

Memories of Dover

A Nostalgic Personal Perambulation.

Part One - Biggin Street to Market Square

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As a Dovorian I have always had a real affection for this town and it has been my great pleasure to have been involved in many organisations and societies in Dover over the years, many in leadership roles, where I have sought to promote, defend, and fight for the interests of the town at many levels. Restrictions on movement during the pandemic have enabled me to reflect on changes in my hometown over the last seventy years or so. What follows is from my personal recollection, but I am conscious of the fact that other people's recollections may differ from mine and one's memory is both selective and fallible.

Dover today is a vastly different place to the town into which I was born in in the 1940s. For instance, unlike today there was no one way traffic system in the main thoroughfares of the town. Before the highway engineers set about changing things there was two-way traffic through the town which did not seem to cause much trouble but there again the volume

of traffic was so much lighter than today. A well-known 'pinch point' was at Biggin Street which was much narrower than it is now and was only improved with the redevelopment of the left-hand side, undertaken just beyond the Town Hall. Dover's strength and arguably its greatest weakness has always been, in my mind, the fact that the main retail street has stretched from near the sea front all the way up to Buckland Bridge although the town centre has probably always been considered as stretching from Biggin Street to the Market Square via Cannon Street. In this area there used to be a wonderful profusion of shops and stores from small local outlets to larger high street names. Permit me to take you on a wander down the town from the Town Hall to the seafront pointing out, if my memory permits, well-known shops and places of interest I can recall - always remembering there has been constant change and a town does not remain static. As intimated at the start others may have different memories of the places I recall. Wherever I refer to Right-Hand Side (RHS) and Left-Hand Side (LHS) it is as walking from the Town Hall seawards.



Biggin Street Before Widening

Immediately adjacent to the Town Hall was the Town Public Library (currently the offices of Dover Town Council, called Maison Dieu House). I recall the reference section was on the ground floor and the lending library was on the next level up. Walking along Biggin Street towards Cannon Street the 'Prince Albert' Pub on the RHS remains to this day. Just a few doors down on the RHS was a sports

shop owned by Eddie Crush, a former Kent cricketer I believe. On the LHS, after what is now the parade of new shops, one encountered the former head office of the Dover & District Co-operative Society where I recall one purchased, among other things, milk tokens for the delivery of milk overnight to the doorstep. The site is now occupied by the Specsavers Opticians and Argos complex. Between them and Pencester Road one would come across the Salem Baptist Church (present site of Boots) and on the corner of Pencester Road was the Midland Bank. On the RHS of Biggin Street, among the many outlets, was the General Post and Telegraph Office in an imposing building on the corner of Priory Street (demolished and rebuilt as a fashion shop) and a little way further down was an extremely popular place – F W Woolworth (Woollies) - which spread from a frontage on Priory Street to a frontage on Worthington Street as well as having a frontage on Biggin Street. Pick 'n Mix was a favourite counter! Peppin the tailor, which became George Lock Ltd tailor, was alongside the Woolworth store on the Biggin Street frontage. On the corner of Worthington Street there was a substantial Timothy Whites store.



Timothy Whites Corner, Worthington Street



Pencesterr Road

On the LHS of Biggin Street, after crossing Pencester Road which was where all the East Kent buses stopped and started on their journeys, the first retail outlet one encountered on the corner, was Murdoch's music, piano, and record store alongside which was a big high street name – Marks and Spencer Ltd (now B&M). Beyond which, heading towards St Mary's Church, were, among others, Vye and Sons grocers, Dewhurst butchers and, still in situ, John Angell (Dover) Ltd jewellers, including clocks and watches, then came a pub or hotel whose name I believe was, The Wellington. St Mary's Church and churchyard came next and that too remains in situ. Meantime on the RHS after crossing Worthington Street the first shop on the corner was Boots the Chemist (right opposite Timothy Whites). In the stretch between Boots and opposite St Mary's Church there was several shops, including the grandly named 'Home and Colonial Stores' as well as a cinema, the Gaumont if I recall correctly (where the Gala Bingo Hall is today), and nearer to New Street was a rather grand but quaint old fashioned drapers' department store called G W Hatton Ltd. A feature I recall here was the overhead zip wire money boxes for payment and change. (Hatton's site is now the site of W H Smith).