

The letters of Arthur Plantageney, Viscount Lisle, lovingly collected and edited by Muriel St. Clare Byrne (1981) are a prime source of history for the most memorable seven years of the reign of Henry VIII – 1533-1540.

More parochially, as Viscount Lisle was Lord Deputy of Calais, there was much Channel crossing and the three thousand letters include frequent references to Dover, many of which would merit quoting in the *Newsletter*. Below are two samples.

As we watch from the Cliffs or the sea front, or from the Gateway or Waterloo Mansions the comings and goings of the dredger, we can give a thought to the problems of Dover Harbour in a less technological age.

On 29th October 1527 Lord Lisle wrote to Cardinal Wolsey:

"Please it your Grace to understand that this xxix day of October at Dover by the counsel and advice of the Mayor and others there, we have made as great diligence for to have passage as was possible. The ships which be in the Wyke cannot be get into the Road, howbeit there be many men with drags and horses to make way for them to be brought out. It is thought that if the wind continue this night our horses and carriage shall be shipped. And the next tide, God willing, we trust to make our passage"

There are frequent references to the difficulty of keeping Dover Harbour from silting up. On this occasion the Prior "gave" half a tide's dragging for Lisle's journey, and the Master of the Maison Dieu "gave" twenty-three tides when Wolsey went over and came back.

In 1535 John Whalley, paymaster of the King's Works at Dover, informed Cromwell that he was having chains and drags made, to get rid of the great quantity of pebbles that are accumulating in the haven. A year later he tells him that "if the King comes to Dover he will be able to see a ship of four score or a hundred tons come into the harbour, as the channel and the harbour entrance have been almost cleansed."

Lisle seems to have got away on that occasion a couple of tides later for on 31st October 1527 he wrote:

"May it please your Grace to understand that the xxx day of October at afternoon we departed from Dover, and for expedition leaving behind our horses and baggage; and so that night we arrived at Boulogne haven at midnight, where we lay at road till four of the clock in the morning. We came to ill lodging in Basse Boulogne."

Not very comfortable to lie in the Boulogne roads for four hours. But the Channel crossing was always an ordeal until very recent times. Arthur Young wrote (5th June 1798) "Passage to Calais. 14 hours for reflection in a vehicle which does not allow any power to reflection – 21 miles"