



THE CONTROL BUILDING AT THE END (ALMOST) OF THE EASTERN ARM

JOHN BARTLETT

Port Control

A VISIT TO THE EASTERN DOCKS

THE GROUP assembled rather anxiously. It was a dull day, threatening rain and a bitterly cold wind. Hardly the best of conditions for a tour of the docks..

Once underway the weather was largely forgotten, since the tour was made in the comfort of a minibus and was largely indoors at Port and Terminal Control.

The first part on the bus covered territory known to most of us - the booking hall and the drive through the check points towards the ferries. However, our guide from the Dover Harbour Board, Valerie Crimmin, enlivened it with interesting information and statistics - for instance that DHB only employed six

hundred people to run this vast twenty-four hour operation. This included eighteen policemen with two cells at their disposal, both of which enjoyed a high occupancy rate! Last year Dover port handled 18,000,000 passengers and we were given the illustration that the one million freight lorries, if placed end to end, would stretch from Dover to Perth in Western Australia - a very credible description to those of us who live near Townwall Street!

Much of the recent expenditure has been to facilitate quick and efficient handling, since this is one of the main advantages featured in the advertising of the Channel Tunnel, the port's menacing neighbour. Foot and car passengers have seen reporting times fall from an hour to twenty minutes. My own experience of the tunnel – taken out of curiosity, of course – suggests the port does as well as or better in this respect. Even more impressive was the saving for freight drivers, who could now be processed almost as quickly, whereas a few years ago most would have spent six to eight hours in the port area before boarding a ferry. This improved check-in operation has been achieved by the installation of automatic and computerised weighbridges, allowing rapid clearance and allocation to ferries. This route is followed by all units weighing over seven tons.

Another facility that must prove very attractive to the freight fraternity is the Truck Stop Area. This is a large safe parking area, within the docks, where lorries can stay for up to forty-eight hours. For the drivers, food, showers and overnight facilities are available. For car passengers there are two Welcome Break restaurants with well-stocked shops and children's play areas.

Our first stop was at the Port Control, situated in the tower at the end of the Eastern Arm. Obviously we were intruding on a very busy work area, where all the port's floating movements were being controlled by two officers. However we were made very welcome and they gave us a fascinating and comprehensive description of their duties and equipment.

The facility was upgraded in 1991 and the equipment is now the very latest available in the field. There are three radars, which between them observe all movements from those in the port itself, right across to Calais, plus those of traffic passing through the Channel. There are

numerous radio channels available for communications with ships, hovercraft and small pleasure craft, in addition to Terminal Control, Coastguard, police, emergency services and the harbour operators, such as mooring parties and tugs.

Although in a superb position to observe the port and its approaches, all the modern technology allows the staff to operate when visibility is so poor that they cannot see the sea below them. Their duties are to control anything that floats. Entry to the port is controlled by the banks of red and green lights at each entrance and they allocate the order of entering and leaving the port and which berth is to be used. They have details of all sailings from the operating companies and do their utmost to facilitate the maintenance of the timetabling. However, it was stressed that the ultimate authority for any ship in the port is the captain.

All the radar displays and radio communications are recorded and kept for several weeks. The room below the Control Room is a mass of recording machines and filing cabinets, where these records are kept.

Returning to the minibus we saw the new facilities built to replace the old submarine pens. These are two warehouses to handle cargoes, one cold storage and the other at normal temperature. Dover's contracts with the freight transporters means that one third of the fruit imported into the country passes through the port.

Our final stop was at Terminal Control. This serves the same purpose as Port Control, but deals with everything on dry land. It has a commanding view over the whole terminal area, but was under extensive renovation, so we were not able to see it in operation on this visit.

Our thanks to Joan Liggett for her part in the organisation of the tour from the Society side and again to our excellent host from DHB, Valerie Crimmins. A very enjoyable and informative tour. <



THE
COASTGUARD STATION
STRATEGICALLY
SITED ON THE CLIFF
ABOVE THE
EASTERN ARM.

MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY VISIT

The Coastguard Station at Langdon Battery

----- STEVE PETERS

DOVER COASTGUARD STATION at Langdon Battery is the base for the Regional Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), its responsibility extending from Norfolk to the Isle of Wight. It is on the cliffs above the Eastern Arm and has uninterrupted views of Dover Harbour, the Channel and the French Coast beyond.

Langdon Battery gets its name from the battery of defence guns that were installed here in 1910 and it was actually on the circular bases of the larger 9.2 guns that the control rooms were constructed in 1979.

On Saturday 25 May 1996 eight members of the Dover Society met in the Battery car park. Arriving early we took

advantage of our waiting time to look at Dover from this hitherto inaccessible vantage point. The Castle looked very impressive from this more lofty perch, the Pharos, at this particular angle, being hidden behind the church. Visibility was good but the French coast was just obscured by mist.

Once an aggressive gun site, this is now a tranquil base surrounded by lush grass, shrubs, brambles and attendant wildlife. We saw rabbits, magpies, jackdaws, starlings and a variety of gulls. This must be one of the finest working environments in Kent.

Our host for the visit was Andy Roberts whose seventeen years Merchant Navy