

Rochester castle : Baronies and knight's fees owing castle-guard service to Rochester

At Rochester as at Dover, the manors which had once carried some share of the responsibility for defending the castle were required to pay castle-guard rents, and they continued paying these rents long after the castle itself had become a ruin.

Thomas Philipott said this:

"There is much Land in this County held of this Castle, whose Tenure is perfect Castleguard: for upon the Day prefixed for the discharge of the quitt-Rent, relating to it, there is a Banner displaid and hung out (anciently it was over the Castle-Wall) and all those who are ... in Default by their non-Appearance, and do not discharge their Customary Duties, and Services, the Penaltie imposed upon their Neglect, is, that the Return of every Tide of the adjacent River which finds them Absent, doubles their Service or quitt-Rent." (Philipott 1659:288)

A later report, mostly but not entirely derived from Philipott, says this:

"Much land in this and other counties is held of this castle, whose tenure is perfect castle guard; for on St. Andrew's day, old stile, <30 Nov OS = 11 Dec NS> a banner is hung out at the house of the receiver of the rents; and every tenant who does not then discharge his proper rent, is liable to have it doubled on the return of every tide in the adjacent river, during the time it remains unpaid." (Shrubsole 1772:40)

By Hasted's account (which I have not checked), the derelict castle at Rochester was granted by James I to Sir Anthony Weldon in 1612-13. Weldon was already the owner of the manor of Swanscombe, which had been granted to his grandfather in 1559-60. The castle-guard rents, previously payable to the king, now became payable to Weldon -- as the owner of Rochester castle, not as the owner of Swanscombe.* Apparently the payments began being recorded in the court-rolls for the manor of Swanscombe; but that would be just a matter of convenience.

* If Weldon had previously been paying a castle-guard rent, as I assume he had been, after 1612-13 he would have been in the position of paying that rent to himself.

During the eighteenth century, the Weldon estate changed hands twice. It was sold by the heirs of Walker Weldon (d. 1731) to Thomas Blechynden (d. 1740); after his death, it was sold by the trustees for his heirs to Samuel Child (d. 1752), "esq. of Osterly park, <Osterley TQ 1478> an eminent banker in London".

This is what Hasted had to say about the contemporary state of affairs:

"The manor of Swanscombe, ... holden of Rochester-castle, owed service towards the defence of it, the owner of Swanscombe being,

as it were, ... <almost verbatim from Lambard> ...

These services have been long since turned into annual rents of money. The following is a list of those manors and lands which held by castle-guard, and now pay rents in lieu of it:

- <3:371> Luddesdown manor.
- <4:492> Ryarsh manor.
- <4:171> Delce Magna.
- <4:547> Addington manor.
- <6:405> Norton manor.
Cobham Eastcourt, and
Aldington Eastcourt. <read "West-"
Stockbury manor.
Little Delce.
- <10:134> Hamwold-court manor.
Farnborough-court manor.
Boughton Monchelsea manor.
- <8:412> Midley and Little Caldecott.
Goddington manor.
- <4:473> Padlesworth manor.
Bicknor manor.
- <7:195> Fraxingham manor.
Wootton manor.
- <4:433> Eccles manor.
Part of ditto.
Sholden manor in Surry.
Lands in Westborough farm,
in Surry.
Dairy farm, in Higham.
Mickleham manor, in Surry.
Barrow-hall manor, in ditto.
Ingrast, Harringfield, East Har-
ringfield, and West Horden,
in Essex. <identified by Round (1902) as Ingrave,
<South> Hanningfield, East Hanningfield and West
Horndon>
Great and Little Borstable
manors. <identified by Round as Barstaple>
Widford manor, in Essex. <? Wickford>
- <2:414> Alchardin, alias Combes manor,
and part of
North-court.

These rents are paid on St. Andrew's day, old style, and the custom has been held, <paraphrasing Shrubsole> that if the rent is not then paid, it is liable to be doubled, on the return of every tide in the Medway, during the time it remains unpaid. This custom was very near being brought to a legal decision some years ago; for Sir Thomas Dyke, bart. <d. 1756> owner of Farnborough-court manor, and Thomas Best, esq. <of Chilston> owner of Eccles manor, having made default in the payment of their castle-guard rents, Mr Child, owner of Swanscombe manor, and the castle, required the penalty of their being doubled; which dispute was carried so far, that ejectments were served on the estates, and a special jury was struck, to try the matter. But by the

interposition of friends, the dispute was compromised, and a small composition was accepted, in lieu of the penalty, though it was entered in the court-rolls of Swanscombe manor, with the consent of all parties, in such a manner, that the custom of this payment might not be lessened in future by it." (Hasted 2:413-14)

Without exactly saying so, Hasted implies that he got this list from the Swanscombe manorial records. Useful though it is, it would have been much more useful if it had included the amount of each rent, and the name of the person responsible for paying it in some particular year. Mostly it is clear which places are meant, but there are some puzzling entries. What about "Fraxingham", for one? According to Hasted, this is an eccentric spelling for the manor in Rolvenden called Fresingham (or, more commonly, Frensham). I am, provisionally, willing to take his word for it; but I do not know (and doubt whether Hasted knew) how that manor might have incurred this liability. For another, what about "Wootton"? There is a Wootton in Kinghamford hundred (Hasted 9:365); but I have not seen any proof that it paid a castle-guard rent to Rochester, and and it is hard to imagine any reason why it should have.

It is possible that puzzles like these might be solved with the help of the Swanscombe court-rolls. There are some surviving records in Maidstone, Centre for Kentish Studies, U285. I have not seen them; but Michael Carter has looked through them and found nothing to the point. (I am greatly indebted to Michael Carter, not just for this but for many other acts of kindness, and I take the opportunity to say so.)

* * *

The earliest evidence known to me which proves that castle-guard rents were being paid is a passage in the "Curia Regis" roll for Michaelmas term, 1201 (CRR 1:23). From this it transpires that Reginald de Cornhille -- sheriff of Kent, but acting here in his capacity as constable of Rochester -- was demanding payment of the rents that were due to him from Willelm de Monchensi and Cecilia countess of Hereford (joint owners of the barony of Swanscombe) and from Radulf Teissun and Johan de Praels (joint owners of the barony of Patrixbourne). The complainants were not denying that the rents were payable: they were claiming to have already paid them to someone else. But they failed to appear in court, and the case was dismissed (luckily for the defendant, unluckily for us) without any further deliberation.

From then onwards, incidental references to castle-guard rents occur here and there. In November 1236, for example, Bertram de Crioil (who had been constable since August 1232) was ordered to hand over the castle to Johan de Cobeham (CPR 1232-47, p. 169); but he delayed making the transfer, so that he could collect the rents which fell due on St Andrew's day (30 Nov.). Accordingly the king wrote a further letter, dated 13 Dec., reprimanding Bertram for the delay, and requiring him to give the money to Johan, so that Johan could answer for it at the exchequer (*Close rolls 1234-7*, pp. 403-4).* By February 1237 it had been decided

that Johan should be allowed to keep 16 pounds for himself and pay a salary of 50 shillings to the castle chaplain, only accounting for the balance (ib. p. 418). (That is, he would have to produce the rest of the money -- or, if he had spent some of it, produce the writs which authorized him to do so.) If it is safe to generalize from the roll for 1242 (ed. Cannon 1918), the Rochester castle-guard rent account was not included in the "great roll" but dealt with and recorded separately. Whether any such accounts survive I do not know.

* The language used here is such as to suggest that only part of the rent was payable on 30 November. But possibly the clerk who drafted this letter did not understand how things worked.

If the man who had to pay the rent was a tenant in chief of the king's (as only a minority were), there ought to be (and often is) a mention of this rent in the schedule of his property drawn up by a royal official after his death -- i.e. the *inquisitio post mortem*, "inquest after death". By this means we can discover, for instance, that the portion of Aldington (near Thurnham) held by the Setvans family was regularly paying a rent of 14 shillings for the guard of Rochester castle (CIPM 1:39, 4:232, 6:243). But the evidence is fragmentary, and often unclear or inconsistent.

There seems to be only one surviving document which aims to give the full picture.* Its significance was first pointed out by Round (1902). The document in question (E 198/1/6) is a single sheet of parchment, measuring roughly 325 by 200 mm. The main text, I would guess, was written by a scribe working for the sheriff of Kent. But some comments added at the bottom are, without doubt, the work of Exchequer scribes.

* Rowlands (1989, p. 268) cites a second document -- then E 370/5/34, now E 389/77 -- which I have not seen. The catalogue gives the date of it as 33-34 Henry III, i.e. (by the exchequer's reckoning) 1249-50.

From the script, and from the people whose names are mentioned, it is clear that the document dates from the middle of the thirteenth century. Willelm de Auberville is already dead: he died in 1248 (xFR 2:28). Warin de Monchensi is still alive: he died in 1255. I probe no further than that, because it appears that the exact date could be determined by checking through the exchequer rolls for this period (see below). Meanwhile it is probably enough to know that the document dates from about 1250.

(0) *Roll of the fees which owe guard in Rochester castle every year.*

As the word is used here, one fee is equivalent to 12 shillings.

(1) *Of the barony of Ingelram Patric, fifteen fees, and these are they:*

- (1.1) *Willelm de Say in the village of Patricbourne, one fee*
- (1.2) *The canons of Beaulieu in the same, one fee*
- (1.3) *Radulf Haket in the village of Hamwold, one fee*

- (1.4) *Midley near Romney with W. de Kaaing', one fee*
- (1.5) *Aldglose near Wye, half a fee*
- (1.6) *Ryarsh near Malling, two fees and a half*
- (1.7) *Little Delce, one fee*
- (1.8) *Radulf de Chetwode in Chetwode and Paddlesworth, two fees*
- (1.9) *Ash, two fees*
- (1.10) *Johan Ansard' of Tadworth and Chaldon, two fees*
- (1.11) *Johan de Bures in Burgh, one fee*

This is the best evidence we have for mapping the barony of Patric. The barony was held at the time by Willelm de Say, who also held the barony of Maminot, and the distinction between one barony and the other had, for most purposes, ceased to be significant. When it came to the payment of castle-guard rents, however, the distinction did still make a difference: the Maminot fees owed guard at Dover, the Patric fees at Rochester.

Only one entry is puzzling. By "Midley near Romney" (1.4) appears to be meant the estate called "Calcot, alias Little Caldecot", in Midley and Lydd, which was paying a castle-guard rent in Hasted's day. Though clearly he made the effort, Hasted was not able to trace its history back beyond a hundred years or so (Hasted 8:412).* I have nothing to add; nor can I explain who W(illelm?) de Kaaing' (Cahaignes?) might be.

* The earliest owner identified by Hasted was Thomas Lumley esq. of Great Bardfield (Essex), younger brother of Sir Martyn Lumley bt. (d. 1702).

Outside Kent the places named are Tadworth TQ 2356, Chaldon TQ 3055 and Burgh TQ 2358 in Surrey and Chetwode SP 6429 in Buckinghamshire.

(2) *Of the barony of Helte, seven fees.*

- (2.1) *The heirs of Willelm de Auberville in Stockbury, one fee and a sixth part of a fee*
- (2.2) *Robert de Setvans in the village of Aldington, one fee and a sixth part of a fee*
- (2.3) *Arnold Biset in the same (Aldington), one fee*
- (2.4) *The same Arnold (Biset) in Preston in the county of Buckingham, half a fee*
- (2.5) *Great Delce near Rochester, two fees and a half*
- (2.6) *Robert de Mykeleham in the county of Surrey, one fee*

This is the barony of Stockbury, which, through a complicated sequence of events (Flight 2010, p. 262), had become split into four unequal portions. Something has gone wrong with the arithmetic. The first two items are correct: they each represent a third of a half of the barony. The other items ought to add up to a half plus a third of a half: so someone had been made to pay 4 shillings more than he should.

There is other evidence that Mickleham TQ 1753 in Surrey paid a castle-guard rent to Rochester (CIPM 3:30-1), but none (to my knowledge) which connects it with the barony of Stockbury. I am doubtful whether it did really belong.

(3) *Of the honour of Perche, five fees.*

- (3.1) *Johan le Flemengh' in the village of Farnborough, one fee*
- (3.2) *Johan de Codynton' <read "G-"> in Chelsfield and in Strood, two fees*
- (3.3) *"Caldecote", "Nusted", and in Chelsfield, half a fee*
- (3.4) *Ricard Gromyn, the master of Strood <hospital>, and their partners, half a fee*
- (3.5) *The heirs of Johan de Yve in Buckinghamshire, one fee in "Moyland"*

This is the second-tier barony of Chelsfield. The heading is unapt: the counts of Le Perche had never had more than a passing connection with this barony (GREx 1205:174-5). Around 1250 the overlord was Simon earl of Leicester, holding by reason of his wife's dower from her former husband (Flight 2010, p. 259).

The last entry does not make any sense to me. This barony did include some land in Buckinghamshire -- specifically the manor of Lenborough SP 6931, which in the past had paid a castle-guard rent. By this time, however, the whole manor was held by the abbot of Reading (*Fees*, p. 871), and the rent had been bought out (Kemp 1986, no. 260, datable 1209×32).

(4) *Of the barony of Robert de Seint Jehan, three fees.*

- (4.1) *Of the village of Norton, two fees and a half*
- (4.2) *Maria Mantell in Bicknor, half a fee*

These fees represent a small fraction of the barony of Port in Kent (Flight 2010, p. 261), the larger part of which (12 fees) owed castle guard at Dover. I do not know how or when this division of labour might have come about.

The land in Bicknor was part of the second-tier barony of Tonge. Maria "Mauncel" sold it to Hubert la Veyle, retaining possession for her own lifetime (*Fines*, 218); apparently she was dead by 1253, when Hubert is listed as the tenant. Ricard la Veyle, presumably Hubert's son or grandson, sold the land to Willelm de Leyburne (d. 1310). Because Willelm held other lands directly from the king, Bicknor appears in the schedule of his property drawn up after his death (CIPM 5:122); and there it is confirmed that this land owed a castle-guard rent of 6 shillings a year to Rochester.

(5) *Of the barony of sir Warin de Monchensy thirty fees, for which the same Warin answers entirely by his own hand. He answers for eighteen pounds.*

The largest barony is left till last, because it is a special case. Warin does not let his tenants pay their rents directly to the constable of Rochester: he insists on having the money pass through his own hands. Unfortunately, therefore, we are given no list of the tenants of the barony of Swanscombe.* The total due is regularly reported as £18. Apparently the lord of Swanscombe

was expected to find £4 4s (as if for 7 fees) out of his own pocket (CIPM 7:223, 10:531), in addition to the rents that he was forwarding from his tenants (as if for 23 fees).

* The only good list that I have seen of the tenants in Kent is the list drawn up in 1324 after the death of Adomar de Valence earl of Pembroke (CIPM 6:329-30).

(6) *Total of the whole guard, thirty-six pounds four shillings.*

The total number of fees is $15 + 7 + 5 + 3 + 30 = 60$, and they ought to be paying £36 exactly. The extra 4 shillings arise out of the arithmetical confusion affecting the barony of Stockbury (2.1-2).

Two different scribes added annotations at the end.

(7) Alongside the total, somebody wrote the remark "It needs to be inquired whether more is due by way of wards", significant because it goes to show that the Exchequer did not regard this schedule as the last word on the subject (and therefore nor should we).

(8) Below the total, somebody else wrote down the results of some arithmetic. He began by adding the total brought forward from "the other roll" (£169 17s 2d) to the total for this roll (£36 4s 0d).^{*} From the total for "both rolls" (£206 1s 2d) he subtracted a sum (£201 5s 10d) which was going to be credited to the sheriff "in the body of the county" (i.e. in his account of the farm of Kent) to offset his loss of revenue from Milton "to the extent that it is in the king's hand"; and that left a small remainder (£4 15s 4d) for which the sheriff would be found to answer in the "great roll", under the heading *De proficuo* (i.e. the extra sum which the sheriff was being required to pay, on top of the regular farm). If anyone will take the trouble to scan through the exchequer rolls, beginning with the roll for 1248 (see above), sooner or later that item should turn up; and the date when it does will fix the date of this schedule.

* Apparently the "other roll" does not survive, but if it does it ought to be easy to identify: we are told that the items listed add up to £134 4s 8d "numero" plus £33 18s 8d "blanch", the latter total converted to £35 12s 6d "numero" (in the usual way, by adding a shilling in the pound).

Though this copy dates from the mid thirteenth century, the overall shape of the text is rather what we might expect to find in a list compiled before the end of the twelfth century. It takes no notice of the fact that the barony of Ingelram Patric (d. 1190-1) was broken up after his death (Flight 2005, p. 371): part of it went to his younger brother, Eudo Patric (d. 1212-13), and then to Eudo's sister's son, Willelm de Moubrai (d. 1224); the larger part went to the husbands of Ingelram's two daughters, Radulf Teissun and Johan de Praels (the two men from whom payment was being demanded in 1201). Similarly it takes no notice of the fact that the barony of Chelsfield was -- after much litigation, beginning in 1192 (GREx 1192:244) -- divided into three portions in 1198 (AC, 1 (1858), 255-8; *Fines*, 9-10). I suspect that this

list may originally have been put together in about 1180-90, but brought up to date in piecemeal fashion after that.

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In January 1127, the king made the odd decision (not without seeking the advice of his barons) to install the archbishop of Canterbury as perpetual keeper and constable of Rochester castle. This is the charter (Johnson and Cronne 1956, no. 1475) which gave effect to that decision:

H. rex Anglorum omnibus fidelibus suis Francis et Anglis de Kent salutem. Sciatis quia concessi et concedo ecclesie Cantuariensi et Willelmo archiepiscopo et omnibus successoribus suis custodiam et constabulariam castelli Roffi semper in posterum possidendam, et hoc consilio baronum meorum. Et concedo ut in eodem castro munitionem vel turrim quam voluerint sibi faciant et in perpetuum habeant et custodiant. Et milites qui custodie eiusdem castelli deputati sunt vel deputabuntur intrent et exeant per vices suas, sicut intrare et exire debuerint, et de eodem castello ei securitatem faciant, salva per omnia fidelitate mea. Testibus Rogero episcopo Sar' et G. cancellario et Willelmo de Tancardivilla et Gaufrido filio Pagani. Apud Wintoniam. (Johnson and Cronne 1956, p. 356, from Lamb. 1212, "p. 18" = fo. 10v)

The second sentence, authorizing the archbishops to build "what fortress or tower they may wish", has been cited very frequently, because it proves that archbishop Willelm envisaged the construction of a keep (but, it should be noted, was not certain that he himself would get the construction done).*

* The first sentence is interesting too, because of the wording which is used: "to the church of Canterbury and to archbishop Willelm and to all of his successors". A similar three-part formula is used in the charter by which St Martin's church in Dover was granted to the same archbishop (Johnson and Cronne 1956, no. 1736). The monks of Christ Church (regarding themselves as the embodiment of the church) construed this formula to mean that St Martin's had been given to them, jointly with the archbishop; and much mischief followed from that. But I am not aware that they ever laid claim to the custody of Rochester castle.

For present purposes, however, the third sentence is the one which counts. It needs to be read alongside a somewhat later writ (Johnson and Cronne 1956, no. 1606), not datable more closely (it seems to me) than 1127×33, clarifying some points which had proved to be unclear. This is the text:

H. rex Anglorum omnibus hominibus archiepiscopi Cantuariensis salutem. Concedo quod illi de vobis faciatis wardam in castello de Roucestr', quos archiepiscopus de vobis elegerit. Et precipio quod archiepiscopus justificet alios homines qui sui homines non sunt, quod faciant wardam suam ad terminos suos, quibus facere solent et juste debent. Et concedo ipsi archiepiscopo hospitia illa in bailia Roucestr' que fuerunt Gaufridi Talebot. Teste cancellario. Apud London'. (Johnson and Cronne 1956, p. 367, from Lamb. 1212, "p. 23" = fo. 13r)

Taken together, these documents prove that there was a rota system in operation at Rochester. It had been in operation for some significant length of time before 1127; it was to continue in operation after 1127, regardless of the fact that the knights involved were not the archbishop's men. (Some of them, it seems, were Goisfrid Talebot's men, i.e. tenants of the barony of Swanscombe.) Archbishop Willelm had it in mind to strengthen the garrison by making some of his own knights liable to this duty; but those knights who were already "assigned to the custody of the castle" were to carry on "entering and exiting, as their turns come round".* At Rochester in the 1120s, castle guard meant precisely that -- not the payment of a rent, but a spell of duty inside the castle wall.

* I am not sure what is meant by saying that these knights are to "make security" to the archbishop. (Before this, I suppose, they would have had to "make security" to the king, in the person of his castellan.) Perhaps it means that each knight, upon arrival, was expected to hand over a sum of money which, all being well, would be returned to him when he had completed his spell of duty. If that was how things worked, the conversion of this security deposit into a castle-guard rent would be an easy matter.

We can (probably) take it for granted that the rota remained in operation throughout the time that archbishop Willelm had custody of the castle -- that is, until his death in 1136. After that, custody would have reverted (temporarily) to the king; though it ought to have been given back to the next archbishop, all the signs are that Henric I's charter was generally disregarded by his successors, who preferred to keep the castle in their own hands. In 1143 (by which time there was a new archbishop in office), the castellan of Rochester castle was a man named Radulf, as we discover from a dated charter of the first recorded owner of the barony of Chelsfield. It starts with the following address:

Domino Ascelino Rofensi episcopo, et Radulfo castellano, et omnibus civibus Rovecestrie: totique hundred de Scamele, Ernulfus de Cialesfelda salutem. (Thorpe 1769, p. 653, from the original, DRc/T191/1)

The same Radulf (I suppose) is referred to elsewhere as Radulf "son of the count": I take him to be queen Mathildis's bastard brother (Flight 2010, p. 247). In any case, I think we can be sure that he answered to the king, not the archbishop.

During the second half of the century, the castle appears to have been in the king's hands all the time. (The evidence from the exchequer rolls and other sources is summarized by Brown and Colvin (1963, p. 807); I have nothing to add.) When archbishop Thomas was picking a quarrel with the king, this was one of the grievances which he raised; but he got no satisfaction. It seems that archbishop Hubert was in possession of Rochester castle for a few years, shortly before he died in 1205 (Rowlands 1989, p. 270). It is certainly true that archbishop Stephan got custody in 1213, on terms which were intended to safeguard the king's interests as well as the archbishop's (Rowlands 1989, pp. 270-5); but that

experiment ended so catastrophically that never again did any archbishop have the nerve to demand compliance with the charter of Henric I.* Though the charter itself was kept (it was still in existence in the 1270s), it no longer had any value.

* With the exception, it seems, of archbishop Boniface, who in 1260 got the pope to write a letter to the king (Rowlands 1989, p. 275). The king, I assume, ignored it.

At some date between 1136 and 1201, castle-guard service was commuted for castle-guard rent. That much is tolerably certain; the rest is guesswork. It seems not unlikely to me that the change was made very early, in 1138 or soon afterwards, when king Stephan was faced with rebellion on every side. To protect his lines of communication with Boulonnais and Flanders, he would have needed a reliable garrison in Rochester castle; and that would have meant a garrison of hired knights (professional fighters, reliable as long as they were paid on time), not a garrison of local men, half of whom had done homage to a lord -- the younger Goisfrid Talebot -- who was now a prominent rebel. In those circumstances, the castellan would (I imagine) have been more than willing to dispense with the service as long as he got the money. That seems a plausible guess to me -- but it is only a guess.

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