

Death, Mad Jack and Cuckolds: The Story of Kingsdown Road, St Margaret's at Cliffe. A Research Study for St Margaret's History Society by Christine Waterman. June 2017.

This is the story of a small road in a small village in Kent, but one which has some very surprising stories about death and inquests, drinkers and teetotalers, some very large guns and some very interesting people.

Kingsdown Road is situated just off the High Street in St Margaret's at Cliffe, a village full of history and characters which has been home to actors and entertainers, such as Noel Coward, Hermione Gingold, and George Arliss, writers such as Ian Fleming and the engineering genius, Henry Royce, who designed the first Rolls-Royce aero engine in the village in 1914.

In its time this small road has contained a pub, a library, the village school, the village blacksmith, a Bowls Club and a Working men's club. It was the original home of the Parish Council; it was where elections were held, and where Coastguards practiced rocket firing. Today it opens out into a well-trodden footpath and national cycle path, from which you can still see the remains of a two large WW2 cross channel guns, a popular golf course and several Bronze Age barrows.

The early history of the road

There are some lovely early maps showing Kingsdown road.¹ One of the earliest is the Andrews Drury and Herbert map of 1769. (Fig.1) it has some inaccuracies. One might be surprised, for example, to see the relative location of Kingsdown (shown as 'Kingswould') transformed into an inland rather than seaside village, but the key features of St Margaret's, such as the Church, and its main farms, Bere Farm, Wanston (Wanson) Reach Farm (Ridge) and the original two South Foreland lighthouses are all here. Fig 1 shows the route of the road in red.

¹ For further details and images of the maps featured here see the 'Guide to Sources' at the end of the report.

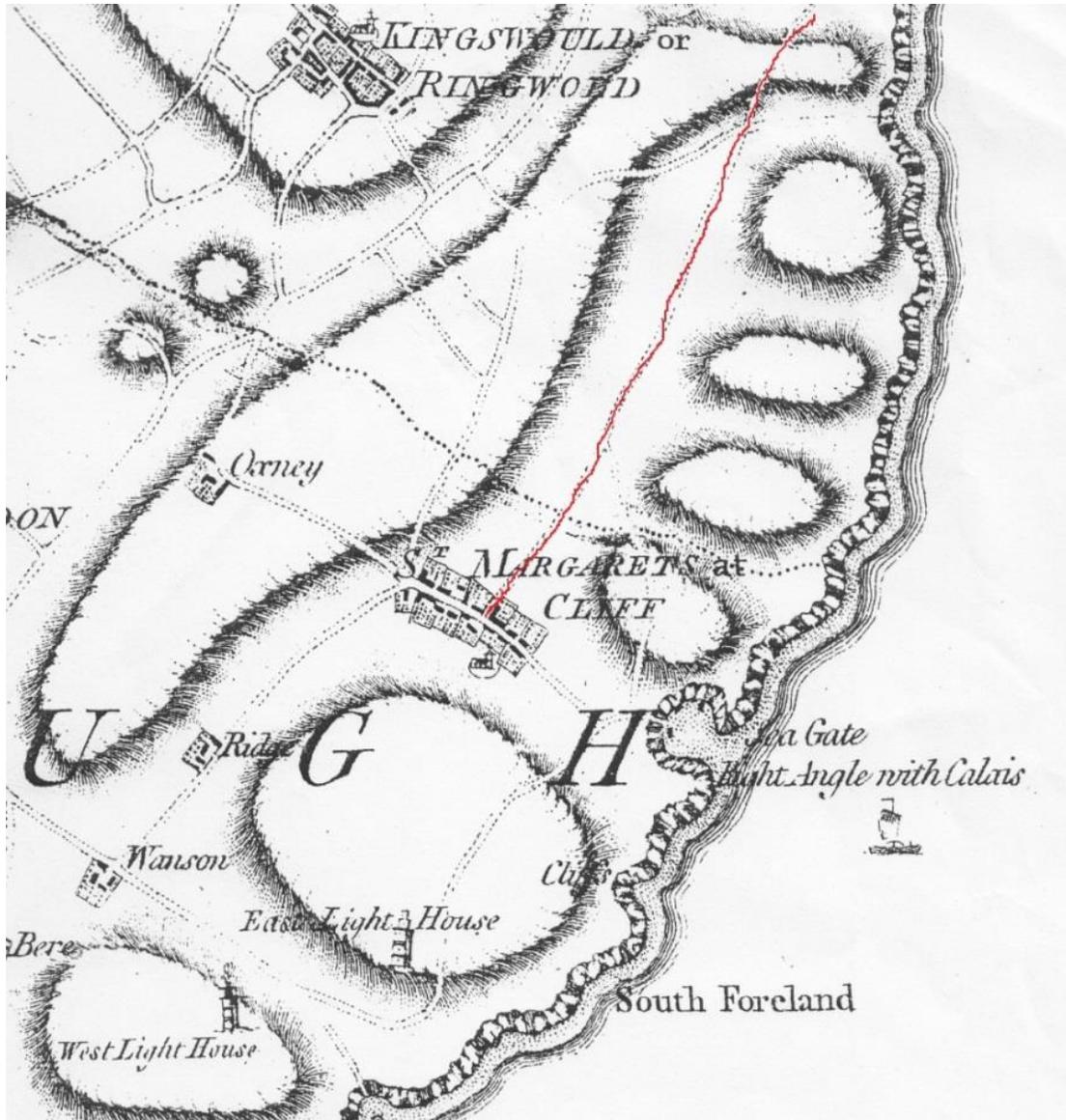


Fig 1: Extract from the Andrews, Drury and Herbert map of Kent 1769
Kingsdown Road is marked in red.

Moving along a few years to 1783, Hasted's map of the county of Kent, on a smaller scale, (Fig 2) shows St Margaret's more clearly as a small settlement off the main Dover- Deal road. It was then an agricultural community with access to the beach for fishing and smuggling with a large 12th C church and known for an annual fair held in July, which was still being held in the 1860's.



Fig 2. Part of Hasted's map of Kent 1862. Kingsdown Road marked in red

The church was sadly not in good condition as this engraving of 1843 shows. The size of the building far exceeded the needs and resources of a small village and its original role remains a mystery.



Fig 3. The church of St Margaret at Antioch 1843, from the London Illustrated. (St Margaret's History Society)

We get far more accuracy and detail on the Kent map produced by William Mudge in 1801, (Fig.6) an early one inch to the mile map produced for the Board of Ordnance, (later known as the Ordnance Survey). The creation of this map was spurred on by the threat of an invasion from France and it is the most accurate so far, with individual village houses recognizable. The survey of Kent was first to go ahead. It began in 1795 under the direction of the Board's chief draftsman, William Gardner. The theodolite used for the survey, specially built by Jesse Ramsden in 1791, was a formidable instrument, almost a metre in diameter and weighing over ninety kilos. A four-wheeled sprung carriage pulled by two horses was needed to move it from place to place. We can picture it rumbling down Kentish roads, to the surprise and interest no doubt of the locals. It was in use for over 60 years and, incredibly, it still survives, having been preserved in the Science Museum, where it can still be seen. (Fig 5)



Fig 5. Ramsden's Theodolite of 1791. Used to provide some of the first really accurate maps of the UK (Science Museum)



Fig .6 Extract from the Mudge map of Kent 1801. Kingsdown road shown in red.

So, we have the first accurate map of the road but we have to wait another forty years to get any accurate idea of its inhabitants.

That comes with the village tithe map of 1840 of which there is a copy in St Margaret's Village Archive. (The original is in the Canterbury Cathedral Archive). It was produced, with an accompanying register of landowners and land occupier's names, as part of a government act of 1836. This Act abolished the tithe payment of 'goods in kind' (a tithe is a 10% tax originally paid in goods to the church) and substitute a simpler annual payment based on the value of the land. The land is divided on the map into plot numbers which link to a list of owners and occupiers and brief descriptions of the properties.

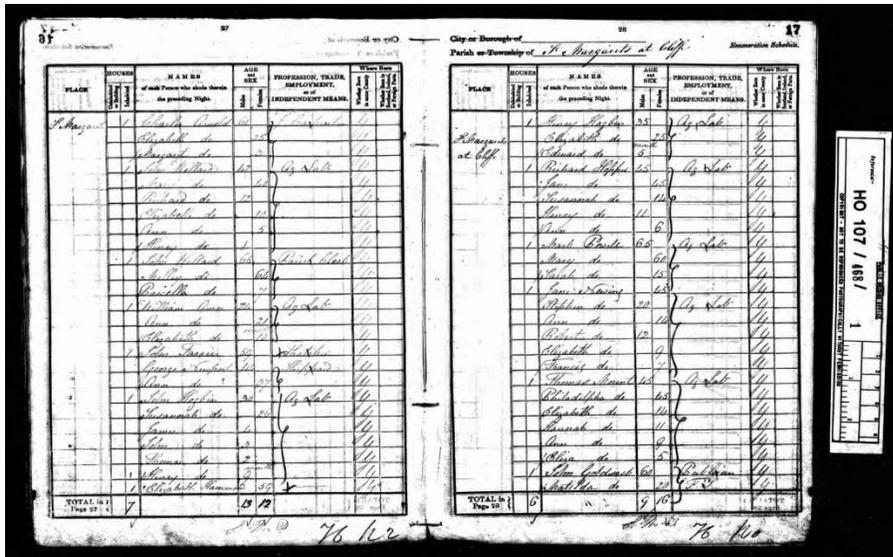


Fig.8. Page from the 1841 census for St Margaret's at Cliffe. Almost no addresses are recorded, but the names of everyone in the village on census night are here. (Public Records Office)

However, for most of Kingsdown Road we can use this list to establish quite a lot of information about the road and its inhabitants. In the table below you can see that three of the tithe map plots shown on Fig7 on the north side of the road. The Red Lion Inn, the home of a thatcher and the village blacksmith can be related directly to the 1841 census, giving the names and occupations of the occupiers of individual houses. This is only possible to do for this date by combining the two sources of information.

Plot Number on Tithe map	Description on Tithe map	Owner on tithe map	Occupier details from Tithe map and 1841 census
371	The Red Lion Inn	Edward Rutley	John Goldsack,60 (Publican) Matilda Goldsack,20
373	Cottage and garden	John Farrier	John Farrier,59 (Thatcher) George Newport,44 (Shepherd) Ann Newport,37

388	Cottage and garden	Henry Hambrook	Daniel Hambrook,37 (Blacksmith) Louise Hambrook,25 George,2 Louisa,5 months Richard Goldsack 30 (Journeyman Blacksmith) Frances Tucker,15
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A quick analysis of the census and tithe map combined shows 15 dwellings in the road with perhaps surprisingly for this time, seven owner occupiers and eight rented properties. One might have expected most to be rented or tied properties. Of the 14 men with a stated occupation nine are agricultural labourers; two are blacksmiths, one carpenter, one thatcher and a shepherd. This is much as expected for this small agricultural community.

The original name of the road: the story of Cuckold's Row

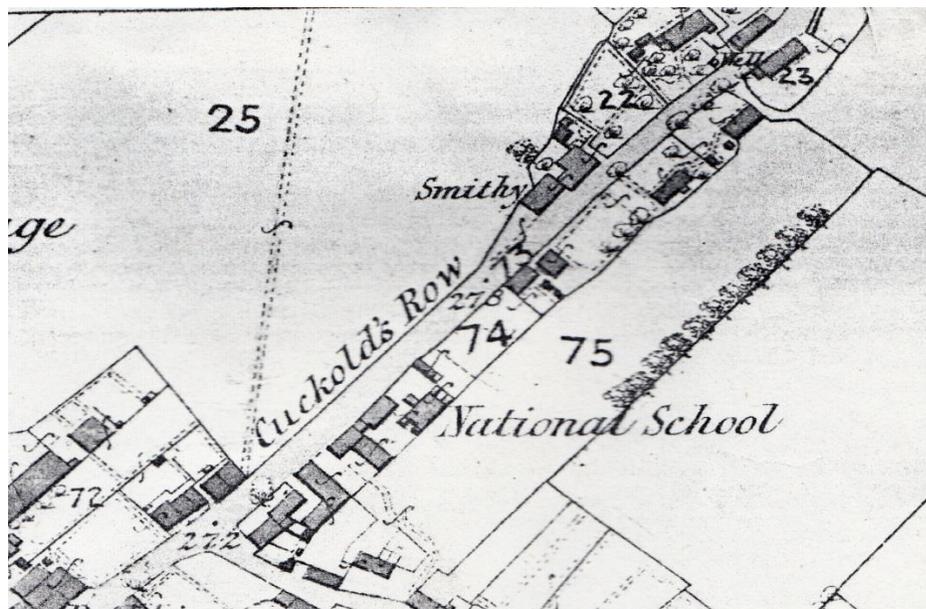


Fig.9 Cuckold's Row, the original name for Kingsdown Road. 1861-1871 OS map 1st edition.

What the title map does not tell us, but clearly shown on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey map (1861-71), shown at fig.9, is that the original name of Kingsdown Road was Cuckold's Row.

The dictionary definition of a cuckold is *'A man whose wife is sexually unfaithful, often regarded as an object of derision, often shown with horns'*



Fig.9 Depiction of a Cuckold 1580-90

The word apparently dates to King John's time (1199-1216) and comes from the old French word for cuckoo relating to the bird's habit of laying its eggs in another bird's nest. The word was in popular use in the 16th Century particularly in ribald songs and plays and was also used in place names, a few of which have survived.

There is a Cuckold's Corner near Snargate on Romney Marsh, a Cuckold's Row in Spaxton Somerset, and a Cuckold's Row Orchard in Herefordshire. Cuckold's Point in London, is now the site of the Canary Wharf Hilton Hotel.

We have some useful information on Cuckold's Point from an online blog on the history of the Thames. (<https://thamesfaceeast.wordpress.com/tag/cuckolds-point/>)

'Cuckold's Point marks the point where the river narrows and the rougher waters of the Thames Estuary turn into the calm of The Pool Of London and so also became known as Cuckold's Haven. It was marked by a tall pole on which were mounted rams horns or deer antlers and this became a landmark that travelers looked out for. It was also said that it reminded returning sailors what their wives

had been up to whilst they had been away. From here every year from at least 1200 was launched the Charlton Horn fair'

'Horn's, and their ribald associations, became the main theme of the Charlton Horn Fair. A large crowd from all over London and Kent would gather at Cuckold's Point to parade to Charlton. Many would dress as characters from the founding legend, The King, the miller or his wife. Cross-dressing of the sexes was common; and the wearing of horns was, more or less, ubiquitous.'

There is no evidence for the origin of the name in St Margaret's! It was still in use sufficiently in 1871 to be used on the first edition of the OS map although by the 1906 version it's been changed to the more acceptable 'The Row'.

A brief history of the main historic buildings of Kingsdown Rd

The Red Lion Inn: Drinking and Death



Fig.10 The Red Lion Inn in the 1950's. The outhouse on the right was used up to the 1930's as a mortuary for bodies awaiting inquests held in the pub. (St Margaret's History Society)

Until its closure in 2016 the Red Lion was probably the oldest surviving pub in the village. The earliest known record for the inn dates to 1736 when it was licensed by the Wingham Justices to Israel Wellard. Two other pubs were licensed in St Margaret's at the same time, 'The Green Man', now the 'Coastguard' on the beach and the 'Barber's Pole'- location unknown. The current building, which has a Grade 2 listing, is said to date to 1825.

Charlie Croucher, a young child being brought up in the village in the 1930's by his foster mother Mrs Newman, described the regular scene outside the pub.

'The corner of the main street by the Red Lion and Goldfinches the Bakers was the really essential hang out for the older lads of the village. There was always a group of a dozen or more especially in the evenings and on Saturday afternoons. They would arrive on bicycle or foot and hang around for hours. Anyone who walked up the village street especially young women or girls were embarrassed by having to run the gauntlet of a dozen gazes and listen to rude comments which they affected not to hear, their manner of walking, their figures, whether they were pretty or plain, all would be commented on'

(From 'Kent Village Memoir' by S Charles Croucher. 1996)

It's also said that Ian Fleming and Noel Coward, who were great friends, had a pint or two in here in the early 1950's when they both had weekend houses in St Margaret's Bay.²

Inquests in the Pub

For many hundreds of years the Red Lion was not just used for drinking. As one of the only readily available large public indoor spaces in the village it also served as a meeting place for parish business and often, but not exclusively, for inquests where coroners were required to investigate a sudden or suspicious death. A jury of 12 'able and sufficient' local men would be required to view the body, usually

² This seems to be an anecdotal claim rather than definite fact. There is plenty of evidence that Fleming and Coward both visited the village from 1945 and certainly used the smarter Granville Hotel in St Margaret's Bay. (Noel Coward Diaries, Payn and Morley 1982) Coward gave a bar to the adjacent Bowls Club but may have been a bit out of place in the down to earth Red Lion.

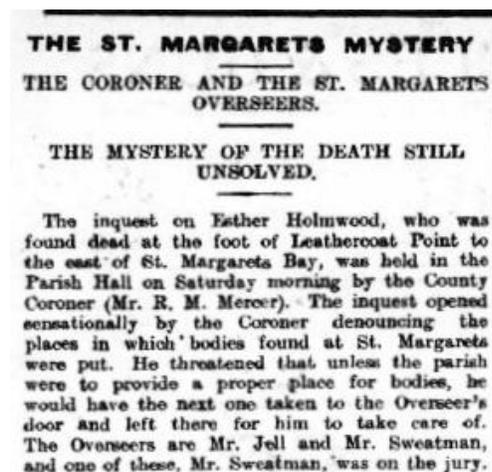
displayed in an adjacent outbuilding. The jury could question witnesses and if foul play were suspected then the case would go on to the courts.

St Margaret's had more than its share of inquests due to a steady flow of suicidal or accidental falls from the cliffs and also when bodies washed ashore- by 1908 about three or four a year.

As the local Coroner, RM Mercer, commented in a newspaper report on an inquest in 1908 most of the deaths in the village were of people with no connection to it 'people washed up or who have fallen over the cliff, who have no ties here and who have no home to be taken to'³

The locals did their duty in retrieving these bodies and in serving on the inquest juries but the handling of the bodies seem to have become a bit casual.

Matters came to a head at an inquest in December 1908⁴ into the death of Esther Homewood from Dover who had been found dead at the foot of Leathercote Point. She was found to have committed suicide. Before commencing the inquest the Coroner roundly denounced the places where bodies were currently kept in St Margaret's citing recent cases of the use of a pig sty and in this case where the body had been laid on manure in a stable where rats may be present, threatened to have the next body found removed to the door of the Overseer of the Poor's House. All was sensationally reported in the local paper, The Dover Express.



³ Dover Express 11Dec 1908

⁴ Dover Express 11Dec 1908

Fig.11 Part of the Dover Express article of December 11th 1908 where the Coroner threatened action against the Overseers of the Poor about the unsatisfactory storage of bodies in the Parish.

The next cliff death came in a few weeks later in January 1909⁵ and true to his word, the Coroner arranged for the body 'which being badly knocked about was a horrible sight' to be taken from the Bay on a coal trolley through the village to the house of Mr Jell, who lived in Kingsdown Road with his wife and five children. The poor body in question was that of a Mr Channer from Deal. This time the inquest was held in the schoolroom in Kingsdown Road. The jury included the Parish Clerk and the Chairman of the Parish Council, Col Cavenagh, as well as poor Mr Jell.

Col Cavenagh took the opportunity to protest against 'this horrible sight' being taken through the village. The landlord of the 'Green Man', Mr Berry no doubt offended by the previous slur on his care of bodies, was now refusing to take any although his premises on the beach were the most convenient. He too was on the jury.

The argument rumbled on through 1909⁶. The Parish Council toyed with the idea of building a mortuary at the church or, rather oddly, of using a room at the 'Excelsior Tearoom' on the beach. Mrs Morse, (the tea room manager) had a living room which was available 'when there were not paying guests' but in the end Mr Berry changed his mind and let them use the 'Green Man' again and the whole thing fizzled out. Inquests continued to be held at the Red Lion, the Parish Hall, Morley House a convalescent home which actually had a proper mortuary,'The Hope Inn', and even once at Westcliffe farm. Some were held in people's houses and one at the Coastguard Station when the new Chief Coastguard shot himself at work.

The last records so far discovered of the Red Lion being used for inquests are for 1932⁷, when there were three in a year, George Howship, a local architect who lived in the village, found at the bottom of the cliffs, another village man, Percy

⁵ Dover Express 8 January 1909

⁶ Dover Express 22 January 1909

⁷ Dover Express 3 June 1932

Curling, from Hope Farm who killed himself at the farm and a Ramsgate man Fred Mynott who jumped off the cliffs in June.

After the war inquests mainly seem to have been held at Eastry Hospital or in Dover Town Hall and the habit in use since the 12th Century of finding 12 village men several times a year to hear an inquest in a local pub seems to have finished.

The Reading Room, The Men's Institute and the Bowls Club



Fig.12 The St Margaret's Bowls Club, founded in 1907 and still in use today. The 1895 teetotal reading room is at the back of the building. (Author's own photo)

An alternative to the lure of the Red Lion for the local thirsty farm labourer was provided in the last few years of the 19th Century. Hardly noticeable behind the tin façade of today's Bowls Club is a pretty flint building which was built in 1895 as

an alternative to the 'evils of drink' as a Working Men's Club. The founder was Gerard Frederick De Zoete a solicitor⁸. The village Vicar was a Trustee.

De Zoete bought part of the Six Acre Field abutting Kingsdown Road and set up a trust. The flint building followed, marked as a 'Reading room' on the 1899 OS map. It acquired its first billiard table by voluntary subscription in 1899. It was a teetotal alternative for the village working men.

In 1907 a new piece of land was acquired for a bowling green, laid out by local horticulturalist Mr Ellis. The two clubs seemed to remain separate for a while and there are lots of jolly photos of matches, featuring many of the key characters of the village such as Col Cavenagh, The Rev Smyth, Mr Jell, local tradesmen and shopkeepers who no doubt enjoying a bit of networking whilst playing bowls.



Fig.13 Some of the members of the St Margaret's Village Bowls Club c. 1910, including many who served on the village inquest juries (St Margaret's History Society)

By 1914 the club seems to have become one club but a split came after WW1 when ex-servicemen called 'Comrades of the Great War' took over the original

⁸ The original Trust deed can be seen in the St Margaret's village archive

building and the responsibility for its maintenance.⁹ They allowed the Bowls Club to use it from April to October. For many years the building became a sort of mini community centre used for meetings and wedding receptions

By the 1970's the Men's Club was in financial difficulties. For 30 years it had received some income from leasing part of the building out as a school room. When the Old School closed this income dried up and it had only a handful of members. The buildings were in need of repair, the front garden was said to be 'an eyesore'. Talks took place, sometimes acrimoniously, about amalgamating the two clubs. The locally based Bay Trust took an interest but then decided not to buy it. Under its original Trust deed it was possible for the premises to pass to the Parish Council and finally in 1974 this was agreed. Needless to say it has sold alcohol for some time and one of its most interesting claims to fame is that its bar was provided by Noel Coward. Probably not quite the sort of thing Mr Zoete had in mind in 1895!

The Old School



⁹ Evidence from minute books of the Working Men's Institute and Bowls club minutes, see Source Guide.

Fig.14 The earliest known photo of pupils and teachers at the village school. C.1910 (St Margaret's History Society)

In the 19th century the village was known for its private boarding schools, one for boys at what is now the White Cliffs Hotel and one for girls, at what is now Portal House School. The decision to found 'a day school for the poor of the parish' was taken at a meeting in the Red Lion on 31 March 1845. The minute book of the meeting has miraculously survived in the village archive.¹⁰ The instigators of the project were Mr Temple, who ran the big private boarding schools in the village, The Curate, the Rev. Boys, Mr Pilcher, Mr Matson and others.

By 1847 enough money had been raised from donations to build the school on Parish land in Kingsdown Road. It was called "The National School" as it was funded by "The National Society for Promoting Religious Education" which founded thousands of elementary schools all over England and Wales. It was also funded by bequests from local people. The school cost £201.13s.9d to build and housed many of the village's 48 boys and 53 girls. It had only one large classroom, 30ft by 16ft and a small front yard. The school was not only for the children of the village but also for the children of Lighthouse Keepers and Coastguards who lived near the village. Some walked 3 miles to get to school.

The school's first teacher was Mrs Pilcher, who taught there for 20 years, and who was initially paid only 7d a week, but was given a free house to live in. The school was also rented out in the evenings for use as an evening school to a Mr Matson.

Soon more space was needed. Two extensions were built, firstly, in 1872, to provide an Infant Department (now the Library building) and in 1875 to give more room. Staffing was increased to two teachers. Later they hired a room in the Bowls club to provide an extra classroom. For 123 years, with a break only for the Second World War, this provided an education for the village children until the current village primary school opened in 1970.

¹⁰ The minute book and a range of other material including copies of the original plans of the school, an 1890's register and many photos and some oral histories can be seen in the St Margaret's Village archive and on their website (Old School box 1&2)

The Old School was also used for other purposes as when its internal partitions were folded back it provided a very large space, making it suitable for public meetings and elections as well as for inquests as mentioned above.

When parish councils were formed in 1894 there was no Parish Hall in the village and this became their meeting place, not least because the use of a school for the purpose was free under a clause in the new act forming parish councils.

These early Parish Councils had wider and different powers than today at a time of considerable social change. Topics for discussion in the early years included the provision of a public water supply (when all residents relied on wells or rainwater tanks), the introduction of a gas and electric supply and the building of essential sea defences to stop the erosion of the Bay, which reportedly was losing nearly five foot of beach a year to the sea. The Council was also responsible for the village fire engine, appointment of Overseers of the Poor and public lighting. In these early years they also tended to call special meetings of all electors to debate big topics. The Schoolroom was in frequent use.

The first Parish Council meeting was held on the 13th December 1894 and like all parish meetings of the time is reported in detail in that week's Dover Express.¹¹ The main topics under consideration were the building of a sea wall between the Bay and Dover, for new sea defences in the bay itself and the need for the clearance of bushes along the cliff path to Dover, the responsibility of Lord Sackville Cecil, owner of the Hermitage, now South Sands House. Rights of way were another issue. On the eve of the 1894 Local Government Act the Earl of Granville's agent had closed public access to the zig zag steps from the cliff to the beach. His notice was almost immediately ripped down 'by persons unknown' Other paths had been ploughed up (Earl Granville again) or closed (Lord Sackville Cecil).

In April 1895 they discuss the issue of the water supply again having been contacted by the East Kent Water company who had a waterworks at Martin Mill about a public supply. It was said that the village well had a good supply which

¹¹ The Dover Express reported every parish council meeting in great detail at this time. The original copies of the actual minutes are still held by St Margaret's at Cliffe Parish Council.

only dried out in dry summers and most houses had tanks and springs on the beach. However, a later survey found many of these tanks to have insecure lids and to have hardly ever been cleaned out. The Parish Council considered forming a private company to supply water from wells in the village with pumps and pipes to houses and commissioned a report and held a special meeting of the electors who voted for it.

Dr Braden, one of the committee said

‘he was in one of the cottages the other day and a woman said to him.’ I have a very good supply of water but it does smell so’. Richer residents had their own wells with filters.

Unfortunately, the Parish Council had overstepped the mark. Water supply was a Rural District Council power, not theirs, and they now had to put pressure on them to get a supply to the village. In the summer of 1895 there was an outbreak of diphtheria in the village when two children died. Finally a public ‘Scavenger’ was appointed to collect rubbish and cess by the Rural District Council for health reasons the first public collection. The water supply had to wait.

In addition to the discussion of these critical issues the schoolroom was also home to elections, both Parish and National.

Pictured below is Baroness Astor of Hever, shaking hands with one of the village blacksmiths Charlie Burden, from the forge up the road ,outside the old school where the polls were held. Her husband, Viscount Astor, was Dover’s MP from 1922-45. Assorted village people including the school head Mr Stanway and Thomas Nobbs, village postman, are in attendance. It dates to an election campaign between 1922 and 1933.



Fig.15 Baroness Astor of Hever outside the village school at election time 1922-33 (Nobbs Collection)

The March 1904 Parish election saw cheating by some of the electors, some 60 in all. To save money votes were by a show of hands but people were caught voting twice, necessitating a proper poll by paper at a cost to the Parish of £13.

In May 1907 the Dover Express reported that the road outside the school was crowded when there was a hotly contested Parish Council election

‘the village streets displayed unwonted animation and by the time the polls closed there was a big crowd’ The village brass band put in an appearance and kept the crowd in good humour by playing selections of harmony that are reputed to soothe savage feelings and then livelier tunes to keep the counters of the votes awake. Names of popular candidates Mr Berry landlord of the Green Man and Mr Kenway were scrawled on village walls. After the declaration of the vote (Berry won the most with 76 votes) there was cheering and dispersal of the crowd ‘

The Blacksmith's



Fig. 14 a photograph taken in 1905 outside the blacksmith's in Kingsdown Road, with Wallace Newman, Charlie Burden and George Chapman.

One trade essential for an agricultural village was a blacksmith. There was one in Kingsdown Road from at least the 1840s when Daniel Hambrook, aged 30, and his wife and two children lived there with another blacksmith, Richard Goldsack. The building is still there today, called Forge House.

Mr Hambrook was still there thirty years later but seems to have sold the business to Timothy Dilnot in 1888.

In addition to horses used in farming the forge served the growing market for horse transport for the village, the largest of which were the Wellard family's stables in Chapel Lane.

A 1907 guide to the village found in the village archive records

'JR Wellard, Queens Mews. Omnibus, brake and fly proprietor. Livery and bait stables. First class close and open carriages. Trains met to order. Carrier to and from Dover.'

In October 1906 it was one of Mr Wellard's horses which killed Timothy Dilnot, aged 40, by kicking him during the shoeing process. He suffered internal injuries and died in hospital at Dover. As a result his inquest was held in the Town Hall in Dover and not in the village. Mrs Dilnot carried on the business until about 1919 when Douglas Stanford took it over. He was the last blacksmith in the village leaving the smithy in 1940. As well as shoeing horses he made gates for local houses and metal tyres for wooden cart wheels.



Fig .15 Douglas Stanford (right) the last village blacksmith. c 1935.

World War One and its effect on Kingsdown Road

WW1 had a big effect on the village. 153 of its men went to war and 31 with village connections died in the conflict. Its twin main sources of livelihoods, farming and tourism, both suffered with so many away and so few visiting. There

were hardly enough men in the village to bring in the harvest and the hotels and guest houses were struggling.¹²

Kingsdown Road did its bit. Comparing a list of those who served in the war with the 1911 census we can say that of thirty-four households in the road, just over 50% had men who were called up or enlisted voluntarily. Three went into the local Dover Anti- Aircraft Corps so they didn't leave the village, but the remaining fifteen did. Four of the fifteen were killed, their stories are below. In common with thousands of those killed abroad none of those killed were returned for burial and all died towards the end of the war in 1918, some at sea, some from injuries sustained earlier in the war.

Fred Barnes



Fig.16 Fred Barnes who died from the effects of gas injury in 1918 (St Margaret's History Society)

Fred was a gardener, aged 37, the son of a coastguard, when he enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps in 1915. He lived at Ballardowgan (now no 89 Kingsdown Road) with his wife Lucy. He was gassed and discharged in 1916, dying

¹² St Margaret's village archive has gathered a lot of information about the village in WW1. There is also material in the Parish Council minute books

finally of his wounds in 1918, he is buried at his wife's parents village in Westcott, Dorking.

Charles Chapman

Lived in 'Hillview' in Kingsdown Road with his parents and was a Signaller in the Royal Navy on H.M.S. Ragoon. He died on 9 January 1918 aged 21. All the ninety-one crew of the 'Ragoon' were lost when the ship ran aground onto rocks on Lough Point, Ireland, in a snow storm. Charlie features on the 1911 census as a golf caddy aged 14. The Dover Express recorded that he was 'a very fine specimen of an English lad, gentle and courteous'

Ernest Fitall

Ernest was from Eastry, a cowman at Townsend Farm when he was called up aged 26, living across the street in Kingsdown Road as a lodger with the Knott family. He enlisted in 1915, was wounded in France in 1916, died in 1918, and is buried in Monkton.

Stanley Goldsack

Stanley was 27 when he signed up as a Troop Baker in the Merchant Marine. He served on SS Minnetonka which was in use as a troopship. He had been a green assistant on the village golf course. He was the son of Thomas and Julia Goldsack of 3 Wellesley Terrace, Kingsdown Road. The SS Minnetonka was torpedoed and sunk near Malta on 30 January 1918.



Fig.17 Stanley Goldsack's ship the SS Minnetonka (St Margaret's History Society)

Kingsdown Road in World War Two



Fig.17 Officers and men of the 14 inch cross channel gun 'Pooh' at the end of Kingsdown Road. 1941. (Imperial War Museum)

This time the war came closer to home. After the evacuation of Dunkirk in 1940 the population, now housed right on the frontline, reduced from 1500 to about 360. They were joined in the summer of 1940 by some 1500 troops brought to defend the beach and man newly constructed cross channel guns sited around the village. Quite a few residents in Kingsdown Road did not leave, either because they had an essential job to do, or because they refused to be 'chased out'. The school in the road closed but the Red Lion stayed open, benefiting as all the village pubs did from the increase in military customers.

The Big Guns of Kingsdown Road

In 1941 a large cross channel gin nicknamed 'Pooh' the twin of a 14inch gun nicknamed 'Winnie' (after Winston Churchill) which had been built in 1940, was positioned in the fields just belong the last house in the road. Both guns had dummy wooden versions erected several hundred yards away and were very loud when fired. Most of the damage to houses in the village was caused by the percussion from these guns. Living in Kingsdown Road became a noisy business with frequent damage to ceilings, doors and windows and much interrupted sleep. The St Margaret's Village Archive has the original nine volumes of WW2 village ARP log books. These contain 72 reports of damage to houses in the road, more than half of this occurring in September 1944 when the Canadian forces were closing in on the German gun sites in Pas de Calais. Knowing they were under threat the German gunners threw everything they had at Dover and St Margaret's. Shelling went on for hours.

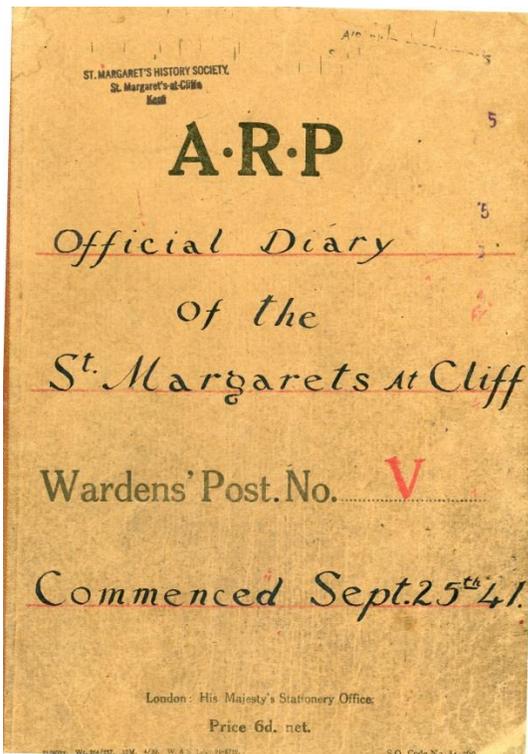


Fig. 18 Front cover of village ARP Log volume 5 one of nine in the village archive (St Margaret's History Society)

'Bruce'

The building of Pooh was followed in 1941-3 by the building of an experimental hyper velocity gun 'Bruce' (named after Vice Admiral Bruce Austin Fraser) but originally known as 'Wilfred' further along the track to Kingsdown. It was only intended to fire towards the Essex ranges as a research project. Small railway lines were built to run ammunition and other supplies to both it and Pooh. After 'satisfactory' initial tests in 1943 a VIP party consisting of reps from the US army and Navy and a Rear Admiral rattled along the track to have a look and again declared the gun 'satisfactory'. This was a view unlikely to have been shared by the landlord of the Red Lion pub whose windows were blown out by Bruce's first shell firing on 30 March 1943.

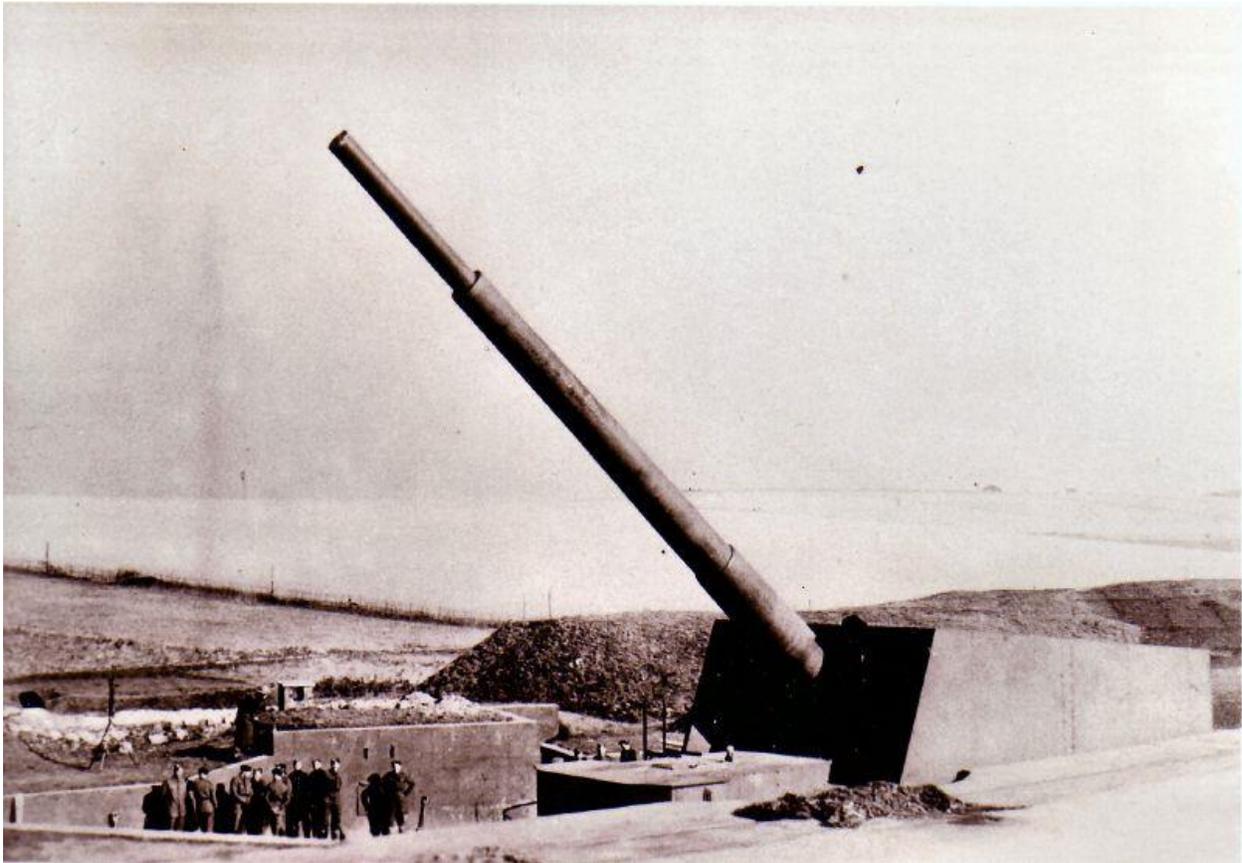


Fig 19. The experimental gun 'Bruce' sited along the Kingsdown Road track near Hogs Bush c.1943.

Several houses in the road were requisitioned by the military. Of most interest, for three months in 1940, were the new occupants of Curfew House, next to the school, the traditional home of the village schoolmaster.

'Mad Jack' and 5 Commando in Kingsdown Road

Curfew House became the HQ of 5 Commando¹³ who arrived at Martin Mill station on 14th September. Commandos came into being at Churchill's request after Dunkirk in June 1940 in order to 'create a reign of terror down the enemy coast'

Their role in was to be responsible for the protection of the St Margaret's area especially for the guns then in place and for the defence of the beach and its immediate recapture should it be lost. They were also tasked with the destruction of any parachute or airborne enemy troops landing in the area and with the operation of a newly built flame barrage on the beach. Six troops of 75 men each were deployed, in Guston, Martin Mill and East Langdon and they were expected to patrol actively day and night.

The 1940 unit diary records

18 Sept: Commandos replace Buffs on beach. Winnie opens fire, crashed Spitfire located and guarded
20 Sept: 40 bicycles ordered, tommy guns, Bren guns ammunition and 8 motorbikes

22 Sept: Message received that the Invasion was to begin immediately but this turned out to be the invasion of Indo China

The local commander was a man of some individuality known as 'Mad Jack Churchill'

¹³ For more on 5 Commando see <http://forum.commandoveterans.org/cdoForum/posts/list/3041.page> where you can also see a copy of their war diary



Fig 19 'Mad' Jack Churchill (Source: Wikipedia)

Major Churchill was a British army officer who fought throughout the war armed with a longbow, bagpipes and a basket hilted Scottish broadsword. Pre Dunkirk he had killed a German soldier with an arrow. He led Commando brigades throughout the war but his first command was based in Kingsdown Road.



Fig.20 A commercially available figurine of 'Mad' Jack Churchill with his trademark sword and bagpipes

Once settled Mad Jack and his men began a series of practice raids on local military positions. At 0200 on 2 October dressed as civilians they captured an anti-tank position at East Langdon and captured their gun truck. At 0400 they attacked the Irish Guards company at Great Watersend Farm at Temple Ewell.

Admiral Ramsey visited them from Dover and agreed to release two whalers to them to be kept in the Bay. The Commandos made further attacks on military positions including Eythorne railway station blocking roads. The First battalion of the Queens Westminster's retaliated by occupying the Commandos quarters at Guston, East Langdon and Martin before they returned from their raid.

But by the end of the month it had been decided to relocate the unit to Brightlingsea. Just before they did, sadly on 1 November, one of their number, Cpl Skeates was killed along the Deal Road by a fragment from an exploding shell. On the 8th they all left for Brightlingsea by train. The Bay defences were handed back to the RM Siege regiment, the beach defences to the Buffs and the pillboxes to the Marines. The Red Lion, opposite Curfew House, no doubt lost a fair bit of business.

Mad Jack went on to madder things. In 1941 he led his men ashore at Norway playing the bagpipes before throwing a grenade and charging into battle. In 1943 he landed at Sicily with his sword, longbow and bagpipes under his arm and used the sword in combat. In 1944 he led 1500 partisans and commandos in Yugoslavia where he was captured and imprisoned in a concentration camp from which he escaped but was recaptured. Freed in 1945 he then went on to Burma to fight the Japanese. In 1948 he fought in Palestine. He became a passionate surfer, was the first man to surf the Severn Bore and finally retired from the army in 1959, dying in 1996 at the age of 89 in Surrey.

This is the end of this group of Kingsdown Rd stories. From Cuckolds to Mad Jack, from Noel Coward's bar to dead bodies delivered by coal trolley it is a small road which has seen life. There are still some signs of individuality however.

Recently, St Margaret's first vineyard has been planted at the end of the road. 'Chateau St Margaret's' or possibly the 'Cuckolds Row Cup' should be ready for bottling in a year or so.



Fig 21. Dieter Jaenicke's vineyard at the end of Kingsdown Road. July 2017. (Author's own collection)

Guide to sources

1. General Background on St Margaret's at Cliffe

There is no definitive published history of St Margaret's. Two pamphlets with brief histories of the village and source material are detailed below. Both are out of print but can be obtained sometimes from online Antiquarian booksellers.

'The Piccadilly of the Sea-St Margaret's Bay' J. Harris Stone. First published in 1910 then reprinted in the 1970's. (23 page pamphlet)

Historical Sketches of St Margaret's at Cliffe 1086-1911. AL Macfie, MA, PhD Manor Press 1977. (28 page pamphlet)

The most up to date research on the village can be found on the St Margaret's History website at <http://catalogue.stmargarethistory.org.uk/>

This site has over 3000 scanned images and information from the St Margaret's village archive which can be seen free of charge if you have online access. Alternatively you can make an appointment to view the archive in St Margaret's by ringing 01304 853464 or by emailing stmargarethistorysociety@gmail.com

2. Sources used in the text

2.1 Maps

All of the maps used in the text are available online

Useful general sites for maps

<http://www.oldmapsonline.org/en/Kent> and

<https://www.old-maps.co.uk/>

The Andrews Drury and Herbert map (1769)

A copy of the complete map can be viewed at

<https://www.royalcollection.org.uk/collection/701700/a-topographical-map-of-the-county-of-kent-in-twenty-five-sheets-on-a-scale-of-two>

OS Maps

The best site for the 6 inch OS series from 1842- 1952 is the National Library of Scotland's website at

<http://maps.nls.uk/os/6inch-england-and-wales/>

The Mudge map of Kent (1801)

can be seen at

<http://mapco.net/kent1801/kent1801.htm>

St Margaret's at Cliffe Tithe map (1840)

A copy of this map with the tithe apportionment (register) is held in the St Margaret's Village archive (see above for contact details) or you could view the original by appointment in the Canterbury Cathedral Archive. Their website gives details about visits at

<https://www.canterbury-cathedral.org/heritage/archives-library/>

2.2 Census Information (1841-1911) and the 1939 Register

The St Margaret's Village archive has copies of all the publically available censuses, which are not its website can only be seen by appointment (contact details above)

Otherwise all of these documents are available on subscription sites such as Ancestry and Find My Past. These can also be viewed free of charge in Kent Libraries which have public computer terminals.

2.3 Newspaper archives

The Dover Express, one of the local papers for St Margaret's has been scanned and indexed from 1850 to 1999 and is an invaluable source for detailed local history information.

It is available online in a searchable form through Kent Libraries for free or by paid subscription through the 'Find My Past' family history site or at

<http://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

2.4 Minutes of the Working Men's Club (sometimes also called The Working Men's Institute) and Bowls Club

Some of the minute books from 1914 onwards have survived and can be seen at the St Margaret's Village Archive

2.5 History Of the St Margaret's at Cliffe Parish Council

The most detailed accounts of the parish council up to the 1930's are to be found in the Dover Express who provided very detailed accounts of their meetings. (see newspaper archives above)

Most of the original minute books of the council have survived and are kept by the modern day Parish Council, based in St Margaret's Hall Reach Road, St Margaret's at Cliffe. Contact the Parish Clerk for access.

The St Margaret's Village archive also has some material. (See above for contact details)

2.6 WW1 resources

Again, the St Margaret's archive has much material on the village at this time also of the men on the village war memorial and those who served and survived. In particular a book of all the names and roles of those involved in WW1 was prepared after the war by the Parish Council and can be found in the archive.

2.7 WW2 Resources

The main published work on the cross channel guns is 'After the Battle (Cross Channel guns issue 29) by Winston Ramsey 1980. Copies are still available from

<https://www.afterthebattle.com/books/books.html>

For more information on 'Mad Jack Churchill' and 5 Commando see

<http://www.commandoveterans.org/5Commando>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Churchill

St Margaret's Village archive has a good collection of material on the village in WW2 including nine volumes of original ARP logs, a collection of oral history relating to the war and details of shell and bomb damage.