



The Golden Triangle: Castle Street to the Sea

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PART 5

The cul-de-sac between Marine Court and The gateway is the rump of Douro Place, which ran from the wide triangular open space formed by the junction of Trevanion and Liverpool Streets to Marine Parade and through which, before the direct connection of Townwall Street to East Cliff was made, funnelled all the traffic to and from the Eastern Docks.

On its north-east side was the Sea Front Baths, destroyed by enemy action with some loss of life. Its site is marked today by the sunken garden next to Marine Court which, incidentally, is sunken because at the time the site was being restored there was, incredibly, insufficient rubble and top-soil available to fill the hole. Beyond the Sea baths was the Territorial Drill Hall with a battalion of

the 4th Buffs (T.A.), The East Kent Regiment in occupation: built originally as a skating rink about, or just before, the turn of the century, it was transformed in 1915 into a hangar to house a flight of R.N.A.S. floatplanes and some tiny Short Bros. flying boats. During that war a second hangar was built immediately to the north-east and, for launching and beaching the aircraft, two concrete slipways with motor-powered winches at the top were constructed on the beach next to what is now called Boundary Groyne but then, much more euphoniously, known as the Castle Jetty. In the 1920's the upper layers of the slipways were removed and the beach soon covered the foundations. During the 1939-45 war the slipways were resuscitated and to simulate war conditions a number of flimsy landing stages were built and used in the course of training troops in the speedy board of landing craft and in assault landings. Once again, after the war, the top layers of the slipways were removed but the RSJs and the concrete of the foundations, still deep down under the beach, have complicated

the work and hindered the contractors who are at the present time (1991/2) constructing the new A20).

In the space at the back of the Sea Baths was the Dover Rowing Club's boathouse and behind Marine Court was a long line of garages.

The two Lawns, Clarence and Guilford, that cut through from Liverpool Street to Marine Parade were more noteworthy than the street itself. In the first named the bust of Captain Webb, who swam the Channel in 1875, stood facing the sea and in the other was the bronze statue of the Honourable Charles Rolls, confident and fearless, the first to fly the Channel both ways non-stop. After major war damage to the area, fortunately with little damage to the statues beyond some chipping of the bases by shrapnel, they were taken away and stored in one of the caves, safely, deep underground. After the war Captain Webb's bust on its granite plinth was planted on the north-east end of the East Cliff promenade and the statue of Charles Rolls was re-erected near the root of Boundary Groyne, where it now stands, quite insensitively, in front of a public convenience. The site of the Webb memorial was on the centre line of the new A20's dual carriage-way and it has now, (September 1991) been removed and, thoughtfully, re-erected on the lawn in front of The Gateway very close to its pre-war site.

It would be most appropriate to move the Rolls Memorial from its position of gross indignity to a similar site on the relatively peaceful Gateway lawn where it would be insulated from the mad rush and roar of the widened A20 race-track that the Ministry of the Environment proposes should be the primary route from London to the Eastern Docks and where, once again it could be near its pre-war site. I understand, on good authority, that the District Council feels it has no funds available to do this. If that really is so

could not The Dover Society initiate and master-mind an appeal for funds for this very purpose? (*March 1992. It is possible that proposals have overtaken the sentiments here expressed.*)

The houses on Marine Parade were not as distinguished as was, and is, Waterloo Crescent, but by and large they served the same original purpose: they had been built with the primary aim of providing accommodation for visitors with a leavening of local residents. Centrally, between the two Lawns was the double-fronted and well-appointed Royal Cinque Ports Yacht Club with a wide verandah topped by a balcony where, especially before the National Harbour was built, members would sit and watch the sailing in the bay.

Until 1939 the promenade, over its whole length was a scene of great social activity and in the summer on Sundays would be so crowded that it was not possible to walk without weaving to avoid encounters with those walking in the opposite direction. Regatta Day was more than a regatta day and in the evening took on the mantle of Carnival. All the essentials for



THE ROLLS MEMORIAL ON ITS ORIGINAL SITE in 1941

such a celebration were available from stalls and barrows parked in the roadway close up against the promenade railings and stocked with balloons and confetti, ice cream and toffee apples, 'teasers' with a feather on the end which unrolled as one blew into them and 'ticklers', much more effective, with a bunch of seven or eight brightly coloured feathers stuck into the end of a thin paper tube. We boys used the teasers and ticklers to great effect on all the girls we passed and we had great fun: the day often finished with a firework display on the Prince of Wales Pier. There was another bandstand on the promenade opposite Waterloo Crescent with performances each Wednesday afternoon, and on that wide open space, monthly throughout the summer, the band of one of the four regiments stationed here, or The Buffs (T.A.), or the Duke of York's School, would proudly 'Beat Retreat' with an aplomb and panache not bettered by any Guards regiment and the crowd that watched them just loved it.

MARINE PARADE ON A SUMMER AFTERNOON, c1905

The fun and gaiety of the Sea Front died overnight when, to "clean-up the image" the powers-that-be, in a joint offensive, prohibited the use of mobile stalls and barrows on the road or promenade. In their place a couple of kiosks were erected on the beach near the Stone Apron but the essential spontaneity had gone and the Sea Front took on the rather prim, and "interdicted" aspect that in my view it bears to this day. (In the summer of 1991, however, a mobile ice-cream van appeared and was stationed on the promenade.)

To keep within reasonable limits much has been left out of this account but I do trust I have been able to paint a picture of the locality, and the life within it, that does justice to so interesting a place. I have been reminded more than once that there is another Golden Triangle that has sinister connotations. Of that, of course, I am well aware, but to me the area in which I grew up and discovered what life was about well merits the name and I am content to use it.

FINIS

