

THE GOLDEN(?) TRIANGLE

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No, not in and around Thailand — but in Dover. It is that part of the town that grew on the land reclaimed from the old harbour between the East and the West Brooks, roughly bounded by a line from the Monument, via Church Street to the bridge in Dieu Stone Lane, then via Ashen Tree Lane to Boundary Groyne, erroneously known by me and my contemporaries as the Castle Jetty.

In 1903 my father moved into 37 Castle Street where I was born in 1909 and, excepting 1913-15, lived there until I was 27. My connection with the street and the areas close by is, however, lifelong, though broken by six years service in the R.A.F.

The area seethed with life and activity. The Sports Centre, St James's Old Church and the filling station at the seaward end of Woolcomber Street define a small triangle where now not a single person lives, but where, prior to 1939, there were 134 separate dwellings and a population certainly not less than 460, but about 575 if the occupants of the Burlington Flats are included. This density was typical and the people's daily needs were provided for by many small shops and enterprises. Throughout my teens, on the southern side of Woolcomber Street, roughly where now is Thompson's Garage, was a furrier, (hardly necessary for anyone's daily needs!), a butcher's shop, a large and very formally conducted men's hairdressing establishment, with revolving brushes, driven by a system of belts and pulleys, powered by a small boy in the basement who was later replaced by an electric motor, a grocer's shop — the International Stores, a post office, a café and, on the corner with Clarence Street, a chemist. Then came the Burlington Hotel, which, though nominally in Liverpool Street, had a greater frontage in Woolcomber Street. It was not then used as an hotel but provided accommodation for the Burlington High School and for 53 flats, a baker and ladies' hairdresser.

On the other side of the street, from Old St. James's Church towards the sea, was an almost continuous parade of shops. But first were three small cottages: in one lived a watchmaker and in another a well-known local figure, Mr Henry Epps, who invariably wore a frock coat with a silver watch-chain looped across his waistcoat. He was the Chief(?) Clerk at the Dover Gas Company. The meticulous timing of his twice daily walk to his office via Castle Street enabled my parents to say to me, "Off to school, quickly, Mr Epps has gone by!"

Shops and a pub stood side by side almost until Liverpool Street was reached. There was a greengrocer, a 'bookie', a decorator, a confectioner, a boot repairer, another hairdresser, a general stores and a newsagent who was on the corner of a lane that led to Trevanion Street. Beyond the lane was a couple of dwelling houses, a drug store and the Imperial Dairy. Here Woolcomber Lane led through to Trevanion Street and beyond this lane was Hopper's Bakery, the "Mail Packet Inn",

a greengrocer's shop and, in a mews behind the houses reached by a narrow lane, the Marine Garage, operated by the well-known Gibbs family. On the seaward side of this lane was a confectioner's shop which I remember as the place where my father would, in my boyhood and on our Sunday morning walk to the Sea Front, treat me to a glass of sarsaparilla at a cost that equalled my total week's pocket money, 2d.

Next to this shop, in a building with a frontage curving in a perfect quadrant into Liverpool Street, and which, in 1861, housed the Dover Collegium, was another watchmaker, George Maton, with a reputation for good work that brought him business from all over East Kent.

Under the cliffs to the north of the present Sports Centre was Trevanion Street and there lived many whose business or calling was connected with the sea, mostly boatmen or fishermen. "Trevanion" is the name of a man who came to Dover in the middle of the 17th century, was an M.P. from 1744 to 1792 and did much for the town. He lived in Trevanion House at the eastern end of the street and dying in 1810, was buried in St. James's Church.

On the northern side of the street the first 50 metres were taken up by the low boundary wall of St. James's Churchyard and then a terrace of seven small houses, Trevanion Place, running at 90° toward the cliff faced the eastern boundary of the churchyard. A little further on was John's Place, a tiny courtyard behind the houses entered via a "tunnel", no more than a metre wide, cut through Nos. 3 and 4. Just beyond this courtyard was the entrance to Trevanion Mews — livery stables — an extensive area behind the houses and using the maze of caves under Castle Hill to increase its accommodation. Here was a horse hospital and stabling for many working horses. Beyond that a public house, the "Star and Garter", and then a few houses further on, at the end of the street, a wood and coal merchant named Wellsted who lived in John Trevanion's house. His business was conducted on a site which in 1840 housed the producing plant for the Dover (*sic*) Gas Company. Old pictures show a gasometer on the site and when Townwall Street was being extended to join up with the Sea Front at East Cliff there could be seen, in the excavations, some of the original mains piping. The road works also revealed the flat chalk surface at the foot of the cliffs, ribbed by the action of the waves, and covered by centuries of accumulated detritus. (It is believed that this flat "platform" was used in the 18th century and earlier, when the tides were suitable, as a road to and from Deal or Folkestone for wagons that could be pulled by two horses, which had the steep inland roads been used would have required the power of six or eight.)

Throughout my childhood and early 'teens road traffic was light; it contributed to the life of the area and did not dominate or destroy as it does today. Drivers said "Hello" or passed the time of day with pedestrians who were then not considered to be obstructions to the free flow of vehicles.

[to be continued]