

The GOLDEN TRIANGLE: Castle Street to the Sea

PART 2

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In the early 1930's, from the "Castle Inn" at the bottom of Russell Street, Dolphin Lane threaded its way between the Dover Gas Company, a malthouse and Phoenix Brewery on the left and Leney's Bottling Store (now Martin Walter's workshops) Leney's Cask Yard, Flashman's workshop and Killick & Back, the drapers on the right, to reach the Market Square. It is thought by some to be the oldest thoroughfare in the town, being the natural route from the Castle via Hubert Passage, next to St James's Old Church, Russell Place and a causeway to the little settlement on the western side of the early harbour. I know of no proof of this theory but it is, at least, plausible. Under some parts of its present tar-mac'd surface there remain the cobble stones used to form the surface when the Paving Commission was, in 1778, given authority to collect stones from the foreshore (if the harbour authorities agreed!) or to use "good Kentish blue stones" to improve the condition of some of the roads in the town. (The gutter on the east side of Laureston Place is, I believe, the sole remaining piece of visible evidence of the use of these cobbles and I pray this evidence will never be removed as a result of the prevailing pursuit of "cost effectiveness", or, indeed, any other pretext.)

Along the line of the boundary between the present day East Kent Garage and the multi-storey car park was Phoenix Place, connecting Dolphin Lane and St James's Street. On its N.E. side was the featureless high brick wall of the Dover Gas Company but the other side was almost entirely taken up with two of Leney's numerous malt houses. A few yards further on was St James's Place, with a row of cottages backing on to the brewery on its S.W. side and running on into St. James's Street. St James's Lane, a little further on, was, and still is, the road between the river and the frontage of the Brewery (now the multi-storey car park) and across the bottom of St James's Street to Townwall Street. This lane, from Dolphin Lane to St James's Street, in places rather less than 6 metres wide, was also cobbled and when rainy weather coincided with equinoctial springs was flooded by the overflowing river which was prevented from

entering the brewery by piles of sandbags stored in the yard in readiness. **149**

The lower part of St James's Street, that is from Fector's Place south-westward, in the early 30's, still showed signs of its earlier importance. Square in the middle of the wall that surrounded the Gas Company's premises was the house of its Managing Engineer, Mr George Dixon (I well remember his two rather lovely daughters) and almost opposite, No. 54, a very interesting house, was the early home of Peter Hawksfield, the founder of the firm of coal merchants later taken over by Powell Dufryn and its subsidiary, Corral. By the 30's the house had been turned into flats. Next door was the Gordon Boys' Orphanage whose founder was the Mr T. Blackman, who was instrumental, with Mr E. Morgan, in forming the Boy Messenger Brigade that operated from Caroline Place. (Mr Blackman was also the treasurer and founder of the Victoria Seaside Orphans' Rest at Hesketh House in Laureston Place.) On Sundays the Gordon Boys wore full Scottish dress though during the week they were rather meanly attired in shorts and a jersey. The boys, themselves, were entirely responsible for the cleanliness of the home and for the washing-up necessary after every meal. Those of us who saw them daily gained the impression that their lives were not of the happiest.

From the orphanage to St James's Lane, on the seaward side, the houses were small and many were occupied by small traders dealing in second-hand goods or by general shopkeepers. Near the centre of this length of the street were two interesting relics of the days, in the early 17th century, when it was necessary to have fire lanes to separate groups of thatched-roofed houses. One such a lane was Townwall Passage, hardly more than a metre wide, that opened out into Townwall Street beside the "Sussex Arms" P.H. and the other, no wider, was St James's Passage, which ran into Townwall Street by the "Granville Hotel". In St James's Street, between these two passages, but on the other side of the road, at No. 79, was St Margaret's Place, a cul-de-sac of 9 houses arranged as in a courtyard. Nos 77 and 79 were large houses of four floors with the front doors adjacent to each other on the first floor, and approached by a flight of 9 or 10 stone steps parallel with the footpath and forming a jagged inverted V. The steps were dangerous as there was no handrail.

150 At the bottom of the street, on the NW corner with St James's Lane was the "Red Lion" Inn and Lodging House. and the 1881 census (regretably the latest that is available for inspection and research) reveals that beside the publican and his staff there were 30 others living there on the day the record was made. Opposite, that is on the seaward corner of St. James's Street and St. James's Lane, were two of the oldest buildings in the street and by their appearance, with an overhanging first floor, they might well have been in existence at the end of the seventeenth century.

St James's Lane led on into Townwall Street between the Ice House operated, when I was very young, by Mr William Smith, a fishmonger and poulterer at the corner of Thornton's Lane (the premises still exist as the Ristorante al Porto) and the Robin Hood Inn, which, with other premises north-eastward, was almost totally destroyed by bombs and shells during the 1939-45 war. I particularly remember the Ice House because I was one of the children of the

neighbourhood who were often, in summer time, sent there with a large wicker basket and 2d. (about four and a half pence today) for which sum the basket was filled with broken ice by Mr Smith's apparently always cheerful workmen. The filled baskets then were very heavy, I would hazard a guess they weighed at least 15 kilos, and we would frequently stop to relieve our arms and to suck a lump of ice. As long as the ice lasted we had refreshing cold drinks which our mothers made with lemonade powder and some substance, possibly tartaric acid, which to our delight made the drinks effervesce.

The tiny part of the original Townwall Street that still remains is from Bench Street to the "Britannia" P.H. at the corner with Mill Lane. The shop recently known as the Bench Street Newsagents was built for the wine shippers, Courts, in or about 1836. Some time prior to 1905 it was occupied by Fletchers, the first chain-store butchers to be established in the town and they remained in business there until after the 1914-18 war. Next door was

Wootton, the grocer's shop and many will remember the wide selection that in those days could be bought in such a well-established grocery and provision store. The next place was Goldfinch's butcher's shop (later moved to the corner of Cherry Tree Avenue and Buckland Avenue) and is now the Townwall Restaurant. Next to Goldfinch's, at the corner with Thornton's Lane, was Mr Smith's fishmonger's and poulterer's business where the fish was displayed on sloping marble slabs in the open windows and almost the whole of the front of the premises was hung with the shop's extensive stock of plucked and unplucked poultry — a present-day food inspector's nightmare!

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This is the site of the present day Ristorante al Porto, The Townwall Restaurant and, until recently, the Bench Street Newsagent's shop at the SW end of Townwall Street, on the occasion of the visit of Prince Arthur c1871. The Triumphal Arch was erected at the top of Snargate Street.

122 The construction of the Grand Shaft linking Snargate Street directly with the barracks as a kind of "sally port" was unique. The Shaft was sealed in 1966, after the barracks had been demolished but it was later restored by the Borough Council.

By the middle of the 19th century a renewed fear of French invasion (by Napoleon III) and the progress made in the effectiveness of long range fire power resulted in considerable modification and repair to the fortifications which continued until the 1870s.

Modern methods of warfare rendered the fortifications and buildings obsolete by the 20th century. However, the ownership remained with the Ministry of Defence who finally decided to discard certain parts of the fortifications. The Citadel was the first to go and was taken over by the Prison Commissioners.

In 1961 the *Dover Express* reported that negotiations were proceeding for the sale of 160 acres of the site for building purposes. At about the same time the then Dover Borough Council (with a fine regard for the archaeological importance of the site) proposed to use the moats as receptacles for the town's refuse and rubbish!. Fortunately both of these proposals were dropped.

In 1962 the fortifications were first officially scheduled as an Ancient Monument. Nevertheless some of the barrack premises, the garrison chapel and the hospital were later destroyed to make way for what is now the site of an industrial area.

The proposal to build 236 houses around the Grand Shaft was reported in the *Dover Express* in 1971 but the plan was apparently dropped. Mr Peverley pointed out that from that year there was much more appreciation of the archaeological importance of the Western Heights. Although the area around the Drop Redoubt is now protected by English Heritage, Mr Peverley's photographs showed that in some parts of the fortifications nature is beginning to take over (Mr Peverley's words) and adequate conservation seems to be lacking.

In conclusion Mr Peverley showed us pictures of somewhat similar fortifications — Fort Brockenhurst near Gosport and Fort Amhurst at Chatham — where restoration and maintenance are being very carefully carried out and put to a practical use.

At least some of us in the audience were left with an uncomfortable feeling that much more needs to be done so that we can enjoy the full potential of these magnificent archaeological remains situated on our very doorstep.

W. G. KING, 15th April, 1991

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The same Mr Smith was the owner of the earlier mentioned Ice Store, another fish shop in the upper part of Snargate Street and, many years before, another shop in lower Snargate Street almost opposite the entrance to the Grand Shaft. On the other side of Thornton's Lane, (a fragment of which may still be seen) was Terson's Auction Rooms which years before had housed the printing works of another part of the Terson family. Next, in my young days, there was a pastrycook's shop and then, on the corner with Mill Lane was the

"Wine Lodge", now entirely re-built and known as the "Britannia".

Beyond the "Robin Hood" was another fish shop run by the kindly Mrs Spicer and next to her was another public house, "The Chandos". A chemist's shop, appropriately owned by Mr Alexander Bottle was next door and I well remember the red- and green-filled carboys, high up in the window, which seemed then to be the distinguishing mark of any chemist's business.

To be continued