Odo was an infamous figure in 11th Century England: "ambitious", "rapacious", "greedy", "ruthless", "arrogant", "tyrannical" and "destitute of virtue" are just some of the words that have been used to describe him. He was certainly not the most popular of rulers, either in Kent or elsewhere, and was almost universally portrayed in a negative light by contemporary chroniclers. Orderic Vitalis, a chronicler monk, creates an unattractive image of Odo as a regent who abused his responsibilities, oppressing the poor and unfairly seizing England's wealth and land.

Odo destroyed and plundered the landowners of Kent, amassing a huge fortune in both land and gold. He forcibly seized lands for his friends and family - one chronicler called him a "ravening wolf", and the Domesday Book, argues historian David Bates, reveals "numerous instances of apparently unjust acquisitions". In Dover, Odo confiscated homes and even the Old Guildhall for his household, and he allowed one of his tenants to build a mill at the harbour entrance in Dover, which had a devastating impact on shipping.

**Making enemies in Kent**

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| Canterbury CathedralOdo quarrelled with the Archbishop of Canterbury |

Odo's tyrannical behaviour made him many enemies in Kent, and it was only a matter of months before his severity drove the county into open revolt in 1067. This revolt, the first major rising under the Normans, was focused around Dover, the centre of Odo's oppressions. The Kentish rebels appealed to Eustace of Boulogne for help, and together they launched a failed attempt on Dover castle. Eustace had been involved in a quarrel with the citizens of Dover on a previous occasion, and so the rebels' appeal to him suggests just how desperate they were to be liberated from Odo.

Odo's position as Earl of Kent brought him - almost inevitably - into conflict with the Archbishop of Canterbury, another strong landholder in the area. The Archbishop Lanfranc resented Odo's encroachments upon his "patch", and this personal feud eventually made its way into the law courts, with the two men vying for control of Kentish land at trials like that of Penenden Heath, which lasted for three days.

The feud even led to bloodshed, and the Earl Waltheof, a client of Lanfranc, was beheaded by a group of men led by Odo. Though this dispute had roots in controversies which predated the Norman invasion, it is still symptomatic of Odo's character, and desire to eradicate competing authorities within his Earldom of Kent.

Odo certainly seems to have had a great desire for power. His main powerbase was in Kent, but as Count Palatine he possessed power over all other earls and magnates in England. He was one of William's most trusted deputies, and in the king's absence acted as regent, alongside William fitz Obern until 1071 and later alone.

Odo seems to have carried out his tasks with relish, creating resentment across the country. Orderic Vitalis said that Odo and fitz Obern "oppressed all the inhabitants of high and lower degree" and "heaped shameful burdens upon them".

**Power-hungry**

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| Odo leaving Rochester CastleOdo left Rochester to jeers from his Kentish subjects |

Not even satisfied with this authority, however, in 1082 Odo made a bid to purchase the papacy, causing a split with William, who arrested his half-brother himself. Odo was tried and imprisoned for sedition, and only released following William's death.

But a leopard never changes its spots, and Odo was soon causing trouble again, leading a revolt against the new King - William Rufus. Again Kent suffered at Odo's hands, as the revolt was played out on Kentish soil. Odo and his supporters ravaged the royal possessions in the county, as well as those of Lanfranc, but Rufus soon crushed the rebellion, which ended with siege of Rochester Castle, and Odo was exiled from England for good.

**Effective but unpopular**

There was no other Earl of Kent after Odo: despite his tyrannical behaviour and the unrest he created, Odo had served his purpose, securing the county and defending the coast while the Norman kingdom was still vulnerable in its infancy. Odo's final split with William should not disguise the fact that he was almost indispensable to his half-brother's government.

And yet, in Kent, Odo's ruthlessness and arrogance won him only enemies. The legend of his final surrender at Rochester is perhaps the most fitting testimony to his unpopularity in Kent. As he left Rochester castle the jeers of his English subjects demanded the hangman's noose - Odo's harsh rule had left a bitter taste amongst the men of Kent.