



Undergraduate assignment feedback form

(to be completed by marker)

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<i>For completion by marker:</i> <i>Comments:</i>	
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A commentary on Rochester Castle, Rochester, Kent, England.

The town of Rochester, Kent, lies south-east of the River Medway, the Castle sits on the east bank on one of the protruding angles of land, created by the winds of the river. Pointing outward across the flat plains of the town and waters either side of it, gives an excellent vantage point for it is near the river's mouth, which leads out to the Thames Estuary. The castle sits nearly 300_{ft} away from the present bridge, which adjoins the two sides of the river with what is today the A2 road, but from the First Century AD it was the great Roman Road which ran from Dover through to London.¹ London, the capital of England; Dover, the exit from the Mainland to the English Channel and to France, Rochester Castle was located at the centre of the two on one of the main Roman English roads, making Rochester, or *Dirobivae* as the Romans named it,² a site by this alone of great importance.

The castle stands an impressive four storeys high and has also the tallest stone keep

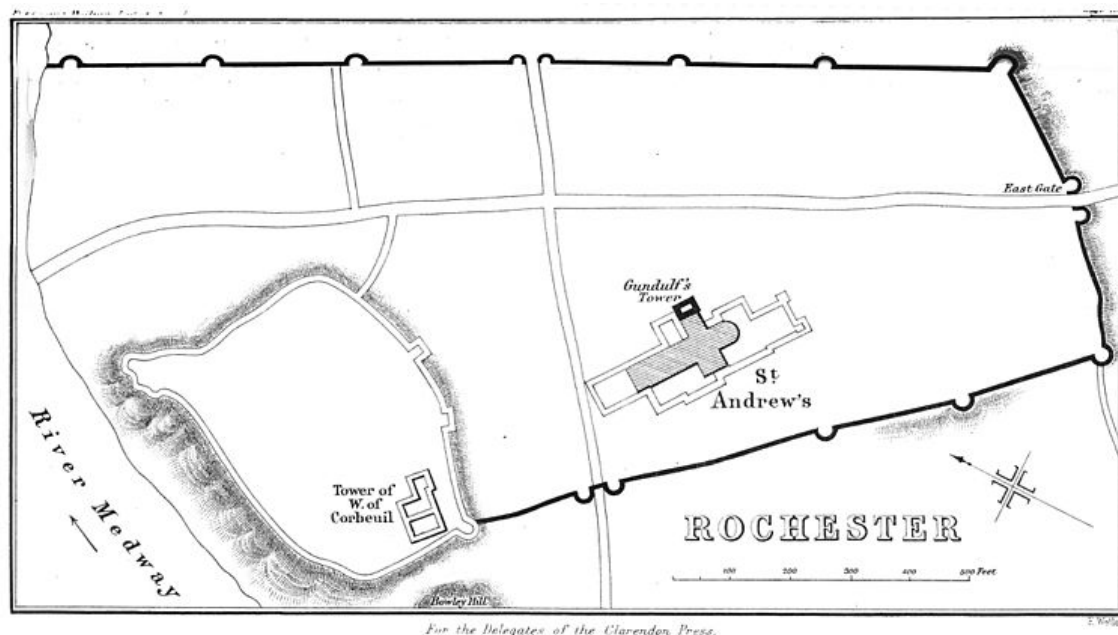


Figure 1: From E. A. Freeman's *"The Reign of William Rufus"*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), a reconstruction of Medieval Rochester.

in Britain with a height nearing 40 metres.³ Its keep is fully intact, save a lack of roof and floors,⁴ that is, the exterior is fully intact. The keep is certainly a feature of main attraction, as Pettifer notes, 'for once it is the castle [Rochester] which dominates, the squat cathedral tower seeming insignificant alongside the magnificent keep.'⁵

¹ C. H. Hartshorne, "Rochester Castle" pamphlet read at the *Annual Meeting of the Institute of Rochester*, July, 1863, p.2.

² A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124.

³ T. Rowley, *The Norman Heritage: 1055-1200*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), p.53.

⁴ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), 124.

⁵ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124.

The importance of castles for the Conquest and the period thereafter can be seen today still for many of the remains of these Norman castles remains, as Liddiard writes 'William and his followers studded England with castles in order to pacify a potentially rebellious population'⁶, which is why most of the early castles were erected quickly and



Figure 2: South-East view of Rochester Castle
Carneycastle.com/Rochester

relatively cheaply for it was not long after the Norman Conquest that William I founded a timber castle at Bole Hill,⁷ land which he obtained by exchange of Aylesford with Odo of Bayeux for Rochester, as noted in the Domesday Book,⁸ located south of the present castle as stands today.⁹ Rochester Castle and town was taken back by Odo of Bayeux come 1088 after the death of the Conqueror. Odo was rebelling against his nephew, William (II) Rufus, from whom he took control of Rochester. William Rufus regained Rochester after some weeks and shortly after commissioned a new Castle to

be built c.1088.¹⁰ This castle, however, would be one of stone, one which is designed to subdue threat for stone castles were built to be intimidating but impressive stone structures made of natural material like other castles, but very unlike those of the earlier motte and bailey style castles.

The current castle was built, oddly enough, by a monk, architecture not particularly common the skills of a monk. Gundulf, Bishop of Rochester (1077-1108) built Rochester Castle and relocated the castle to a more stable place than the one built by William I.¹¹ So stable, that is, the foundations of the castle are that of the Roman Wall of Rochester *castrum*.¹² It was under the rule of Henry I in 1127 that King granted Castle to the

⁶ R. Liddiard, *Castles in Context: Power, Symbolism and Landscape, 1066-1500*, (Lancaster: Canegie Publishing, 2005), p.1.

⁷ (i.e. *Bailey Hill*). A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124.

⁸ E. S. Armitage, *Early Norman Castles*, (London: John Murray, 1912), p.196; C. H. Hartshorne, "Rochester Castle" pamphlet read at the *Annual Meeting of the Institute of Rochester*, July, 1863, p.3.

⁹ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124.

¹⁰ "History of Rochester Castle: Before the Castle" on *English Heritage*, online at <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/>, accessed on 29/11/2017.

¹¹ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124. He built also Rochester Cathedral from St Andrew's Abbey as well as the White Tower (Tower of) London amongst many others. T. Rowley, *Norman England*, (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd, 1997), p.73. The White Tower of London and Colchester Castle being the largest secular buildings constructed under the rule of William I. Colchester Castle being on the site of a Roman temple which was dedicated to the Emperor Claudius. R. Liddiard, *Castles in Context: Power, Symbolism and Landscape, 1066-1500*, (Lancaster: Canegie Publishing, 2005), p.34.

¹² M. Morris, *Castle: A History of the Buildings that Shaped Medieval Britain*, (London: Windmill Books, 2012), p.87.

Archbishop of Canterbury, William de Corbeil, it was he who built the great keep of the Castle.¹³ The keep of Rochester, as above mentioned, is a marvellous structure. In French, a keep is called a *donjon*, from the Latin *dominium*, meaning ownership; property, quite simply to dominate, a symbol of clear colonisation and control. The location of Rochester at this midway point of two important towns, London and Dover, presents a display of stark power across the Kentish landscape to be observed by all.

The Castle at present has had many blows to it over the centuries, yet as such a robust castle, it has held strong, even during Edward III's reign in which he refurbished the south wall in 1367-1370 against the French threat.¹⁴ Regardless of whether to class Edward



Figure 3: Elevated view of the East drum tower of Rochester Castle, looking West. Henry III's patching can be seen here also. "Drone DJI Phantom 3 Pro – Rochester Castle Kent", Ali-Buck Drone Strike Vids, pub., 2/1/2016, YouTube.

III as a Norman, being the 13th generation descendant of King Rollo, one can easily doubt this claim, his inheritance was undeniably Norman, for the castles he inherited were that of Norman men, Rochester Castle being one of them. The use of Rochester Castle, albeit that he refurbished the south curtain after the third siege met by the Castle,¹⁵ functioned for c.300 years in the same way from its initial construction.

The most notable hit that Rochester Castle underwent was which Marc Morris describes as being 'one of the biggest sieges of the Middle Ages'.¹⁶ The siege in the closing months of 1215 when King John lay siege against the rebels of the First Barons' Revolt (1215-1215) at which the drum tower on the

east curtain wall on the south corner was damaged by John and his men.¹⁷ John's son, King Henry III, rebuilt the wall in the 1220s, the work still visible today, the red-coloured stonework opposed to the grey-coloured stone of the original building, as shown above in figures 2 and 3. The Barnwell Analyst concludes on the siege of 1215 that 'there were few who would put their trust in castles' after this event, which signifies the sheer sturdiness of Rochester Castle for this was the Castle at which its defeat brought faith in the castles as a means of defence into doubt.¹⁸

¹³ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124.

¹⁴ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.124 and p.126.

¹⁵ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.126. The third siege of Rochester Castle was that under Simon de Montfort against Henry III during the Second Barons' Revolt (1264-1267).

¹⁶ M. Morris, *Castle: A History of the Buildings that Shaped Medieval Britain*, (London: Windmill Books, 2012), p.77.

¹⁷ A. Pettifer, *English Castles*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995), p.126.

¹⁸ M. Morris, *Castle: A History of the Buildings that Shaped Medieval Britain*, (London: Windmill Books, 2012), p.90.

Rochester Castle's structure is one of remarkable intelligence for to enter the Castle, one does not do so by the ground floor, instead the entrance being on the first floor as well as the thick fore-building of the keep enhances fortification of the Castle;¹⁹ as discovered by John and his men during the siege of 1215 mining the Castle proved an ever-difficult task because, as previously mentioned, of the Castle having been built along the remains of the Roman Rochester *castrum* walls, thus acted as a deep foundation for the present build. It is unknown however as to whether Gundulf constructed the Castle with this in mind, however it nevertheless served this purpose.

Charles Henry Hartshorne states that the 'military structure presents nothing dissimilar to other Norman Castles'²⁰ which to an extent is true as it, it is made of stone, has a keep, a moat, it had also a drawbridge, and was constructed in a strategic place for a number of reasons, nevertheless, Rochester Castle does have its own merits separate of the stereotypical Norman castle, much of which has already been outlined above.

¹⁹ M. Morris, *Castle: A History of the Buildings that Shaped Medieval Britain*, (London: Windmill Books, 2012), Morris, p.87.

²⁰ C. H. Hartshorne, "Rochester Castle" pamphlet read at the *Annual Meeting of the Institute of Rochester*, July, 1863, p.18.

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Image References:

Figure 1: Freeman, E. A., *The Reign of William Rufus*, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1882), a reconstruction of Medieval Rochester.

Figure 2: "Rochester" on *Carney Castle*, online at: Carneycastle.com/Rochester, accessed: 1/12/2017.

Figure 3: "Drone DJI Phantom 3 Pro – Rochester Castle Kent", by *Ali-Buck Drone Strike Vids*, pub., 2/1/2016, *YouTube*, accessed: 29/11/2017.