



East Hoathly & District Preservation Society

Guided Tour of Seaford

by Kevin Gordon

14 Sep 2014

Start of the tour at the Lych Gate of Seaford Church



This walk happened on the Sunday following Kevin's talk to the EHaDPS about the Palace of Westminster, so it was a good chance to ask him those questions that weren't thought of at the time.

Gathering at the Lych Gate, we were told of its original role as a point where coffins were brought to the entrance of the churchyard, to wait for or be greeted by the clergyman. In the Middle Ages most people were buried in a shroud, as a coffin was too expensive, being carried there on a bier. Lych is derived from the old English word *lic* for a corpse (compare the modern German *Leiche* and the Swedish *Lik* for corpse). In centuries past no one was allowed into the church or its grounds without being a member of that faith, so a lych gate was a shelter for the purpose of verifying the legitimacy of a corpse entering the church. Similarly, new born babies had to wait at the lych gate to receive a drop of holy water before being allowed in to the church to be christened.



Seaford Church (above)

The first part of the walk was to look around the graveyard at the different styles of headstones and be told of the features carved into them and their significance. It just happened that the sun was shining obliquely across many of the stones, so the engraving on them was thrown into sharp relief. Going into the church itself (normally locked), detail of how the tower had been built from within another structure and its various uses over the years was given. The history of prominent people of the Seaford area who are buried in the church and the wonderful stone carvings that date back to the early Middle Ages illustrated how important Seaford, a Cinque port, had been.

The tour then continued through the town to highlight many features that most of us walk past without giving them a second thought. For example, the different types of flint stone work to be found in buildings and walls, and their significance; the car park where the cinema once stood and the history of its demise; mathematical tiling on some buildings and the purpose of the wooden runners that border them; the variety of civic and military buildings that are dotted around the town and how their use has changed.

The latter stage of the walk took us along the edge of the old port and up to the Martello Tower, one of several hundred built around Britain and across the Empire. The name is a corruption of the word Mortella, whose round defensive towers that formed part of the Genoese defence system in Corsica inspired their conception.

There, a demonstration was taking place of soldiers in period costume on parade and their loading and firing of blanks in their rifles. The solid walls of the tower certainly helped to reflect and amplify the sound emanating from them!

Soldiers at the Napoleonic battle re-enactment in the Martello Tower (2nd pic taken 15 Sep 2008)



Text & pictures: Leycester Whewell.