



ENGLISH HERITAGE

NEWS RELEASE

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The King, the Tower and the Saint

Extraordinary medieval interior created by English Heritage shows Dover Castle was more than a fortress

The huge interior of the keep at Dover Castle has undergone a £2.45million transformation by English Heritage to re-create the splendour of a royal court in the late 12th century.

This has been prompted by new research that highlights that King Henry II (1154 - 1189) built the keep or The Great Tower for PR reasons rather than for defence: as a magnificent palace so that all foreign pilgrims on their way to the popular shrine to Thomas Becket would be greeted with an unequivocal symbol of his own wealth and power before they reached Canterbury.

The result of the sumptuous re-creation will be unveiled to the public on 1 August 2009, when the Tower will be spectacularly lit up at night.

New research by Professor John Gillingham has shown that the spectre of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in 1170 by four of the King's knights, was the main reason for the king to build something impressive at Dover. The need to erect a symbol of royal power visible from afar to exploit and counter the growing cult around the saint was top on his mind, so was the need to have a suitably grand place to entertain dignitaries who were passing through Dover to visit Becket's shrine in Canterbury (**see Notes to Editors**).

Professor Gillingham said: “The re-created medieval interior of the Great Tower will show how Henry was eager to impress his audience amid the rise of a religious, some say anti-monarchical cult, around Becket. Improving the king’s castle at Canterbury was an uncomfortable option because in this place royal power would always be overshadowed by the power of the saint, not the message Henry wished to send.”

Dr Edward Impey, director of the project at English Heritage, said: “The Great Tower is superbly preserved and still gives an instant impression of the power and ambition of its builder, but up to now to understand how it might have functioned, looked and felt in the period of its creation requires a huge leap of the imagination.

“The newly presented rooms will enable visitors to gain a startling and fresh view onto the world of 12th century life, power and politics in the building in which they were played out.”

The project is one of the most significant heritage tourism developments in the UK, the fruits of over two years of research by English Heritage, with a team of historians working closely with numerous artists and traditional craftspeople.

The interiors of the King’s Hall, the King’s Chamber, the Guests’ Hall, the Guests’ Chamber, the privy kitchen and the armoury will all be furnished to evoke their original appearance. An extraordinary array of furniture and decorative items, from hand-painted wall hangings, embroidered textiles and the King’s throne to a *Mappa Mundi* (world map) and 21 oak doors made using 12th-century joinery techniques, has been made using authentic materials and traditional methods.

Pepper’s Ghosts (light projections of moving figures), costumed re-enactors and audio-visual presentation will add atmosphere and drama about gossip and rumour of Henry’s complex family and court life, transporting visitors back to one of the most turbulent periods of European history.

Like the kings of England since his great-grandfather, William the Conqueror, Henry was not English. He built the largest European empire of his age, stretching from Scotland to the

Pyrenees – the Angevin Empire. A new exhibition will highlight how he inherited and expanded it, and how his son, King John, lost half of it.

The core funding for the project comes from the Government's Sea Change Programme which aims to drive regeneration and economic growth in seaside towns, and is supplemented by English Heritage grant-in-aid.

Dover Castle is one of English Heritage's flagship sites, attracting over 300,000 visitors a year. It is open to the public daily between 1 April and 1 November. Please call 01304 205 108 to check opening hours.

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For further press information please contact Renee Fok, English Heritage Corporate Communications on 020 7973 3297 or at renee.fok@english-heritage.org.uk

Images of the re-created Great Tower interior are available from www.picselect.com under Arts/English Heritage/Dover Castle Great Tower Project

NOTES TO EDITORS

I. John Gillingham's research on the origins of The Great Tower at Dover Castle

Dover's strategic location and importance as a lynch-pin of Henry II's vast Angevin Empire have traditionally been cited as the main reasons why the Great Tower at Dover Castle was built. But Professor Gillingham's research shows that the reason could have more to do with the personal PR needs of the monarch.

According to the research, the chronology of expenditure shows that it was in the financial year beginning one month after the pilgrimage of Louis VII, King of France, to Canterbury in 1179, that King Henry started construction of the Great Tower and began to spend more on Dover than on any other castle in England. This visit was an extraordinary event, the first state visit to England by any French king, heralding a series of high profile visits to Becket's shrine at Canterbury by notable pilgrims and princes from Europe and afar, all passing through Dover.

Gillingham's research suggests that Henry was ill-prepared for the visit and seemed to have been embarrassed with the lack of appropriate accommodation and ceremonial facilities for

Louis' massive entourage. His own visit to Paris two decades earlier was received in palatial accommodation and entertained with the finest wines and elaborate pomp.

Improving the king's castle at Canterbury was an unpalatable option because of the proximity to Becket's shrine. In this place royal power would always be overshadowed by the power of the saint, not the message Henry wished to send.

Gillingham concluded, "It is hard not to think that it was this extraordinary visit [by Louis VII], and the prospect of more to come, which triggered the king's decision to build something truly spectacular at Dover." In the words of Professor Thomas Keefe, the historian whose ideas inspired Gillingham to undertake further research: "Henry built for himself, as his own monument, Dover Castle, under which all pilgrims might pass and reflect on the power of the man who was once a saint's patron, and now patronised by a saint."

2. Sea Change Funding Programme

Sea Change is a funding program from CABI (the Commission for architecture and the built environment). It aims to drive cultural and creative regeneration and economic growth in seaside towns by funding inspiring, creative and innovative projects, bringing a sense of pride, enjoyment and celebration. Anyone interested in finding out more about the Sea Change programme or getting involved in some of the projects can find out more at www.seachangedover.co.uk or can visit the exhibition in the Discovery Centre from July 15th 2009.