

Napoleon III

HIS VISITS TO DOVER AND HIS FLINGS

by Terry Sutton

During the planning of the Dover Society project to put up blue plaques on buildings to mark the Millennium, I was asked to provide evidence for the claim that Napoleon III, on his abdication, was reunited with his wife Eugenie at the Lord Warden Hotel, Dover. This sent me off on several hours of research that not only proved the claim but also made me realise what an extraordinary chap he was.

Louis Napoleon was the nephew of Napoleon I - or so he believed but there's doubt about that. It is possible he was the fruit of a liaison between Napoleon I and his step daughter. After the overthrow and imprisonment of Napoleon I, the Bourbons were restored and members of the Bonaparte family lived in exile. Napoleon crept back into France but had to get out quickly, with his mother and, in 1831, arrived at Dover having sailed in disguise from Calais.

Years later, in 1836 and in 1840, Louis Napoleon led two unwise and fruitless attempts to invade France, one through Strasbourg and the other at Boulogne. Both ended in fiasco and for the Boulogne invasion he was jailed for life in an old fortress at Ham near St. Quentin. But, after a couple of years, he escaped dressed as a carpenter, made a dash to the Belgian frontier

and sailed from Ostend to Dover where his friends were waiting. He was getting to know the back streets of our little port quite well.

He was back in France, legally, a few years later and was elected President of France in 1848 and within three years staged a coup d'etat that led to his being made Emperor. During this time he and his wife Eugenie visited Queen Victoria and Albert on several occasions and were received at Dover with much pomp. There is a famous painting of them leaving Dover after one of their state visits.

During his years in control of France, Napoleon started four quite unnecessary wars and the last one, against the Prussians, led to his defeat at Sedan where thousands of Frenchmen died. He was made a prisoner of war by the Prussians under Bismarck and, on his abdication and release in March 1871, he travelled through Belgium and across the Channel to Dover once more.

Here, in our port, he was taken to the Lord Warden Hotel where he was reunited with his wife and son, the Prince Imperial. He went off from Dover to Chislehurst with them, where, a sick man, he died two years later.

What sort of man was Napoleon III? He proved to be a dictator but with democratic leanings, an imperialist who championed other nations' self-determination - Italy especially, a capitalist with socialist tendencies, a militarist (he caused



Napoleon III, aged 31 (1839)
Drawing by V. Martin

26 four major wars), yet he would vomit at the sight of blood and flesh on the battlefield. The list of paradoxes and contradictions is endless.

The number of love affairs, even after marriage, was also endless. Yet he was devoted to his wife Eugenie. One of his mistresses, an English actress from Brighton, Harriet Howard, so loved him that she spent her fortune financing his attempts to win power. Even when he was locked up in the fortress at Ham he wooed a young pretty laundress... and gave her two children whom he later made counts.

One affair that shook France was that with a 25 year old beautiful circus artiste Marguerite Bellanger, who earlier worked as a chambermaid in Boulogne. They met at a royal hunt and she was soon showing him tricks in which she could stand and walk on her hands. Paris gossip was that she could do other tricks while standing on her hands too!

There were scores more women whom Napoleon III bedded. From Italy, France, and Russia they flocked to him for the honour. There was even a lover in Tunbridge Wells.

It seems to me if Napoleon III had spent less time in bed, indulging his

pleasures, he might have made an even greater Emperor.

Still, we all have our weaknesses!



*Napoleon & Eugenie
(circa. 1862)*

Drawing by E.Senyard

Dover in the Reign of Bloody Mary

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DURING THE SIX YEARS of the reign of Edward the Sixth, who succeeded Henry the Eighth, there was little to report on the fortunes of Dover. The castle suffered badly from neglect and the harbour became more and more unusable, because of shingle (often called 'prebble' in old records), progressively blocking the harbour mouth, so much so that even ships drawing as little as four feet of water could not enter.

Queen Mary started off her reign in the right way, as far as the town was concerned, spending much money on the castle, and being concerned with the harbour problem, though her efforts achieved little. She authorised an indulgence which gave permission to collect money from all over the country for the repair of the harbour. It however produced practically nothing.

A fundamental problem was the landing of goods and passengers from the ships which, being unable to enter the harbour, were forced to anchor offshore, many small boats being used to ferry their goods and passengers to the beach.

These boats, being completely uncontrolled, charged exorbitant fees, and caused both inconvenience and scandal. It is said that these small boat crews, by their exorbitant demands, gave the name to Dovorians of 'Dover sharks'.

To overcome this problem and enable the town to control them, the