



(Rochester Castle, England).

The imagery of the Rochester Castle in Kent, England will be judged in a balanced and fair manner, and aspects and views of historians will be analysed. This piece will look at the brief history of Rochester Castle in the Norman era, what it meant to the Normans and what the castle represented, thereby coming to a conclusion and overall opinion of the site in question.

Castles were introduced by the Normans on their conquering of Britain and helped establish dominance and secure territory across England.¹ Rochester was an important structure as it is situated on the River Medway which served a strategically critical advantage for the Normans.² It was also built on an original Roman settlement.³ The tower-keep was built with Kentish ragstone in 1127 by William of Corbeil the Archbishop of Canterbury, with three floors above a basement, and it still stands to this day at 113 feet high.⁴ The tower was the tallest of its kind at the time of construction and still remains the tallest tower of its type in Europe.⁵ The outer walls are also one of the thickest of its kind and can only be compared to the castles in Hedingham, Essex and Norwich.⁶

The castle was built for the purpose of being purely military and was able to hold a large quantity of troops in a hostile region and for any battles that may take place.⁷ The castle guard consisted of sixty knights' fees marking it as an exceptionally valuable

¹ T. McNeill, *English Heritage Book of Castles* (London: English Heritage and B.T. Batsford, 1992).

² T. McNeill, *English Heritage Book of Castles* (1992).

³ J. Brain, Rochester Castle (Historic UK, <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/>, 2020).

⁴ *Rochester Castle*, English Heritage. (<https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/>)

⁵ *Rochester Castle*, English Heritage.

⁶ *Rochester Castle*, English Heritage.

⁷ T. McNeill, *English Heritage Book of Castles* (1992).

fortification.⁸ The castle's ground was mentioned in the Domesday book and was recorded to be worth seventeen shillings and four denarius.⁹ It is the only land mentioned in the survey where the previous property owners were reimbursed when the land was taken in order to build Rochester Castle.¹⁰ In 1215, the castle endured a siege by King John with rebel barons inside which resulted in the defenders holding on to Rochester for two months ultimately causing their deaths via starvation.¹¹ After this, the fortification was rebuilt under the orders of King Henry III, the son of King John, due to the damage that was made during the siege, and remained a fortress until the sixteenth century.¹² The castle has medieval architectural detail similar to those found in cathedrals and abbeys at that time, and it is considered particularly complex.¹³

The strength of the old Norman castle held a massive architectural impact which was clearly evident as it withstood so many battles and sieges. The significance of Rochester Castle is that it is one of the best-preserved examples of Norman buildings in the United Kingdom. The close association between the castle and cathedral in Rochester is a powerful symbol of dual roles of authority, and an example of how medieval society prioritised both the crown and nobility alongside the religious power of the bishops and monastic orders.¹⁴ It can be argued that the castles had been influenced by some of the components of the cathedral's layout¹⁵, further strengthening the bond between church and crown.

After a siege in 1264, the remainders of the castle were the keep, gatehouses, hall, kitchen, and stables which survived even in a state of collapse.¹⁶ The whole keep was in serious need of refurbishment, however at the time it was still in use and the heart of the domestic life at the castle.¹⁷ In 1275, the castle's constables failed to make any form of effort to restore the structure and stole stone from the fortification to use elsewhere.¹⁸ The castle's constable in 1281, John of Cobham, demolished the castle's hall and chambers, which had been left as burnt ruins after the siege of 1264.¹⁹ The castle was never truly repaired until the reign of Edward the Third and in a survey conducted in 1340, it was expected that the refurbishments for the fortress would cost £600, and another twenty-three years later it was confirmed that it would cost £3,333.²⁰ However, between May 1367

⁸ R. A. Brown, *Rochester Castle* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969).

⁹ C. G. Hartfield, *A Hand-List of Castles Recorded in the Domesday Book* (1991).

¹⁰ C. G. Hartfield, *A Hand-List of Castles Recorded in the Domesday Book* (1991).

¹¹ *Rochester Castle*, English Heritage.

¹² *Rochester Castle*, English Heritage.

¹³ *Rochester Castle*, English Heritage.

¹⁴ T. Tatton-Brown, *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology at Rochester* (British Archaeological Association Conference Translations, Leeds, 2006).

¹⁵ T. Tatton-Brown, *Medieval Art, Architecture and Archaeology at Rochester* (2006).

¹⁶ R. Brown, *Rochester Castle* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969).

¹⁷ The Paul Drury Partnership, *Rochester Castle Conservation Plan Part 1: Understanding and Significance* (Teddington, 2012).

¹⁸ The Paul Drury Partnership, *Rochester Castle Conservation Plan Part 1: Understanding and Significance* (Teddington, 2012).

¹⁹ The Paul Drury Partnership, *Rochester Castle Conservation Plan Part 1: Understanding and Significance* (Teddington, 2012).

²⁰ The Paul Drury Partnership, *Rochester Castle Conservation Plan Part 1: Understanding and Significance* (Teddington, 2012).

and September 1370 repairs were finally undergone and were £2,262; this was spent on repairing the curtain wall, and two mural towers were built, one of them replacing a tower on the same site.²¹ By 1369 there were not many castles that still stood from the Norman era.²²

In conclusion, the motte-and-baily castle in Rochester is a fortress with much significance to the Normans and many castles like it were the overall key to their dominance in England. It can also be said that Rochester castle is one of the most prominent Norman fortresses, still complete today, where the architectural design can be seen. The castle being so close in both architectural layout and proximity to the cathedra, symbolises the power that the monarchy and religion had together and how they worked as one cohesive unit in controlling the population of Britain. The castle was designed to defend Norman property and land with its thick walls. The intent upon construction of the castle was to hold as many knights and members of the Norman armies as possible. The fact the structure still stands to this day and it is well recorded that the castle withstood many sieges shows us that the fortification fulfilled its purpose.

²¹ R. Brown, *Rochester Castle*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969).

²² R. Brown, *Rochester Castle*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1969).

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