

One of a series of articles
covering the lives of Dovorians of international renown.

Albert Mummery

- *the father of mountaineering*

by Lorraine Sencicle B.A. (econ) hons

Albert Mummery was born on 10 September 1855 at Maison Dieu House (the present Town Council offices). He was the younger son of William Rigden Mummery, Mayor 1865 and 1867, who owned the ancient Stembrook Tannery. He bought the Tannery in 1850 and while still a child Albert joined his brother William in the family business as part of his education. By 1861, they were employing 21 men and William Mummery was making a name for himself in local politics. However, no sooner had his term of office as Mayor ceased than William died. He was 48 years old and young Albert, 13.

Following the funeral, the two young brothers were sent for a holiday in the Alps. There, as Albert later wrote in his book, *'My Climbs in the Alps and the Caucasus'*, *"the crags of Via Mala and the snows of the Theodule raised a passion within me which has grown with my years, and has to no small extent moulded my life and thought."*

On returning to Dover, the two boys decided to take over running the tannery. They introduced recently patented machinery and the business continued to prosper. However, Albert longed to return to the Alps and his opportunity came in 1871. He later wrote that when he first gazed upon the Matterhorn, he scarcely dared to hope that he would ever climb it. Three years later, and described as being tall, blond, with a powerful frame and oozing with energy, he successfully reached its peak and wrote that he, *"ought to have ceased taking an interest."*



© Dover Museum

It was possibly about this time that Albert met J. Norman Collie and William Slingsby, then in the vanguard of guideless climbing. The three became expert mountaineers with Albert eventually making seven ascents to the summit of the Matterhorn. Of this he wrote, *"no sooner had I ascended a peak than it becomes a friend, and delightful*

as it is to seek fresh woods and pastures new, in my heart I long for the slopes of which I know every wrinkle, and on which each crag awakens memories of mirth and laughter, and of the friends of long ago."

On one of his trips to the Alps, Albert met Mary Petherick, the daughter of an Exeter solicitor who also enjoyed mountaineering. They married in 1883 and included a climb to the top of the Matterhorn in their honeymoon. That was in the middle of summer and as they sat, at the top looking over the majestic Alps they both loved, *"the wind was not sufficient to stir the flame of a match."*

Although, at the end of the nineteenth century high-risk sports such as mountaineering were frowned upon, Albert continued climbing. He was the first to ascend the Aiguille du Grépon in the Mont Blanc group; later a famous crack was named after him. He climbed the Dent du Requin and the Grands Charmoz also in the Mont Blanc Group; the Teufelsgrat on the three sided Tschorn (southern Switzerland), and on the Matterhorn, the difficult Zmutt ridge.

In July 1888, Albert ventured into Himalayas and said that it was like looking through a, "big hole in the cornice of the ridge I could look down 3,000 feet or more on to the vast unbroken glacia ...". That year his mother, Esther, died and Albert decided to devote his time to the family business. Along with Mary and their daughter Hilda, born in 1885, he bought a house in Leyburne Road (since demolished).

However, Albert's heart was still in his beloved mountains and he in his spare

time wrote his biography. He also researched and wrote *The Physiology of Industry* (1889), a pioneering book on economics, with his friend John Atkinson Hobson. In the book, they argued that the economy required intervention to achieve stability, a stance that was very controversial at the time.

Nevertheless, the mountains called and in 1895, he was back in the Himalayas, this time in an attempt to climb the unconquered, 26,929 feet, Nunga Parbat, the ninth highest peak in the world. At the western end of the great mountain range, the Nunga Parbat is in Pakistan administered by Kashmir, near the Afghanistan/Chinese border. The mountain's name describes it well, Nunga means naked - one side is so steep that snow cannot lie on it - and Parbat means peak. The mountain has three faces; the northern one is the Rakhiot.

Along with two mountaineer friends and a number of Ghurkhas, Albert set out from the military station of Astor. On 24 August, having successfully established a camp at 10,000 feet, together with Ghurkhas, Ragobir and Goman Singh, Albert set out to reconnoitre the Rakhoit Face of the great mountain.

Shortly after they left the camp there was an avalanche and the three never returned. Their bodies were never found. Subsequently there were many attempts to climb the Nunga Parbat and many more lives were lost. A German-Austrian team eventually conquered it in 1953.

Although Albert is highly revered within

the climbing community and referred to as the 'Father of Mountaineering', it is sad that there is not a tribute to him in his hometown... although, I am told, there was one once in Maison Dieu House.

This article first appeared in the Dover Mercury and the Dover Society would like to thank them for the use of this story.
Editor



St Peter & St Paul churchyard

© Alan Sencicle

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==== **Royal Victoria Hospital** ====

by Joan Liggett

It is ironical that the Royal Victoria Hospital was probably only built because Dover was spared during the Cholera Outbreaks in the early 1850's. Many towns were affected by the disease but somehow Dover escaped - though deaths occurred in Canterbury, Sandgate and Folkestone (Shorncliffe Barracks). As a practical "Thanksgiving" Dover decided to establish a hospital and to raise the necessary finance by public subscription.

The Hospital Fund having raised £1,760 (*equivalent to £170,000 in 2010*) a suitable site was sought. The first proposal to build on St Martin's disused burial ground having been rejected; it was decided to buy a property on the High Street named Brook House at auction for £1,336 (*£130,000 in 2010*).

Dover had had a Dispensary since 1823 (located on the east side of the Market Square) so it was decided to incorporate that with the new hospital, under the name "The Dover Hospital and Dispensary."

After undergoing extensive alterations, the original hospital building was opened in 1851; the text over the window reads; "INSTITUTED AT THE GENERAL THANKSGIVING OF MDCCXLIX" (1849).

In 1851 the hospital and grounds was surrounded by meadows; but in 1858 Wood's Meadow (the name given to the land on each side of the Dour), was bought by Developers; to prevent the hospital being hemmed in by buildings half an acre of the meadow was purchased at a cost of £740 (£68,000 in 2010). That transaction enabled the later enlargement of the hospital to take place. It was suggested in 1870 and again in 1897 that the hospital be removed to another site; but eventually it was decided to enlarge the existing site.

Monies raised by public subscription were used to build the Annexe to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. The upper panel reads; "HOSPITAL ANNEXE" and the lower