

From Via to Dover

Maxine Formaggi (Mrs Cheese!)

(London-Ripi e la Via del Petrolio, Italy-Widred Road)

Well! here I am. In 2016, after twelve years away from England, I moved back. But not to my native London; to Dover, in Tower Hamlets. I can walk to the sea in fifteen minutes, instead of an hour and a half in the car across mountains. I walk everywhere, actually, instead of having to drive to buy even a loaf of bread. I used to live in Italy, so there's a big difference to my life – and yet a lot of similarities, because of course Dover had visitors from that peninsular two thousand years ago, welcomed or not; the Romans.

They got everywhere, didn't they? Dover has a pub called the *Roman Quay*, from when the river was wide and powerful. There's *The Roman Painted House*, where the remains of a very posh hotel for officers and VIPs to reside in luxury (with much plainer T&Cs for the squaddies in their barracks) can still be seen. What was the Roman baths quietly under York Street; what a shame it too isn't revealed and appreciated. London Road would have taken the Roman army straight to the city and even greater dominion over Albion.

History is all around you in Dover, from successful invaders like Julius Caesar to failed ones like Napoleon and Hitler. The old maritime station, where the famous left the boat train to embark for France in all those years before the port and its ferries and the Chunnel, saw Agatha Christie, Bogart and Bacall, amongst many. I can imagine those three on the same journey, with Agatha having a great idea for another crime novel about a Hollywood star being bumped off between Dover and Calais. Then there's Matthew Arnold on

his honeymoon, looking out at the sea and composing poetry – Matthew, stop, your bride awaits!

Another similarity is the friendliness of most people in Dover. People in our village in Italy were very friendly too; many knew each other on a daily basis. Names often recur through the generations in all communities – I don't know which ones in Dover are like that, but I bet there are some. Italian surnames can be foods (as is mine, see translation below). We knew of a Signora Meloni; Mrs Melons. A solicitor in our nearest town was called Carlo Lasagne. Some were oddly famous; an Italian politician was called Roberto Speranza – literally Bob Hope. Others were really weird: a book I read credited some research to a Dottorressa Feces (I'm not translating that one).

Dover is all hills behind the renowned cliffs, like gigantic waves from the Channel that became petrified millions of years ago. Our Italian village was just as up and down, with a very steep walk to the centre and a swoopy descent home.

And food? I'm sorry, but I can't draw any comparisons there. Of course, you can get a decent Chinese meal in Dover, or an Indian one, a Turkish or Spanish one – and great fish and chips. But some delicious antipasti (appetizers), big bowls of tasty homemade pasta, homemade bread, salad, a litre of local wine and coffee for less than £18.00 for two? I don't think so. Not Dover's fault of course, it's the weather and the duty levied on alcohol here.



L'antica Porta San Angelo - Foto di Emilia Trovini

We used to see films at a small local cinema in Italy, very like the delightful

one in Goal Lane. Paper tickets punched out of a machine and not spewed from a computer, coffee available further along the counter, old-fashioned seating. We all once had to exit halfway through the film, though; an earthquake hinted but then withdrew - I don't think that would happen in Dover town centre.

Something that is common to Dover and our village is a sad one; empty shops dot the passeggiata just like they do in Biggin Street. Locals in Italy told me that when they were young there was a greengrocer, a fresh fish shop, a cobbler, a newsagent's kiosk... all gone.

So, similar in some ways, in others not so much. I'm off to walk a dog now; I'm teaching her Italian.

Maxine Formaggi (Mrs Cheese!)

D & L Wondercrafts

Original Hand Crafted Items

*By
Denise and Lynn*

We stock a wide range of Knitted and Crocheted Items - All Handmade

Something Different - Unique and Unusual Framed Hand Crafted Diamond Pictures by Denise

We also stock Cuddly Soft Toys - Can Be Made to Order - All at reasonable prices - Wreaths for All Occasions



**Now Trading from Unit 5, 11-16 Biggin Street, Dover CT16 1BD
(Dover's New Indoor Market in the old Poundstretcher building)**

Contact

Tel: 01304 213668

Denise: denise.lee@ntlworld.com Mob: 07757 483501

Lynn: lyn.lee@ntlworld.com Mob: 07787 909919