

## Questions .....



*Do you know where  
to see the  
Zeebrugge Bell?  
...What is it?  
.....Why is it there?*

## Answers .....

### **An Account of the Raid on Zeebrugge**

*(Museum Information Panel)*

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*"May we give the Dragon's tail a good twist?" -*

*Commander Carpenter's, Captain of Vindictive, reply to battle signal.*

**O**n St. George's Day, April 23rd 1913, the Dover Patrol carried out one of the most audacious and daring actions of the war. Ever since 1914 Germany had used the captured Belgian port of Zeebrugge as a base for submarine destroyer operations. Inland from Zeebrugge, and connected to it by ship canal, was the port and dockyard of Bruges which was also connected to Ostend by a shallower canal.

Vice-Admiral Roger Keyes, Commander of the Dover Patrol, formulated a plan to block the canals with odd ships in a simultaneous raid on Zeebrugge and Ostend. The harbour Mole at Zeebrugge was one and a half miles long and was heavily fortified. Any ships making for the canal entrance would come under heavy fire. The raid seemed suicidal and only unmarried volunteers were allowed to go.

As a diversion, UMS Vindictive and two Mersey ferries loaded with Marines, would attack the Mole, landing the Marines to cause as much damage and havoc as possible. Meanwhile, an obsolete submarine loaded with explosives would ram the wooden part of the Mole.

Heavy casualties were sustained by both sides before the Dover Patrol, battered almost beyond recognition, pulled out. Despite overwhelming odds the block ships had reached the canal, and although not completely blocking it, large destroyers and submarines were no longer able to use Zeebrugge and Bruges for the rest of the war. The Ostend raid was not so successful and was attempted again a few days later with only partial success.

Eleven Victoria crosses were awarded for the two raids, together with 679 other decorations, the largest number of VCs ever awarded for a single action. The daring attack helped to raise British morale.

Extract from

## 'Dover and the Great War'

by J.B.Firth

Published by Alfred Leney & Co Ltd - Brewers - Dover 1919

**S**ir Roger Keyes brought to Dover a new spark of living fire; he supplied the touch of genius which transcends talent even of the highest order he possessed the sure gift of imaginative vision, and he bore about with him the air and atmosphere of triumph, which proves so contagious among brave men and which makes victory sure, because it renders defeat or stalemate impossible.

Dover will never forget the sense of security which Sir Roger Keyes inspired down to the day he left in order to take command of the Battle Cruiser Squadron of the Grand Fleet in March, 1919. The Mayor and Corporation took an early opportunity of giving public expression to its gratitude and admiration by presenting the Admiral with the Honorary Freedom of the Borough in the Town Hall on December 12th. And the Admiral took the same opportunity, in his reply, of laying before the public for the first time a connected and vivid account of the work of the Dover Patrol. .... Sir Roger told the Story of the Dover Light Barrage; he told the story of how the enemy's raid upon the sweepers and drifters was avenged in the Dunkirk roads; he told anew the deathless story of Zeebrugge and Ostend and he gave to each of the multifarious units of the force which he commanded the generous recognition which it had richly earned.

Sir Roger also gave the history of a large bronze bell on the platform beside him. He described how, while inspecting the Mole at Zeebrugge a few days before in the company of the King of the Belgians, he had asked King Albert to give him some little memento of the raid, which he might present to the town of Dover. The King willingly assented and asked what he would like. The Admiral thereupon pointed to a big bell which was lying on the Mole just by where they were standing. It was the bell on which the Germans used to give warning of British attacks by sea or air. "I expect it rang pretty loudly", said the Admiral, "on the morning of St. George's Day, and it used to ring every day and night regularly for air raids, which the Dover Patrol Air Force used to develop." So, without any more ado, the Admiral ordered a party of bluejackets to hoist the bell on to the destroyer lying alongside the Mole and bore off the King's gift, without waiting for formal presentation.

That is how the big bronze bell from Zeebrugge, which weighs a couple of hundredweight, came into the possession of Dover, as the joint gift of King Albert and Sir Roger Keyes. It has been mounted on a stand outside the Town Hall, and its moments of furious agitation are over. But on the first anniversary of the Raid the Mayor struck eight bells upon the Zeebrugge Bell, and this will doubtless become an annual ceremony. It would be well, too, if at eleven o'clock on every eleventh of November the sound of this bell recalled to future generations the signing of the Great Armistice.

The Zeebrugge bell will thus be a perpetual memorial in Dover to the most spectacular exploit performed by the Dover Patrol.

*Should the Zeebrugge Bell stay where it is - or should it be moved to another site? What do you think? Read the following two letters to the editor and then send in your own views.*

## 24 A SUGGESTED NEW SITE FOR THE ZEEBRUGGE BELL

For some time now I have felt that the Zeebrugge Bell is situated in such an out of the way position that it fails to give full credit to why it was presented to the people of Dover, or to explain how it was used by the Germans at Ostend in WWI. Sometimes I sit in the cafe opposite the Town hall and only once have I seen anyone look up at the bell.



Many people, particularly those born in Dover, have been aware of the Zeebrugge Bell, and as it is something that they have always associated with the Town Hall roof, they would be very opposed to moving it to somewhere else. This I can understand, but I am anxious to suggest a new approach to where it should be.

The question arises of what the bell represents. There is only a small plaque on the wall beneath, which does not do justice to what lies behind the bell. Admittedly the Dover Museum have a fine display about the raid, but this does not highlight what the bell stands for.

The Zeebrugge raid was in a sense uniquely a Dover Event - it was planned from Dover, the armada set out and returned to Dover, and many of those lost in the raid are buried in Dover. If the bell is a symbol for all these things, as well as being a war trophy, it should be sited in a far more appropriate place. In its present situation any association with the sea is missing.

All the monuments on the sea front are associated with the sea in one way or another (except the Miner). The most recent example of empathy between a monument, what it stands for, and its surroundings is of course the Battle of Britain site at Capel. This is what I feel is needed for the Zeebrugge Bell.

My personal choice would be for the bell to be hung high up on the outside of the lighthouse at the end of the Prince of Wales Pier. It would be in a similar position to that which it had on the Mole at Zeebrugge during WWI. Full details of the raid could be displayed at the base of the lighthouse. There would be other advantages - the end of the pier would be a more fitting place to hold the St. George's Day Parade, and being away from motor traffic would be a benefit. The question of striking 8 bells at noon on St. George's Day I am sure could be overcome.

If the Dover Society were to agree in principle to the idea, there would of course be some issues that would need to be sorted out. The bell belongs to the people of Dover, and would therefore need the Council's permission for it to be moved. Then there is the question of persuading Dover Harbour Board to agree to this idea. They have been agreeable to the plaque for the Unknown Warrior and the brass geographer plaque to Sir Clifford Jarratt. Why not the Zeebrugge Bell?

On the question of funding the scheme, I would like to suggest that the present Lord Keyes be approached. I am sure he could put out some feelers to some of the naval ex-service associations.



I feel it is important to remember that the Zeebrugge Bell is a war trophy which is associated with Dover, and one of the most daring exploits in the annals of the Royal Navy, and as such should be sited in a more appropriate place so that it can be seen.

**FOOTNOTE** - I realize that the Dover Harbour Board have erected a small plaque containing the grappling hook from HMS Vindictive which took part in the raid, which is situated on the landward side of the sea front near the Clock Tower, but this does not give any details of the actual raid.

*David Atwood*

#### **RESITING OF THE ZEEBRUGGE BELL**

I have read with interest David Atwood's proposal that the Zeebrugge Bell should be resited in a more appropriate and more visible location than its current lofty site high on the Town Hall. I think the suggestion is well worth serious consideration.

As David says, the Bell is a memento of an audacious, heroic and costly (in human lives) operation by the Dover Patrol during World War I. It deserves a site where it can be seen easily, where the people of Dover and visitors can pause and look at it easily and read about the exploit. The Town Hall site may have been chosen because the Bell was taken from Zeebrugge Town Hall by the Germans for use as an alarm on the Zeebrugge Mole. Apart from this link the present site has the practical advantage of being vandal proof but little more to commend it. The Bell and its plaque are well above eye level and easily missed. That said, there may be difficulties in removing it from the Town Hall since the building is listed and the Bell may be considered an integral part of the structure.

Before looking for problems - including the consent of the owners and the cost of resiting - we should consider whether there is a more appropriate site. Personally I am not attracted to David's suggestion for it to be attached to the lighthouse at the end of the Prince of Wales Pier. Whilst this would have something in keeping with its original site on the mole at Zeebrugge, it would look out of place attached to the lighthouse and would still not be seen by that many people.

The seafront is another possibility although we may be in danger of overloading our promenade with memorials and similar. However, the grappling iron used at Zeebrugge is there and the Bell would complement it if sited alongside.

The Market Square area particularly outside the Dover Museum would in my view be a strong contender since the bodies of the many killed in the Zeebrugge raid were brought back to Dover and laid out in the Market Hall - now the Dover Museum.

Another appropriate setting could be in the Library Gardens by the Town Hall which is the home for the town's war memorial. If attached or adjacent to the Town Hall this could possibly overcome any problems associated with the Bell being part of the listed building.

These three suggestions - and there may be others with equal or more merit that members could suggest - all offer the potential for the Bell and a suitable plaque to be easily seen by many people who could linger in safety. The sites would also lend themselves to a highly visible ceremony on St George's Day when the Bell is rung annually to commemorate the raid.

One word of caution - great thought would need to be given to making any new site as vandal proof as possible

*Derek Leach*