

Memories of Dover

A Nostalgic Personal Perambulation.

Part Three - Bridge Street to Town Hall

Peter Sherred

Before I progress further with my perambulations around the town I would like to thank, once again, John Richards who raised with me the reference to the "Elephant and Hind" pub and its previous incarnations. It was, once upon a time, two pubs, the "Walmer Castle" and the "Duchess of Kent." The two merged in the early 1960's and the "Elephant and Hind" opened in October 1964. Fremlins had, as part of its logo, an elephant and in the Whitbread logo was a hind, so presumably it was thought appropriate that the new business was called the "Elephant and Hind." I thank John for drawing this to our attention.

Continuing my perambulations, I recall that my family lived in rented accommodation in the High Street where, following my father's death at the early age of forty-two, my mother, sister and I lived until the 1970's. These were days before the widespread availability of things we take for granted today - such as the television, refrigerators, freezers, central heating, and indoor WC's and, of course, rationing continued well beyond the end of the Second World War. We hear much today of 'austerity' but in the early 1950's people experienced real austerity without the availability of the support structures that exist today. Yet somehow there was a great community spirit. The terrace of properties in the High Street where we lived, for example, had a real neighbourly feel about it embraced, as it was, by a willingness to help each other. In reflecting on Dover then and now and having focussed on the main street from the Town Hall to the Seafront, I turn the focus now on the High Street between Bridge Street and Ladywell. Before doing so I remember the

town generally, and especially between these two roads, was dominated by a manufacturing plant that bordered Charlton Green, Maison Dieu Road and Bridge Street, known as the Dover Engineering Works - Gatic, manufacturers, among other things, of manhole covers I seem to recall. The plant had quite an impact on the town because of its smoke emissions, particularly when there was low cloud, for the emissions would linger over the town with a scent not too different from bad eggs! Windows had to remain firmly closed! The firm was a major source of employment, but I doubt current Planning or Health and Safety regulations would permit such a complex in a town centre! It eventually closed and was demolished, along with a dairy and milk bottling plant owned by the Dover and District Co-op at Crafford Street. Today the site forms the area where the Morrisons and Asda stores and associated retail outlets and the large flat open carpark that serves them, are located. A distinct environmental improvement!

So, as one walked from Bridge Street towards the Town Hall, what has changed? Well, quite a lot. In the 1950's there was an almost



Engineering Works

continuous line of small retail units throughout its length on the left-hand side (LHS) going towards the Town Hall together with the then functioning Royal Victoria Hospital in which I had to seek treatment on two occasions, (the hospital was converted into the residential apartments we see today). On the right hand side (RHS) there was a more mixed frontage comprising residential, commercial, and retail units, as well as a Salvation Army citadel and a United Reformed Church.

Let us start at Bridge Street and see what the little grey cells can remember on the LHS. The National Provincial Bank was located at the junction with the High Street. Then came Vanes the baker shop and, remarkably, it is still there and functioning! In the 1950's I recall that Good Friday was respected more than it is today and the only shops that would be open, probably only in the morning, were the fresh fish shops and Vanes - the former to satisfy Catholic tastes' the latter to provide the most tasty of Hot Cross Buns. Two or three doors down from there was arguably my favourite shop as a child - Doyle & Son, the toy shop! Here I would go and buy my Indian and Cowboy figures but, more importantly, my meagre pocket money was saved up so I could buy Dinky Toys. How I regret disposing of my collection as I grew up, for the prices they attract these days would have landed me a small fortune! The shop on the corner of Peter Street, currently a chemist, was Dunford's Greengrocery.

Peter Street was interesting as it was quite narrow, but it connected High Street with Maison Dieu Road, running right through the Engineering Works site. It came out nearly opposite The Grapes public house (now the Louis Armstrong) and I took this route daily when I first attended St Ursula's Convent Junior School, then located in Salisbury Road in a building called Claremont (now redeveloped for housing). There was another

little pub at the top of Peter Street, near its junction with High Street, called The Friend in Need and I remember a rag and bone merchants' premises nearby as well, Castle & Son, I believe. Eventually Peter Street was stopped up for about two thirds of its length and the exit from the current car park is just about where it used to have its junction with Maison Dieu Road.

Crossing Peter Street, on the corner opposite Dunford's greengrocery was a large shop owned by the Grilli family which was a confectioners-cum-coffee shop that also sold lovely ice cream. Some years later it became an Indian Restaurant called, not surprisingly I guess, the Taj Mahal where I was to have quite an experience involving one of the hottest of Indian curry dishes! A few of the shops that followed included a newsagent called Dennis, a tobacconist's (Casselden?), and a little way down Morecrofts, the Ironmongers, beside which was a private house with a front garden. Then there was a butcher's shop before another greengrocery shop run by the Tyler family. George Tyler, a contemporary of mine, subsequently became a Oolitec Councillor, lived in Alkham, and then moved to France. Almost opposite our house (on the terrace (on the RHS)) was a shop called Hills which specialised in prams and other essential baby requirements before it became a laundrette (remember them?). A large grocery store, by the standards of the time, and butchers called David Greig Ltd was immediately opposite our house. It was a double fronted shop, I remember, with groceries served by the LHS entrance and the butchers served by the RHS entrance. Then came a fresh fish shop - managed by Alec Howell and a few doors down an off-licence and wine shop, which could have been another John Lukey outlet although I believe it was called Croftons (like the sherry Croft but with 'ons; added!), with more small shops including another fishmonger, a hardware store, a pet shop, and even another small pub, called I believe, The

Angel, before we reached a large store called Lant and Marshall outfitters, selling outdoor clothing including jeans! (this shop is now a computer repair centre called Pharos, I believe). An interesting consequence of the parade of all these small shops from Bridge Street down was that people, such as my mother, used to shop daily there because of the convenience and ease of access to them. Anchor butter and New Zealand Lamb loomed large in the grocery and butcher's worlds respectively I seem to recall - this before we abandoned New Zealand in favour of the EEC. In respect of greengrocery produce, we were very dependent on seasonal availability rather than the vast array of produce we have all year round in our Supermarkets today. So it was that Spring Greens were available in the Spring while the first sight of Brussels Sprouts meant that Christmas was not far away! Celery always heralded the coming of winter and the helpfulness of frosts! Soft fruits were very much only available in the brief summer months.

Of course, all these properties, from Peter Street to adjoining Lant and Marshalls, were demolished as a wholesale redevelopment gripped this area of the town when the Charlton Shopping Centre complex, complete with multi story carpark off Dour Street, was built. This redevelopment also accounted for Crundall's wood yard at the bottom of the aptly named Wood Street. It was suggested this complex would transform Dover and relocate the shopping experience into a new Town Centre. It never happened, despite the valiant efforts of my dear old and much-lamented late friend Ron Dryden as the General Manager. The problem was the quality of the build did not match up to expectation, in my view, and as far as I am aware it was never fully occupied on both levels as expected. It did have an 'anchor' tenant initially - a Sainsbury store but that did not last overlong, and the complex has limped along with changing shops and stores ever

since. The centre of gravity of the retail experience in the town did not change as anticipated and then, of course, other developments both within the town and on the outskirts detracted from the Centre. On the corner of Peter Street and High Street there are now the High Street and Peter Street Doctors' Practices.

Moving on from Lant and Marshalls store, on the corner of Wood Street was a large old-fashioned chemists called Leonard D Cox and I have memories of those very large, coloured glass containers with bottle stops one used to see in such chemists. On the corner of Maison Dieu Place was John Scrase music and record shop - radio and television engineers - now a hairdressing salon. Past the Royal Victoria Hospital was a lovely little shop where I remember one could take a basin and purchase pease pudding and also dripping - lovely on bread seasoned with salt! The Mason's Arms pub came just before the shop unit where Jack Bailey, a lovely man, ran his dispensing opticians' practice. Between there and Ladywell was another cluster of shops including another pet shop and the Co-op laundry and on the corner with Ladywell was another chemist called Hilton's. So much of the character of the LHS of the High Street was lost with the wholesale redevelopment for the Charlton Centre - a great shame.

Now let us go back once again to Bridge Street and come down the RHS of the High Street to the area of the Town Hall. First, we cross the High Street to the RHS where on the corner with Tower Hamlets Road was a boot and shoe repair shop called Deans (it subsequently became a shop for the sale of video's but is occupied now by an accountancy firm) beside which was a little, but very popular, café. The row of residential properties (that still exist today) ran down as far as the garage but just before the garage was a shop unit that was set back from the frontage and was once occupied by Kent Photo's run by Pat and Joe Court

before they relocated to King Street. The garage was an interesting feature. Currently it operates as a funeral service, but I remember it housed the H J Sawyer funeral and taxi service and there were petrol pumps at the front (long since gone). Horace Sawyer had a fleet of beautiful old Rolls Royce limousines and hearse which he used for his funeral service, and these had to be reversed into the garage which extended a fair way back. He had a chapel of rest and my father in 1955 set out on his final journey from this place.

Beyond the garage was a raised terrace of properties and I was born in number 81. At the end of the terrace was a café which in due time became the quite popular Good Luck Chinese Restaurant, now boarded up. Between the shop at the end of the terrace, to what was A T Blackman's business, currently is to be found the relatively new array of shops which includes Iceland, and these replaced several interesting properties and their businesses. After the shop at the end of the terrace of residential properties there was an open space we called the caves, probably wartime air raid shelters in the chalk but, post war, fronted by large advertising billboards. Those who remember Bernard Cunnington (Bunny) will remember that the family grocery business had its main shop just down from the open space - A. (Arthur) T. Cunnington and I enjoyed holidays working with the firm. Turnpenny had a large shop frontage for their furniture store and there was a small confectionary shop with the most gorgeous homemade sweets. I do not know why, but I have a feeling this was run by two brothers, one or both having a connection with the East Kent buses. Then we came to A.T Blackman & Son plumbers, heating engineers and kitchen fitters. Bill Blackman was a long-time member of the Rotary Club and his second son, Richard, was a very active Rotoractor as well as a member of South Foreland Rotary Club. The 'Silver Grill' fish and chip shop run by the Reardon family

(where I also earned a few bob doing odd jobs and where one could buy a good six pennyworth of chips and fish) was next and then came the Salvation Army Citadel. In those days the Salvation Army had a significant presence in the town, and I well remember each Sunday its band used to march up the High Street making a merry din, with tambourines waving and instruments played with energy - not always appreciated by local residents who felt Sunday was a day of rest to sleep in bed undisturbed! My local hairdresser, a rather old-fashioned place but a good service, came next (this may have been under the name of Don Stibber) and if memory serves me correct, either that or its next door property, became the Dover offices of the Dover Express, but no doubt Terry Sutton will indicate if my memory is failing me here.

Victoria Crescent (which still exists) was mainly residential but Fred Greenstreet, bootmaker, relocated here and there was also a chiropodist (Mr Stubbs?) working in the Crescent. Beyond the Crescent was the United and Reform Church which is currently scaffolded and being converted into flats. Among shop units between Priory Hill and Effingham Crescent there was an off licence - John Lukey again! - right opposite the Town Hall (where The Allotment restaurant is now) and also Jarman and Watts dry cleaners. On the corner with Effingham Crescent was a soft furnishing and haberdashery store called Sharps. Just across Effingham Crescent on Priory Road was a Rediffusion South East outlet (who remembers those?) which became E R Longley electrical contractors and beyond that a celebrated dental surgery - where one Ron Proudler practised, who at one stage became the National President of Rotary in the UK. On that note I will stop at this point, but I hope these quick nostalgic trips down memory lane have brought back some memories for readers. So much changes and yet so much stays the same.