

St. Mary-in-Castro

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Sitting high on the heights above the town and port and located within the grounds of Dover Castle is the church of St Mary in Castro arguably the oldest church of Christian worship of the town which is still functioning. In the absence of documentary evidence of the early history of the church one can derive much information from its construction for it is almost entirely of re-used Roman material. It has been suggested that the church was built in the 4th to the 11th centuries – quite some age range! The adjoining Pharos, an original Roman structure, probably dates from the 1st century and in later centuries it seems to have been adapted to form a western tower of the church. It was for a time used as the bell tower of the church which use continued until the late 1600s. The likelihood is that the Romans built the Pharos as a lighthouse in this location to guide shipping round the Foreland to the principal port at Richborough. It is likely to be the earliest human created structure in the grounds of what now forms Dover Castle.

An important thing to note is that the church is cruciform in shape. An interesting feature is a bricked-up door in the south wall which is of Saxon work. After the upheavals of the Commonwealth the church became disused and neglected such that by the eighteenth century the church was in a ruinous state, having been used as a coal store, being roofless and abandoned. In the nineteenth century the church was comprehensively restored, or rebuilt, and reconsecrated for divine worship. Its interior decoration of mosaic and tile wall covering to a design of William Butterfield FSA architect sparks differing views as to its suitability in a place of worship. During the

restoration of the church under Sir Gilbert Scott, architect, the vestry was built in 1888 and the North Transept which had been used as a vestry was restored to the church. The levels of the entire church were refloored and some new windows inserted. The entire church was re-seated, the choristers' seats were taken out of what had been the Sanctuary and placed beneath the tower the upper walls of which were rebuilt with a new roof and parapet.

The Church served as the garrison church for the military of the Dover and Shorncliffe garrisons until December 2014 when 2 South East Brigade was disbanded, and the army retrenched to barracks at Chatham and other locations. A plaque was erected in the church to record the ending of the specific use of Saint Mary in Castro as a garrison church. This event led to a discussion as to the future of the church within the grounds of the castle, but an enlightened English Heritage preferred to retain a working, or functioning, church rather than leave it to fulfil a purpose as a museum. After consultations between English Heritage, the Diocese of Canterbury, the Ministry of Defence, and other interested parties, the church made the transition to civilian status. It currently operates as an extra parochial church in the Diocese of Canterbury of the Church of England. Effectively, this status reflects the fact that the church does not operate as a parish church since it predates the parochial system and it was a Royal, or later a military, church within the castle grounds remaining as such until the army withdrew in 2014. With the departure of 2 Brigade the congregation became part of the Diocese of Canterbury under the jurisdiction of the Archbishop of

Canterbury. A Memorandum of Agreement between various parties as to its use and status was agreed in principle.

There seems to be a public impression that the church of St Mary in Castro is no longer a functioning church. This is most definitely not the case for, under the guidance of the former Co-ordinating Chaplain the Reverend Canon Jonathan Russell, the church evolved into a very special sacred space with a committed congregation members of which worship at the church every Sunday at 10am. The church is, however, open to allcomers, and most services of worship have visitors to the castle entering the church finding to their amazement a functioning church rather than a museum! The church retains strong links with its military history and throughout the year veteran or cadet groups attend special services such as those commemorating Sea Sunday, Battle of Britain, Remembrance, or St Barbara's day (the patron saint of miners, gunners, engineers and others creating or working with explosive elements) which are held at the appropriate times of the year. The church remains a focal point for military units that remain in the area. Baptism, wedding, funeral, and memorial services still take place at the church for those with a close association with the military or the castle community. In December celebrations of the Christmas season take place with the holding of a Christingle Service for younger people and the traditional Midnight Mass is celebrated. In Holy Week local town Christians carry three large wooden crosses to stand outside St Mary the Virgin Church in Cannon Street before being taken up to St Mary in Castro where they are affixed to castle walls, so they are visible to people in the town. At sunrise on Easter morning a service is held by St Mary-in-Castro to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Currently, the church is served by a ministry team comprising four ordained members of the clergy, a licensed Lay Reader and a Lay Chaplain. In January 2023 I was commissioned as the Honorary Co-ordinating Chaplain at St Mary in Castro in succession to Jonathan Russell, a considerable privilege for a self-supporting priest. Enquiries regarding services at the church or other matters relating to the church can be directed to me personally. General oversight of the operation of the church is through a church council comprised of elected members of the congregation. All committed to the work of the church act as a team. Standards of those who have served as Lord Wardens of the Cinque Ports and those serving as Deputy Constable of Dover Castle are displayed throughout the church including the Transepts. Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother's standard together with those of Sir Winston Churchill, The Duke of Wellington, James Duke of York (who succeeded as King James II in 1685) among others are displayed at various points in the church. Of the Deputy Constables, Brigadier Maurice Atherton's standard is displayed. Society members will recall he served as a local magistrate as well as being President of the Society. The Lord Warden for the time being is the Constable of Dover Castle. Presently the post of Lord Warden is vacant following the death in November 2022 of the last Lord Warden, Admiral of the Fleet the Lord Boyce KG GCB OBE a former submariner who in 2004 succeeded Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother as Lord Warden following her demise. The installation of a Lord Warden invariably begins within the grounds of Dover Castle with a service in St Mary in Castro before the ceremony descends to the town and to the grounds of Dover College where the installation takes place in a Court convened by the Confederation of the Cinque Ports.

On many of the special occasions, where St Mary in Castro provides a service, military personnel or veterans attend complete with their standards which are paraded through the church and placed in the Sanctuary nearby the altar. The pride with which the standard bearers carry out their duties is a wonder to behold and is extremely touching. One such standard bearer who attends at the church for such military services is Dover 'born and bred' man Harry Hopper of Pioneer Road in the town who frequently bears the standard of the Royal Artillery. On Battle of Britain Sunday this year the Royal Air Force Association standard was borne by 92-year-old Peter Markick of Deal.

Harry Hopper was born in a house in Glenfield Road which property was 'shelled out' during the Second World War. His parents had many local connections. After education at Barton Road, Powell School and Charlton Primary School as well as St Mary's and Oakleigh House (which some Society members may recall was based in Maison Dieu Road), at the age of 14 he became an apprentice jockey which was to stand him in good stead for what followed. In 1957 he was commissioned into the Royal Artillery at the age of 18 for three years. He subsequently joined the King's Troop at St John's Wood London and then as a member of the 5th Field regiment of the Royal Artillery he

found himself first in Hong Kong and subsequently in Malaya and Singapore. In 1960 he came out of the army and became a professional groom to the East Kent Hunt. Among his subsequent varied roles, he became a publican with Ind Coope spending ten years with the company and working in five different pubs, finishing as the manager of the Black Bull on Canterbury Road in Folkestone.

Harry joined the Royal Artillery Association just at the beginning of the new (21st) century and was also a member of the Royal British Legion, Dover Branch. Sadly, the Dover branch folded in 2005 through lack of members. While on paper the branch had several members, attendance at meetings of the branch was poor. Harry was a colleague of Pat Cunningham who was Chairman of the Royal Artillery Association and who, Society members may recall, was the Lord Warden's (the Lord Boyce) Admiralty Sergeant until Pat's death a few years ago. Harry took over the post of Chairman of the Royal Artillery Association upon the death of Pat Cunningham. Before Pat's death Pat, Harry and others, would meet up at the Dover Sea Angling Association premises in Priory Road until the Dover Branch was folded. It then merged with the Canterbury Branch of the Royal Artillery Association where Harry held the post of Vice Chairman.

Among the many and varied jobs Harry has undertaken during his civilian working life was a spell as a bus driver for East Kent and then, later, Stagecoach. Following retirement Harry devotes much time to Royal Artillery affairs attending meetings in Canterbury. In 2015 Dover (White Cliffs) Branch of the Royal British Legion was created and Harry became a member. When time permits, he attends meetings of the local Legion branch in the Railway Club, now (The Phoenix Club), off Crabble Road



Peter Markick with RAFA Standard and Licensed Lay Reader Lieutenant Colonel (retired) John Morrison

in River where the reconstituted Branch meets.

On Merchant Navy Day on the seafront this year (2023) 1st September - Harry joined the line-up of standard bearers on parade and, by and large, he attends all military commemorations held locally and some further away when he is proud to bear the Royal Artillery Standard. Harry also turns out when time permits at the Royal British Legion events with the Royal Artillery standard particularly for services of commemoration and remembrance. Harry always cuts an impressive figure by the way he holds himself and his impressive mutton chops make him a face easy to remember! Most interesting and important is that Harry's services are all undertaken on a purely voluntary basis. All the time he is around the Royal Artillery locally can rest assured for a professional and proper bearing while the standard is being carried. He is always a very welcome guest at St Mary-in-Castro. Harry has given a lifetime of commitment to horses and is one of the local 'characters' who give richness to the life of the town of Dover.

Another person who attends St Mary in Castro from time to time is Christine Walton a resident of Knights Templars on the Western Heights who is deeply committed to veterans' affairs. She has her origins in Hackney north London but moved to Dover with her husband Brian in 2010. Both are retired. Originally Christine attended the Deal branch of the Royal British Legion (where she remains a member) but following the creation of the new Dover (White Cliffs) Branch of the Legion she became a member of that branch and is also a member of St Margaret's branch. Attending a battlefield tour inspired her to become ever more involved in veterans' affairs and so she became Treasurer in 2016 of the newly formed Dover branch then

became Secretary in 2017. Thereafter she has taken on the job of the Poppy Appeal annually for Dover and St Margarets. Her concern for veterans and their interests led her to start a Friends of Veterans Breakfast Club in 2017. This meets every third Saturday in Wetherspoons between 9 and 11.30am. Such meetings have themes such as Battle of Britain, Trafalgar, Remembrance - determined by the time of the year. A recent meeting had thirty-seven people attending.

Pre-Covid, Christine organised meetings for veterans and their partners at the café in the Charlton Centre but since the Covid pandemic these meetings now take place twice a month in St Mary's Church parish centre. Christine is also involved with the Veterans Singing Group, in Deal, and she has taken over responsibility for the Channel Dash while organising all the Dover branch activities. Next year, 2024, looks as if it will be a busy one for Christine with the eightieth anniversary of the D Day landings in addition to the usual V.E. Day and V.J. Day commemorations. St Mary-in-Castro will be available to play its part in any commemorations planned for 2024. In view of her commitment to veterans and their concerns Christine is invariably invited to commemoration events that take place in St Mary-in-Castro. She is well respected by veterans and their associates.

Advance Notice! St Mary-in-Castro will be hosting a Celebration of Christmas on 21st December at 7pm where the public is invited to come along and sing well known carols and secular seasonal songs. The Pharos Chamber Choir will be present and that is always good value to add to an event. It promises to be a good event so why not come along? Contact 01304 203548 to book in which is essential as there is a capacity limitation. Do remember St Mary-in-Castro is open to one and all and is functioning.