

# Looking Back 100 Years

**Terry Sutton**

One hundred years ago, in the autumn of 1923, Dover's massive Admiralty Harbour was transferred from the Admiralty to Dover Harbour Board. It was the most important change of the year.

Apparently, the Admiralty decided Dover was no longer an important base for the Royal Navy which caused much sadness in the town where the Navy boys were always popular. The harbour and its quays were formally handed over to Dover Harbour Board on September 29th in 1923 following an Act of Parliament. A small portion of the Dockyard was retained by the Admiralty. Dover Harbour Board was still trying to interest investors in the provision of a very large dry dock, costing well over a million pounds. A small amount of Kent mined coal was being exported through Dover to Boulogne because of the fuel shortage of coal from the Ruhr.

Another change was the ending of the Noon Day gunfire, a feature in Dover for many years. The firing of the gun ceased in August 1923 on the grounds of "national economy".

Yet another important change, to the benefit of Dover, was that five railway operators came under the control on January 1st of



*Dover 1923*

the newly named Southern Railway which decided to make Dover an important employment base and to upgrade Priory railway station.

One of the main works of Dover Town Council was to find useful tasks for the unemployed. One job was finishing the task of linking by road Elms Vale and Tower Hamlets by converting a cow path to create what became known as Astor Avenue. Plans were afoot to widen parts of Folkestone Road and the approach to Buckland Bridge from the Crabble direction.

A number of obsolete warships, including Dreadnoughts, were being demolished at Stanlee's ship-breaking works at the Eastern Docks, providing a number of low-paid jobs while the British Oxygen Company had built a factory and offices in Castle Place. The very old Dover business, Dover Tannery, closed down.

On April 23rd the bodies of 79 Belgian soldiers who died in the UK were returned to their homeland with a big ceremony.

There was a row over the town council's decision to buy and lay-out Pencester Meadow (Pencester Gardens) when it was discovered the seller did not own all the land.

Another big debate was over the move to replace Dover's ageing trams with trackless trolley cars. Eventually it was agreed to replace the trams with East Kent buses.

With many old houses being demolished in the Pier district, there was a shortage of homes to let. A number of large houses on the sea front, previously used as B&Bs, were vacated and let as flats.