

# Heritage Open Days in Dover

— Saturday 13th & Sunday 14th September 2008 —

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*The annual Heritage Open Days event is organised by English Heritage and the Civic Trust. This event is arranged to encourage free access to buildings usually closed to the public or who normally charge an admission fee. This year The Dover Society coordinated arrangements in Dover for the viewing of six properties.*

## Maison Dieu House



Built in 1665, in Biggin Street, as the Agent Victualler's residence this Jacobean house has now been purchased and fully restored by Dover Town Council. In 1834 it was the residence of the commander of the Royal Engineers before being purchased by the Kingsford brewing and milling family as a private residence. The next owners were the Mummery family, owners of the Stembrook tannery. The local Corporation bought the property in 1899 and converted the building into council offices. This remained as the use until after the Second World War when it became the public library until changed to council offices. Visitors were able to view the town's civic regalia, which was on display during the tour of the building.

## Dover College

Mike Vanderhoeven and Rupert Hill led the tours of the college which took in the Chapel, the Norman refectory and the gatehouse. In the grounds are the remains of the Priory of St. Martin and St. Mary of the New Work at Dover. Founded by King Henry I on the 4th May 1130 it is known popularly as Dover Priory. The refectory, built mainly of Caen stone, is the only Norman refectory in Britain still used for its original purpose. The Chapel was once the King's Hall, or White Hall, and it is said that King Stephen died here in 1154. The gatehouse, rebuilt in 1320, is now the home of the drama department.

On 4th August 1295, during a small French invasion, one of the monks, Blessed Thomas de la Halle, was martyred. His tomb in the Priory Church was a place of



pilgrimage. The greatest period in the Priory's history was at the beginning of the Renaissance, 1371-93. The accounts for 1530-31 show Thomas Tallis as the organ master on an annual salary of £2. On 17th November 1835 the Priory was dissolved by Henry VIII and its lands handed over to the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Dover College began life with 15 boys on 12th September 1871 with the formal opening taking place on 19th October. During WWI the College was evacuated to Leamington Spa and in WWII to Devon. A Royal Charter was granted to the College by King George V in 1923 and the first girls were admitted in 1975.

### St Edmund's Chapel

Situated in Priory Street this tiny cemetery chapel, consecrated by St Richard of Chichester in 1253, was dedicated to his friend St. Edmund Archbishop of Canterbury 1234-45. Hidden for many years, following war damage to the surrounding buildings the chapel was revealed again. In the mid 1960's the chapel was restored and in 1968 it was reconsecrated.



### Church of St. Mary the Virgin



Situated in Biggin Street this parish church, nearly 1,000 years old, has been enlarged three times. Excavations beneath the floor near the font have shown evidence of a Roman bathhouse. From 1585 to 1826 the Town Mayor was elected here. Seven of the eight bells installed in 1724 are still in use today. In 1843-44 Canon Puckle had the medieval church rebuilt, with the exception of the tower. Declared unsafe in 1844 the tower was repaired in 1893. One of the bells returned to the tower in 1898 had to be replaced as it was found to be cracked. During WWII the church roof was damaged and most of the stained glass windows were lost.

One of the more unusual parts of the tour was that to the bell tower. The ringers' gallery is on the first level where some of the bell ringers were on hand to answer questions. A number of the team are female including the youngest, a schoolgirl along with her sister and mother.

Above this is the clock chamber which used to be the ringing chamber until that was moved down to the gallery below in 2002. The clock dates from 1186/7 and strikes the hours and quarters. It was fascinating to be able to climb up above the bells in the bell chamber and see the sound-control system;

the volume heard outside is regulated by shutters. On the outside of the south face of the tower are the clock face and a sundial that dates from 1656.

### **The Unitarian Church**

Located in Adrian Street, just above York Street near the roundabout with Snargate Street, this is a grade 2 listed building. Originally it was known as the Adrian Street Chapel, designed by the architect Thomas Read, at a cost of £2,100. Completed in 1820 and licensed for marriages in 1838, the building is unusual in that it is in the shape of an elongated



octagon. The chapel is surrounded on three sides by the old burial ground which was closed in 1854. Most of the original roof and ceilings were renewed as a result of war damage and a fire in 1987. Inside are box pews to seat 136 people and simple stepped pews in a small semi-circular gallery. On the wall there is affixed also a small memorial tablet to the war dead. The G. M. Holdrich pipe organ, built in 1855 at a cost of £65, was played expertly throughout the visiting hours. There was also a small art exhibition to add interest to the visit.

### **Grand Shaft Staircase**

The lower entrance in Snargate Street is a part of the restored guardroom. Entered through a short tunnel there is a unique triple staircase, each part with 140 steps,

which lead to an open bowl with another 59 steps to ascend. The barracks and fortifications on the Western Heights are some 250 feet above Snargate Street. The steps wind clockwise one above the other round a central vertical brick faced shaft open at the top. The staircases are lit naturally by windows in the side of the vertical shaft. Work on the structure started in 1804 to a plan by Lieutenant-Colonel William Twiss and was ready for use by 1807. The shaft gave troops rapid access to defend the harbour area and the town. It could also serve for the withdrawal of troops to the heavily defended Western Heights.

For a wager in 1812 Mr Leith from Walmer rode a horse up the shaft. After the threat of invasion had abated the use of the three staircases became segregated and notices erected to indicate who was entitled to use each one. There are various versions; the most popular seems to be "Officers and their Ladies", "Sergeants and their wives" and "Soldiers and their Women". Bavington-Jones quotes "Officers and their Ladies", "Soldiers", and "Women" (or "Civilians").

