

Installation of the Lord Warden *at the* Court of Shepway

A PERSONAL VIEW BY OUR CHAIRMAN DEREK LEACH

IN 1979 I WAS ONE OF THE CROWD in the Market Square cheering Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother as she passed in her carriage in procession from Dover Castle to the grounds of Dover College where she was to be installed as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports and Constable of Dover Castle. It was rather different for me on 12 April 2005 when, as Chairman of The Dover Society, I had the honour of witnessing the installation of Admiral the Lord Boyce, the 119th Lord Warden, in the grand marquee. He had already met the representatives of the Cinque Ports at Dover Castle where he had been presented with the castle key and had attended the Hallowing Service in St. Mary-in-Castro.

My old friend, Joe Harman, a well-known local character and researcher of Dover history, also received an invitation to attend as one of the surviving Freemen of Dover. I pushed Joe, aged 90 and confined to a wheelchair, from the car park to the college. In due course we were allowed to enter the magnificent marquee through the guard of honour made up of smart sea cadets - at least half of whom are girls in these days of equality. Being in a wheelchair meant that Joe could sit in the main aisle and I could sit at the end of a row next to him, which meant that both of us had a grand view of everybody arriving and of the formal proceedings.

The army was in firm control of proceedings as the great and the good began to arrive to take their seats, including many army and navy officers both serving and retired and our own

President, Brigadier Maurice Atherton, a former Deputy Constable and the First Sea Lord. The bewigged Lord Chancellor was in the front row of the audience. By noon most of the 400 participants and spectators had taken their seats and we awaited the arrival of Admiral the Lord Boyce.

Having inspected the guard of honour comprised of sea, army and air cadets, he



processed in, followed by all the mayors and barons of the Cinque Ports and the two Antient Towns, who were preceded by their macebearers in all their finery. They took their seats facing the distinguished audience, as did the Town Clerks, with the new Lord Warden in their centre. The Sergeant-at-Admiralty placed the Silver Oar on the table in front of the Lord Warden. The formal proceedings began with the Seneschal reading the Queen's proclamation summoning the Grand Court of Shepway. The fourteen Mayors of the Ports and Corporate Members handed in the names of their representatives to

the Seneschal who announced that the Court was formed. As requested by Admiral Boyce, the Joint Solicitor then read the Letters Patent from the Queen appointing the Lord Warden and detailing the duties and privileges of the office. The Mayor of Hastings, as the current Speaker of the Cinque Ports, then invited Admiral Boyce to undertake the duties of the ancient and honourable office and to uphold the franchises, liberties, customs and usages of the Ports. Admiral Boyce accepted.

As the Mayors of the fourteen Cinque Ports bowed to the new Lord Warden, an army officer radioed *HMS Albion* to fire the 19 gun salute and we heard it rumble around the bay as the Lord Warden's flag was raised at the castle. This set several dogs barking in the college vicinity which half-drowned the speech by Admiral Lord Boyce when he



replied to the Address of Congratulation. When the dogs stopped, further interference came from a lone drummer outside the marquee!

With the proceedings completed, the Seneschal proclaimed the Court dissolved and the Lord Warden left. Efficient army officers lined up the distinguished guests in precedent order for the procession from the college to the Maison Dieu where they were to have lunch. As the procession



took a longer route via Norman Street, it allowed Joe and I to scurry down Effingham Crescent in time to see the rear half of the procession reach the Town Hall.

It was over for us. No doubt the procession for a retired Chief of the Defence Staff was not so impressive as that for the Queen Mother back in 1979, but the ceremony inside the marquee maintained the ancient tradition of the Crown's appointee promising to protect the ancient rights and liberties of the Cinque Ports, which were once so vital for the defence of the realm.

My wife and I were also fortunate to receive an invitation to the reception on board *HMS Albion* that evening to meet the new Lord Warden. With two or three hundred others we boarded this modern assault ship and made our way down countless iron stairs to what resembled a car deck on a ferry where presumably the assault craft and helicopters were



HMS Albion

normally stored. Lord Boyce welcomed everybody individually and then each couple were whisked away by a naval officer who obtained drinks and made polite conversation. Our officer was in fact a local lad who had worked at AVO's. After circulating for a bit, we were summoned up to the helicopter deck where a Royal Marines' band entertained us with Beating Retreat in the fading light. That marked the end of the evening and Lord Boyce said goodnight as we stepped off the ship. Back in 1979 it would have been on board the *Royal Yacht Britannia*, but you can't have everything!

*All photographs with the
kind permission of Phil Wyborn-Brown.*

