

# Blow That Horn, Man!

Terry Sutton

For the first time for 75 years Dover has heard the sounding of the town's Burghmote Horn stolen from the Town Hall nearly 50 years ago. The ancient horn, dating back to 1550, was used over the centuries to call Dover folk to a town meeting or to warn the town's freemen to gather with their tools to clear the silt bar preventing ships berthing in the harbour.

The Burghmote Horn was displayed in Dover museum at the Town Hall in 1969, along with other Dover treasures, when raiders broke in and stole a number of historic items. Fortunately they left the town's heavy golden mace, valued at that stage at more than £3,000, made in 1676 in memory of the landing of Charles II at Dover in 1660 on the Restoration of the Monarchy.

As a result of extensive enquiries by Kent and London detectives two men were arrested and jailed. A few of the stolen items were recovered but not the historic horn. Since then insurance company detectives have been on the watch at



*Burghmote Horn Blown at Tudor Festival 2016*

auctions and probing private sales, leading to investigations throughout Europe and further afield. It is believed money changed hands in the quest for information. Without a great deal of publicity Dover Town Council, responsible for the care of mayoralty regalia and other historic items, revealed the horn was back in its possession. And to prove it the ancient horn, claimed to be one of the best still in existence, it was blown several times on 1st October 2016 when members of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports paraded in Dover and during Dover's Tudor Festival.

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## Dover's Burghmote Horn

*Martyn Webster*

"Medieval Burghmote Horn has returned to Dover after it was stolen in the 1960's". So wrote Emily Stott in the Kent Mercury newspaper of 11th August 2016. Her article under quotes read as follows and is reproduced here with due acknowledgment to her and her newspaper: "A medieval civic horn which was stolen in a daylight raid on the Town Hall in the 60's has finally been returned to Dover after years of searching.

The Dover Burghmote Horn, made of copper alloy, was used to summon civic assemblies by the town crier. With reports from as early as 1558, it is one of ten of its kind with the nine

others in Faversham, Folkestone, Hythe, Ipswich, Canterbury, New Romney, Ripon, Sandwich and Winchester. On Monday 7th July 1969, it was stolen in a raid which also saw a large amount of silver and other treasures taken, including the (twice replaced since) Silver Oar of the Cinque Ports. It was reported that while councillors filed into the chamber for a meeting about housing, one of the raiders slipped inside and then waited to let the others in, before running off with the loot.

Allison Burton, Dover Town clerk said: "It's been a long fight and we're delighted to be bringing it home." At the time, there was a

reward issued from insurance loss adjusters and a public appeal by the Mayor of the day, William T Muge. He said: "To the thieves this horn is practically worthless but to the citizens of Dover it is extremely valuable. "I appeal to the good sense and kind hearts of the thieves to return the horn to the town. Naturally we hope to get all our silver back but I am particularly anxious about the return of the horn. It is the oldest piece in our collection."

The horn was lost until 2010 when a sale held by Christie's for the collection of the late Mrs Elias-Vaes included the Dover treasure, as well as three other horns. A German dealer who suspected the horn of medieval origin acquired the entire lot. He showed it to a London-based dealer who believed it dates back to the 13th century. Before long it was identified as the Dover Burghmote Horn. Dover Town Council has been involved in a lengthy legal battle to be able to bring the horn back to the town and on Tuesday 9th August 2016 it finally returned."

By way of further background, it is now well worth noting the report and lecture on the Burghmote Horn made by Edward Knocker FSA Honorary Librarian and former Town Clerk to the Right Worshipful Mayor of Dover and Town Council in a subsequently printed account in 1878 after having exhibited the horn, the Dover seals (still lost) and the Cinque Ports Silver Oar (also still lost but since replaced in 1979) to the Society of Antiquaries to which he was made a Fellow in 1874. It is also worthy to add that Edward Knocker's Muniment Cabinet in the Maison Dieu Council Chamber (1877) once held an undedicated existing description of the horn dating from 1817 which he must have relied on in part for his information – this archive presumably now being in the Dover Corporation archive transferred to Maidstone in 1979.

Edward Knocker's verbatim report is produced herewith only slightly abridged – "The horn, which is richly chased, measured in a

perpendicular line, is of the length of about 2 feet, and the diameter of the mouth is about 5 inches. In a band encircling it at a distance of 4 inches from the mouth is the inscription following, viz. A G L A IOHANNES, and in a scroll starting from the band, and I assume a continuation of it, is the following, viz, DE ALEMAINE ME FECIT". Now the first letters AGLA represent the most potent of all exorcisms, compounded of the initials of the Hebrew ATHA GEBIR LEILAM ADONAAI – "Thou art mighty for ever, o Lord". Mottoes so composed are of very great antiquity. Anyone desirous of further investigating such ancient talismans of amulets will find them in the Archaeological Journal vol xxvi.p.229. The remainder of the inscription may be read "Johannes de Alemaine me fecit" - "John of Germany made me" ...The date of this horn is to be assigned to the 13th century; if manufactured in Germany, to the early part of it; or, if made in England, to the middle of the century. So that it may properly be attributed to the reign of King Henry III (1207-1272).

In other boroughs where ancient horns exist, they are sometimes called Wakesmen's Horns", from the custom, it is supposed, of having been used to wake the inhabitants (which) carries them back to early Saxon times (when) they were called "Waking Horns". This account surprisingly does not explain in as many words whether the horn was actually animal maybe ox, or as the photo would suggest perhaps made out of a metal such as pewter. It was therefore seemly and appropriate for Emily Stott's article on the subject to be illustrated with a photograph of the current Mayor of Dover Councillor Neil Rix actually hornblowing the regained town treasure. The ancient artefact was paraded publicly again after more than forty years' absence on Cinque Ports Speaker's Day in Dover on 1st October 2016. If the horn could but speak with a voice of its own just imagine what it could tell us but if it could only from what is now hopefully its place of safe keeping forever!