

LOWER WALMER - NORTH

WELCOME TO WALMER - THE Fortress Against the Sea

Welcome to Walmer – a little place with a big and colourful history of invasions, smuggling, fishing, trading with visiting ships, guarding England’s most vulnerable shoreline and home to England’s most famous soldier – the Duke of Wellington. Walmer’s name is said to be derived from ‘Vallum Mare’ a corruption of the Latin ‘ Quasi Vallum Maris’ or Fortress Against the Sea.

The original village of Walmer, situated on higher ground at the top of the Dover Road grew up around an estate established after the Norman Conquest. A church and cottages for workers and tradesmen soon followed and by Victorian times this small agricultural community had become a thriving village.

INVASION

Walmer was not always successful against invasion and on August 27th 55 BC Julius Caesar and his legions landed on this beach. Channel storms prevented reinforcements and resupply resulting in the planned invasion being little more than a reconnaissance mission lasting a few weeks. Despite one more abortive landing further north one year later, it was almost 100 years before the Emperor Claudius managed to make Britain a part of the Roman Empire.

Another kind of invasion took place in June 1648 when Parliamentary forces numbering 2000 troops attacked Walmer Castle during the English Civil war. The Castle held out for almost one month before surrendering, probably due to lack of supplies. Deal Castle was also attacked successfully.



A Wreck on the Goodwin Sands

WALMER’S INVOLVEMENT WITH THE SEA

Walmer has a long history of fishing, smuggling and rescuing sailors and in 1856 a lifeboat station was built on Walmer Green. Up to 2019 28 gallantry medals have been awarded to Walmer R.N.L.I. crews. In May 1940 the Walmer lifeboat, was one of 19 lifeboats in the flotilla of little ships which took part in the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from Dunkirk.

Just off Walmer is the Goodwin Sands: a notorious 10 mile sandbank that has claimed many ships. In November 1703 one storm alone claimed over 1000 lives. Between the shore and the Goodwin Sands is ‘The Downs Anchorage’ a deep water, safe haven for ships. It was not unusual to have hundreds of ships at anchor off Walmer during storms and one night in 1878 the Chaplain to the Seaman’s Mission counted 500 sheltering off shore. All these ships were victualled from Walmer and Deal.

CHURCHES

Walmer has many churches and opposite the Lifeboat Station is the charming boatmen’s church, St Saviours built in 1849. The Parish Church is St. Mary’s completed in 1893. In Upper Walmer there is the original Norman church and the Catholic Church of the Sacred Heart. The imposing Walmer Baptist Church completed in 1904 is on the Dover Road.



Royal Marine Barracks

DEFENCE

When France and the Holy Roman Empire became allies in 1538, Henry VIII knew that England was under threat from the combined might of Europe’s foremost military powers. To counter that threat Henry built three castles, at Deal, Sandown and Walmer. Walmer Castle built in 1539, houses a collection of memorabilia to our most famous soldier, the Duke of Wellington (of the Battle of Waterloo and the defeat of Napoleon fame). He lived at the Castle for 23 years until his death in 1852. In military use until the 19th Century the Castle has beautiful formal gardens and is the official residence of the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

MILITARY

In 1665 a company of the Duke of York and Albany’s Maritime Regiment of Foot was established in Walmer, and this area, south of Deal Castle, developed rapidly. The North and South Barracks were built in 1794-5 for a cavalry regiment and two infantry battalions. The new Naval hospital built in 1812 topped with a cupola and clock was situated facing the sea behind the main gates and other buildings were added over time.

In 1861 the Royal Marines took up residence and by 1869, the Admiralty had acquired all the military sites in Walmer. The gate facing Dover Road with the view of the South Barracks was renamed the Jubilee gate in 1887 in honour of Queen Victoria. The Royal Naval School of Music was located within the barracks from 1930 and in 1950 was renamed the Royal Marines School of Music.



Walmer Lifeboat

In 1989 a terrorist bomb planted by the IRA exploded within the Barracks and eleven musicians died. The Bandstand was built to commemorate these men. The Royal Marines left in 1996 and the barracks closed ending over 300 hundred years of continuous military use. The Royal Marines Heritage walk was introduced in 2018.

Walmer has many interesting houses and has had many interesting residents. The single storey house, on the beach, towards Deal Castle was built in 1878 and named Clanwilliam Baths. Visitors could enjoy hip baths filled with hot and cold seawater fed from a boiler in the garden.



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This is one of a series of Historic Village information panels which can be found in most of our villages in the Dover district. There are also Historic Town panels in Dover, Deal and Sandwich. Historic Town Trail leaflets can be found on line at www.whitecliffscountry.org.uk

Further information from Dover Visitor Information Centre 01304 201066 or Dover Museum 01304 201066

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