King Edward I and Edward II, Battle and Eastern Sussex 1272-1327

Edward I, 1272–1307

by Unknown artist oil on panel, 1597-1618
22 7/8 in. x 17 3/4 in. (580 mm x 450 mm) uneven
Purchased, 1974 NPG 4980(6)

Edward I cannot have had particularly fond memories of eastern Sussex after his visit with his father during the 2nd Barons War before the Battle of Lewes (14 May 1264) and its aftermath (the 1st Barons War vs King John was 1215-7). They had entered Sussex from Kent on 2 May and their first experience was an affray on the Kent-Sussex border, after which a severe reprisal took place. Carpenter says, *'315 archers were beheaded in the Weald in the parish of St Mary, Ticehurst, in the place called Flimwell in the presence of the king …* '

After this Henry III and Prince Edward moved on to the Cistercian Robertsbridge Abbey, where they were 'entertained', but they demanded 500 marks (1 mark = 2/3 of one pound or 13s 4d [67p). Converted to a 2016 value one mark might be equal to £650 today) to be paid to Edward to spare the monks' lives. The next day Abbot Reginald of Brecon and the brothers of the Benedictine Battle Abbey went out in procession to meet the king and give him a loyal welcome, but Henry was still angry and demanded 100 marks from the abbey as he said that some of its tenants had been at Ticehurst. Prince Edward demanded another 40 marks. In addition some damage was inflicted on the abbey's religious chattels.

On 4 May the king then went on to Old Winchelsea to 'ensure' the support of the Cinque Ports, who had generally favoured the barons since 1259. This support was not happily forthcoming and Henry took hostages, who gave a grudging promise to obtain ships for the king's use. Henry's army was let loose on the wine cellars, and worse.

After four days Henry and Edward returned to Battle, before moving out westwards. They stayed one night at Herstmonceux, and then moved on towards Lewes on 10/11 May. Some negotiations took place with the barons, but no accord was reached and on the 14 May the Battle of Lewes took place. The barons won and King Henry and Prince Edward were both taken prisoner. On 15 May the 'Mise of Lewes' involving conditions for further negotiations was agreed and the 'Provisions of Oxford' were enacted, placing the king under the authority of a Council of Fifteen, to be chosen by twenty-four men made up of twelve nominees of the king, and twelve nominees of the reformers. The chief ministers, the Justiciar and Chancellor were to be chosen by and responsible to the Council of Fifteen, and ultimately to regular parliaments to be held three times a year.

Prince Edward was initially sent to Dover castle to be guarded by Henry de Montfort, while king Henry was taken back to Battle Abbey by Simon de Montfort, '*no longer with power to extort money from his entertainers as he had done on his last visit less than a fortnight before'*, and thence to London.

The Cinque Ports, with Winchelsea to the fore but also involving Rye and Hastings, joined a fleet off Sandwich to prevent foreign assistance being sent to Henry. 300 archers were stationed at Winchelsea whilst the fleet was away. The fleet also took some time out to pillage Calais. After that things went astray as the younger Simon de Montfort encouraged naval anarchy, and the Cinque Ports activity deteriorated into piracy with ships of no nation, even English, being safe. It does seem that the sailors of Winchelsea were an exceptionally aggressive group and needed little encouragement to behave in this way. Their antipathy towards other English sailors particularly from Portsmouth and Yarmouth was legendary and long standing and could lead to murderous conflicts.

Following the Battle of Evesham (4 August 1265), with the death of Simon de Montfort and the rout of the barons, the Cinque Ports did not escape retribution for their support of the magnates. Rye and Hastings made 'grovelling apologies' in similar letters to the king. These apologies were successful and they were forgiven with minimal sanctions. But Old Winchelsea – at that time a town of possibly more than 700 houses, two churches and over 50 inns and taverns and a population of a few thousands were still belligerent and did not apologise. In late 1265/early 1266 Prince Edward approached Winchelsea with a navy recruited mainly from Yarmouth and the east coast and the town was subjected to a combined attack from the sea and land with a force that also contained 577 Welsh archers. The leading citizens were 'put to the sword', but the majority spared. Winchelsea revolted again in 1267, to no avail, the leaders were taken to Rochester and never seen again. But the town was pardoned after its submission and it was guaranteed its land and liberties. Edward had recognised that he needed the town's support for a harbour and ships for his fleet and took an unusually forgiving stance. This act did not go unrewarded for from that time forward the town, in spite of its anarchic tendencies from time to time, generally cooperated with him to mutual benefit.

Henry III died at his Palace of Westminster on 16 November, 1272. Prince Edward had left England in 1270 to join the Eighth Crusade and eventually returned in 1274 as King Edward I to London, being crowned at Westminster on 19 August. He was in fact the fourth King Edward of England, but the first since the Conquest over 200 years ago.

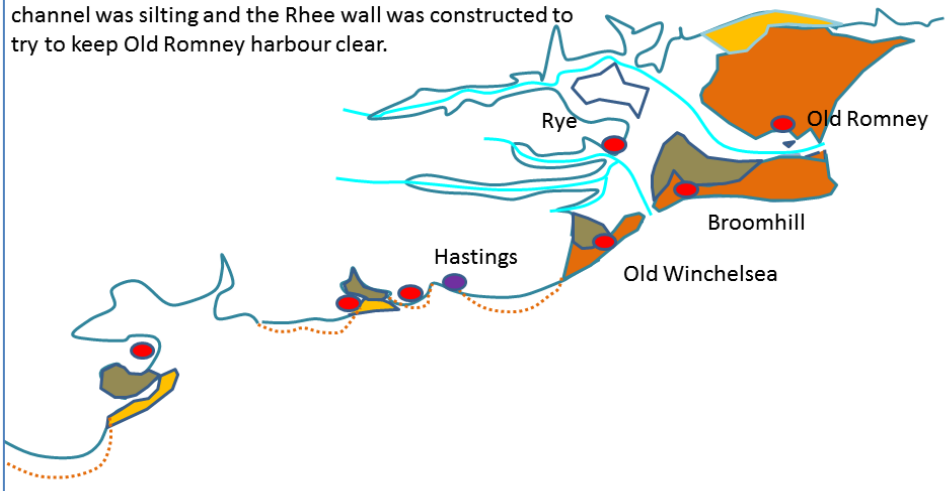
Only five years after their last revolt Winchelsea first appealed for help in 1272. The coastal changes between 800 and the start of the 14th century, secondary to natural coastal change combined with a sequence of fierce storms in the late 13th century, indicate a devastating situation for Old Winchelsea. Winchelsea must have been little more than a tiny fishing village at first and Eddison considers that Old Winchelsea could not have been of much significance as a harbour before the end of the 12th century, when it rapidly enlarged in both size and importance. For a while it became the preferred English port on the route from London to France. Sadly, Old Winchelsea's demise was as quick as its rise. During several great storms of the late 13th century, there was a shingle bar breach in 1250, and it was finally almost completely lost to the sea along with its shingle bank after 1287.

Edward must have been briefed about this and although he may have had some residual antipathy towards Winchelsea, this did not last long as he clearly appreciated the strategic

nature of the ports of Rye, which had become more accessible and also some significant residual potential from Winchelsea, albeit that the latter was severely damaged. Both still retained the sheltered large lagoon of the Rye Camber and both still had ship making skills. He would also have been aware that Hastings was decreasing in its attractiveness as a port due to its own damage from the sea and its now more open position with lack of a large port. The situation has been summarised by Foord and Clephane-Cameron and is described pictorially below.

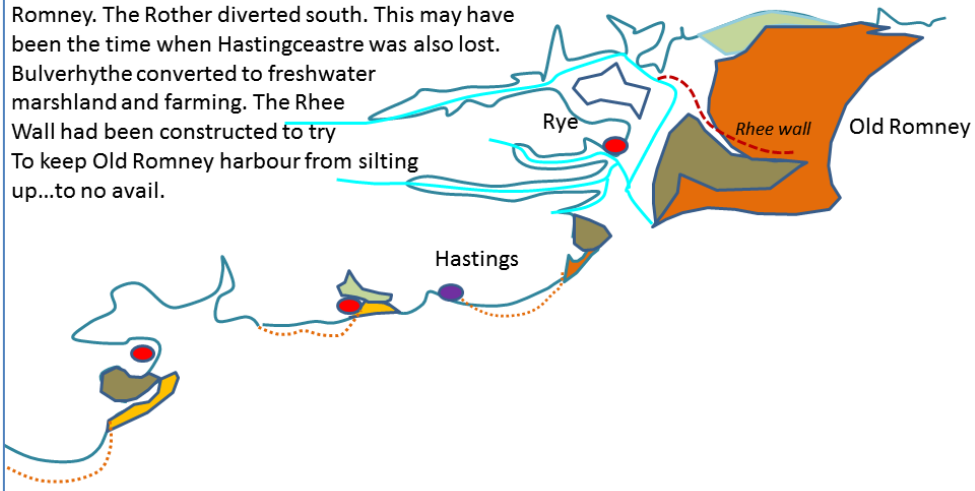
12th Century

The shingle banks were well established but already there was silting and 'inning' of the lagoons. Shingle blocked Bulverhythe which slowly became a fresh water marsh. A breach in the shingle bar allowed the Brede and Tillingham rivers to exit to the sea via this. The Rother channel was silting and the Rhee wall was constructed to try to keep Old Romney harbour clear.



13th to 14th Centuries

In mid and late 13thc. There was a series of great storms, Old Winchelsea flooded, then it was lost together with the shingle bank, which allowed severe flooding of the whole Rye Camber and the estuaries. The lost shingle was moved eastwards and re-deposited at Dungeness, where it also blocked the exit of the Rother at Old Romney. The Rother diverted south. This may have been the time when Hastingceastre was also lost. Bulverhythe converted to freshwater marshland and farming. The Rhee Wall had been constructed to try To keep Old Romney harbour from silting up…to no avail.



The new port proved to be a key Cinque Port for another 80 years or so, but gradually it silted up and was further obstructed by ballast jettisoned from ships, so that by 1380 the town was in severe economic decline and Rye became the predominant local port. Winchelsea was also severely affected by the Black Death and frequent French raids and was de-populating.

'Historic Hastings' records that Edward visited Hastings 1274 and made 'certain sea laws'. In Twiss' 'Black Book of the Admiralty Vol. 1' on p68 is a transcription of the Old French record and on p69 the English translation, both mentioning King Edward I but in neither is there a precise date or place. There is a side note by Twiss that '*an Act was made at Hastings by Edward I that no contract concerning port pleas should be tried elsewhere than in the Admiral Court'* but the dating appears to rely indirectly on an old record made just before the time of Henry VI (i.e. in the early 1400s) by one Thomam Rowghton of Rowghton who may have been a registrar of the Admiralty Court. This claims that the Act was made during the second year of Edward I's reign. This gives some difficulty as the second year of his reign ended on 16 November 1274 and he did not return to England until 2 August 1274 when he landed at Dover. After this there are two small gaps in his itinerary between 2 and 5 August when he is found at Canterbury and between 7 and 10 August when he visits Tonbridge and Reigate, then moves north through Croydon to London. He stays in Windsor for a while then visits Hampshire, returns to London and then goes northwards towards Northampton and Fotheringay. There is nothing recorded at the time that he came to Hastings, but it was not an absolute impossibility that he may have visited in one of the short gaps when he was nearby in Kent. There is an almost direct parallel to this dilemma also relating to 'sea laws' which King John made also believed to be at Hastings (see Foord – Battle, Eastern Sussex and the early Norman and Angevin Kings of England).

Another later referral to 'sea laws' affecting the local Cinque Ports may be to the so-called 'Apocryphal Statute' or the 'De Officio Coronatis' of 1275, which contained instruction to Coroners about wrecks and treasure trove, particularly the rules about getting the permission of the king to hold items from shipwrecks and their specific modification for the Cinque Ports.

Edward I did not visit Winchelsea to assess the situation there for nearly two years after his return to England. Arriving from Lewes via Laughton Edward was at Battle Abbey on 1 July 1276 (for which visit the abbey bought a prodigious quantity of beef and emptied its fishpond of fish) and the next day he moved on to Winchelsea to inspect the sea damage, after which he moved on rapidly to Romney in Kent.

Much of the first part of his reign was dominated by Edward's campaigns in Wales. He invaded in 1277, defeated the Welsh, and the Welsh lords swore fealty to Edward who built a ring of castles to enforce his authority. The ships of the Cinque Ports took an effective part in this Welsh campaigns including blockading Anglesey and ferrying troops over the Menai Straight – Edward soon recognised this as in 1278 Edward issued a great charter to the Cinque Ports which included –

> 'The King confirms to the Barons of the Cinque Ports in recognition of their past faithful service, and their recent service in the Welsh army all their freedoms including immunity from toll and custom and from the jurisdiction of shire and hundred, and the right to trove by land and sea. In return they are to provide 57 ships for 15 days each year, upon the summons of the King.'

Clearly the Cinque Ports had at least partially redeemed themselves in the eyes of Edward. The share of the eastern Sussex ports to the 57 total was: Hastings 6 ships; Rye 5; and Winchelsea 10. A further charter was issued in 1290 (Calendar of Charter Rolls, 18 Edward I, 12 February 1290).

Arms of the Cinque Ports

After a Welsh rebellion Edward invaded Wales again. The Cinque Ports fleet this time were involved in the creation of a temporary bridge across the Menai Straight to enable the English garrison to attack the Welsh rear, and this time after Edward won Wales was brought into the English legal and administrative fold. The Welsh leaders were this time executed. These wars certainly distracted Edward as many other items before his court were left aside. Battle Abbey was caught up in this.

By 1279 Edward had still not confirmed the full Battle Abbey charters, prevaricating with adjournment after adjournment, and in fact never would. Battle was not alone in this, but it threw the associated administration of local Battle justice into a degree of confusion. A special eyre court [assizes] session had been last held in Battle in 1271 with the abbey's monk-lawyers sitting with the itinerant royal justices. But the justices did not know what to do after Henry III died in 1272, and it was not to be until 1286-7 that Edward I agreed to special eyre (assize) sessions in Battle. In the meanwhile Battle had nearly lost this right, the justices having unilaterally declared in the absence of clarity from the king that the right to hold this special court was time expired.

Battle's Abbot Reginald of Brecon, who had been elected in 1261 resigned or died in 1280/1 and Henry de Aylesford was approved by Edward I as abbot, by letters patent, on 28 May 1280. Abbot Henry in turn died in 1297, and was succeeded soon afterwards by John de Taneto, or Thanet, who according to the patent rolls of Edward I was approved on 30 January 1298 and resigned in 1307, the same year that Edward I died. So during Edward's reign three abbots held the abbacy of Battle. All three had had John of Whatlington, who was to be the next abbot, as an able aide.

By charter of the 9th (1281) and 26th (1298) years of his reign, Edward I confirmed the agreement of King John concerning the custody of Battle Abbey during vacancies, and added some other privileges;

> 'as that the abbot should have right to all fines and amercements of his tenants in the town of Battel, which had before been received by the king's clerk of the markets ; together with the assize of bread, and of weights and measures; and also the cognizance of all trespasses committed within a certain extent of the abbey precinct.'

But Edward was much more attentive to England's strategic naval needs and in 1280 gave instructions to acquire land on the hill of Iham on which to build a new town of Winchelsea. On 11 November 1280 he issued instruction:

> ‘Commission to Ralph of Sandwich, king’s steward, to extend and buy or obtain by exchange certain lands of John of Langherst and John le Bon (*Bone of Wickham*) which are suitable for the new town of Winchelsea, which is to be built upon a hill called Yhamme, the old town being for the most part submerged by the sea.’

In 1283 he issued instructions to start building New Winchelsea and the freehold of a new town was granted to the barons of Winchelsea 1288. Accepting this the barons stipulated that no other religious establishment should be accepted in Winchelsea other than the Greyfriars who had been established in Old Winchelsea. The site was to be on the hill of Iham some 3 miles (5 km) or so inland from Old Winchelsea, whose site was by that time almost completely lost to the sea. All the land for the town was acquired in late 1283 by the king’s commissioners, Henry le Waleys, Gregory de Rokesle and Stephen de Pencester by purchase or exchange. It totalled about 151 acres (61 Ha), of which approximately 87 acres (35 Ha) would be built over. The settlement of Iham, still owned by the Abbey of Fécamp, remained outside New Winchelsea and Edward kept a large area of 12 acres (5 Ha) near St. Leonards Church for himself. The town was ‘planned’ and laid out as a regular grid – modelled perhaps on French bastide towns. The development of New Winchelsea is an extremely interesting story, but far beyond the scope of this paper. Two books of particular interest on this topic are one authored by Martin and Martin and another edited by Martin and Rudling (both in 2004). Lilley, Lloyd and Trick have also published detailed work via the Archaeology Data Service (2005).

By the 1292 rental there were 690 property holders in New Winchelsea, which might equate to a population of about 3500, or maybe 5000 if there were sub-lettings – a very large town at that time. New Winchelsea had stone gates at each of its four main points of entry. It also had churches (St. Thomas, St Giles and St Leonards, Iham), other religious institutions including the Franciscan (grey friars) monastery which re-located from Old Winchelsea where it had been founded in 1252. The new harbour was on the river Brede. It may have been encircled by earthwork and palisade defences linking the four gates.

Edward I’s next visit to eastern Sussex was 19 July 1285 – to Uckfield, then on to Lewes for 20/21 July. Then during the next three years (1286-9) Edward was for much of his time in Gascony.

In 1295 ship service was commanded from the Cinque Ports for an expedition to Gascony by Edward’s brother Edmund. This time Winchelsea supplied 13, Rye 7 and Hastings only 3 ships, a further sign of Hastings’ continuing decline. About 600 mariners of Winchelsea were required to crew their ships. Later that year Edward I undertook a visit to his fleet and stayed at Udimore 1–17 November 1295, visiting Winchelsea 20/21, back to Udimore on 21, then to Winchelsea again on 22 and then travelling on to Robertsbridge the same day, after which he returned to London. We can only wonder what the monks thought of this visit, given the forced extortion of his last!

Also in late 1295 there was a new Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert of Winchelsey, who it is believed was indeed a son of the town of Winchelsea. With direction from the Pope the new archbishop was to sternly resist the financial demands that Edward tried to place upon the church. To say that he and Edward I had a stormy relationship would be an understatement.

Right: Arms of Robert of Winchelsey from a stained glass window in Canterbury Cathedral.
Barrée of six, Gules and Ermine, in chief three cinquefoils, Or

In 1297 he was at Lewes on 28/29 May, then Mayfield on 30 May and then into Kent, almost certainly to meet with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Later on 8 August 1297 he returned to eastern Sussex, to Robertsbridge, then on to Brede, where he held a court, then Udimore on 9 August where he stayed again for quite a while assembling the English fleet and army from 9–17 August. After a quick visit to Winchelsea for 17/18 August he popped back to Udimore then stayed in Winchelsea 19–22 before he left for Flanders on a ship called the *Cog St Edward* with a fleet of 305 ships, including 73 from the Cinque Ports. The barons of England demanded more redress of the principles of Magna Carta, which Edward had often ignored, before they would give him extra money or go with him. Edward was not amused, but agreed and the deed was sent after him and sealed at Ghent. His continued 'benevolence' towards Winchelsea was also sorely tried as the men of the Cinque Ports and Yarmouth resumed their long standing feud, with the portsmen burning 20 of the ships from Yarmouth and killing as many as 171 of their crews on landing at Swyn (on the coast north of Bruges in Flanders).

In 1298 the king whilst at St. Albans issued two more Charters to the Cinque Ports

> The King orders that, in consideration of the great expense of maintaining the fleet of the Cinque Ports, all the Cinque Ports and all who claim their liberties should contribute to the cost.

and

> The Barons of the Cinque Ports are granted freedom from taxes upon their ships and rigging, privileges in their trade with Ireland and, if they held land outside the franchise of the Cinque Ports, have freedom from the payment of certain feudal marriage dues to the King and to marry according to the rights of the Cinque Ports.

Old manuscript marginal drawing of a medieval sea battle

The Cinque Ports fleet were also involved in Edward's wars in Scotland in 1296, 1299, 1300 and 1303, normally for transport of food, materials and soldiers, but also for blockades, being particularly involved in the blockade of Berwick upon Tweed which Edward I took in 1296. The ports fleet was assembled for active duty in the Rye Camber in June 1300 under Gervase Alard of Winchelsea, the first recorded mayor of Winchelsea, who had been appointed Admiral of the Western Fleet. In 1306 26 ships of the fleet were involved, some of which will have been from eastern Sussex ports, but mainly Winchelsea, Hastings only

sending one ship on this last occasion. However the men of Winchester, feisty as always, on one occasion which cannot be precisely dated, refused to prepare their ships as the 'king's clerks had broken the debt tallies and had failed to pay the kings debts or given any allowance or any other thing at which they are much displeased'. During the Scottish campaign on 10 November 1302 Battle Abbey was commanded, along with 20 other towns (but no other abbeys) all of which were coastal, to send a ship, with men and 'necessaries' to Newton on Ayr. Presumably this was arranged via Winchelsea as the abbey held lands near Winchelsea..

In 1299, in echoes of Battle Abbey's previous feud with the Bishop of Chichester, Chichester tried to force on the Royal Free Chapel of St. Mary's in Hastings Castle his right to select the canons there. This was fought off and in 1301 the Warden of the Cinque Ports intervened and was supported by the king and parliament, with the constable of the castle being instructed by Edward I not to allow a visit by the Archbishop of Canterbury. Likewise the Archdeacon of Lewes was kept out in 1302.

Edward's penultimate visit to eastern Sussex was in 1302 – to Lewes on 13 September, then Michelham Priory on 14 September, Herstmonceux on 15 September then overnight at Battle Abbey 15/16 September from where he sent two letters, one to Sir Roger Brabazon about a legal case involving his aunt and another jointly to the Earls of Lincoln and Savoy about negotiations with the King of France. He also confirmed an appointment of a priest to a church in Worcestershire and made two legal orders. After that he travelled to Newenden in Kent, from whence he sent the order forbidding the Archdeacon of Lewes from visiting St. Mary's, Hastings (as above). This order was dated 15th September so probably was written at Battle but sent from Newenden, a manor that belonged to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Concerning the Herstmonceux visitation the village and manor of Herstmonceux was situated around the church and present castle site, south of today's village. In about 1300 the manor was occupied by the Monceaux family. John of Monceux's daughter Maud married a John de Fiennes whose family eventually built the castle. The visit by Edward in 1302 must have been a quieter affair than his previous visit with his father and an army in 1264. On this occasion he missed out the eastern Sussex Cinque Ports, but his onward trip was to Canterbury once more again undoubtedly to argue with Archbishop Robert Winchelsey.

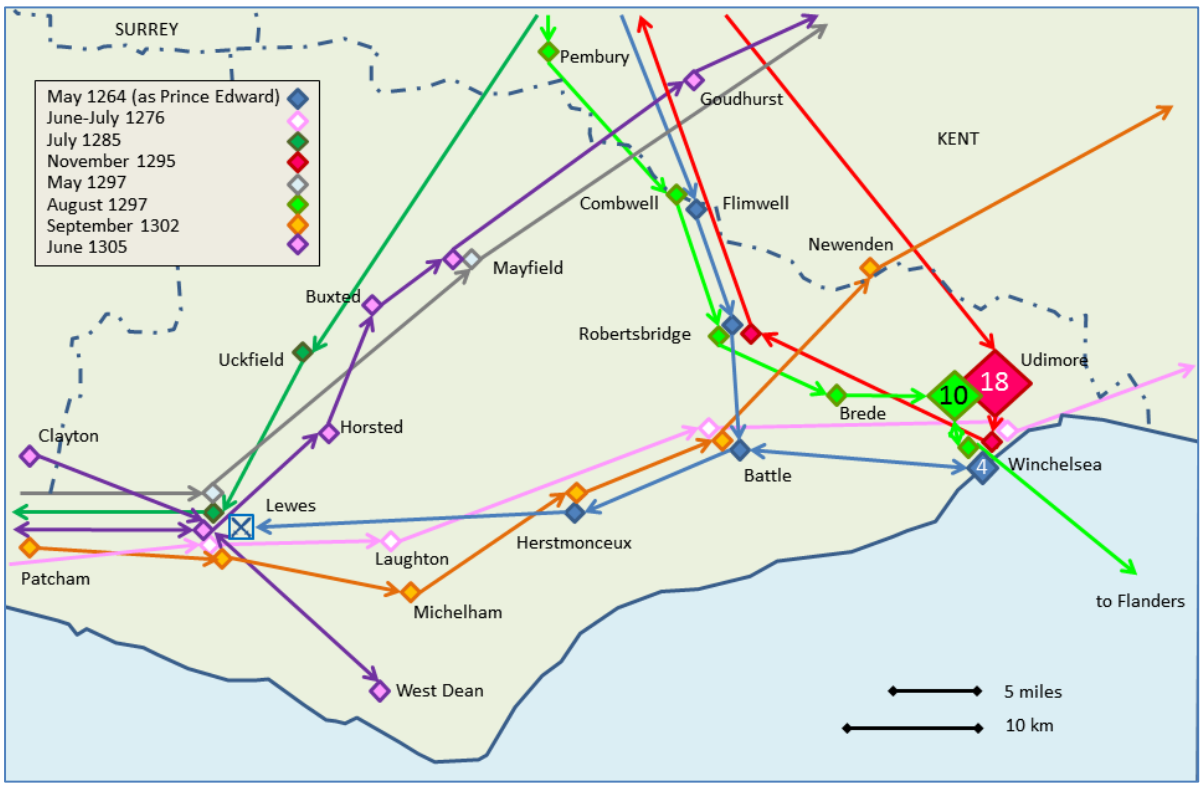
His final visit to eastern Sussex was a tour of Lewes, a short return side trip to West Dean, then on to Horsted, Buxted and Mayfield between 23–28 June 1305 when he also went on to Kent, probably for the usual reason. The reason to visit West Dean is obscure. West Dean appears to have been a manor in the hands of the Heringod family whose arms we are able to find – '*Azure cruzily with six herrings Or*'.

It has been suggested that King Alfred the Great once had a manor here, when it was called just 'Dene' and that ships were able to get up the Cuckmere valley at that time. Maybe Edward was 'checking it out' to see if it was still a viable haven.

Right: Arms of Willem Heringod circa. 1270-80 : **Redrawn from original in BL Add 77720**

Edward I travelled a lot, but nothing like as restlessly as King John. He would make visits for hunting and to visit shrines, etc. and obviously to campaign in Wales and Scotland. But another reason for royal itineracy was economic, for it was cheaper to be given hospitality, food, drink and fodder for his horses by bishops, abbots and others who must have dreaded the costs of such a visit – for the royal household may have numbered up to 500 men and horses, and twenty or more wagons as it travelled to visit outlying royal manors. A further reason was political, for the itineracy made royal authority a reality to the people. Speed of travel varied. It was possible to travel over 20 miles a day between venues, but up to 15 miles a day was normal. The visits were seemingly marked by few ceremonies, such as formal entries to towns.

The king's itinerary would often have no regular pattern of travel, and plans were not made long in advance, although the longer visits by Edward I to Udimore must have been planned. Looking at his visits to eastern Sussex plotted on the map below, based on Gough's 'Itineraries', the visit with his father Henry III of May 1264 during the 2nd Barons War and the visits to Udimore in both 1295 and August 1297 clearly had structured purposes (the length of the longer stays is marked in the diamonds in days, other stays ranged from ½ to 2 days maximum).



The itineraries of King Edward I in eastern Sussex © Keith Foord

The other visits often passed through Robertsbridge, normally having come from or going to Chichester and Arundel. The visits of 1276, 1285, May 1297, 1302 and 1305 have the appearances of perambulations, but more likely had political motives to rally support and finances for wars in Scotland and France. This is suggested by his visit to Mayfield as there was a palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury there, within his Deanery of South Malling

'Peculiar' (within which Uckfield and Buxted also lay), as well as going to Canterbury before returning to London.

As the Scottish wars were so expensive, he increased taxes in 1305 and included the Cinque Ports in this request. Although this was not the first time they had been asked, it was against the Cinque Ports constitution. However the Courts of Brodhull and Guestling met and they agreed to pay 2,000 marks (for comparison: maybe over £1 million at 2016 values!), of which Hastings paid 700 marks and the other ports 1,300 marks between them. Archbishop Winchelsey also resisted, but Pope Boniface VIII, who would have supported Robert of Winchelsey had died and the new Pope Clement V suspended him.

Edward's stays at Udimore were at Court Lodge, which belonged to Sir William of Etchingham, next to the church, both within a moated enclosure. He will have undoubtedly have used St. Mary's Church at Udimore for any devotions. A church stood on this site at Domesday, but the existing church has much remaining from Edward's time including the 12th/13th century chancel and tower

Udimore St Marys Church

Photo: Keith Foord

Pevensey had suffered from the same harbour problems as the other ports with gradual blocking of its entrance and silting up and inning for farmland. The salt panning trade had disappeared. A rental of 1292 lists 46 burgesses, holding 62 tenements, with another six lying empty, but after this it went into decline. Pevensey Castle remained in crown control from 1268 to 1372 after the 2nd Barons War. It would have remained of some strategic importance against the French, but although he owned it Edward I did not visit.

King Edward I died on 7 July 1307, aged 68, at Burgh by Sands, Cumberland, near Hadrian's Wall. He was on his way to confront Robert the Bruce having mustered an army at Carlisle. A monument was erected in 1685 to mark the place where he died; this is signposted and can be reached on foot. His body lay in the village church until taken for burial in Westminster Abbey where it was placed in coffin of black Purbeck marble within an austere plain tomb of the same material. For some reason this was opened in 1774 and the length of his body was measured as 6 feet 2 inches (1.88 m). Clearly he was very tall, would have had a commanding presence, and was well suited to his nickname of 'Longshanks'.

Postscript: There is a curious final anecdote about Court Lodge, Udimore. There was an old building on its site dating from the mid-15th century. The 15th century building was saved

from demolition and was moved piece by piece to a new site in Groombridge, between Tunbridge Wells and East Grinstead. This is not the earlier, 12th or 13th century, manor house which was presumably on or close to this building and used by Edward I and his grandson Edward III when reviewing the English fleet off Winchelsea in the lower Brede estuary. For further reading about this see the summary by Martin and Martin in 'British Listed Buildings: Court Lodge, Speldhurst', their full report in "the Rape of Hastings Architectural Survey' (1987), and some 'Country Life' articles of 1920 and 1963.

Edward II, 1307-1327

Edward II at his coronation: Extract from British Library Royal MS 20 A ii

Edward II was the fourth son of Edward I, but his three brothers had pre-deceased him. In 1308, he married the 12 year old Princess Isabella of France. But he tends to be remembered for his dalliances with men, civil war, wars in Scotland and Gascony, later abandonment by his wife Isabella, being forced to abdicate and his reportedly rather unpleasant murder. As always conspiracy theories abound around his sexuality and his death including that he escaped from imprisonment in Berkley Castle and fled to Italy via Ireland or that he was just 'forgotten'. But these unfortunate matters do not really concern us in this book.

As always it took some years to confirm Battle Abbey's charters – this time five. In October 1312 Edward II confirmed the charters in two dossiers that contained six charters of William I, two of William II, four of Henry I and the 1270 charter of Henry III. The abbot paid £50 for one of the dossiers, but we are not told the price of the second. These dossiers which were well crafted in legal terms turned out to be particularly useful bases for future confirmations in 1348, 1400, 1412 and 1414. Buoyed by their legal success the abbey pushed for further writs to reclaim rights that conflicted with other lords' claims or had been interrupted, with mixed results.

In 1318, somewhat against the wishes of the local population Edward II granted a plot of land near the New Gate at Winchelsea to build a Dominican (Blackfriars) Priory. This was not very successful as it was at a distance from the main part of the town and they were later to move to other sites.

In 1324 Edward II was a guest at Battle Abbey and the abbot managed to get a warrant to have jurisdiction over weights and measures and the quality of bread and ale within the banlieu, a small, but probably significant victory.

The three charters of Edward I of 1278 and 1298 to the Cinque Ports were confirmed with additions by Edward II in 1313. Two years later in 1315 Edward, together with Queen Isabella visited Hastings and Winchelsea. At Winchelsea they bought a large quantity of wine, six tuns in all – nearly 6000 litres. Three years later the king was to approve the establishment in the town of a church and houses for brothers of the Dominican (Blackfriars) order, who apparently were not welcomed with open arms.

In 1324 the manor of Brede was temporarily taken into Edward II's hands from the Abbey of Fécamp because of escalating hostilities with France and at the same time special wardens were appointed for the defence of Winchelsea and Rye.

Edward II's reign was clearly a difficult one. There was war with Scotland throughout and relationships with France were tense. Raids on coastal towns and piracy continued in the Channel. Ship duty to transport men and arms particularly to Gascony was called for frequently from the Cinque Ports. Isabella was sent to France to negotiate a peace treaty in 1325 and refused to return. She became involved with Roger Mortimer who had previously led the Marcher lords in a revolt against Edward, and they invaded England with a small army in 1326. Edward's regime collapsed and he fled to Wales, where he was captured in November. Edward was made to abdicate in January 1327 in favour of his 14 year-old son, Edward III.

Keith Foord 2017

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