

# WOT - *Sleaze?* - IN 1886?

TERRY SUTTON

- with the aid of a London printer - contributes another interesting article

THE DAYS when political infighting over membership of Dover Harbour Board caused such a row in Kent that questions were asked in the House of Commons are revealed in a document that has been lodged in the port authority's archives. The details, contained in a pamphlet published by a London printing house in 1886, were given to me by an old Dovorian and handed on to Dover Harbour Board.

The dispute involved the sacking of Dover Conservative councillor William Henry Crundall, a local timber merchant, from his seat on Dover Harbour Board at the request of the chairman, Lord Granville, a leading national Liberal and Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports.

We complain about political sleaze now but the pamphlet shows how dirty were politics more than a century ago. Even the Liberal-minded *Dover Express*, a friend of Lord Granville, attacked the sacking of Councillor Crundall by the Liberal coterie. The Conservative's two local newspapers, the *Dover Standard* and the *Dover & County Chronicle*, were even more bitter in their condemnation.

What happened was this. At that time Dover Harbour Board, under Lord Granville, was in the hands of the Liberals. One of the members of the Board died and the Conservative government then in power appointed Councillor Crundall to the vacant place, representing the President of the Board of Trade.

A few months later there was a general election and the Liberals were returned to power. Councillor Crundall had been sitting at Board meetings biding his time to come up with a series of suggestions that he believed would benefit the town of Dover.

But with the Liberals in power the Liberal chairman Lord Granville, saw his chance to get rid of the troublesome

Mr Crundall before he could cause any real bother. He wrote to his friend, Mr Mundella, by then the President of the Board of Trade, suggesting Mr Crundall should be removed from the Board.

An excuse was needed. Lord Granville pointed out that the Crundall family had contracts to supply timber to the two railway companies that sailed ships out of Dover. Both railway companies had representatives on the Board.

Without saying so, Lord Granville was suggesting that here was a clash of interest between Mr Crundall's wood business and his responsibility to the Board. That was sufficient for the President of the Board of Trade who wrote to Mr Crundall thanking him for his few months of service but adding he was being replaced by a man from Shropshire who then moved to Dover.

What the Liberal President of the Board of Trade had probably not realised was that another member of Dover Harbour Board was also a wood merchant. Mr Steriker Finnis, a Liberal, also had contracts to supply wood to at least one of the railway companies.

Mr Crundall's dismissal was first debated by Dover Town Council and condemned with all councillors, Conservative, Liberal and Independent, calling for the reinstatement of Mr Crundall. It did no good. The newspapers took up the issue, condemning the Lord Warden in very strong terms.

28 National newspapers joined in the row, all backing Mr Crundall.

Eventually past and present Members of Parliament wrote to the President of the Board of Trade asking for Councillor Crundall to be returned to the Board. But to no avail.

So Major Dickson\*, one of the two Members of Parliament for Dover, tabled a question in the House of Commons when the President of the Board of Trade admitted he did not realise Mr Steriker Finnis, vice-chairman of the Board, also had contracts with the railways. But the President pointed out that Mr Steriker Finnis was not appointed by the Board of Trade so his continuing to sit on the Harbour Board was nothing to do with him.

Again the Liberal government did nothing and local feeling against Lord Granville grew apace over the insult offered to the popular Councillor Crundall.

So much so that a big dinner was held in Dover Town Hall when Councillor Crundall was the chief guest and many

were the tributes paid to him. Mr Crundall revealed he had hoped to persuade Dover Harbour Board not to hand over a £4,400 surplus to the government to help pay for a larger Dover harbour, to open up Board meetings to the press and the public, and to sell the leases of sea front houses to the tenants and give the revenue to Dover in order to widen Biggin Street.

No wonder the majority of the Board was not in favour of that!

Many suggestions were made in Dover, in the national press and in Parliament that if the Liberal's decision was not reversed there were likely to be sweeping changes in the membership of the Board if and when a Conservative government returned to power.

\* Major A.G. Dickson and Mr C.K. Freshfield (Conservatives) were joint MPs for Dover until the Parliamentary Re-distribution Act which reduced Dover to a one-Member constituency. In 1885 Major Dickson was elected, defeating Mr R. Murray Lawes (Liberal) of Old Park, while Mr Freshfield retired.

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# Membership News

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S. R. COPE  
*Membership Secretary*

## AUTUMN 1997

Our membership stands at 430, slightly more than this time last year. We have both gained and lost about 30 members but the overall trend is upward. While it is inevitable that many members can maintain contact only through our Newsletter, we continue to hope that all members who come to meetings will feel equally at home. Name badges are being worn by the committee members, so please introduce yourselves, especially if you have recently joined.

Warm thanks to those who supply prizes and buy tickets for our raffles; proceeds in winter contribute largely towards the hire charges of St. Mary's hall. We also organised raffles on our three main outings

this summer, raising £77.50, which the committee agreed to make up to £100, as our contribution to the Friends of Dover Hospital. We were unable to man a stall at the fête because the date clashed with our outing to Le Touquet.

Congratulations to Mrs. Janet Johnston who was awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours list. Members who have received similar honours in recent years are Mrs. Joan Dobby, Mr. Derek Leach and Mr. Terry Sutton.

We welcome to our membership: The Rev'd Father Gary Gill, Mr. D. Iron, Mr. J. Aylen and Mrs. S. Allen, Mr. & Mrs. W. Worsley, Mr. & Mrs. P. Sheldrake and Mrs W. T. Westwater.