

# Yesterday Today

THE MAISON DIEU

Bronze Age Connections  
in a Modern World

## The Conference Dinner Venue – The Maison Dieu, Dover

The Maison Dieu was founded in 1203 by Hubert de Burgh, the then Constable of Dover Castle, as a place to accommodate pilgrims coming to visit the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury Cathedral from the Continent. The manors of River and Kingsdown were given to the hospital in order to fund this.

The original buildings consisted of one large hall with a kitchen and living quarters attached for the Master and Brethren who 'practised hospitality to all strangers'. The hospital accommodated permanent pensioners and other wounded and poor soldiers, as well as pilgrims.

In 1227, a chapel was added and Henry III attended its consecration. Today, this chapel survives as a courtroom, having been converted in the nineteenth century by the town council. The Stone Hall, where the Conference Dinner will take place is thought to be the "Great Chamber". Built in 1253 it has an interesting selection of stained glass and contains the town corporation's civic paintings as well as the regimental flags, arms and armour of the Cinque Ports Volunteers.

In 1534 the dissolution of the monasteries meant that the religious role, previously held by the institution, came to an end. Ten years later, the building was surrendered to the Crown and it was subsequently used as a supply depot for the navy and army until as late as 1830.

In 1834, the building was sold to the Corporation of Dover who used the Maison Dieu as the Town Hall. Little restoration was undertaken whilst it was used by the Town Council, but eventually they turned the old chapel into a courtroom and built a prison below. In 1851 the Council decided to fully restore the building and agreed to implement renovations suggested by the eminent Victorian architect Ambrose Poynter. It took seven years of fundraising before the Council were able to commission William Burges to start on the restoration project. It was Burges who designed the Council Chamber at the end of the hall, which was added in 1867 and in 1881 work began on a town meeting and concert hall. Burges died before he had finished the work, but the renovations were completed by his partners Pullan and Chapple.

The Maison Dieu continues to be used as one of the main meeting halls in Dover and as well as being open to the public for functions such as conferences, weddings, fairs, concerts and theatrical performances. I am sure you will agree it will be a fine setting for our dinner.

