

# HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

## Saturday 11th & Sunday 12th September 2010

Once again The Dover Society is coordinating arrangements in Dover for Heritage Open Days, organised by English Heritage nationally every year. 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. Dover has a great wealth of historic buildings, but only some are normally open to the public such as Dover Castle and the Roman Painted House. This year seven buildings will be open to the public free of charge.

### 1 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 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 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 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.

### 2 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.

### 3 Dover College:

the remains of St. Martin's Priory: built in the 12th century, it was suppressed in 1540 as part of 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.

### 4 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, but was rebuilt by the Normans. At the Dissolution it was saved from demolition when 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.

#### **4a Bell Tower of St. Mary the Virgin:**

in the gallery of this Norman tower visitors will see how the bell-ringers operate and in the clock chamber they will see the clock workings and various artefacts.

#### **5 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 to 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, music played on the 1855 Holdich pipe organ and refreshments.

#### **6 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.

#### **7 St. Radigund'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 guesthouse survive.

Opening times will be:

- 1 Maison Dieu House –  
Saturday only 10am to 4pm
- 2 St. Edmund's Chapel –  
Saturday 10am to 4pm
- 3 Dover College (Guided tours only) –  
Saturday 11am and 2pm
- 4 St. Mary the Virgin Church –  
Saturday 10am to 4pm
- 4a Bell Tower of St. Mary the Virgin –  
Saturday 10am to 4pm and  
Sunday 12.15 to 4pm
- 5 Unitarian Church –  
Saturday 11am to 4pm
- 6 Grand Shaft Staircase –  
Saturday and Sunday 10am to 4pm
- 7 St. Radigund's Abbey (Guided tours) –  
Saturday 10.30 to noon and 2.30 to 4pm

Publicity leaflets

These are available from the Tourist Information Office behind the Town Hall, Dover Town Council Offices (Maison Dieu House), Dover Museum and Dover Library.

To find out about other buildings open in the region call 020 7539 7921 or visit [www.heritageopendays.org](http://www.heritageopendays.org)

Local contact for more information:  
Derek Leach on 01304 823926 or email [derekrivervdale@btinternet.com](mailto:derekrivervdale@btinternet.com)