

# *MP Who Proved To Be No Butterfly*

by Terry Sutton

Every year, for 300 years, our civic leaders have distributed the Papillon Charity to deserving recipients in Dover.

Just who was this man Thomas Papillon with the French name meaning butterfly whose generosity has benefited our citizens down the ages?

Thomas Papillon sprang from a French Protestant family who, in the reign of Elizabeth I, were asylum seekers in this country. His father David and the then family stole away from France in 1588 but their ship was wrecked near Dover and Mrs Papillon was drowned. His father presumably married again and Thomas was born in Putney in 1623, although the family home was in Leicestershire.

At the age of 14, young Thomas was apprenticed to a member of the Mercer Company and made progress. This was the time of the aftermath of the Civil War and he and a fellow apprentice began plotting for the overthrow of Cromwell and the restoration of the monarchy. Their plot was discovered and the two had to run away to France.

By about 1648 Thomas Papillon thought it safe to return to England but he was arrested and jailed at Newgate until the man to whom he was apprenticed bailed him out so that he could continue his apprenticeship. He served under this employer for 13 years until the age of 27 when he embarked on a merchant's career on his own account, becoming a director of the East India Company.

Thomas is reported to have taken no further involvement in politics until after the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 (when Charles II landed at Dover). In 1666 Thomas purchased the Manor of Acrise near Folkestone and around this time he married Jane Broadnax of Godmersham.

In 1673 the Earl of Sandwich died and his heir, Dover MP Viscount Hinchinbrook, went to the House of Lords creating a vacancy at Dover. Papillon made his move and contested the election that proved to be hard fought. His opponent was Admiral Sir Edward Sprague who had the support of Dover Corporation (an offer

of £300 to the town might have had an influence in that support). Papillon was elected but his opponents alleged there was something wrong with the election procedure so another election was ordered. Not to be outdone Dover Corporation hastily appointed 52 new Freemen (who had the vote) and this second election resulted in Papillon's defeat. Before Papillon could take action on what had been going on in Dover his successful opponent, Admiral Sprague, was killed in action against the Dutch in August 1673. The House of Commons ordered that Thomas Papillon should be admitted as Member of Parliament for Dover. He became active in Parliament on commercial issues and introduced and carried through a Bankruptcy Bill.

There was further trouble for Thomas Papillon during his third term as an MP when he became involved in strife with the Lord Mayor of London while he was carrying out his duties as Sheriff of London. Due to some kind of legal mix-up a writ was issued under Papillon's name for the arrest of the Lord Mayor for which the mayor hit back with a court action that resulted in Papillon being ordered to pay £10,000 damages. To evade this punishing fine Thomas mortgaged his estates in Kent and dashed off to Holland where he remained until the end of the Stuart dynasty in 1688.

After the abdication of James II and the arrival of William III (William of Orange), Thomas Papillon returned from exile and in January 1689 was again returned as Dover's MP. He was elected Dover's MP five times between 1673 and 1690 and was followed, after his death in London on May 5 in 1702, by his son Philip and later by David Papillon who served as Dover's MP from 1734-1741.

\*In his will Thomas Papillon bequeathed £400 for the purchase of land, houses or annuities with the profits arising to be used to help the sons of Freemen of Dover to become apprentices or to help the sons of poor Freemen to set up in trades. Or to be distributed in helping poor Freemen as should appear fit and convenient. That is what Dover councillors seek to do every January.