

Heritage Open Days in Dover 2019

FREE!

Derek Leach

This year around the country Heritage Open Days will be spread over two consecutive weekends on 14/15 and 21/22 September. Once again The Dover Society is coordinating arrangements in Dover. 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. In Dover this year 10 buildings will be open to the public free of charge.

Western Heights North Entrance Road

Tunnel Guided Tours: Access to the North Entrance Road Tunnel on the Western Heights Dover will be opened specially again this year. Built in the 1860s, it provided vehicular and pedestrian access to the military defences from the town of Dover. It was closed around 1967 when a new road was cut through the ramparts and public access stopped a few years later.

Pre-booking is essential as places are strictly limited on these guided tours. Due to the terrain the tours are unsuitable for prams and wheelchairs and for young children. The tour route covers uneven ground with low levels of lighting so sturdy footwear should be worn. Limited parking will be available on nearby Drop Redoubt Road. Booking details will be available from 1st September and publicised via the Western Heights Preservation Society website: <http://www.doverwesternheights.org> and Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/WesternHeights>.

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.

Dover Town Hall formerly the Maison

Dieu: Founded in 1203 by Hubert de Burgh, then Constable of Dover Castle, the primary purpose of the Maison Dieu was to provide free board and lodging for pilgrims on their way to the shrine of Thomas Becket at Canterbury and, later, to care for the elderly poor and sick of Dover. A chapel was added in 1227, which was adapted in the 19th



Maison Dieu © Alan Lee

century as a court. More buildings were added over the centuries. In 1536, the religious house was suppressed by King 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 impressive 13th century Stone Hall 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.

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 King 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



St Edmund's Chapel

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 Dover 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.

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.

Dover College: Incorporating the remains of St. Martin's Priory: built in the 12th century, but suppressed in 1535 as part of King 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.

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, then rebuilt by the Normans. At the

Dissolution it was saved from demolition when King 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.

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

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 and 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 and dolls' house show, as well as refreshments.

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:

Weekend 14/15 September St. Edmund's Chapel – Saturday only, 10am to 4pm

St. Mary's Church – Saturday only, 10am to 4pm

Bell Tower of St. Mary the Virgin – Saturday only, 1pm to 4pm

St. Radegund's Abbey – Guided tours on Sunday only, 10.30 to noon and 2.30pm to 4pm

Unitarian Church – Saturday and Sunday, 10am to 4pm

Town Hall/Maison Dieu – Guided tours Saturday only, 10am to 4pm

Weekend 21/22 September Western Heights North Entrance tunnel – Saturday and Sunday, pre-booked tours only 10am to 3pm.

Grand Shaft Staircase – Saturday and Sunday, 10am to 4pm

Dover College/Dover Priory ruins – Guided tours only at 11am and 2pm on Saturday and Sunday. Maison Dieu House – Saturday only, 10am 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 visit www.heritageopendays.org

Local contact for more information:

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