

Oliver's Mount

A Significant Feature Within the Landscape

Barry O'Brien – Dover Tales

Once more I am indebted to an online History forum, this time to Paul Wells' excellent Dover History site where a cutting recently appeared referencing "a circular earthwork some 60 metres in diameter adjoining the east side of the road to Guston village, some 580 metres north of the castle keep. This feature in the landscape is marked as 'Oliver's Mount' and plotting it on a modern map, places it immediately to the south of Fort Burgoyne in an area long occupied by Connaught Barracks."



Oliver's Mount Location

As the article continues, the earthwork was "a significant feature within the landscape" until at least the mid-18th Century, although its exact date and purpose are lost to history. There is, though, the somewhat obvious suggestion that the name Oliver's Mount is suggestive of a Civil War earthwork.

There again, as is suggested elsewhere: "Over time, as is common throughout England, anything Civil War is linked to Oliver Cromwell who almost certainly never went there!"

Dover was, in fact, taken by the Parliamentarians in the early days of the Civil War in an act that could almost be portrayed as bordering on the comical. Dover Castle was in a somewhat neglected state in 1642, held for the King by a group of approximately twenty-five soldiers, when a band of eight daring men, led by Richard Dawkes, a Dover Freeman, met at the Flying Horse Inn, King Street, a little before midnight on August 20th and resolved to seize the castle for parliament. Having formulated their plan, they agreed to depart the Flying Horse separately and convene an hour or so later at the Northfall Meadow, near the castle cliff. Climbing the slope near the Ashford Towers, they were able, owing to the decayed state of the walls, to scale the old wall south of the Roman oval and surprise the guard who, assuming that their assailants were numerous, surrendered without resistance.

The Kentish Royalists set out to re-capture "The Key of the Kingdom" the following month, September 1642, but this was successfully resisted by the, by now presumably reinforced, Parliamentary garrison. No further attempt was made to win back the castle until 1648, when the Royalists, led by Sir Richard Hardres, undertook to re-capture all the Kent coast fortresses previously seized by the Parliamentary forces. Having seized the castles of Sandown, Deal and Walmer, they removed the captured ammunition and guns to Dover, where they assembled 2,000 foot soldiers alongside the Kentish Yeomanry before opening fire from batteries on the high ground north of the spur. Might this have been Oliver's Mount? With the northern walls of the castle



Colonel Nathaniel Rich

successfully breached, a storming party was readied but were duly thwarted by a Parliamentary force under Colonel Nathaniel Rich, who arrived from Maidstone and “dispersed the besiegers.”

Dover Castle thereafter remained in the possession of Parliament until the Constable, the Earl of Winchelsea, handed it over to Charles II at the time of the Restoration.

Perhaps the most likely interpretation of Oliver’s Mount, the article suggests, is that it relates to the field works thrown up by the French during the siege of 1216 and could perhaps represent a temporary earth castle in the form of a motte or ringwork. Taking place in the latter months of the reign of King John, the 1216 siege occurred when the English Barons invited Louis, Dauphin of France, to take the English crown. Louis landed a great army at Stonar, near Sandwich, and advanced on London, leaving Dover Castle, which was



*Arrival of Louis of France in England
Chronica Majora, Matthew Paris, 1236-1259*

held for King John by Hubert de Burgh, untouched.

When the Dauphin’s Father, Louis VIII, heard that his son had advanced on London without first taking Dover Castle he sent a message that Prince Louis could not consider he had gained a foot in England until he had captured Dover Castle and so the prince returned to Dover. Having used battering rams to effect breaches in the Castle walls, on June 24th, 1216, the French attempted, unsuccessfully, to take the fortress by storm. Louis then spent the month of August, 1216, attempting to starve out the castle garrison while French miners dug a deep trench from the foot of the hill, throwing up a high mound of earth to the south in consequence, hoping to shield themselves from the anticipated bombardment from the castle walls. While the miners were engaged with the trench, Sir John de Pencester, along with a strong body of cavalry, bringing provisions, made a dash across the Northfall Meadow and successfully entered the castle, offering new heart for the garrison. Louis’ siege was, however, still in place when, on October 19th, King John died of a fever at Newark Castle, having lost some of the Crown Jewels during his flight from Lincoln. Louis duly sent a flag of truce with the news of the King’s death, calling for a surrender, with the threat that if

Hubert de Burgh continued the struggle he would be hung in front of the castle walls. To this Hubert replied: "Let not Louis hope that I will surrender as long as I draw breath. Never will I yield to French aliens this castle, which is the very key and gate of England!" The French abandoned the siege soon after. So, temporary French field works, Civil War earthwork or perhaps something that dates back far earlier than the mid-18th Century? As Oliver's Mount no longer exists we may well never know.

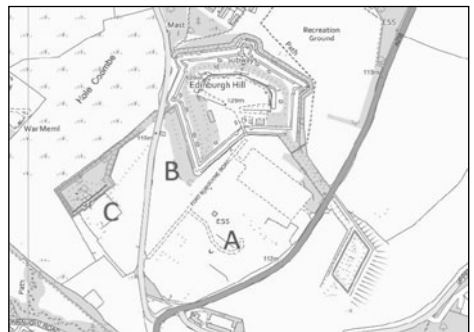
There is a similarly named area of high ground overlooking Scarborough in North Yorkshire, which as well as offering views across the town, is also the location of a tribute monument to Scarborough's War dead, a site for camping and caravanning at selected times of the year, 10 football pitches and a rugby league pitch. Although this particular Oliver's Mount is primarily known for its motorcycle races, its 2.4 mile (3.9km) circuit also hosts car rally and car hill-climb events. Formerly known as Weaponness, its present name may be derived from the mistaken belief that Oliver Cromwell placed batteries on it during the siege of the castle.

Closer to home, another Oliver's Mount could once be found in Hanover Square Mayfair, London, pretty much equidistant between Grosvenor and Berkley Squares, the tavern or beer house so named being recorded as early as 1808 until at least 1882.

Finally, to the suggestion that over time, as is common throughout England, anything Civil War is linked to Oliver Cromwell the website devizesheritage.co.uk references Oliver's Castle, an iron age hill fort thought to date from around 600BC. This particular earthwork should more properly be known as Bromham Hill Fort, the name Oliver

having become associated with it as a result of the Battle of Roundway, when a 2,500 strong cavalry, under the command of parliamentarian Sir William Waller, camped nearby. The Battle of Roundway Down took place on July 13th 1643 and, although thought to have lasted no more than two to three hours, Parliamentarian losses were high with between 3 to 4,000 killed, 800 captured and many wounded. Additionally all eight pieces of artillery were captured along with 28 colours. Royalist losses were considerably less with between no more than 100 to 150 killed and wounded.

This decisive Royalist victory opened-up the west to the King and allowed the subsequent storming of Bristol and the siege of Gloucester. So, given evidence of an Iron Age fort being renamed, seemingly to mark a Royalist victory, might this unlock the key to Dover's Oliver's Mount? Probably not, as the Parliamentarians held Dover throughout the Civil War, the stronghold only being relinquished when, in the early afternoon of May 25th 1660, Charles II landed on Dover beach at the invitation of the Convention Parliament, thereby marking the end of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland and the beginning of the Restoration of the British monarchy.



Possible location of Oliver's Mount at 'C'. Paul Wells