

## ODO, THE WANABE POPE

by Terry Sutton

DOVER people, and others throughout Kent, were once heavily taxed in order to finance a bishop's desire to become Pope. Soon after William the Conqueror was crowned King of England he decided to give Dover and its castle into the custody of his half brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, whom he created Earl of Kent. That was when troubles began, because Odo, although a man of great ability, proved greedy and too ambitious. His greed fed his lust for power. Odo, who had invaded England with William, as soon as he was created an earl, began plundering from the landowners of Kent. He seized for himself 200 manors and such was his greed that he goaded his tenants into a revolt which failed. His resulting punishments were so severe that King William felt he had to interfere.

Historian Lambarde wrote: 'The king was offended with the disobedience, avarice and ambition of Odo who raked together great masses of gold and treasure. Odo then caused this gold to be ground into small powder, filled into pots and had them sunk in the bottom of rivers so that he could eventually purchase the papacy of Rome!'

Odo was also suspected of having his eyes on the throne of England. Suspicious King William consulted Lanfranc, the Archbishop of Canterbury, about what should be done. He asked if the Church would be offended if he prevented Odo taking

the confiscated treasures out of the country as he headed for Rome. Lanfranc was a clever old bird. He suggested to the king that Odo should be detained, not as a bishop but as Earl of Kent.

The king thought that a good idea and imprisoned Odo in Normandy. Meanwhile Odo's servants were persuaded, by torture, to reveal where the confiscated treasures were hidden.

After William died, Odo was pardoned by King Rufus (William II) in 1087 and he returned to England but was soon banished for conspiracy against the new king. In disgrace Odo then lived in Normandy for a further ten years, dying in retirement unhonoured and unsung. Ancient documents tell that Odo allowed one of his tenants to build a 'mill' at the entrance to Dover harbour but there is some mystery over this because, surely, the violence of the sea would have destroyed any building. It is written the 'mill' - not there in the time of King Edward - damaged almost every ship, including the king's, that entered the harbour. Later historians suggest that the word 'mill' had been badly translated when it should have been 'mole' (a breakwater). That would certainly make more sense because a mole would have stood up to lashing by the sea and could easily have damaged any ships arriving.

*\*Today, nearly 1,000 years on, one of the few memories of Odo is a road named after him at Tower Hamlets.*