

New Dover Society Plaque

THOMAS PATTENDEN

by Denise Lee



At 10.30 am on Wednesday 20th July 2010, a small group of people gathered at St Mary's Parish Centre to witness Kathleen Hollingsbee unveil the latest Dover Society plaque. This is in memory of Thomas Pattenden, 1748 to 1819, a noted local diarist and respected citizen of the town.

The opening address by Derek Leach and the unveiling speech by Kathleen Hollingsbee are reproduced here in full.

The Society chairman Derek Leach opened the proceedings as follows:

"Welcome on behalf of The Dover Society. We are here to unveil this plaque to Thomas Pattenden. Thomas who? Never heard of him, most people would say. 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 sea water! Why does he deserve a plaque and why here?

Thomas became one of the wealthiest and most respected men in Dover, a Freeman (by purchase), an assessor of taxes, a commissioner in the Dover Court of Requests, churchwarden and

doer of good works.

He was well read, sketched, (he drew the illustrations for Rev John Lyons' History of Dover) painted, a keen gardener, collected coins and fossils, but above all was a keen observer of Dover life.

For more than 20 years, beginning in 1797 when he was 55 and only ending with his death in 1819, Thomas Pattenden recorded what he called 'daily remarks and occurrences' about what was happening in Dover, the country and the world. Being English he always mentioned the weather!

He made careful note of ships passing Dover especially great fleets. An eye was kept on the British economy, noting in 1800 that the price of candles and soap had risen sharply because of an expected war with Russia.

During the Napoleonic wars he recorded that 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, to Maison Dieu Fields. He made drawings of the French coast for use by the military. The strengthening of Dover's defences

were recorded in detail as well as troop movements from the town. He also managed to see several sea battles from the cliff tops with the aid of his spyglass. Captured French sailors were kept in the town gaol; 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 celebrations in Dover of Trafalgar and Waterloo are recorded. Thomas was certain that God was on England's side and was punishing France for its wicked ways.

During these momentous times Thomas carried on his business, which sometimes took him to Canterbury. He recorded walking all the way back from Canterbury, leaving at 8am and reaching home at 6pm. When Thomas had to travel to London he either went by coach via Canterbury and Rochester or by boat from Whitstable.

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. Thomas gained the release of another debtor by himself paying the £8 owing. The pillory was still in use in Dover in 1800 and Thomas records the crowd pelting some unfortunate. 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.

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

When he died in 1819 he left a good deal of money, but his lasting legacy is his diary.

A substantial sum was left to St Mary's for the graves of his wife and himself to be maintained, as well as for providing relief to six poor widows of husbands lost at sea. But in 1978, as part of a 'tidying up' by the District Council, responsible for maintaining closed churchyards, a large tree growing in the grave was removed together with the gravestones. Now there is no trace in the churchyard of this remarkable Dovorian, but today we are putting that right!

Kathleen Hollingsbee, here, has agreed to unveil our plaque. It is most appropriate that she should do it since, not only is she a knowledgeable

local historian like husband Bob, but she was a member of a Kent Family History team that transcribed all the remaining, legible headstones of this churchyard in 1991. Kathleen....."

"Thomas Pattenden cared about people and their welfare - his family, friends, colleagues, the poor and those who had suffered injustice. His diaries speak about daily life in Dover, not only its commerce, finances, the military, the navy, but about new buildings, taking tea with his friends, and what Biblical texts were used for the Sunday services at St Mary's.

An apparently quiet and modest man he enthused over fruit and flowers in his garden at No 1 Townwall Street, exchanging plants and cuttings with his friends - and he grew some of the choicest flowers known at that time.

A large burial plot in the North East corner of the churchyard was used for the burial of Thomas's parents. Thomas, a schoolmaster of Dover, buried in 1748 and Sarah, buried 1779. In 1806 the plot was used for Thomas's own wife Ann and for Thomas himself in 1819.

In 1908 the Dover Express published a feature about him. The photograph of the grave and memorial stones in the feature show a large tree growing on the burial plot. Sometime later the tree had to be removed - in doing so the memorial stones were damaged, taken

away and never replaced, despite a large sum of money he left to church for maintenance of the grave.

The site of the burial plot is this side of, and not far from the ornamental cherry tree planted in more recent times by the Queen Mother.

It must be about 100 years now since the name Pattenden disappeared from the churchyard.

Now, thanks to the efforts of the Dover Society, this plaque will remind residents and visitors of the life of this remarkable man."

Kathleen then unveiled the plaque to warm applause.

The Dover Society would like to thank John Hill of John Hill Building Services, 125 Lewisham Road, Dover, CT17 0PA for installing the plaque free of charge. The Society also extends its thanks to everyone involved in the research, planning, and manufacture of the plaque.

