
Dover, Kent

updated 20/06/2001

Δογμα

Dover Castle, Church of St Mary-in-Castro

Grid ref TR 326 418

Church fabric

Earthwork

Date

Transeptal church – C10 or C11

Fisher

Nave, tower, chancel and transepts a complete cruciform church but very heavily restored – period C1

Taylor

History

Dover lies at the English end of the shortest Channel crossing and this position has given it a certain importance from the beginnings of British history. It lies at the mouth of a little valley cut through the chalk cliffs, which afforded a natural harbour, most convenient for traffic desiring to proceed swiftly to Canterbury and London without risking the uncertainties of the Thames Estuary. These advantages are evident even under modern conditions, but to appreciate the full importance of the site we must turn to the Middle Ages ... Even before this we can trace the story of Dover in Roman days, a period of which the pharos, or lighthouse, on Castle Hill remains as a witness more imposing than the scattered buildings and objects yielded by the soil of the town.

Dubra (for such is the probable form of the classical name) was so called from the little river Dour, a Celtic word signifying water. But the name provides no evidence for a pre-Roman settlement and attempts to see in the great banks and ditches of the castle a prehistoric hill fort are supported neither by the character of the remains nor by finds of pre-Roman date. When the invading armies of the Emperor Claudius landed in AD43 a detachment may have made use of the natural harbour at Dover, but Richborough twelve miles to the north was the main base. Dover, of secondary importance, seems to have developed more slowly and objects earlier than the end of the first century occur but rarely. To this early phase we should probably attribute the pharos, or lighthouse, on Castle Hill. On general grounds the necessity of some seamark for cross-channel shipping would have arisen at an early date and the structure itself confirms this view. The counterpart, formerly

standing on the opposite cliffs of Boulogne, is often identified with the high tower which, as Suetonius records, was erected by Caligula in AD40 to commemorate his barren triumph over the Ocean.

Objects belonging to the second and third centuries are more common than those of the earliest Roman period. Moreover, excavations conducted by the Dover Excavation Committee since the last war in areas devastated by enemy action have exposed portions of what appears to have been the main street of a town, bordered by substantial stone buildings which are not military in character. We can, therefore, visualise the gradual growth of a small port living on the cross-channel traffic, possibly thriving but always overshadowed by its more prosperous neighbour at Richborough, which lay in the direct path of the flourishing trade with the Rhineland.

The 'British Fleet' organised as early as the first century to patrol the waters of the Channel had its headquarters in Boulogne with lesser stations at other points. At the end of the third century a general reorganisation was required to meet the menace of Saxon piracy which was rendering the narrow seas unsafe for shipping. In 286 the strengthened fleet was placed under the command of Carausius, himself a native of the Low Countries. But his revolt, setting up a separate Empire in Gaul and Britain, neutralised the advantages gained by his more vigorous handling of the situation. When Constantius once more established the unity of the Empire, a more thorough-going reorganisation was undertaken. To Carausius, however, we may attribute the origin of the arrangements which were stabilised and systematised by Constantius, and which are described a century later in the late Roman army list known as the *Notitia Dignitatum*. To watch the channel, safeguarding both the communications with Gaul and the wealthy estates of southern Britain, a new force was organised under the Count of the Saxon Shore. To his headquarters at Richborough the second legion was transferred from Caerleon in Monmouthshire, and a series of fortified bases was prepared covering the coast from Portchester near Southampton to Brancaster at the entrance to the

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Wash. Each of these provided not only a harbour and dockyard for the fleet but a strong fortress adequately garrisoned by a detachment of troops.

Even before this reorganisation, Dover had probably served as a base for the Channel fleet, since tiles inscribed CL BR, for Classis Britannica, have been found in the town. It seems likely that it was now chosen as the site of one of the new fortresses lining the Saxon shore. No trace of its wall or other buildings has been found during the recent excavations, but earlier discoveries in the town have suggested a conjectural reconstruction of the plan. Rectangular defences may have enclosed 5½ acres lying between St Mary's Church and Queen Street and running west from Market Square to the site of St Martin's Gate. There we may visualise the lofty walls and towers built of flint rubble with ashlar facing like those which still stand on the neighbouring sites of Richborough and Lympne. Eastward on the lower ground lay the harbour formed by a widening of the river Dour where it falls into the sea. On the hills to the west rose a second lighthouse to supplement that on Castle Hill. This, known as the Bredenstone, remained a prominent feature in the accounts of Dover until the eighteenth century saw a gradual decay, consummated in 1805 when the scanty remains were covered by a redoubt hastily thrown up against the threat of a French invasion. Some masonry of this lighthouse still remains at Drop Redoubt.

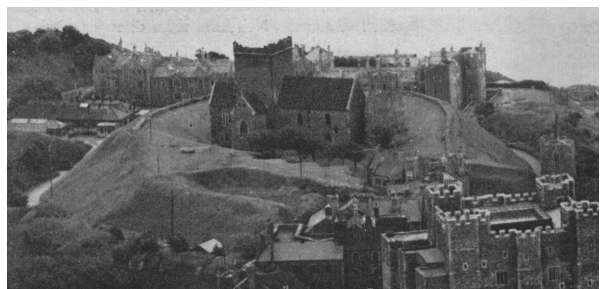
Such was the last period of Roman Dubra, a settlement military rather than commercial in character, and when in the C5 Britain was separated from the unity of the Western Empire the fortress ceased to function. Richborough more than sufficed for the diminished traffic across the Channel, and it is to this port that the scanty notices of the period point. At Dover the desertion is illustrated by the gradual silting of the ancient harbour, by the covering of the Roman quays with a layer of alluvium, and by the bank of drifted sand piling against the seaward defences and obliterating them.

With the establishment of a settled Jutish Kingdom and its conversion to Christianity another era opens. Contact with the Continent began again and Dover once more appeared as a port. Eadbald, King of Kent, founded a monastery 'within the castle' before 640, and it is clear that the castle recorded is the old fortress of the Saxon Shore, given over like Reculver to the practices of the new

faith. No structure of this date survives, as the foundation, dedicated to St Martin, was entirely reconstructed after the Norman Conquest. But a single discovery confirms the antiquity of the house, a tombstone with a cross in relief and a Runic inscription recording one Gisheard. This belongs to a rare type to which few parallels can be quoted, but it cannot be later than the C9 and should probably be ascribed to a date much closer to the foundation of the monastery.

The absorption of Kent, first by Mercia and then into the dominions of the house of Wessex, tended to increase the prosperity of the Channel ports and even the miseries of the Danish invasions affected this area less than many others. The gradual growth of Dover cannot be followed through this period, but it is clear that it was already a place of importance before the Norman Conquest. The earliest records of the Cinque Ports date from the C13, but they refer to privileges already granted under Edward the Confessor, and the proud record in Domesday Book states explicitly that the five ports enjoyed liberties belonging to no other city in the Kingdom. Of the five named, Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich, Hastings and Dover were the most important, each being bound to supply twenty-one ships against the five required from the other ports. From the privileges granted to these five towns we may watch the gradual emergence of the Corporation of the Cinque Ports, and organisation which assumed a definite form with the great charter of Edward I.

The growth of Dover in the late Saxon period has left its mark on Castle Hill. The Church of St Mary de Castro, one of the best preserved Saxon buildings of this period, is a large cruciform structure with a central tower, the whole lying to the east of the early Roman lighthouse. The exact date of erection is uncertain, but the arrangement and structural details point to the earlier part of the C11, probably during the reign of Canute. At that period the hill was still unfortified. The Castle



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mentioned in the story of Eustace of Boulogne's quarrel with the citizens of Dover in 1051 can only be the town which, like many others, may have been fortified during C9 and C10 as a part of the deliberate policy of the Saxon kings. The earliest record of a castle on the hill comes later in the same reign. Eadmer, a native of Kent and a monk of Canterbury, relates the history of Harold's visit to William of Normandy and the promise then extracted from him. Among these was an undertaking to construct a castle at Dover together with a well. This provision can only relate to the site on Castle Hill, where an artificial water supply was needed if the fortress were to stand a siege. The sequel records that Harold between this oath which was probably taken in 1064 and his accession are less precise, but there is no reason to doubt the detailed statements of Eadmer who, as a local man, may have known those who remembered the building. ...



Roman archway in the Pharos

The Roman Pharos

The Roman Pharos or lighthouse is situated on the summit of the hill within the late Saxon earthwork. It stands at the west end of the Church. The structure rises in five stages of which the uppermost is mediæval. This bears a shield which has been attributed, though with some doubt, to Sir Richard de Pembridge, Constable of the Castle in 1369, a date in keeping with the simple trefoiled head of the windows.

The four lower stages are Roman and are built of flint rubble originally cased in tufa ashlar with tile bonding courses. The masonry contains no re-used materials and none of the tiles examined bears any stamp of the British Fleet (Classis Britannica). The structure is octagonal in plan with walls of diminishing thickness enclosing a chamber 14' square. The present battered appearance of the exterior is due partly to decay, partly to mediæval refacing. Originally the walls were vertical, with a set-back of 1' for each stage. The lowest storey is nearly 18' high, the others varying from 7½' to 8'. Each of these had a wooden floor carried on two main beams, held in sockets on the north and south walls.

The entrance was on the south side where the Roman arch can still be traced. On the other three sides are openings or recesses largely deformed by mediæval work. Similar openings exist on the other storeys. That in the east side of the third storey remains substantially complete with a thin screen of masonry blocking the other end and pierced near the top with a small window. Others must have followed this model, but it is probable that some were designed without windows to increase the accommodation of the tower. The gradually diminishing thickness of the walls suggests an original building of eight storeys which would be crowned by a parapet, the whole rising to about 80'.

The identification of this structure as a pharos or lighthouse depends not only on its situation on the hill, which would render any other explanation difficult, but on our general knowledge of Roman lighthouses which are well illustrated by the classical texts and numerous representations. The absence of re-used material in the Dover structure is in favour of a date early in the Roman occupation.

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The Saxon Church

The Church of St Mary is a cruciform building with an aisleless nave and central tower. The walls are of stone and re-used Roman brick with dressings of the latter material. The plan and position of the church suggest that it was designed in relation to the Roman Pharos which was intended to serve as a west tower. There are no very closely datable features, but the arrangement and certain details suggest that the Church was erected in the early eleventh century, possibly during the reign of Canute (*sic*).

The north door of the nave is a later insertion, but that in the opposite wall retains its original form with a high opening, stone jambs and an arch of re-used Roman brick. There are two large Saxon double splayed windows with brick dressings on each side of the nave. The arches carrying the east and west walls of the central tower retain their original form, but those opening into the transepts date from the thirteenth century, when additional windows were inserted.

The chancel was also altered at this date, retaining the original plan and much of the Saxon masonry. The triple light east window, the lancets in the side walls and the piscina and sedile on the right of the altar all form part of the alterations which were carried out about the middle of the C13.

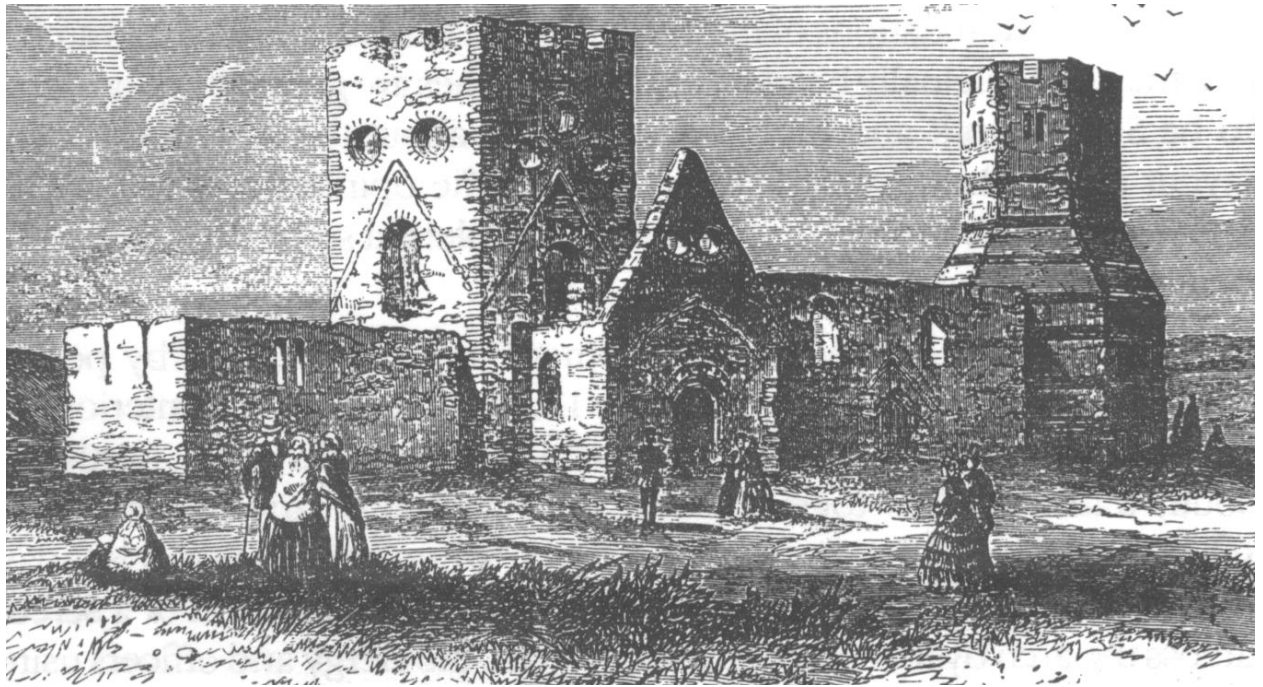
In modern times the Church was long roofless and deserted. It was repaired and reconsecrated about the middle of the last century, at which date the unhappy internal decoration was carried out ...

*From C. A. Raleigh Radford, M.A., F.B.A., F.S.A.,
Formerly Inspector of Ancient Monuments for
Wales, Sometime Director of the British School at
Rome: Dover Castle, Ministry of Works Guide
Book: London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office
1959.*

"The Church on the Castle Hill at Dover", wrote Sir Gilbert Scott in 1862, "is probably about the most entire ... among all the pre-Norman remains which have come down to us ..." (*Archæologia Cantiana* 5). Although now heavily restored by Scott himself, it still forms a significant part of one of the most

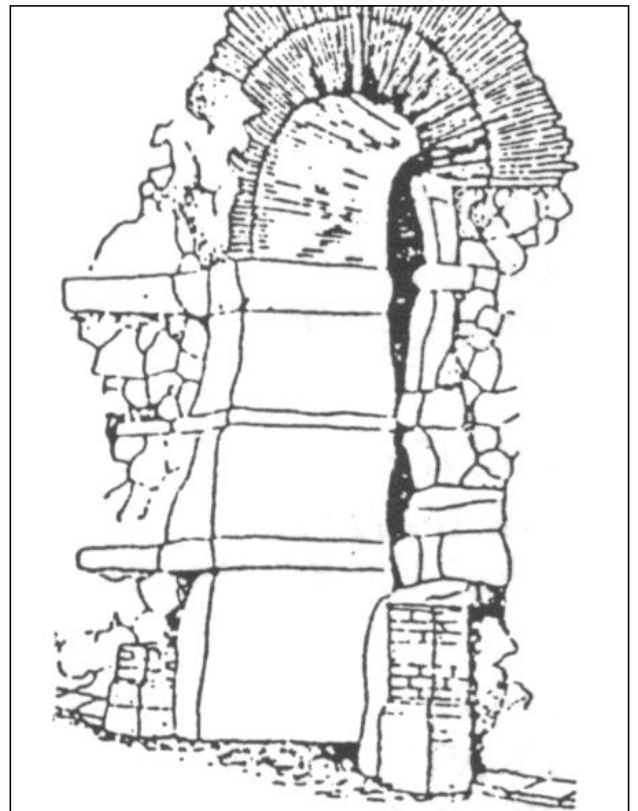
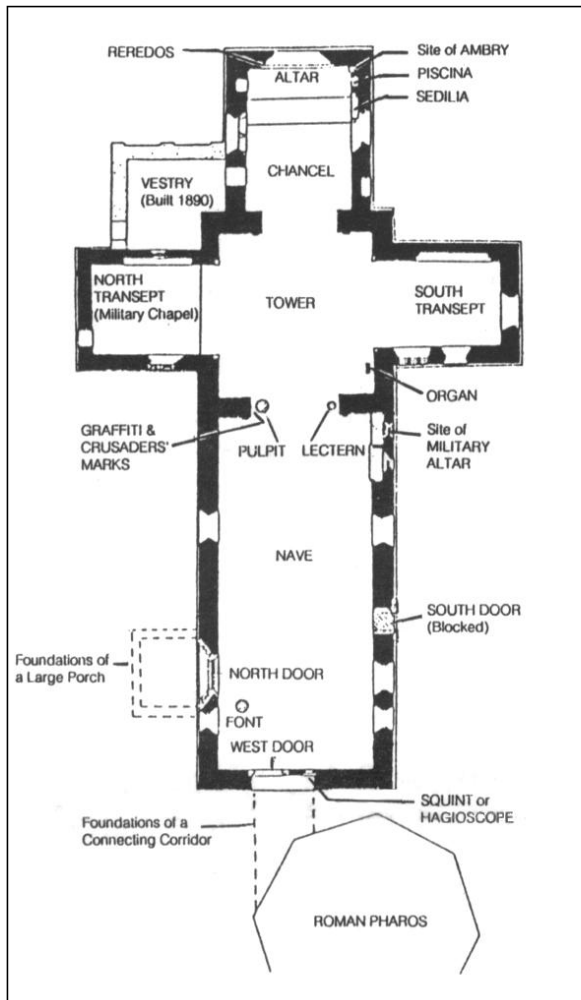


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Above: The church in 1858. It is interesting to note that at this date the Pharos seems to be in better repair than the church – a marked difference from the scene today

Below: Saxon doorway



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ancient clusters of buildings surviving in the County.

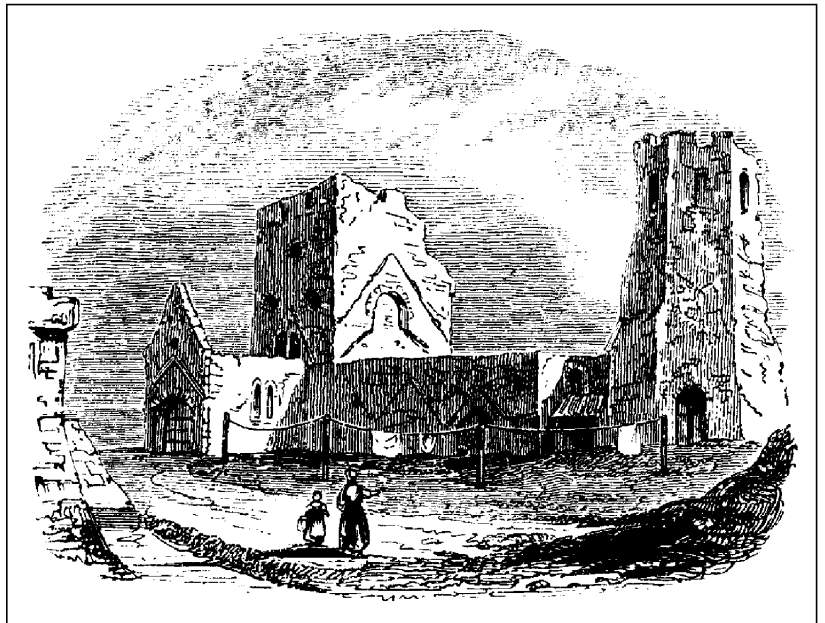
Although the oldest parts of the present structure probably belong to the C10, there is some evidence that this may be the successor to an earlier church, presumably of wood. In the early C7, we are told that King Eadbald founded a church for twenty canons "in the castle of Dover". It is quite possible, of course, that this may have been intended to mean the Saxon Shore fort of Dubris, which lies approximately under the Market Square of modern Dover. However, the consideration that King Wihtræd subsequently moved the canons to St. Martin's church (which *does* lie in the Shore Fort) may well be seen as suggesting that they had previously resided elsewhere.

Excavations on the southern side of St Mary's in the 1960s certainly revealed an extensive cemetery of late Saxon date, whose burials included those of women and children. The large number of these interments suggests an occupation of the site much earlier than the existing church, and could imply that the iron-age hill-fort here had been re-occupied in the C9 as a fortified *burh*. If so, then the new Church would likely have been erected to form its heart. The adjacent Roman pharos may have been used as a free-standing *campanile*.

The existence of such a citadel or "upper town" centred on St Mary's may indeed be hinted at in the entry appearing in the *AS Chronicle* for 1051, which records that the arrogant Count Eustace "went up to the town" with his men and slew a score of the populace. Abandoned for generations, the very existence



Two more views of St Mary-in-Castro before 1860.



of St Mary's was threatened in the mid-C19, when the Victorian mindset decreed the need for a church to serve the Castle garrison. Plans to demolish the ancient structure, however, were fortunately abandoned after a furious campaign by Kent's anti-quarians, and Scott was instead

commissioned to renovate and restore the ruins.

"Restoration" in Victorian times was a more draconian process than we would understand by the term today. Inevitably, this resulted in some loss and damage to the surviving structure, but to his credit, Scott took care to preserve as much

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as possible of what he found, and documented features he felt were beyond recovery. Some of his actions were surprisingly modern in their inspiration: much of the repair work to the crossing tower, for instance, was in brick, so as to be readily distinguishable from the authentic stonework it replaced.

Many of the surviving architectural characteristics of the Saxon building were retained as "features" of the restored church. The original South entrance, a classically tall and narrow doorway with an arch of re-used Roman brick and long-and-short stonework in its jambs, had been blocked in the Middle Ages. Scott preserved it, constructing his new main entrance door in the opposite wall. The *oculi* – the round openings in the walls of the transept gables and tower – were retained, albeit now infilled with new masonry. Nor was all of the new work executed in the fashionable 'neo-gothic' style so beloved of the Victorians. A surviving window (or maybe a high-level doorway to a lost floor) was used as a model for the new nave windows, and Scott records with some satisfaction how he experimented with the architectural logistics of a Saxon archway.

Regrettably, however, St Mary's is now once again in need of a little "tender loving care". Our long wet summer and the last winter have taken their toll, and on my most recent visit (May 2001) the tower was swathed in sheeted scaffolding. Inside there was some clear evidence of water penetration and warnings of falling masonry. Let us hope these problems can be overcome, to keep St Mary's standing firm into its third millennium.

St Mary's is open during normal Castle visitor hours (10am–5pm daily, except Christmas/New Year), English Heritage entrance fees apply, except to gain access to Sunday morning worship. A step down inside the door may cause problems to those with mobility difficulties.

*Karl Wittwer, gerefā Cantwara,
Tidunge, Rim VIIJ Sumor VIIIJ Ind.*



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Δορυπαρ

Town Museum, Market Square

Grid ref TR 317 417

Artifacts, various

Principal Anglo-Saxon displays are located in the main ground floor exhibition hall, and occupy the right hand half of the rear wall, and the large wall-mounted display cases on the right hand side.

Rear wall:

Reconstruction of a male burial from the Buckland cemetery, showing a chalk-cut grave, with bones and artifacts as they would appear during excavation. The grave is flanked by life-sized male and female figures, showing reconstructions based on Graves 38 and 56 (late C6 – excavated 1951). The actual artefacts recovered are preserved in the display case on the right

Female goods:

Buckle, bronze

Disk brooch, silver gilt

Finger ring, gold

Pendant, bronze bird-head (possibly re-used as hair ornament)

Necklace, amber and glass

Two knives, iron, fragmentary

Weaving batten, iron

Male goods:

Key, iron, fragment

Spear head and ferrule, iron

Buckle and belt mounts, bronze

Shield boss, handle and rivets, iron

Sword, iron, pattern-welded

Cone beaker, glass, damaged

Also in this case is

Bucket, bronze-bound, C6, from Mill Hill Cemetery (excavated 1988)

Karl Wittwer, gerefa Cantwara