

THE RE-SITING of the ROLLS MEMORIAL

From 1916, when I was seven, to the middle of the 20s the Sea Front and all that lies thereabouts was my playground and I knew every crook and cranny and every inch of it. My childlike reaction to the Webb and Rolls memorials, dominating respectively the Clarence and Guilford lawns, was simply to acknowledge their remarkable achievements – Webb was the first to swim the Channel and Rolls the first to fly to France and back without landing.

After the war I was inevitably preoccupied and it was some time before I realised that the two memorials had been moved (about 1952 I think) from their severely damaged sites and were suitably installed on the promenade. The Rolls statue had been erected on the wide area of the promenade at the root of Boundary Groyne, a most appropriate site, at it had been used as a base for flying boat and seaplane squadrons in W.W.I. However it was not long to be sacred to the memory of The Hon. Charles Rolls for a large public convenience was most insensitively built behind and almost within touching distance of the statue. I was appalled – and so were many others – at the almost insulting juxtaposition of these so dissimilar structures. But, regrettably, neither I nor any others did anything but “mutter in our beards”.

Then, in the summer of 1992, on one of his frequent visits to the town I had a chance conversation with David Atwood, a member of the Society and an old Dovorian. We discovered a shared concern that the Rolls statue should be moved to a more dignified setting, preferably to the Gateway lawn and almost on its original site. It was as a result of this conversation that I began a fairly deep exploration of the pros and cons of moving the statue. So began this saga which, I hope is now to end happily in the relocation of the Rolls statue in May of this year.

First I attempted to discover the ownership of the statue with, initially, entirely negative results. A report in *The Aeroplane*, of 2 May 1912 is the only ‘evidence’ that can be discovered; it reads, “after the unveiling ceremony performed by His Grace (the Duke of Argyll) the Deputy Mayor, on behalf of the town, and Sir William Crundall representing the Harbour Board, accepted the statue, with promises to maintain it”. No corroboration of this, or any related matter,



The angle from which this photograph was taken divorces the statue from the toilets behind it.

42 can be found in the Minutes of the Dover Corporation or in the Minutes of the Dover Harbour Board, the Air League or of Rolls Royce plc. The conclusion must be drawn that the report in *The Aeroplane* is a figment of journalistic imagination. In spite of this negative 'evidence' I still felt that the old Dover Corporation were the owners and directed my efforts accordingly. In April 1993 David wrote to John Clayton, the Director of Planning and Technical Services at Dover District Council putting forward his views on both the Webb and the Rolls Memorials. He copied the letter, and the reply, to me.

The reply from John Clayton gave the position as he knew it at the time, honest and straightforward, but it caused alarm bells to ring within me. I have taken the liberty of quoting from John Clayton's letter because it would be impossible to paraphrase it and give the facts in anything more stark than his own words. After mentioning the final re-siting of the Webb bust he wrote the following: "However, the Landscape Architects for the A20 works had wished to make a feature of one of the memorials, ... and are therefore very keen to incorporate Rolls on the enhanced esplanade. Their logic in doing this is to give the esplanade a sense of history rather than just being the widening of a new road. ...". Then, following a few comments about other proposals involving sites on the Gateway lawns, the letter ended with "Bearing in mind the above, you will appreciate that certainly in the short term, it is unlikely the Rolls Memorial will be located on the lawn, but I hope you feel the additional features and enhanced site for the Rolls Memorial will lead to significant enhancement of the sea front. ...".

I was dumbfounded to read this, especially as I was aware, as any other interested person would have been, that the Ministry had used its compulsory powers to purchase both the land on which to build the road *and the land and beach* on which the new promenade was to be built. I also believed that there was a legal process that could be invoked to assert ownership of anything that was erected on that land if a previous owner of the thing erected had not disputed the assertion of ownership within a fixed period (I am uncertain of the period). I felt that the Ministry of the Environment, Department of Transport, in the absence of any claim to the contrary within the specified time, could by due legal process, "hi-jack" the Rolls memorial.

The following indented passage is extracted from my letter to David Atwood, dated 2.8.93. (All quoted text is verbatim but where quotes are not used text is paraphrased for the sake of brevity.)

"I copied my complete file to Leo Wright, the Society's secretary and to John Gerrard, Vice-Chairman and I suggested that as the Society had been advised by" D.D.C. "at least a year ago that it was in favour of putting the Rolls Memorial on the lawn in front of the Gateway but that as funds were not available 'it would have to wait', much that was in John Clayton's letter (of 26th May) was ominous and should be investigated.

"As far as I know there is no written record of what transpired but I may be wrong on that point.

"Speaking on the phone to John Clayton, ... on the morning after receipt of the file, our Secretary was surprised to be told that a decision to move the Rolls Memorial to a new site on the promenade at East Cliff, referred to in the Engineer's letter (to David Atwood) of 26th May, was a decision made jointly by the Department of Transport and the contractors at a very early stage in the road planning. This, by easy deduction, must have been before the Society's Secretary was told that the Council was in agreement with the idea of re-siting the memorial on the Gateway lawn. To me the discrepancy was alarming. John Clayton also reported that the decision to move the memorial to East

Cliff was a *fait accompli*, that nothing could be done about it and that stone-masons were already working on a new plinth." (*Why, what is wrong with the original?*) "He also advised Leo that the new promenade, on which it was proposed to re-erect the memorial ... was now in the sole ownership of the Department of Transport.

"This raised three disquieting points:

"i. What right had the contractors, or the Department, to move something that did not belong to them and was not within the bounds of the road works, ... ?

"ii. If in fact the memorial was moved on to the Department's property" with no recorded objection, "might not the situation arise that Dover, i.e. the Dover District, would lose the right of ownership in favour of the Department of Transport?

"iii. Assuming that "the memorial was moved to East Cliff by the Department should" there not therefore "be prepared a legal document to reserve its ownership to the town or district and to give to the town or district the right to define the conditions under which the memorial might be 'loaned' to the Department?

"In short why was a decision made to move the memorial without consultation and discussion with the community to which it had belonged" (or so I thought) "for the eighty years since it was erected."¹

Not satisfied with the Council's answers, our secretary, Leo Wright pursued the matter. It was then that it was discovered that the Department of Transport had decided not to proceed with the project but that it would be up to the Dover Harbour Board and IMPACT to find an acceptable solution I wrote to David Atwood in October "Much of the information I have been given is contradictory, which makes it difficult to pursue and particular point". There was no doubt in my mind that the department of Transport had originally intended to move the statue, as earlier documents had shown. Now they were implying that there were never any proposals to move it.

To try to get some more definite information I wrote to the *Dover Express*, on 12.10.93 mentioning a number of disquieting rumours – to protect my sources I purposely referred to "rumours" – about the moving of the Rolls memorial. A letter from the Director of Planning and Technical Services was published the following week, indirectly chiding me for listening to rumours and saying "The Department of Transport does not have any plans to move the Rolls statue ...". That could be correct at that instant, but the Department *did, earlier, have plans* which without exaggeration, caused me some concern. The letter also said "As with all IMPACT schemes" (*was it an IMPACT scheme?*) "the public would be encouraged to give their views upon the proposals". As far as I can discover the only invitation to give views appeared in the *Newsletter* of December 1993 and what knowledge Dovorians have of any proposals results from short notes in that journal and my own puny efforts to arouse local awareness.

Four or five months passed without any further action or information. At this stage I felt I had been banging my head against a brick wall. By June 1994, the Dover Society Committee,

¹ Later the Dover Harbour Board disputed the claim that the memorial belonged to the town and averred that as it had been erected on its property and had remained there for eighty plus years (except for a few months during or just after the war), they had a legitimate and irrevocable claim to ownership. I saw no point in "kicking against the pricks" – doing just that had not got me very far – and as by then the Board was being very co-operative I decided to let the matter drop.

44 anxious to know what was happening, instructed our Secretary, Leo Wright to write to IMPACT. Most of the letter was a general statement of the position as seen by the Society but the final, and very apposite paragraph read: "We would be grateful if the position could be formally clarified. At present it looks like a log-jam and perhaps the simplest way would be to meet. I, or a member of the Committee, would willingly call in at IMPACT if that would be profitable."

IMPACT replied in their letter DO/P/306 of 15.6.94 "Thank you for your letter of 13 June enquiring if we have any knowledge concerning the re-siting of the Rolls statue. We have not been informed of any outcome of discussions between Dover Harbour Board and their architects and I have therefore passed your letter to John Clayton at Dover District Council to ask him whether he is better able to help in clarification." The letter was signed by Ms Linda Wade.

D.D.C. replied direct to our Secretary in a letter which, uncannily, almost exactly reflected my own appreciation of the position.

"POSSIBLE RE-LOCATION OF ROLLS MEMORIAL

"Julian Owen has referred to me ... your letter ... dated 13 June and I will try to rehearse what I understand to be the present situation. The D of T are not trying to move the statue ... towards the Eastern Docks as I originally envisaged, which I think everybody believes would have been a retrograde step.

"Further investigation ... has identified that ... the statue is on D.H.B. land and presumably is now vested in the Harbour Board. ... "

"... the scheme put forward by D.H.B. for works on the seafront only included the section in front of Waterloo Mansions ... and therefore I do not believe this would offer the opportunity for re-location.

"To move the matter forward ... talk direct to John Gerrard with his D.H.B. hat on and if there is then unanimity between the Society and D.H.B. and you need District Council involvement, please come back to me.

"I am sorry I cannot be more helpful at this time".

Without knowledge of Leo's letter to IMPACT of 13.6.94, or of the two subsequent letters, I had, almost in despair, written on the 14th to the Chairman of Rolls-Royce plc and asked for his interest in and support for the project of moving the Rolls statue to a more seemly site. The Chairman's response was all that I could have expected and it gave me great encouragement. My letter was passed to Mr Michael Evans, Head of Community Relations, who, throughout a still-continuing correspondence has been most helpful. Mr Evans also put me in touch with Mr Gordon Bruce, an historian intimately concerned with Rolls-Royce and all its ramifications who has been equally helpful and encouraging. From June until the middle of December 1994 much correspondence passed between Mr Evans, Mr Bruce and me. Photo-copies of reports and newspaper articles, historical facts, the mechanics of repairing and moving a statue (Rolls have fairly recently moved and restored the statue of Henry Royce and finally re-erected it in front of its headquarters in Derby), verbatim transcriptions from the Dover Express of 1910, interesting photographs (I was able to give them one they had not seen before) and much more, shuttled to and fro.

Meanwhile John Gerrard was very active in discussions with the Board and with IMPACT. Writing to IMPACT as D.H.B.'s Services General Manager on 17th January in the matter of the re-location of the Rolls memorial, John said "... *We own the statue and the Dover Society has written to us asking if we can transfer it to its original site on the Gateway lawn area.*

"We are entirely happy with this proposition and we understand that the Dover District Council is willing to accommodate the statue subject to their not incurring any costs in relation to the transfer. Before giving their formal approval, Dover District Council require confirmation that the necessary funding will be available. 45

"The Board's maintenance engineering staff, who would carry out the work, have estimated the cost of re-locating the statue would be £2,400. Jonathan Sloggett has agreed that he would be prepared to pay £500 towards this.

"...you indicated that IMPACT could provide funding of up to £1,000 ... and I have written confirmation from the Rolls-Royce Enthusiasts Club that Rolls-Royce would be prepared to cover the £900 shortfall. ... I would be grateful to receive confirmation that your original offer still stands.

"Subject to all going well the statue will be in its new position early next Spring, ready for a grand opening ceremony at the start of the Dover Festival. Rolls-Royce have indicated that they will provide "a fly-past and "a cavalcade of vintage cars"

"... The precise location has yet to be finalised."

This is an important key letter and it presents the culmination of the activities of all concerned.

Planning permission is currently being sought and, subject to approval the statue will be transferred to its new location by the Harbour Board's Engineering Services staff in time for a special ceremony on the anniversary of the flight, 2nd June.

Jim & Jean Davies

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A CORRECTION

On page 162 in the previous issue I made a serious mistake. The C. in C., Coastal Command, RAF who held an Extra Master's Certificate in Sail and joined the RNAS from the Merchant Navy in 1914 was Air Marshal Sir Frederick Bowhill, not Sir Philip Joubert de la Ferte, who was, in fact, Sir Frederick's predecessor. My apologies to Sir Frederick's memory.

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