

Dover castle : Knight's fees owing castle-guard service at Dover : Introduction

There may once have been a time when the changing of the guard at Dover Castle was a spectacle worth seeing. If it happened at all, it happened every four weeks. A cavalcade of more than twenty knights, followed by their servants and packhorses, went trotting up the hill towards the castle, ready to begin their spell of garrison duty. Some time later, a similar cavalcade came trotting down the hill, as the knights who had just completed their spell set out on their journeys home. (For some of them, that journey might be a very long one -- perhaps as far as Dorset or Northamptonshire.) Each of these departing knights would have to return to Dover, after some number of weeks, when his turn came round again. He would meet up with some of the same companions again, but he would not meet up with all of them. Because of the way in which the system was set up, the cavalcade which came trotting down the hill on this (or any other) particular occasion would never reassemble itself.

By the time that we get any detailed information, the system had become fossilized. No knight was expected to travel to Dover (in person or by deputy) and take up residence inside the castle for the next four weeks. All that was required from him was the payment of a castle-guard rent of ten shillings (120 pence). As the time approached for his theoretical spell of duty, he sent one of his servants to Dover with a purse containing the money; the servant arrived, handed over the cash, collected some sort of receipt, and went back home again; and that was all that happened.

The basic source of information is a list which seems to have been put together in about 1230. There are probably many copies and several versions of this list. The text is not very long (written in columns it does not take up much space), and it was interesting enough for people to want to own a copy, even if they were not directly concerned. One copy at least was made for the monks of Christ Church (CCA, Reg K, fos 123v-4v), one copy at least for the monks of St Augustine's (Lambeth Palace Library 1213, fos 130v-1r). Those copies seem to exist for no reason beyond curiosity. The king's exchequer, by contrast, was bound to take an interest in any matter which affected the king's finances, and one of its registers, the "Red Book" (E 164/2), contains three copies of this text.

Apart from the Christ Church copy (see above), the only copies which I have seen are the three in Hall's edition of the "Red Book" (Hall 1896). I refer to them here as copy 1 (pp 717-22, from fos 196v-7r), copy 2 (pp 613-18, from fos 157r-v), and copy 3 (pp 706-12, from fos 194v-5r). What we are given is a list of the people or places from which castle-guard rents are due. The list is organized into nine sections, one for each of the baronies which carried some share of the load. "One knight" means the rent for one knight for one month, which means 120 pence. In round figures, "fifteen days" means half a knight-month (60 pence), and "twenty days" means two-thirds of a knight-month (80 pence). More exactly, "one month" means four weeks, a thirteenth part of a

year.

Copy 1 is closest to the original. Many of the names are badly spelt, but the shape of the text is well enough preserved. Copy 2 is of very little value. Mostly it runs parallel with copy 1, but two of the sections are transposed, several entries are missing, and the spelling is even more corrupt. Just occasionally, however, copy 2 does get something right which copy 1 gets wrong.

Copy 3 is different. Though the heading has been garbled (by the scribe or by the editor), the gist of it is clear: this is an account of the rents actually paid in the course of the financial year 1261/62. The baronies are in the same sequence as in copy 1, but within most baronies the order of the entries is rotated. That is, copy 3 begins at a point which in copy 1 comes somewhere in the middle.

Comparing copy 1 with copy 3, it is not very difficult to understand how the system was designed. Each barony (except for the ninth one) was organized into shifts, as follows:

1 Constabulary -- four shifts of five knights each plus nine shifts of four knights each (so thirteen shifts and 56 knights all told)

2 Avranches -- seven shifts of three knights each (21 knights)

3 Fobert -- five shifts of three knights each (15 knights)

4 Arsic -- six shifts of three knights each (18 knights)

5 Peverel -- five shifts of three knights each (15 knights)

6 Maminot -- eight shifts of three knights each (24 knights)

7 Port -- six shifts of two knights each (12 knights)

8 Crevequer -- three shifts of one knight each plus three shifts of two-thirds of a knight each (so six shifts and five knights all told)

During the financial year 1261/62, we know from copy 3 that the shifts rotated like this:

	b a r o n i e s							
weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1-4	1/4	2/3	3/4	4/3	5/1	6/5	7/3	8/3
5-8	1/5	2/4	3/5	4/4	5/2	6/6	7/4	8/4
9-12	1/6	2/5	3/1	4/5	5/3	6/7	7/5	8/5
13-16	1/7	2/6	3/2	4/6	5/4	6/8	7/6	8/6
17-20	1/8	2/7	3/3	4/1	5/5	6/1	7/1	8/1
21-4	1/9	2/1	3/4	4/2	5/1	6/2	7/2	8/2
25-8	1/10	2/2	3/5	4/3	5/2	6/3	7/3	8/3
29-32	1/11	2/3	3/1	4/4	5/3	6/4	7/4	8/4
33-6	1/12	2/4	3/2	4/5	5/4	6/5	7/5	8/5

37-40	1/13	2/5	3/3	4/6	5/5	6/6	7/6	8/6
41-4	1/1	2/6	3/4	4/1	5/1	6/7	7/1	8/1
45-8	1/2	2/7	3/5	4/2	5/2	6/8	7/2	8/2
49-52	1/3	2/1	3/1	4/3	5/3	6/1	7/3	8/3

In this particular year, some shifts paid less than others and some paid more. Shift 2/2, for example, was lucky (it only had to pay once) and shift 4/3 was unlucky (it had to pay three times). But that was only true for this year. During the next financial year, the shifts would rotate like this:

		b a r o n i e s							
weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
1-4	1/4	2/2	3/2	4/4	5/4	6/2	7/4	8/4	
5-8	1/5	2/3	3/3	4/5	5/5	6/3	7/5	8/5	
9-12	1/6	2/4	3/4	4/6	5/1	6/4	7/6	8/6	
13-16	1/7	2/5	3/5	4/1	5/2	6/5	7/1	8/1	
17-20	1/8	2/6	3/1	4/2	5/3	6/6	7/2	8/2	
21-4	1/9	2/7	3/2	4/3	5/4	6/7	7/3	8/3	
25-8	1/10	2/1	3/3	4/4	5/5	6/8	7/4	8/4	
29-32	1/11	2/2	3/4	4/5	5/1	6/1	7/5	8/5	
33-6	1/12	2/3	3/5	4/6	5/2	6/2	7/6	8/6	
37-40	1/13	2/4	3/1	4/1	5/3	6/3	7/1	8/1	
41-4	1/1	2/5	3/2	4/2	5/4	6/4	7/2	8/2	
45-8	1/2	2/6	3/3	4/3	5/5	6/5	7/3	8/3	
49-52	1/3	2/7	3/4	4/4	5/1	6/6	7/4	8/4	

So shift 2/1 could look forward to being lucky, and shift 4/4 would have to take its turn to be unlucky. In the long run, within each barony, everything balanced out, and everyone paid an equal share. Between baronies, the load was not evenly distributed. Those knight who were working to a short rota -- the 20-week rota for barony 5, for instance -- would always have to pay more than those knights who were working to a longer one.

There are some anomalies, the explanation for which is not made known to us, but which can sometimes be guessed at. In the first and largest barony, the Constabulary, it looks as if the rota originally consisted of fourteen shifts of four knights each. For some reason it was decided to reduce the number to thirteen; so one of the shifts was disbanded and its members reassigned, one each to shifts 1/5-8. Also, somehow or other, an extra shilling -- notionally one-tenth of a knight -- attached itself to shift 1/9. In the barony of Peverel, three-quarters of a knight are missing from shift 5/3. In the barony of Crevequer, it looks as if the rents paid by five knights were spread out to fill up a rota originally designed for six knights.

The ninth barony, the "Guard of Adam son of Willelm", is altogether anomalous. There were only three fees in this guard, each of which paid twice a year. The Christ Church copy is the only one which manages to describe the facts clearly (CCA, Reg K, fo 124v): payments were due from *La Doune* on the fifteenth day before Michaelmas and the fifteenth day before Easter; from *Herthangre* on the fifteenth day before Christmas and the fifteenth

day before Midsummner; and from *Graven'* on the fifteenth day after Christmas and the fifteenth day after Midsummer.

Four of my files are being made available here. "Version A" is an attempted reconstruction of the text in its original form. It is largely based on copy 1, but I have done what I can to filter out copy 1's mistakes and improve the spelling of the names. "Version B" is a straight translation of copy 1; some of its errors are noted, none corrected. "Version C" is a similar translation of copy 2, for what little that copy is worth. "Version D" should be more interesting: this is my reconstruction of the version of the text (updated in places) on which the account for 1261/62 -- the account surviving as copy 3 -- was based.

Reference

H. Hall (ed.), *The Red Book of the Exchequer* (Rolls Series 99, 1896).

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