

Carisbrooke Castle and the Lords of the Isle of Wight

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THE Battle Abbey Roll records the name of one 'Riuers' as having served at the Battle of Hastings in William the Conqueror's army. This may possibly have been Richard de Redvers.¹ In the Domesday Book under the years 1084 and 1086 this knight is found holding land at Mosterton in Dorset.² Richard de Redvers was one of the five barons who sided in 1090 with Prince Henry against his brother Robert in a contest for the crown. When Henry came to the Throne as King Henry I in 1100, Richard was rewarded for his loyal services.

He was given the town of Tiverton, the Honour of Plympton and created Earl of Devon and Lord of the Isle of Wight. With the lordship of the Isle of Wight came Carisbrooke Castle. This castle had fallen to the Crown in 1078, having been forfeited for rebellion by Roger Fitz Osberne to whose father, William Fitz Osberne, William the Conqueror had granted it. The castle at this period was a 'motte and bailey' castle with defences of earth and wood. Richard de Redvers began to replace the wooden stockade, which formed the enceinte of the castle, with stone.³ A further honour conferred upon Richard de Redvers was that of the Honour of Christchurch in Hampshire in which was the church of Christchurch Twyneham. This church with its buildings he converted from a house of secular canons to a Priory of Augustine Canons. The castle adjacent to the priory was possibly begun by Richard de Redvers.

His son Baldwin de Redvers, 2nd Earl of Devon, and Lord of the Isle of Wight, completed the curtain wall of stone and built upon the motte of Carisbrooke, constructed of chalk rubble,⁴ a stone 'shell keep'. As the *Gesta Stephani* tells us, Baldwin had a strong and splendid castle in his island domain—'In hac idem castellum habebat ornatissimo lapidum aedifico constructum, validissimo munimine firmatum'.⁵ Earl Baldwin was a strong supporter of the Empress Matilda and upheld her cause in the South of England with some energy for a brief spell.

In 1136 he rebelled against King Stephen and forthwith oppressed the citizens of Exeter, who appealed to the King for help. The King sent two hundred horse. The earl's men were defeated, the King arrived in person, and the Siege of Exeter Castle (Rougemont) began. The Siege lasted for three months, during which time the earl's castle of Plympton fell to the King's troops. Baldwin and his garrison at Exeter made proposals for surrender; but the King rejected them. Countess Adeliza with dishevelled hair, bare-footed, and in tears, implored the King in vain. The barons, however, finally prevailed upon Stephen to accept the terms and the garrison were permitted to march out.⁶

1. See Duchess of Cleveland, *The Battle Abbey Roll*, Vol. III, p. 59. Planche, J. R., *The Conqueror and his Companions*, Vol. II, ch. ii, p. 47.

2. Eyton, R. W., *A Key to Domesday*, ch. iv, p. 113.

3. *Vic. Hist., Hants and Isle of Wight*, Vol. V, p. 224.

4. Stone, Percy G., *Official guide to Carisbrooke Castle*, p. 39.

5. *Gesta R.S.*, p. 28 Londini, 1846 (*English Historical Society*).

6. See *Gesta R.S.*, pp. 20-28.

CARISBROOKE CASTLE

-  12th century
-  12th century incorporated in later work
-  13th century
-  13th century incorporated in later work
-  Later work

CARISBROOKE CASTLE

DE REDVER'S WORK
OF
12th and 13th CENTURIES

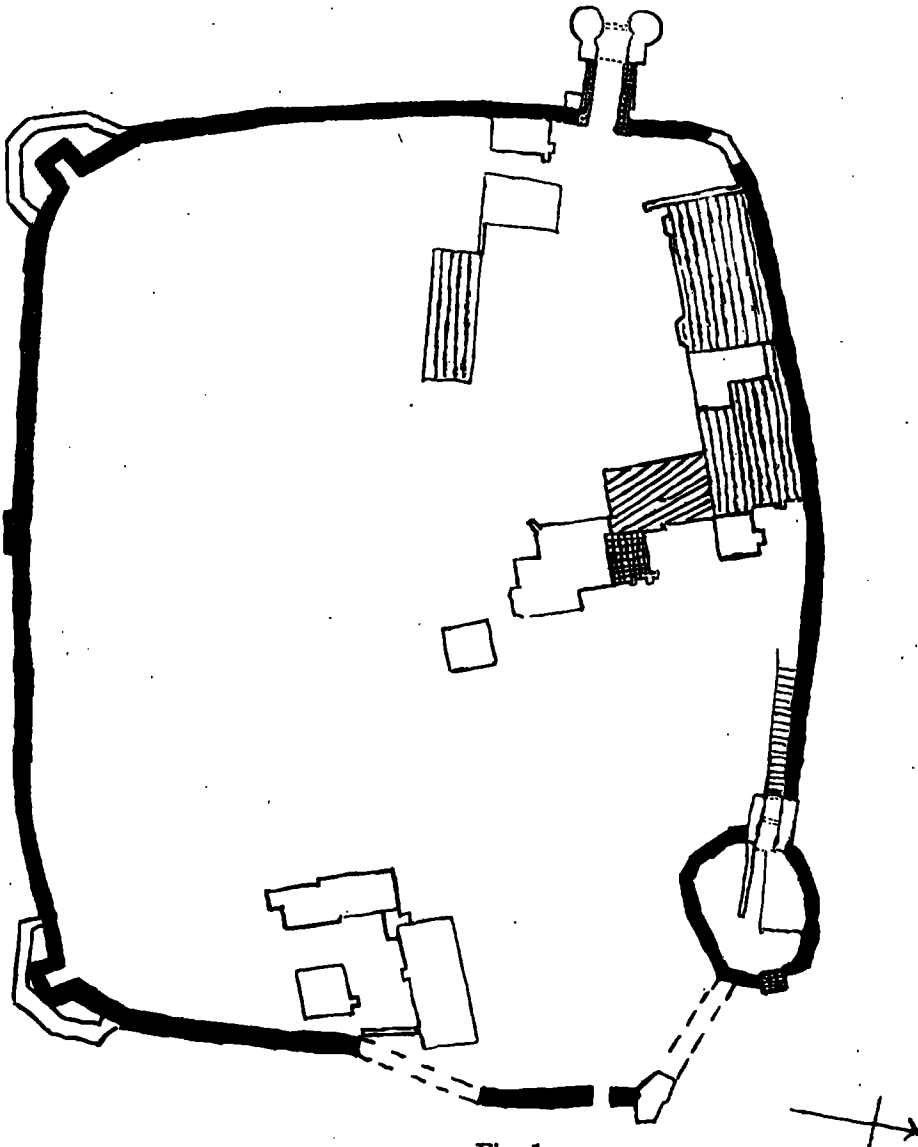


Fig. 1

HAMPSHIRE FIELD CLUB PROCEEDINGS

Baldwin, his castles captured and his earldom pillaged and overrun by the enemy, fled to his island lordship—to his newly-fortified castle of Carisbrooke. Established in the Isle of Wight, he assembled a pirate fleet and harassed the King's shipping: but King Stephen prepared to invade the island, whereupon Baldwin, his castle well having dried up, surrendered and fled abroad to the Count of Anjou. Encouraged by the Countess of Anjou, he stirred up a rebellion in Normandy.

In 1139 Baldwin de Redvers returned to England, where he landed at Wareham, and proceeded to Corfe Castle. He held the Castle for the Empress Matilda against King Stephen. The King raised the Siege upon hearing of the landing of Robert of Gloucester. Baldwin left Corfe and joined the Empress. He was present in 1141 at the Siege of the Bishop of Winchester's Castle of Wolvesey. Baldwin's fiefs were restored to him in 1153. Two years later, in 1155, he died and was buried at Quarr Abbey which he had founded in 1131.⁷

The earldom and lordship passed to his eldest son Baldwin, d. 1162, and then to his two grandsons, Baldwin, d. 1180, and Richard, d. 1184, and finally to his younger son William de Redvers, 6th Earl of Devon, and Lord of the Isle of Wight, otherwise known as William de Vernon from the name of his birthplace in Normandy. The earl was one of the four barons who held the silken canopy over the head of King Richard I at his second coronation at Winchester in 1194. He resided frequently at his castle of Carisbrooke and built the great hall.⁸ A two-lighted 12th century window yet remains to be seen amongst later work. De Vernon's hall succeeded an earlier one, which was possibly under the curtain wall. William de Vernon suffered some oppression under King John. He spent £300 in erecting a monument for his father and himself at Quarr Abbey where he died and was buried in 1216.

William was succeeded by his grandson Baldwin, 7th Earl of Devon, who died in 1245, leaving a son of the same name. He was knighted at the marriage of the Duke of Brittany with Beatrix, daughter of King Henry III. Baldwin married a cousin of Queen Elinor's, the Lady Avizia of Savoy, and was finally poisoned, it is said, by his brother-in-law Peter of Savoy. Thus died Baldwin de Redvers, 8th and last Earl of Devon, and Lord of the Isle of Wight. He was succeeded by his sister Isabell, a lady of some interest and character.

Isabell de Redvers was born in 1237 and married William de Fortibus, 8th Earl of Athermarle as his second wife in 1245. She had five children, but four died young leaving an only daughter Avelena. Avelena was born in 1259 and possibly at Burstwick in Yorkshire where Countess Isabell frequently resided until 1263.⁹ An entry in the household accounts refers to 'shoes for the young Countess Avelena'.¹⁰ The De Fortibus estates at this time consisted of Cockermouth in Cumberland, Holderness, Radston, and Naseby in Yorkshire, Borley in Essex, and Clopton in Suffolk, with headquarters at Borley where the Countess' Chamberlain, or receiver-general, presided over her financial affairs. In 1262 her brother Earl Baldwin died leaving her the Earldom of Devon and heir to the Lordship of the Isle of Wight, and the Honour of Christchurch. She did not come into the possession of the last until the death of her mother Amicia in 1284 who enjoyed the lands as her dower.

Three years after the death of William de Fortibus, who died in 1261 leaving the Countess a widow of 24, civil war broke out and the battle of Lewes was fought. In the following year, 1265, Simon de Montfort, Earl of Leicester, visited his castle of Odiham in Hampshire. The earl left on April 1 and shortly after Isabell de Fortibus arrived and spent Easter¹¹ with

7. *Vic. Hist., Hants and Isle of Wight*, Vol. II, p. 137.

8. *Vic. Hist., Hants and Isle of Wight*, Vol. V, p. 224.

9. Denholm-Young, N., *Seignorial Administration in England*, pp. 46-47.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

11. R.H. Comtissae Leicestae 1265. In Roxburghe Club, *Manners and Household Expenses of England*, p. 16.

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the Countess of Leicester and no doubt heard the latest war news. Before the close of the year Earl Simon lay dead upon the field of Evesham. In 1266 the Countess held a general audit of her estate accounts at Carisbrooke Castle. In 1269 her only daughter Avelena, now one of the richest heiresses in the Kingdom, married Edmund Earl of Lancaster, King Henry III's second son. Her fortune founded the House of Lancaster. She died without issue in 1274 and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Isabell de Fortibus resided frequently at Carisbrooke. Her constable was paid 50 shillings a year for his clerk, and received in addition a sum proportionate to the length of time that the Countess was absent from the island.¹² Amongst other administrative duties the constable was responsible for the upkeep of the castle. By the late 13th century the constable was not necessarily a knight. In 1270, with Hugh de Manneby as her constable, the Countess began building operations which continued till the end of her life. In this year she began the chapel of St Peter and made a new well. 'This is probably the well now existing in the courtyard.'¹³ James de Alneto (1271-72) succeeded as constable and in 1272 a new great chamber was made with a tiled roof. Three years later in 1275 under John de Pgrave (1274-76) the 'new chamber of the Countess' was being built. It was built at the north end of the hall, and there was a covered way from the hall to the kitchen. In 1287 the old kitchen was pulled down and a new one made 45 feet by 32 feet and 16 feet in height with a louvre for the smoke. Little now remains of this great kitchen except for a stone shaft, as a 16th century building of Sir George Carey's superseded it. The constable at this time was John de Hadington (1278-90). In 1291 a new wheel with ropes and buckets was made for the well.

Countess Isabell's building operations were such that the castle became known as the 'New Castle of Carisbrooke'. Since 1262 Carisbrooke had been her headquarters, and from its he administered her estates, which were scattered all over England. Here were her exchequer, treasury, and receipt. From her estates she made about £2,500 a year,¹⁴ in her later years. In spite of this, however, her financial position was a precarious one, as she was involved in dealings with the notorious money-lender Adam de Stratton. In November 1293 at her manor of Stockwell near Lambeth, Isabell de Fortibus, Countess of Devon, and Lady of the Isle of Wight, died. The Earldom of Devon went to Hugh de Courtney and the Lordship of the Isle of Wight to the Crown. It has been said of Countess Isabell that 'she was one of the many women of the feudal age who displayed that capacity for administration which those ignorant of history and psychology deny her sex to be possessed of'.¹⁵

The close of the 13th century saw the passing of the De Redvers, Earls of Devon, and Lords of the Isle of Wight; but the monks of Christchurch remembered their benefactors. The priory was renowned for its alms-giving to the poor. 'On each of the anniversaries of Richard de Redvers the elder, of Adeliza his mother, of Hadewise his daughter, of Richard his son, and of Baldwin, William, and Baldwin, Earls of Devon; of Lady Joan de Briwere, of Bishop Henry de Blois, of Roger Martel, of Adeline of Stampit, and of the priors Reginald and Nicholas, after solemn high mass for the benefactors, forty poor persons received a loaf of bread, a pottle of beer, and a dish from the kitchen. On the anniversaries of Isabell de Fortibus, Countess of Devon, of Nicholas de Lakinges, sub-dean of Sarum; and of Walter de Hereford, the Mason, one hundred poor folk were similarly entertained.'¹⁶

12. Denholm-Young, N., *Seignorial Administration in England*, p. 35.

13. Peers, Sir Charles R., *Carisbrooke Castle, Isle of Wight*, p. 14.

14. Denholm-Young, N., *Seignorial Administration in England*, p. 23.

15. D'Auvergne, *The English Castles*, ch. iii, p. 117.

16. *Vic. Hist., Hants and Isle of Wight*, Vol. II, p. 154.