

# The Boltons, Coal and Dover

## Dick Bolton

The Bolton family hail from Tyneside. My father, Stanley R Bolton, a chartered shipbroker, came to Dover in 1933 and joined P Hawksfield & Son Ltd of Castle Street, as their Shipping Manager. During his time with Hawksfields he had three offices: firstly, on the quayside of Granville Dock in a magnificent brick warehouse, then to a small brick building, still on the Cross Wall and lastly to the office below the Clock Tower at the entrance of the Prince of Wales Pier.

Stanley met our mother Kathleen Brett at the Greenleas Tennis Club in Connaught Park. They married in the new St James Church on the 31st of August 1935. I was born in their new home at the bottom of Whitfield Hill in 1937 and in 1945 my sister Rosemary was born in Waldershare Park, to which Dover's Royal Victoria Hospital had been evacuated. Stanley was a member of Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve (RNVR) and during WW2 served in London and later Brussels planning the movements of shipping. In the early 1960s he became a Special Constable and then after retiring from Hawksfields in the mid-1960s, he joined P & O as a Purser. He was joined in Kent by an elder brother John (Jack) S Bolton who was a manager in London and Richborough with Pearson and Dorman Long, owners of Betteshanger and Snowdown collieries. He then joined the National Coal Board, next to the Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club. Both brothers now lived near to each other in the new Gateway flats. Jack was in the London Scottish Regiment. They went to France in September 1914 and in October were at the Battle of Messine Ridge; the first volunteer unit to see action in the war. He was then commissioned in the Durham Light Infantry and later, the recently formed, RAF.

He saw action in Northern Italy in the Battle of the Piave River, directing artillery fire from a basket under a tethered balloon. He had a parachute, which he said was useless and a telephone line to pass orders and ask to be winched back to the ground if he came under fire!

**P Hawksfield & Son Ltd.** The founder, Peter Hawksfield, a master mariner and owner of three cargo sailing ships, was persuaded by his son Henry V Hawksfield to join him as a coal merchant. So, on the 14th of September 1876, they commenced business in St James' Street Dover and owned one sailing ship, the "Conrade", a brigantine of 320 tons but were soon chartering other vessels to carry coal from the ports of South Wales and the Northeast to Dover. Peter died in 1892 and his son took over. In 1902 the last of the sailing ships went out of service and were replaced by SS "Peter Hawksfield" and SS "Kenneth Hawksfield" named after the great grandsons of the founder. Their father, Henry T Hawksfield (HTH) joined the firm in 1905 and became Managing Director in 1923. Until now the handling of coal was an inefficient, slow and dirty business, using shovels and baskets on many different quays. In 1923 the firm leased a site from



*Customs House Quay, Granville Dock*

the Harbour Board and a new coal wharf was built at the Granville Dock, with the first of three quayside cranes which "grabbed" the coal from the ship and loaded into wagons for delivery by rail and into "hoppers" to fill lorries for local trade. On their sixtieth anniversary in 1936 Dover had one of the country's most efficient wharves for handling coal; moving 200 tons an hour, accurately weighed and automatically sorted by size. Coal was now arriving from Scotland, Northumberland, Durham and Yorkshire.

Hawksfield's first major challenge had come in 1919 when Europe was in post-war chaos. Now "bunkering" was urgently needed twenty-four hours a day, to keep British and foreign ships on the move. The next challenge was the coal strike of 1921 (and in 1926). So, to keep electricity and gas flowing imports were quickly arranged, from Belgium, Germany, France, Poland, Canada and the USA.

In November 1932, the Company moved office to Castle Street. HTH was one of the first members of the Coal Utilization Council, which looked at ways of burning coal more efficiently. A new show room was opened and supported by three local ironmongers: George Thomas of King St, Joseph Thomas of 86 London Rd and Mr A T Blackman of 30 High St. Here you could see working examples on how to use various solid fuels for all your domestic needs!

HTH's sons Peter and Kenneth joined the firm in 1936 and 38, but in 39 they and other staff were called up for war service. The Port of Dover was closed to all merchant shipping, except carriers of coal. After the evacuation from Dunkirk our Southeast coastline, for seven miles inland, became a prohibited zone. The firm's HQ moved to London, but their new home was blitzed three times! "Accounts" returned to Dover and "Shipping" went to Newcastle.

Throughout these years coal was shipped to Dover from Blyth and the Tyne. In 1941 the wharf offices were damaged and on the 6th of September 1942, 60 Castle Street was destroyed. At the outbreak of war, the company owned three colliers of which two were sunk. On the 9th of July 1940, the SS "Kenneth Hawksfield" was damaged by a bomb off Dover and on the 21st of June 1941 was sunk by a mine off Aldeburgh, Suffolk, bringing coal from Blyth to Dover. The SS "Hookwood" was sunk by a mine on a similar journey on the 23rd of November 1939. The surviving vessel was the SS "Kathleen Hawksfield."

In 1945 Hawksfields joined ACW, a group of companies trading between Dover and Poole. From then the firm expanded into the local domestic market across Kent, with over 50 lorries delivering a quarter of a million tons of coal a year. 1946 saw the Shipping department re-established to handle shipping and cargoes for Southern Wharfs Ltd. A new office was built on the Castle Street site and opened in 1952. Later the firm became part of Powell Duffryn.

**Memories!** HTH and Mrs Hawksfield lived at Ripple Court, where Sir John French, 1st Earl of Ypres had been born. In the summer, the Hawksfields held a Garden Party for all their staff and families. Whilst the grown-ups mingled and played tennis we swam in the pool and played in the outbuildings until it was time for the strawberry tea, with acres of strawberries! At Christmas, each family was given a chicken. Then, I think, it was the only time we ate chicken during the year. When I was at Dover Grammar School my father got me a holiday job on the quayside as a "teller." As the crane lifted a load of oranges onto the quay, I had to count and record each crate and make sure it got into the warehouse safely. The Dockers put up with me and I learnt many words I had never heard before!