



EAST CLIFF, DOVER c1880

The History of East Cliff, Dover (2)

The Building of East Cliff (1817 – 1844)

When the first houses were built at East Cliff, all the land along the shore there was owned by John Smith, the builder of Smith's Folly. John Smith finished building Smith's Folly in 1791, having taken ten years clearing the land and erecting the several buildings which constituted the Folly.

There were other dwellings along East Cliff, some little more than makeshift homes cut into the cliffs. Early documents, in title deeds to houses in East Cliff, mention caves and apartments in the cliffs and also refer to other edifices and buildings, gardens and pieces of land, some of these occupied by under-tenants of John Smith.

The following is an extract from the indentures, dated 25th June 1803, of John Smith's agreement to leave his estate to his son, Sir Sidney Smith.

(The original spelling and punctuation has been retained.)

All those several Messuages Tenements Dwelling Houses or Buildings and Towers near or adjoining each other sit. & being near the bottom of the Cliff or Hill on the Summit of which Dover Castle is standing & being with the

108 *Gardens Yards & several pieces or parcels of land thereunto belonging and adjoining And also All that one other edifice and building situate at a distance of 470ft or thereabouts from the South East Side of the Highway there All which premises abutted and bounded to the Jetty or Head there towards the South East and contained by Admeasurement on the South East Side 932 feet and to the Highway there towards the North West And also All those several other Edifices and Buildings situate and being upon or at the Bottom or Foot of the said Cliff or Hill or adjoining thereunto And also All that several Rooms Apartments or Caves situate and being in the said Cliffs or Hill and formed and out of the same And also All those several Gardens Pieces or Parcels of Land Well and Pump and premises near or adjoining thereto abutting to the Beach and other part of the said Cliff or Hill in a parallel line with the said Jetty or Head towards the North East to other parts of the said Cliff or Hill Towards the North West to Guildford Battery Towards the South West and to the said Highway towards the South East and containing by Admeasurement on the South East Side of 950 feet little more or less All of which had been for many years & were then in the Tenure and Occupation of the said John Smith his Assns. and Underts.*

When John Smith died, in October 1804, all this estate passed to his son, Sir Sidney Smith, who, at that time, was engaged in fighting the French. When Sir Sidney left the army in 1810 there is no evidence that he visited his Dover inheritance, although some sources refer to the Folly as "occasionally his residence". In 1815 he moved to Paris and rarely visited England thereafter. It would appear, therefore, that he had little interest in the East Cliff estate and soon after Sir Sidney moved to Paris the land at East Cliff was acquired by a Mr. Wilson Gates. The exact date is not known. Possibly it was about 1817, a date mentioned in several sources as the year in which building was commenced at East Cliff. Several Dover Guide books of the period refer to various building work at East Cliff from 1817 onwards.

The first record traced by the researcher of a transaction between Gates and Sir Sidney Smith exists in an Indenture dated 29th August, 1822. It is an agreement between

"Sir William Sidney Smith KCB residing at Paris in France and Dame Caroline his Wife of the 1st part and Willson Gates of the Town and Port of Dover in the Co. of Kent Bricklayer of the 2nd part".

This is described in the document as an absolute sale of the land for the sum of £525.

In the same year Wilson Gates borrowed the sum of £1000 from a Mr. James Shipdean at 5% interest.

Horsley (Memories of Old Dover, 1892) knew Gates. He described him as "a Dover man, the builder of the right side of Trevanion Street, where he lived". Horsley seemed to think that Gates acquired the land at East Cliff after the death of Sir Sidney Smith, but, as already indicated this could not have been true, as Sir Sidney died in 1840 and Gates acquired the land long before that.

Horsley includes an engaging anecdote of his acquaintance with Gates, but unfortunately gives no dates for the parties he describes. He writes:

"Part of the estate thus acquired consisted of a paddock, which had to be enclosed constantly, owing to the inroads made by the sea, In this paddock Mr. Gates kept cows and occasionally gave syllabub parties to which I often went and enjoyed the refreshing beverage which I understand most of the young people of today have never tasted, I believe it was made from port wine into which the cow was milked producing a frothy drink highly coloured with the red wine."

After Gates acquired the land at East Cliff many changes followed. In the next decade there was a great deal of building work started and a lot of the land was sold off in parcels and some exchanged hands several times.

Details of some of these transactions can be seen in the title deeds of individual houses in East Cliff, some of the descriptions being duplicated in the deeds of different houses.

For example, an extract from the deeds of No.3 Marine Terrace (as it was called at that time) shows that in 1826 Gates "caused two messuages and tenements to be pulled down and caused two messuages and tenements and other erections to be built on or upon part of the sites thereof".

It is not possible to identify which buildings or parts of buildings described correspond to the buildings as they stand today, nor is it possible to state how much land Gates owned in East Cliff, but it could have been the whole of the area of the East Cliff Estate, originally owned by John Smith.

In 1827 Gates sold some land to a Richard Smith of Dover and some to a Dubois Smith of Greenwich.

Between 1828 and 1832 several parcels of land were sold off. Five different purchasers are named: Matthew Hight, John Nash, Christopher Wood, Thomas Middleton and John Rigden. Nash bought a house and building for £100 in 1828. Hight bought several pieces of ground in 1831 and 1832 for £21. Wood bought other pieces of land in 1832 and 1837 for £15 and Rigden and Middleton bought pieces in 1832 for £4 each. Hight also leased a piece of land for 99 years at a rent of 1/- yearly.

By 1830 Gates paid off his mortgage to James Shipdean, who died in that year. After the mortgage was "paid home" Gates destroyed the papers. Later he was to regret this, as he was obliged, in 1837, to sign a sworn affidavit to this effect and to obtain another affidavit, in support of this, from an associate, James Jeffries. Both affidavits were discovered among the deeds of 9 East Cliff.

It is evident from reading various deeds that in some cases earlier buildings were pulled down and more substantial ones erected and in other cases additions and alterations were made to existing buildings. Therefore it is difficult to state with any accuracy the exact dates of any house in East Cliff in the form in which it exists today, although it is likely to have been between 1817 and 1836. Early numbering of houses may give clues to the order in which some of the buildings were erected as the following example shows. In the earlier pages of the deeds of the present numbers 5 and 6 East Cliff, these properties are referred to as No. 3 Marine Terrace, belonging to a Mr. Matthew Hight who owned several pieces of land along East

110 Cliff. Matthew Hight married in 1808, a Miss Letitia Hagell. She died in 1822 and Matthew in 1837. In his Will (dated 1830) Matthew Hight left to his two daughters, Letitia (baptised St. Mary's 1813) and Matilda Mary (baptised St. James's 1820), the house 3 Marine Terrace, eight freehold cottages, one other cottage, one piece of land unoccupied and one piece of land with a house partly erected.

In 1837, when Matthew Hight died, Letitia was married to a Mr. R. W. Sharp of Maidstone, a wine merchant, and her sister, Matilda Mary, was a spinster.

In 1839, states the document, the sisters decided to split the property – "and reciting that the said R. W. Sharp and Letitia his wife and Matilda Mary Hagell Hight were desirous of making a partition".

The 1839 document still calls the property 3 Marine Terrace, whereas in a document dated 1841 the reference is to No. 5 and No. 6 East Cliff. Letitia Sharp and her husband sold Letitia's share (No. 6) in 1841 to a Mrs Emma Eyre, a widow, for £1000. Mary Matilda, with No. 5 as her share, in 1841 married a Mr. Joseph Tootell. The eight cottages were sold to a Dover brewer in the same year, 1841, for £250.

It is interesting to note the change of numbering and the use of 'East Cliff' rather than 'Marine Terrace'. There is inconsistency in the naming of the road about this time. In various documents it occurs as East Cliff, East Cliff Terrace or as Marine Terrace. However, this example does indicate a re-numbering of the houses in the road in 1840, suggesting that most of the building was finished by this date.

Other substantiating evidence can be found in the Dover Guide Books of the period, written by W. Batcheller. We know from these that a lot of building was started in East Cliff in 1817, that by 1836 the houses were "nearly finished" and that by 1844 they were "all completed". The only specific reference here, in the Dover Guide of 1830, is to "the building of a substantial house called East Cliff Lodge on the site of the former Sir Sidney Smith's villa and another genteel dwelling also, tastefully fitted up and the whole encircled by a wall". (East Cliff Lodge presumably the site of the present East Cliff Hotel).

The houses in East Cliff were built before those further along the promenade, where building was commenced on the Esplanade in 1833 and Waterloo Terrace in 1834. The buildings were described as "large elegant lodging houses" and were often let out as summer residences. This was the beginning of a new era for Dover, a period when the town was regarded as a fashionable seaside resort.

A Miracle at Kearsney Manor

WHAT A COINCIDENCE!

On the day, the very day, when Dover's M.P. David Shaw visited the invalids in the Nursing Home the lake had filled with water after having been an expanse of mud. Not many an M.P., surely, faced the election with a miracle under his belt.!