

VARIOUS

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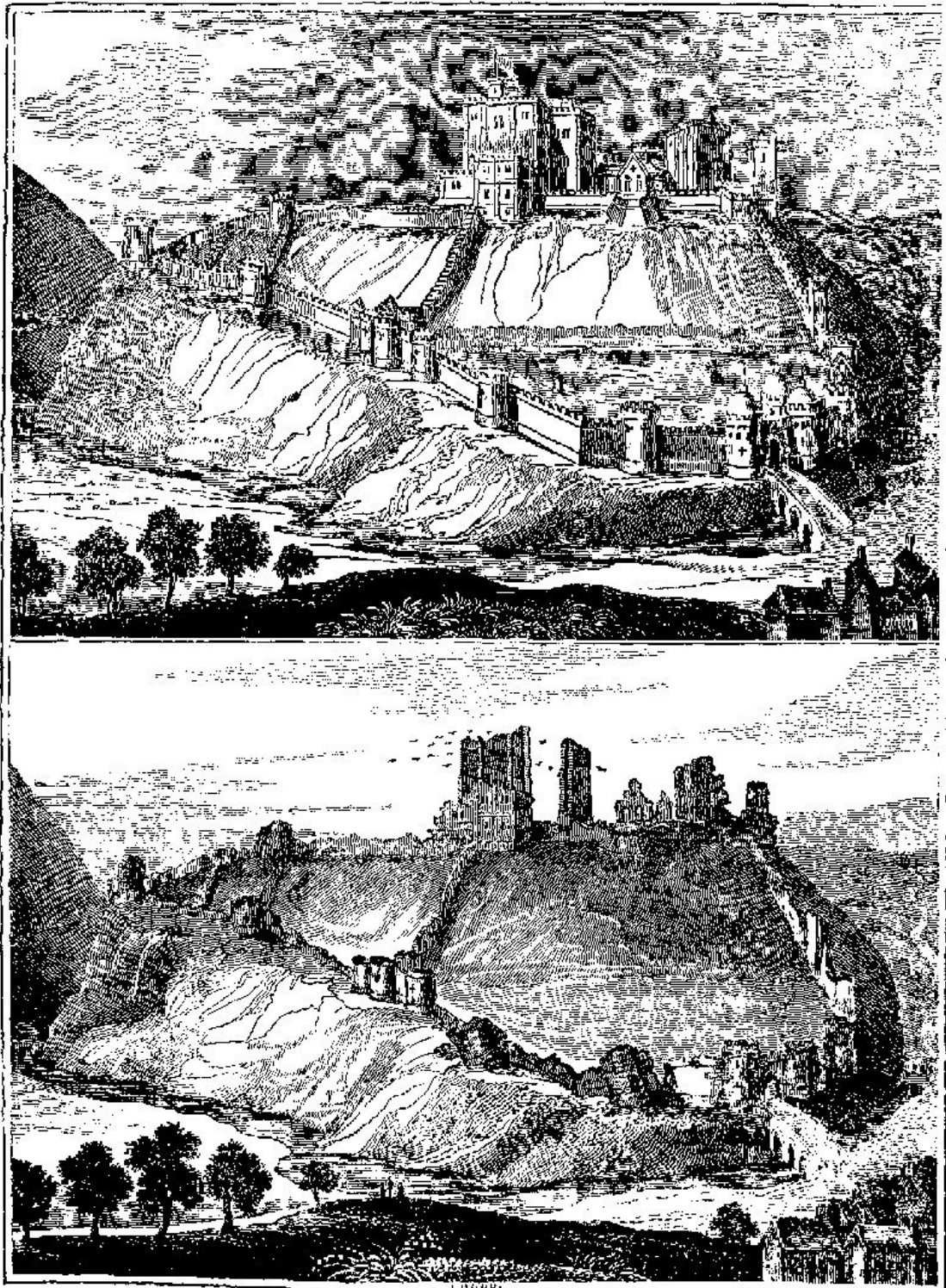
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CORFE CASTLE



CORFE CASTLE

The annexed Engravings are an interesting page in the early history of our country, and deserve all the space we have appropriated to them. Their political notoriety, of much less interesting character, we leave to be set down, said, sung, or set aside, elsewhere.

Corfe Castle nearly adjoins a town of the same name: both are situate in the Isle of Purbeck; and their histories are so incorporated, that we shall not attempt their separation.

The town, according to the *Beauties of England and Wales*, vol. iv. p. 386, is nearly in the centre of the Isle, at the foot of a range of hills, on a rising ground, declining to the east. Its origin must undoubtedly be attributed to the Castle, which existed previous to the year 980; though the town itself does not appear to have attained any importance till after the Conquest, as it was wholly unnoticed in the Domesday Book. The Manor and Castle seem always to have descended together, and were often granted to princes of the blood, and the favourites of our kings, yet as often reverted to the Crown by attainder or forfeiture. In the reign of Richard the Second, they were held by Thomas Holland, Earl of Kent, jointly with Alicia, his wife. In the reign of Henry the Fourth, they were granted to the *Beauforts*, Earls of Somerset; but were taken from that family by Edward the Fourth, who bestowed them successively on Richard, Duke of York, and George, Duke of Clarence; on the attainder of the latter, they reverted to the Crown. Henry the Seventh granted them to his mother, the Countess of Richmond, for life. In the 27th of his successor, Henry the Eighth, an act of parliament was passed, by which they were given to Henry, Duke of Richmond, his natural son. After his death they reverted to the Crown, and were, by Edward the Sixth, bestowed on the Duke of Somerset; whose zeal for the Reformation was undoubtedly invigorated by the numerous grants of abbey lands made to him after the suppression of the monasteries. On the duke's attainder, the demesne lands of the Castle were leased for twenty-one years, on a fee-farm rent of 7l. 13s. 4d. In the 14th of Elizabeth, the Castle and Manor, with the whole Isle of Purbeck, were granted to Sir Christopher Hatton, whose heirs continued possessors till the commencement of the 17th century, when the Manor and Castle were given by Sir William Hatton to his lady, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas, Earl of Exeter, and afterwards second wife to Lord Chief Justice Coke, who sold them, in the year 1635, to Sir John Bankes, Attorney-General to Charles the First, and afterwards Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench. His descendant, Henry Bankes, Esq. and representative for this borough, is the present owner.

Though this is an ancient borough by prescription, it was not incorporated till the 18th of Queen Elizabeth, when a charter was obtained by Sir Christopher Hatton, by which the inhabitants were invested with the same liberties as those of the Cinque Ports; besides being favoured with various other privileges. This charter was afterwards confirmed by James the First and Charles the Second. The government of the town is vested in a mayor and eight barons—the barons are those who have borne the office of mayor. The first return to parliament was made in the 14th of Elizabeth. The right of election is possessed by all persons within the borough who are “seized in fee, in possession, or reversion, of any messuage, or tenement, or corporal hereditament; and in such as are tenants for life, or lives; and in want of such freehold, in tenants for years, determinable on any life, or lives, paying scot and lot.”¹ The number of voters is between forty and fifty.

Corfe Castle “stands a little north of the town, opposite to the church, on a very steep rocky hill, mingled with hard rubble chalk stone, in the opening of those ranges of hills that inclose the east part of the Isle. Its situation between the ends of those hills deprives it much of its natural and artificial strength, being so commanded by them, that they overlook the tops of the highest towers; yet its structure is so strong, the ascent of the hill on all sides but the south so steep, and the walls so massy and thick, that it must have been one of the most impregnable fortresses in the kingdom

¹ Hutchins's Dorset, vol. i, p. 279, 2nd edit.

before the invention of artillery. It was of great importance in respect to its command over the whole Isle: whence, our Saxon ancestors justly styled it Corfe Gate, as being the pass and avenue into the best part of the Isle.”

The Castle is separated from the town by a strong bridge of four very high, narrow, semi-circular arches, crossing a moat of considerable depth, but now dry. This bridge leads to the gate of the first ward, which remains pretty entire, probably from the thickness of the walls, which, from the outward to the inner facing, is full nine yards. The ruins of the entrance to the second ward, and of the tower near it, are very remarkable. “The latter (which once adjoined to the gate) was separated with a part of the arch at the time of the demolition of the Castle, and is moved down the precipice, preserving its perpendicularity, and projecting almost five feet below the corresponding part. Another of the towers on the same side is, on the contrary, inclined so much, that a spectator will tremble when passing under it. The singular position of these towers seems to have been occasioned through the foundations being undermined (for blowing them up) in an incomplete manner. On the higher part of the hill stands the keep, or citadel, which is at some distance from the centre of the fortress, and commands a view of boundless extent, to the north and west. It has not hitherto suffered much diminution from its original height; the fury of the winds being resisted less by the thickness of the walls than by the strength of the cement. The upper windows have Saxon arches, but are apparently of a later date than any other part of the building west of the keep, the stones of which being placed *herring-bone fashion* prove it to be of the earliest style. The Chapel is of a very late date, as appears from its obtuse Gothic arches; and I have really an idea that almost all the changes of architecture, from the reign of Edgar to that of Henry the Seventh, may be traced in this extensive and stupendous ruin.

“We could not view without horror the dungeons which remain in some of the towers: they recalled to our memory the truly diabolical cruelty of King John, by whose order twenty-two prisoners, confined in them were starved to death. Matthew of Paris, the historian, says, that many of those unfortunate men were among the first of the Poitevin nobility. Another instance of John’s barbarous disposition was his treatment of Peter of Pontefract, a poor hermit, who was imprisoned in Corfe Castle for prophesying the deposition of that prince. Though the prophecy was in some measure fulfilled by the surrender which John made of his crown to the Pope’s Legate, the year following, yet the imprudent prophet was sentenced to be dragged through the streets of Wareham, tied to horses’ tails.”²

The exact period when this fortress was erected is unknown; though some circumstances render it probable that it was built by King Edgar. That it did not exist previously to the year 887, or 888, the time when the Nunnery at Shaftesbury was founded, is certain, from an inquisition taken in the fifty-fourth of Henry the Third; wherein the jurors returned, “that the Abbess and Nuns at Shaston (Shaftesbury) had without molestation, *before the foundation of the Castle at Corfe*, all wrecks within their manor of Kingston, in the Isle of Purbeck.” Mr. Aubrey, in his *Monumenta Britannica*, observes, he was informed, “that mention was made of Corfe Castle in the reign of King Alfred; yet it seems very improbable that this should be the fact; for if it had actually existed in the time of that monarch, it would surely have been more publicly known. The short reigns that succeeded would not allow time for so extensive an undertaking; but Edgar enjoyed more peace than almost any of his predecessors, was superior in wealth and power, and a great builder; he having founded, or repaired, no fewer than forty-seven monasteries.” To him, then, the origin of this castle may with the greatest probability be ascribed, as his second wife, Elfrida, resided here at the commencement of her widowhood. During this residence was committed the foul murder on King Edward, Edgar’s son and successor, of which William of Malmesbury relates the ensuing particulars.

² Maton’s Observations, vol. i. p. 12.

“King Edward being hunting in a forest neare the sea, upon the south-east coast of the countie of Dorset, and in the Isle of Purbecke, came neare unto a fair and stronge castell, seated on a little river called Corfe, wherein his mother-in-law, Elfrida, with her sonne Ethelred, then lived: the King, ever beareing a kinde affection to them, beeing soe neare, would needs make knowne soe much by his personall visitation; which haveing resolved, and beeing either of purpose or by chance, singled from his followers, hee rode to the Castell gate. The Queene, who long had looked for an opportunitie, that, by makeing him awaye, shee might make waye for her own sonne to the Crowne, was glad the occasion nowe offered itselfe; and therefore, with a modest and humble behaviour, she bade him welcome, desireing to enjoye his presence that night. But hee, haveing performed what hee purposed, and doubting his companie might find him misseing, tolde her, that he now intended on horseback to drink to her and his brother in a cuppe of wine, and soe leave her; which beeing presented unto him, the cuppe was no sooner at his mouth, but a knife was at his back, which a servant, appointed by this treacherous woman, stroke into him. The Kinge, finding himselfe hurt, sett spurs to his horse, thinking to recover his companie; but the wounde beeing deepe, and fainting through the losse of much blood, he felle from his horse, which dragged him by one foot hanging in the stirrop, untill he was left dead at Corfe gate, Anno Dom. 979.”

Thus far Malmesbury: Hutchins, in his History of Dorset, relates the circumstances of this event in the following words:—

“The first mention of this Castle in our histories, is A.D. 978, as the Saxon Annals (though some of our historians say 979 and 981), upon occasion of the barbarous murder of Edward, King of the West Saxons, son of King Edgar, committed here by his mother-in-law, Elfrith, or Elfrida; 15 cal. April, in the middle of lent: The foulest deed, says the Saxon annalist, ever committed by the Saxons since they landed in Britain.”

In the reign of King Stephen, the Castle was seized by Baldwin de Rivers, Earl of Devon; and though the King afterwards endeavoured to dispossess him, his efforts were ineffectual. King John appears to have made it for some time his place of residence, as several writs, issued by him in the fifteenth and sixteenth of his reign, are dated at Corfe. On the coronation of Henry the Third, Peter de Mauley, the governor of the Castle, was summoned to attend the ceremony, and to bring with him the regalia, “then in his custody in this Castle wherewith he had been entrusted by John.” The following year he delivered up the Castle to the King, with all the military engines, ammuniton, and jewels, committed to his charge.—Edward the Second was removed hither from Kenelworth Castle, when a prisoner, by order of the Queen, and her favourite Mortimer. Henry the Seventh repaired the Castle for the residence of his mother, the Countess of Richmond, the parliament having granted 2,000*l.* for that purpose; yet it does not appear that it was ever inhabited by this princess. It was again repaired by Sir Christopher Hatton, and most probably by Sir John Bankes, whose lady became illustrious from the gallant manner in which she defended it from the attacks of the parliament’s forces, in the time of Charles the First.

In the year 1645 and 1646, the Castle was again besieged, or rather blockaded, by the parliament’s forces, who obtained possession through the treachery of Lieutenant-Colonel Pitman, an officer of the garrison. When it was delivered up, the parliament ordered it to be demolished; and the walls and towers were undermined, and thrown down, or blown up with gunpowder. “Thus this ancient and magnificent fabric was reduced to a heap of ruins, and remains a lasting monument of the dreadful effects of anarchy, and the rage of civil war. The ruins are large, and allowed to be the noblest and grandest in the kingdom, considering the extent of the ground on which they stand. The vast fragments of the King’s Tower, the round towers leaning as if ready to fall, the broken walls, and vast pieces of them tumbled down into the vale below, form such a scene of havoc and desolation, as strikes every curious spectator with horror and concern.”³

³ Hutchins’s Dorset, vol. i. p. 286, 2nd edit.

The tragical murder of Edward by Elfrida, at Corfe Castle, and its memorable defence by Lady Bankes, form two very interesting narratives in Hutchins's Dorset. Their details would occupy too much of our present sheet, although they are worth reprinting for the gratification of the general reader.

Corfe Castle, as we have already intimated, is proposed to be disfranchised by the Great Reform Bill now before Parliament.

A year or two hence, probably, the political consequence of the place will be humbled as the Castle itself!

ANCIENT PARLIAMENTS

(To the Editor.)

In the *Literary Magazine* for 1792 I find the following list of places, which *formerly* sent members to parliament:—

Dunstable	Odiham	Langport
Newberry	Overton	Montacute
Ely	Bromyard	Stoke Curcy
Wisbeach	Ledbury	Watchet
Pohurun	Ross	Were
Egremont	Berkhemstead	Farnham
Bradnesham	Stoteford	Kingston upon Thames
Crediton	Greenwich	Bradford
Exmouth	Tunbridge	Mere
Tremington	Manchester	Highworth
Liddeford	Melton Mowbray	Bromsgrove
Modbury	Spalding	Dudley
Southmolton	Waynfleet	Kidderminster
Teignmouth	Bamberg	Pershore
Torrington	Corbrigg	Doncaster
Blandford	Burford	Jervale
Winborn	Chipping Norton	Pickering
Sherborn	Doddington	Ravenser
Milton	Whitney	Tykhull
Chelmsford	Oxbridge	Hallifax
Bere Regis	Chard	Whitby
Alresford	Dunster	and
Alton	Glastonbury	Leeds
Basingstoke		
Fareham		

The three last named places were summoned during the Commonwealth—also Manchester;—when discontinued, not known. Greenwich was summoned 4th and 5th of Philip and Mary; discontinued 6th of Philip and Mary. The other places were principally summoned and discontinued during the reigns of Edward the First, Second, and Third. Calais, in France, was summoned the 27th of Henry the Eighth; discontinued 3rd of Philip and Mary.

In the reign of Edward the Third, an act of Parliament, made in the reign of William the Conqueror, was pleaded in the case of the Abbey of St. Edmundsbury, and judicially allowed by the court. Hence it appears (says a writer on this subject) that parliaments, or general councils, are coeval with the kingdom itself.

The first triennial parliament was in the year 1561; the first septennial one, in the year 1716.

Henry the Eighth increased the representatives in parliament 38; Edward the Sixth, 44; Mary, 25; Elizabeth, 62; and James the First, 27.

P.T.W.

ANCIENT BOROUGH OF LYDFORD

(For the Mirror.)

Lydford is a poor, decayed village, consisting of ragged cottages, situated about seven miles from the north of Tavistock, Devonshire. It was (says Britton) formerly a place of consequence; and Prince states, that this ancient town and borough was the largest parish in the county, or the kingdom, and that the whole forest of Dart belonged to it; to whose parson, or rector, all the tithes thereof are due. It is said that this town, in its best strength, was able to entertain Julius Cæsar, at his second arrival here in Britain; but, anno 997 it was grievously spoiled by the inhuman Danes. Recovering again, it had, in the days of the Conqueror, 122 burgesses. This is still the principal town of the Stannaries, wherein the court is held relating to those causes. There is an ancient castle, in which the courts are held; and offenders against the stannary laws were here confined, in a dreary and dismal dungeon, which gave rise to a proverb—"*Lydford laws punish a criminal first, and try him afterwards.*"

It appears from the Domesday Book, that Lydford and London were rated in the same manner, and at the same time.

Lydford formerly sent members to parliament, but was excused from this burden, as it was then considered, by pleading *propter paupertatem*.

P.T.W.

A WORD FOR THE READERS OF THE MIRROR

Cadwallader Colden, in his *Account of the Five Indian Nations of Canada*, says—“They think themselves by nature superior to the rest of mankind, and call themselves *Ongue-honwe*—that is, men surpassing all others. The words expressing things lately come to their knowledge are all compounds. They have no labials in their language, nor can they pronounce perfectly any word wherein there is a labial; and when one endeavours to teach them to pronounce these words, they tell one they think it ridiculous that they must *shut their lips to speak*. Their language abounds with gutturals and strong aspirations: these make it very sonorous and bold; and their speeches abound with metaphors after the manner of the eastern nations. Sometimes one word among them includes an entire definition of the thing: for example—they call wine *Oneharadeschoengtseragherie*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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