

Dover Castle Garrisons

by Wendi Atherton - Reported by Merril Lilley

Our President, Brigadier Atherton was posted to Dover in Spring 1976. At the time the architect then in charge of the castle, Michael Kormanic, had plans to convert the nineteenth century Salvin building, the old Officer's Mess, into an 'Interpretative Centre'. He envisaged three different types of restaurant, a cinema, an education area and a lecture hall. He wanted the theme of the decor in the entrance hall to be militaria, including lists of the regiments which had been stationed at the castle painted on the panelled walls. He suggested to Mrs. Atherton that she might try to compile the list. She

through this work, I confess to being unashamedly dotty about the castle!"

Mrs. Atherton started by finding a few regiments named in Bavington-Jones' *Annals of Dover* and Statham's *History of Dover*. Next she obtained a list from the historical branch of the Ministry of Defence, which was on Dover only and started in 1800. On visiting the MOD library in Whitehall, she met someone who pronounced the job impossible and, while this initially dismayed her, it subsequently acted like the proverbial red rag. She was determined to give it a try.

The first problem encountered was that as



The Officer's Mess

told us, 'I don't think he had any idea what he was asking me to do and, as a complete novice, I certainly had no idea what I was taking on!'

As she went on to say, the proposed conversion was abandoned but by that time she was hooked. She said, 'I've been at it on and off ever since, about 25 years (rather more off than on!) and, having lived at the castle for five years and kept my interest since then

well as the castle Dover had a number of barracks, the Citadel, South Front, Drop Redoubt, Archcliffe Fort and Fort Burgoyne (or Castle Hill Fort), and that many of the records just stated 'Dover', so that no list could ever be completely accurate and complete.

She was steered, by Gregory Blaxland, to the Public Records office at Kew and advised to look for Marching Orders and Monthly Re-

turns. This unearthed some valuable results. For instance one might find, 'A Marching Order from Plymouth to Dover Castle. 12th April to 14th May, 1764, taking 4½ weeks.' Or an order from 1781.

'It is His majesty's Pleasure that you

than originally intended. Gradually a picture of a pattern of occupancy began to emerge. The castle was designed in the twelfth century for up to 1000 men and 100 horse in time of war or siege, but often housed only 100 men in times of peace. In



The 77th DC

cause the companies of Col. Rich's Regiment of Foot under your command at Dover or in Dover Castle to march from their places three days before the election of a Member of Parliament begins there, to the next adjacent Place or Places, beyond the distance of two miles and that they do not return to Dover until two days after the election.' 1752. Apparently this happened for every election. Our researcher wondered where to start and considered beginning with the start of the Standing Army in 1660, but then kept finding earlier references to the Civil War period and earlier medieval times and so the research, which was rapidly assuming the form of a book, began at a much earlier date

Stuart times the castle was in a state of disrepair and was very sparsely garrisoned. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries one could easily chart the periods when the country was at war, the militia being in occupation and the regular troops abroad. By then the castle could accommodate 2000 troops. In peacetime the regular army used the castle as winter quarters.

Earlier records might be in Latin, or Norman French, and in pretty indecipherable writing. Often help was needed to read and translate them, but some interesting facts emerged.

One of these, from King Richard in 1377, showed how the governor of the castle was severely admonished. He had undertaken to

keep 30 men-at-arms and 30 archers to guard the Castle and was paid accordingly. When it was found that he was using only 10 men-at-arms and 15 archers he was told to deliver the balance of the money he had received to the Constable of the Castle and in

ble ranks, a captain 12 pence or 16 pence, porters 6 pence, gunners 6 pence, gunner's mates 3 pence.

There were many references to provisions. A document from the late twelfth century gives figures for a garrison of 1000 men for 40



future to retain an appropriate number of days.

men to guard the castle. The report reads, 'Know then that we are greatly amazed how you are willing and dared to serve us in this manner, and regard it as a great fault, and are very unhappy because of the peril and mischief that might come to our said castle as to our kingdom through your fault.'

(Richard II was only 10 at his accession in 1377 so this was probably written for him by John Of Gaunt).

Wages accounts needed a great deal of deciphering. Our researcher was amazed to discover that rates of pay did not change much from 1339 to 1540, when she compared documents from these years. In 1339 a knight had 2 shillings a day, 20 men-at-arms at 12 pence a day, 40 at 6 pence a day and 40 archers at 3 pence each. In 1540, for almost compara-

'Meal for 1000 loaves a day; 600 gallons of wine (2½ quarts per man); beef, pork or mutton on 18 days; 100 casks of beef, 270 hogs, 162 casks of mutton; fish on 22 days; 44,000 herrings (5 herrings per man), 1320 cods, 6000 stock fish or middle cods; cheese, oatmeal, salt, almonds, rice, vinegar, pepper and spices, kidney beans. Wax, cotton and beef suet for candles; sea coal; hay for 100 horses, 100 cart loads, 50 cart loads of litter, 600 horse shoes, 6000 nails; mutton and suet tow for wounded horses'.

There are entries relating to the 1216 siege, to the thirteenth century civil war and the 1267 'Statutes of the Castle', which decreed there should be 20 warders on the castle walls.

From the seventeenth century onwards there was a lot of material to collect and collate. Obviously it would be impossible to mention all her findings in a short talk so our researcher selected some interesting anecdotes for us and some of them are described here. In the first half of the seventeenth century watchmen and soldiers of the ordinary garrison were appointed by the Lord Warden and sworn in individually to the King's allegiance. The jobs were much sought after as they were 'Privileged Exempted and Freed from being Returned Impannelled or put in any Juryes Assizes or any Inquests by the Sheriffe... or do any Service of Personal Attendance in any other place other than the said castle'. Soldiers also made a plea to be exempt from the county musters and other local duties and were excused these. Some gunners lived in but others might be some distance away and did not always answer the castle musters.

Once, in October 1615, there were only 7 gunners to be seen out of 16. The Marshall complained that some of them neglected their duty. William Eldred, who became Master Gunner at the Castle in 1619 wrote a description of his idea of the duties and qualities of a good gunner, who should be sober, honest and god-fearing. Eldred also describes the firing of the 'Basilisco', later known as Queen Elizabeth's pocket Pistol, in 1613, 1617 and 1622.

In 1642, when the castle was taken by surprise for Parliament by eleven Dovorians, led by Richard Dawkes, there was a garrison of only 20 with a rather elderly Lt. Governor.

In the early eighteenth century a company of invalids (about 60 men) was more or less permanently part of the garrison. They were formed from 'Out Pensioners' from the Royal Hospital, Chelsea. In addition there were 1 to 3 companies of infantry. The main duty was guarding French and Spanish prisoners of war. Much graffiti in the keep dates from this period. French prisoners described

it as 'une prison affreuse' (a frightful prison). Over the years there were many references to dishonest practices at the castle. Several times gunpowder barrels were found to be filled with ashes or sand. Arrears of pay was a recurring complaint and cheating the system by not supplying the number of men paid for.

In 1753-54 James Wolfe (of subsequent Quebec fame) commanded his regiment there and wrote, 'I am sure there is not in the King's dominions a more melancholy dreadful winter station... the winds rattle pretty bad and the air is sharp, but I suppose healthy for it causes great keenness of appetite! He thought Dover socially boring but the advantages were, 'we have no magistrates or inhabitants to quarrel with; the soldiers are under our immediate inspection; we can prevent them in any evil designs. it would be prison to a man of pleasure but an officer may put up with it'...

In 1755-6 soldiers were employed alongside civilian workers on massive building works carried out at this time. In 1756 the weather was atrocious. Broken windows were a frequent complaint and the soldiers were happy to blame these on the weather.

In 1803, when William Pitt was Lord Warden, he raised a regiment of three battalions of Cinque Ports Volunteers and his nephew, Viscount Mahon, commanded the 1st Battalion. The regular army did not think much of them.

At the time of Waterloo there was much traffic through Dover, both going out and back, after which the army was drastically reduced again. In peacetime it was regarded as a nuisance and an unnecessary expense.

There were volunteer movements in 1859, 1867 and 1869. On the last two occasions the men were reviewed at Dover by HRH the Duke of Cambridge. In 1869 over the Easter weekend about 25,000 troops from all over the country crowded into Dover for a mock battle, attacking the castle from the plateau behind.

In 1896-8 when General Sir William Butler was Deputy Constable, living in the Constable's Tower, Lady Butler did her famous

1860 to 1925 with small detachments of infantry on guard duty from those regiments stationed on the Western Heights or at Fort



Steady the Drums and Fifes

painting 'Steady the Drums and Fifes'. Writing in her autobiography, she said, 'The Castle was the very ideal, to me, of a residence. Here was History, picturesqueness, a wide view of the silver sea and the line of the French coast to free the mind of insularity... It was a pleasure to give dances at the Constable's Tower, and the dinners were like feasts in feudal times under that vaulted ceiling of the Banqueting Hall... and a winding staircase conducted the unappreciative London servants by a rope to their remote domiciles... My studio had a balcony which overhung the moat and drawbridge. What could be better than that?'

Dover Castle was an artillery station from



Lady Butler

Burgoyne.

Mrs. Atherton told us that she had had great difficulty when she came to the two world wars as reporting of troop movements was forbidden. Many of her sources dried up. War diaries were useful but those for WWI were not kept for home stations after the first few months. Those for WWII were

were some periods when there were no troops at all.

The only military presence in the castle nowadays is for the occasional firing of gun salutes, for instance to commemorate the death of the Queen Mother or to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee. The Deputy Constable (the senior military officer in the area)



Salute for Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

better but quite complicated as there were so many minor units in the castle. Above ground the main unit was a regiment of Coast Artillery. Operational HQ was in the casemates and underground tunnels, which were greatly extended from 1942 to 1943. Admiral Ramsay masterminded the evacuation of Dunkirk from his HQ there and a statue of him was erected on the cliff top in 2000 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Dunkirk.

After the war the castle was a base for several regiments prior to their departure for operations in Korea, Suez or Kenya. There

still resides in the Constable's Tower.

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