

Some TROGLODYTES of EAST CLIFF, DOVER

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AN EARLIER ARTICLE, entitled *Embarking on a One-name Study* (Newsletter 12, January 1992), recorded the demise, in 1833, of carrier Benjamin Burville. Burville family-lore attributed his death to a brush with a highwayman at Oxney Bottom which is on the Dover to Deal road. The truth is less glamorous: it seems that he died in a tragic accident, when he fell off the float of his cart, at Broad Leas Bottom, to the east of Dover Castle. In *The Dover Telegraph & Cinque Ports General Advertiser* (16th. November 1833), the report of the inquest described Burville as "... a poor man who, with his wife and several children, resided in a cave beneath the Castle Cliff". They were troglodytes.

In a subsequent edition of *The Dover Telegraph & Cinque Ports General Advertiser* (30th. November 1833), one reads:

The sympathy of inhabitants of Dover for the situation of a bereaved and distressed widow and four orphans is earnestly entreated and their assistance solicited. The unfortunate widow alluded to is Mary Burville, known to the public as an inhabitant of a cavern cut out of the chalk beyond Mr Nash's Boarding House, who lost her husband, a carrier of coals etc, a few days since, in consequence of his falling from his cart and fracturing his skull. Any generous and humane individual who will either assist her by trading contributions, or who will make use of her horses and carts, which are managed by her brother, for the convenience of their coals and goods will be performing a truly Christian duty.

A friend to the distressed. Nov. 26 1833

One does not know who the friend was or, indeed, the outcome of the plea.

A question raised in my earlier article was,

why should a carrier live in a place so inaccessible as the bottom of Castle Cliff? Could there have been benefits other than the likely cheapness of such accommodation?

Additional benefits of troglodyte living may have been both commercial and aesthetic, though the latter may have been a value that our ancestors could not have

generally afforded. As for the commercial benefits, some clues are given by the early images, of East Cliff, which feature a horse and cart, the stock-in-trade of the carrier. One example, and there are many, was printed in the January 1992 Newsletter (no. 12), in Merrill Lilley's informative *Smith's Folly* article. It featured a horse and cart outside one of the small properties in what is now Athol Terrace, which extends to the east of East Cliff. Clearly a carrier's horse and cart was not an unusual sight in the East Cliff area.

A splendid 1850 photograph of this area shows a carrier's horse and cart, together with heaps of shingle, which have clearly been brought up to the road level from the beach. This photograph and other pictures, referred to in this article, feature on the Dover Museum computer-based Picture Library, which the public can use to explore the Museum's extensive collection of images. In another of the museum's photographs one can see piles of shingle, on the beach, a small distance from a winch which, doubtless, was used to hoist the stones up to road level. The photographic evidence makes it reasonably obvious that the carriers, from this area, were transporting flints for building use and shingle for paving activities. Dover Paving Commission, on 2nd January 1817, ordered that "... the surveyor do procure a sufficient quantity of Beach to be laid on the different roads where the same may be most required for the amendment thereof".

In the 1841 census return widow Mary Burville, charwoman, is recorded living with her four children still under the cliff in the Parish of Guston. Her youngest child was born six months after the death of her carrier husband. One imagines life must have been

quite a challenge for this, as well as many other families. Also recorded under the cliff was James Hart, a carrier, with his family. As readers may be aware, the East Cliff area was extra parochial to Dover until relatively recent times - even the 1891 census records all of Athol Terrace and part of East Cliff as being in the parish of Guston.

The Tithe Return of 1843, for Guston⁵, tells us that Mary Burville occupied a Cottage in the Cliff together with 13 perch of land (about 400 sq. yds.). The tithe does not record anyone else occupying caves but this does not necessarily mean there were no other troglodytes. The Tithe Map, which complements the list of landowners and occupiers in the Schedule, shows Mary Burville's property at the foot of the cliff. From the map it looks as though the entrances of a complex of three caves were on the top of a large cliff fall below the East Point (western side) of Fox Hill Down. This would place the caves in the middle of the Eastern Docks, to the east of the Jubilee Way flyover into the harbour. Perhaps carrier James Hart was still living nearby as a subtenant.

Dover Museum has two beautiful little water-colours⁶ by William Henry Prior, showing the interior and exterior of an East Cliff cave cottage. The floor plan of the cave, as seen in the water-colour, looks very much like the middle cave on the tithe map, so it could well be where Mary Burville and her family lived. The exterior picture shows what appears to be a pair of wash-tubs, with attached scrubbing boards, just outside the cottage garden walls. The tubs look as if they are carved out of blocks of hard chalk. That a laundress was in residence fits in with the information in the 1851 census. Also outside the cave are some strange rock-like objects which Mark Frost, of Dover Museum, has suggested could be anchors made in the Roman fashion - a matter to be followed up. W H Prior was painting during the 1833-1857 period⁷, but I

do not have a date for these two paintings.

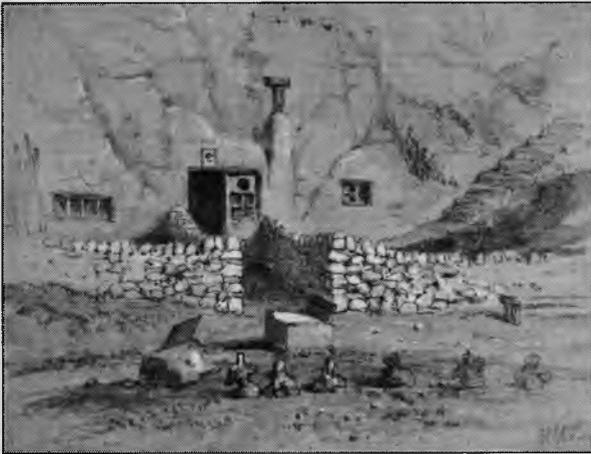
The 1851 census⁸ records Mary Burville as a laundress living at East Cliff in the parish of Guston. It appears that she was still living in the cave with two daughters and two sons. Daughter Elizabeth's occupation was given as laundress, whilst Mary Ann was a dressmaker, and the boys Benjamin James and William Joseph were boatmen. The washing equipment and possible anchors, in the picture, match the supposed tenants' occupations. The next entry, in the census, shows William Clarke, a road labourer, who was probably living in an adjacent cave. Clarke's occupation seems appropriate when one thinks of the plentiful supply of road-building material available in the locality.



In addition to the normal household requirements, two laundresses would have needed a plentiful supply of fresh water. In this area, ample flows of fresh water spring from the bottom of the cliffs. However, much effort would have been needed to carry the water up to the caves. In addition to the usual clothes-line, it was quite common for washing to be laid out on the beach to dry. This can be seen in a pre-1844 engraving, showing Shakespeare Beach, where two ladies are laying out what looks like bed-sheets on the shingle. An early 1890s photograph⁹, of East Cliff Beach, records the same practice. Provided that the area of beach was chosen with some caution, this method of drying would have imparted a delightful aroma to the material.

The description of the Guston enumeration district, for the 1861 census¹¹ includes "...the houses at East Cliff comprising Athol Terrace, Marine Court and the cottages inhabited by the Coast Guard, Sydney Villas & Cottages, the houses under the Cliff towards the zig-zag and the Castle Hill and Broad Leize Farms". The zig-zag, referred to, is that leading up to the Signal Station on Corn Hill at the eastern side of Langdon Hole. From this description one gathers there were still occupied caves east of Athol Terrace. The only candidates, that I can find in the census return for cave-dwelling, are the three bricklayers' labourers Richard Collard, Richard Taylor and a Henry, whose surname I have been unable to decipher. The first was a widower, the other two unmarried. It is possible they were involved on some project in the area - houses were being built during this period. The Burvilles were, by this time, housed more conventionally at East Cliff.

A Dover Guide, of 1830¹², describes a road beyond East Cliff Lodge, a villa built on the site of Smith's Folly:



Passing from this villa, and continuing about a mile along the base of the cliff, there is a curious road, ascending from the beach to a watch house on the cliff, (a perpendicular height of upwards of three hundred feet.) This work was executed by government for

the accommodation of the officers and men employed in the blockade service. There is also a telegraph on the new principle.

This appears to describe a track running along from Athol Terrace, past carrier Benjamin Burville's cave, to the *curious road* up the face of the cliff described in the census, and elsewhere, as the zig-zag. This pathway up the cliff was created as part of the coastal blockade, in about 1818¹³, when a series of stations were built, some three miles apart, to be manned with counter-smuggling officers. In 1831 they became the Preventive Water Guard. The zig-zag led up to the Corn Hill station which, in later years, became a Coast Guard Station. The track, leading to the zig-zag, and Burville's cave can be seen on John Rennie's Dover town maps of 1805 and 1835¹⁴.

Ten years later the 1871 census enumerator¹⁵ tells us "...Houses under the cliff towards the Zig Zag washed away by the sea." Dover Museum's photographs¹⁶ of the area show the effects of sea erosion. Old cliff-falls are eroded and new falls occur, causing some impediment to cave access along the

cliff tracks. The census return¹⁷ intriguingly records a family living in Broad Leas Hole, in sheds, but gives only their ages, no names or occupation. It is not totally clear, to me, whether they were in a cliff-cave or in sheds on top of the cliffs. Following the style commonly used in the Dover area, above the cliff could have been referred to as Broad Leas Bottom or as Broad Leas Hole (as with Langdon Hole and Fan Hole¹⁸). In the Guston census, of 1881¹⁹, several families are recorded as living in Cherry Tree Hole, which sounds very much like a place. This leads one to think our anonymous shed-dwellers were living on top of the

cliffs, not in them.

The subsequent 1881 and 1891 censuses make no reference to houses under the cliff towards the zig-zag. In all the census returns there is the possibility of cave dwellers being listed who are not identified as such, so that

no claim is made that all troglodytes have been identified. In the East Cliff and Athol Terrace area there are several caves which were used for human habitation as well as for the stabling of horses and donkeys. In an affidavit (see Merril Lilley's article referred to above), dated 2nd October 1849, bricklayer John Gregory who, as a boy, worked on *Smith's Folly*, stated that "...and which cave the said John Smith had previously purchased of a man named Simpson for the sum of five pounds which was paid in my presence by the said John Smith to the same man named Simpson who for some years before that time used to reside in such cave...". This cave was at the rear of the Sir Sydney Smith public house (possibly 61 East Cliff). Simpson would have been living in his cave up to about 1783, approximately when the sale took place.

A correspondent, Ernest Crunden¹⁹, told me that big six-footer Andrew Claw, who in 1912 was awarded a 25-year service medal for life-saving activities²⁰, was born in one of the caves. Claw described the caves as very comfortable as they provided shelter from cold winds, and the early morning sun shone in through the windows and door. In the next cave was a shoemaker, in other nearby caves were pigs, donkeys and horses. At a guess, Claw was describing things in the late 1870s early 1880s. My uncle Stephen James George Burville²¹ and Crunden told me that Andrew Claw went for a swim every morning winter and summer. Clearly the troglodytes were of a tough constitution as well as character.

The two Prior pictures certainly give one the impression that life in the caves was comfortable. The fireplace, next to the door, has the chimney rising some feet up the cliff face. Although it is not shown in the picture, my father William Stephen Burville, told me the smoke from the chimneys of caves stained the cliff face. The caves would be cool in the summer and comfortable in the winter although there would have been little light coming through the small windows. The smoke from candles, oil lamps and tobacco would have stained the chalk walls and ceiling, reducing the amount of reflected light. Creating a new shelf, or even a room, involved no expense, only the effort of DIY

chalk excavation. The furnishings in Prior's Cave Cottage painting are sparse, as are the cooking arrangements which appear to consist of just an open fire with an iron grate typical of the period. The walls are hung with several pictures, the subject matter of which cannot be determined.

So how long did the Burville family live in the cave? In January 1831 when Benjamin applied to the Dover Paving Commission²² for permission to alter the pavement to facilitate access of his cart to his house, he was living in Biggin Street. From the newspaper accounts we know he lived in the cave at the time of his death in 1833. Records confirm that this family were cave dwellers from 1833 to 1851. It is possible that they moved into the cave as early as 1831 and did not vacate that home until 1860. This suggests a minimum of 18 years and a maximum of 29.

Stephen Burville²³ wrote that, at about the turn of the century, there were three caves on the Valley Beach - that is below Broad Leas Bottom. These were the last to be inhabited and were known as Oliver's Hole, Claw's Hole and Betsy Burville's Hole. The Claw family we have already met. Betsy was almost certainly Elizabeth, the daughter of Mary Burville, who had not moved into an East Cliff house with her mother. But who was Oliver?

A twentieth century John Smith²⁴, whose mother before marriage was Amy Elizabeth Burville, great-grand-daughter of Benjamin and Mary, stated that these Valley Beach caves were destroyed when the cliff was faced during the work on the harbour at the turn of the 19th-20th. centuries. This work on the cliffs is well illustrated in some of the Dover Museum images²⁵.

This area of Dover, with the castle on the cliff-top and the caves at the bottom, has provided examples of a diverse range of human habitations over the millennia. The Dover Museum Picture Library offers an easy and graphic means for the public to view some of this history. In addition, it is planned to launch, in the near future, a carousel-sequence of the East Cliff area, which will take the viewer through a series of images illustrating how the area has developed during the past two centuries.

The two East Cliff cave cottage pictures are reproduced courtesy of Dover Museum. The author would like to thank the staff of the Centre for Kentish Studies (CKS), Dover Library and Dover Museum for their help and support in researching the archives referred to in this article.

References:

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4. Census 1841 HO 107/466, folio 8, page 10.
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6. Dover Museum, water colours, d00886 and d00889.
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18. 1881 Census RG 12/742/ folio 82/page 12.
19. Ernest Crunden of Dover, now Sittingbourne, 19th. September 1981.
20. Dover Express, 7th June 1912, page 8.
21. Stephen James George Burville, private correspondence 10th. April 1974.
22. CKS, Do/UP/Am/3/1, page 563.
23. Stephen James George Burville, unpublished manuscript Looking Back.
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EXCURSION TO RAMSGATE



Leo
Wright

The Society trip to Ramsgate certainly lived up to the promises (see newsletter No.31), and that despite Saturday 13th June being one of the wettest days of 1998.

Professor May had shown his paces when he talked to us in January. This day he very adroitly used the parked coach and occasional sorties between the showers to show us Ramsgate and to leave us with the wish to return at more leisure.

We found memones - and monuments - to Augustus Pugin and his son Edward's terraces, Van Gogh, not to mention the Romans and St Augustine. And why a Royal Harbour? King Billy (in costume) spoke to us in the Sailors' Church. We must go to Ramsgate again on one of the summer days when they have costumed performers narrating more of the glories of the Regency, anti-Napoleonic wars and Gothic Revival town.

Joan Ligget's organisation was as usual impeccable and the skill of Professor May left us wanting to return and stroll about more of Ramsgate's Victorian past. Not that, as Chairman of the Ramsgate Society, he did not also convince us that he, like we, in the Dover Society, is working to preserve what is worth preserving from the past - the Italian Conservatory, the Casino or the Montefiore Synagogue - and to promote high standards in what is planned for the future.