

VISIT TO THE MARLOWE

West Side Story 20th July, 2000

It was our first trip with the Dover Society as new members. A party of twenty left Dover by coach for Canterbury on what seemed like the hottest afternoon of the year. Despite the fact that we felt we should be making the most of the rare glimpse of the sun, this was more than compensated for by the brilliant show we saw at the Marlowe Theatre, *West Side*

..... by LIZ VEALE

Story, a modern 'Romeo and Juliet' set in America, the singing, dancing and acting as professional as it could be.

Our seats were in a good position and although some of our party found the music too loud we were not of the same opinion. A very enjoyable outing for our first with the Dover Society and many thanks to the organisers of the occasion.

THE OCTOBER MEETING

The meeting held on 16th October, 2000 was divided into two halves. In the first half of the evening members enjoyed a talk by Derek Leach and after the interval everyone was involved in discussions about future projects and other Society matters.

"The Secret Treaties of Dover"

Derek Leach's Address to Members 16 October 2000

by JACK WOOLFORD

The first secret Treaty of Dover began: "For the perpetual union and friendship between the two kings and their states, articles so secret and advantageous to the monarchs have been agreed upon that a treaty of similar importance can hardly be found in any period of history. The Lord King of Great Britain being convinced of the truth of the Catholic religion and resolved to declare it, and reconcile himself with the Church of Rome as soon as the welfare of his Kingdom will permit". To explain this and two other similar treaties, perhaps the most discreditable in England's history, explained our speaker, we had to go back to the 17th century.

Derek Leach outlined the events of the Restoration of Charles II in 1660 and illustrated these with portraits of the King and pictures of his landing at Dover at dawn on May 25 where the Mayor presented him with an ornate Bible which, he said, was "the thing I love above all things in the world". That evening a thanksgiving service at Westminster Abbey had to be cancelled because

Charles slipped away to spend the night with Barbara Palmer (nee Villiers), for which her husband was made Earl of Castlemaine and she Duchess of Cleveland. After twelve years and six children Charles broke with her when John Churchill, later Duke of Marlborough, jumped out of her bedroom window to avoid him.

Charles swore to maintain the Magna Carta and pardoned all those who had opposed his father, Charles I, apart from the 49 who were signatories of the 1649 death warrant. Only 10 were executed - "I am weary of hanging" - but Cromwell's corpse was exhumed and hung at Tyburn. The Cavalier Parliament, more Royalist than the King, re-established the Church of England, though Charles himself was inclined to toleration and tried to get pensions for 2000 Puritan clergy who were sacked. Games and sports, music the theatre and the arts were released from puritan dreariness. Aged 30 Charles was dazzling yet earthy, athletic in every sense of the word. He acquired the nickname "Old Rowley"

8 from his lusty stallion. With 39 known mistresses and 14 acknowledged illegitimate offspring he was nevertheless amused.

Apart from such immediate problems as the Great Plague (1665) and the Great Fire of London (1666), Parliament always kept him short of money which may account for his duplicity and intrigue. "I need not tell you how much I love parliaments" he declared but confided to the French ambassador: "I have to humour people and my parliament". Foreign policy, which he still controlled by prerogative, was the contentious issue. Charles sought military and political alliance with Catholic and Absolutist Louis XIV of France and declared war on the Dutch in 1664 only to have his fleet burned in the Medway and Sheppey plundered. Parliament, with rival Protestant and Parliamentary beliefs and colonial expansionist dreams, preferred alliance with France's enemies, notably Holland and Sweden. Hence the first Secret Treaty, signed at Dover in 1670: Louis was to pay Charles £140,000 for declaring himself Catholic and £200,000 per annum for war with Holland. Half the Cabal (Cabinet) and all the people were not informed.

In a second Dutch War, the English fleet was wrecked in a storm after the bloody but indecisive Battle of Southwold. As to public conversion to Catholicism, Charles consistently prevaricated, acquiring a new French mistress in the process, expelling Jesuits to persuade parliament to pay for a new navy and even permitting his niece Mary to marry Protestant William of Orange. Louis threatened to cancel payments but handed over another £300,000 for a Second Secret Treaty. To persuade Parliament to grant him £1 million, Charles even went to war with France. He also screwed £1.2m out of Parliament for revoking his Declaration of Indulgence to Catholics (and non-conformists) which, though tolerant, was bitterly unpopular. He further broke the Secret Treaty of

Dover by having to assent to the 1673 Test Act which denied public office to non-Anglicans. He declared to both Houses of parliament that there were no secret agreements with France. His answer to Parliamentary complaints about the growth of Popery, the standing army, the French Alliance and his "evil counsellors" was to prorogue and later dissolve it. A third Secret Treaty followed in 1676. In 1678 "peace" was declared with Holland.

By now the crucial issue was the succession to the throne. Having no son by his queen, Catherine of Braganza, Charles' heir was his ardently Catholic brother James Duke of York and, now with a second Catholic wife presumably able to conceive a son. It was on this vital political, constitutional and religious complexity that modern political parties, "Court" and "Country" soon satirically nick-named "Tory" (Irish rebel) and "Whig" (Scottish Covenanter) first formed. Parliamentary elections and dissolutions were followed by three years without Parliament, subsidised by Louis XIV to prevent an English alliance with William of Orange. Additional Customs and Excise levies on rapidly increasing colonial trade enabled Charles to pay off his debts, pension his mistresses and munificently patronise architecture, the arts, and science. He even procured the succession of brother James as James II - although not for long. But that, as Derek Leach concluded, was another story.

This was a splendid solo effort: text and illustrations, talk and projection, clear delivery and piquant asides not only produced a clear narrative but wove the multifarious interacting threads of personality, constitutional, political, religious and moral issues into a masterpiece of enjoyable and instructive entertainment. Queen Victoria may not have cared for him, but as the "Merrie Monarch" he more than made his mark. Moreover as Derek gently hinted, cynicism, duplicity and sheer infidelity continue to thrive in politics as merrily as ever.