

2nd Talk

Streets of Dover

A talk by Derek Leach reported by Alan Lee

Derek commenced his talk by outlining some of the older history of Dover; there is evidence of people living here since about 2000 BC.

The priory of St. Martin Le Grand was possibly the first substantial building erected in Dover since Roman times. King Withred of Kent, 691 to 725 AD, removed 22 secular canons from the castle into the Priory.

The church of St. Mary the Virgin, erected by the secular canons from St. Martin Le Grand, is now known to have been built on part of the site of a Roman bath house.

The Doomsday book of 1086 valued the town at £40, twice the amount recorded during Edward the Confessor's reign, 1042 to 1066. This also showed how much Dover had recovered and expanded since the burning of the town by William's troops in 1066.

Medieval Dover was comprised of the military quarter on Castle Hill, the fisherman's quarter under Castle Cliff, the ecclesiastical quarter around St. Martin Le Grand and the commercial quarter around Queen Street.

From 1066 to 1600, the town changed considerably. Many large and

important buildings were built along with the town walls and numerous gates.

The building of the castle between 1180 and 1275 certainly transformed the view of the skyline from the town.

Many pilgrims and soldiers passed through the town. Henry III's royal charter decreed that all pilgrims would leave England via Dover or face a year of imprisonment.

Between 1600 and 1809 the town continued to grow and prosper. The only setback to growth was the national outbreak of the plague. In 1665/66 when it was at its height up to 900 townspeople may have died. Many were then buried on the side of the Western Heights. The town was so filthy that all householders were required, by law, to sweep the streets in front of their house. More ships used the bay and the Pier district expanded rapidly. Turnpike roads became more common. It took three days to reach London by coach, but although it was in a bad state of repair it was the most used road in the country.

The king's daily mail service from London to the continent, via Dover, was instituted in 1660. In 1778 the Dover Paving Act was passed. The first street cleaning contract was

awarded to Israel Claringbould: £10 per year to clean the town's streets once every week. In 1780 the first paving contract was awarded. In 1790 the Tivoli Theatre, later the Royal Hippodrome, was built.

By 1800 the population of Dover was 8,570. With fewer than 2,000 houses the Maison Dieu was the upper limit of the town. Charlton and Buckland were still separate villages. Between 1801 and 1810 they both grew in size at a much faster rate than did the town. The Napoleonic War years proved another boom time with a garrison up to 10,000 stationed at Dover. The town attracted the well-to-do and became one of the most fashionable places in the country. By 1835 the villages of Charlton, Buckland and Hougham had become part of the town with River being added in 1903. They regained parish status in 1987. A local gas company was established in 1821 under Castle Cliff, the whole town being lit by 1823. The workhouse opened in 1836 and the Dover Police Force, run by

the Watch Committee was set up the same year.

The coming of the railway in 1844 heralded another period of prosperity for the town. The horse drawn coach services were discontinued the same year. The town's stations were built, as was the Lord Warden Hotel.

In 1850 it seemed that every other house in the Pier District was a public house with 16 in a 700-yard stretch of Snargate Street, 30 in Limekiln and Strond Street and another 30 from here to the Town Station, near the Lord Warden Hotel. Many large businesses flourished and included mills and breweries.

By the 1870s gas lighting in homes was commonplace. Electric lighting was introduced in 1881. Many schools opened during this period, boosted by the 1879 Education Act.

Then in 1897 Dover became one of the first towns to introduce trams. Three miles of track were laid and the penny fare proved to be very popular.



Construction of the Admiralty Pier

© Dover Museum

Bomb damage, Randolph Road

© Dover Museum



In 1905 the line was extended to River. The Admiralty Pier was constructed between 1847 and 1871. At this time the pier and seafront area saw a rapid expansion in house building; many large villas were also built. Connaught Park was laid out and opened in 1883. Crabble Athletic Ground opened in 1897; it was a commercial failure so the Dover Corporation purchased it for the town in 1902.

After the Great War many of Dover's old slums were cleared and replaced by new housing estates, much of this work being carried out in the 1920s.

The period between the two wars was a depressing time for the people of the town with many out of work. One bright spot was the opening of Pencester Gardens in 1923.

During the Second World War many of the businesses were closed down and the Admiralty took over the running

of the harbour. Dover became known as **Hellfire Corner**. By the end of the war half of the town's housing either had been destroyed or suffered some damage from enemy bombs and shells. In 1947 a great many "prefabs" were built as a temporary solution to the housing shortage. It would be 30 years before the last of these were replaced by permanent houses. The Gateway flats were built with the first tenants taking up residence in 1958. Much of old Dover disappeared at this time. York Street was completed by 1972 and the Dover bypass by 1977. The most controversial road, the A20, was completed in 1993 and the A20 is still a major source of concern to the people of the town

Derek's talk was most enjoyable, enlightening and interesting. If anyone would like a more in depth insight into the town then Derek's book *Streets of Dover* is still available in local bookshops.