

138 HENRY VIII'S ASSOCIATION with the TOWN of DOVER

This year marks the 500th anniversary of the birth of King Henry VIII.

During his reign, King Henry paid numerous visits to Dover. He was particularly interested in the construction of the coastal defences and sympathetic towards the development of the town's harbour but, of course, the dissolution of the religious houses in Dover had a profound impact on the townsfolk.

DOVER CASTLE

Prior to his accession to the throne, Prince Henry, Duke of York, was appointed to the post of Constable of Dover Castle and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1493. Prince Henry adopted an enthusiastic rôle in fulfilling his duties up until the time when he was pronounced heir to the throne upon the death of his brother, Arthur, when he chose to appoint Sir Edward Poynings as his deputy.

In 1533, George Boleyn, Lord Rochford, was appointed Constable and Lord Warden. Co-incidentally, the King secretly married Boleyn's sister during the same year. In 1536, however, following the disgrace and execution of George Boleyn, Henry's son, Henry Fitzroy was made Constable and Lord Warden although he died during the same year that he was appointed.

Henry Fitzroy's successor was the treasurer of King Henry's household, Sir Thomas Cheyne, who was allocated the onerous task of informing Anne of Cleves of the King's desire for their marriage to be annulled during a visit to Dover Castle. It is also of interest that Sir Thomas, when repairing the Castle, used stones collected from the previously dissolved abbey at Langdon.

During the reign of Henry VIII many changes were made to adapt the existing fortifications for the use of artillery. The King was able to fund such schemes by taking



Henry VIII
in 1536-7
from the portrait by Holbein

possession of the Constable's lands. This source of local revenue was used by the King to fund the construction of coastal fortifications including the Moat Bulwark, Archcliffe Fort, Sandgate, Walmer and Deal Castles, all of which were considered to be part of Dover's defences.

THE HARBOUR

During King Henry's reign the western harbour works were extended. Between 1538-1540 the King made frequent visits to Dover to supervise the many additions to the Town's defences, including the works at the harbour. It is estimated that the harbour works during the reign of King Henry VIII amounted to some £60,000. It is recorded, however, that the entrance to the new harbour had been obstructed as early as 1541 by a bar of shingle. Moreover, sadly for the town of Dover, the King's attention was diverted from Dover during the rest of his reign and as he had made no provision for the expenses of keeping the harbour in a good state of repair it fell into decay and became almost useless.

THE DISSOLUTION OF THE MONASTERIES AND RELIGIOUS HOUSES

Between the years 1536 and 1540 Henry actively pursued the dissolution of the Country's religious houses. This policy resulted in the closing, in Dover, of the Priory and the hospitals of St. Bartholomew and the Maison Dieu. In order to accommodate the needs of the poor of the town, Henry gave his assent to a law which required church-wardens and two others in every parish to make collections for the poor on Sundays.

When the Maison Dieu was dissolved its lands were taken by the Crown. The associated church of St. Mary was, however, given by the King to the town of Dover whilst the Maison Dieu Hall was retained by the Crown and has, ever since the Dissolution, been used for public purposes. It is one of the stained glass windows in the Maison Dieu which depicts the grand occasion when Henry and his entourage embarked from Dover in May 1520 to meet and discuss policy with King Francis I at the "Field of Cloth of Gold". The arrival of the courtiers and nobility in the town, and the entrance made by the King himself by torchlight, must surely have been greeted with great interest by the inhabitants of Dover.

So, 500 years on from the birth of King Henry VIII, the British Tourist Authority and English Heritage are organising a number of events to commemorate this anniversary, and further information on these may be obtained from the Tourist Information office at Dover.

JANICE NIXON

IN MEMORIAM

We regret that we have to record the deaths of two members:

Mrs J. Leeming and

Mrs G. E. Muckleton

and send our condolences to their families