



When and Why Tenterden became a Member of the Confederation of Cinque Ports

Presently there are fourteen Corporate members of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports. Why fourteen when the Old French word “cinque” means five. The first recorded occasion when the original five Head Ports of Hastings, Romney, Hythe, Dover and Sandwich were mentioned together is in Charter of Edward the Confessor of 1050. Rye and Winchelsea were initially limbs of Hastings but when that port was seriously affected by the loss of its harbour Rye and Winchelsea now called the “Two Antient Towns” were promoted to the status of Head Port in the Reign of King John.

This created seven Head Ports which in their turn also sought assistance from nearby communities. The Cinque Ports were given many powers including the right to self government, independent legal jurisdiction and equally importantly exemption from national taxation. In return for assistance many communities were granted some of the benefits of their Head Port. At times there have been over forty such members. In other cases the assistance was recognised by the grant of a charter and there are currently seven such towns namely Deal, Faversham, Folkestone, Lydd, Margate, Ramsgate and Tenterden. These together with the Head Ports appoint the Lord Warden at a Court of Shepway. For many centuries the Court of Shepway was the equivalent of a Shire Court presided over by a Sheriff. The Cinque Ports fell outside of any County for many legal purposes.

Storms in the 1230s and 1250s had a detrimental effect on both Romney and Old Winchelsea. In 1280 survey work for New Winchelsea commenced. The great storm of 1287 turned Old Winchelsea into an island and closed Romney haven. The River Rother changed course to now join the sea near Rye.

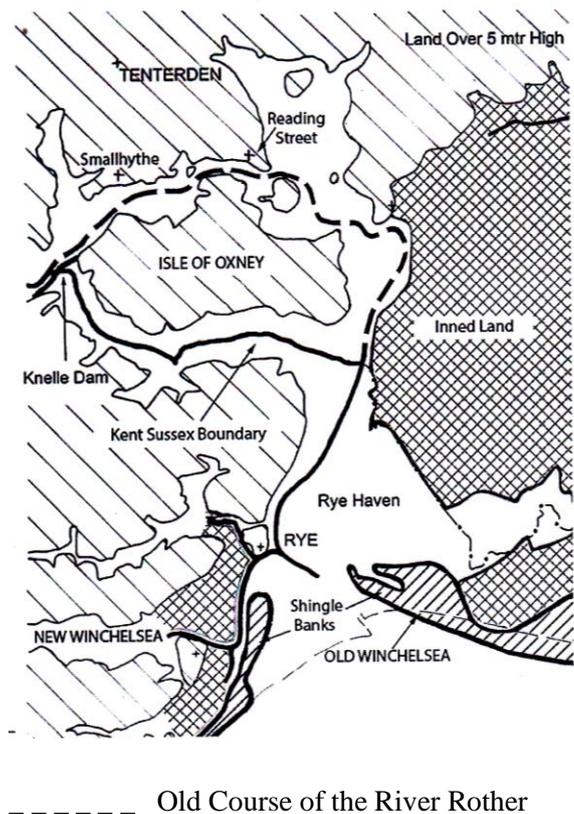
In 1332 the Knelle Dam was constructed from the north west corner of the Isle of Oxney to the Beckley side of the river channel. This action diverted the River Rother to the North of Isle of Oxney and enabled Smallhythe and Reading Street to be developed for ship building. Winchelsea was granted powers to impose a levy to clear silt from its haven but this was only partially successful.

A series of calamities then affected Rye starting with a French raid in 1339, the Black Death of 1348/9 and the French raid on Rye and Winchelsea in 1360. Between 1350 and 1375 the eastern side of Rye was undercut by the Rother. A further French raid took place on Rye in 1377 when the bells were stolen - but retrieved in 1378. In 1400 it was reported that Winchelsea haven had almost silted up.

The hamlets of Smallhythe and Reading Street benefited from the Rother being diverted to the North and East of the Isle of Oxney and enabled the establishment of shipbuilding at these more defensible locations to replace those of Rye which were being constantly harassed by the French.

In 1400 the New Romney accounts record the building of the “Eneswithe” at Smallhythe and in 1414 the “Jesus” (1,000 tons) was launched at Smallhythe.

Then as now the wheels of government turned exceedingly slowly but on 1st August 1449 Henry VI issued a Charter from which the following is a quote:-



“Whereas the Barons and good men of the Cinque Ports are held to find fifty nine ships each year at their own costs for fifteen days at the King’s Summons, and the Town of Rye, one of the most ancient of the said Ports and near the sea where ingress of enemies and rebels in the realm can be made, has come to such waste and poverty by the tides and by burnings committed by the said enemies not only of lands and tenements but of the inhabitants there, that neither the town nor the barons and good men thereof can find their contingent of the fleet: the King has granted to the Mayor and Barons of Rye.....and to the inhabitants, tenants and residents in the Town and Hundred of Tenterden that the said Town and Hundred shall be incorporated in the Town of Rye and separate from the County of Kent, and the said Bailiff and Commonalty shall contribute with the Barons to do service touching ships for the fleet.”

In addition the Town and Hundred of Tenterden was given the right to “chose for themselves a bailiff”.

Shipbuilding continued with the “Regent” 600 tons being launched at Reading Street in 1490, and “The Great Gallyon” being visited by Henry VIII at Reading Street in 1546. By 1561 there were reports of Rother silting and restricted access to Appledore. The Great Fire at Smallhythe would not have helped but the precipitate action leading to the demise of large scale shipbuilding was the breach of the Knelle Dam in 1635 enabling the Rother to revert to the channel south of the Isle of Oxney. This action left Smallhythe and Reading Street literally “high and dry”.

The construction of the new River Rother channel for land drainage purposes to the South of the Isle of Oxney in 1680 put the final nail in the coffin for major shipbuilding.

In the unfortunate event that Romney Marsh was to be inundated it has to be borne in mind that about seven miles of the boundary of the Town and Hundred stretching from the Woodchurch Road, past Reading Street and Smallhythe to Rolvenden Station is below High Spring tide level.

Although some eight miles from tide water Tenterden continues to be a member of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports.

John Weller

The Ashford Borough Council Arms

The Borough Council Arms was designed to symbolise the general character of the district.

Against the shield’s background of gold, for the richness and fertility of the garden of England, are three sprigs of ash representing the three former Ashford areas – East Ashford Rural, West Ashford Rural and Ashford Urban. Each sprig has five leaves to indicate the five areas comprising the Ashford Borough. These are the three areas above, along with Tenterden Rural District and the old Borough of Tenterden.

A wavy line suggesting the rivers of the area, i.e. the Stour, Rother and Beult, borders the top of the shield. The gold and white lion is taken from the ancient arms of the Cinque Ports and indicates the historical importance of Tenterden as a member of the confederation of the Cinque Ports.

Above the shield is the closed helm proper to civic arms, with its twisted crest wreath and decorative mantling or tournament cloak. These are white and red, the colours of the Kent County Council shield and of the device of Ashford Urban District Council. Red is also the colour of the field of the Tenterden arms.

On the wreath is the crest which symbolises the main characteristic industries of this part of Kent. The white horse of Kent holds in its mouth a leaved hop-cone and rests a hoof on the driving wheel of the locomotive Invicta, which was a feature of the Ashford Urban District Council device. The motto ‘With Stronger Faith’ is a phrase adapted from a poem by Richard Lovelace, the 17th century poet and a member of the Lovelace family of Bethersden in the former West Ashford Rural District. This phrase appropriately expresses the aspirations and determination of the borough council.

The Arms were designed by H Ellis Tomlinson MA FHS

