

# *The Archæology of the A20*

## *(and the Dover Sewers)*

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THERE can be few coastal towns in southern Britain that surpass the ancient Cinque Port of Dover in historical importance. The proximity of this settlement to the Continent with its location beside the River Dour within the only significant gap in many miles of high chalk cliffs has ensured its standing as a highly important port since at least Roman times.

During 1991 the construction of a major new road, the A20, together with extensive deep excavations for the replacement of much of the town's Victorian sewer system posed a major threat to the town's buried archæology.

The line of the new road and its related works has required large-scale earth moving and excavations along much of Dover's seaward side, cutting through most of the maritime quarters of the old town. It is these key areas of ancient Dover which have received the least archæological attention in the past and the new construction work has now provided a splendid opportunity to examine these areas in some detail.

Recognising the archæological potential of the project English Heritage made a substantial grant to cover the cost of the work and the Canterbury Archæological Trust was engaged to undertake the task. A small mobile team from the Trust has now been busy in Dover for over a year, conducting both set-piece excavations and watching briefs along a corridor some two kilometres in length and half a kilometre in width.

Fieldwork has been concerned with archæological remains widely distributed both in time and space. Indeed, 'total archæology' has been a hall-mark of the project with remains ranging in date from the prehistoric period to the Second World War being recorded. Moreover, the large scale of the project has allowed fairly detailed overviews of the archæology of substantial areas to be built up in a way that is not often possible in single, set-piece excavations.

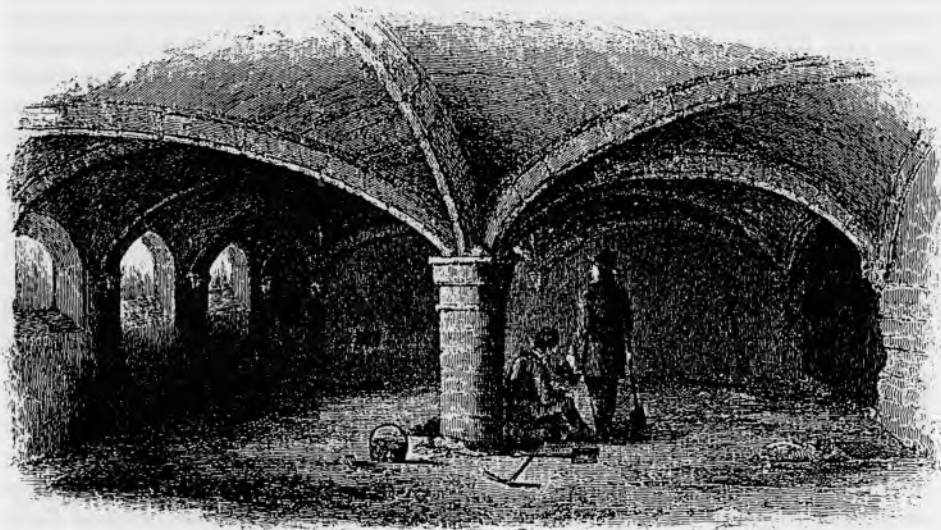
The research of two broad themes of the history of Dover has guided the investigations, namely the evolution of the port and the defence of that port through time. Dover is, and always has been, primarily a port and much of the town's maritime history is bound up with the effects of the gradual silting of the original Dour estuary and the blocking of the river's exit to the sea by constantly moving shingle. This silting culminated in the complete removal of the harbour and all its facilities to Archcliffe, about one kilometre to the west of the original Roman harbour site, during the early post-Medieval period.

One special feature of the project has been the detailed examination of the succession of valley sediments by Dr Martin Bates and a team from the Geo-archæological Services Facility of the Institute of Archæology in London.

Examination of the deep sections provided in contractors' cuttings has been supplemented by bore-hole sampling across most of the project area, allowing a much more detailed picture of the natural silting of the old estuary and harbour site to be built up. The results of this work are being fully integrated with the results of the more conventional archaeological field work and with the information provided by ancient maps – there are at least sixteen 16th-17th century maps of various existing and proposed harbour works for Dover.

The defence of the port facilities at Dover has always been important: during the Roman period two successive forts guarded the site whilst the huge medieval castle on the Eastern Cliffs above the town is world-famous.

Yet the medieval town itself was also defended by a substantial stone wall, all traces of which have long-since been destroyed. Various deep excavations, however, have allowed the recording of a number of sections of the 14th century curtain wall, together with a part of the Boldware Gate which stood at the end of Bench Street.



Medieval Crypt or Cellar as Recorded in Bench Street, 1836 (Dover Museum)

In Bench Street itself, a 40-metre length of Medieval and early post-Medieval frontage has been recorded on the eastern side of the street. The principal structures are the base of a Medieval defensive tower, perhaps part of a rich merchant's house rather than the old Church of St. Nicholas (as was once thought), with the remains of a vaulted undercroft or cellar on its southern side. Both of these structures were briefly recorded before their demolition during road widening in 1836 (see Fig.) and a study of the early accounts in conjunction with the present excavation records should yield some significant new information. On the western side of Bench Street another Medieval undercroft (the so-called Crypt) was recorded and a highly interesting sequence of