B. G. de Montgomery's Origin and History of the Mongomerys, which states connections with more certainty than do other writers on the period. Descriptions of the original castle are interpreted from the aerial photograph in the CMS Newsletter and various histories of Norman and Viking fortifications.

...JMM