

# MIDDLE STREET FEED MY LAMBS

## The National School

In 1792, churchgoing folk in Deal decided that they should provide some free schooling for the children of parents who couldn't afford to pay for their education. This was the origin of the Deal Charity Schools, later called the St George's National Schools.

The building at 80 Middle Street is the site of one of these former National Schools. It was built around 1850 and is shown on historic maps of Deal. The school provided education and religious instruction for 25 boys and 25 girls from poor families in Deal. There were strict rules around attendance and behaviour; children had to attend school every day and church on Sundays. They were expelled quite often.

Above the doorway of the building are the words 'Feed My Lambs'. This phrase comes from the New Testament of the Bible and refers to the teaching of Christianity. The building became a Mission Hall sometime in the 1920s.

*Looking up along the north section of Oak Street, off Middle Street.*



Credit: Colin Vorrall



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*Middle Street in the 1930s. The building on the left-hand side of the photograph is now a fish and chip shop. It used to be the Harp Inn. Another pub, the Royal Oak, is on the right. This was destroyed in the Second World War.*

## An infamous reputation

Middle Street had a dubious character in the early days of the town. Beatings, stabbings, landlords robbing clients, drunks and half-naked people in the streets were all quite common. The mayor in 1703, Thomas Powell, resolved to reform Deal. He walked through the town each Sunday, closing pubs, shops, the market and businesses, including the stagecoach service and fishing. He carried a large stick as 'a severe scourge to all manner of vice, profaneness and immorality'. Without benefit of trial, he dealt out his own form of justice including putting swearers in the stocks and he once gave a prostitute twelve lashes.

Opposite the former National School, on the corner of Brewer Street, is a house called

The Paragon, still bearing the name of the disreputable public house and music hall that it once was. The building dates to the 1700s and was originally called the Two Brewers. It publicised its cock fighting in a 1770 edition of the Kentish Gazette. By the early 19th century it was known as the Star Inn and then by 1876 it was the Paragon, when it was used as a music hall. Unaccompanied ladies were not allowed in. Its landlord was once sued by a performing dog for back-pay and another local landlord was charged with kicking a banjo player. It was later known as the Empire Theatre of Varieties.

In 1908 the Paragon became an entirely different establishment, as the Citizens Hall with quiet reading rooms. In the 1930s, it became a billiards club.

## Renumbering

Building development along Middle Street developed in a haphazard way. Numbers for buildings were introduced around 1810 and through the 19th century properties had numbers such as 61½ and 61¾. The Post Office wanted this situation to change and in 1892 Middle Street was renumbered, along with the High Street, Beach Street and side streets.

## Other buildings

Further south along Middle Street, number 73 is reported to be the house where Nelson's great friend, Captain Edward Parker, was brought after he was wounded in the raid on Boulogne in 1801. He died there some weeks later and is buried in St George's Church Yard.

The house next door at number 75 is an older property that dates to the early 18th century. It used to be an old inn called The Five Bells. The earliest mention of it being a pub dates back to 1828. It closed in 1959.



*The nuclear shelter in the 1960s, in the area that is now the Oak Street car park.*

Credit: The family of Basil Kidd and Deal Museum.

Another pub, the Royal Oak, used to stand on the site of today's car park. The pub was completely destroyed by a shell during the Second World War. In the 1960s, during the height of the Cold War, the premises were demolished. The site became the location for what was considered to be Britain's first Nuclear Fall-Out and blast shelter that members of the public could buy a cast copy of for their own garden. The concrete shelter was built by a local building firm, A W Letheren.

The first post office in Deal was on Coppin Street. It had moved to Middle Street sometime between 1824 and 1840. The post office handled the 'ship letters' that arrived in Deal. These were letters from the expanding number of British colonies, sent home by merchants, sailors and people who had emigrated.

*A 'ship letter' that passed through Deal, dated 1826. Before postage stamps, these envelopes were given post marks and other markings to show the cost of the letter. They were stamped on-shore with various notes – this one says 'India Letter Deal'.*



Credit: Alan Buckman

After the war, many of the run-down buildings on Middle Street were classed as slums. However, they were refurbished and now this is a much sought-after area to live in.

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