

THE PATTENDEN DIARIES 1797-1819

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For more than twenty years, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in a series of small, leather-bound notebooks, in a fine copper-plate hand, Thomas Pattenden, draper and stocking seller of 1 Townwall Street, Dover, noted those 'daily remarks and occurrences' which he deemed to be of interest. He proved an acute observer, for today his notes, the greater part of which survives intact, provide a graphic record of life in Dover during a critical period in its history.¹

The Pattendens were not long resident in Dover. Thomas's grandfather, Robert, whom he described as 'thoughtless and negligent' was for many years clerk to the parish of Acton. It was, therefore, most probably his father, also a Thomas, that moved to Dover. In any case Thomas himself was born on 21st May, 1748, in a house situated in the centre of the town near the old mill. Otherwise the Pattendens lived for the most part in or around London, in Fulham, where he often visited, in Mortlake and in Hitchin.

Unlike his grandfather, Thomas proved both industrious and shrewd. As a result his business prospered. Moreover, once established at 1 Townwall Street, he let part of the house, while his wife took in children whose health required that they bathe or take the sea air. His savings, and in the later years of his life they were substantial, he invested in property and government bonds, so that in due course he became one of the wealthiest and most respected citizens of Dover, an assessor of taxes, a churchwarden and the patron of numerous charities and good works.

Not that his energies were entirely given over to the pursuit of wealth and station. Throughout his life he followed world affairs, read widely, sketched, painted and collected books, coins and fossils. He was particularly fond of reading and would copy out favourite passages in

¹ The Pattenden diaries, and a summary of Volume II, which is missing, are in the possession of Dover District Council.

extract-books which he later had bound. Moreover, towards the end of his life, when ill-health confined him to the house, he wrote a history or chronology of ancient times from the deluge of Noah to the end of the Middle Ages, which he also had bound in three volumes.

In his diaries Pattenden frequently noted the passing of a merchant ship or fleet. On one occasion he counted twenty-seven ships, laid to, waiting to pick up pilots; and on another eighteen large Indiamen, together with two South Whalers. On 17th April, 1797, he noted:

‘A large fleet of ships from Lisbon, Coast of Africa Sierra Leone and West Indies but last from Portsmouth with convoy passed this place to the Downs – they appeared with great beauty it being a fine afternoon. Some of the sails had the sun on, the others in shadows, the ships in different positions and distances and seen against a dark grey cloud (next the horizon) the upper broken edges of which were here and there tipped and enlightened by the sun’.

When, on another occasion, the Jamaica fleet sailed down the Channel, he noted that it took six hours to pass the town.

It is evident from his other writings that Pattenden looked on these great fleets as the visible embodiment of what he later referred to as England’s ‘exalted state of national and commercial credit and prosperity’. The origins of this prosperity, he concluded, lay in the value added by manufacture and trade:

‘The immenseness of the enhanced value of many manufactures, from their first raw or unimproved material is well worth remarking as we find in an ingenious treatise published in London in 1723 entitled “The Payment of Old Debts without New Taxes”.

‘One hundred pounds’, says the author, ‘laid out in wool and that wool manufactured into goods for the Turkey market, and raw silk brought home in return, and manufactured here will increase that one hundred pounds to five thousand pounds which quantity of silk manufactures being sent to New Spain would return ten thousand pounds which vast improvement of the first hundred pounds becomes in a few years, dispersed among all orders and degrees from the prince to the peasant.’

Pattenden paid equal attention to the state of trade and commerce at home. On 4th March, 1797, one of the earliest entries in the diary, he noted that the Privy Council had suspended the gold standard, by which the Bank of England was obliged to exchange bank notes for gold, owing to a shortage of cash. Later, on 18th April, 1797, he noted that the Funded Debt (the National Debt) stood at £372 millions. On 16th December, 1800 he noted that candles and soap had risen sharply

in price because of an expectation of war with Russia; and on 14th October, 1801 that the price of bread, which in March had reached 3s. 7½d. a gallon, had recently fallen back to 1s. 10d. On 24th December, 1806 he remarked that during the previous fourteen years consols had fluctuated in price from as little as £47½ to £98¾.

It will come as no surprise to learn that in May 1797 Pattenden purchased a copy of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, in three volumes, printed for T. Cadell of the Strand in 1784.

In the course of the French Wars, and more particularly when invasion threatened, Pattenden noted a number of incidents and events. In December 1797, he noted that on the occasion of Lord Malmesbury's trip to Lille to treat for peace, Peter Fector, his old master, had ordered the construction of two boats, so confident was he that peace would be concluded. In May 1798, when the Government raised a force of volunteers, he informed the officer-in-command that he would do anything he was fit for, but feared that in view of his poor health he would be unable to expose himself to the cold and damp as others did. In October 1803, when volunteers were again raised, he noted that Dover had raised eight companies. They generally furnished their own arms, did duty for three weeks at a time and received pay. On one occasion they paraded, in their scarlet regimentals, on the Rope Walk, whence they marched, with William Pitt at their head, to the Maison Dieu Fields. In August 1805, when it was rumoured that a French flotilla stationed in Boulogne had set sail, sixty ball cartridges were issued to each man and precautions taken to prevent a surprise attack. From the cliff top the enemy encampments ranged on each side of Boulogne were clearly visible. With a spy glass, indeed, even the horses ploughing could be seen.

In 1804, Pattenden was able to contribute more directly to the defence of the realm. Mr. Stow, the Collector, asked him to make a copy of a drawing of the landscape at Boulogne, so that he could send it to the Secretary of State. Later, no doubt in connection with Sir Sidney Smith's planned attack, he was asked to copy a map of the coast and batteries of the town, including the entrance to the harbour.

During the French and Napoleonic Wars, the defences at Dover were substantially reconstructed. Much of the work, as Pattenden noted, was undertaken in 1795-7, when new sally ports, a subterranean bomb-proof barracks and a new entrance to the castle across the ditch through Monks Battery were constructed. Later, the Grand Shaft, a remarkable structure with triple spiral staircases designed to give rapid access to the defences on the heights from the harbour below, was completed, as were other extensive defence works in the area.

In the course of the wars Pattenden witnessed many of the troop movements associated with expeditions to the continent. On 14th May,

1798 he noted that a fleet with troops was sailing that day from Margate, supposedly for some part of the Netherlands, later identified as Ostend. In August 1799 he witnessed the departure of another expedition, also destined for the Netherlands, which succeeded in taking the Helder, a fort at the mouth of the Texel, but was later defeated and forced to withdraw. The returning troops were disembarked at Yarmouth. They then marched to Dover, where they were billeted in the castle.

Pattenden saw something, too, of the war at sea. On 16th January, 1798, he went down to the pier to see the *Policrate*, a French privateer of sixteen guns and seventy-two men, taken the previous week off Beachy Head by the *Racoon*, a British sloop. He observed that the top mast had been shot away and several holes shot in the sails. Later, he noted that the *Racoon* had captured another French privateer, a lugger of fourteen guns, taken after a sharp engagement in which nine of the French crew were killed and several wounded. On 4th August, 1801, he observed that the fire and smoke of Nelson's fleet attacking Boulogne could be clearly seen from the cliff-top, and on 16th August that he had seen Nelson's flag ship, the *Mediye*, returning to the Downs after an unsuccessful attempt to board and take the gunboats defending Boulogne harbour – 'a great many men killed and wounded'. In August 1803, further attacks were launched on the French fleet in Boulogne. During one of these, Pattenden noted, 'floating machines' were directed into the harbour in an attempt to set fire to the French vessels.

Among the officers leading the attacks on the French fleet in Boulogne was Sir Sidney Smith, the hero of Acre. Whilst stationed in Dover, he spent some time experimenting with the design of a boat for the landing of artillery. Pattenden noted that he experimented with two models, one made up of two boats bound together and another of two half boats joined by cross pieces. The model made up of two half boats, he observed, appeared to go to windward better than that made up of two boats.

On 13th February, 1809 Pattenden described an incident in which the war was brought even closer to home:

'This afternoon the seafaring people at the pier saw a schooner coming up from the westwards which was chased by a French lugger privateer who was firing into her with small arms and had grappled and endeavoured to board but the schooner came straight on for Dover Harbour intending as it afterwards appeared to run on the shore opposite the mouth of the harbour and was actually close in with the mole rocks but the sailors on the heads waved her off and launched two boats one of which soon got on board—about this

time the guns of the Pier Fort were repeatedly fired at the privateer and also some more guns from the other batteries. Finding his intention was discovered the Frenchman put about and stood away for his own coast but he had killed some of the schooner's crew with his musquets before any assistance could be given her—they tell me she is from Bredport.'

French sailors captured in these battles were generally imprisoned in the town gaol. On 8th January, 1808, three prisoners so confined escaped and took a small boat beached in the bay, belonging to Mr. Andrews, who being informed of the fact took a galley and went in pursuit of them. They were eventually recaptured, despite a thick fog, far out in the Channel.

Occasionally, old and infirm prisoners were released. On 18th January, 1811, Pattenden saw two brigs, full of such prisoners, being sent over to France for release.

Pattenden noted most of the major battles of the period in his diaries: the defeat of the Dutch fleet off Schevening, 1797; the battle of the Nile, 1799, of which he read an account in the *Gazette*; the capture of Cairo, 1801; Austerlitz, 13-14th October, 1805, 'a great battle'; Trafalgar, 21st October, 1805, in which 'unfortunately our brave Lord Nelson was slain'—the *Victory* with the body of Nelson aboard anchored off Dover on 13th December; the capture of Buenos Ayres, 1806; Jena, 1806, fought 'continuously for some days . . . great loss'; Friedland, 1807, 'a most bloody battle'; the victories of 1814, 'great thanksgiving'; and, finally, Waterloo, 1815, the 'late, decisive battle'.

These victories were generally celebrated in Dover with festivities, including on occasion a parade, a cannonade and a ball or grand supper, usually at the theatre. The town was illuminated and candles lit in the windows of the houses. Pattenden noted that the ball held to celebrate the Battle of the Nile was attended by the French Generals Humbert and Sarazin, who had been taken prisoner by General Laker in Ireland.

There was little doubt in Pattenden's mind that providence favoured the British cause in the wars. Following the Battle of the Nile, he recorded the vicar's remarks, in a sermon of 29th November, 1798, to the effect that the nation had great cause for thanksgiving for the recent victory and that Lord Nelson in particular had displayed a strong trust in the Lord, otherwise he would not have begun his despatches by saying that the 'Almighty had blessed His Majesty's Arms'. It had, indeed, he noted on another occasion, been asked if the English victories were from God, whom were the French victories from? But that was 'an improper and ignorant kind of wit against religion', as they were taught by scripture that God had permitted wicked men to

prevail merely in order to promote some wise end which men could not foresee. Anyway, the French were a nation professing Christianity that had fallen away into atheism and blasphemy. Such impiety and immorality began in the neglect of public worship: those who did not fear God would not fear the King. The peace and security of Government was indeed founded on the Christian faith. It was true, however, that when a nation became sinful God would chastise it by general afflictions, first by withdrawing the fruits of the earth and then, if that did not reclaim them, by the sword of a fierce enemy. No nation in history ever reformed themselves without the hand of providence afflicting them first. The French were as warlike and irreligious as the Assyrians of old, who were the instruments of God's wrath to other nations.

The impact of the French wars, though hardly comparable with the two World Wars, was clearly considerable. Nevertheless, in other respects life went on much as usual. Pattenden for his part pursued his business affairs with his customary diligence. He ordered stockings from Stocks of Canterbury, worsted materials from Decaufours and other goods from Perkin's. York linens he occasionally ordered from Cook's, and Irish linens from Cappers and Crowder, of Gracechurch Street, London. Occasionally, while in Canterbury he would buy books or have his papers bound at Simmon's bookshop.

Pattenden normally travelled to Canterbury by chaise. Occasionally, he walked part of the way, to the Half Way House or to Bridge. On 13th May, 1797, he set out to walk back:

'This morning about 8 I left Mrs. B. (Mrs. Brickenden, with whom he stayed) and going out of St. George's Gate and seeing the sky partly fair and clouds dispersing I began to walk towards Dover—in the road between the Gate and the turnpike the dragoons were riding to exercise. They rode six horses in depth and filled the whole width of the road and being about 400 in number though they made a grand appearance I was not quite pleased to be so near so many horses as they rode on the footpath on both sides I had no safe place but to get into the hopground which I did till they passed back again towards Canterbury. I walked through Bridge at 9 exactly and observing it not likely to rain I walked over the Down, got to the Half Way House at 11 and sat there an hour . . . I got to Lydden soon after one and stopped at Mr. Harnett's to tea. Afterwards walked towards Dover—when I came to top of the Hill at Crabble the wind was coming easterly and the land of France showed itself with great beauty . . . got home soon after six and thank God met Mrs P. again in health and safety.'

When Pattenden travelled to London, he generally went via

Canterbury and then either by coach via Rochester or by water from Whitstable. The journey was sometimes arduous. On 13th July, 1799, when he visited relatives at Fulham and Hitchin, he arrived at Whitstable at 4 p.m. to find that rain, hail and a westerly wind had made passage up the Thames impossible, so that he was obliged to return to Canterbury the following day and take a chaise from the Rose. On the chaise he met a lady and gentleman who had been down to Margate in a passage vessel to fetch their son from school. On the coach to Hitchin, he was obliged to sit outside, though he managed to get a seat inside at Stevenage. It rained all the way and the journey was 'exceedingly hard'. Whilst in London he took the opportunity of visiting Lambeth Palace, Putney Bridge, Smithfield and the new canal at Paddington. On the return journey he tried once again to take a passage vessel on the river, from Chester's Quay, but found the wind once again in a contrary direction, so that he was obliged to take a coach to Rochester, where he stayed at the Duke's Head, and then another to Canterbury from the Cross Keys, Gracechurch Street. On the journey he met many Dover pilots returning home. In May 1805, when Pattenden again visited London, he visited the British Museum in Great Russell Street.

The harsher aspects of life received only occasional mention in Pattenden's diaries. The fate of William Hussey, a debtor, confined in Dover Castle, clearly caused him some concern. When Mrs. Smith, a friend, sent the poor man a one pound note, he personally delivered it. Another debtor, John Clement, cabinet maker, was discharged after being confined for four years in the castle. A third, Neame Kennard, escaped, was recaptured and served another four years, when Pattenden requested that he be released, offering to pay his discharge fees of £8 himself. In January 1799, Pattenden noted that Simon Ward, a fisherman, and some of his companions had seized a soldier named Turnbull who had stolen two thousand guineas from the mint in the Tower. He had offered Ward thirty guineas to carry him over to France and had more than a thousand guineas on him at the time of his arrest. In June 1800, a man named Saville was exposed on the pillory in the market place and much pelted by the crowd for his insolence to them. In December 1809, Ambrose Back was found guilty of writing an abusive libel against Mr. Huntingdon and sentenced to six months imprisonment.

In March 1807, Pattenden witnessed a riot in Dover. What he described as a great concourse of people assembled in the market place and demanded the release of four smugglers, taken after firing on the revenue's cutter. The magistrates read the Riot Act and a squadron of light horse 'rode up very fast' and cleared the mob, which afterwards dispersed 'happily'. When the men were finally convicted, they were

sent, under a guard of light dragoons, to Canterbury to be forwarded thence to Newgate.

Only once was Pattenden personally affected by crime. In January 1800, he was obliged to sack his servant, Nelly Williams, for stealing a pair of stockings.

Pattenden noted besides two cases of serious crime reported in the press: Governor Wall, hanged at Newgate for cruelty twenty years previously, while stationed on the coast of Africa, when he had ordered one Benjamin Armstrong to receive eight hundred lashes, from which he later died; and the trial and execution of 'that wicked wretch' Patch for the murder of a friend.

In the course of his diary, Pattenden noted many other odd incidents and events. In October 1802, enterprising Doverians towed a whale, stranded on the Goodwin Sands, to Dover, where it was landed on the beach near Archcliff Fort and exhibited to the populace at a charge of 6*d.* a head. Later it was cut up into pieces and its flesh boiled for oil, producing, it was reported, a thousand gallons. The giant skull was pulled by horses to the top of the cliff where it remained an object of unusual interest for some time. In May 1811, a pig, buried in a cave by a prodigious cliff fall, which demolished a house, killing the occupants, was dug out, emaciated but still able to walk, more than six months later. Finally, in 1817, Pattenden noted that a corsair from Tunis, marauding in the Channel, one of a pair, had been seized and brought into the Downs—'a very uncommon occurrence'.

Pattenden, though evidently not a sporting man himself, seems to have followed sporting events in the neighbourhood with keen interest. He attended the races at Priory Fields, Barham Downs and Buckland Valley, and watched 'matches of cricket' played in Northfall Meadow. Cricket seems particularly to have taken his fancy. In August 1798, he noted that the Sussex men had beaten the men of Dover and Deal by an innings and thirty runs, while in August 1807 he walked over to see the Gentlemen of Dover play the Gentlemen of the Surrey Militia, though alas the match was not played out.

Pattenden retired from his drapery business in March 1804. Two years later on 8th February, 1806 his wife died, aged fifty-eight. In his diary he recorded their last hours together. They sat together in the parlour until nine o'clock although she was already very ill. In the morning, she was taken worse: 'She called me to her bedside and said "Give me your hand. I am dying. Send for Mr. Hannam" (the doctor) . . . at twelve . . . she was failing fast . . . at five he could scarce feel any pulsation remaining. At six I felt the parting pang and saw her breath for the last time, when she expired without a struggle and fell asleep "till the last trumpet shall awake the dead".' Mrs. Pattenden was buried, with her husband's father and mother, in the churchyard of St.

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Mary's Church. Pattenden survived his wife for a further thirteen years, dying *c.* 1819, aged seventy-one. He appears to have spent the closing years of his life in contented retirement, looked after by a housekeeper, Mrs. Harboard, and her daughter, continuing to the end to take a keen interest in life, to write, paint and sketch, and to record interesting incidents and events in the last of his notebooks.

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