

GOLDEN TRIANGLE

Castle Street to the Sea

PART 1

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The last part of the Golden Triangle that I now attempt to describe is the rectangle defined on the N. and E. sides by the line of the seaward side of the Castle Street houses, Maison Dieu Road from Castle Street to Woolcomber Street (in my boyhood known as Castle Place), Woolcomber Street to Liverpool Street and then almost diagonally via Douro Place to the Castle Jetty - for many years now known much less euphoniously as Boundary Groyne: on the SW side, by New Bridge, Bench Street, King Street and the Market Square. The area is conveniently divided by the line of the original Townwall Street and Clarence Street and its dominant road pattern, NE to SW, is a perpetuation of the area's 16th century road axis: from the Deal road, now Laureston Place via St James's Street and Queen Street to Cowgate. Elizabeth I on her peregrination of Kent is reputed to have entered Dover through Cowgate and then proceeded down a hill later to be known as Queen Street.

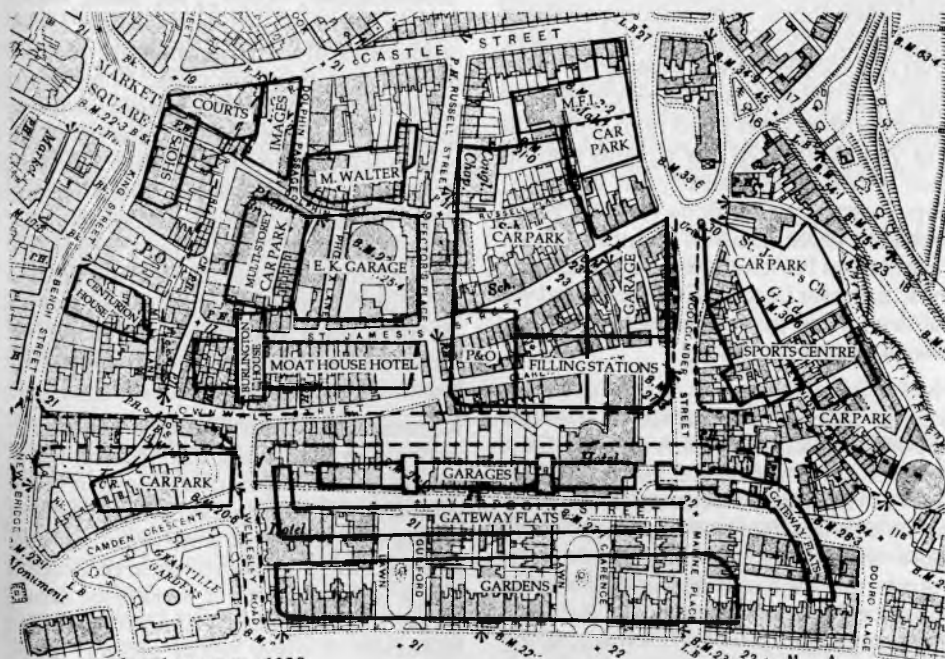
Clockwise from Castle Street, in Castle Place (now embraced in Maison Dieu Road) was the distribution *dépôt* of the British Oxygen Company. extensive premises entirely filling the space between Castle Street and St. James's Street and subsequently taken over by Southern Autos, part of John Dodd's "Southern" empire. (Now, in 1990, occupied by the inelegant M.F.I. building.) The garage's workshops, behind the street frontage, were originally a large malt-house with access from both Golden Cross Passage and Castle Place and belonging, as I recall, to Leney's Phoenix Brewery. Opposite, on the NE side, just into Castle Place,

was the Imperial Photographic Studio, later to become W. Martin's, the electrician's shop and later still a *café*. Then on the area of the present filling station was the walled garden of Castle Hill House where, at the age of 12, in the loft of a coach-house, a particular friend and I experimented with a packet of 20 Players and I began my career as a heavy smoker (ceasing however, 11 years ago). The garden was eventually built over and occupied by Rowland's wholesale grocery business: later, when the firm moved to St. Radigund's Road, the warehouse was destroyed and replaced by the present filling station. In the now demolished part of the curved wall at the seaward end of the garden was a large stone in which was carved the date "1666", and was reputed to have once marked the site of St. Helen's Gate. or tower, part of the town wall at, approximately, the interface between the Sports Centre and its larger car park. In the latter half of the 18th century, the builders of Castle Hill House, the Stringer family, rescued this stone and caused it to be built into the wall. (When the wall was demolished, as no other person appeared to be interested, I made frantic efforts to obtain custody of the stone. Arrangements were made with the architect, the contractors and the secretary of the owners of Castle Hill House, for me to be present at 8.30 on a certain morning to collect and take the stone away for preservation. At 8.30, when I arrived, the bull-dozer had finished its work, the wall was demolished (how similar to the Brook House affair) and I was able to find only three small pieces of the stone: they are still, I hope, under a hedge in my garden. Thus are bits of Dover's history lost for all time.)

Just seaward of this wall, in the centre of an area now much diminished by the entrance to the Sports Centre car park, was an elegant (?) circular cast-iron pissotière surrounded by cast-iron railings and a dense privet hedge. A number



St. James's Street. c.1895



based on a map c1930

94 of people living in the immediate area were concerned that this Victorian relic should be preserved but, alas, it very conveniently, disappeared (as a result, we were told, of a misunderstanding!) just prior to alterations to the road layout.

The "White Horse" Inn and St. James's Old Church are both in St. James's Street, a reminder of the time when neither Castle Place nor Woolcomber Street existed. Castle Hill Road, often referred to as Castle Hill - which it is not - is comparatively recent, having been built in the 1790's. St. James's Street, ran S.W. from the "White Horse" to St. James's Lane and was, in my youth, still the artery of a lively community. Opposite the still remaining houses, Nos. 5, 7 and 9, at Nos. 4 and 6, were the offices of Stilwell & Harby, the solicitors, who are now in Maison Dieu Road. The lower numbered buildings, and St. James's Rectory, had disappeared many years earlier in two separate stages of road widening. Next to Stilwell's was the shop of Betts, the greengrocer which, with two other shops in Woolcomber Street very effectively supplied the area's needs. That is not strictly true because on Tuesdays and Fridays Mr Betts toured the streets with his cart piled high with fruit and vegetables and our parents bought their needs, quite literally, on the doorstep. Every year Mr Betts with his horse and cart were at St. James's Sunday School Treat in Old Park, where now is installed the R.E. Junior Leaders Regiment, and we children were given marvellously long rides at a penny a go.

Next to Betts's shop was Arthur's Place, a narrow lane with a terrace of cottages opposite which was the Assembly Gospel Hall which doubled back and had another entrance a few doors down in St. James's Street. Beyond the Gospel Hall there was a tiny courtyard with three houses, one each side and one facing the entrance. Most of the houses in Arthur's Place were occupied by boatmen, some were entrepreneurs providing the beach

pleasure boats and others formed the crews of the many motor boats that shipped and landed the North Sea Pilots.

Between the Assembly Hall and Fector's Place, — who remembers where that was? — were two or three general shops, a bookbinder, a wholesale stationer, a goodly number of excellent and varied craftsmen and amongst them Mr Cole, previously a lifeboatman — in the days when the lifeboat was an oared vessel — who taught me to sail an Essex One Design and very largely took over the rôle of second father to me and of grandfather to my elder daughter.

On the other side and next to the still existing houses at the top of the street, with Golden Cross Passage between them, was the "Golden Cross" public house and Johnson's most comprehensive general shop. As well as the requirements of our elders Johnson's sold tiger nuts, horse beans, liquorice root, liquorice straps and pipes, catapult elastic, toy pistols and the 'ammunition', '-caps', - for them, water pistols, air gun pellets, marbles, toffee apples and all the other absolute necessities for a young boy's life. Continuing towards the S.W. and next door but one to Johnson's was St. James's Parish Hall, where the awe-inspiring Miss Stratton, previously a missionary in Africa was the Superintendent. Not many doors away was St. James's Girls' School with Miss Clipsham as the Head-mistress. and a little further on was the intersection with Fector's Place and Fox Passage which formed a 'natural break' between the two halves of the street.

Reverting to Golden Cross Passage: half-way along and facing into Russell Place was Golden Cross Cottage with a large gilded cross, about a metre high, planted on the wall above the front door. Beyond Russell Place, in an extension of Golden Cross Passage, was a terrace of small three-floored houses — if one counts the basement, entirely below ground level,

—entered by a steep flight of steps and in most cases used as the living quarters.

Until the recent demolitions the tiny piece of road that led from opposite the "Castle Inn" into the car park was the last remaining vestige of Russell Place but in my time as a boy much went on there. Behind the readily visible 3-storied houses on almost the entire N.W. side there was an "invisible" courtyard with six or seven houses approached by a narrow "tunnel" about a metre wide, apparently bored through the ground floor room of one of the houses and thus that particular room was made very narrow. On the other side was St. James's Parish Gymnasium, the home of the 9th Dover Scouts: for five years I was a member and I learnt so much. Later, as the parish social club, the building was destroyed by a bomb. I have a photograph of the interior after the bombing and amongst the rubble, at a drunken 45°, is one of the billiard tables.

Next, there were four very small cottages, with two ground floor rooms and a tiny bedroom wedged into the roof, then came St. James's Boys' School with a tiny yard attached to it and next to that, and very much larger, was the coal yard of Peter Hawksfield & Sons. Square in the middle of what is now the extension to Russell Street was a house that faced towards Castle Street and in which lived Hawksfield's yard foreman. When that firm moved to Union Quay, Mr James, a coal dealer who had premises at the bottom of Queen Street, took over the yard and lived in that house.

From the Castle Inn to St James's Street the comparatively narrow thoroughfare was, and had been for nearly 200 years, known as Fector's Place. (leading on, through Fox Passage, to Townwall Street). In 1939 it was still lined, on the N.E. side with Fector's warehouses and a building at the corner of Fector's Place and St. James's Street which in the 1890's had housed a velocipede manufacturer, but

from 1900 until the early 30's was occupied by Peter Hawksfield & Son who, in 1931 or '32, moved into Leney's recently vacated offices at the top of Dolphin Passage. The office in St James's Street was then occupied by the local N.U.M.

Peter Fector was a nephew of Isaac Minet, a Huguenot refugee who, escaping with his family to Dover in 1686 to join other refugee relations already here, built up a thriving shipping and banking business with offices near the Esplanade and, later, on Custom House Quay. Peter Fector, nineteen years old, came from the Low Countries to assist his kinsman and, within a few years, took over complete control of the business, greatly extended it and changed its name to Minet & Fector. He took up residence in Kearsney Abbey and became deeply involved in the town's business, administrative and social life. He married into the Minet family and in 1835 his son, John Minet Fector became the town's Member of Parliament. Connected with that old Dover firm - through the allied interests of Isaac's brothers - the name of Minet is preserved in a London financial institution which today provides funds mainly for the purchase and extension of airline fleets. How tragic that the name of Fector is lost and that of a small-time property speculator is preserved in its place.

[to be continued]

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I have once again exceeded my allotted space and failed to achieve my target - to complete the story of the "Golden Triangle." I apologise for a stupid error in the previous instalment. Toward the bottom of page 27 "George II" should, of course, be "George IV."