

# Heritage Open Days in Dover

Thursday 10th to Sunday 13th September 2015

## Plus Magna Carta Exhibition in the Town Hall

10am to 4pm from 10th to 19th September except Sunday 13th

Once again The Dover Society is coordinating arrangements in Dover for Heritage Open Days, organised by English Heritage nationally every year. This event celebrates England's fantastic architectural heritage by encouraging free access to buildings that are usually closed to the public or would normally charge an admission fee. Dover has a great wealth of historic buildings, but few are normally open to the public such as Dover Castle and are not free. This year 8 buildings will be open to the public free of charge.

**1 Dover Town Hall formerly the Maison Dieu:** Founded by Hubert de Burgh, then Constable of Dover Castle, in 1203, the primary purpose of the Maison Dieu was to provide free board and lodging for pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Thomas a Becket at Canterbury and later to care for the elderly poor and sick of Dover. A chapel was added by Henry III, which was adapted in the 19th century as a court. More buildings were added over the centuries. In 1536 the religious house was suppressed by Henry VIII, becoming the King's property. The buildings became a victualling depot for the navy until 1830 when it was taken over by the Board of Ordnance. Put up for auction in 1834 it was bought by the Dover Corporation. Restoration and adaptation of the Stone Hall and chapel took place between 1852 and 1862. The 19th century stained glass windows in the Stone Hall depict episodes in the history of the town and there are a number of portraits of famous people connected with the town. The Council Chamber was added in 1868

and the adjoining Connaught Hall was opened in 1883.

**1a The free Magna Carta Exhibition,** celebrating 800 years since King John agreed to the 1215 charter, will include the Faversham 1300 Magna Carta.

**2 Maison Dieu House:** this fine Jacobean house in Biggin Street is the oldest domestic building in Dover. It was built in 1665 as the Agent Victualler's residence close to the Maison Dieu, which Henry VIII had requisitioned as a store for the Navy Victualling Office following the Dissolution. In 1834 it became the residence of the commander of the Royal Engineers in Dover before becoming a private residence. The Kingsford brewing and milling family and the Mummery family who owned the Stembrook tannery lived here during the 19th century. Bought by the Corporation in 1899, the house became council offices until after the Second World War when it became the public library. Following the move of the library to the Discovery Centre, the premises were purchased and beautifully restored by Dover Town Council for its use. The town's regalia will also be on show.

**3 St. Edmund's Chapel:** this tiny cemetery chapel in Priory Road was consecrated by St Richard of Chichester in 1253 in memory of his friend, St. Edmund, Archbishop of Canterbury 1234-45, and was probably used as a cemetery chapel for the Maison Dieu close by. Hidden for many years by development around it and used as a workshop, it was revealed again following

war damage to the surrounding buildings. The chapel was restored and reconsecrated in 1968.

**4 Dover College: the remains of St. Martin's Priory:** built in the 12th century, it was suppressed in 1535 as part of Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries. The site was then leased for farming and most of the buildings fell into disrepair. Fortunately, the grand Norman refectory was used as a barn and survives today. Dover College opened on the site in 1871 when the refectory and gatehouse were restored and the king's hall became the college chapel. Part of the cloister also survives. The entrance is from Effingham Crescent.

**5 Church of St. Mary the Virgin:** this prominent building in Biggin Street, dating from Saxon times, was built originally by the secular canons of St. Martin Le Grand, but was rebuilt by the Normans. At the Dissolution it was saved from demolition when Henry VIII granted it for use as a parish and civic church. Unfortunately, because of its weak foundations, it was rebuilt in 1843, although its original arches and columns were reinstated. The magnificent tower survived this restoration.

**6 Bell Tower of St. Mary the Virgin:** in the gallery of this Norman tower visitors will see how the bell ringers operate and in the clock chamber they will see the clock workings and various artefacts.

**7 Unitarian Church:** this brick-built

octagonal church sitting above York Street was constructed in 1820 and its worship area reflects the shape of the building. The origins of the church go back to 1643 to a local community of Baptists who established a meeting house in 1655, but were persecuted following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. In 1692 Samuel Taverner made part of his house available for worship and part of the garden as a burial ground. Freedom of belief and form of worship as a Unitarian Church was agreed by members in 1916. Following Second World War damage, the chapel reopened in 1952. There will be an art exhibition as well as refreshments.

**8 Grand Shaft Staircase:** this unique triple staircase was started in 1804 and finished in 1807. It connected the barracks and fortifications on the Western Heights through the 250 foot high cliff to sea level, Snargate Street and the Pier District, enabling troops to move quickly up or down its 140 steps within the cliff plus another 59 into the barrack yard. In 1812 a Mr Leith of Walmer rode a horse up the staircase for a bet. The entrance is in Snargate Street.

**9 St. Radegund's Abbey:** this premonstratensian abbey founded in 1191 was visited by several monarchs. Following its Dissolution in 1538, the great abbey church was demolished and the remaining buildings with its lands were leased to tenant farmers by the monarch. Today the refectory is the farmhouse surrounded by abbey ruins. A gatehouse and a guest house survive.

#### ————— *Opening times will be:* —————

- 1 Town Hall/Maison Dieu - Guided tours Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10am to 4pm
- 1a Town Hall Magna Carta Exhibition - 10am to 4pm 10th to 19th September except Sunday 13th
- 2 Maison Dieu House - Saturday 10am to 4pm
- 3 St. Edmund's Chapel - Saturday 10am to 4pm
- 4 Dover College - Guided tours only at 11am and 2pm on Saturday and Sunday
- 5 St. Mary the Virgin Church - Saturday 10am to 4pm
- 6 Bell Tower of St. Mary the Virgin - Saturday 1.30pm to 4pm

- 7 Unitarian Church - Saturday and Sunday 10am to 4pm
- 8 Grand Shaft Staircase - Saturday and Sunday 10am to 4pm
- 9 St. Radegund's Abbey - Guided tours on Sunday 10.30 to noon and 2.30pm to 4pm

Publicity leaflets are available from the Visitor Information Centre (now located in Dover Museum), Dover Town Council Offices (Maison Dieu House), Dover Town Hall and Dover Library. To find out about other buildings open in the region call 020 7539 7921 or visit [www.heritageopendays.org](http://www.heritageopendays.org). Local contact for more information: Derek Leach on 01304 823926 or email [derekriverdale@btinternet.com](mailto:derekriverdale@btinternet.com)

## Refurbishment Committee

Jeremy Cope

### **The Upper Road pathway from Bleriot Memorial to Langdon Cliffs.**

I am very pleased to report that Kent Public Rights of Way have installed new steps that will take out the dangerous blind corner along Upper Road. Mike Weston, Barbara Little and I cleared the pathway besides Upper Road of overhanging branches, brambles and other vegetation which now makes it so very much safer. Kent will now cut back twice a year the section from the foot of the steps to the cliff edge path. This means that we can have a safe and attractive walkway around the Castle with a branch off to Langdon Cliffs. The Society will need to fund raise to secure proper signs but this will need to be done with cooperation of and help from District and Town Councils, English Heritage and National Trust.

### **Litter and dog fouling.**

Alan Sencicle was so very diligent in working for a cleaner Dover and that included voluntary litter collection. Alan has decided that he will no longer take part in our committee - we are very sorry to see him go and will miss him.

We continue our input into ideas for improvements to Dover's road system. We deal with the town whilst Pat Sherratt and the planners cover the A2/ A20. An email

shows Kent Highways looking at alternative ways of dealing with speeding along Barton Road/ Maison Dieu Road and in particular problems at Five Ways. Highways are also looking at Dover's bus network but the Society's view remains that these measures should be part of an overall traffic strategy to provide a proper balance between vehicles and pedestrians. This should include a re-assessment of the one way system. Thankfully Beverley Hall continues to provide us with a very welcome dose of traffic expertise.

Jenny Olpin and John Cotton continue to liaise with Chief Inspector Barlow with a variety of concerns including, traffic, anti-social behaviour and drug use. Do remember we can bring your concerns to the Chief Inspector's notice.

Sylvie Parsons has made great efforts with planting schemes in Dover in the Market Square, Priory Station and at the rear of St Mary's. As with all voluntary work our aims are often thwarted or only partially successful. Sylvie has decided to withdraw from these voluntary tasks and concentrate on the many other demands upon her time. We are sorry to report this but hope that Sylvie will find time in the future for some of her imaginative ideas.