

Heritage Open Days in Dover 2007

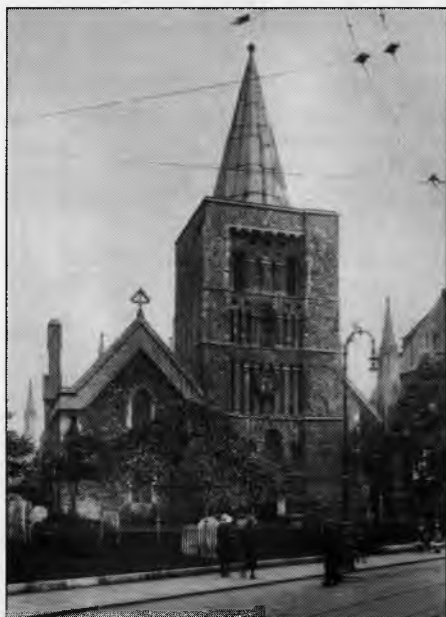
Thursday 6th to Sunday 9th September

Derek Leach

Once again The Dover Society is coordinating arrangements in Dover for Heritage Open Days, organised by English Heritage and the Civic Trust every year. This event celebrates England's fantastic architecture by encouraging free access to buildings that are usually closed to the public or would normally charge an admission fee.

Dover has a great wealth of historic buildings, but only some such as Dover Castle and the Roman Painted House are normally open to the public. This year six properties will be open to the public free of charge, including two for the first time.

Grand Shaft Staircase: this unique triple staircase was started in 1804 and finished in 1807. It connected the barracks and fortifications on the Western Heights through the 250 foot high cliff to sea level, Snargate Street and the Pier District, enabling troops to move quickly up or down its 140 steps within the cliff plus another 59 into the barrack yard. In 1812 a Mr Leith of Walmer rode a horse up the staircase for a bet.



Church of St. Mary the Virgin: dating from Saxon times it was built originally by the secular canons of St. Martin Le Grand, but rebuilt by the Normans. At the Dissolution it was saved from demolition when Henry VIII granted it for use as a parish and civic church. Unfortunately, because of its weak foundations, it was rebuilt in 1843, although its original arches and columns were reinstated. The magnificent tower survived this restoration.

St. Edmund's Chapel: this tiny cemetery chapel in Priory Road was consecrated by St Richard of Chichester in 1253 in memory of his friend, St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury 1234-45, and was probably used as a cemetery chapel for the Maison Dieu close by. Hidden for many years by development around it and used as a workshop, it was revealed again following war damage to the surrounding buildings. The chapel was restored and reconsecrated in 1968.



Maison Dieu House: this fine Jacobean house in Biggin Street is the oldest domestic building in Dover. It was built in 1665 as the Agent Victualler's residence close to the Maison Dieu, which Henry VIII had requisitioned as a store for the Navy Victualling Office following the Dissolution. In 1834 it became the residence of the commander of the Royal Engineers in Dover before becoming a private residence. The Kingsford brewing and milling family and the Mummery family who owned the Stembrook tannery lived here during the 19th century. Bought by the Corporation in 1899, the house became council offices until after the Second World War when it became the public library. Following the move of the library to the Discovery Centre, the premises were purchased and beautifully restored by Dover Town Council for its use.



Unitarian Church: this brick-built octagonal church sitting above York Street was constructed in 1820 and its worship area reflects the shape of the building. The origins of the church go back to 1643 to a local community of Baptists who established a meeting house in 1655, but were persecuted following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. In 1692 Samuel Taverner made part of his house available for worship and part of the garden as a burial ground. Freedom of belief and form of worship as a Unitarian Church was agreed by members in 1916. Following Second World War damage, the chapel reopened in 1952.



Dover College – the remains of St. Martin's Priory: built in the 12th century it was suppressed in 1540 as part of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries. The site was leased for farming and most of the buildings fell into disrepair. Fortunately, the grand Norman refectory was used as a barn and survives today. Dover College opened on the site in 1871 when the refectory and gatehouse were restored and the king's hall became the college chapel. Part of the cloister also survives.

Opening times will be:

ST. EDMUND'S CHAPEL - Thursday to Sunday 10am to 4pm

MAISON DIEU HOUSE - Saturday only 10am to 4pm

UNITARIAN CHURCH - Saturday only 11am to 4pm

GRAND SHAFT STAIRCASE - Saturday and Sunday 10am to 4pm.

DOVER COLLEGE - Saturday and Sunday. Guided tours only at 1pm and 2pm each day.

ST. MARY'S CHURCH - Saturday 10am to 4pm

If you would like to find out about the other buildings open in the region call 020 7539 7921 or visit www.heritageopendays.org

Contact for more information: Derek Leach 01304 823926.