

GLIMPSES OF THE PAST

Some snippets of Dover History

MEMORIES by Bessie Newton

Budge's photos brought back so many memories for me, particularly those of when I was a child in the 1930s, my sister Doris was two years older, my brother Harry two years my junior. These recollections are random and not in any chronological order.

The harbour was a source of wonder to me then, boats coming and going, the beach, where we spent so much time in the seemingly endless summer days, fortified by jam sandwiches and lemonade powder drinks.

One of the family events spoken of with pride was the annual swim from the breakwater. My two older cousins, John and Rosie Jenkins, were excellent swimmers and we used to go to watch and cheer them into shore. My sister Doris, taught by Rosie at the old baths, also became a very good swimmer but, despite all efforts, they realised I was pretty hopeless and much more interested in books!

I remember so clearly the Granville Gardens, for me it was the band concerts, the stirring music. This could be heard free, the seats were for those who could pay. The attraction for my sister was the roller skating area, again she excelled while I after a few tentative sorties, abandoned the whole hazardous exercise.

The highlight of the summer was the annual Regatta. Stalls lined the seafront, packed with sweets and streamers. Yachts raced across the harbour to cheers from spectators and military bands played while marching up and down the front.

Living in Clarendon Place we used the 64 steps as a way of getting to my Gran. My first memories of her are when she

lived in a little cottage in a dark lane that ran beside George Fox's shop on Queen Street, her yard backed on to their property. I often looked over, absorbing the delicious smells which came from there, adept at looking pathetic, I sometimes was rewarded by Mr Fox with some delicacy! Later she moved to Gorley Almshouses. Her apartment was upstairs; what a fascination for me to explore. She was Bessie too, warm and comforting and a refuge for me. The Cause Is Altered was very conveniently placed for Gran, she used to send me there to the off-licence, at quite a tender age, for a pint of stout. This was carried with great care by me, in a jug covered with a beaded cloth, having been admonished not to spill any. I enjoyed the chapter on public houses as it was a reminder of my father, Harry. If asked for directions they were always via them rather than street names!

All those streets and shops - I had forgotten so many of them. The Market Square, a hive of activity on market days and much patronised by my mother, who produced wonderful meals on a very small income. Mr Alifano, who sold hot chestnuts from a glowing brazier in winter and delicious ice-cream in summer. I still remember the excitement, when I won a scholarship to the Girl's County School, of going to Killick & Back for my uniform; it had a special aura.

My favourite was Snargate Street with its intriguing jumble of shops, I believe it was near the top end that there was one that made rock. I would stand for ages watching them roll and make it with Dover running through, and then we could buy a halfpenny worth of the ends

they snipped off.

All the old shops, churches and streets - I could go on ad infinitum but I cannot finish without recalling Brook House - which was very much a part of my childhood. My aunt and uncle, Bessie and Bob Beer, were caretakers there for many years. Their quarters seemed quite grand to me, they had a bathroom and inside toilet, however, they had to ascend a few flights of stairs to their bedroom. I spent

many hours there, and, when the offices were closed, would help my aunt to clean them. How palatial they were to me, particularly the Town Clerk's office. The demolition of Brook House was like taking away part of my childhood, but my memories of it are still crystal clear.

Though now distant from Dover, like the rock, its name is written through me and is a part of me. Thank you for so many memories.

THE MAN WHO WANTED DOVER A FREE PORT

by Terry Sutton

Arnold Braems, a prominent Dover man in the seventeenth century, knew how to make money and how to waste it. A leading Royalist, he was at his happiest when Charles II landed at Dover on the Restoration in 1660. As one of Dover's Members of Parliament he tried, and failed, to persuade the House of Commons to make Dover a free port. Arnold Braems, of Flemish stock, worked with his father Jacob and undertook to farm out the Customs work at the port. As Dover was the most efficient port between the Thames and Southampton, there was a lot of money to be made. And he made it, quickly building up the family fortunes. During the civil war, which began in 1642, Braems joined a local Royalist troop in which he was promoted a major. After Charles I was executed in 1649, Braems kept quiet but records show that Cromwell's secret service kept tabs on him in London and in Dover. When, in 1660, it became an open secret that negotiations were in progress to bring Charles II back to the throne, Braems got into trouble and was arrested. Diarist Samuel Pepys tells that, at Gravesend, after Braems had drunk too many toasts to Charles, he was arrested for shouting "Vive le roi." But his guards realised which way the political wind was blowing and Braems was soon released. And within a fortnight he was elected a Member of

Parliament for Dover - along with Sir Edward Montague who had arrested him! The day after Charles II was welcomed ashore at Dover, on the Restoration, Braems was knighted at Canterbury by the king. While serving as an MP, he was mayor of Dover at the same time, Braems tried to persuade his colleagues that Dover should be made a free port, absolved of any Customs duties and taxes.

He failed but if he had succeeded what a difference the Port of Dover would be now. Braems soon got fed up with his duties in London and returned to making money in Dover. He acquired the lease for a stretch of the waterfront where he built warehouses and Customs posts. Income just poured in. He became so wealthy he bought the Manor House at Bridge near Canterbury and on the site built the enormous Bridge Place. Hasted records he spent so much on Bridge Place he exhausted his fortune on the construction and maintaining the property. Braems, married three times, died at Bridge Place in 1681. His first wife is buried at St Mary's Church, Dover while the other two, who also died before him, are buried at Bridge. His son Walter inherited Bridge Place and lived there until his death eleven years after his father. His widow soon found Bridge Place too expensive and sold it. The next owner also realised it was too big and demolished half of the property.