

The Dover Express

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Recently I came across some notes I made from some research into Dover's newspapers and with the departure from Dover of Terry Sutton, a veteran Express reporter, it seems a good time for a Newsletter article. I hope that Terry will forgive me if there are any inaccuracies!

The Express dates from 1858, founded by John Thomas Friend. It operated from 133, Snargate Street, moving to 185 Snargate Street in 1859. The four pages cost one old penny, undercutting the other local newspapers that charged 3d. The first copy contained adverts for Flashmans, upholsterer in Market Place, Dover, John Scott, dyer and cleaner in Snargate Street, Forster's, a chemist in Castle Street, Charlton Mill offering best quality flour at 37s 6d a sack and Dover Races with a racecourse by the castle. News included a report of the Board of Health meeting where it was said there were five hundred places in the borough that were not clean. At the quarterly meeting of the borough council somebody complained that some streetlights were 'like a rushlight in a turnip'. There was also mention of a forthcoming reading of Shakespeare with appropriate music at the Wellington Hall in Snargate Street. Names were given of famous people arriving, staying, or leaving Dover.



Dover Express office in Snargate Street

The weekly cross Channel traffic figures were 803 passengers arrived and 1273 departed.

In 1871 John Bavington Jones purchased the Dover News and Echo, which he then amalgamated with the Dover Express purchased from John Friend, in 1873. For the next seventy-six years John Bavington Jones and his sons, Oliver and Russell ran the paper and saw all its rivals disappear – the Dover Standard, Observer, Chronicle and Telegraph. John died in 1922, Oliver in 1933 and Russell in 1949.

John was born in Shropshire in 1840, the son of a miner who had been killed in a mining accident. John worked at the pit from ten years old to support his mother and sisters. Self-educated he went into journalism in various parts of the country. He accompanied Matthew Webb on the famous first cross Channel swim in 1875 and championed the development of the Kent coal fields. Perhaps John is best known for his untiring research into Dover's history published in books such as *Records of Dover*, *Annals of Dover* and *Dover, A Perambulation*.



John Bavington Jones, wife Phoebe.
Russell (left) and Oliver (right)

As Honorary Dover Librarian he catalogued the ancient corporation records and was made a Freeman in 1918.

Oliver was born in 1872 and acquired a wide knowledge of Dover and its history, reporting on Dover Council meetings for forty years – surely, he deserved a medal! He excelled at cricket, football, golf and rifle shooting.

Russell, born in 1876, concentrated on the business side of the paper and became joint editor with his father when his brother died. He also had a vast knowledge of local history and played chess for Kent.

Norman Sutton, a keen footballer, cricketer and rifleman succeeded Russell Jones as editor in 1949. A local boy, he attended St. Martin's School and Dover County School. Wounded in France during the First World War, Norman joined the Express in 1919.

During the Second World War twelve bombs and shells fell within one hundred yards of the Express offices in September 1944, but only one issue was late (Saturday instead of Friday) due to a loss of electricity. For long periods during the war the only editorial staff were Norman and Russell. During WW2, the censor would not allow the Express to state where bombs and shells had fallen. Reporters could only say that 'a South Coast town was attacked', but everybody in the town knew. When the censorship ban was lifted from weather reports and forecasting in newspapers, Norman Sutton telephoned Dover's weather to national newspapers. On one occasion Norman was telephoning the weather from a telephone box, but was overheard by an army officer. Thinking he could be a spy, the officer pulled out his revolver and challenged Norman. His explanation was not believed so Norman suggested they went to the police station where he was well-known, causing some amusement!

The coronation of Queen Elizabeth in 1953 brought about a big change. Instead of adverts filling the front page, they were replaced by bold headlines with reports and photographs. In 1964 it boasted that it had never missed a single weekly issue despite the bombs and shells that fell on Dover during two world wars. From 1964 to 1966 the paper was printed out of Dover for fifteen months, caused by a mighty crash in the machine room when the seventy year old press collapsed requiring a new machine room to be built and the old press scrapped. The Snargate Street premises were demolished in 1971 to make way for the York Street/A20 roundabout. Norman was succeeded as editor by the chief reporter, Stan Wells, who died only seven months later aged forty-seven. George Pepper then became editor. He had joined the paper in 1950 and resigned in 1987 after twenty-four years. Tony Richardson followed him and then Jeremy Wells. By this time the Express and the Folkestone Herald had a single editor. Now the editor role covers several local newspapers in the area with no Express office in Dover.

A Bavington Jones, Robin, was still a director in 1966. This family tradition continued in 1949 with Terry Sutton, son of Norman, becoming a cub reporter at twenty following National Service. During his fifty-nine years with the paper, Terry became chief reporter, news editor, deputy editor, acting editor for a few months and finally retiring as associate editor when he retired officially in 1994 at age sixty-five. He continued, however, in a part time capacity then as a freelance for many years. With his father's forty-five years' service, Terry and Norman served the Express for over one hundred years! Bob Hollingsbee also worked for the paper for forty-four years following in his father, Eddie's, footsteps.

Today, with local newspapers struggling, one wonders how long the Dover Express can survive.