

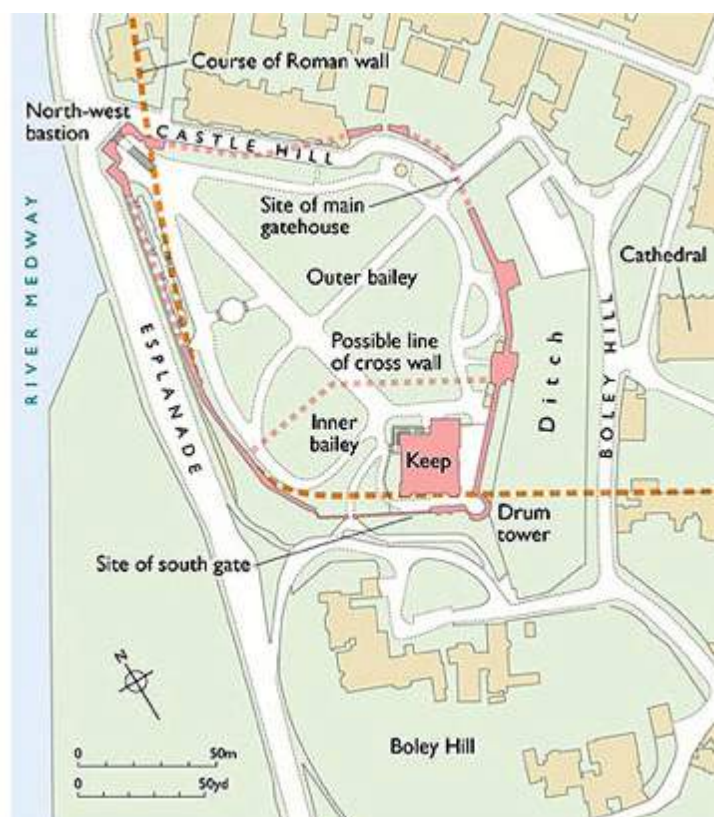
HISTORY AROUND US : Rochester Castle

Part 3 : SOURCES AND INTERPRETATIONS

This collection of sources and interpretations has been assembled to support teachers who are planning to organise a History Around Us course which focuses on Rochester Castle. It is not intended that all of them are used. Teachers will need to select the sources and interpretations they wish to use and devise their own activities according to the enquiries they are planning and the learning needs of their students. Some of the written sources are quite lengthy; teachers might wish to provide their students with extracts from them and/or simplify their language where appropriate. Note that there are no written extracts from the English Heritage guidebook because it is so easily obtainable.

The collection is organised chronologically in four sections :

- 1066 - c1100 (pages 2-5)
- 1100 – 1199 (page 6)
- 1200 – 1299 (pages 7 -12)
- The later Middle Ages, c1300 – 1499 (pages 13-14)
- Rochester Castle since 1500 (pages 15-18)



The location and remains (shown in pink) of Rochester Castle

From the English Heritage webpages for Rochester Castle

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/description/>

1066 – c 1100**PROFESSOR R.A. BROWN**

R. Allen Brown was Professor of Medieval History at Kings College, University of London. He wrote many books on the Normans and Castles. This is an extract from his Guidebook to Rochester Castle which was first published in 1969.

TEACHERS' NOTES :

The first recorded reference to a castle at Rochester is in Domesday Book (1086). It was presumably a Motte and Bailey castle built in, or soon after, 1066. Its exact location was uncertain until archaeological excavations in the 1970s uncovered remains of Norman defences on the site of the present castle. Before then it was assumed that it had been built just north of the present castle on Boley Hill (a corruption of bailey?). There was a siege at Rochester Castle in 1088 during the civil war which followed William the Conqueror's death in 1085. It is thought that the first stone defences, the curtain wall, were built soon afterwards ; parts of it still survive.

"The first castle at Rochester was built at the time of the Norman Conquest (1066) and is mentioned in Domesday Book (1086). It was probably a Motte and Bailey Castle built outside the old Roman Wall on Boley Hill."

DOMESDAY BOOK

Domesday Book was written in 1086 on the command of William the Conqueror. He wanted to find out how much the people- of England should pay him in tax so he sent teams of officials round the country. They would ask questions about the land in each village and how much it was worth. Later a second group went to the village to check the answers. All the details were written down, in Latin, into two large books which were kept on a big iron chest in Westminster.

Today Domesday Book is kept in the Public Record Office and historians study it because of the detailed information it contains about towns and villages in the late eleventh century.

"Aylesford, near Maidstone : the Bishop of Rochester possesses much of the land of Aylesford, which is worth 17 shillings and 4 pence, in exchange for the land on which Rochester Castle is placed."

COLIN FLIGHT and A.C.HARRISON

Colin Flight and A.C.Harrison are archaeologists who carried out an excavation in the grounds of Rochester Castle in 1976. They found remains of the city wall built by the Romans, fragments of Norman pottery and evidence that the earthworks were built much earlier than the castle walls.

"We suggest that the earliest castle at Rochester was probably built soon after 1066 inside the S,W. corner of the Roman Walls. It was defended by massive earth works, a wooden stockade and a 20 ft ditch. On the west overlooking the river the Roman Wall was incorporated into the defences of the- castle. It is most unlikely that it was built outside the Roman City Wall on Boley Hill."

ADAPTED FROM 'ODO OR THE SIEGE OF ROCHESTER CASTLE' BY EDWIN HARRIS, 1900

The author :

Edwin Harris (1859 – 1938) was a Rochester businessman who became interested in local history. He wrote many books about the history of the town. He wrote this at the beginning of this book :

"In placing this book before the general public my main motive is to interest visitors and others in the Old City of Rochester, my home town. The book is a work of fiction, based on historical facts. Some of the characters in the book are imaginary. In it I have tried to show the different feelings of Odo and Gundulf - both were churchmen but one was ambitious, treacherous and forceful, the other a proper father to the rich and poor alike."

"At the end of October in 1087 in an old castle in Normandy sat three important men. The first was Robert, Earl of Normandy, the second was Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, the third was a young soldier, Eustace, Earl of Boulogne. The Earl had heard that William the Conqueror had died and his youngest son William Rufus had seized the throne with the help of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lanfranc. They agreed that Odo and Eustace should return to England, create trouble and then Robert would invade to seize the Crown.

Odo and Eustace sailed to England, landed in Dover and then travelled towards London, where they met King William Rufus in the Tower of London and swore to be loyal to him. Soon, however, they were gathering supporters to overthrow him. Then they went to Rochester and seized control of the castle there. They gathered men, weapons and supplies and by Christmas their preparations were complete. Gundulf, the Bishop of Rochester, however, found out about these plans and warned the King.

While Eustace remained at Rochester, Odo travelled to Pevensey Castle in Sussex to wait for Earl Robert's men, William Rufus' men laid siege to Pevensey Castle for several weeks until Odo surrendered. Odo promised to give up Rochester Castle and then leave the country. He travelled to Rochester under royal guard but upon entering the castle Count Eustace arrested the guards and freed Odo.

William Rufus, who had returned to London thinking that the rebellion was over, gathered a new army and marched to Rochester to lay siege to the castle. At midnight Rufus and his followers began silently to surround the castle, ladders were placed over the moat to the drawbridge and the chains cut away. Scaling ladders were put against the walls but Odo's men threw them back. Huge stones were thrown from the battlements and the King ordered his men to retreat into the city.

The siege continued for several weeks. Inside the castle food was running out and some of Odo's men were dying of disease when they were pleased to see Norman ships sailing up the Medway, one of them was Odo's own ship. But the ships were sailed by men from Dover who supported William Rufus.

Soon after this Eustace decided to surrender. A white flag was flown from the battlements. Odo and Eustace walked out of the castle to shouts of 'Hang the traitor bishop and his friends'. They were escorted to the ships and taken to Normandy. Their soldiers were allowed to return home after having a good feast. On hearing this they cried out 'Long Live the King!' and swore never to rebel against him again."



ODO LEAVING ROCHESTER CASTLE. From 'Cassell's History of England' published in the late nineteenth century.

THE ANGLO-SAXON CHRONICLE :

This part of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was written by a monk at Peterborough Abbey between 1121 and 1154. Some of it, however, might have been copied from an earlier chronicle kept at St. Augustine's Abbey in Canterbury.

"1088. In this year the most powerful Frenchman in the land plotted to betray their King and make his brother, Robert, king, he who was Duke of Normandy. One of the leaders of this conspiracy was Bishop Odo. As soon as Easter came these men attacked the King's farms and devastated the lands of all those men who supported the King. Each of them went to his own castle, and began gathering men and supplies. Bishop Odo went to his lands in Kent; his men attacked the King's lands and then went to his castle in Rochester.

When the King heard of all these things he gathered an army and went towards Rochester, determined to seize Bishop Odo. The King learnt that the Bishop had gone to the castle at Pevensey ; and the King with his army followed after and besieged the castle on all sides for

six weeks. Thereafter food ran short inside the castle; then they surrendered to the King. The Bishop swore on oath that he would leave England and promised to surrender the castle at Rochester. So the Bishop departed in order to surrender Rochester Castle and the King's men went with him. Then the soldiers of the castle seized the Bishop and the King's men and put them in chains.

When the King heard of this he went in pursuit and sent over all England, calling upon every honest man, whether English or French, to help him. A great army came to his assistance and he went to Rochester and besieged the castle until the soldiers there surrendered. Bishop Odo, and the other men, went overseas."

AN EXTRACT FROM THE TEXTUS ROFFENSIS

The 'Textus Roffensis' is the register of Rochester Cathedral. It was handwritten by a monk at the cathedral in about 1122-4.

"In 1088 King William Rufus was quarrelling with Gundulf, the Bishop of Rochester, over £100 the Bishop was said to have owed him. Eventually the King agreed to forget about the money, upon the condition that Bishop Gundulf, a skilful builder, should build the King a stone castle at Rochester at his own expense. The Bishop reluctantly agreed to this in the King's presence and Gundulf built the castle for £60 out of his own money."

1100 – 1199

TEACHERS' NOTES : The stone keep at Rochester was built in 1126-7 soon after the castle was granted to the Archbishop of Canterbury by Henry I. Little else is known about the castle's history during the 12th century.

JOHN OF WORCESTER'S CHRONICLE

John of Worcester was a monk at the monastery of Worcester Cathedral. Little is known about him except that he died in 1118. Other monks continued to write the Chronicle until 1295.

"In 1126 King Henry I gave Rochester Castle to the Archbishop of Canterbury and gave him permission to build a tower there."

GERVASE OF CANTERBURY

Gervase of Canterbury (1141?-1210?) was a monk at Canterbury Cathedral. His Chronicle covers the years 1100 - 1199.

"King Henry I granted Rochester Castle to the Archbishop, William de Corbeil, who built a noble tower there."

NB Henry I was King of England from 1100 - 1135. William de Corbeil was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1123 to 1136.

AN ARTIST'S RECONSTRUCTION SHOWING THE KEEP OF ROCHESTER CASTLE SHORTLY AFTER IT WAS BUILT

© Historic England (illustration by Chris Jones-Jenkins) <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/research/>



1200 – 1299

THE SEAL OF THE CITY OF ROCHESTER, c 1210

This is the earliest known visual representation of Rochester Castle



TEACHERS' NOTES : The thirteenth century was the most dramatic period in the castle's history. In 1215 King John laid siege to the castle, undermining and bringing down the SE corner tower of the keep. After the siege Rochester Castle was taken into the custody of the crown. Extensive building work costing £680 was carried out from 1220 – 1260 including the rebuilding of the SE corner of the keep, a new two-storey tower in the curtain wall and an interior wall across the bailey. In addition a new range of residential buildings was built along the inside of the riverside wall. A third siege of Rochester Castle occurred in 1264 when Simon de Montfort attacked the castle during the Barons' War. The outer bailey was captured and the keep sustained further damage from stone throwing machines but de Montfort abandoned the siege after two days. Despite the damage there are no records of any repair work at the castle until the 1360s.

ROGER OF WENDOVER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIEGE OF 1215

Roger of Wendover was a monk and chronicler at St. Albans Abbey. Although he was not an eye witness to the events he describes he was very careful to collect accurate information particularly from people travelling along Watling Street which passed close to the abbey. He died in 1236.

"King John did not allow the besieged any rest day or night. For, as well as the stones hurled from the catapults and slings and the missiles of the crossbow men and archers, frequent attacks were made by the knights and their followers. When some were tired, other fresh ones took their place in the attack, which allowed the besieged no rest. The siege lasted many days owing to the great bravery and boldness of the besieged, who hurled stone for stone and weapon for weapon on the enemy.

At last the King used miners. Many of the royal troops had been killed and he saw his siege engines were useless. Soon the miners threw down a great part of the walls. The food of the besieged also began to fail and they even had to eat their best horses.

The soldiers of the King rushed into the breaches and forced the besiegers to enter the keep. The King then used his miners against the keep and after much difficulty they broke through the walls. At last, not a scrap of food remaining, all the soldiers left the castle and surrendered to the King. They were nearly all unhurt, except for one knight who had been killed by an arrow."

THE BARNWELL CHRONICLER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIEGE

Little is known about the author of the Barnwell Chronicle except that he was a monk who lived at Barnwell Abbey in Cambridgeshire. His account seems to have been written close to the time of the events ; he might have got some of his information from people travelling along the Great North Road (A1) which is close to the abbey.

"The siege was very strongly enforced but the defenders fought earnestly; even after the walls had been destroyed they remained in the tower.

King John gave orders for blacksmiths to make many iron picks and he put expert miners to work. They cut their way underground until at last they were under one of the great corner towers. As they moved soil and rock out, they put wooden beams in, with pit props underneath them, to hold up the roof above their heads. They worried every time the beams creaked from the great weight above them. The defenders worried too. Every night they heard tapping sounds under the ground but could do nothing about it.

After two months when the miners came out, brushwood and branches were carried into the tunnels and fat from forty pigs. Then a fire was started. The fire crackled and sizzled as all the timbers caught fire and blazed until they collapsed. With a great roar the whole roof gave way, the castle walls cracked and the whole tower fell down but the defenders did not surrender until they had nothing but horseflesh and water to sustain them."

A LETTER written by KING JOHN DURING THE SIEGE

This letter was written by King John to his chief adviser, Hubert de Burgh, at Rochester on 25th November 1215.

"We order you to send us night and day with all haste 40 bacon pigs of the fattest and those less good for eating to use for bringing fire under the tower."

FREDERICK SMITH'S ACCOUNT OF THE SIEGE

Frederick Smith was an historian and town councillor in Rochester. He was able to study all the old records and documents kept in Rochester. His book 'A History of Rochester' was first published in 1928.

"In 1215 King John signed Magna Carta and one of his first acts was to give Rochester Castle back to Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury. The barons ordered William D'Albini to take possession of Rochester Castle and put it in a state of defence. Before he could do this effectively the King brought his array to attack it .The garrison consisted of 94 knights and other soldiers who manfully defended the castle.

The siege continued for seven weeks, and when the outer walls were taken and destroyed the garrison withdrew to the keep. By means of a mine one of the corners of the keep was shattered. The King ordered his men to force their way through into the keep, but every attack was driven off. It was only famine that gave the King victory. When the defenders had eaten their last meal, they suddenly opened the gates and asked for mercy. King John, at first, issued an order for all the leaders to be hanged, but fearing the barons, he sent them as prisoners to different castles."

A PICTURE SHOWING THE SIEGE OF ROCHESTER CASTLE IN 1215

taken from Edwin Harris' book 'The Second Siege of Rochester Castle' first published in 1901.



A RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF THE SIEGE OF ROCHESTER CASTLE IN 1215

This was drawn by a modern artist who was commissioned by Medway Council.

© Medway Council ; see <http://www.historytoday.com/sites/default/files/articles/rochester.jpg>



ANOTHER RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF THE SIEGE OF ROCHESTER CASTLE IN 1215

This drawing of King John leading an attack on Rochester Castle during the siege was drawn by a modern artist for the castle guidebook. © English Heritage 1987 (see pages 22 and 23)



THE CLOSE ROLLS, 1225

The Close Rolls were royal orders and letters. This one was dated 14th February 1225 and fixed with King Henry III's seal, showing it had the King's approval..

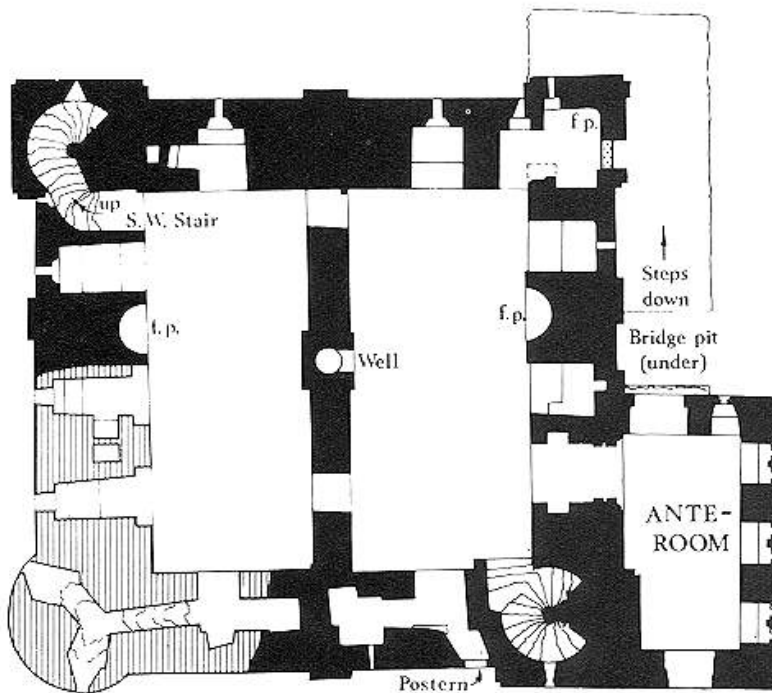
"To the barons of the Exchequer. There is accounted to our sheriff in Kent £30 9s which he spent on our command in 1224 on the carpenters who made the mangonels and engines in our castle of Rochester. There is also accounted to the same sheriff £4 10s 10½d, which he spent in the same year on making a brattice and drawbridge to the south of the castle."

Exchequer : the government department which looked after the king's money

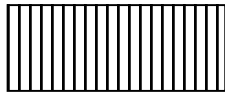
brattice : timber defences

A FLOOR PLAN OF ROCHESTER CASTLE KEEP

Taken from the English Heritage guidebook to Rochester Castle by R Allen Brown, 1969.



FIRST FLOOR



Begun 1226 -7



Begun 1127

WILLIAM RISHANGER'S ACCOUNT OF THE SEIGE OF 1264

William Rishanger (1250? - 1312?) was the monk at St. Albans Abbey responsible for writing the abbey chronicle. He was a supporter of Simon de Montfort.

"After Easter Simon de Montfort and his supporters laid siege to Rochester Castle in which were many noblemen , including John, Earl Warren, Henry de Percy and Roger de Leyburn, who the King had ordered to guard it, De Montfort ordered machines and other things necessary for the siege of the castle to be transported from the City of London by water and by land. With these he attacked the castle. He ordered that a ship be filled with dry wood, set on fire and placed by the bridge while his men attacked the castle with bows and arrows. The bridge was soon alight and the gate burned down ; his men got into the castle and began attacking the Tower with battering machines. The King was told of these fierce attacks and hurried there with his army to help his men. Many of his best horses died on the journey, but when he arrived, Simon de Montfort ended the siege and returned to London with his men"

MATTHEW OF WESTMINSTER'S ACCOUNT

This chronicle is thought to have been written at Westminster Abbey in the early fourteenth century. Matthew of Westminster was presumably a monk at the abbey but nothing is known about him.

"At that time John Earl Warren came with Lord de Leyburne and certain others to Rochester to guard the city and castle. Simon de Montfort and his barons, who were in Tonbridge and London, heard of this and came with many soldiers to besiege the town. On Good Friday, Simon burned down the bridge and his men entered the city even attacking the church. On Saturday they took the outer bailey of the castle and the Earl Warren, with his men, retired into the tower where they defended themselves bravely for seven days during which time many inside and outside the tower were killed. On the following Saturday Simon de Montfort fled with his army ; he had heard that the King-was coming. The King then came into Kent with a great army, captured Tonbridge Castle and regained control of the country."

WATCHING THE ARRIVAL OF KING HENRY III FROM THE RAMPARTS OF ROCHESTER CASTLE : a drawing by HAROLD BIRD

This picture was drawn for Edwin Harris' historical novel 'Simon de Montfort and the Third Siege of Rochester Castle' which was first published in 1902.



THE DUNSTABLE CHRONICLE

From the Chronicle of Dunstable Abbey.

"Simon de Montfort set out for the castle at Rochester in Earl Warren and a certain other Earl, Roger Leyburn, Reginald Fitzpeter and many others were in hiding. When Simon reached Rochester, the townsfolk broke down the bridge and fortified their side of the bridge ready for an attack. But the Earl skilfully set fire to the fortifications of the bridge and captured the town killing four or five of the townsfolk. When the Earl laid siege to the castle he took the outer bailey on the first day and then began, with his supporters, to prepare to capture the keep.

The king who was in Nottingham hurried to Rochester with his army to end the siege. Meanwhile it was reported to Simon that he must go to London to help his supporters there. At this Simon abandoned the siege and returned to London."

THE LATER MIDDLE AGES c1300 - 1499

TEACHERS' NOTES : After nearly a century of neglect £2,262 was spent on repairing the castle between May 1367 and September 1370 (during the reign of Edward III, 1327-1377). Sections of the curtain wall were rebuilt, two new wall towers were built and the main gateway strengthened. A tower at the north end of the castle, overlooking the bridge over the Medway, was built during Richard II's reign (1377-1400). There are no further records of building work at the castle but there were several royal visits including Sigismund, Emperor of Germany in 1416 and Henry VII visited Rochester Castle three times during his reign.

THE MINISTER'S ACCOUNTS

This document survives from the reign of King Edward III (1327-1377). He built and strengthened many castles during the Hundred Years' War with France which began during his reign. The document is a list of expenses paid for materials and craftsmen during work carried out at Rochester Castle. It is thought to have been written between 1367 and 1369.

Stone (from Caen in Normandy, Maidstone, Reigate and other places)	£276 8s 5d
Iron	£59 8s 9d
Lime	£15
Timber (oak, poplar)	£28
Nails	£3 3s
Coal	£13
Barrows, wheels, casks, pipes and ropes	£12
Transporting materials	£96
Wages	
masons	5d to 8d per day
setters	3d to 6d per day
carpenters	3d to 6d per day
smiths	6d per day
plumbers	4d to 6d per day
carters	10d per day
labourers	2d to 4d per day
inspector of works	6d per day

TOTAL : £1,203 15s 4d

signed by the Master of the Works

A RECONSTRUCTION DRAWING OF ROCHESTER CASTLE AS IT MIGHT HAVE APPEARED IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES

This was drawn by the artist Alan Sorrell (1904 – 78) in 1958. Sorrell was well known for his many reconstruction drawings of historic sites. To produce them he always visited the site and researched its history.

© Alan Sorrell. English Heritage Photo Library <http://www.heritage-explorer.co.uk/web/he/searchdetail.aspx?id=9672>



ROCHESTER CASTLE SINCE 1500

SAMUEL PEPYS

Samuel Pepys (1633 – 1703) was a civil servant and a Member of Parliament during the reigns of Charles II and James II. He kept a private diary from 1660 to 1669.

"2 October 1665 : At Rochester, while dinner was getting ready, I did walk to visit the old Castle ruins. Lord! to see what a dreadful thing it is to look down the precipices, for it did fright me mightily. The place had been very noble and great and strong in former ages."

DANIEL DEFOE

Daniel Defoe was a famous author and traveller. This extract is from one of his books, 'A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain' (written between 1724 and 1727) :

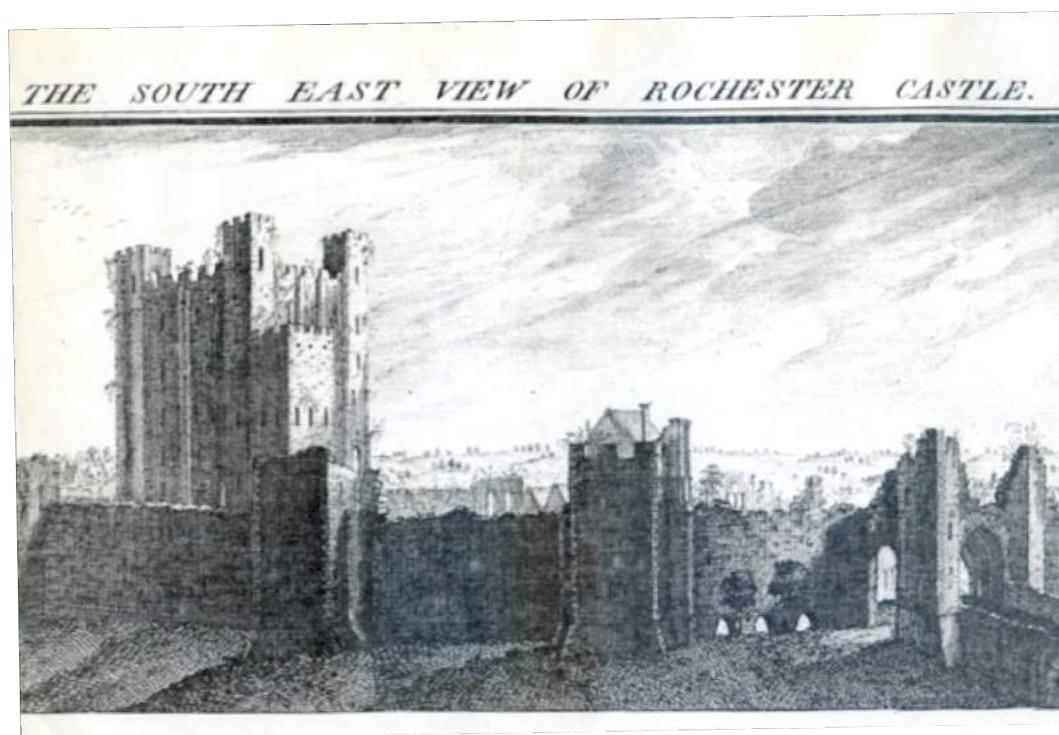
"There is little remarkable in Rochester except the ruins of a very old castle and an ancient cathedral..."

TWO VIEWS OF ROCHESTER CASTLE IN THE 18th CENTURY

These engravings were produced by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck in 1735. They were brothers who, from 1725 until about 1750, travelled around the country during the summer months making drawings of historic buildings. Then they made engravings from the drawings and printed them for sale in their London workshop.

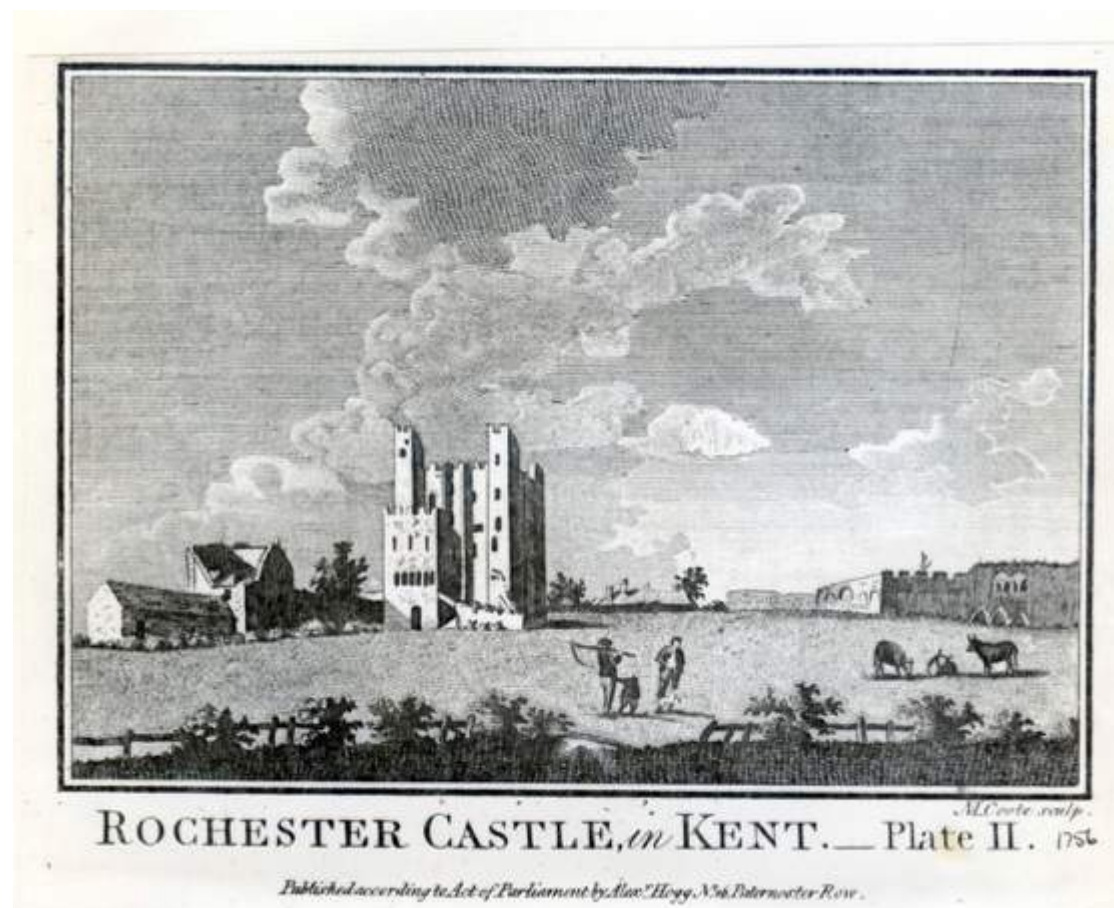


TEACHERS' NOTES : Henry VIII visited the castle in 1522 (with the Emperor Charles V) and in 1540 (to meet his fourth wife Anne of Cleves). Almost nothing is known about Rochester Castle until 1599 - 1601 when Elizabeth I allowed stone from Rochester Castle to be used for building a new fort at Upnor to guard the mouth of the River Medway. In 1610 James I gave the castle to Sir Anthony Weldon who sold off some stone and timber to local builders. In 1870 Rochester Council began turning the grounds of Rochester Castle into a public park and cut a new entrance through the north-western tower. The Ministry for Public Building and works took over the site in 1965 and it has been administered by English Heritage since 1984.



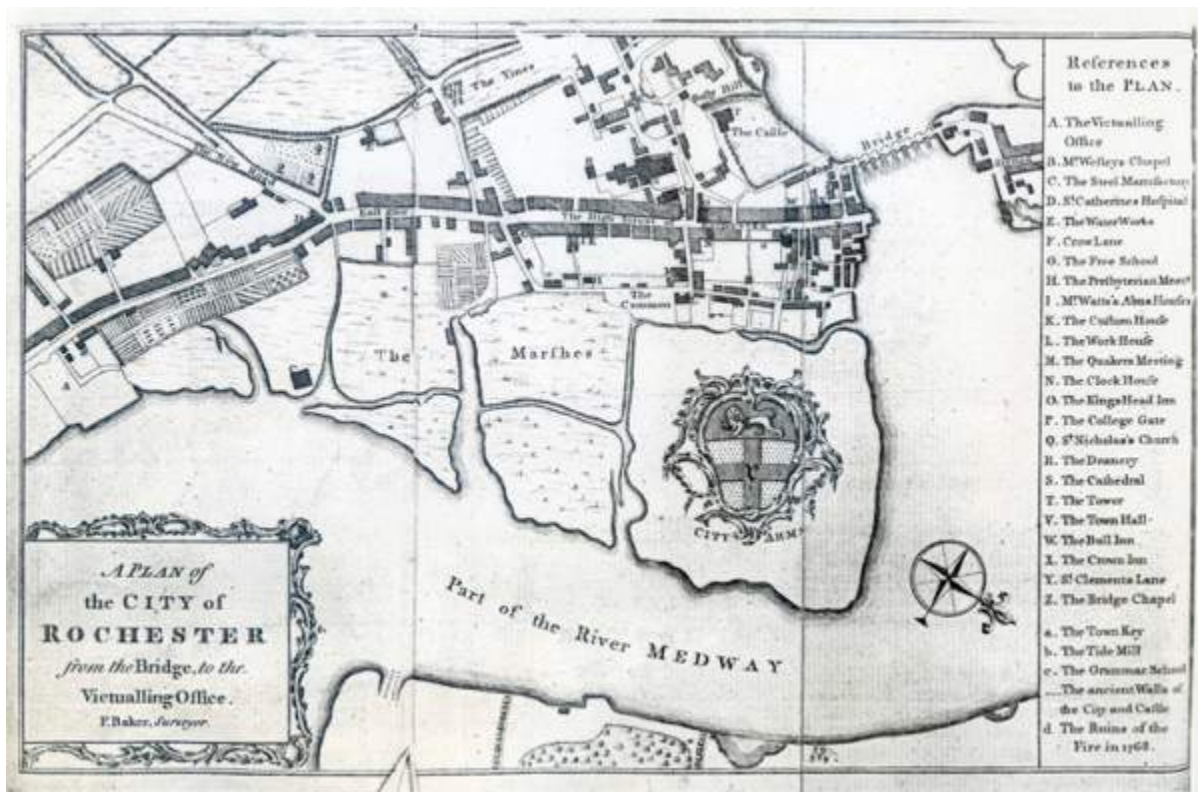
A DRAWING OF ROCHESTER CASTLE IN THE 18th CENTURY

This engraving, called 'Rochester Castle in the County of Kent' was made by M Coote (and is dated 1756) was published in a book called "The Antiquities of England and Wales" (1785)



A MAP OF ROCHESTER IN THE 18th CENTURY

This map was drawn by the surveyor of Rochester in 1772



ROCHESTER CASTLE IN 1884

From the Illustrated London News



A POSTCARD OF ROCHESTER CASTLE, 1910

You can find more information about the castle on the English Heritage website: <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/>

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1233301/mediaviewer/rm3386752512>

and

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/rochester-castle/history/>



A SCENE FROM THE FILM 'IRONCLAD', 2011

The 2011 film 'Ironclad' was loosely based on the siege of Rochester Castle in 1215 and was partly filmed at the castle. The official trailer can be found here : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnoTSICzAuM>

