

REVIEW

DOVER IN OLD PHOTOGRAPHS collected by Mark P. Smith Alan Sutton Publishing £6.50

It is 150 years ago this year that Daguerre in France and Fox Talbot in England produced the first permanent and recognisable pictures by exposing sensitised plates to light. In 1839 the photograph was transformed from a dream to a reality. Since then people, places and events had been recorded with a degree of accuracy not previously available to mankind.

We all know that descriptions of events passed on by word of mouth change a little, sometimes quite a lot, with each telling of the tale. Writers and diarists, travellers and journalists report things as they see them or as they recall them after the event; sometimes their writings are coloured by religious, political or just romantic views of events. Similarly the painter may modify the scene to enhance the composition of his picture and the portrait painter, perhaps mindful of his fee, may consider it prudent to flatter his subject.

None of these options are open to the camera. Although modern technology enables all sorts of tricks to be played with the camera the majority of photographs taken over the past 150 years have simply recorded the subject matter exactly as it was during one split second of time. The importance of old photographs to the historian cannot be over-estimated.

To produce this book Mark Smith has delved into the photographic archives of Dover Museum and selected more than 250 pictures taken between the middle of the last century and 1936. It is a varied and fascinating collection and must appeal to anyone interested in this historic town and port.



Drawing from photograph in 'Dover in Old Photographs', by P.K.

Sedgwick's at the corner of St. James's Lane & Flying Horse Lane

The photographs are not assembled at random but are gathered together in eleven sections such as the harbour, the military connection, buildings, people, events and so on. There is a short introduction by museum curator, Christine Waterman. There is also a commendably succinct preface to each section and the subject matter of each photograph is briefly described.

The one failing of the book, and it is in a book of this type a serious shortcoming, is that there do appear to be a rather large number of inaccuracies in the text. One of the problems of old photographs, as we all know from our own snap shots from past years, is that dates, places and subject matter are frequently not recorded. This may well account for some of the errors in the book but others look much like carelessness or bad proof reading. The Queen Mother, for instance, was installed as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1979 not 1984.

The Zeebrugge Bell was not, I believe, taken from a church but was removed by the Germans from the Town Hall in Zeebrugge and set up on the Mole by them to warn of British attacks. It was from there taken by the King of the Belgians and presented to Admiral Keyes.

The introduction to Section 1 indicates that there was a single gun in the Admiralty Pier turret whereas Section 4 states correctly that there were twin guns. (They are still there!).

I will not dwell on the errors. A thorough check of the text and they can all be corrected in the next edition. I certainly hope and believe that there will be a next edition because the book does bring together a collection of photographs not readily available but of great value to those interested in the history of the town and the changes that have taken place over the years.

It is difficult to single out particular photographs for comment but I like especially those showing the people who have figured in Dover life over the past 150 years. There is Thomas Longley, the 42 stone landlord of the Star Inn who was complimented by Queen Victoria on his good health and on the facing page, in nice juxtaposition, the frock-coated, top-hatted, W.J. Barnes and Sir William Crundall (not Crundell). There are two very good photographs of the tram staffs in 1918 and 1921, with many familiar names in the captions. But perhaps most fascinating of all, especially in the context of Dover as we know it today, is the Dover Promenade Orchestra as it was in 1906. How times have changed!

I hope members of the Dover Society will buy the book and support the enterprise and effort which has gone into producing it.

Peter Johnson a Vice-President and member of Committee



N. SIDE OF MARKET SQUARE BEFORE 1905.