

Memories of Dover

A Nostalgic Personal Perambulation.

Part Five - Port and Town Miscellany

Peter Sherred

I am very grateful to those who have responded to my perambulation articles in such a positive way and for this edition I would particularly like to acknowledge some comments from Linda Livingstone regarding the last edition's article on transport and in particular the reference to the no 86 bus service between Tower Hamlets and Eastern Docks. As a resident of Douglas Road, Linda confirms the No. 86 bus service did go as far as Chamberlain Road. The bus travelled along South Road and along Noah's Ark Road and then to Chamberlain Road and the playing field, where she believes it turned in a half circle, reversing to a bus stop near No. 2 Chamberlain Road. On the journey to East Cliff the first bus from Tower Hamlets was at 6.00 am, scheduled to arrive at the East Cliff bus stop about 6.15 am, Linda remembers this as she worked at the Merry Dolphin restaurant during school holidays on the early shift and was given dispensation to start the shift 15 minutes late, as this was the first bus to arrive at East Cliff. Thank you, Linda, for this clarification and information. Regarding movements in the port in the 1950's and onwards referred to in the last edition of the Newsletter (No 104), two things came to mind subsequently. Firstly, where the 'Invicta' used to berth was alongside the Admiralty Pier and, more significantly, the Dover Marine Station, a terminus where continental travellers arrived on such trains as the 'Golden Arrow'. The station had four tracks and platforms and the picture shows the area of the central two platforms with electric trains stationed at the platforms. All the rail tracks have been infilled and this area now forms part of the Cruise Terminal. The Winter Festival, organised by Dover Harbour

Board and partners, is held on the area identified in the picture. The Marine Station also was the starting point of a sleeper train that travelled through the night to Stirling in Scotland. That was an important motorail service which linked up with another train from the West Country to provide a connected train service to Scotland.

Another memory was triggered by a photo of the Eastern Docks showing the two ro-ro berths which reminded me that until the 1960;s only the eastern entrance to the port was in use. The reason for this was the western entrance had been blocked by sunken ships firstly during World War One and then in World War Two. The remnants of three former vessels sunk in the harbour mouth (one in 1914 the other two in 1940 & 41 respectively) were not finally removed until 1963 when the western entrance was opened for the first time since 1940 and the 'Invicta' was the first, I believe, to sail through the entrance since the war's conclusion in 1945.

Dover has seen many notable buildings demolished since the 1950's. Saturday morning treat for children was to go to the cinema and Dover was well provided with cinemas after the war since television had not yet made an impact and people enjoyed visiting 'the flicks'. The Odeon was a large cinema on the left-hand side of London Road just before Cherry Tree Avenue on the right-hand side. I attended this cinema on many Saturday mornings but, eventually, it was sold and demolished, and the Territorial Army facilities were built on its site and are currently in use by cadet organisations.

While mentioning this cinema in Dover others included the Granada in Castle Street which became a night club and has since been demolished leaving a vacant site. The Essoldo cinema was in Cannon Street opposite St Mary's Church and the Gaumont cinema was in Biggin Street opposite Marks and Spencer, in the King's Hall, latterly the Bingo Hall.



Odeon Cinema

St Bartholomew's church was situated in a commanding position at the junction of London Road and Templar Street. This was closed, then demolished, and the site used for the construction of flats which currently exist. The lifespan of St Bartholomew's was relatively short in church terms – just about one hundred years following its consecration in 1879. It was a “high” church of the Anglo Catholic tradition and merged with Charlton parish in the 1970s. Many well-known priests were associated with St Bartholomew's including Bill Shergold, its last priest, who was known as the motor bike priest who had formed the 59 and the 69 motor bike clubs in London and Dover, respectively. Another church that was demolished post war was Christ Church on Folkestone Road nearly opposite Dover College. It too was replaced by flats.

Arguably the most infamous demolition of a substantial property occurred in 1988 when Brook House, formerly used as offices by

Dover Borough Council and Dover District Council, was demolished rapidly over a weekend with more than an element of subterfuge involved. The day before its demolition it had been listed apparently as a building of architectural and historic interest but by the time notification of this arrived at the District Council Offices they were closed and, conveniently, work of demolition began the next day over a weekend. It had been a grand looking building with a significant history, and I remember in the 1950s one approached it from Maison Dieu Road by a roadway that was bordered by tennis courts on either side. It was a significant feature and building in Dover and while it may possibly have been costly to repair and refurbish the manner of its demolition was a matter of concern. Its site now forms the location of the surface car and coach park by the Riverside Centre located to the left and behind Dover Health Centre on Maison Dieu Road. Its demise was a dramatic case of ‘now you see it, now you don't’. Who, precisely, was responsible for such officially sanctioned vandalism? Reflecting on the demolition of Brook House directed my attention to other Dover buildings that have been lost through demolition or had their nature radically changed. One such building was Webb's Hotel at Folkestone Road in Dover owned, if memory serves me right, by Terry and Jean Eleftheriades. The property was demolished in or about 2006 to be replaced by residential development.

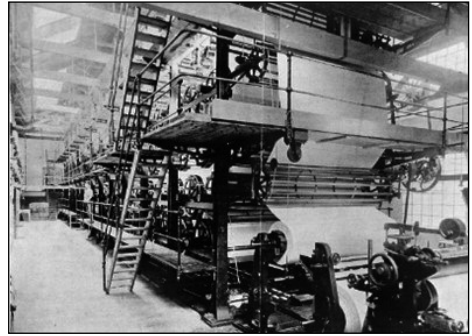
On the other side of Folkestone Road coming back towards the railway station was a very impressive building set in its own grounds, called Westmount. It had a chequered career being once a Junior School for Dover College and latterly owned by Kent County Council as an Adult Education Centre. It suffered a devastating fire in 2007 and thereafter deteriorated until it was eventually demolished. At one time it was thought it would be redeveloped for residential use

along with the former ambulance station adjoining. This large site would no doubt provide a good number of residential units.

In recent times residents of The Gateway had a grandstand view of the demolition of the disused Leisure Centre on the corner of Woolcomber Street and there is speculation as to the future use of the site which remains open and empty. But what connection has that site with Coombe Valley Road in the St Radigunds area of the town? Well, this area of land (on which the leisure centre and the adjoining car park had been situated) was once a thriving residential area with a roadway called Trevanion Street running through it and with another feature of the area – a gas works!

An original gas works for Dover was established in the early part of the 19th century to help light up the town. Gas was derived from burning coal handily brought ashore from the harbour to this nearby site. Decades later a gas works was established in Union Road, now Coombe Valley Road, and Trevanion Street works closed. I recall the large gas holders on the left-hand side of Coombe Valley Road, a hundred yards or so up from the railway bridge over the road. The enterprise covered a much larger area and involved buildings and facilities up to and including St Radigunds Road much of which site is now occupied by a builders' merchants and a heavy lorry parking area. The death knell for these facilities was the exploitation of natural gas from the North Sea. The plant, which following nationalisation in 1949 became part of the South Eastern Gas Board, was closed and demolished. Another feature of old Dover gone!

At the top end of town, by Buckland Bridge and running up Crabble Hill, was a large enterprise of international repute and a major employer of the town – the Wiggins



Wiggins Teape Paper Mill Courtesy Lorraine Sencicle

Teape paper mill, usefully located beside the River Dour. Celebrated for its quality paper watermarked 'Conqueror' as well as for paper for maps and charts the time came when it was decided production on this site would cease resulting in unemployment for some and raising the question as to what would happen to the site. Fortunately, the building fronting Crabble Hill avoided demolition and was gradually converted into flats with parking, a leisure facility and a Co-op store. A new block of flats was built beside the former Manager's house and the large area to the rear of the retained building, bordered by the footpath that runs from Buckland Bridge to Crabble Lane, is to be developed for mixed uses. The iconic clock tower has been preserved in the retained building. So a structure that once provided employment for people now provides much needed residential accommodation.

And to think I have not mentioned the fate of the pissoir shown on the Trevanion Street map and referred to as a urinal – handily placed outside both The White Horse pub and St James the Apostle church - a relief, no doubt, to those who frequented either. Why was it not listed and preserved I wonder? – not such a public convenience perhaps?