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THE DOMESDAY OF DOVER CASTLE – AN ARCHIVAL HISTORY

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It was not unusual in medieval society for any organisation of significance to record, sooner or later, the charters, by-laws and regulations which governed its activities. Thus medieval boroughs produced their much treasured customals and the Confederation of the Cinque Ports likewise set down its liberties and responsibilities. There is nothing surprising, therefore, in a customal being prepared relating to the management of Dover Castle. Just when this compilation was first made is unknown, though tradition ascribes its preparation initially to Sir John Fenes, reputed Constable of the Castle in the reign of William the Conqueror. Unfortunately for tradition, Horace Round, earlier this century, and others have indicated that Fenes and others of his near contemporary Constables were figments of the imagination rather than beings in history and that such an early origin for the customal is improbable.

When John Bavington-Jones wrote his valuable book on *The Records of Dover*, published in 1920, he saw fit to draw attention to just such a record called 'Domesday', which had formed part of the paraphernalia of office of the medieval Lords Warden and which, properly, was handed, together with the keys of the castle, to successive holders of that office.¹ The story told by Bavington-Jones, however, was particularly directed to the seventeenth century and to the Constablership of Theophilus, Earl of Suffolk, whose Lieutenant between 1629 and 1635 was none other than Sir Edward Dering.

With knowledge of the latter's antiquarian interests, it is hardly surprising to find that about a year after he left office, the Lord

¹ Bavington-Jones, *op. cit.*, 74–6.

Warden found it necessary to write in strong terms to Dering about missing records of Dover Castle. His letter of 3 November, 1636, quoted by Bavington-Jones, reads: 'I am given to understand that you have in your custody a manuscript called Domesday Book and divers other records and writings which properly belong to this castle, and ought not hence to be removed . . .' Dering replied on the 14th of the same month, stating that when he returned home to Surrenden he had indeed found certain documents which had been inadvertently picked up with his own papers, but he assured the Earl that these had all been returned to the castle as soon as he found them.² He then continued regarding the so-called Domesday Book or custumal (for, of course, it has no connection with the compilation of 1085), that 'being torne and defaced and unbound, I took care to have renewed as it is, resolving to have added to the end thereof the names and arms of your Lordship's honourable, and some royal predecessors in office with their Lieutenants, but I could not get the painters down this summer nor could I get Mr. Somersett's help in perfecting of the catalogue . . .'³ Bavington Jones then adds: 'Whether Sir Edward Dering ever finished his additions to the list of Lord Wardens and Lieutenants of the Castle seems to be unknown . . . Those who in later years made purchases of the MSS. of the great Surrenden Library became possessed of fragmentary parts of a list and arms of Lord Wardens. . . . Nothing afterwards was heard of the Dover Castle Domesday Book. Probably it remained in the Surrenden Library and when the first part of those MSS. were sold by order of Mr. Cholmley Dering . . . in the early part of the 19th century, a Kentish antiquary wrote "doubtless the Domesday Book was amongst them".'

Many years ago, now, the then Town Sergeant of Dover was given a volume for safe keeping, which in 1959, was placed in the Kent Archives Office at County Hall, Maidstone.⁴ At the time of receipt it was thought to be in the possession of the Town Sergeant, but after representations, was recognized as belonging to the Corporation of Dover and as being held on deposit from that borough. This volume, upon examination, proved to be in the hand of Sir Edward Dering and to be a very detailed armorial of the Lords Warden and of their Lieutenants, prepared somewhere about

² One cannot be sure of this disclaimer. Dering gave some documents to Cotton, which almost certainly came from Dover.

³ Mr. Somersett is of course John Philipot, Somerset Herald, who had himself prepared an armorial of the Lords Warden for the Duke of Buckingham.

⁴ K.A.O., U 715.

1630 and with a fine, contemporary, tooled leather binding. When the matter was drawn to the attention of the Town Clerk of the day, he evinced great concern and, in discussion, explained both about the lost Domesday and that, as seneschal of the Ports, he was doubly anxious lest the book in question should prove to be the missing volume. The cause of the special concern and the background story, itself, being known, the truth proved both stranger and simpler than anyone had anticipated.

Some two years earlier a visit to Knole had included an examination of those items on display in the great hall, and one remembered having seen another armorial there, coloured, and possibly in the hand of Dering himself. An approach to the Rt. Hon. Lord Sackville was therefore made and he very kindly allowed the volume to be borrowed by the Office after the season was over and also permitted it to be photocopied.⁵ This opportunity for a closer examination helped to unravel the mystery which had faced Bavington-Jones and many others over the years, for the volume from Knole was indeed the missing Domesday of Dover Castle and the basis for Dering's reply to the Earl of Suffolk is recorded in these words at the start of the book:

Anno Domini, 1630	
New velem att each end	4s.}
New binding	8s.} 12s.

EdwarDering (*sic*)

What had transpired, it seems, was that Dering had never finished the intended work, nor was the book ever returned to the Earl of Suffolk. Dering died in 1644 and with the confusion of the Civil War, the Domesday and its attendant armorial were lost to sight. Indeed, nothing is known of the story of this record during the rest of the seventeenth century, and it is not until 1704 that any further evidence is forthcoming. This takes the form of an endorsement, once again in the front of the Knole volume, which records that one, John Sackett of Thanet, having come by the book – how is unknown – restored (*restituit*) it to the Lord Warden, then George, Prince of Denmark, consort of Queen Anne. Prince George died in 1706 to be followed in office by the Duke of Dorset residing at Knole. Presumably, the Domesday having been transferred to the Duke, was removed by him to his home, where it has remained. The closed nature of private archives until this century is in itself

⁵ K.A.O. TR 745.

sufficient explanation for the apparent loss of the document. At least the Dering family can be exonerated from the charge of disposal by sale in the last century.

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It would not be right, however, to leave this matter without a more detailed consideration of both the Dover MS. and the Domesday volume and each will now be examined more closely.

As an armorial the Dover MS. is by far the more important document. It was prepared with great care by Sir Edward, each entry consisting of a blazon of the arms of the Warden or Lieutenant, as the case may be, and a biographical note concerning him. Entries for the Lieutenants are generally less complete simply because the men, themselves, were more obscure, less easy to identify and less noteworthy. The shields are not coloured, but are marked with appropriate metals and colours by abbreviation, this work having been accomplished before the standard use of hatching had been agreed by heralds. Some indication of the size of the undertaking is shown by the composition of the book. Using Dering's own numeration of the pages, pages 1-124 are taken up with a list of the Constables from Earl Godwin to the Earl of Suffolk; then after a short gap, pp. 127-53 comprise a like list for the Lieutenants of the Castle; pp. 161-3 are a detailed account of Hubert de Burgh and of the Earl Warenne of the time of King John and on p. 188, the last of the original pages, there are notes regarding the bells in St. Mary-in-Castro.⁶ All is in the hand of Sir Edward Dering. An indication of the scholarship involved is the manner in which every entry bears references to the authorities from which it has been taken, and it is of interest to compile a list of those authorities so used. The following list is not necessarily complete nor is it possible always to determine what the source included at that date.

- (a) *Primary sources:* Charter, Patent, Close, Escheator and Fine Rolls in the Public Records
Domesday Book and the Red Book of the Exchequer
Michell MSS.
Dover Records and the Faversham Leiger
Record de Constabulariis

⁶ These notes are essentially similar to the note on Dover Bells in *Arch. Cant.*, i (1858), 177, but coats of arms are added.

Liber Zouch and Liber Cobham

Sir Robert Cotton's papers and rolls

(b) *Secondary and other sources:* Matthew Paris

Polydore Virgil, *Angliae Historiae*

John Speed, *History of Great Britain*

Raphael Holinshed, *Chronicles*

John Weaver, *Ancient Funereall Monuments*

William Eldred⁷

William Lambarde, *Perambulation of Kent*

Augustine Vincent, Windsor Herald

'Robson Archivist of the Tower Records'

Sir Henry Spelman, *Glossary*

John Philipot, Somerset Herald⁸

This extensive list indicates that Dering used the most reliable and proper sources for his work, together with such specialist knowledge as was available at the time and that, even if some of the information is suspect in terms of modern scholarship, the research thus indicated deserves due recognition and the result can hardly be dismissed without very careful examination.

Finally, so far as the Dover MS. is concerned, it should be noted that the biographical notes thus obtained are also given in an abbreviated form, usually underlined in red, and that a comparison shows that these briefer comments form the basis for the like notes appended to the shields in the Domesday of the Castle version of the armorial. There is, therefore, every reason to suggest that the Dover MS. with its greater detail and evidence of careful research is the draft for the more famous armorial of which its author wrote in 1636.

iii

The so-called Domesday of Dover Castle, on the other hand, is significant not so much because of the armorial of holders of office, as for its core, which is a late medieval volume, probably early

⁷ Eldred is a Dover name. A William Eldred was master gunner at Dover Castle and was author of the *Gunner's Glasse*, published in 1646 (D.N.B.). A William Eldred also prepared a magnificent large scale plan of Dover in 1641, still retained by the Dover Harbour Board, a photocopy of which is available in the Archives Office (K.A.O., TR 1380).

⁸ It is impossible to identify all these sources, but they suggest that the Public Records, some private libraries including material now in the British Library, as well as printed works were thoroughly searched.

fifteenth-century – or, as Dering himself records, of the reign of Richard II (1377–99) – and most likely prepared in this country although its style is not unlike some French documents of the period.⁹ A collation of the volume as it now exists is as follows: 14⁺1 (2–5⁸ 6²) 7–10⁶; i.e. the first quire and the last four are the additional leaves added by Dering, while the quires indicated within the brackets are the original and probably incomplete volume as found by Sir Edward in 1630. The state of the outer leaves of the core supports his claim that when he found the book it was unbound and possibly damaged, though the state of some of the pages of the armorial also suggests that subsequently the document suffered further vicissitudes. The first leaves of the core bear seventeen long lines of writing and new sections of the text are headed by finely executed initial letters formed of fully armoured knights both coloured and illuminated. The volume, as it now exists, was probably rebound once more in the nineteenth century, but the centre-piece from the seventeenth-century cover was re-used, jasper end papers added and the head, foot and side edges gilded.

It is apparent, therefore, that the Domesday, as we now have it, consists of three parts – two essentially the work of Dering – and the custumal, itself, like the filling in the sandwich. It would be tedious to list the contents page by page, but some indication of content is desirable:

- (a) The first quire is of some special interest because interspersed among blank leaves one finds three containing special information as follows: (i) the note of the cost of repair and rebinding already mentioned above, the same page also bears a scribble in an unknown hand which appears to be a name, either 'John Requedi or Regnedi'; (ii) a note in Latin, dated 1704, and to the effect that John de Sackett of the family of Sackett of the Isle of Thanet having received the book had restored it to the Lord Warden; and, (iii) a page bearing (1) Dering ancient – *arg., a fess or and in chief three torteaux gu.*, on a standard supported by a black horse and with a note regarding Richard Dering, *fl. temp.* Richard II, lieutenant of Dover Castle; (2) Dering modern – *or, a saltire sable with a crescent for a difference*, on a like standard similarly supported and with a note regarding Richard Dering, *fl. temp.* Henry VIII, lieutenant of the Castle; and, (3) a similarly supported standard – *quarterly, 1 and 4 Dering ancient, 2 and 3 Dering modern and over all the badge of Ulster* and with a note concerning the history of the Domesday in Latin, viz. '*Librum hunc vocatum Domesday per Jo. Dominus Fenes conscriptum Anno 14 W. Conq., renovatum atque auctum 10 H. 3 per Hubert de Burgo comite Kancie: pag. 19, et deinceps 18 E 1 per dominum Steph. de Pencester militem*

⁹ For the bibliographical details of this volume I am indebted to Miss A.M. Oakley, Archivist to the Dean and Chapter and to the City of Canterbury, who undertook the initial examination of this volume when it was borrowed from Lord Sackville.

statutis astructis cumulatum; pag. 39, et de integro rescriptum 14 R 2 per Dominum Jo. Devereux militem: pag. prima, iam lacerum, dissutum, neglectum, recollegit, resarsivit, adornavit, Dns. Edwardus Dering miles et Baronettus, Anno regni serenissimi Regis Caroli sexta . . . 1630.

- (b) Then follows the core section starting with the legend 'the Constables hold from the King in chief . . .' embellished by an initial 'C' supported by a ducally crowned armoured figure with a hound issuant from the crown; to the right is a smaller mailed figure with surcoat and shield bearing *cross-crosslets 3, 2 and 1 and in chief two mullets* (the arms of William de Clynton, Earl of Huntingdon, Lord Warden during the reign of Edward III). Central are the arms of France quartered with those of England and supported by *two lions sejant guardant* at the base.

The following eighteen pages detail the seven knight's fees, each fee being prefaced by an initial letter enclosing a fully mailed figure, some bearing heraldic shields. At the end, following a table of fees, Dering has added another Latin note: '*Istud Domesday erat renovatur Anno Ed. f. Hen. Regis per Stephanum de Pencester tunc Constabulari Castri Dovor. Memorandum hunc titulum sequentibus duobus foliis praescriptum vidi ubi ipse duo folia charistere Temporis H.7 transcripta erat. EdwarDering*'. There follow four pages regarding Castle-ward, prefixed by a finely embellished initial letter 'S', and this, in turn, by details of the victualling of the garrison, by a copy of the Domesday of the Cinque Ports and details of the fodder required for horses, duties of the 'kerneaux' of the Castle and finally a list of British ports from London to Falmouth. All of this, except for the first four pages, is in French, whereas the earlier part of the book was in Latin.

The last twenty pages of the core section are devoted to the statutes or rules of the Castle which the legend records as having been established in the reign of Henry III and always maintained in his day and ever after. Once again this part of the text is in French. These rules comprise twenty-six heads covering the guarding of the Castle, with punishments for leaving the watch or for sleeping while on guard, the latter including the penalty of being thrown over the walls of the Castle for a fourth offence! Foul language and assault on fellow guards also incur penalties and as for prisoners in the Castle, the smith could not only charge them 4d. for being released from their irons, but also 4d. for the pleasure of putting them in irons in the first place! Other rules concern the chapel, the duties of the chaplain and those of the other officers. This core section is completed with a leaf bearing a very rough drawing of the Castle keep, but the few blank leaves following have been used for (i) a scribble of the opening words of a royal charter; (ii) notes of three appointments, one so damaged by damp as to be illegible, the others those of Richard Hughes as *tormentarius* (gunner) on 18 Jan., 1604/5 and of John Hicke as gentleman janitor on 17 Feb., 1604/5; and (iii) a copy of the oath required to be taken by the lieutenant of the Castle. All these final leaves of the section are badly damaged by damp at the head of the page.

- (c) The last four quires are again parchment leaves added by Dering. These begin with the heading: '*Series Constabularium Castri Dovor et Custodem Quinque Portuum . . .*' and are filled with a very fine coloured armorial from Godwin, Earl of Kent to Theophilus, Earl of Suffolk. Some of the leaves are damaged by damp, in some cases the pigment has been smudged, and the final page of the armorial bears no titles although the arms are complete. A few shields have not been finished and remain blank, probably because of uncertainty over the traditional arms ascribed to the holders. Finally, this section too, has been finished with a page bearing a drawing of the Castle keep similar in style to that which is borne on the ancient Cinque Ports flag.

We have evidence, therefore, not only of the medieval rules governing Dover Castle, a matter of interest in itself, but also that Dering expended considerable time and energy unravelling the history of the office of Constable and Lord Warden as also that of Lieutenant. It is perhaps surprising that no truly authoritative list of Lords Warden has ever been compiled. The most comprehensive is probably that prepared by Edward Knocker and added to *An Account of the Grand Court of Shepway*, which was published in 1862. An examination of this list, however, indicates some of the problems faced by the compiler. First, tradition plays an essential part and not all can be substantiated by research nor, in Knocker's case, has been, for he has naturally accepted tradition and had not the advantages of later work on the early Constables to which to refer.¹⁰ Second, having prepared his list he seems to have been unaware that on occasions one person served more than once, or, perhaps more difficult, that one person may be hidden under various pseudonyms, e.g. Edmund Plantagenet (no. 94 in Knocker's list) is followed by Edmund de Langele, Earl of Cambridge, without any indication that it was appreciated that they were identical. Third, as a result of these complexities, the order accorded to the Wardens is itself suspect.

Both Hasted and Philipot provide lists of Lords Warden,¹¹ not unlike Knocker's in content though understandably briefer and less complete and each was dependent to a degree upon yet earlier records. John Philipot, Somerset Herald, completed a list for the Duke of Buckingham in 1627,¹² and an indication of the difficulty of this work is shown by the fact that whereas Knocker found 133 persons holding office before 1642, Lambarde could only account for 54 and Philipot's roll of arms includes 68 Wardens.

It is the more significant, therefore, that Sir Edward Dering, preparing his armorial only a few years after 'Mr. Somersett' and indeed using that herald's work extensively, produced a list of 121 names for his draft and included 89 of these in his final work.

¹⁰ Horace Round, in *Family Origins* (1930), challenged some of the early tradition and see F.W. Steer, *Ashburnham Archives* (1958) for an account of the confused tradition of the early members of that family.

¹¹ *History of Kent*, (1st edn. 1799) vol. 4, 67-75, and *Villare Cantium* (1659), 12-4.

¹² The original of this armorial was found in the Ashburnham MSS, when they were deposited in the East Sussex Record Office at Lewes. The list was edited by the late F.W. Steer and published in 1956 with a foreword by Sir Winston Churchill, then Lord Warden.

This once again illustrates the measure of care shown by Sir Edward in that he could reduce a list by a quarter because of the doubtful character of the evidence or because he could find no reference to a reputed Constable in the primary sources he used. He had, of course, no reason to doubt the strong early traditions or to regard the reputed Constables and Wardens of the Norman period with suspicion and as a result the Dover MS. remains the most complete authoritative list which we have of both the Lords Warden and their Lieutenants. In this sense, it is an invaluable document supported by the evidence of so much careful research. On the other hand, the Domesday of Dover Castle is significant because of the core element and not really by reason of the additions, which, however well executed, add nothing to the information contained in the Dover MS. It is, of course, of very considerable interest that both these records have survived; that the fears expressed by John Bavington-Jones can be shown to be without foundation; and that a late medieval text, treasured for many years by successive Wardens, should have been rescued by Sir Edward Dering and then 'lost' essentially because it had been restored to proper custody! The public spirited action of Lord Sackville means that not only can the original be seen at Knole, but that a good photocopy is available for research and for comparison with what has been termed, the Dover MS.

