

The REV. JOHN MAQUEANE

priest of St. Mary the Virgin, 1698-1729

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“Old John” or “Old Rev.” as he was popularly known in Dover, was parish priest of St. Mary’s at a most interesting period of Dover’s history, a time of complete change, and considerable progress, in many fields.

During the reigns of Charles the Second and James the Second the town suffered greatly from royal displeasure since, except for a few rich people and a priest or two, the townsfolk had been solidly behind Parliament during the time of the Commonwealth, when we had no king, and with the return of the monarchy in 1660 they had to suffer severely for it.

Charles abrogated Dover’s prized charter which had been granted by Queen Elizabeth, and forced his own charter on the town, which cost them more money than was available, and in consequence the town had to sell land and the chamber above the Biggin Gate to make ends meet.

Charles had hoped that his new charter would eliminate the anti-royalist, and the non-conformist, factions from all

the branches of civic life, and also ensure the return to Parliament of M.Ps. who would be subservient to the court and to his demands.

Anyone not conforming to the Church of England was disqualified from holding any office in the town, and the groups of non-conformists were persecuted, some of their members being driven from the town, deprived of their livings or imprisoned, and their places of worship, often private houses or workshops, destroyed.

Man was set against man, and any co-operation between the various groups was impossible. This deplorable state of affairs continued into the brief reign of James the Second, and in particular royal interference in the town’s internal organisation was a continuing problem.

In fact, only months before James fled to the continent Robert Jacob, elected Dover’s mayor in 1688, was removed from office, he being considered unworthy by the Privy Council. He was not the first, but he was the last, Dover mayor to be so illegally treated.

When James the Second fled to the continent, and was deposed in 1689, all this interference and

DOVER FROM THE WEST IN THE 1640’s. St Mary’s Church is in the centre. At the base of its tower is the Biggin Gate.



persecution came to a sudden end, but it left an unfortunate vacuum, both in public life and in personal relationships, a situation which threatened chaos, but old Captain William Stokes, one of Dover's great citizens, of whom we shall say more later, steadied the helm for several years. One of his first acts was to call a "Horn Blowing", a gathering of the townsfolk, in the Market Square and to declare, to a cheering population, the end of James the Second's reign.

They tore down the royal arms of Charles the Second, which he had directed should be placed prominently in St. Mary's Church, and made a bonfire of it, together with a copy of his hated charter, in the Market Square.

The years of stress and dissension had however left behind many social and, especially, religious problems, and there were many old scores to be settled.

The Baptists, the Society of Friends, and the Presbyterians began to prosper, at last no longer persecuted by the civil power, but the Church of England, previously the favoured church, fell upon difficult times for several years, and it was fortunate that, eventually, "Old John" was appointed in 1698.

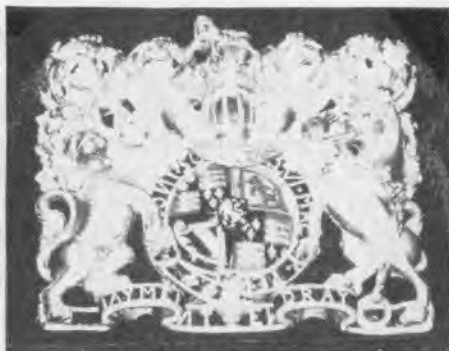
He was very much a man of the people, short, stout, unkempt and quite careless of his personal appearance and hygiene, a lovable man with a great weakness for alcohol which he consumed in large quantities, mixing with the people, and sharing their lives.

His easy going nature soon prompted the churchwardens to take advantage of him by depriving him of his church fees and other emoluments in order to lessen the cess then levied for church purposes, but he seemed not to have protested.

He liked his drink increasingly as time went on and night after night, with the parish clerk, he went the rounds of the ale houses. The parish clerk was a great talker and teller of tales, and the pair of them were "back room boys" and in company with others of their kind, they consumed vast quantities of liquor which had paid the new fangled, and to them iniquitous, excise duty. Supplies came into the town, and were distributed, by night, and nobody questioned from where, or indeed how, it had come. Indeed it would have been very dangerous to have done so,

John and his clerk got into all kinds of escapades when they were well past the sober stage. On many occasions the pair of them were discovered in the morning fast asleep in the churchyard, having quite failed to cover the last few yards home, and sometimes they slept off their drink on a bench in one of the old alehouses. On more than one occasion, having imbibed too freely in one of their favourite haunts, the "Light of the Sun" on the Crosswall at the harbour, both were fished out of the muddy water by boathooks, having failed to negotiate the wooden bridge by which it was connected to terra firma.

Of course, people were a little scandalised at times, but Dovorians got on well, and often affectionately, with old Rev. John. After all, he was usually sober enough to baptise, marry and bury, and on Sundays he turned out a good sermon, a most



The royal arms of William and Mary, mounted in St. Mary's early in the 18th cent to replace those of Charles the First.

100 important part of Sunday at that time. Above all, he was very human, and he lived with his flock and shared fully in their life, which was certainly more than could have been said for some of those supporters of a decant royalty who were before him, or many of those chilling inhuman pillars of Victorian rectitude who came after him.

After thirty years however he could not carry on unaided and in 1728 he asked for an assistant, but insisted on choosing his own man. The people were however equally insistent that the choice must be theirs. Perhaps they wished to make sure that he would not be merely another drinking pal of Old Rev. In the end they had their way, but the old priest did not like the sober, staid, rather strait-laced new man and refused to have anything to do with him. The dispute dragged on for months and at last the people were exasperated with Old Rev, and they decided that he should preach at St. Mary's no more.

On the next Sunday, when he entered the pulpit the congregation started to sing the 119th Psalm, which contains 176 verses. He sat patiently until they had finished and then moved once more to the pulpit, whereupon they started the Psalm again. After a third attempt, he asked to speak.

"My Friends", he said, "I think we are now about even. I have, in this place, often told you a very pretty story; and today you have entertained me with a very pretty song: So now, farewell", and he left the church.

Things were finally settled however. It was agreed that the young man should do most of the work and that Old Rev should be paid £15 a quarter and allowed to officiate from time to time, because everybody was fond of him and did not want to hurt him. He was content. He had countless friends and few enemies. He spent nothing on clothes and little on food, and many a family always had, and still would, give him a meal at any time. Moreover, in those days £15 a quarter would buy a great deal of liquor and convivial company in the snug little "Light of the Sun", or at the bust "Flying Horse Inn" in Flying Horse Lane, or for special occasions there was always the "York Hotel", and the "Ship Inn", or "Wright's", down at the harbour.

Old Rev continued to enjoy life among his people, sharing their joy and their grief, until he died, to be buried in St. Mary's churchyard on 13 Jan. 1733, mourned by the whole town.

When he was appointed, it was to a community divided into many hostile warring factions, bitterly at odds with each other, and when he died he was mourned by everybody. The social crisis of the town had been resolved, and the many old, deep wounds inflicted in the Stuart reigns had been healed.

The Maison Dieu as it was early in the 18th century.

