

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

Some snippets of Dover History

BORN IN THE YEAR OF WATERLOO

Derek Leach

Ann Fry was born in Dover in the year of Waterloo, 1815, and these are her (edited) memories first told in the Dover Express on 30 April 1909 when Ann was aged 94.

She was born in a little double-fronted Dutch-tiled house next to the sawmill off Charlton Green (site of the present Charlton Centre car park). Edward Fry, her father, was a cooper who worked for Mr Kingsford at Charlton Oil Mills (later Chitty's Mill and now the site of Halfords), and also for Mr Walker at the brewery, which later became Leney's. Charlton Mill used to grind corn in the summer and crush oil seed in the winter. One of Ann's childhood playmates was George Clark who started the Dover Nurseries firm. Just over the river was St Mary's Workhouse and she was often taken there to see the inmates. There was no bridge across the river at Charlton, only a plank to cross. Wagons, carts, horsemen and cattle splashed through the water. Charlton Fair was always held on quarter-day, 6 July, with swings, stalls and booths down each side of the road. There was another big fair that lasted a week: Bartholomew's Fair by Chapel Hill (above Buckland Terrace).

When Ann was a child old Charlton Church, a poor little place, stood close by the river. It was made larger in 1827. Ann attended but services were only held once a fortnight. Mr Monins was the Rector 'a very good man, or so they said' but he usually sent, from Ringwold, his curate who rode a donkey to and fro. Ann and her husband were both in the choir. There was no organ but a clarionette, a serpent' (a

sort of French horn), a big brass viol and other instruments. There were no houses below Charlton Green except for Mr Kingsford's and three old cottages (near where the bottom of Park Avenue is now) until Ashen Tree Lane Dairy was reached. The road was called Charlton Back Road with Gorely's Fields on one side and Maison Dieu Park on the other. There was a wall round the park until Mr Moxon pulled it down and built Brook House (now Maison Dieu car park).

There was a lot of smuggling when Ann was a child (nothing has changed!). Seamen used to bring ashore illegally beautiful lace and silk. Ann's father would have nothing to do with smuggling - but sometimes bought things from the smugglers! Everybody did.

Ann went to school in Queen Street, to the Quakers' School, supported by prominent Dover Quakers. Later a larger school was built at the foot of Durham Hill called the Girls' School of Industry. As a child of seven Ann saw a man hanging at Black Horse Lane - Dover's place of execution (by the Tower Hamlets traffic lights) - and never forgot it. He had shot at a coastguard officer. Both families lived in Dover and so there was 'a great to-do' when he was hung. Ann's teacher held her up for a better view! When Ann left school she went into service at the home of young Mr Walker, the son of the brewery owner, who lived in a large house with a fine garden where the Prince Albert pub stands in Biggin Street. Priory Farm was just behind and there were no other houses in that

direction until you reached Maxton. Ann was living there when the corporation bought the Maison Dieu and converted it into a gaol, closing the old gaol in the Market Place. Mr Walker then moved to a new house at Alfred Place.

Where Castle Street is now there were just meadows and gardens except for Mr Jeken's house, which later became the Town Clerk's office. Stembrook ran from the back of St Mary's Church through the river (no bridge) to Dolphin Lane and the brewery. There were some big houses that way; old Mr Walker lived in a large house in St James' Street; Peter Fector lived in Fector's Place (now the lower end of Russell Street); Admiral Bazely lived in St James' Street beside Fox Passage; John Finnis (who owned the timber yard in Biggin Street) and George Stringer had houses in Dolphin Lane. George Stringer, a farmer from Whitfield, had a long barn in what is now the Castle Street area. Victoria Park was then called Stringer's Field. Ann remembered Edward Knockier going to live in Castle Hill House (which still stands). She remembers often seeing Edward's father, William, walking arm in arm with the Duke of Wellington (Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports) to old St James' Church. William Knockier lived at The Esplanade and had a house and paper mill at Bushy Ruff.

Ann became Mrs Bailey when she married in 1844 and went to live in Trevanion Place (where the Leisure Centre now is) where Mr Trevanion's house once stood. He owned much of the land up to Laureston Place which was called Little Waldershare. Later John Minet Fector built Laureston House. Wilson Gates had a farm beside Trevanion Street. On the other side of Woolcomber Street near the sea was Clarence House, where Madam Rice lived, with a very large garden all down the side of Upper Townwall Street. She was a very fine lady who wore wonderfully big bonnets, but never gloves because, she said,

it wore them out! She owned a carriage and pair. Close by her garden was the Quakers' Burial Ground but nobody was buried there in Ann's time as far as she could remember. There was also the Round House in Townwall Street, built by John Shipdem, the Town Clerk. According to Ann, people said that he built it round so that the devil would not catch him in a corner! It was built on the site of a black hole where prisoners were put (presumably the old 'hole in the wall' gaol). At the corner of St James' Street and Woolcomber Street was the old Rectory, reaching nearly to the church and making the entrances to Woolcomber Street and Trevanion Street very narrow. Ann remembered it being pulled down. St James' Poor House was in Woolcomber Street and Ann remembered her father-in-law, a verger at old St James' Church, paying the Poor Relief in the vestry before the Dover Union was formed (in 1836). In about 1850 Ann had her likeness painted by a travelling artist who was staying at The Three Mackerels on the corner of Trevanion Street and Woolcomber Lane.

Dover changed greatly during Ann's lifetime. When she was a child there were only two houses on the seafront: Smith's Folly under the castle and the York Hotel by the harbour (Western Docks). The seafront was a wide stretch of shingle used as a ropewalk and a military parade area. There were no railways, no steamboats and no gaslight.

Ann's husband died in 1853 and she was left with two children, but was very proud of the fact that she had never claimed parish relief. Nevertheless, she was pleased to be receiving (in 1909) the newly introduced old age pension. By 1909 she had been a widow for 56 years and had lived under five sovereigns: George III and IV, William IV, Victoria and Edward VII.

I wonder what she would make of Dover now, nearly 100 years after she was interviewed?