

The southern defences of Rochester: the documents

(1) Petition from John of Sheppey, prior of Rochester

Not extant, but the gist of it is reported as follows in doc 2:

"Our beloved in Christ the Prior of Rochester has besought us that since the wall of the city of Rochester which extends from the east gate of the same city towards Canterbury to the gate of the said Prior towards the south in divers places has been destroyed and prostrated to the ground, and in some places for defect of mending and repair threatens ruin, and very great damage can easily happen to the same City and Priory through enemies and other evil doers unless the wall be speedily mended and repaired, we will grant to the same Prior and the Convent of the same place that they may fill up the ditch outside the said wall between the gates aforesaid with rubbish and earth, and may hold it when so filled up for themselves and their successors in pure and perpetual alms for their convenience then made for ever, on condition that in place of the same wall the same Prior and Convent at their own costs make (1) a new wall of stone, sufficiently embattled, of the height of 16 feet, outside the said old ditch, and (2) a ditch on the ground of the same Prior and Convent in the same place sufficient in length, breadth, and depth outside the wall by them so to be made anew, and that wall by them so made they are at all times to keep up and maintain."

(2) The king to John de Cobham, 28 Apr 1344

Edward, by the grace of God King of England and France and lord of Ireland, to his beloved and faithful John of Cobham, constable of his castle of Rochester, greeting. Our beloved in Christ the Prior of Rochester has besought us ... <as above> ... to keep up and maintain. We desiring to be more fully informed if it be to the hurt or prejudice of us or any one else if we accede to the prayer of the said Prior on this part or not, and if it be, then to what hurt and what prejudice of us, and to what hurt and what prejudice of others and of whom, and how, and in what way, and how much the ditch so to be filled up contains in length and width by the number of perches or feet of ground: we command you, by the oath of upright and lawful men of the City aforesaid, through whom the truth of the matter can be the better known, to make careful inquisition upon the premises, <and send it> distinctly and openly made to us in our Chancellery under your seal and the seals of them by whom it shall be done, without delay, and this writ. Witness me myself at Westminster the 28th day of April in the 18th year of our reign of England and our 5th of France. By writ of privy seal. (Hope 1900:16--17, with some guess corrections of mine)

Edwardus dei gracia Rex Anglie et Francie et Dominus Hibernie

dilecto et fideli suo Johanni de Cobham Constabulario Castri sui Roffensis: Salutem. Supplicavit nobis dilectus nobis in Christo Prior Roffensis quod cum murus Civitatis Roffensis qui se extendit a porta orientali ejusdem Civitatis versus Cantuar. usque portam dicti Prioris versus austrum in diversis locis dirutus sit et ad terram prostratus et in aliquibus locis pro defectu emendacionis et reparacionis minatur ruinam ac maxima dampna de facili evenire potuerint eisdem Civitati et Prioratui per inimicos et alios malefactores. nisi dictus murus cicius emendetur et reparetur; velimus concedere eidem Priori et Conventui ejusdem loci quod ipsi fossatum extra dictum murum inter portas predictas fimis et terra implere et illud sic impletum tenere possint sibi et successoribus suis in puram et perpetuam elemosinam pro commodo suo inde faciendo imperpetuum. ita quod loco ejusdem muri: ijdem Prior et Conventus sumptibus suis unum novum murum de petra competenter kirnelatum altitudinis sexdecim pedum extra dictum antiquum fossatum et unum fossatum in solo ipsorum Prioris et Conventus ibidem competens in longitudine latitudine et profunditate extra murum per ipsos sic de novo faciendum murumque illum per ipsos sic factum perpetuis temporibus sustentare faciant et manutenerent. Nos volentes plenius cerciorari si sit ad dampnum vel prejudicium nostrum aut aliorum si supplicacioni prefati Prioris annuamus in hac parte necne et si si<c>: tunc ad quod dampnum et quod prejudicium nostrum et ad quod dampnum et quod prejudicium aliorum et quorum et qualiter et quo modo et quantum fossatum sic implendum tam in longitudine quam latitudine contineat per numerum particularum sive pedum terre: vobis mandamus quod per sacramentum proborum et legalium hominum Civitatis predictae per quos rei veritas melius sciri poterit: diligentem super premissis fac<iatis> inquisitionem et eam distincte et aperte factam nobis in Cancellaria nostra sub sigillo vestro et sigillis eorum per quos factam fuerit: sine dilacione *<mit>tatis et hoc breve. Teste me ipso apud Westmonasterium xxviiij die Aprilis anno regni nostri Anglie decimo octavo regni vero nostri Francie quinto. Per breve de private sigillo. (Hope 1900:18--19, from the original, C 143/274/16, with some guess corrections of mine)

* I assume that the word is *mittatis*, "you are to send". Hope read it as *incitatis* and took a wild stab at a translation, "urged thereto by this writ". The following words, *et hoc breve*, are just the chancery's way of saying: "And don't forget to send this writ back too".

(3) Inquisition at Rochester, 12 May 1344

An Inquisition taken in the City of Rochester before John of Cobham, constable of Rochester Castle, on Wednesday on the vigil of the Lord's Ascension, in the year of the reign of King Edward of England the third after the Conquest the 18th, but of his reign of France the 5th, by virtue of a certain writ of the same lord King directed to the aforesaid John and sewn to this inquisition, by the oath of John Potyn, John St. Denys, Henry Newman, Henry Taylor, Roger Perewich, John Nasshenden, Robert Corby, Thomas atte

Warde, John Legh, Adam Chaundler, John Hampton, and Thomas the Taverner. Who say upon their oath that it is not to the hurt nor prejudice of the lord the King, or of the said City, or of others, if the same lord King accedes to the prayer of the Prior of Rochester, that he grant to the said Prior and the Convent of the same place, and their successors, that ditch which is between the east gate of the aforesaid City towards Canterbury as far as the gate of the aforesaid Prior and Convent towards the south. To have for themselves and their successors in pure and perpetual alms for ever, and to fill up the said ditch with rubbish and earth, and to make their convenience of the said ditch as is more fully contained in the aforesaid writ. Moreover they say upon their oath that it is to the very great convenience of the lord the King and of the aforesaid City, as it seems to them, if the aforesaid Prior and Convent make, at their own costs, a new wall of stone sufficient as to the height contained in the said writ, and a sufficient ditch in the same place outside the aforesaid wall on the land of the same Prior and Convent of sufficient length, breadth, and depth, and cause the wall and ditch to be made anew by them to be kept up and maintained for ever, as in the said writ is more fully contained. They say also upon their oath that the aforesaid old ditch to be filled up by the said Prior and Convent as is said before contains in length 54 perches and 14½ feet, and in breadth 5 perches and 4 feet. In witness of which thing the seals of the aforesaid jurors have been appended to this inquisition on the day, place, and year abovesaid. (Hope 1900:17--18)

Inquisicio capta in Civitate Roffens<i> coram Johanne de Cobeham Constabulario Castri Roffensis die mercurij in vigilia Ascencionis domini Anno regni Regis Edwardi Anglie terciij post conquestum decimo octavo regni vero sui Francie quinto. Virtute cujusdam brevis ejusdem domini Regis predicto Johanni directi et huic Inquisicioni consuti per sacramentum Johannis Potyn. Johannis Seyntdenys. Henrici Neweman. Henrici Taillour. Rogeri Perewich. Johannis Nesshendente. Roberti Corby. Thome atte Warde. Johannis Leghe. Ade Chaundler. Johannis Hamptone et Thome le Taverner. Qui dicunt super sacramentum suum quod non est ad dampnum <vel> prejudicium domini Regis vel dicte Civitatis aut aliorum si idem dominus Rex annuat supplicacioni Prioris Roffensis videlicet quod concedat eidem Priori et Conventui ejusdem loci et successoribus eorum illud fossatum quod est inter portam orientalem predicte Civitatis versus Cantuar. usque portam predictorum Prioris et Conventus versus austrum. Habendum sibi et successoribus eorum in puram et perpetuam elemosinam imperpetuum et ad dictum fossatum fimis et terra implendum et ad comodum illorum de dicto fossato faciendum prout in predicto brevi plenius continetur. Set dicunt super sacramentum suum quod hoc est ad comodum maximum domini Regis et Civitatis predicte ut videtur si predicti Prior et Conventus faciant sumptibus suis unum Murum novum de petra competentem altitudinis in dicto brevi contente et unum fossatum ibidem competens extra murum predictum in solo ipsorum Prioris et Conventus longitudinis latitudinis et profunditatis competencium

et Murum ac fossatum per ipsos faciend. de novo sustentari faciant et manuteneant imperpetuum prout in dicto brevi plenius continetur. Dicunt eciam super sacramentum suum quod predictum antiquum fossatum per dictos Priorem et Conventum implendum ut premittitur continet in longitudine quinquaginta et quatuor particatas et quatuordecim pedes homin<is> et dimidium pedis homin<is> et in latitudine quinque particatas et quatuor pedes homin<is>. In cujus rei testimonium sigilla predictorum Juratorum huic Inquisicioni sunt appensa. die loco et anno supradictis.
(Hope 1900:19, from the original, C 143/274/16, with some guess corrections of mine)

(4) The king for the prior and convent of Rochester,
23 <May> 1344

Grant in frank almoin, after inquisition ad quod damnum taken by John de Cobeham, constable of the castle of Rochester, to the prior and convent of Rochester of the king's dyke without the wall of the city of Rochester, leading from the east gate towards Canterbury, as far as the gate of the prior towards the south, for them to fill the same in with dung and earth and make their profit thereof; on condition that they make on their own soil a new wall of stone sufficiently crenellated, of the height of 16 feet, without the dyke aforesaid and a new dyke corresponding to the old one, to wit 54 perches, 14½ feet, long and 5 perches, 5 feet, broad, to be maintained for ever at their charges. (Calendar of patent rolls 1343--5, p 262, from C 66/211)

Edward, by the grace of God King of England and France and Lord of Ireland, to all to whom the present letters may come, greeting. Inasmuch as we have learned by an inquisition which we have caused to be made by our beloved and faithful John of Cobham, our Constable of Rochester Castle, that it is not to the hurt or prejudice of us or of any other if we grant to our beloved in Christ the Prior and Convent of Rochester our ditch without the wall of the City of Rochester, which extends from the east gate of the same City towards Canterbury to the gate of the said Prior towards the south. To have and to hold for themselves and their successors in free, pure, and perpetual alms for ever, on condition that the same Prior and Convent fill up that ditch with rubbish and earth, and thenceforth make their convenience for ever, and that in place of the same wall they make a new wall of stone sufficiently embattled of the height of 16 feet outside the said ditch, and a new ditch outside the same wall so to be made anew on the soil of the same Prior and Convent in the same place sufficient in length and breadth to be maintained and sustained at their costs for ever; which said ditch so to be filled up contains within itself 54 perches and 14½ feet of earth <in length> and 5 perches and 5 feet of earth in breadth. We willing to do special favour to the same Prior and Convent in this part have given and granted for us and our heirs as far as in us is to the same Prior and Convent the said ditch between the aforesaid gates, to have

and to hold for themselves and their successors in free, pure, and perpetual alms, for their convenience thenceforth for ever, on condition that the same Prior and Convent cause a new wall of stone of the aforesaid height, sufficiently embattled, outside the said ditch so to be filled up, and a certain ditch of the aforesaid length and breadth outside the same wall in the same place to be made anew on the soil of the Prior and Convent, to be made, maintained, and sustained at their own costs for ever as has been aforesaid. In token of which thing we have caused these our letters to be made patent. Witness me myself at Westminster the 23rd day of April in the year of our reign of England the 18th, but of France the 5th. By writ of privy seal. (Hope 1900:19--20)

Edwardus dei gracia Rex Anglie et Francie et Dominus Hibernie Omnibus ad quos presentes littere pervenerint salutem. Quia accepimus per inquisitionem quam per dilectum et fidelem nostrum Johannem de Cobeham Constabularium nostrum Castri Roffensis fieri fecimus quod non est ad dampnum vel prejudicium nostrum seu alicujus alterius si concedamus dilectis nobis in Christo. Priori et Conventui Roffensi<bu>s fossatum nostrum extra murum Civitatis Roffensis qui se extendit a porta orientali ejusdem Civitatis versus Cantuari<am> usque portam dicti Prioris versus austrum. Habendum et tenendum sibi et successoribus suis in liberum puram et perpetuam elemosinam imperpetuum ita quod ijdem Prior et Conventus fossatum illud fimis et terra implere et commodum suum inde facere possint imperpetuum et quod loco ejusdem muri unum novum murum de petra sufficienter kernelatum altitudinis sexdecim pedum extra dictum fossatum et unum novum fossatum extra eundem murum si<c> de novo faciendum in solo ipsorum Prioris et Conventus ibidem in longitudine et latitudine competens faciant suis sumptibus perpetuis temporibus manuten<en>dum et sustentandum, quodque dictum fossatum si<c> implendum continet in se quinquaginta et quatuor partic<at>as et quatuordecim pedes terre et dimidium in longitudine et quinque particatas et quinque pedes terre in latitudine. Nos volentes eisdem Priori et Conventui gratiam in hac parte facere specialem. dedimus et concessimus pro nobis et heredibus nostris quantum in nobis est eisdem Priori et Conventui dictum fossatum inter portas predictas habendum et tenendum sibi et successoribus suis in liberam puram et perpetuam elemosinam pro commodo suo inde faciend<o> imperpetuum, ita quod ijdem Prior et Conventus unum novum murum de petra altitudinis predictae sufficienter kernelatum extra dictum fossatum sic implendum ac quoddam fossatum longitudinis et latitudinis predictarum extra eundem murum ibidem de novo faciendum in solo ipsorum Prioris et Conventus sumptibus suis fieri manuteneri et sustentari faciant imperpetuum sicut predictum est. In cujus rei testimonium has literas nostras fieri fecimus patentes. Teste me ipso apud Westmonasterium vicesimo tercio die Aprilis anno regni nostri Anglie decimo octavo regni vero nostre Francie quinto. Per breve de privato sigillo. GRYMESBY. (Hope 1900:20--1, from the original, DR/T62, with some guess corrections of mine. This charter, I understand, was removed from Medway Archives in 2016 and repossessed by the Dean and Chapter. I cannot imagine why.)

(5) The king for the prior and convent of Rochester,
5 Aug 1345

Licence for the prior and convent of Rochester to build a wall of stone and mortar from the east gate of the city of Rochester as far as the gate of St. William, between the city and their orchard (gardinum), and crenellate the same wall. By p.s. (Calendar of patent rolls 1343--5, p 539, from C 66/214)

Edward by the grace of God king of England and France and lord of Ireland to all to whom the present letters may come greeting. Know that we of our special grace have granted and given licence for us and our heirs to our beloved in Christ the prior and convent of Rochester that they may make a certain wall of stone and lime, from the east gate of the city of Rochester as far as St William's gate, between the city and the garden of the prior and convent, and strengthen and crenellate that wall, and hold it so crenellated to themselves and their successors forever, without fuss or bother from us or our heirs or any of our ministers. In testimony of which thing we have caused these our letters to be made patent. Witness myself at Westminster the 5th day of August in the year of our reign of England the 19th, but of France the 6th. By writ of privy seal. (my translation from Thorpe 1769:552--3)

Edwardus dei gracia rex Anglie et Francie et dominus Hibernie omnibus ad quos presentes litere pervenerint salutem. Sciatis quod de gracia nostra speciali concessimus et licenciam dedimus pro nobis et heredibus nostris dilectis nobis in Christo priori et conventui de Roff' quod ipsi quendam murum de petra et calce a porta orientali civitatis Roff' usque ad portam sancti Gwillelmi inter dictam civitatem et gardinum eorundem prioris et conventus facere et murum illum firmare et kirkellare et kirkellatum tenere possint sibi et successoribus suis imperpetuum, sine occasione vel impedimento nostri vel heredum nostrorum aut ministrorum nostrorum quorumcumque. In cuius rei testimonium has literas nostras fieri fecimus patentes. Teste meipso apud Westm' quinto die Augusti, anno regni nostri Anglie decimo nono, regni vero nostri Francie sexto. Per breve de privato sigillo. Grym. (Thorpe 1769:552--3, said to be from the original, "Autograph. penes Dec. et Cap. Roffen.")