



Queen's Messenger passport

different groups of people as illustrated by a 1659 passport for a German mercenary soldier travelling from Britain to Saxony, which referred to 'requiring those under our control' and 'requesting those not under our control' to allow the bearer to pass freely.

By the end of a well illustrated talk delivered with enthusiasm and humour, Martin Lloyd had amply demonstrated that a passport is not just a boring piece of officialdom, but an interesting and sometimes fascinating insight into one or more episodes in a person's life.

Martin Lloyd has produced the only history of the passport. *The Passport - The History of Man's Most Travelled Document*, a hardback published by Sutton Publishing, price £9.99, is available in most book shops.

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April 2004 Meeting

DOVER'S ALIENS' CLERKS..... Reported by Anthony Lane

OUR USUAL action-packed A.G.M. was completed with a talk by Immigration Officer Martyn Webster, who broke away from his usual theme of memorials to talk about immigrants, a subject on which most of us are prepared to profess an opinion, but whose exclamations are not always based on the true facts surrounding the issue. Recalling this familiar subject, he took us back to less familiar times, commencing in the latter half of the 18th century when few immigration controls existed.

At the time of the rise of Napoleon there was concern of a threatened invasion from France, not by a military force, but due to the possible displacement of up to 80,000

'Europeans' who might feel safer on this side of the Channel. How many of these actually succeeded in reaching these shores was not recorded but the 'threat' caused the government of the day to pass an Aliens Act in 1793, resulting in the employment of a force of Aliens' Clerks at Dover. These clerks required the recording of details by ship's masters berthing at Dover of all foreigners they had aboard. Such information was entered in the registers kept for the purpose. The aim was to reduce to a minimum the entry of 'Spies, insurgents and refugees and those who could undermine the British State.' Failure to report an alien would result in a fine of £10 in 1793 for the shipmaster concerned, a



The introduction of paddle steamers to the cross-channel routes resulted in a very large increase in the number of travellers during the nineteenth century. Although they still had open decks, their arrival improved the degree of comfort available and shortened considerably the time of the crossing relative to the days of sail.

sum which increased to £20 in 1826. The Aliens' Clerk would in turn issue a certificate of landing.

The stringent 1793 Act was modified in 1816. The Inspectors of Aliens were employed by the Aliens Office, a separate Office of State, to which all the returns were sent. It was amalgamated with the Home Office in 1836. Further amendments to the legislation for aliens was made in 1826 and 1836, when the requirements were relaxed by degrees, for with the arrival of the steam packets, the numbers of foreigners arriving at Dover increased rapidly as the nineteenth century progressed.

The introduction of a railway network led to increased ease of travel and a peak was reached at the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851. Totals for passengers crossing the Channel at this time were:

1849	-	19,949
1850	-	21,915
1851	-	36,215

In the last of these 68,668 bags and packages were examined, which suggested

that the tasks of the Customs and Aliens' Clerks had to be combined, as the bags also had to be searched for contraband. It became very difficult for the Clerks to list all foreigners arriving at London and Dover at this period and so those having return tickets to their place of origin were not recorded.

These controls and searches caused numerous complaints from passengers arriving at Dover from abroad. Having to wait in all weathers in a crowd on the open upper deck, while the vessel rolled at her mooring, and expose their personal effects to the elements as well as the inspecting officers, was too much for many of those whose faces were already paled by seasickness. Travellers were often justly concerned about these intrusions, maintaining they had committed no crime and these occasions often led to swearing and unruly behaviour by some. 'How can the most civilised people in the world provide such barbarous conditions for examinations?' was a common complaint



A view of the deck of a cross-channel steamer experiencing rather inclement weather. After uncomfortable crossings, passengers complained if they were kept waiting on deck while details were taken and searches of their property made by the Aliens' Clerks.

even up until the First World War.

Clearly the connection of Dover to London by rail in 1844 and the opening of the line between Calais, Lille and Paris in 1848 meant that the arrivals at Dover would become much higher, and to avoid some of the problems of examination on the boats special facilities were opened at Dover Town station in 1851. As many of the steamers now arrived at night, an extra duty was initiated for the Examining Officers on 20th June 1850. One Polling Smithett was a senior officer during this period, whose family lies buried in Cowgate cemetery. At this time there were 25 established staff at Dover covering a variety of tasks related to the examining of all passengers as well as aliens, as Dover was the main port of entry for visitors from Europe.

After 1865 the Aliens Act of 1836 fell into desuetude, and although still on the Statute Book, no great change occurred

until 1905, when Sir Haldane Porter, doyen of the Immigration Service, presided over the introduction of a new Act, which allowed only for two steerage passengers to be inspected by Aliens' Officers—presumably allowing for emigrant ships and the new record-breaking liners which called at Dover on their way to America and Australia. This new Act formed the basis for modern legislation. In 1920, under subsequent legislation, an Alien Officer's stamp was introduced for marking travel documents.

Martyn went on to talk about current immigration controls, saying that more people are travelling these days than ever before, and it seems as if the whole world is on the move. These huge numbers mean that different and much more sophisticated methods of checking have to be used. He explained that as warranted officers of the Crown, nowadays immigration officers may take fingerprints, make photographs

but they do not nowadays have the power of arrest, for the person examined has committed no crime in arriving at the border of another country.

He quoted from a newspaper some words perhaps familiar to us. 'It is impossible to calculate the number of aliens in this country. They are gathered together in groups in certain towns and those in employment work longer hours for less wages. There are sufficient poor in our society, and these immigrants only add to our burdens etc.' The newspaper was dated 1898. *Le plus ça change.....*

Martyn Webster's talk was highly informative and particularly interesting as it followed directly Martin Lloyd's presentation on the history of passports. It was also directly relevant to the concerns about immigration which are highly topical. Those who had wondered about who Napoleon might displace, and later

were concerned who the railways and steamers would allow to reach us, might now worry who might be eligible to come here from all those new countries joining the European Union. However, having not been invaded for nearly a thousand years it is due to those immigrants that have reached our shores that we owe our social diversity and national character.

NOTE. Martyn mentioned that few books had been written about the Immigration Service. He had managed to find two which might be of further interest:

'The Key in the Lock,' by T.W.E. Roche, was published in 1969. The author was a Assistant Chief Inspector of Immigration. An authoritative history covering legislation since 1793 was published by the Public Record Office at Kew in 2000, entitled: *'Immigrants and Aliens - A guide to sources on immigration and UK citizenship.'*



A Boom House, situated at the original harbour entrance, was occupied by those recording the arrival of aliens. This later building, constructed around the time of the First World war in approximately the same place, was also occupied by the Immigration Service and later HM Customs and Excise. (A.R. Lane)