



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor

On 17th January 2012 I gave, at their invitation, a talk to the Friends of Dover Museum entitled "Dover's Cemeteries and Burial Places". This was the culmination of many years' research and hard work and effort by me, a Dover born expatriate, and a small band of dedicated helpers. It must be seen as a moratorium and valediction to the subject as far as I am now concerned.

My original target to record for posterity the monumental inscriptions contained within Dover's burial grounds has now more or less been achieved. To this can be added the bid to alert and enlighten the people of Dover, those of Dover background or connexions, local institutions, bodies and authorities to the astonishing wealth of history, both personal and local, which the cemeteries of Dover contain. This is way and above that which might be found elsewhere in a town of similar size and its position, both geographically and strategically, makes this possible. This is not to mention the astounding beauty of the surroundings.

My purpose has been served in no small measure by publicity articles in the local newspaper, the Dover Express, and more particularly by the encouragement of the Dover Society, to whom I first introduced the subject in the year 1999. It has been enormously gratifying to me that my guided tour of Cowgate Cemetery in 2000 revealing to them the woeful plight that the site had fallen into has led to the regular programme of maintenance by the gallant efforts of a team of willing workers. For this I, and the people of Dover, owe the Society a heartfelt expression of profound thanks.

Between 2000 and 2006 I gave a number of walking tours around Dover's cemeteries under the auspices of the White Cliffs Countryside Project. These were always well patronised and were a learning experience for me also due to the wonderful contributions made by fellow attendees as we went around. Alas I am no longer disposed to keep these walks up.

The four uniquely sited and beautifully planted Copt Hill cemeteries, including the Commonwealth War Graves and Zeebrugge Raid memorial at St James and the rare Jewish burial ground nearby, contain an enormous range of naval and military personnel with four VC holders, not to mention a significant number of foreign burials amongst the worthy and good citizens of Dover. A whole history is written in their epitaphs.

My extensive efforts in 2008 to have the cemeteries listed in the National Register of Parks and Gardens (Cemetery Section) took two years to be decided upon but to great disappointment all round failed to make the necessary grade. There would appear to be no such local listing at the disposal of the Dover District Council who maintain the sites. This is most regrettable.

I am highly delighted therefore that Paul Wells and Jeff Howe have kept up the cemetery walks from time to time under the auspices of the White Cliffs Countryside Project. I wish them well in their ventures for this reason:

With local government funding at a premium for the foreseeable future it is open to question how local authority maintained cemeteries will fare in years to come especially bearing in mind the dismaying absence of responsive interest shown to me by any of their representatives in my projects despite my concerted efforts at all times to inspire it. To this should be added the total lack of up to date information (requested by me but unforthcoming, to include in my last talk) about the progress of the planned new cemetery at Elms Vale whose funding input was rejected by Dover Town Council last autumn.

Any attempt therefore to keep public awareness to the fore is paramount. Or to put it another way, what would we see in our crystal ball if we looked at our cemeteries one hundred years on from today and we did nothing in the meantime? These after all are our heritage.

If there is any reward I personally would like to see for the people of Dover it should take the form of a plaque recording what became of the remains of those who were buried in the old St James churchyard and so unceremoniously removed to Charlton cemetery in 1974, such a plaque to be placed either at St James and/or at Charlton. Surely the foregone deceased of Dover deserve as much. I understand this proposal has been under consideration by the Dover Society and if it is carried out will complete my own sense of fulfilment.

Yours sincerely
Martyn Webster

Editor
 The Executive Committee will always discuss any suggestions for the placing of plaques around the town. To date there have been a great number of names and locations put forward. These will all be looked at and prioritised as the funds available for plaques are not very large.

There is a historic description board at the old St James's Church in Castle Hill Road (formerly this was part of St James's Street).

Dear Editor

Permit me to draw your attention to a couple of solecisms included in Newsletter No 72.

The flyer for the Christmas feast refers to the "Historical" Refectory at Dover Priory. This is obviously a mistake for "historic". The term "historical" refers to the study of history or something depicting history such as a film or a novel, whereas "historic" relates to an event in history or perhaps likely to be recorded therein. Thus the meeting at Dover between King John and the Papal Legate was truly "historic", but this is said to have taken place in the Chapel of the Templars on the Western Heights, and not at the Priory.

My other point arises from the article on the Officers' New Barracks at Dover Castle. The photograph of the Royal Arms over the door of the Officers' Mess is not "Queen Victoria's Crest." Under the Laws of Chivalry a lady cannot bear arms and hence wear a helmet with a crest - although there have been a few exceptions such as Joan of Arc! Ladies may however display their family arms, without a crest or supporters, on a lozenge. As Victoria was married to Prince Albert, she would have impaled the Royal Arms of Great Britain and Ireland with those of the Principality of Saxe-Coburg Gotha.

Incidentally it was quite wrong for the coffin of Princess Diana to be draped by the Royal Standard since she was only a dowager Princess of Wales. Her personal arms would therefore have been Spencer impaled by Wales, although as she was divorced, even that is doubtful. It's surprising that the Earl Marshal should have permitted such a breach of protocol.

The coat of arms over the door of the Officers' Mess are in fact the Arms of the Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, irrespective of the person actually on the throne, but it's true that they were altered on the accession of Queen Victoria by the deletion of the White Horse of Hanover. Under Salic Law as applied in Germany, the Kingdom of Hanover passed on William IV's death to his youngest brother, the Duke of Cumberland, instead of to his niece, Princess Victoria of Kent. The Royal Arms remain unchanged today.

Perhaps you may wish to point out these two corrections in a subsequent newsletter.

Yours Truly
M Turns

*Dear Mr Turns
I note with interest your informed
knowledge of the coat of arms over
the doorway of the Officers' Mess.
It increased my knowledge and no
doubt that of the members. Since
your letter I have read much more
on the way coats of arms have
evolved.*

The Editor