

— 2nd Talk —

Tales from a Unique Village

The St Margaret's Archive Project

A talk by Christine Waterman reported by Alan Lee

It is 18 months since Christine retired from Dover District Council and she is pleased to be back working and helping in the heritage sector. With the help of eighteen volunteers from the History Society of St Margaret's the archives have been moved into the village hall. They are now busy cataloguing the thousands of documents and photographs. A new dedicated free website is planned to hold many of the more interesting documents and photographs.

Christine continued by giving the background history of the village before singling out some of the interesting happenings and characters that are mentioned in the archives.

In 1918 the last bomb to be dropped on England fell on St Margaret's.

In 1870 the only building down at the Bay was the Green Man public house, now called the Coastguard. The pub has been destroyed and rebuilt a couple of times over the years. The original pub served mainly the local coastguards, customs officers and local fishermen, plus visitors who came along the foreshore road that existed in those days.

Gradually over the years cottages were built. By 1894 St Margaret's was attracting rich people who came for the scenery and the sea air. This led to a number of holiday lets and the

Lanzarote hotel being built in the village. The St Margaret's Bay hotel was built along the foreshore and by 1936 this had 60 rooms, a ballroom and a swimming pool. Then came the Second World War and the War Office took over the whole of the bay and the local people were moved out of their properties. Most of these buildings were then used to train the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, the Marine Commandos and Canadian troops in street fighting techniques in preparation for D Day. By the end of the war most of the buildings had suffered terrible damage.

Filmed in 1947 a British Pathé newsreel called 'The Deserted Village' can be viewed on You Tube via the internet.

After the war the foreshore was returned to the local community and the landlord of the Green Man restored the pub. He also applied to build a café with a 150 foot frontage but this was turned down.

In 1945 Noel Coward and his partner Graham Payn took up residence in The White Cliffs at the eastern end of the bay. Many weekends would see them arriving often with famous people and film stars including Vivien Leigh and they sometimes enjoyed a drink with their friends at the Swingate Inn. The Duke of Kent and Princess Marina have holidayed there. Coward painted there but he found the solitude and the

scenery both an inspiration and a distraction. They moved out of White Cliffs in 1951. Coward died in Jamaica in 1973.

In 1988 DDC purchased Noel Coward's painting The Cliffs above St Margaret's Bay. It can be viewed at St Margaret's visitor centre.

Noel Coward sold White Cliffs to his great friend Ian Lancaster Fleming the creator of James Bond and writer of Chitty-Chitty-Bang-Bang. Fleming married his wife Anne Charteris in Jamaica in 1952. 007 is said to be named after the local bus service which ran from the village to Martin Mill. They lived there until 1958.

During the 1930's Peter Ustinov lived in the old coastguard lookout up on the cliffs.

In 1913 Henry Royce, co-founder of Rolls Royce, lived high on the cliffs in a house named 'Seaton'. It was here in 1915 that he developed his first aero engine the 'Eagle'. In 1919 the 'Eagle' powered the first non-stop crossing of the Atlantic by J. Alcock and A. W. Brown and the first flight from England to Australia by Ross and Keith Smith, Bennett and Shiers.

The City financier Clarence Charles Hatry had a house in the village. In 1924 he went bankrupt owing over £3 million. He borrowed from his wife and friends, paid off his creditors, returned to the 'City' and became known as "The Man Who Always Pays".

He built up the Hatry group of companies and in the late 1920's he raised £4 million for a scheme to

amalgamate the British steel industry. Then when Austin Friars Trust, his chief finance company, got into trouble he loaned it £1.5 million of the steel funds to keep it afloat. To plug the hole he issued illegal duplicate loan certificates. He was however discovered and on 20th September 1929 the entire Hatry Group collapsed and shudders went through the London and New York stock markets. This is said to have contributed to the Wall Street Crash of 1929. His investors lost a total of \$145,000,000.

He was tried at the Old Bailey and sentenced to 14 years for fraud and forgery with the first two years of hard labour at Brixton; he was released after 9 years. He then bought Hatchets the book sellers for £5,000. In 1956 he sold his house 'The Hermitage' and left St Margaret's. He died in 1965.

In 1820 The Cliffs, now the White Cliffs Hotel, was a boarding school run by the Temple family. In 1881 Mr Temple died and it was bought by a Mr Cripps. He later sold it to a Mr Denman. On taking over he found that he had been duped.

The school was in a mess financially and instead of there being 100 children boarding there were only 40. Incensed Denman took Cripps to court. He won his case and Cripps had to repay all of his money and also pay damages. Cripps then closed the school and reopened it as a hotel.

Concluding her talk on a personal note Christine said that while researching her family history she found out that her 3 x great grandparents had lived in St Margaret's and to her surprise it was in the same road where she now lives.