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A249 - Kingsferry Bridge to
Queenborough Roundabout
Improvement Scheme

An Archaeological Note

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1 General

1.1 This brief note concerns various aspects of the history and archaeological potential of the Sheppey stretch of the A249 improvement scheme. It is intended to supplement two recent reports by Wessex Archaeology rather than serve as a full report. Given the time restraints, it is not exhaustive and few references are given.

1.2 Much of the Isle of Sheppey's early medieval coastline may be approximated from map evidence and is sometimes visible in the field. Documentary evidence, comparison with the Seasalter examples and sherds recovered by the writer from a damaged mound at Flatcreek Head¹ all point towards a 12th-13th century floruit for the salterns. Both the Seasalter and Flatcreek Head mounds appear to have stood directly on tidal mudflats. Contemporary mean high water (MHW) must have lain between these mounds and the +5 m OD contour. Further, extant drainage channels often lie along, or begin at, the junction of the marsh proper and the slight rise which marks the old coastline. Old counter walls also tend to die out at this junction. An accompanying figure shows the putative old shore line and minimum extent of some associated mud flats in relationship to counter walls, roads and known salterns.²

1.3 The history of the inning of the marshes is problematical, the records of the Commissioners of Sewers being very patchy for this area. The only early overall map of the island, Elizabethan in date, is concerned chiefly with land tenure and shows only a few "Old Bulwarks".

2 Kingsferry Bridge - Straymarsh Cottages

2.1 In the medieval period, the ferry itself was called "Tremhethē" (later Trindhethē or Trimhethē), indicating a timber quay. Henry IV granted the right to levy a "Ferry Cess" (in order to maintain the ferry and road) in 1401 but the first known use of the term "King's Ferry" is on an Elizabethan document of 1596.

¹ An area of parallel laid twigs or reeds, about 1 sq.mt. in extent, was also noted within the mound - clearly comparable to the mats found at Seasalter. A small sample of this material is held in deep-freeze at CAT offices.

² Three destroyed salterns on the southern flank of Rushenden, listed by Wessex as IQ 9, are not included.

³ British Museum, Cotton MSS, Aug. I. i, 51; published in *VCH(Kent) II*, facing p.306.

2.2 In the 1360's, Edward III ordered the widening of the existing four foot wide trackway from the ferry to "Cothelles" to thirty foot. The road would have been embanked and perhaps flanked by one or two ditches. A counter wall running parallel to part of the old Ferry Road, on its north western side, probably represents the medieval(?) inking of Neatscourt Marshes.⁴ With the possible exception of this embankment, the line of the medieval road can hardly be other than that of the old Ferry Road which meandered across the marsh from Kingsferry to the salterns, locally known as "cotterels", near Straymarsh Cottages.⁵

2.3 Place-name evidence (Iwade, Tremheth) suggests a Saxon or earlier date for the original road, which may itself have rested on a still earlier (prehistoric?) timber trackway. The southernmost Straymarsh salterns appear to have stood farther from the early medieval MHW than most others, suggesting that mud flats had already begun to form along the flanks of the embankment.

2.4 The proposed route twice crosses the old Ferry Road, once as it meets the Straymarsh salterns and once as it makes "landfall" just north of them. It also crosses the parallel counter wall at least once. Further, the precise position and extent of the ferry installations, including the Ferry House mentioned in documentary sources, are unknown and they may have stood, at least in part, north west of the modern bridge.

2.5 According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Edmund's army fought and pursued that of Canute onto the island in 1016. The precise position of this action is not known but the vicinity of the old road would be a logical area in which to expect to find any material lost during the pursuit.

⁴ The south western end of this earthwork appears to have been obliterated by the new road in the 1960's but its course should be visible on early Ordnance Survey maps.

⁵ And thence on slightly higher ground to the tellingly named Wallend Farm. This route then probably continued on, roughly along the line of Barton's Hill Road, over Rape Hill to Minster though there was probably also a westerly fork leading past Neats Court to Queenborough Corner.

⁶ Given the wide range of exploitable resources available, it is reasonable to suppose that most of the isolated rises in the North Kent marshes would have attracted prehistoric settlements. Indeed, separate recent excavations by B.Philp and by the writer have revealed the presence of prehistoric features at Minster, the earliest perhaps late Bronze Age in date and certainly no later than early to mid Iron Age. Bronze Age metal-working hoards have been recovered from Harty and Round Hill, immediately north east of Minster village. Late Bronze Age/early Iron Age and middle Iron Age pottery has also been found on Round Hill and on a small Sheppey Archaeological Society site in Minster. On a casual visit in 1993, CAT staff found early-mid and late Iron Age pottery just north east of Harty Church.

2.6 Though pier foundations might be placed so as to avoid the known positions of the old road and counter wall, it is impossible to predict the presence or precise location of any wooden trackways, quays or sunken vessels. Depending upon their nature, date and degree of preservation, such finds may legitimately be regarded as being of regional, national or international importance. The excavational and post-excavational costs of dealing with such material, including possible delay or alteration to the construction works, would be considerable and serious thought should be given to insuring against such a situation arising.

3 Straymarsh Cottages - Neats Court

3.1 This area consists largely of a fairly level promontory, straddling the +5 m OD contour, separating Neats Court Marshes and Cheyne Marshes. An old shore line can be made out, flanked by salterns on its seaward margin, suggesting a slight embayment on the western side. Part of the old Ferry Road runs roughly along the eastern margin of the promontory and a straight public footpath along its spine. The first edition one inch Ordnance Survey (Sheet 81, 1819, rev. 1889, repr. 1970) shows a spur of the old road running to Cowstead Farm, more or less on the line of the current road, but does not show the footpath. Subsidiary structures associated with the medieval site of Neats Court may be present in the area, though these are unlikely to be of any great archaeological significance.

3.2 A casual visit by CAT staff a few years ago, after the field was freshly ploughed, revealed the presence of probably 13th century material in the south eastern part of plot 30 and post-medieval(?) pebbles in its north western part. Only one or two sherds of pottery were found but it should be remembered that no systematic field-walking was undertaken. The quantity involved is not inconsistent with nightsoil being spread on the field but it is possible that there may have been a medieval homestead between Wallend and Neats Court, perhaps indeed at the junction of the Cowstead and Wallend stretches of the old Ferry Road.

3.3 Such a settlement, rather than Wallend, might have been the focus for working the Straymarsh cluster of salterns. As it is proposed to build a new roundabout in the vicinity, both its site and that of the new road should be further evaluated by detailed field-walking or trial trenching.

3.4 A very regular earthen embankment running south from the current road opposite Neats Court does not appear on any OS plans consulted up to 1974, nor do any field boundaries respect it. It is probably modern, perhaps associated with the imported car depot into which it runs. Local enquiries should readily or contradict this assumption. A small corner of a field isolated by this earthwork has a corrugated surface but this is probably due to modern working rather than medieval ridge-and-furrow.

4 Neats Court - Old Counter Wall East of Queenborough Roundabout

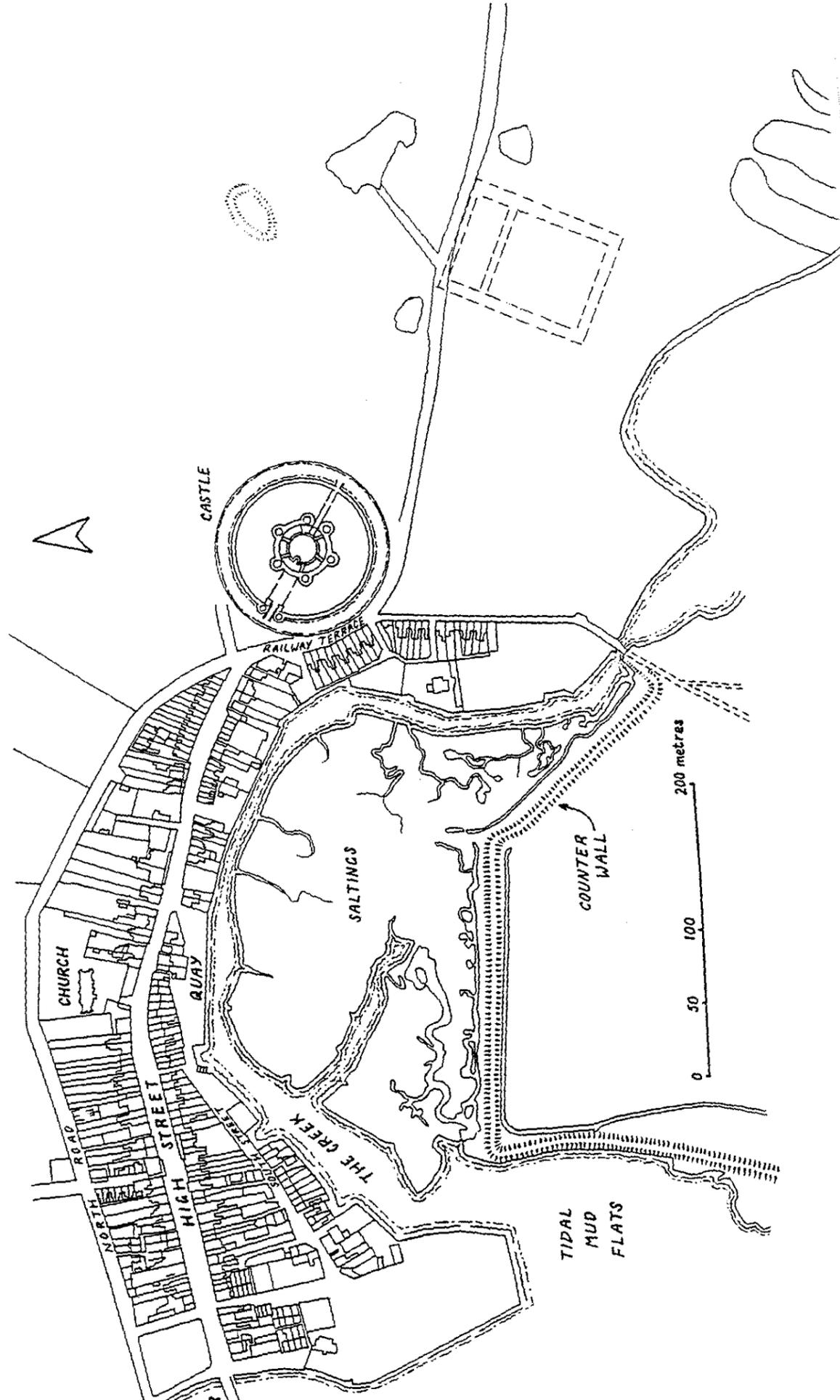
4.1 West of Neats Court, the old shoreline approaches almost to the modern (and probably ancient) road in a slight embayment. There is, however, a margin some 50 m wide sloping very gently down from the road to the level of the marsh. The western limit of this area is marked by a zig-zagging embankment, considered in section 5.

4.2 At the moment, the preferred route leaves the higher ground of the Straymarsh promontory and runs across this part of the marsh. No particular archaeological problems are anticipated here though further evaluation might be advisable. Any organic material, including timber structures, would be more likely to survive in the relatively anaerobic conditions of the marsh than on the higher ground. On balance therefore, any sites encountered on the northern margin are likely to be of lower intrinsic importance and less costly to deal with than any in the marsh. The probability of any major site along this stretch is however very low except, possibly, immediately to the east of the counter wall which marks its western limit.

5 Old Counter Wall South of Queenborough Roundabout - Queenborough Road

5.1 A considerable earthen embankment zig-zags west from the current A249, eventually forming the eastern bank of Queenborough Creek. A roughly parallel stretch of counter wall is shown on early Ordnance Survey maps, forming part of the northern western bank. The latter earthwork is now largely obscured by landscaping but a short cross-wall connecting its eastern terminal with the southern bank still forms the easternmost limit of the tidal ponds which have formed in that part of the earlier creek cut off by the construction of the railway c.1860. During a field visit arranged with Mott Macdonald, the writer recovered an abraded sherd of Roman pottery (second or third century, probably a local sandy ware) from the junction between the southern wall and the cross-wall, though this seems likely to be residual and of no value for dating purposes. A marked deviation in the line of the southern wall immediately west of this junction suggests the deliberate widening of the tidal area. The very eastern extremity of the same wall, on the sloping ancient shore rather than the marsh, is lighter in construction and is not marked on the 1898 Ordnance Survey. This part coincides with a modern property boundary and may be twentieth century in date. The 1898 Ordnance Survey shows the presence of two large mounds, no longer readily discernible just west of a ditch running north from the cross wall. The proposed new roundabout would affect the site of the more northerly.

5.2 The land east of the cross-wall (bounded by the southern counter wall, the current road to Queenborough and the old coast line just west of the A249) is marshland. This area lies much lower than the tidal reach and must clearly have been inundated prior to the cross-wall's construction. A bore-hole showing silts here at depths of 16 m is probably to be explained by an overall sudden drop in bedrock in the vicinity of Queenborough attributed to the presence of a very ancient branch of the Medway Estuary (M.Bates, pers.comm.).





42
8-072

41
19,211

Barrons Gate

Munl Poroo By

40
1,404

45
8-158

Camp
(Site of)

46
6,338

47
3,37

50
151

48
2,115

49
2,286

Old Counter Wall
LONDON, CHATUR

539
1-841

43
6,488

44
8,838

51
4,776

537
3,19

C.D.

556
3,728

565
17,718

566
3,700

555
5,857

567
1,182

564
31,452

554
15,155

Neats Court

570
6,955

571
2,458

573
461

572
248

Sheepfold

574
4,354

568
30,081

5.3 In addition to the small "camp" noted in the Wessex report, a large rectilinear earthwork, over 250 ft by 350 ft, lay a little north of the creek, under the twentieth century housing along Gordon and Harold Streets. Its date is unclear: the plan might suggest a Roman or late Saxon fort or a Viking³ camp but a medieval "industrial" role cannot be excluded. Since 1905, various local historians have written of a Saxon precursor to Queenborough Castle but without presenting any evidence for such a site. Local newspaper archives or original Ordnance Survey records might contain information as to the structure's date or pottery may be recoverable, without excavation, from the gardens of the houses concerned.

Its erstwhile position is marked on the 1898 Ordnance Survey and a sketch plan of the already destroyed earthwork appears in *VCH(Kent) I*, 409.

The Vikings first over-wintered on Sheppey in 855 AD. They would probably have sought sheltered waters with a sloping shore to draw up their ships. The best candidates for such a site are Capel Fleet, Windmill Creek and Queenborough Creek. Milton was fortified by Haestan the Dane in 892. Milton and Sheppey were raided by Earl Godwin and Harold in 1052. Fortification of Queenborough around either of these dates would not be surprising.

In the case of a military function, the position of this earthwork, on the low-lying landward side of the slight rise on which Queenborough (Saxon Bynne) stands is directly comparable to that of the fourteenth century royal castle. Such a position, rather than on the relatively commanding heights of Rushenden, might suggest a particular concern with the more or less canalised creek and the protected anchorage it could afford. Several possible "industrial" interpretations also present themselves: oyster pond, saltern (though obviously not using the same method as the cotterels), fresh-water catchment or tidal mill pond.¹ None of these however, except perhaps the last, seems particularly probable. Some form of harbour installation might also just be a feasible interpretation, though improbable given the separation between the earthwork and the northern counter wall.

5.4 The 1898 Ordnance Survey shows a set of three large irregular features just south east of the rectilinear earthwork. Their nature is not clear from the map but they may be slight depressions.² These features consist of two very roughly elongated ovals and a crescent, their long axes lying parallel to each other and orthogonal to the creek. There is some indication of possible interconnection. Harbour installations, oyster ponds, salterns and tidal mill ponds lead the list of possible interpretations if these were indeed depressions.

¹ In 1361 Edward II ordered that "In a place called Bynne rainwater falls and is received by the Swale. Licence is granted for the prioress to make four dykes, furrows or baulks with a plough, the width 3 feet 20 poles round the well for the water to run in. The water may be carried by ships' boats, carts, horses etc. and they may come and go as they please by the causeway which leads to the castle." The meaning of the second sentence is rather obscure. The only well at this time lay at the centre of the castle's small inner court, supplemented by rainwater carried from the castle roofs in leaden pipes. However, prior to the well's construction, the town had drawn its water from a pool (possibly artificial, site unknown) bearing the same name as the castle's first Constable, Foxle. The need for the well was highlighted when flooding contaminated the pool with salt water.

² From 1368 to 1378, Queenborough replaced Sandwich as the regional wool-staple and as the centre for collection of cloth duty. From 1362, Edward III's accounts refer to a new water mill, adjacent to the castle, at which ships unloaded cargoes of wool.

³ Modern landscaping has obscured the situation and it is not impossible that the features were merely patches of scrub.

5.5 As mentioned above (note 9), Edward III granted right of access to Minster Abbey along "the causeway which leads to the castle". The only known plan of the castle is from an Elizabethan manuscript held at Hatfield. Though its scale might be slightly questionable, it accords very well with fourteenth and seventeenth century accounts and with a lost but widely copied engraving by Hollar. The castle was circular, with a sally port diametrically opposed to the main gate. The centre of the castle can be located by its central well, now capped, on Castle Green. Its orientation is uncertain but, given that the town itself was refounded by Edward, the main entrance is likely to have faced down the High Street. This road lies on relatively high ground and would hardly merit the term "causeway", which must therefore have lead across the marshy ground from Barrows and Docs Hills to the eastern or south eastern rear gate.

The likeliest route for this cause way, which may well be Saxon rather than medieval in origin, would run roughly along the current road between the town and Queenborough roundabout. However, a broad lynchet-like feature may be seen running along the eastern side of Docs Hill and this may be the causeway referred to.

5.6 The 1898 Ordnance Survey shows a huddle of small structures straddling the road to Queenborough just west of the current roundabout. It is labelled as Barrows Gate and stands at the junction between the marsh and the old shore. Queenborough's original charter gives the name as Barres Gate. "Gate", like "Bar", might indicate some form of toll or levy and might help explain the last clause in Edward's grant to the prioress (see note 9). It would also strengthen the argument for the current road lying on the earlier causeway. Further documentary research might clarify the situation here. The preferred new route would affect much or all of this medieval or earlier site.

5.7 Overall then, there is evidence for a complex and evolving historical landscape from the mouth of Queenborough Creek to the present roundabout. Though no prehistoric material has yet been identified from them it is quite possible that Rushenden and/or Queenborough were occupied from at least the Bronze Age. In this case wooden tracks may have been used to reach the respective rises from Doos and Barrows Hills. Saxon Bynne is likely to have had some form of communication with the Minster Hills, if only from the seventh century foundation of the Abbey, and this may well be represented by the slight embankment on which the current road lies. Use of this causeway may have been subject to a levy and a keeper's house may have stood here. The southern counter wall, running to Rushenden, may be Saxon but a medieval date is also likely. In any event, the creek was eventually canalised at least as far as the cross wall and perhaps up to the old shore line near the present roundabout. The cross wall may represent a later truncation of the creek, which was further shortened in the nineteenth century. A large earthwork just outside the study area was probably military in origin and may indicate Viking or late Saxon defence of the inlet: this would make particular sense if it still extended as far as the old shore line. Three large oval features, also just outside the area, may represent harbour or "industrial" installations, probably of medieval date. Two mounds just within the area may have a similar interpretation.

5.8 In summary, the north western end of the preferred route will cross one counter wall, probably of Saxon or medieval date and there is a possibility of one or more prehistoric timber tracks under this wall or elsewhere in the vicinity. The roundabout is very likely, though not absolutely certain, to cut through another such embankment under a modern road and will certainly destroy the site of a group of small buildings extant at the close of the last century and quite possibly marking the site of a medieval road-keeper's cottage. The roundabout will also impinge on the site of a mound of uncertain function. The area between the two counter walls probably formed the head of a tidal creek whose lower and middle stretches are known to have been centres of activity. As such, this area is more likely than the open marshes to yield well preserved timber remains of boats and wharves of virtually any date from the prehistoric to the later Middle Ages. The possible survival of prehistoric, late Saxon or Viking craft would be of particular interest.

5.9 By contrast, conditions and incidence of preservation are likely to be greatly inferior along the eastern margin of the area, along the old shore line and above the level of the marsh. Further, a route here would cut through only the eastern extremity of the southern wall, of dubious antiquity, and could also avoid the putative medieval cottage on the other. The new roundabout could then be shifted to the area where ground works associated with the current roundabout, and the creation of a road-constructors' compound in the 1970's, have probably already destroyed any significant archaeological potential.

¹¹ Indeed, the continuance of the southern counter wall east of the cross wall might best be explained by supposing that the head of the creek once extended up to the sloping ancient shore line. However, this interpretation would demand either that a similar continuation of the northern wall has been lost or that Doos Hill or the embankment under the current road served that purpose.

6 Recommendations

6.1 Where the proposed route crosses the marshes, between Kingsferry Bridge and Straymarsh Cottages and between Neats Court and the head of Queenborough Creek, superficial trenching is likely to be of little or no archaeological value as any remains should be expected at some depth (but see 6.2). If the road is to be supported on piers along these stretches, the pier positions might be sheet-piled and excavated mechanically under archaeological supervision, with paleo-environmental samples taken as appropriate. Should any ancient features be encountered, further archaeological excavation should be conducted manually.

6.2 At least one archaeological transect should be cut across the (probably ancient) bank carrying the Old Ferry Road where it is intersected by the proposed road.

6.3 Where the route crosses the relatively higher ground from Straymarsh Cottages to Neats Court, any available ploughed fields should be field-walked. In addition, trenches totalling in length approximately 33% of the chainage should be machine cut under archaeological supervision along the easement and further evaluation excavation be conducted as necessary. The results of both investigations should be used to formulate an appropriate archaeological response.

6.4 A close contour survey of the western end of the proposed route, around the head of Queenborough Creek, should be undertaken under archaeological supervision. This might most economically be achieved in parallel with an engineers' survey. Following this survey and based upon its results, at least 20 m of trenches should be cut in the vicinity of Barrow's Gate to elucidate the nature of the site. A further transect should be cut across the southern counter-wall here where intersected by the proposed route.

6.5 In order to investigate the nature and antiquity of the head of Queenborough Creek, a transect of bore-holes, collecting U4 samples, at a spacing of 20-30 m should be sunk from just north of the current road into Queenborough to just south of the southern counter-wall. It may be cost-effective to incorporate this work with the sinking of engineering test-bores.

no investigation

The following pages are a slightly modified extract from S.Pratt, "Queenborough Castle: Report on Evaluation Trenches" (Canterbury Archaeological Trust, 1991), a client report for Swale Borough District Council. The bibliography has not been updated.

Abbreviations¹

- Allen Brown = R.Allen Brown, "English Medieval Castles", Batsford, 1954.
- Beresford = M.Beresford, "New Towns of the Middle Ages", Lutheram Press, 1967.
- Clapham = A.W.Clapham, "Queenborough Castle and its Builder, William of Wykeham" in A.W.Clapham & F.H.Godfrey, "Some Famous Buildings and their Story", Technical Journals, 1913, pp.271-275.
- Creighton = C.Creighton, "A History of Epidemics in Britain", I, Cambridge University Press, 1894, (repr. Cass, 1965).
- Daly = A.A.Daly, "History of the Isle of Sheppey", London, 1904.
- Fawcresfeld = C.Fawcresfeld, "The Constables of Queenborough Castle" in *Invicta Magazine*, III, pp.97-103.
- Guy = "East Kent from the Air", Margborough, 1957.
- Harvey = J.H.Harvey, "Henry Yevele c.1320-1400, the Life of an English Architect", Batsford, 1944.
- Hist. = R.Allen Brown, H.M.Colvin & A.J.Taylor, "The History of the King's Works", II, HMSO, 1963.
- Hughes = D.T.Hughes, "Queenborough Church" in *Bygone Kent*, September 1991, pp.551-6.
- Kelly = "Kelly's Kent Directory", London, 1938.
- Lambarde = W.Lambarde, "A Perambulation of Kent", 1570.
- Newman = J.Newman, "The Buildings of England: North East and East Kent", Penguin, 1969.
- PRO Cat. = Public Record Office, "Maps and Plans in the Public Record Office, I, British Isles, 1410-1860", HMSO, 1967.
- PRO Surv. = Public Record Office, "Exchequer, Augmentations Office, E.317."
- Renn = D.Renn, "A Note on the West Gate Gunloops" in S.S.Frere, S.Stow, P.Bennett et al., "The Archaeology of Canterbury II, Excavations on the Roman and Medieval Defences of Canterbury", Kent Archaeological Society, 1982, p.107.
- Saunders = A.D.Saunders, "The Coastal Defences of the South East" in *The Archaeological Journal*, CXXVI, 1970, pp.201-205.
- Shrewsbury = J.F.D.Shrewsbury, "A History of the Bubonic Plague in the British Isles", Cambridge University Press, 1971.
- Tyler = E.J.Tyler, "European Clocks", Ward Lock, 1968.
- Whitehead = J.G.O.Whitehead, "Henry Yeveley, Military Engineer" in *The Royal Engineers Journal*, 1974, pp.102-110.
- Woodruff = C.E.Woodruff, "Notes on the Municipal Records of Queenborough" in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, XXII, 1897, pp.169-185.

¹ Most of the secondary sources cited include references to primary documents.

² References are to a typed extract, lacking page numbers, held at Sheerness Library.

Plan of the Castle

The principal sources¹¹ for the layout of the castle are a much copied tracing by Sir Alfred Clapham of a plan on an Elizabethan MS held at Hatfield House (see *inter alia*: Clapham, p.273, fig.108; Harvey, p.26, fig.22; Allen Brown, p.93, fig.47; Hist., p.795, fig.63; Whitehead, p.103, photo 1), a detailed description by the Parliamentary Commissioners of 1650 (Clapham, p.272; PRO Surv., 52) and a lost engraving by Hollar, dated to 1610. An eighteenth century copy of Hollar's work is widely reproduced (see *inter alia*: Clapham, fig.107; Hist., pl.47b) and slight variants have also been published (e.g. Ialy, p.88; Harvey, p.26, fig.21; Whitehead, p.103).

Four sixteenth century plans (one of which is mentioned, though not reproduced, in Hist., p.794) held by the Public Records Office are catalogued as "Queenborough or Sheppey castle" (PRO Cat., nos.1228-1231) but at least three of these (nos.1228,1229, 1231) are of polygonal forts and the shore line indicated on one (no.1231) is clearly that around Garrison Point rather than Queenborough Creek. Since the 1650 survey states that the building was then still circular these plans, which the P.R.O. have dated tentatively to 1574 (nos.1228-1230) and 1588 (no.1231), must refer either to a proposed rebuilding or, more probably, to later fortifications at Sheerness.

The design of Queenborough Castle, described as "so advanced as to be unique" (Allen Brown, p.93), has attracted the admiration of at least one modern professional military engineer (Whitehead, p.104). The concentric plan is highly reminiscent of, but two centuries earlier than, Henry VIII's defences around the South Coast and "was almost the earliest example of the fort, in the modern sense" (Clapham, p.274). It has been paralleled with Castel del Monte (octagonal rather than circular), built around 1240 by Frederick II in southern Italy: "in England, however, [it] was unique" (Newman, p.404) though it has been compared to the contemporary (hexagonal) Wardour Castle in Wiltshire (Harvey, p.47).

¹¹ Until recently, the Queenborough Society was in possession of an aerial photograph of Castle Green which probably showed the positions of the keep's towers: efforts are being made to trace this photograph.

¹² Incomplete dye-lines of nos.1228 & 1231 are held at the Sheerness Branch of Kent County Library. I have not yet been able to inspect copies of nos.1229 & 1230: the former is catalogued as "similar to 1228" whereas the latter is described as "apparently another, and different, plan of the foregoing [1228]".

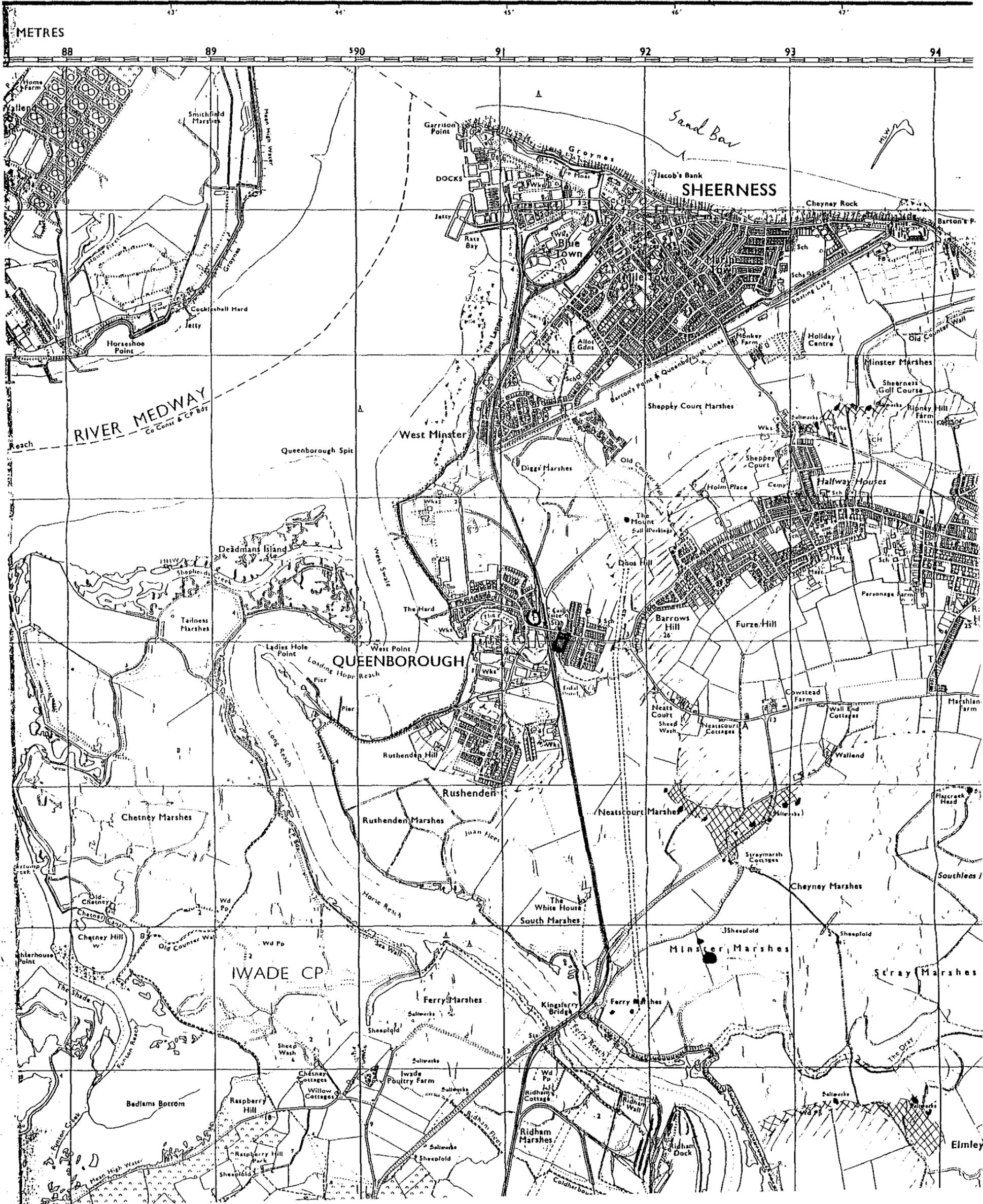
The core of the castle was formed of a central Rotunda, also known as the Great Tower, composed of six towers connected by a circular curtain wall which was lined with two-storeyed apartments (Whitehead, p.104) arranged around a small circular courtyard with a well at its centre. The only entrance to the Rotunda was between the easternmost pair of towers. Around the Rotunda lay the outer ward, also called the Barbican (Hist., p.798), enclosed by a curtain wall. This wall was breached by a main gate, flanked by two towers, to the west and by a small postern to the east. Beyond the curtain lay the moat, traversed by drawbridges at the two gates. Pairs of high walls connected the main gate with the western face of the Rotunda and the postern with the Rotunda's gate. Each of these walls was itself pierced by a gate (Hist., p.799, n.8). The Rotunda and main gate were probably equipped with gunloops similar to those used in the town defences of Rochester (Whitehead, p.104) and Canterbury and at Cooling Castle (Renn, p.117; Saunders, p.201).

The practical result of the unusual layout was that any attacker intent on taking the keep intact, assuming he could not take the narrow postern nor breach the thick outer curtain, would need to cross the moat, force the main gate (itself a considerable strongpoint), force an inner gate, circle halfway round the outer ward, force another inner gate and then force the gate of the Rotunda (all this whilst exposed to fire from the Rotunda and from the outer wall) and would then find himself in the central ward with a choice of six narrow doors. Each door gave onto a separate segment of the Rotunda (which was completely compartmentalised at ground level and probably at every level save the battlements) and any intruder trying to force even one door would have been exposed to fire from the windows of the surrounding apartments. Queenborough, presenting convex surfaces in every direction, was one of the first castles ever designed to withstand cannon fire and, given its plan, it is difficult to imagine it ever being taken by storm. In this respect the castle gave a very small scale, but still impressive, indication of its impregnability in 1450 (see below).

Though the centre of the castle is still easily located by the well, which still survives under a concrete capping, its orientation is not certain. The main gate probably faced the junction between the High Street and North Road but there is a possibility that it was aligned instead on one of the two short streets, leading down from Railway Terrace to Queenborough Creek, to allow for easy access by barge or boat.

THFINDER 1179 (TQ 97/TR 07)

Mud flats  Coast line
Earthworks & Salterns • Counter Walls & Roads



Historical Background

Queenborough Castle, known in early documents as the Castle of Sheppey or of Rushenden (Hist., p.793, n.4) was built by Edward III on land belonging to the Manor of Rushenden, bought from Sir Walter Mauny in August 1361 (Beresford, p.458). It was provided ostensibly "for the defense of the realm and for the refuge of the inhabitants of the island" (Daly, p.85; compare this quote from the Letters Patent with Lambarde, p.227). However, given that it was constructed during a relative lull in the Hundred Years War, it seems possible that this isolated castle may also have been intended as a royal refuge from any repetition of the Plague¹⁷. At least two houses, of Simon Waryn and of John Segar, were demolished to make way for the castle and the occupants rehoused (Beresford, p.459). The work force was being recruited as early as February of that year and a comptroller and four surveyors were appointed in April. The earliest accounts for work on the building run from 1st March to 1st November (Hist., p.794, n.1). Large amounts of building materials were bought (through Henry Yeveley) in 1361, including "Stapleton and Reigate stone, ashlar and Kentish rag" (Hist., p.794). Reigate stone was used in the contemporary town defences of Canterbury and Stapleton stone¹⁸, from Yorkshire, was supplied by Yeveley for repairs to Rochester Castle in 1368 (Harvey, p.29).

¹⁷ The Treaty of Brétigny of May 1360 was accepted as the Peace of Calais in October of that year. Though unofficial bands continued to fight in France, the two monarchs were not in open opposition again until taking different sides over Pedro the Cruel's deposition from the throne of Castile in 1366. Meanwhile the *pestis secunda*, had struck, resulting in the demise of "a great multitude" in London in May 1361 (Shrewsbury, p.128). Perhaps of more immediate concern to Edward, Henry Duke of Lancaster, Edward's cousin and John of Gaunt's first father-in-law, had already been similarly struck down at Leicester in March (Creighton, p.203). It may also be significant that Queenborough Castle was unusual in being a royal commission: medieval fortifications were more frequently erected by private individuals or corporations (Saunders, p.201). Finally, if the castle was indeed intended as a refuge, its position would have been exceptionally well suited to the role, on an isle within an isle and within reach of a boat ride from the capital, with no need to touch any shore until virtually at the gate.

¹⁸ A white, magnesium limestone, perhaps from Yeveley's own quarry. Large quantities were shipped down via Hull and stockpiled at Greenwich (E.Robinson, pers.comm.)

One of the earliest striking clocks recorded in England was installed one of the Rotunda's towers (Hist., p.802, n.6). The clock's bell was bought in 1366-7 and in 1368 a special charter was granted to protect foreign "Orologiers", probably working on the mechanisms at Queenborough, Westminster and Kings Langley (Tyler).

There was comparatively little expenditure on the castle after 1369, the year of Phillipa's death, but some finishing touches were applied between 1373 and 1375: e.g., the putlogs were filled in 1373 and the outer gate was finished in 1374. The same period also saw work carried out on four inner gates, presumably those giving onto the walled passages from the outer bailey, and the "pentice of the barbican" was tiled (Hist., p.799). The total cost of the castle has been estimated as probably in excess of £20,000 (Hist., p.800).

The castle's design has been variously attributed to William Perot de Wykeham (Beresford, p.458; Clapham, p.271; this view was reported though perhaps not accepted by Lambarde, p.227) or to Henry Yeveley (Harvey, pp.25-7; Whitehead, p.102). However, Wykeham's role here seems to have been purely administrative whilst Yeveley appears in the accounts only as a provider of building stone, it has therefore been suggested that the "architect" was Master John Box, the project's chief mason (Hist., p.801, n.5).

The king expunged the hamlet of Bynne and, in its stead, founded the town of Queenborough (Burgus Reginae) on the 10th May, 1369 (Woodruff, pp.170-2). The last new town founded in England until the early seventeenth century (Beresford, p.457), it was probably intended to attract the level of population required, as militia (Whitehead, p.104), to supplement the garrison in case of a French attack. Building work on the town pre-dated the charter however and the accounts were included with those of the castle from 1366 onward. By 1362 work had begun on a new mill, *prope castrum* and *juxta castrum*, at which ships unloaded cargoes of wool. One document refers to it as a water mill (Hist., p.794, n.7), presumably worked by tidal power. In July 1368 Queenborough replaced Sandwich both as the staple wool port for all the coast from Winchelsea to Gravesend and as a centre for the collection of cloth duty. These spurs to the town's development survived Edward by only a few months, lapsing in January 1378 (Beresford, pp.458-9). The street plan and property boundaries still reflect the lines of the fourteenth century settlement, but the only medieval structure to survive is the church (built 1366-1367), originally of St James, but rededicated to the Holy Trinity in the fifteenth century (Hughes, p.551).

A severe earthquake hit Kent in 1382, under Richard II, six of Queenborough's towers collapsed and two had to be entirely rebuilt. Repairs or alterations to the castle were carried out under Henry IV, Henry V and Edward IV (Hist., p.804), Richard III (Daly, p.131, Hist., p.904) and Henry VIII (Lambarde, p.227). Some internal redecoration, at the least, must have been carried out around 1593 which was the date of an ode to the Virgin Queen displayed in a large dining room (see Daly, p.92, citing a report by Johnston dating to 1629).

The importance of the building is best judged by the status of the men appointed to its Constablenesship (see Favresfeld, *passim*) The first to hold the post, Sir John de Foxle, died in 1377 and the honour passed to Edward's third son, John of Gaunt. Gaunt resigned in 1385 and was succeeded by Robert de Vere, Earl of Oxford and later Duke of Ireland. Subsequent Constables included Sir William de Scroope, who defended (and lost) Bristol for Richard II against Bolingbrooke, Archbishop Thomas Arundel of the Fitzalan family (Earls of Arundel) and Sir Humphrey de Stafford, Duke of Buckingham. Following his royal pardon in 1450, the Kentish rebel Jack Cade lead the remnants of his army, admittedly perhaps less a score strong, against the castle but was successfully repulsed by Sir Roger Chamberleyn assisted by only two other men. From 1465 the bibulous George of Clarence, then heir presumptive to the throne, held the Constablenesship until his death by drowning in 1477. In 1485 the castle passed into the hands of Sir John Cheyne after the Battle of Bosworth and remained with his family until the death of Sir Thomas Cheyne, Privy Councillor, Treasurer of the Royal Household and Warden of the Cinque Ports, in 1559.

As the relevance of the Swale as a shipping route waned, so too did the importance of the castle until it was declared obsolete by the Parliamentary Commissioners in 1650 (PRO Surv., 52) and rights to its fabric sold by the Mayor of Queenborough (ironically, another Segar) to Daniell Judd of London (see Appendix I). It was demolished shortly thereafter and its loss was sorely felt when the Dutch took the island in 1667. The well was reopened and deepened in 1725 by order of the Commissioners of the Navy and was maintained by the Victualling Board until 1829, when it passed to the Royal Engineers who put it into the charge of the Corporation of Queenborough (see Appendix II). With the advent of the railway, the easternmost limit of the castle's outer circuit was overlain by the line to Sheerness, a second well was sunk next to the original and a Well House, now demolished, was erected by the railway company in about 1868 (Kelly, p.606). In the nineteenth century the north western part of the site was given over to a school which underwent progressive enlargements (see Appendix III) until its closure in recent years. Part of the buildings are currently used as a community centre whilst another part houses the local branch of the county library.

