

# Dover's Two Great 12th Century Men

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When King Henry the 2nd, the first of the Plantagenet dynasty, came to the throne in 1154, the country was in a dreadful condition; internally in the grip of rival barons, each with his own motte and bailey castle, many of them openly pillaging the surrounding countryside, and with the crown in dispute; and externally open to attack from foreign raiders against whom there was little defence. King Henry II was a hard, restless, workaholic, determined to carry out the necessary changes to make the country governable again.

His first concern was to stabilise the internal situation and he ordered the destruction of all the illicit castles, (those built without royal permission). This edict affected the castles of many barons, a Kent example being Allington, near Maidstone.

In looking at the risk of invasion he was particularly concerned about three areas: the land behind the flat beaches of Suffolk; the north-eastern coast where there was the constant threat posed by North European tribes since no doubt he was aware that there, an invasion in 1066 by Tostig and Harald Hardrada, coupled with that of William in the south, resulted in William's defeat of Harold and the occupation of the country by the Normans; and William's primary invasion point at Dover, even though he did not succeed in landing there, for his overladen ships propelled only by small square sails were being forced further westwards than he intended.

Dover was a particular worry to him, since not only was an enormously strong defence needed at this very vulnerable point, but also he distrusted the old system of Castle Guard Tenure established there by William I. This consisted of the granting of considerable areas of the country to eight barons, who were Arsic,

Averanches, Grevecouer, Fitzwilliam, Fulbert, Mamignot, Peveral and Port. They had each to provide their own knights and their retainers to supplement the permanent castle guard for a given period of the year. The total was 171 1/2 knights fees. Henry, however, had cause to distrust the system of putting this vital defence into the hands of barons whose loyalty he did not trust. After all, only a few years previously the castle had been surrendered without a fight to Matilda when she arrived in the harbour from the continent. He therefore introduced the system of Scutage, in which the barons surrendered their castle guard duty in exchange for fines payable to the king who, with the money, was able to hire his own mercenary troops to guard the castle.

Henry then embarked upon a campaign of building permanent stone castles. An early one was Orford to guard against any invasion forces landing on the inviting flat Suffolk beaches, but his primary concern was to defend two specially vulnerable areas of the country, the north east coast, and Dover in the south.

His castles were not to be of the old earthen motte and bailey type which had proved to be a failure at Dover only a few years earlier, but of stone like the great keep of Rochester, built earlier in the century, and to achieve this he engaged the services of his own 'king's master mason', Maurice the Engineer, whose great castle still dominates Dover today, more than eight centuries later.

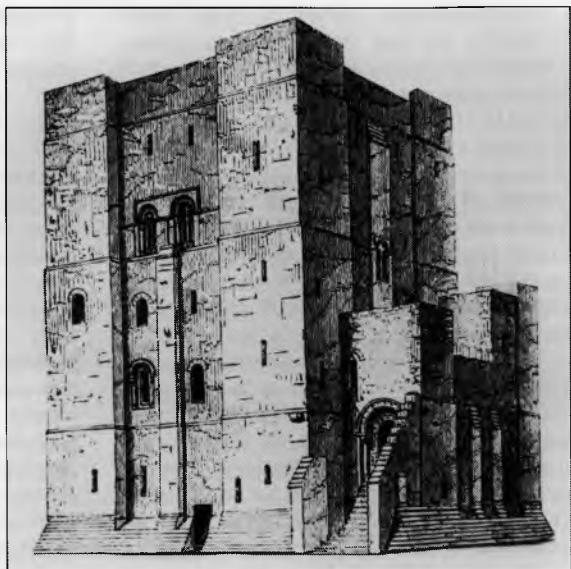
Today, and indeed for most of Queen Victoria's reign, any important work was always preceded and at least nominally supervised by a committee of socially acceptable and well known figures, even if they had little or no real experience of the proposed project.

But Maurice's was not just the royal appointment of a knightly supporter to provide overall supervision of the work, for like all mediaeval masons he was a highly skilled craftsman having spent many years of his life at learning all aspects of working with stone, first as a boy, shaping blocks of material for more skilled men, and then gradually progressing through many years of training to the point where he knew the whole craft and also had experience in the design and the organisation of the erection of great stone buildings.

He would have spent perhaps a quarter of a century of steady progress at more modest stages of his craft before he could have been appointed to his final position, the first ever recorded king's master mason. He possessed an annual stipend and was given presents from time to time. Considering his responsibilities he must have been wholly in the king's service.

He built Newcastle, the very name of the town referring to his building there, the new castle. Although much smaller, and costing some £900, only a fraction of the money spent on his later work at Dover, it bears a striking resemblance to Dover's great keep.

The illustration shows an old Victorian picture of Newcastle's keep. Even the entrance to the storage space at its base (bottom centre front) and the basic layout of the complicated entrance, which is also to be seen in ruin at Rochester, is familiar, though Dover's is more elaborate, its entrance being through the base of the tower which also includes the two chapels.



*Fig. 1. This illustration is an old Victorian picture of Newcastle's keep. Its similarity to the great keep of Dover is unmistakable.*



*Fig. 2. The entrance to Maurice the Engineer's great keep at Dover Castle*

32 Immediately after completing Newcastle he was transferred to Dover, where expensive defensive works had already been carried out between 1168 and 1174 AD. Here, with the king's support, he commenced the greatest defensive project of the time, the building of the great stone fortress of Dover to replace the old Iron Age camp on the Eastern Heights and the Saxon motte and bailey defences which succeeded it and had been commanded, under early Norman rule, by Fulbert de Dover.

While he worked at Dover, Maurice also oversaw work on a smaller keep at Chilham between 1181-2. This still survives and is shown in Fig. 3. Its similarity with Orford suggests that he may have been responsible for both. Being an important royal servant of the King, he would always have travelled with a bodyguard and have been treated as an important individual wherever he went. A mediaeval king's master mason is depicted in a sketch by Matthew Paris in the British Museum where the mason is shown conversing with the king and carrying two badges of his profession, a

set square and a very large pair of dividers. The master mason used these on his mason's floor, an area of fine compacted earth on which no workman stepped except with bare feet.

Upon this surface the master mason, who was always expert in geometry, drew the plans of the windows, door frames and other delicate detail full size. His masons would then carve the stones to fit the plans exactly. When the particular piece was finished every stone was marked so that they could all be assembled on the building in their correct positions. Sometimes errors were made and the stones were assembled wrongly. This in fact happened in the rose window in Barfreston church, where one stone, wrongly placed, can still be seen eight centuries later.

Maurice seems to have been working at Dover in 1170-71 since he was granted 40 shillings as a gift for his work and, later, when he was working at Chilham, it is recorded that he was granted a gift of one mark. His masons were, of necessity, free men, not bound to their native soil, as were most of the population, but moving

from job to job, walking many miles sometimes right across Europe to new projects when their current ones were completed. Many masons were needed at Dover and they would have caused accommodation problems in the town because they always lived as a family group, with the master mason as their head, in the mason's lodge, a temporary structure beside the mason's floor and the work in which they were



Fig. 3. The Surviving keep of Chilham Castle, with which Maurice was also involved.

engaged. They were, of course, of varying degrees of skill, some carving the stone with an axe and the more skilled with a mason's chisel.

The materials at Maurice's disposal were very hard, durable but difficult-to-work Kentish Ragstone, which he used in large quantities, some from Gravesend but most from the great quarries at Boughton Monchelsea just south of Maidstone and smaller quantities from the Folkestone Beds, together with the softer and more-easily-worked stone from the King's own quarry at Caen for intricate carving and detail finishing work, such as in the two chapels.

The enormous amount of work involved in transporting the many thousands of tons of stone by a community with little equipment for handling large blocks except by manual effort can only be imagined. Most of the huge blocks of stone were hewn in quarries near Boughton Monchelsea and dragged on sledges down to a quay on the Medway riverside at Maidstone, loaded on to ships and brought around by sea to the little original harbour near old St. James's Church at Dover, where they were unloaded and hauled up the steep hill to the castle site on sledges drawn by oxen, the common beast of burden in those days. There were no wheeled vehicles available for such loads and, in any case, there were no good roads, only rough and often muddy tracks. The Ragstone from the Folkestone Beds was brought in the

same way, as was the Caen stone from Normandy. 33

The ships available were similar to those used for fishing and for Cinque Ports duties, but were larger, propelled by up to fifty oars and with larger square sails, still on a single central mast. But it is unlikely that oars would have been used for transporting stone, since their abandonment would have given more room for the heavy and cumbersome stone blocks.

This enormous undertaking was additional to the normal life of Dover's citizens. The working of the passage connecting England with the continent across the Channel still went on, as did fishing, some commerce with continental ports and further afield, the chasing away of piratical bands from overseas, especially from the northern countries, and less official occupations such as piracy, wrecking and occasional raids on foreign coastal towns.

The king frequently called upon the services of the Cinque Ports ships to transport him, his court and his soldiers across the straits. One such journey was to Fretieval in 1170 when he made peace with Thomas Becket, his exiled archbishop. There is an interesting account of the archbishop's return home. On sailing up the channel to berth at Sandwich, one of his entourage pointed out Dover's white cliffs and called out 'This is England', a very early reference to 'White Cliffs Country'.



## Society Badges

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Just contact the Treasurer, Mike Weston at 71 Castle Avenue or phone him on 202059 (with a cheque or P.O. if possible) and he will very quickly ensure that a badge is in your hands.