

34 THE END OF THE EASTERN DOCKS PENS

As part of its battle to offset the possible adverse effects of the Channel Tunnel and develop new shipping facilities at the port, the Dover Harbour Board recently commissioned a demolition contract for the removal of that well-known wartime landmark the 'Submarine Pens.'

Contrary to local opinion they were never designed nor used to protect submarines, but provided invaluable protection to the many MTBs and air-sea rescue launches that used the port during the second World War.

They were designed and constructed by the Royal Marine Engineers in 1941 and a total of 14 Pens were provided. The massive 3 metre thick roof structure which contained eight layers of reinforcement and weighed 23,000 tonnes, was supported on a grid of large reinforced concrete columns which in turn were founded upon large concrete-filled caissons driven into the chalk sea bed.

The "Sappers" certainly made an excellent job of the construction because it took 26 weeks for a major demolition contractor, using a fleet of special hydraulic concrete breakers, to complete the work. It is interesting to note that the concrete and steel by-products of the demolition contract have since been re-processed for hardcore and steel smelting and thus the Pens' 'ghost' lives on in a reconstituted form.

As well as providing protection for small vessels the Pens also incorporated operations rooms, as well as offices and quarters, and these were visited by many famous wartime figures such as Winston Churchill and H.R.H. Prince Bernard of the Netherlands.

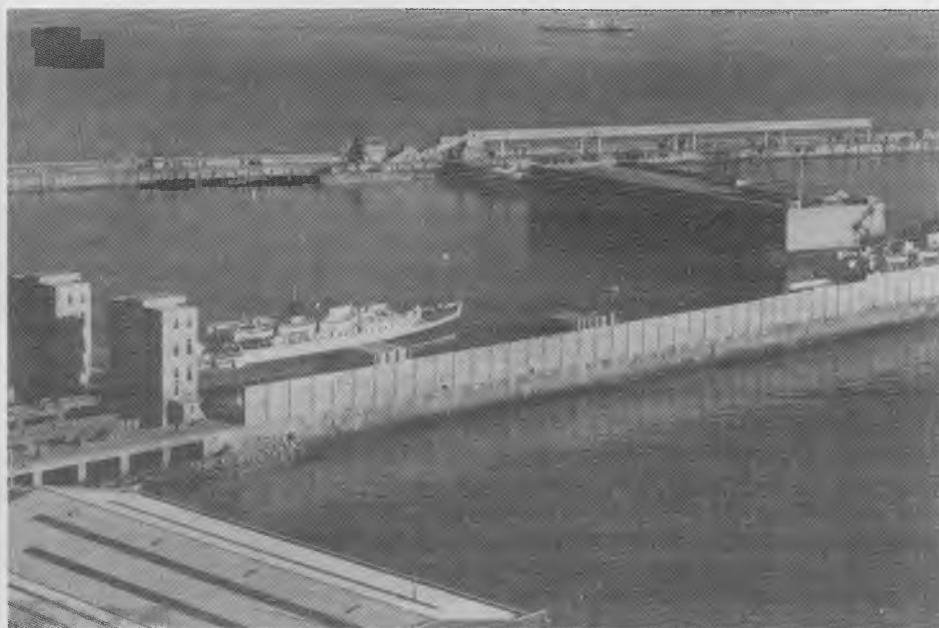
In the post-War years the Pens were used to house a variety of small vessels including the M.O.D. range boats which are used at the Hythe firing ranges, the Harbour Board's survey and patrol craft, the local Dover lifeboat and other small craft.

With the infilling of the Camber in 1988 to provide much needed vehicle parking areas and a new No. 3 Berth, maritime activities at the Pens came to an end and small vessels were transferred to the Tughaven at the Western Docks.

Unfortunately the design of the structure did not lend itself to conversion for other commercial uses and since it precluded access to a valuable deep water berth site, the Harbour Board concluded that its commercial interests would best be served by clearing the site and redeveloping new general cargo facilities there.

As a result, members will shortly see two large lightweight steel sheds being erected some 20 metres or so back from the quay edge, and by the end of the year the Board expects to see a healthy increase in its general cargo trade. In the process it will be providing more local employment, a greater diversity of trade, about 10,000 cubic metres of hardcore and a bit of smelting steel!!

JOHN GERRARD



The 'Submarine Pens' in the late 1950's after the construction of the pioneer ro-ro berths. In the background is the Southern Railway coal saithe on the Eastern Arm.



The pens as demolition started and showing the in-filled Camber.



Further stages as the demolition progressed.

The illustrations on pages 35 and 36 are by courtesy of the Dover Harbour Board.