

engagements with piratical seaborne groups, mostly from Northern Europe.

There were times of disaster, such as the loss of the fleet, including Dover's ships and men, in the violent storm during the King's expedition to Scotland in 1091. The men were, of course, irreplaceable, but new little ships would have been built quickly on the open beaches. Ship building was a communal activity and the skills required, many of them fairly simple, were passed down from generation to generation among various families, not all of whom were sea-going members of the community.

In addition to increasing trade with the continent and legitimate ventures further afield, it must be admitted that seamen also indulged in less desirable activities,

such as piracy and wrecking.

The fishing industry began to prosper enormously and Dover, with its considerable number of ships, which included 21 contracted to the King under the terms of their charter, was well placed to profit from it. The little ships followed the shoals of herring into the North Sea and up the coast to Yarmouth, which then consisted of only a few huts. There they set up their famous herring fair, to which buyers came in great numbers from all over the East Midlands and from continental countries. The herring, which were later gutted, dried and salted, provided a staple item of food for many, including increasing numbers in the proliferating religious institutions. But more of that later.

DOVER VISITORS, THE UNEMPLOYED POOR AND A TUNNEL

by Peter Burville

Dover had a serious problem. A *Common Hall* meeting, chaired by the Mayor of Dover, was held on Friday 25th of February 1870, at the Town Hall "... for the purpose of considering the best mode of alleviating the great distress now prevailing amongst the labouring population of the Borough, in consequence of the weather, and of adopting such Resolutions thereon as might be expedient". The MP, S. M. Latham Esq J.P., proposed that a subscription fund should be raised. A fortnight later *The Dover Express* recorded that some 240 individuals and firms had contributed sums ranging from £5 = by the Mayor and others, to a more modest 2/6d (12.5 p).

One of the major works chosen was the excavation of a tunnel through the cliff from East Cliff up to the cliff top. Unfortunately, in less than a month it was reported in *The Dover Express* that this project had run out of funds. However the Council's General Purposes Committee confirmed "... the desirability of completing the new road, in course of formation, from East Cliff to the North Foreland Meadow", inspiring the Mayor to offer another donation, this time of two sovereigns.

At the beginning of April *The Committee for the Relief of the Unemployed* reported that work was continuing on the path rising from Athol Terrace, East Cliff, up to Northfall

28 Meadow, and that more funds were being actively sought as the path was expected to be a considerable attraction to visitors.

One potential source for this funding, an amount of £40 or £50, was the residue of an 1861 collection made to provide relief for those thrown out of employment by the frost. The Rev. Canon Puckle, who was the custodian of this fund, eventually handed over the money.

On the afternoon of Tuesday, 12th of April, Borough Surveyor John Hanvey, with the help of some Royal Engineers, carried out blasting operations, at East Cliff, to dislodge an estimated 2,590 tons of chalk which was impeding progress on the tunnel construction. Reports suggest that the two or three thousand spectators who had gathered at East Cliff, Athol Terrace, on the jetty and cliff top, had not witnessed a pyrotechnical display but a properly controlled use of 400 lbs of gunpowder. In the first East Cliff photograph the cliff-top scar created by the explosion can be seen just below the white notice board. It is likely that this photograph was taken soon after the cliff-sculpturing. Evidence to support this is the lack of fencing that was erected at the bottom entrance on completion of the tunnel. At this stage more money was still needed to complete the work, the hope being that it would be finished in time for the coming visitors' season.



The possibility of a path up to Northfall Meadow had been considered over a period of some thirty years. The Duke of Wellington, as Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports (1829-1852), had been against it, as had the War Office, but now a more cooperative attitude was being encountered so that it was felt the opportunity should not be lost. Consequently

another employment project, on a road leading past Copt Hill, was abandoned in favour of the tunnel. During April the *Chamber of Commerce* was invited to engage in the tunnel project, recognising the shift in emphasis from employment of the poor to providing a facility for visitors to Dover. This change in objective was reflected in the proposal to carry out more cliff-blasting, rather than using navvies, to remove chalk, and to put the work out to contract. Perhaps unemployment in the town had become less of a problem.

There then seems to have been a lull in the building of the pathway, while the Royal Engineer Department and the War Office considered the detailed plans but by mid-July Mr Hanvey reported that work on the pathway was progressing and that the 138 feet tunnel would be provided with ventilation and natural lighting. However, the collection of the funds was not going as well as hoped, one problem being that at least one member of the committee, Councillor Ayers, did not relish being a collector of contributions.

With the work progressing satisfactorily - the tunnel had been cut through to the cliff-top and a gallery was being made to the cliff-face - concern was expressed, in mid-August, about "... boys rushing in at the top of the tunnel and howling at the top of their voices while wayfarers were ascending". To counter this it was proposed to build a two-roomed cottage at the bottom. Councillor Ayers undertook "... to find a respectable man who would find suitable materials and build the cottage, and for a mere nominal sum, say half-a-crown (12.5p) a week, would undertake to keep the path swept and prevent the likelihood of disorderly proceedings."

It rather looks as though the whole construction was carried out by public subscription. Certainly the tunnel was much appreciated by visitor and resident alike. Various late 19th century Dover guide books ¹ referred to the tunnel, as did the German Baedeker Guide ², so the facility was obviously considered of potential interest to visitors. In 1894 Deputy Surgeon-General C. T. Paske ³ stated that "The Promenade has of late years been very considerably lengthened to the eastward; and although to any one observing it from the harbour or Admiralty Pier it appears to terminate in the East Jetty, there is in reality a prolongation close under the cliff, which leads to a short cut, through a tunnel, up to the back of the Castle and the grassy downs. The conception of this outlet, which I cannot remember having seen during either of my earlier visits, was a happy idea and its execution a great boon, shortening as it does the road to Deal via St. Margaret's over the downs." Paske's two earlier visits were probably in 1844 and 1854.

A one-time East Cliff resident, Stephen Burville, stated ⁴ "The tunnel, as I have previously mentioned, was the eastern outlet from the sea front to the cliff-top. This was blasted away during



30 the building of the National Harbour. But a hole to give light was made half way along the tunnel and I well remember, as a child, being lifted up to see the ships through the hole in the tunnel." This light-hole was doubtless the gallery that was made from the tunnel to the cliff-face. Perhaps this window-on-the-sea is the dark oblong shape that can be seen in the first photograph, just below the fencing that projects over the cliff-edge under the notice board.

A Dover Library photograph, of 1891, shows a well-worn cliff-top path going inland from the tunnel. This path appears to be heading towards the convict prison, built on Langdon Cliff in 1884. The local work-force would have found the tunnel a most helpful route to the prison which was in use until the mid 1890s.

At the beginning of September the Mayor reported a new problem. Following the construction the tunnel from Athol Terrace to Northfall Meadow, the landowner, the Earl of Guilford, placed a notice prohibiting the use of the footpath along the margin of the cliff. This rather defeated the objective of the tunnel project. The notice board and associated white fencing can be seen in the first photograph. At a Dover Local Board committee meeting there was much discussion about rights-of-way, with Councillor Robinson saying "... he had known it used as a public footway for sixty years." In a Dover Museum photograph of the area, attributed with a date of 1850, there is a path clearly visible along the cliff-edge. An interesting question is, how did those people using the path gain access to Dover? Was it through the castle, all the way round the castle or down the cliff-face, perhaps by means of a ladder? The diary of Mrs Maria Kingsford Wood (nee



Loud)⁵, sister-in-law of a William Burville, both of St Margaret's-at-Cliffe, records that on 11th March 1828 she walked to Dover with Mrs James Wood and Miss A N Pilcher. Unfortunately the route taken is not recorded. According to her diary, the lady's normal mode of travel was by horse so one imagines that in walking she took a scenic route rather than a dusty track, and hence used the well-worn track along the cliff.

Whilst in mid-September the problems with the Earl of Guilford continued, fittings, such as seats, fencing and gates, were being provided for the tunnel although further funds were still needed. The fencing on the cliff-top and exit to Athol Terrace, can be seen in the second photograph dated 1893. The cliff-top entrance to the tunnel can be seen going down into a cutting, with the fenced lower platform, leading out from the tunnel, clearly visible at the base of the cliff. A man named Oliver had been appointed to take charge of the path at an allowance of 2/6d (12.5p) a week. He was expected to supplement his income by the sale of ginger-beer and fruit in the summer time. (It seems likely that this is the same Oliver who inhabited one of the East Cliff caves reported in an earlier article in Newsletter 32).

In mid-October *The Dover Express* reported that the tunnel project had been successfully completed. The news-paper also recorded that Oliver had been carrying out his duties remarkably well and it was hoped to make him a special constable in order to increase his authority.

The Dover Chamber of Commerce clearly felt the tunnel project had been successfully completed when they made a presentation to Mr. Hanvey of "... a handsome gold pencil-case, in morrocoo case", for his efforts "... in bringing this attractive work to as successful termination". No mention was made of the original objective of the project, which was to provide relief to the unemployed poor of Dover.

In these present days of planning authorities, it is interesting to contemplate the attitude of the Dover Chamber of Commerce and the Borough Surveyor in embarking on the building of a tunnel through land owned by others - indeed, the land was not even in Dover but extended into the parish of Guston! This bullish approach reflected the spirit of the Victorian age in which the surveyor exercised a form of one-man planning authority in the town, as can be seen from the contemporary Dover Local Board reports.

By the end of 1870 an agreement had been reached with the Earl of Guilford, (through his trustees as he was still in his minority), with the help of a Major A. G. Dickson. It was agreed that the Earl would insert a gate in the fence to allow access to the cliff-top path but there was to be no trespassing on his adjacent lands. The Earl's notice board can still be seen in photographs taken many years later. At that time it doubtless discouraged people from leaving the path along the cliff rather than prohibiting them from using it.

One aspect of the interest of the War Department, in the tunnel, is recorded in *The Dover Express* where it states that the gate at the top of the tunnel was "... locked during the time of firing at the Government ranges". The rifle range is shown on the *Plan of the Volunteer Review at Dover on March 29th 1869*⁶ as being in Broadlees Bottom. The gate remaining locked after the military firing had ceased was of concern to would-be users of the tunnel.

In 1871, the year following the tunnel's construction, there were new problems. Cliff-falls, inclement weather and vandalism caused inconvenience to tunnel users. The dangers involved in walking on cliff paths were recorded in June, when Widow Ann Claw fell some 65 feet to her death on the beach from an unfenced path leading to the cave, east of the tunnel, where she had lived for 12 years. In falling she collided with a lad named Brewer who sustained a fractured leg. Her son Andrew was walking along with her at the time, carrying crabs and a bucket of water, but he was unable to prevent her falling once she had slipped where "... a small piece of the road had given way".

The tunnel, the path leading to it and many caves were destroyed when the Admiralty Harbour was built at the turn of the century. Much of the cliff-face east of East Cliff was removed to reduce the chance of cliff-falls and to provide material for land reclamation. The military control over the right-of-way through the tunnel passed on to the path which replaced it. Oral tradition records the path being closed by the military for 24 hours annually.

Whilst the tunnel had a life of less than thirty years, it was clearly quite a feature in the lives of Dover's residents and visitors and, despite this limited existence, it does appear on Ordnance Survey maps of the period⁷. Some fifty years later, in 1924, East Cliff was the subject of another suggested project to help the unemployed but the proposed road from East Cliff to St Margaret's was not built.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the staff of the Centre for Kentish Studies, Dover Library and Dover Museum for their help and support in researching the archives for this article, and the Dover Library for permission to reproduce the two photographs.

References

All the reports mentioned in the article are to be found in copies of the *Dover Express* between March 1870 and June 1871. Any reader wanting specific information on these should contact the author.

1. The Dover Guide and Appendix 1876, page 9 (Dover Museum)
2. Great Britain Handbook for Travellers, K. Baedeker, 1890
3. *Sunny Dover, Then & Now*, C. T. Paske, pub C. Goulden & others, 1894, page 27
4. Stephen James George Burville, unpublished manuscript *Looking Back*.
5. A transcript of the diary is held by St Margaret's History Society
6. Copy at Dover Museum
7. Ordnance Survey 1st Edition surveyed 1871, LXVIII/10, 25 inch.



NEW HOMES AT OLD PARK BARRACKS

From Terry Sutton

The first of 133 homes, once housing army families, at Old Park, Whitfield have been handed over to tenants nominated by Dover District Council.

The handover has been made possible through the cooperation of the District Council, the Ministry of Defence, Dover Harbour Board, and the new owners of the homes, High Weald Housing Association.

When Dover Harbour Board bought the former barracks at Old Park, the port authority had no use for the 133 houses and flats there. So a deal was

worked out that on the day Dover Harbour Board purchased the many acres, High Weald immediately bought the homes from the port authority on the agreement that Dover District Council would have first option to nominate those families on its housing waiting list.

Since High Weald came into the ownership of the houses and flats, which had been empty for years, extensive repairs and upgrading of the properties has been carried out before the tenants began moving in.