

# ‘Museum in Miniature’ at Dover Museum

Vronni Ward

Our latest temporary exhibition, ‘Museum in Miniature’, presents an extraordinary collection of intricate models and miniatures encompassing architecture, maritime artefacts, and toys drawn from our stores. This exhibition explores the enduring fascination with scaled-down representations of the world around us - works that embody both artistry and imagination, crafted and cherished across generations.

The art of miniaturisation demands patience, precision and remarkable skill. Such objects have historically been fashioned in moments of celebration, advancement, nostalgia, or even confinement.

These are not merely models; they are miniature marvels - eloquent storytellers of history, culture and human ingenuity.

## Exhibition Highlights

**Ships** - Intricate miniature ships feature in the exhibition. These delicate dioramas, sealed in glass bottles, are more than just decorative curiosities. They are rooted in both maritime culture and folk-art, capturing the essence of seafaring life.



*Dover Museum*

The golden age of ships in bottles spanned the late 18th to early 19th centuries, coinciding with the height of global exploration and naval supremacy. Sailors, known for their resourcefulness and creativity during long voyages, began crafting small replicas of their ships as keepsakes or gifts for loved ones back home.

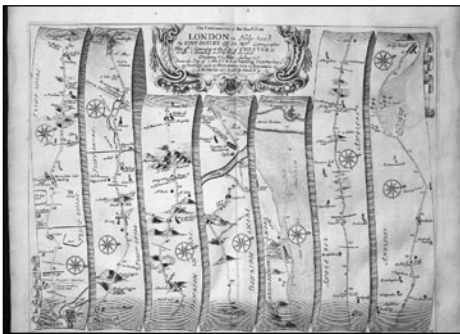
**Dolls’ Houses** - Among the artefacts on display is a wonderful collection of dolls’ houses and contents. On a world stage, the most notable dolls’ house is a model of Queen Mary’s famous dolls’ house, created for her between 1921 and 1924 at Windsor Castle. Designed by the leading British architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, it contains works from over 1,500 of the finest artists, craftspeople and manufacturers of the early 20th century offering a captivating glimpse into the domestic ideals of its time.



**Harbours** - Dover Harbour boasts a history of more than 3,500 years. Evolving from a Bronze Age settlement using the River Dour estuary to a strategic Roman stronghold, a medieval Cinque Port, and later an important defensive and commercial port. Its naturally sheltered position between chalk cliffs and proximity to the continent has made it crucial for military and trade, from Julius Caesar's time to its role as Britain's "front line" during World Wars, and today it is the busiest passenger port in the UK and Europe.

Nationally, miniature harbours also hold pride of place. Celebrated examples include the meticulously reconstructed Cornish fishing village and harbour at Wolf's Cove (a National Trust property) as well as the detailed harbour scene and village at the Grade II listed The Model Village in Bourton-on-the-Water.

**Maps** - Our exhibition presents a rare and fascinating cartographic treasure; a map published in 1675 by John Ogilby, the first person to provide an accurate survey of the roads of England and Wales. Ogilby ultimately produced more than 100 maps, each depicting a "ribbon" of roadway connecting towns and cities across the nation.



*Ogilby Map*

This particular map commences in Southwark, progressing southeast through Blackheath and Dartford, before continuing into Kent, passing Rochester, Sittingbourne, Canterbury and ultimately reaching Dover's coastline. Ogilby recorded the distance as 71 miles - a little shorter than the modern route of approximately 75 miles, closely aligned with today's A2.

Ogilby's life was as extraordinary as his work. His earliest employment, in 1612, was as a dancing master. By the 1670s, however, he had risen to the esteemed position of Royal Cosmographer to King Charles II, producing elegant, meticulously measured drawings that, for the first time, placed England's roads upon reliable maps. His path to this achievement was far from ordinary: he endured fire, plague, warfare and shipwreck; he was an impresario in Dublin, poet in London, soldier and sea captain, secret agent, publisher and scientific geographer. Beset by danger, he carefully encrypted his personal history in codes and cyphers, a life as complex as the maps he created.

Worldwide, some of the most famous miniature historic maps were created by Abraham Ortelius of Spanish Belgium, produced in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. These hand-coloured miniatures were derived from his renowned *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum*, the first modern atlas. Another significant set of miniature maps are the English Miniature Speeds, which were pocket-sized versions of John Speed's larger maps, which enjoyed wide popularity in their day.

The exhibition runs until April 2026. Opening hours: Monday to Saturday 9.30am to 5.00pm. Open Sundays in the summer (April to September) 10.00am to 3.00pm. Admission is FREE. Tel: 01304 201066 Visit [www.dover.gov.uk/museum](http://www.dover.gov.uk/museum)