

Cowgate Cemetery

Report by Lesley Gordon

In 2001, at the behest of the White Cliffs Countryside Project, the Society took on what seemed a daunting project to clear two plots of graves in the derelict and overgrown Cowgate Cemetery at the foot of the Western Heights. It also resolved to make a record of the location and inscriptions of surviving headstones. Emboldened by early compliments, the volunteers in the two clearance parties gradually extended their remit and the inscribers followed them, until all eight plots plus the line of vaults along the rear wall were included in the project.

Three years later it is with some relief that the recording team can report a successful conclusion to the exercise, and a large tome is ready to be lodged with Dover Museum. This contains maps of the eight plots and line of vaults showing the location and grave number of each recorded gravestone, followed by a section of inscriptions and a final index of names, each with its own burial reference number. Another book, comprising just maps, has been prepared for Dover District Council who hold all the burial records for the cemetery, but who for many years have had no map, or easy way of locating individual graves within the plots. The Society's enterprise built on and consolidated the work of Elizabeth de Bourbel who, in the 1980s recorded over 400 tombstones. The Society has itself recorded only slightly less, yet many more inscriptions must have been lost to the elements as each of the eight plots contained over 200 graves, although not all would have had inscribed stones. Over 7250 people were buried in the cemetery between 1837 and the 1950s.

Although the Museum and the Council will eventually hold the original record, it

is hoped that the local Family History Society will put the whole work on microfiche so that the Society and Dover Library can hold copies for their records. The Family History Society also intends to make copies of the microfiche available to purchase for a small fee. In this way, the public will have ready access to data captured for posterity, as well as easier access to the cemetery itself.

Cowgate is one of many cemeteries in Dover, and those researching family histories may not be sure where a relative is buried. In these cases, the District Council, who have the records for Cowgate, St. Andrews at Buckland, Charlton, St James's and St. Mary's cemeteries (but not the churchyard burials) are happy to do some delving. Call Madeleine Whitcombe, Environmental Support Officer on (01304) 872287 for details or e-mail her on burials@dover.gov.uk. If possible, have the full name of the person you are researching and date of death (or approximate date of death) ready as a charge may be made if a lot of detective work, or more than one name, is involved. If the burial was at Cowgate and you are given the grave number, the society's records in the museum or library should enable you to at least locate the grave with reasonable accuracy even where a headstone is missing. The more fortunate will find full details of the tombstone's inscription in the records. So, grateful thanks are due to Ian Murton and Hugh Gordon for their tireless labours in collecting and recording this piece of Dover's history. Unlike the teams of clearance volunteers, who will labour on for the foreseeable future, their work is done.