

Itinerant justices in Kent : Introduction

During the twelfth century, the king's justices made occasional visits to Kent, as they did to every county. Little is known of their proceedings: the main evidence consists of a crop of new entries in the next exchequer roll, recording the debts which people had incurred through getting into trouble with the justices. The following list consists of all those passages in the exchequer accounts for Kent which result from a visitation of the county by justices dealing with a broad range of business. Only once - in 1176 - are the justices explicitly described as "itinerant justices".

(The actual word used, *errantes*, is a pun which only worked in medieval French. As French was pronounced in the twelfth century, two different words - *edrer* from colloquial Latin *iterare*, 'to make a journey', *errer* from Latin *errare*, 'to make a mistake' - had come to sound (and often to be spelt) the same. So *justiciers edranz*, the justices who travelled around the country, were also *justiciers erranz*, the justices who got things wrong. Similarly *edre*, 'journey', came to be pronounced *erre*. In the sort of French spoken in England, that (I do not know why) became *eire*; and English scribes, who tended to write "y" for "i" whenever possible, turned *eire* into "eyre".)

before 1130 - ... *de plac' Henr' de Port et soc' eius* (GREx 1130:65)

before 1130 - ... *de plac' G. de Clint'* (GREx 1130:65)

1154×6 - ... *de plac' cancell' et Henr' de Essex'* (GREx 1156:65)

1166 - *De plac' com' Gaufr' et Ric' de Luci* (GREx 1166:115, 1167:200)

1168 - *De plac' archid' Pict' et Widon' dec' et Regin' de War' et Henr' fil' Ger' cam'* (GREx 1168:214)

1175 - *Nova plac' ... per Will'm de Lanual' et Tom' Basset* (GREx 1175:218)

1176-7 - *Nova placita ... per Rog' fil' Renfr' et Ric' Giffard' et ipsum vic', justiciarios errantes* (GREx 1176:209, 1177:206) <The sheriff was Robert fiz Bernard.>

1178-9 - *Nova placita ... per Rad' et Will'm filios Steph' et Rog' fil' Reinfr' et Rob' Mantell'* (GREx 1179:118)

1179-80 - *Nova placita ... per Hug' Murdac et Ric' de Pech et Mich' Belet et socios suos* (GREx 1180:145)

1185 - *Nova placita ... per Will'm de Ver et Rog' fil' Renfr' et Will'm Ruffum et socios suos* (GREx 1185:228)

1186 - *Nova placita ... per Joscel' archid' et Will'm Ruffum et Otonem fil' Will'i et Henr' de Cornhill'* (GREx 1186:191)

1188 - *Nova placita ... per Rad' archid' de Colecestre et socios suos, scilicet Rog' fil' Renfr' et Mich' Belet et Rob' de Witefelde* (GREx 1188:206) <A fine made before these justices concerning land in Kent was produced in evidence in 1203 (Jessup 1956, pp cxxii-iii citing CRR); it is not said where the fine was made.>

1189 - *Nova placita ... per Joh'em ep'm Norwic' et ep'm Roff' et socios suos* (GREx 1189:238)

1191 - *Nova placita ... per Warinum precentorem Ebroic' et Simonem de Pateshell'* (GREx 1191:146)

1193 - *Nova placita ... per W. Roth' archiep'm et G. Roff' ep'm et Rog' fil' Renfr'* (GREx 1193:171)

1194 - *De amerciamentis hominum per G. Roff' ep'm et Osb' fil' Hervei et socios suos* (GREx 1195:6)

1196 - *Amerciamenta per Rad' de Arden' et Rad' de Sc'o Martino* (GREx 1196:290)

1197 - *Ammerciamenta per Ogerum fil' Ogeri et Galfr' de Sunderness' et socios eius* (GREx 1197:32)

1198 - *Ammerciamenta facta per Steph' de Turneham et Rad' de Sc'o Martino et Rand' thesaurar' Saesb' et socios eorum* (GREx 1198:205)

1199 - *Ammerciamenta facta per G. fil' Petri et socios suos* (GREx 1199:67)

1202 - *Ammerciamenta facta per Ric' de Heriet et Regin' de Cornhull' et Joh'em de Gestling'* (GREx 1202:216)

1206 - *Ammerciamenta per Will'm de Wroteham et Regin' de Cornhull'* (GREx 1207:35)

1210 - *Amerciamenta per S. comitem Wint' et Ric' de Marisco et socios suos* (GREx 1210:121)

From the late twelfth century onwards, another source of information becomes available, in the shape of the class of documents called "final concords", "fines" for short. A fine was the record of an agreement reached between two parties in the king's court, drawn up in proper form by the justices' clerks. If the matter was urgent, people from Kent might take their business to Westminster, or to wherever else a suitable court was in session.* But most people, most of the time, preferred to wait until the king's court came to them. So the arrival of the justices in Kent tends to be marked, not just by a sudden increase in the number of fines, but also by the fact that these fines were being issued in Canterbury or Rochester.

* To cite an extreme case, in February 1212 three fines relating to Kent were

made at Newcastle on Tyne (Churchill 1956, pp 50-1).

There are few surviving fines earlier than 1195; but in that year it was decided - the decision took effect on 15 July - that in future all fines would be drawn up in the form of a tripartite chirograph (as illustrated by the frontispiece in Churchill 1956, cf Jessup 1956, pp xvi-vii), the third portion of which, called the "foot of the fine", would be retained by central government. This was, in its way, a very significant decision: for the first time, the king's government committed itself to preserving for all time a class of public records. The decision, once made, was adhered to. From that date onwards, therefore, the survival rate for documents of this kind is very close to 100 per cent.

The two earliest known fines relating to Kent date from the 1180s; these two were both issued at Westminster. The earliest known fines that were issued in Kent date from 1194: they result from the visitation by Gilbert bishop of Rochester and others recorded in the exchequer roll for the following year (see above). Three such fines are known (Jessup 1956, pp cxxiii-iv), all dated at Canterbury in September 1194. One of them begins like this:

Hec est finalis concordia facta in curia domini regis apud Cantuariam die Veneris proxima post festum sancti Mathei apostoli anno regni regis Ricardi vi^o coram domino Gilberto Roffensi episcopo et Osberto filio Hervei et magistro Radulfo de Sancto Martino et magistro Simone de Scall' et Willelmo de Auberville justiciis domini regis et aliis fidelibus domini regis tunc ibidem presentibus ... (Turner and Salter 1915-24, pp 531-2).

"This is a final concord made in the lord king's court at Canterbury on Friday ... (23 Sep 1194) ... before Gilbert the lord bishop of Rochester ... (and others) ... the lord king's justices, and others of the lord king's faithful subjects then and there present, ..."

For the period 1195-1216, the feet of fines relating to Kent were printed in shortened form by Larking, in the first six volumes of *Archaeologia Cantiana* (1858-66).^{*} For that same period, and for the period 1216-1272, there are published abstracts of all fines relating to Kent (Churchill 1939-56).

^{*} A facsimile of an early fine (dated 20 Oct 1197) can be found in volume 1 (opp p 249). The text is printed by Larking (1858, pp 249-50) and summarized in Churchill (1956, p 8).

The justices came as close as Bermondsey in November 1198 (Larking 1858, pp 260-70, Churchill 1956, pp 11-14) and again in October 1202 (Larking 1859, pp 268-73, 1860, pp 209-15, Churchill 1956, pp 23-6, 55); but (as far as this type of evidence goes to show) they did not reappear in Canterbury till September 1206 (Larking 1861, pp 297-306, Churchill 1956, pp 39-40).^{*} On this occasion the itinerant justices - explicitly called by that name - were Willelm de Wrotham archdeacon of Taunton, Reginald de Cornhulle, Johan de Gestlinges and Roger de Huntingefeld (Larking 1861, p 297); too late to show up in the exchequer roll for 1206, their visitation

is recorded in the next year's roll (see above). After that the next known visitation was in June 1219, year 3 of Henric III, when a team of justices headed by Benedict bishop of Rochester was responsible for the issuance of five fines at Canterbury (Churchill 1956, pp 68-9) and three at Rochester (p 69).

* This is true by and large, but there are two special cases to be noted. (1) A single fine was levied at Canterbury on 3 Feb 1202 before Ricard de Herierd, Johan de Gestlinges and Reginald de Cornhulle (Larking 1859, pp 264-5, Churchill 1956, p 23). These are the same justices named in the exchequer roll for this year (GREx 1202:216); so the date of this fine is certain, despite the original's not being fully legible. (2) A single fine was levied at Canterbury on 7 Nov 1204 before a court presided over by the king himself: *coram ipso domino rege Johanne, G. filio Petri comite Essexie, Simone de Pateshull', magistro Radulfo de Stok', justiciariis* (Larking 1861, p 287, Churchill 1956, p 26).

For the rest of the reign of Henric III, the data are tabulated by Jessup (1956, p xix), as follows:

11 Henry III <1227> 79 fines levied, 75 of them at Canterbury

16 Henry III <1232> 45 fines levied, 27 of them at Rochester and 8 at Canterbury

20 Henry III <1236> 82 fines levied, 78 of them at Canterbury

25 Henry III <1241> 63 fines levied, 61 of them at Canterbury

32 Henry III <1248> 91 fines levied, 88 of them at Canterbury

39 Henry III <1255> 84 fines levied, 59 of them at Canterbury and 1 at Rochester

47 Henry III <1263> 77 fines levied, 69 of them at Canterbury, 5 at Rochester, and 1 at Tonbridge

55 Henry III <1271> 103 fines levied, 82 of them at Canterbury, 14 at Rochester, and 3 at Tonbridge

From this and other evidence, I arrive at the following list of the "eyres" of Kent during the period 1216-1348 (after which this type of visitation was discontinued). The "JUST 1" references denote the rolls still existing in the National Archives.

1219 - Benedict bishop of Rochester and others - at Canterbury 9--16 Jun, at Rochester 20--21 Jun

1227 - Martin de Pateshulle and others - JUST 1/358 - Maitland 1887, vol 3, pp 591-610 - at Canterbury 21 Sep--21 Oct

1232 - Thomas de Muletone and others - at Rochester 20 Jan--10 Feb, at Canterbury 3--10 Feb

1236 - Willelm of York and others - at Canterbury 13 Apr--11 May

- 1241 - Willelm of York and others - JUST 1/359 - extracts in Furley (1874) - at Canterbury 2--25 Jun
- 1248 - Henric of Bath - at Canterbury 1--22 Jul, 30 Sep--27 Oct
- 1255 - Gilbert de Preston and others - JUST 1/361 - extracts in Furley (1874) - at Canterbury 25 Jun--22 Jul, at Rochester 11 Aug, at Canterbury 30 Sep--13 Oct, at Tonbridge 20 Oct
- 1262-3 - Nicol de la Tour and others - JUST 1/363 - at Canterbury 18 Nov--3 Feb, at Rochester 10 Feb, at Tonbridge 10 Feb
- 1271 - Roger de Seyton and others - JUST 1/364-6 - at Canterbury 13 Apr--25 Jun, at Rochester 1--15 Jul, at Tonbridge 8 Jul
- 1279 - Johan de Reigate and others - JUST 1/367-71 - the 'quo waranto' proceedings printed by Illingworth 1818, pp 336-51
- 1293-4 - Johan de Berewik and others - JUST 1/373-8 - the 'quo waranto' proceedings printed by Illingworth 1818, pp 352-68
- 1313-14 - Hervic de Stanton and others - JUST 1/382-4 - the 'quo waranto' proceedings printed by Illingworth 1818, pp 310-35 (with the date misread as 6 Edw I) - at Canterbury 1--21 Jul, 22 Sep, at Rochester 22--8 Sep, at Canterbury 30 Sep--12 Nov, at Rochester 18 Nov--7 Dec, 27 Jan--9 Feb, 3 Jun <These are among the fines calendared by Greenstreet (1877-83). "It is worth noticing that 7 Edward II <1313-14>, when 64 fines were levied at Rochester and 46 at Canterbury, compared with only eight at Westminster, was the last year when fines were levied in the county before itinerant justices. Thereafter they were levied at Westminster, or, very occasionally, at York" (Jessup 1956, p xxi).>
- 1333 - Galfrid de Scrope and others - (JUST 1/387-9)
- 1348 - Willelm de Thorp and others - (JUST 1/393)

Brief extracts survive for 1219; original records survive for 1227, 1241 and 1255, and for every "eyre" after that (Crook 1982), but none have been published in full. The accompanying files contain further notes on each of the four "eyres" just mentioned.

References

- I. J. Churchill (ed.), *Calendar of Kent feet of fines to the end of Henry III's reign* (Kent Records 15, 1939-56).
- D. Crook, *Records of the general eyre* (PRO Handbooks 20, 1982).
- R. Furley, *A history of the Weald of Kent*, 2 vols. \ in 3 (Ashford, 1871--4).
- J. Greenstreet, 'Abstracts of the Kent Fines ('Pedes Finium'), levied in the reign of Edward II', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 11 (1877), 305-58, 12 (1878), 289-308, 13 (1880), 289-320, 14 (1882),

241-80, 15 (1883), 273-310.

W. Illingworth (ed.), *Placita de Quo waranto* (Record Commission, 1818).

F. Jessup, 'Introduction', in Churchill 1956, pp xi-cxii.

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F. W. Maitland (ed.), *Bracton's note book*, 3 vols. (London, 1887).

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