

# 11th CENTURY BUILDING IN DOVER

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IVAN GREEN BA. FCCed.

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When considering 11th century buildings in Dover we must take account of the materials which were available to the builder and the tools with which he used to work them. His two abundant materials here were flint from the chalk subsoil which was abundant all over the South East corner of the county and wood from the forests which were then covering much of its surface. The only stone freely available locally was tufa, in appearance like a sponge and easy to work. Quantities of it were found in the valley of the River Dour, but it has almost been worked out now. Some pieces of tufa can be seen in the Roman Pharos and in the walls of St Mary in Castro, and it was much used all over the county, including even complete churches, of which West Farleigh is a good example.

Kentish ragstone was found in several parts of the county, but principally in the great quarries to the south of Maidstone, and in smaller quantities from the Hythe Beds near Folkestone.

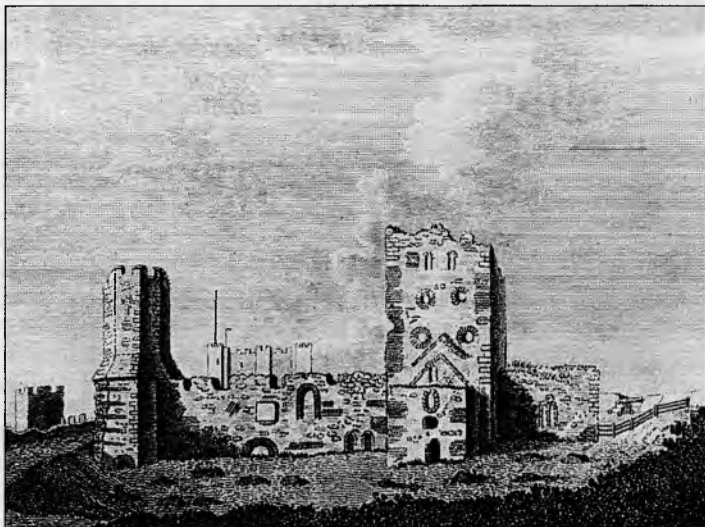
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A very early view of the building when it was ruinous. It is titled: 'The Old Church In Dover Castle, Kent. Pub. 25 Augt 1784 by S.Hooper. Godfrey Sculp.'

Ragstone was very hard and difficult to work and it had to be transported from the quarry to a local dock and then by ship to Dover's original little harbour near Old St James's church, and thence by sledges drawn by oxen to the building site. (The roads, only rough tracks, were too poor for heavily laden wheeled vehicles and oxen were the generally used beasts of burden).

Before about 1150AD, stone was principally used for important work, and only in limited quantities for the less important.

Lime for mortar was produced from chalk in Dover from early days and it continued to be until the 18th century. An old picture shows at least seven smoking lime kilns in old Limekiln Lane, later of course re-named





The old Saxon south door as it is today after being excavated and exposed to the elements since the 1860's.



Limekiln Street. A further material available on some sites was re-used brick and tile from the ruins of old Roman buildings. The Saxons did not make or use their own brick or tile until very late in the period.

The Saxon craftsmen worked by splitting the ragstone one or by cutting it with a mason's axe. Very uneven surfaces were also sometimes produced by pulverising the surface with a hammer, or by rubbing it with a stone together with water as a lubricant. This produced a slurry which improved the cutting process, and which is still in fact used today at York Minster for lubricating modern local buildings.

The outstanding local building of this period is St Mary in Castro, which has already been mentioned in a recent article. It is mainly built of flint with some pieces of tuffa, but extensive unsympathetic rebuilding in the 19th century was responsible for the dark red brick of that time where the original quoins, (the corner stones) were missing, probably elsewhere. They have been taken for other work and for repairs to the ruined tower. Most of the windows, too, were renewed at that time, not in Kentish ragstone, but in one of the softer materials such as Caen stone, by then freely available from the continent.

There has been much speculation, and some uninformed comment, on the age of the present windows in the south nave wall, but the fact is that they are of the 13th century when the restoration was carried out.

'The Old Church. South door' (as when first excavated). Revd J. Puckle. Drawn by J. R. Jobbins. Canon Puckle made a rough sketch and Jobbins, who produced many fine illustrations, produced the finished work.

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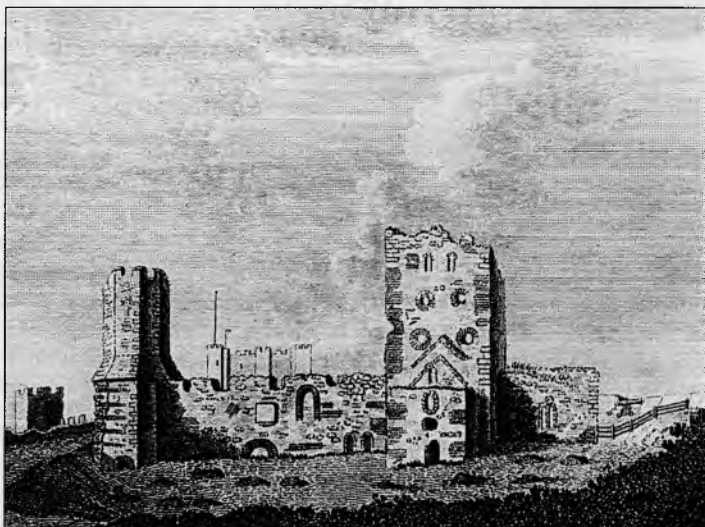
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The old Saxon south door as it is today after being excavated and exposed to the elements since the 1860's.

Limekiln Street. A further material available on some sites was re-used brick and tile from the ruins of old Roman buildings. The Saxons did not make or use their own brick or tile until very late in the period.

The Saxon craftsmen worked by splitting the ragstone or by cutting it with a mason's axe. Very uneven surfaces were also sometimes produced by pulverising the surface with a hammer, or by rubbing two stones together with water as a lubricant. This produced a slurry which improved the cutting process, and such a slurry is still in fact used today at York Minster for lubricating modern stone saws.

The outstanding local building of this period is St Mary in Castro which has already been mentioned briefly in a recent article. It is mainly of flint with some pieces of tufa, but extensive unsympathetic rebuilding in the 19th century was responsible for the dark red brick of that time being extensively used, especially where the original quoins, (the corner stones) were missing, probably having been taken for other work elsewhere, and for repairs to the ruined tower. Most of the windows, too, were renewed at that time, not in Kentish ragstone, but in one of the softer materials such as Caen stone, by then freely available from the continent.

There has been much speculation, and some uninformed comment, on the age of the present windows in the south nave wall, but the fact is that they are of the mid 19th century when the restoration was carried out.

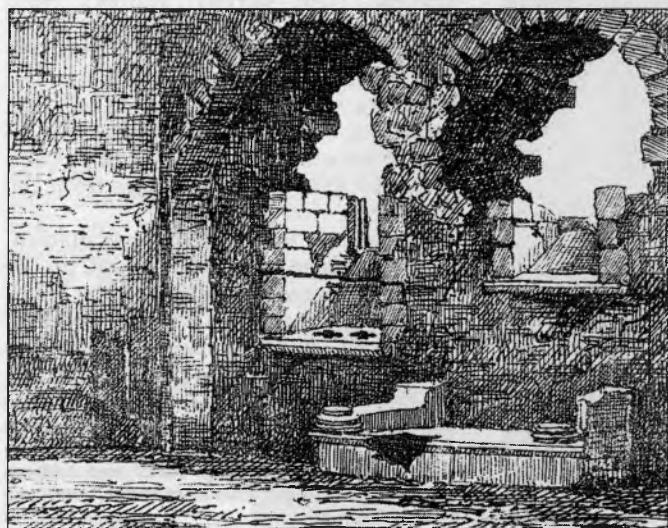


'The Old Church. South doorway (as when first excavated). Revd J.Puckle. Del. J.R.Jobbins'. Canon Puckle made a rough sketch and Jobbins, who produced many fine illustrations, produced the finished work.

A late 18th century view of the interior of the church when it was, of course, a roofless ruin.

The restoration of the 1860's uncovered several original features, including the fine old Saxon south doorway into the nave. It is now uncovered and very damaged by exposure to the elements but fortunately a detailed account of the church appeared in a Victorian description of the church published by Canon Puckle. Its conclusions have long since been discredited, but it includes a fine drawing of this old doorway when it was first uncovered, and it shows its original details.

The verticals, of axe hewn ragstone, are typical examples of the famous Saxon 'long and short' work, and the arch is composed of a double row of re-used Roman tiles, no doubt salvaged from the old Roman buildings which probably



once surrounded the old Pharos.

The old Sacrarium in the south wall of the nave was composed of irregularly shaped and sized axe hewn stone blocks, another feature of its time, but unfortunately it was rebuilt in the nineteenth century in a mock Gothic style as the present

The original Sacrarium in the corner of the nave of St Mary In Castro before it was demolished and replaced by the present Soldiers' Altar in the 19th century restoration.

The north internal wall of Old St James's church.



Soldier's Altar. The building methods and the materials used by the Saxons continued until years after William's arrival and work of rough axe hewn stone appear in buildings well into the twelfth century. An example can be seen in the ruins of old St. James's church, which must be of the eleventh, or early years of the twelfth, century. In the picture modern restoration work in the two pillars at the centre is obvious, but between them is, undeniably, work done in the Saxon tradition. Particular note should be taken of the axe hewn stone in and around the small arch at the top and the stone which surrounds it.

And now a post script. The turning point in building work has, strangely enough, been generally accepted as a consequence of the Crusades.

At the Council of Claremont in 1095 Pope Urban issued an appeal to the faithful for help for the Eastern

Christians and the recapture of holy places. Many Western Christians who embarked on Crusades had their first encounter with the lands of the Orient. They were amazed at the quality of the workmanship in the stone carving of the buildings, a result of the use of softer stone and an unfamiliar tool, the mason's chisel. In a few years, building, already a growth industry in the twelfth century, was revolutionised.

Here, the use of softer stones from the continent, especially from Caen, and the adoption of the mason's chisel, was the dividing line between the rougher, wide-jointed, axe-hewn Saxon work and the new higher quality, chisel-worked stone.

Some of the ruins of the old St. Martin le Grande (parts of which survived into the nineteenth century), St. Mary in Castro, and parts of old St. James's, thus all predate the use of the mason's chisel.

Gervase the monk, writing in the twelfth century about current work in Canterbury Cathedral, compared it with surviving earlier work in the Saxon tradition, recording: "There the arches and everything else was plain, or sculptured with an axe and not with a chisel".

Finally, compare the rough, axe-hewn stones in the old Sacarium in St. Mary in Castro (about 1020) with the fine semicircular arches in the west end of the nave of St. Mary the Virgin, which are good examples of chisel worked stone with very fine joints, probably of about 1230 or a few years later. They were dismantled in the rebuilding of the church in 1843-4, but (we are assured) were replaced in exactly their original states and positions without any modification.