

Looking Back

When Oxford Bags Were All The Rage

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Well, we are well into 2022 now, with plenty of problems for our country and our town. But there were probably even more problems one hundred years ago, back in 1922.

There were big changes politically in the country with back-room Conservatives breaking down the Tory-Liberal coalition government, of which David Lloyd George was the prime minister, replacing him with Andrew Bonar Law as prime minister, heading a 75-Conservative majority in the House of Commons. It was the first time the Tories had held power since 1906.

There was still the widespread fear of Communism, or what the Dover Express described as more extreme Socialism, in Dover and elsewhere.

There remained considerable unrest in Dover among the unemployed, the number of which topped 1,100 before the end of 1922. At one stage the police had to fight a crowd of jobless off the steps of the Town Hall. Buckland Mill, Dover's biggest employer, was on short time.

This unrest came despite the efforts of Dover Borough Council to create work including the formation of River Athletic Ground, the widening of Crabble Hill, and the completion of the widening of Green Lane at Buckland. There was even talk of completion of the long proposed Cliff Road to St Margaret's Bay but that proved too expensive. In November the Council bought Pencester Meadow (now Pencester Gardens) for £5,000 but no action was approved about the future of the land.

One bright piece news was the expansion of work at the ship-breaking industry at East Cliff where about six hundred were employed (although poorly paid). The arrival at East Cliff of four of the earlier class of Dreadnoughts for demolition brought some hope. But there was still no progress in the massive project of creating a huge dry dock in the harbour, an idea first considered in 1920. Both Snargate Street and Bench Street were repaved—with wooden blocks!

Earlier hopes of providing many jobs in Dover through the export, and the fuelling of ships, with Kent coal, slipped behind with problems in the industry. Tilmanstone Colliery was in danger of closing down as well as Snowdown.

One of the biggest problems for the country was the continuing state of affairs in Ireland and this had a big impact on the number of troops in the Dover garrison, with at least two of the regiments sent there, resulting in a considerable loss to the local economy. The national "Geddes Axe" (reducing the wages of those employed, including troops) was another blow to the economy.

In January 1922 the Irish government narrowly voted (64-57) to accept the treaty setting up the Irish Free State and arrangements for Northern Ireland. This resulted, throughout the year, in IRA killings, with Protestant-Catholic riots in Belfast and elsewhere. Dover-based troops were sent there to try to keep the peace.

There was plenty of in-fighting politically in Dover where, in November, the three

parties seeking seats on the town council were: The Municipal Conservative Party, the National Citizens' Union, and the Trades and Labour Council. There was a very poor turn-out of voters with one National Citizens' member elected with the remainder all Conservatives.

But this in-fighting was even more bitter in the 1922 general election. Major Astor's Conservative Party took on sitting MP Sir Thomas Polson who called himself an Independent but really represented "die hard" right wing Tories. Polson had previously won the Dover seat with the help of national character Horatio Bottomley MP who later in the year was jailed for seven years for fraud through his spurious Victory Bonds.

Major Astor won the seat easily with the Liberal candidate in third place. Astor remained Dover's MP for years ahead.

While all this was going on Dover did well out of tourism with again calls to scrap the trams, which ran through the town centre on tram lines, to replace them with trackless trams. The existing tram lines were said to be in a "terrible state."

There was still a debate over the provision of a civic war memorial in Dover. "Little progress on this issue," reported the Dover Express. The war memorial at the Duke of York's Royal Military School was unveiled in June by the Duke of Connaught.

A number of Dover's more wealthy young men had taken to the latest national craze of wearing Oxford Bags, voluminous trousers, while the girls were hoping, and singing, 'I wish I could Shimmy like my sister Kate.' But more Dovorians were taken up in November to listening, for the first time, news being broadcast on their wireless sets.



Oxford Bags. These are about 40 inches

They heard of the activities of the Fascist, Benito Mussolini's "March on Rome." Few had yet heard of a German bloke called Hitler. But these were early signs that democracy in parts of Europe was beginning to crumble.

The Medical Officer of Health for Dover reported to the Town Council that cases of influenza had occurred to such an extent over the weekend that on Monday 16th January he had closed the School Clinic and fourteen schools in the town. The remaining schools were to close on 17th January. Cinemas were to be closed to children and it was recommended that Sunday schools be closed, private and public children's parties to be discontinued and children prevented from gathering together. Editor



March on Rome 1922 L to R Italo Balbo, Benito Mussolini, Cesare Maria de Vecchi and Michele Bianchi