

# *Shakespeare Cliff to Langdon Bay:*

## A SLIDE SHOW of WATERSIDE DOVER

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DEREK LEACH

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On 15 January Budge Adams, eighty-six years young, presented to an eager gathering of Dover Society members what he described as his swan song. We were treated to a whole evening of Budge Adams talking about his favourite subject – Old Dover – well before he was born as well as the Dover he knew as a boy and as a young man. His talk was complemented by fascinating pictures of the town which came to life as Budge trotted out anecdotes about himself and the Dovorians of yesteryear. As a relative newcomer of some twenty-two years I have always regretted that I had not known old Dover. Budge's talk intensified that regret but on the other hand I felt that despite my keen interest in Dover's history for twenty years my knowledge and appreciation of old Dover and the strong feelings of Dovorians for their past made a quantum leap in a single evening.

Budge took us on a perambulation from Shakespeare Cliff to Langdon Bay with barely a mention or sight of anywhere further inland than Townwall Street. Even in this restricted area I had the feeling that Budge only had time to reveal the tip of the iceberg of his local knowledge.

We heard how popular Shakespeare Beach was for bathing and how the coming

of the railway affected the area. The imposing and solid Pilot's Tower stood in the way of the railway. Faced with the unattractive options of diverting the line or demolishing the tower the solution was to put the line through the arch at the base of the tower! We moved into the Pier District with all those hotels catering for

### SHAKESPEARE CLIFF



the cross-Channel travellers – the Lord Warden, the King's Head, the Ship, the Hotel de Paris and the magnificent Dover Castle Hotel. Apparently hoteliers were not averse to exaggerating the bad weather conditions in the Channel to encourage their guests to stay a bit longer until matters improved!

We touched upon the cross-Channel packet boats. In 1840 the boats grossed about 40 tons and had engines of approximately seven horse power. Budge told us of the boyhood treat of the Penny Ferry (rowing) boat in the inner harbour. At times, when there was "less than four feet over the bar" at the harbour entrance, passengers were landed on the beach in the bay. Apparently the extortionate prices charged by boatmen to carry travellers ashore was the origin of the name "Dover Sharks". We heard about the trans-Atlantic Liner Terminal that opened on the Prince of Wales Pier in 1905, served by a rail link that ran from Strond Street, across the Wellington Bridge and on to the head of the pier. Obviously history is repeating itself in the building of the new Cruise Liner Terminal at the Western Dock, albeit without the benefit of a rail link.

Minet, the banker and Amos, the photographer were two Dover celebrities that we heard something about. Minet was a Huguenot refugee and Amos a born and bred Dovorian. Amos had premises in Snargate Street and we were treated to superb photographs of the docks taken with a pin-hole camera using five- to seven-hour exposures! Minet came to Dover as a refugee in the late eighteenth century and made his name and fortune with a house on Custom House Quay. Mention of Custom House Quay stimulated my interest even more, being a Customs man. In more recent times the Customs were housed in Southern House (formerly the Lord Warden Hotel) with our Long Room occupying the former Banqueting Hall. The only reminder of past glories in the Western Docks now is the isolated and derelict Watch House on South Pier.

As we strolled along the old streets Budge identified shops and their owners, including his maternal grandparents who had tea rooms in Snargate Street. His father, who was born in 1855, came to Dover in 1875, but his maternal ancestry in Dover goes back to the Finnis family early in the 18th century and to the Holness 'tribe' in Kent to the 16th.

Budge moved us on to the seafront area with a story about the Granville Bars and Restaurant: "We were warned not to go there because there were *women* there and they *danced!* And so, of course we went." One of the hostelrys attracted Budge and his contemporaries because the landlord's beautiful daughter often took to dancing (or was it cartwheeling?) on the bar counter. Here, too, there were fine hotels – including the Grand where Budge recalled the haggis being piped in as part of a Burns Night celebration and then noticing that his wife had disappeared, as had also the Mayor's chain of office! He found his twenty-two year old wife on the marble steps at the front of the hotel, wearing the Mayor's chain around her neck and feeding haggis to two policemen. The Burlington was another imposing hotel which during the war provided the German gunners across the Channel with a superb range-finder for shelling Dover! The town was not only the Gateway to England but also a popular holiday resort with well-to-do Londoners renting seafront houses for a month for themselves and their domestic servants.

Dolphin Lane is thought to be the oldest thoroughfare in Dover. In Woolcomber Street we saw the barber's shop where Budge as a boy had his hair cut every fortnight for four old pence, whilst his Dad, at the same time had to pay sixpence. Anything and everything could be bought in the old Woolcomber Street. What can be bought there now?

Moving on to East Cliff we saw the salt water sea baths, ingeniously filled via a large-bore pipe from the baths to the sea at low water mark. During the war, when the baths were full of soldiers deporting them-

selves, it was destroyed by enemy action with heavy loss of life. The outline of the baths survives in the sunken garden adjacent to Marine Court.

Budge learned to swim from the Ping Pong breakwater in the harbour (now the Nib jetty) but he had no idea how it got its name.

The County Skating Rink became a sea-plane hangar during the first world war with two squadrons established there, one equipped with float-planes and the other with tiny mahogany flying boats. The buildings still standing below the Mote Bulwark were used as workshops and for administration. Behind and a little to the SW of the Skating Rink was the riding school of the Royal Field Artillery.

Climbing up on to Langdon Cliffs we learned that Langdon Prison, so it was generally believed, had been built to house convict labour to be used for the construction of Dover Harbour. More enlightened policies apparently ruled this out and the prison was eventually shut down and its buildings were taken over by the military.

The building of the harbour was a subject in itself. For its time it must have been comparable with today's Channel Tunnel project. The shape of the cliffs was changed in providing infill for the harbour walls

LANGDON PRISON (on cliffs above the Eastern Docks)



LANGDON BAY

and an overhead railway was constructed to bring coal from Tilmanstone colliery to the Eastern Arm. Youngsters collected spilt coal wherever the overhead railway crossed roads or footpaths.

All too soon – even though it was 10.45 -- Budge drew to a close and I could stop trying to take notes in the pitch darkness.

It was clear that he was as sorry to stop as was his audience. As he said, his greatest pleasure is talking about Dover. If this was his swansong, may it be the first of many. Since Budge says he must live until he is at least 120 to do all the things he wants to do, I am sure we have not heard the last from this man of Dover.