

THE GOLDEN TRIANGLE - 2(1)

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To the south west of the locality described in the last issue is another interesting area, in which, in the first half of this century there was significantly more industry and commerce than at the present day. Conveniently, this section of the Golden Triangle readily sub-divides and Castle Street and its hinterland towards Dieu Stone Lane I now attempt to describe.

It is not easy for present-day Dovorians to accept the fact that Castle Street was formed on the top of an embankment built across a low-lying and well-watered meadow used for centuries to fatten sheep and cattle. But that is an established fact corroborated by the bald legal phrases of deeds and leases drawn up when there were changes in the ownership of land or hereditaments. In the 17th century the meadow was owned by Kent's Quaker community and the income derived from it was used to support its indigent members. Later it was owned in three separate parcels by two local men and the Trustees of the Dover Almshouses and in 1835 it was acquired by a local consortium of developers. The new owners' first task was to bridge the river which ran across the meadowland from the east side of the now vacated B. & Q. site and on to St. James's Lane in front of the present-day multi-storey car park.

In the 17th century and until the building of Castle Street, Eastbrook Place was a rural footpath and at the junction of Ashen Tree Lane with Dieu Stone Lane and Charlton Back Lane - later to be transformed into Maison Dieu Road - the open space was known as Horse-pool Sole and was within the bounds of Horsepool Ward. From the Sole to the sea the route was via Ashen Tree Lane to the bottom of Laureston Place then right, into St. James's Street and after crossing the face of St James's Old Church, left into Trevanion Street, very roughly parallel to Woolcomber Street, and thence on to the ropewalk and herring-hang on the foreshore above high water mark.

Castle Street was designed to run from Ashen Tree Lane southwest towards the Guildhall in the Market Square and an embankment was built across the meadow towards Stembrook, high enough at the sou'western end to align with the top of an arched bridge to be built over the river. The extension from Stembrook to the Market Square took place some few years later, after action, not entirely unfamiliar to us today, was taken in an attempt to force the owners concerned to accept the Paving Commission's offer of £1500 for the buildings and land necessary for the scheme. The Commission applied to Parliament for powers of compulsory purchase and though the Bill was approved and the new street was completed and opened up to the Market Square by 1837, the cost to the

Commission was more than double their planned expenditure.

Eastbrook Place was a narrow insignificant lane and Castle Place, a logical continuation from the seaward side of Castle Street to St. James's Street, was no better. When the proposals for the new Castle Street became known it was decided to widen these two lanes as a general improvement to the area and to provide further sites for the speculative building that was proposed. The builders adhered to their plan to begin Castle Street at Ashen Tree Lane but they grasped the opportunity to enhance the aspect of the proposed properties above the new intersection. The three graceful houses, Nos. 1, 3 and 5, built on the northwest side can be seen today but those opposite, with pillared porches and equally elegant, were, in or about 1914, demolished for road widening.

Building in Castle Street began in 1836. The foundations of the houses were about half a metre below the level of the original meadow, the lower floor being a semi-basement, fairly deep at the front, ie below the level of the embankment, but shallower on the garden face at the rear. It is interesting to note that at about half a metre below the surface of the gardens of Nos. 27 - 43, running out to the river at the rear, is a bed of shingle that may well have formed the shore line in Saxon times. (This I discovered as a boy when digging graves for lamented and departed pets, and which, for reasons of public health, my father insisted should be very deep. I do recall one I dug, so deeply that it met the water table.)

The new road, which in its essentials lasted until 1921, was of water-bound macadam and was built with an extremely high camber, the centre being almost half a metre above the gutter level. (I verified this in 1921 when at the re-making of the road after the damage caused by World War I traffic, the camber was reduced to the present level and Castle Street became Dover's first tar-macadamised thoroughfare.

During World War I American soldiers were billeted in Victoria Park and the precarious angle assumed by their ration wagons as they drove along Castle Street, as a consequence of the high camber, caused many 14lb tins of corned beef to "fall" into the road - perhaps not entirely without a little help - where, without the slightest demur on the part of the 'dough-boys' who sat high up on the piled rations, they were quickly picked up by the Castle Street children - of whom I was one - who then scampered home with their prizes as quickly as their legs could carry them.

The five-fold increase in the town's population during the 19th century meant that most of the new houses were immediately occupied, by doctors, dentists, solicitors and veterinary surgeons whilst the remainder were principally used as lodging or boarding establishments.

(to be continued)