

Dover Borough Records Cataloguing Project

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By the time of the last progress report, nearly all the volumes in the collection had been catalogued, but work had not yet begun on the boxed papers (beyond an initial rough listing done soon after the records were accessioned in 1979). The major task during the last seven to eight months has been to sort them in detail. Progress has been slower than hoped, as they are not only very bulky but were also mostly found to be in a very jumbled order.

In addition to this, further Dover Borough material originally accessioned by the Area Archivist for South-East Kent was transferred from outstore to County Hall during 1996: these and some 19th-20th century petty sessions records for Dover recently accessioned from the Channel Courts had to be incorporated into the sorted sequence. The work of arrangement is now complete, the long sequence of Borough quarter-sessions files, 1865-1971, is catalogued, and progress is now under way with cataloguing miscellaneous acquisitions and deposits.

Inputting entries into our INHERIT cataloguing data base was initially done through an Access package which worked slowly and was subject to technical problems. We are confident that the installation this month of an SQL-Server package, which has been successfully tested with INHERIT, will help to achieve more speedy and trouble-free cataloguing work from now on. It is also intended, when cataloguing is complete, to scan images of selected items on to the database.

The material still to be catalogued is too varied and extensive to describe in full but includes the following:-

Dover's Paving Commission assumed responsibility for the town's paving, street lighting, fire service and sanitary affairs from 1778. Its records are unusually full and form one of the major features of the collection. Among them are petitions from local residents for sanitary improvements and other correspondence, tenders and contracts with local tradesmen, paving bonds, accounts, vouchers and litigation papers.

Judicial Records: The Borough's administrative and judicial authority extended to Dover's Cinque Port Liberties in Thanet, including the parishes of St. John (Margate) and St. Peter-in-Thamet (Broadstairs). The records contain coroners' inquests and verdicts for the 1850s; informations and examinations of the Sessions from 1792 (many cases relating to smuggling; much evidence heard before the Cinque Ports Bench, referred for trial by the Dover justices); the justices' orders at Sessions on poor law matters, vagrancy, etc; cases referred by the justices in the 18th century to counsel for opinions, throwing light on many local issues. (It would also be highly desirable to correlate those records already catalogued with those judicial and other

32 records for Dover Borough held by the British Library in the Egerton MSS. and Additional MSS.)

Polls and nomination papers for *municipal elections* from 1708 onwards.

Over fifty boxes of *deeds and corporation leases* of land from the 13th century onwards. Much early material in the collection was listed in J. Bavington-Jones, *Records of Dover* (1920), but on close inspection it appears that, in cases where the author lacked special knowledge, more archivally precise descriptions are needed.

Cinque Ports papers. The Cinque Port connection accounts for the existence in the collection of (for instance) medieval charters and confirmations of privileges relative to the passage over the Channel, 16th century accounts for repairs to Dover Castle, and, more recently, papers relating to the installations of Sir Winston Churchill and Sir Robert Menzies as Lords Warden. Some are listed by Bavington-Jones, but here again his descriptions require revision or expansion: he has misdated certain items and some acquired papers, e.g. those relating to the Cinque Ports'

jurisdiction over Faversham, 1350-1604, are omitted by him entirely.

Miscellaneous acquisitions and deposits: many significant items, such as the naval memoranda of James Boyton and diaries of Thomas Pattenden (a meticulous compiler of diaries and historical notes who witnesses manoeuvres in the Channel at the time of the Napoleonic wars); posters, cartoons and propaganda illustrating civil controversies arising in the 1880s and 1890s over the Dover Harbour Bills and street improvement projects; 16th century papers relating to the upkeep of the harbour before the Dover Harbour Board assumed responsibility for it; 13th to 15th century charters of endowment to the Maison Dieu Hospital.

There are, naturally, standard municipal records relating to administration, finance, freedom, etc., including about 1,500 19th-20th century files of the Town Clerk's Department on a wide variety of matters; many papers, including photographs, relating to public works such as sea defences schemes and railway and tramway projects; many logbooks of First Aid and ARP services, 1939-1945.

A Letter from Dover

One day, in the middle of the month of April, in the year 1776, a London tradesman received the following letter:

Dover, 11th April, 1776

A few days before my setting off from London I called on you to settle our account, but did not find you at home, Affairs of great concern call me for a while in the continent. I shall return to London on the beginning of next October, at which time I'll take care of discharging my little bill.

I am your humble servant,

Dr. MARAT.

This is the earliest extant letter of Jean Paul Marat, the French revolutionary leader

who organised the massacres of 1793 and was murdered in his bath, in 1793, by Charlotte Corday.

The tradesman may have been satisfied with so much politeness but the French colony in London had none too good a reputation in money matters. At this stage of his career Marat was sponging on his friends and flying from his creditors and there is no evidence that he returned to London.

What a list one could compile of notables who have passed through Dover: Chaucer, Erasmus, Henry VIII and Wolsey - to name but four, at random, who are recorded as staying at the Priory!

E L W