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Cinque Ports welcome new Lord Warden

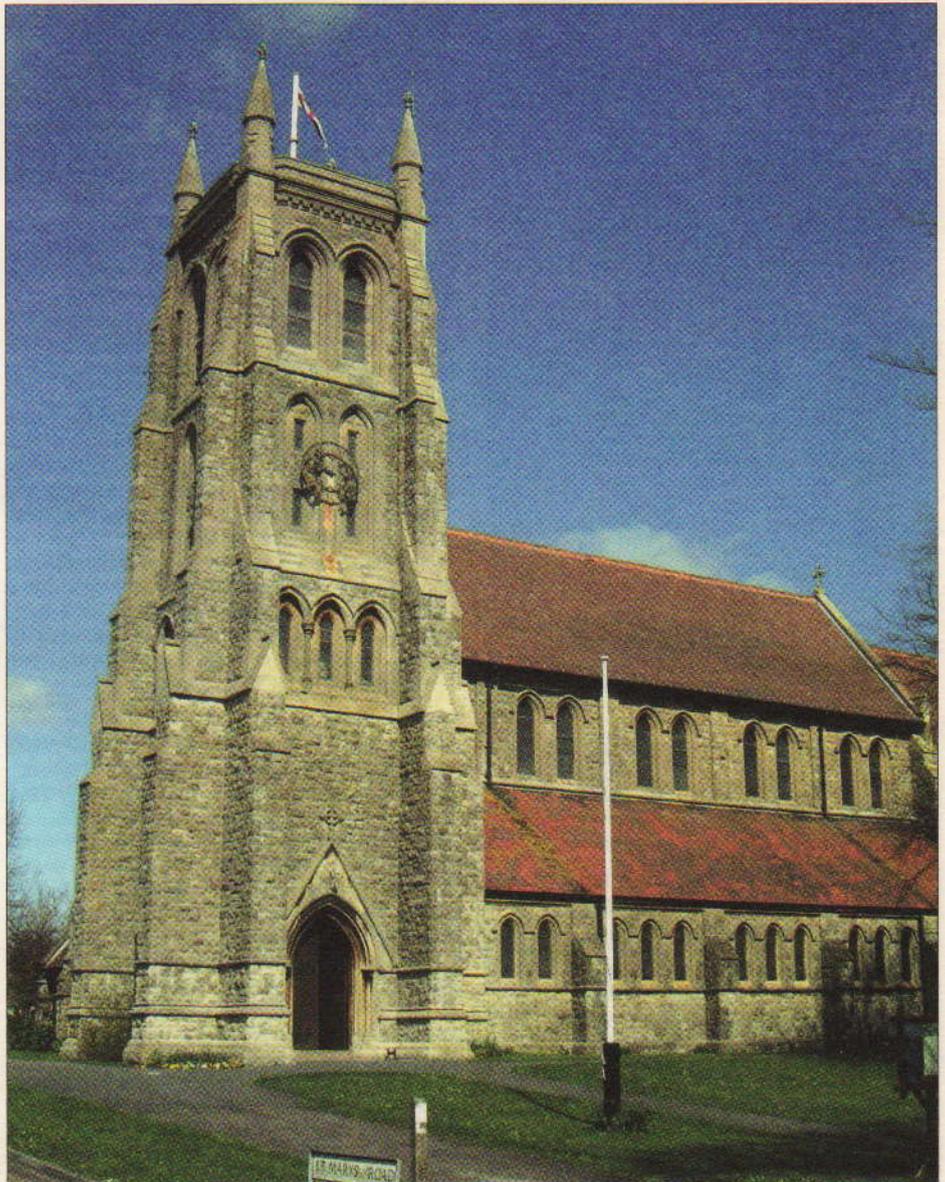
by Dickon R. Love

The Confederation of the Cinque Ports was formed in c.1050 by Edward the Confessor. By 1155, a Royal Charter granted portsmen from the five towns of **Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney and Hastings** special rights, privileges and dispensations in return for the use of ships and 15 days of free service to the King. In essence this was the forerunner of the Royal Navy and an important part of the country's defence strategy. This made the Cinque Ports (pronounced as we ringers would rather than the French) one of the most powerful confederations in the country compared with central Government, almost to the point of acting as an independent state.

According to the charter, members of the Cinque Ports had 'exemption from Tax and Tallage, Sac and Soc, Toll and Team, Blodwit, Fledwit, Pillory and Tumbrell, Infrangentheof, Outfrangeneof, Mundbryce, Waifs and Strays, right to Flotsam, Jetsam or Legan, Privilege of Assembly as a guild, Rights of Den and Strond, and Honours at Court'. Translated, the rights gave the portsmen full self-government allowing them the organisation of their own taxation and legal affairs. The portsmen had their own courts, could judge and punish criminals, levy tolls and claim any wreckage found in the sea or on shore. Their special honours at court gave them the right to carry a canopy over the King at his coronation and sit at his side at the Coronation Feast. In addition they controlled the annual Yarmouth Herring Fair, a tradition which brought them into frequent conflict with the Portsmen of Norfolk.

The Ancient Towns and Limbs

As the town of Hastings went into a decline as a port, two more Sussex towns, **Rye** and **Winchelsea**, were added to the five. These were given the special status of "Ancient Towns". Other towns too were added in time as "Limbs" to the original Cinque Ports and Ancient Towns. Sandwich acquired the Limbs of **Ramsgate** and **Deal**; Romney received the Limb of **Lydd**; Rye took on the Limb of **Tenterden** and Dover was joined by **Folkestone**, **Faversham** and **Margate**. **Brightlingsea** (Essex) became the only port not located in Kent or Sussex when it became a Limb of Sandwich.



St Mary's Walmer. The tower built in memory of Earl Granville was pealed to welcome his 13th successor as Lord Warden.



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The Walmer peal band (l-r): Dickon Love, Tom Barlow, Ian Bushell, David Grimwood, Simon Davies, David Dearnley, Stephen Wheeler, John Keeler. Photo: Josh Baker

The Lord Warden

The post of Lord Warden was created in an attempt to control the activities of the Confederation and to be an ambassador to represent the interests of both the Crown and the portsmen. The Cinque Ports had their own Member of Parliamentary who used to be appointed by the Lord Warden (although subsequently elected), and their place in Parliament was not abolished until the 18th Century. It was a position appointed by the Crown and in more recent years has been filled by famous names such as William Pitt, the Duke of Wellington, Sir Winston Churchill and since 1979, HM Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother. The official residence of the Lord Warden is **Walmer Castle**.

In the reign of Henry VII (15th Century), the founding of the Royal Navy reduced the necessity for the Cinque Ports, sending them into decline. When the call for a fleet to face the Spanish Armada came in 1588, only five ships were contributed by the Cinque Ports. Some of the Ports became silted up and even landlocked so that eventually the Confederation became a purely ceremonial one. The towns still have representation at the Coronation but the post of Lord Warden is purely an honorary one bestowed by the State for good service.

Heralded by Bells

The Queen Mother was a popular Lord Warden and was a frequent visitor to the Ports, Ancient Towns and Limbs. On 20th May 1990 she was present at the dedication of the new ring of bells (transferred from Kirkheaton) at St. Clement's, Sandwich. Following her death, she was succeeded by Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, retired Chief of Defence Staff in a ceremony that took place on 12th April, 2005 at Dover Castle. Bells were very much part of the occasion. A peal attempt of Grandsire Triples took place at St. Mary's, Dover which included a number of ringers who took part in the 1979 peal to welcome the Queen Mother. Unfortunately this was unsuccessful following a miscall. However after the installation ceremony, the local band (itself newly formed after Dover's recent restoration) produced some very respectable ringing.

Success was also achieved at St. Mary's, Walmer where a fine peal of Bristol Major was

rung. While the church here was built and consecrated in 1888, there was no money left to build the planned tower and spire and install a ring of bells. However following the death of Earl Granville (Lord Warden for 25 years and an esteemed politician), his many friends "in high places" decided that a new tower, spire and ring of bells would be a fitting memorial. As it happens the spire was never built, but a tower and 18 cwt ring of eight was cast by John Warner in 1892 and dedicated, with the tower, in April 1898. The peal for Earl Granville's latest successor was itself notable as being the first peal on the bells for 41 years. The peal band was given a handsome welcome by the local ringers.

The Confederation of the Cinque Ports may no longer be the great power that it once was, but all the villages and towns associated with the Confederation are very proud of their titles, and the installation of the Lord Warden is a significant local occasion.

See pearl report on p.408.



The new Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports, Admiral The Lord Boyce, GCB, OBE, DL

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