



Delysia

Michael

THE TURRET A LITTLE HISTORY

Jim Butler spoke with enthusiasm and specialist knowledge when he addressed our party in the Admiralty Pier Fort, on the occasion of our visit to the Western Docks, last September. (Reported by Jeremy Cope in our 4th Newsletter.) We could have listened to Jim for much longer than time allowed. However, out of the considerable bibliography available on the " Turret " (as it has long been called by Doverians) he has given us a summary of its history by David Burridge. This is itself too long to reprint here in full but the following basic facts will, I hope, cast further light on what our party was able to see. (Some parts of the interior of the Turret are still unsafe.)

Construction of the fort began in January 1872 and the two independently-mounted 16-inch 80-ton breech-loading guns were finally installed in the completed Turret in 1882. From

then on, until the Turret was superceded, before the First World War, by the development of longer-range weapons, it was being constantly improved. Its story is almost the history of the progress of technology.

1883 -85. The Turret was still at the pierhead, not half way along the pier as it is now, and was given the rounded corners which are still visible.

Electric lighting, powered by a dynamo, driven by its own steam engine, was also installed by 1885, replacing gas lamps. There were four additional steam engines used in the operation of the Turret. One ran the guns in and out, elevating and depressing them and worked the ammunition lift and the rammer. The main engine rotated the Turret. An auxiliary engine and a donkey engine supplied the boilers and drove the pump for the " Hydro Pneumatic accumulators " which were used for hosing out the guns.

Compressed air was " applied as a substitute for steam " to the Turret's engines as early as 1886. The compressed air was supplied through iron pipes from compressors belonging to the then Channel Tunnel works, two miles distant. A lift for raising the 112- pound shells was installed and " an overhead traveller " , a gantry with a travelling crane, to transfer them.

There was constant rearrangement-improvement of the accomodation and the ammunition storage. For the present all that we, the public, are able to see is the guns themselves and part of their inclined slides, which used to let them descend until their muzzles protruded from the gun ports, ready for firing. But someone with the informed historic eye of Jim Butler can point out what remains of the items listed above - or the site of them if they are gone.

I hope that these brief notes may recall the interest and pleasure of that September visit to those who were there and arouse the interest of those who may be able to visit the Turret in the future. One thing is quite clear : the Admiralty Pier Fort is a site of the greatest historic interest and if , one day, it could be sufficiently restored for safe public visiting, as Jeremy Cope wrote : " The tourists would flock to see it. "

Leo Wright Secretary

THE FIRST BOMB

Earlier this year I contributed to the Dover Society Newsletter a review of "DOVER IN OLD PHOTOGRAPHS" compiled by Mark P. Smith. One of the photographs in the book intrigued me particularly. It was a picture of a fragment of a German bomb mounted on a wooden stand with an engraved plate on the base recording that it was a piece of the first hostile bomb dropped on British soil. The bomb had been dropped at 10.45 a.m. on Christmas Eve 1914.