

CINQUE PORTS & the DOVER DEPUTY

Edward the Confessor needed financial help with fending off an attack on his realm and so in 1051 he negotiated a set of privileges with five of his Channel ports. They became known as the Cinque Ports and consisted of Sandwich, Dover, Rye, Winchelsea and Hastings.

The privileges consisted of exemption from the King's tolls and custom duties - and they help to make the five ports very rich. For these privileges the ports had to provide the cash to fit out a fleet of ships for the King. To help them raise the money for the King, they were allowed to enrol other nearby 'ports' as 'Limbs' of their port, who would be granted similar but less beneficial privileges. This was because they were charged a smaller contribution to the King's Money - or Composition Money, as it was called. This was because there were several Limbs, who contributed to the sum required.

Birchington was paying Composition Money from at least the 15th century through to the 17th century - proved by a series of receipts held in All Saints Church Archives and now held in Canterbury

Cathedral.THE CINQUE PORTS

The Confederation of the Cinque Ports had already existed for at least 200 years when its first charter was granted by Edward I in 1278. The ports of Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich, together with the two 'Antient Towns' of Winchelsea and Rye, were at risk from Saxon raiders during the Roman occupation, from Danes throughout the Saxon era and from the French attacks during the 13th century. They were the principal trading ports of England and the first line of the kingdom's defence.

Because of their vital role in the economy and defence of England the ports developed into uniquely independent local authorities, with obligations to provide vessels when required to do so by the state. In return they received rights and privileges that nurtured among the portsmen a disdain for the laws of the land, including those which condemned smuggling.

Over time other towns joined the Confederation as Corporate, or as less formally linked Non-Corporate Members of the Head Ports, with which they shared some of their duties and privileges. One of the privileges entitled portsmen to land their boats, sell their fish and dry their nets at Great Yarmouth, free of cost.

This gave rise to animosity between the towns that reached a climax (but not an end) in 1297, when Kent and Norfolk ships assembled to fight a French fleet. Instead, they attacked each other. The portsmen destroyed 32 Yarmouth ships and killed 200 men, which did nothing to endear them to the King.

Alan Bignall

DOVER DEPUTY

Each community was obliged to elect a "**DEPUTY to Dover**", who was responsible for the maintenance of Law and Order in his parish. He had to collect the Composition Money each year to help equip a ship in Dover and also conduct criminals to the Dover Assizes for sentencing. He was also responsible for appointing a Parish Constable, but these were all very amateur arrangements. When Robert Peel came to prominence in Parliament in 1822 and started the national police force, initially in London only in 1829, the standard of keeping law and order slowly began to alter, but it was several years before anything dramatic changed in out of the way places like Thanet..

The Deputy was elected annually, but many held office for more than one year. We hold a list of most of the men who held this onerous office in Birchington as far back as 1499. This information comes in part from the receipts issued to the Deputy when he delivered the Composition money, and partly from the Churchwardens' accounts. These recorded the Deputy's expenses during each year. He was able to claim for 'traveling expenses' to Dover, which almost always included 'beer, meat & horse'.

The members of our Composition were -

St Peter's (Broadstairs)

St John's (Margate)

Gore End (Minnis Bay)

Birchington (named by village name not by Church name!)

