

## The Victorians in Dover

*Report by Merril Litley*

### A special exhibition on life, work and play in Victorian Dover

The temporary exhibition at Dover Museum this summer covers every aspect of Victorian life; home, people, dress, jewellery, household effects, kitchenware, china and children's toys and books.

One of the sections on people depicts a Do-

brigade before its embarkation for the Crimean War and also the picture of the 'Steam Packet Quays at Western Docks, 1845.'

Among my favourites are two splendid pictures by William Burgess. One of these is of



ver family called Fox and includes their family tree. Apparently in the eighteen hundreds the average family had six children. Another display focuses on well-known Dover families with a picture of the marriage of Henry Mowll and Gertrude Worsfold in 1889. There are also sections on 'Empire' and 'Industry and Invention'.

There are many interesting old pictures and photographs showing Dover streets and buildings, most of them of the last two decades of the nineteenth century. Many of these give 'then and now' shots under the heading of 'Vanished Victorian Dover', with main streets like Bench Street, Biggin Street and Worthington Lane. Others offer nostalgic shots of places or buildings long since gone; Commercial Quay and the bandstand in Granville Gardens.

There are plenty of paintings of historic interest. I like the one entitled 'Field Day for the Highland Brigade, 1857', showing the

the 'Wellington Pavilion 1839'. This was built in the summer of 1839, on land owned by Dover Priory, to celebrate the first decade of the Duke of Wellington's time as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. In the picture the Town Hall (Maison Dieu) can be seen on the left of the pavilion.

Two elaborate entertainments were held in the pavilion, a banquet on 30th August and a ball on the 5th September. Burgess produced pictures of both these events. The other lithograph the museum has chosen to exhibit shows the Cinque Ports Ball.

These two pictures conjured up such a vision of the people of Dover flocking to the site that I determined to find out more about the celebrations and, a few days later, set off for Dover library to see what I could uncover. I was lucky. The library had a copy of the 'Dover Telegraph' of 1839 on micro file and there the banquet was described in great detail in the week it occurred and the ball,

of rather lesser interest, in the newspaper of the following week.

## The Cinque Ports Banquet and Ball at the Wellington Pavilion

*Report by Merril Lilley from the Dover Telegraph of 1839*

In 1839 Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington, had held the position of Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports for ten years. He continued in the post until his death in 1852. The duke was very popular and the idea of a grandiose celebration to mark his first decade as Lord Warden caught the attention of the public.

The newspaper article describing the banquet covered a complete page of four columns in the 'Dover Telegraph and Cinque Port Advertiser'.

It began, 'On Friday, the 30th August, this most splendid and magnificent entertainment took place at Dover. The Cinque Ports united to celebrate the event of the greatest Commander in the world, being their Lord Warden, and to commemorate it with a splendour and to an extent which will show to future ages how Englishmen in the nineteenth century honoured the man to whom Europe owed its release from the yoke of a tyrant, and to whom his fellow countrymen were indebted for their existence as a free people, and for the security of their national glory and renown.'

The enthusiastic reporter continued in this vein for the rest of the long article. First he described the building of the pavilion opposite the Maison Dieu, which took several weeks and cost nearly £1200, using four hundred loads of timber. It had necessary offices, covered ways and lobbies and the entrance was formed by a covered lobby decorated with flags.

'On entering we beheld a spectacle, which to describe is almost impossible. The rich colours of the banners and flags with the varied and splendid designs of the tapestry, the gold and silver glittering in the rays of light,

the innumerable number of persons present, the beauty and elegance of the ladies' gallery, the long array of nobility, and above all the noble duke himself, created a scene, which to be appreciated as it deserved, must have been witnessed.'

How the reader wishes she could have seen it!

Next all the important personages present were named, long lists of lords and earls. Then the interior of the pavilion is described, detailing all the chandeliers and window lights, all the armaments, coats-of-arms and whole-length figures lining the galleries. Among them all the display of the Duke's arms was resplendent against a suspended drapery of pink and white stripes. In the centre was the Queen's coat-of-arms, surrounded by flags belonging to the Cinque Ports Volunteer Regiment. Above this was a trophy, composed of a cuirass, helmet and other arms taken from the field of Waterloo and the word 'Waterloo' inscribed between two stands of muskets and a scroll supported by eagles.

The plate service was magnificent, the knives having handles of gold, all borrowed from a firm in the City of London. There were four different sources providing the dinner and the wines.

There were twenty-six tables, 25 at each, twenty-six ditto 23 at each, one ditto 124 and the Duke's table 172. 29 quarters of lamb; 56 dishes roast veal; 56 ditto boiled beef; 120 couple chickens; 40 turkey poults; 28 hams; 56 tongues; 120 pigeon pies; 240 venison ditto; 180 fruit ditto; 160 custard puddings; 200 lobsters; 200 salads, cucumbers, pickles, etc.

The article goes on to say that the only cause for complaint seemed to be in the attendance of the waiters, among whom there appeared a want of management rather than a deficiency in numbers!

As the hour for dinner approached all the streets leading to the Priory Meadow were almost impassable. A guard of honour of the

27th (Inniskilling) Regiment marched from the Castle. Finally, at a few minutes to five, the Duke was seen driving from Walmer in his phaeton and pair and drove through the streets to tumultuous cheering. Guns were fired from the Artillery at the Heights and church bells rang. The Duke was received at the Maison Dieu by the Mayor and Recorder of Dover and conducted through a double line of noblemen and gentlemen, including the architect of the pavilion.

As His Grace, dressed in the *cinque ports*' uniform, passed from the portal, under the ladies' gallery along the entire centre of the pavilion, and through a line formed of those assembled to do him honour, the most enthusiastic and rapturous greetings met his

ear. The ladies waved their handkerchiefs and the fine band of the 11th dragoons struck up, 'See the conquering hero comes'. On reaching his chair the Duke was again similarly greeted nor did the cheering cease until the trumpet sounded for silence.

The article reported that 'after the cloth was cleared' the toasts began and gave in some detail all the toasts and speeches which followed. The full account covered half a page of the newspaper.

The celebrations were not over. On the following Thursday, 5th September, a Grand Festival Ball was held in the pavilion before it was dismantled. Once again this event was reported in the *Dover Telegraph*, although in less detail than that given for the ban-



*The Cinque Ports Banquet*

Lithograph by William Burgess Published 1839

View of the interior of the Wellington Pavilion, from the Ladies Balcony. The gentlemen are at their tables with dignitaries and Wellington on the dais in the background.

The illustration also provides excellent detail in the decoration, also designed by Burgess. Hung above the dais were the Royal Arms, the coat-of-arms of Wellington, the Cinque Ports Volunteers flags and trophies taken at the battle of Waterloo.

Text © Dover Museum.

quet.

The ball was attended by the Duke of Wellington, several of the principal county families and most of the leading inhabitants of the town and neighbourhood. The number of tickets sold was 940. All the decorations remained from the banquet, the only alteration being the removal of the tables that occupied the centre, where a floor for dancing was laid down. Mount's band played from the gallery that formed the dais, while, at the other end of the hall were the bands of the 90th and 27th regiments, which played pieces alternately between the dances. Elabo-

rate refreshments were served on massive plates.

The Duke, in his usual dress, arrived at nine and stayed until half past eleven, 'during which time he was moving about among the groups of dancers, conversing affably with many gentlemen, and, we understand, expressed himself highly gratified by the magnificence and splendour of the scene'.

The article went on to list all the most important guests attending the ball.

A footnote to the account reported that, on the following day the Duke entertained the Mayors of the Cinque Ports at dinner at



The Cinque Ports Ball at Dover Castle.

Lithograph by William Burgess Published 1839

View of the interior of the Wellington Pavilion, Dover, where a ball to celebrate the ten years of the Duke of Wellington as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports in 1839, was being held.

The guest of honour, the Duke of Wellington, can be seen in the left foreground.

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