

Dover Society Commemorative Plaque

The executive committee on behalf of the members of the society are attempting to have a plaque erected by St. Mary's Churchyard in honour of Thomas Pattenden, all traces of his grave having been removed.

From Joe Harman's files...

THOMAS PATTENDEN

Dover's Diarist

This is a summary by Derek Leach of an article by
A. L. Macfie in *Archaeologia Cantiana* Vol. 4 XCIV 1978.

For more than 20 years (1797 to 1819) Thomas Pattenden recorded interesting 'daily remarks and occurrences' about what was happening in Dover, the country and the world. Being English he always mentioned the weather! Thomas, born in Dover in 1748, was a draper and stocking seller living at 1 Townwall Street where his wife took in children needing sea air or seawater! Eventually Thomas became one of the wealthiest and respected men in Dover, a Freeman (by purchase), an assessor of taxes, a churchwarden and doer of good works. He was well read, sketched, painted, collected coins and fossils, but above all perhaps was a keen observer of Dover life.

In his diaries he made careful note of ships passing Dover, especially great fleets, including one that took six hours to pass. A watchful eye was kept on the British economy noting in 1797 that the Privy Council had suspended the gold standard and in 1800 that the price of candles and soap had risen sharply because of an expected war with Russia.

So keen was he that he bought the three volumes of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* when published in 1797.

During the French wars Thomas noted the recruitment and training of volunteers for local militia service and in 1803 recorded that the volunteers paraded in their scarlet uniforms on the Rope Walk and then marched with William Pitt, Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports at the time, at their head to Maison Dieu Fields. In 1804 he made drawings of the French coast and Boulogne harbour for use by the military. Apparently, with the help of his spy glass he could even see horses ploughing on the French cliff tops, The strengthening of Dover's defences to counter the Napoleonic threat were also recorded in detail as well as troop movements from the town. He also managed to see several sea battles from the cliff tops. Captured French sailors were kept in the town gaol; in 1808 Thomas recorded that three of them escaped in a boat, but they were pursued and recaptured way out in the Channel despite a thick fog!

The great sea and land battles of the period were also recorded, including Trafalgar and Waterloo, which were celebrated in Dover by parades, gunfire and a grand ball or supper with candles in all the house windows illuminating the town. Thomas was certain that God was on England's side and was punishing France for its wicked ways.

During these historic times Thomas carried on his business as usual, ordering his goods from various parts of the country, including Canterbury. Occasionally he walked part of the way to the Halfway House or to Bridge. He recorded walking all the way back from Canterbury, leaving at 8am, reaching the Halfway House at 11am, where he rested for an hour, and then on to Lydden where he took tea at a friend's house. He reached home soon after 6pm 'and thank God met Mrs. P. again in health and safety.' When Thomas had to travel to London he either went by coach via Canterbury and Rochester or by boat from Whitstable. This was sometimes difficult since he could reach Whitstable when a storm was raging or the wind was in the wrong direction and would be forced to return to Canterbury and travel by coach.

Crime and punishment did not escape his notice. A debtor confined in the castle prison caused him some concern and he delivered personally a pound note from a well-wisher. He notes another debtor released after four years and yet another who escaped and was sentenced to a further four years; Thomas gained his release by paying the £8 owing himself. The pillory was still in use in Dover in 1800 and Thomas records the crowd pelting some unfortunate. In 1807 he witnessed a riot when a great crowd demanded the release of four smugglers.

Magistrates read the Riot Act and mounted troops quickly cleared the Market Square. Thomas also dispensed his own justice when he sacked his servant girl for stealing a pair of stockings.

The diary is interspersed with unusual incidents, including the landing of a stranded whale which the public could see for 6d. Later it was cut up and boiled producing 1000 gallons of oil. On another occasion a pig was buried in a cave by a cliff fall, but was apparently dug out six months later still alive albeit emaciated!

Thomas recorded local sporting events, attending horse races at Priory Fields, Barham Downs and Buckland Valley as well as watching cricket matches at Northfall Meadow.

Recipes to remedy ailments were also included: for whooping cough, dropsy, sore throat as well as Dr. Lewis's recipe for making ink!

He retired from his drapery business in 1804 and his wife died two years later. Thomas sat with her during her last hours and noted, 'At six I felt the parting pang and saw her breath for the last time, when she expired without a struggle and fell asleep...' She was buried with her husband's father and mother in St. Mary's churchyard. Thomas, aged 71, joined her in 1819. During these 13 years of widowhood he still took a keen interest in life and continued to record it in his diary.

Postscript: Thomas left money for the grave to be maintained, but in 1978, as part of a 'tidying up' by the District Council (responsible for maintaining closed churchyards) the gravestones were removed. There followed an item in the Dover Express in memoriam page: 'PATTENDEN - Thomas. Diarist and Freeman of Dover. Not forgotten.'