

*One of a series of articles covering the lives of
Dovorians and local events of international renown*

William Henry East

By Lorraine Sencicle B.A. (econ) honrs

1926 was, as far as many political-economy historians are concerned, a watershed year. Although the General Strike which started on 3rd May divided the country, the events that led up to it and how the situation was handled was a major learning curve. When the economy, through outside forces, sank to its lowest ebb in the early 1930s what had been learned played a major economic and political role.

However for some individuals caught up the events appertaining to the General Strike the results were devastating, none more so than for the Mayor of Dover at the time, William Henry East.

William, from a Yorkshire family, came to Dover in 1878 to take up the post as Headmaster of Dover's Art school. He had exhibited at the Royal Academy of Arts and was, in 1896-97, elected Chairman of the Society of Art Masters. He married Emma, a Yorkshire lass, in 1880 and they bought a house in Maison Dieu Road that they named East-Lee, now a guesthouse under the same name.



William East c1890s

The Art School had recently moved into the Drill Hall, owned by Dover Harbour Board in the then Northampton Street. The accommodation was one room on the upper floor and there were 171 fee-paying pupils. Most of these came from poor backgrounds, holding down full time (60 hours a week) jobs and determined to better themselves.

The school was run as a charity but the total income was only £263. The teaching staff, although well meaning, had little understanding of application



East-Lee Guest House ©Lorraine Sencicle

and art appreciation. The previous year 112 students had submitted 2,433 pieces of work for public examination but only 24 pieces passed.

As part of the deal for the room, the Harbour Board insisted on a professional and on William's arrival the school was renamed the Municipal School of Science and Art. It was then officially opened, with great pomp, by the Earl of Granville, the then Lord Warden. Although it was said that the appointment of William was through his strong Masonic connections, it was inspirational. The exam results, year on year, improved. By 1892, the school was considered one of the best outside of London and the Corporation agreed to fund it. William lost no time in persuading them to invest in a purpose built combined Art and Technical School.

On the assurance that William would remain the Principal, Kent County Council (KCC) gave a grant of £12,000 and the Corporation borrowed £11,000, repayable over thirty years. They purchased land in Ladywell for £3,000 and the contract was given to local builder, William Bromley. The architect was J.S. Chappel, who had worked with William Burges, the designer of Connaught Hall.

In 1894, the Mayor and Mayoress of Dover, Sir William and Lady Crundall opened the new school. By 1903,



Technical College and Connaught Hall, Ladywell ©Alan Sencicle

students were successful in obtaining scholarships to the Royal College of Art. One of them was Reginald Goulden - designer of the Dover's War Memorial.

Two years earlier, in 1901, William put forward the case for providing secondary education for the more academic boys. At the time, the Education Bill was going through Parliament and if passed, schools and Dover College governors had made it clear that they would remain private. William wanted an equivalent school for Dover's pupil population, subsidised by the state. In 1903 what eventually would become the Dover Boys Grammar School opened in the basement of the Ladywell premises.

William retired in 1920. With Emma and a son who survived World War I and two daughters, he was entertained by students, past and present, of Dover's

Art and Technical school in Connaught Hall. The Mayor supported by other dignitaries also attended and William was presented with an oxidised silver rose-bowl and an illuminated address in book form.

Although he planned to spend the remainder of his life painting and devoted to his beloved Emma and family William was active in the Masonic lodge. It was possibly there that he was persuaded, in August 1922, to stand for the council in an unopposed seat in Castle Ward. On election, he was assigned to the committee dealing with the municipal Electricity Company, eventually becoming the Chairman.

At the time the country was sliding further into an economic depression. This was reflected in the increasing number of electricity failures due to the old plant wearing out with little money to replace it. The government's Electricity Commissioners suggested a cable link between Dover and Folkestone but William's committee decided instead to seek a loan. With this, they bought a 1500-kilowatt 3-phase 50-cycle turbo alternator costing £24,800.

In 1924, they bought a new boiler costing £10,000, which forced an increase in the price of electricity provided to their customers. William publicly stated that the increase would have been greater if they had bought home produced coal rather than imported... which did not go down well with the local coal mining community. Cheap imported coal had led to short-time working, wage cuts and unemployment in the domestic mining industry.

On 9th November 1925 William was elected Mayor but tension throughout the country due to these wage cuts was mounting. In the spring of 1926, due to the strength of sterling, the price of imported coal fell and a Royal Commission recommended a further cut in the miners' wages. The first general strike in British history began at midnight on 3 May 1926. Out of fear of a Bolshevik type revolution, a State of Emergency was declared.

The country was immediately divided into areas with arrangements run by Civil Commissioners. In Dover, this was the 78-year-old Mayor, William East. Attitudes in the town towards the strike were divided. Lady Violet Astor, the wife of Dover's MP, was reported as saying, "those miners wriggling again - can't those earthworms keep still?" Five hundred locals answered Mayor East's call for volunteers to man strategic places such as the electricity and gas works, the railway station and the post office.

On the other hand, under the leadership of the Kent Miner's secretary, John Elks, the Dover Central Strike Committee was set up. This included Bill Newman, whose son of the same name was active in local politics up until recently. The railway and tram workers came out on strike followed by workers at Buckland paper mill and the Packet Yard. The second day saw Palmer's Connaught Coachbuilders joining the strike and by the end of that day, most workers in other Dover industries were on strike.

Throughout the strike, William had hardly slept and caught a 'bit of a cold.'


At mid-day on Wednesday 12th May, the strike was called off and William, on behalf of Dover Corporation, sent a letter of congratulations to Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister. Over the next few days, he put in many hours getting the town 'back to normal.'

On 25th May, he and Emma were guests of honour at the Boys' County School sports day even though he still had the cold. The following weekend they cancelled all engagements but by the Monday William had developed pneumonia, he died on Wednesday

2nd June. The funeral, at St Mary's where William had been a churchwarden, was followed burial in Charlton Cemetery. On 26th October

1926 the Corporation resolved that for 'eminent services rendered... particularly in conjunction with her late husband during the period of his Mayoralty... Emma East be admitted as an Honorary Freeman of the Borough.' She was the first woman to be so honoured.

This article was first published in the Dover Mercury.



Borough of Dover.

DEATH OF HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR

The funeral of the late Mayor is to take place on Monday, the 7th inst. The first portion of the service will be held in St. Mary's Church, commencing at 2.30 p.m., and the interment will take place in Charlton Cemetery.

It is suggested that all shops should be closed on the day in question from 2 to 3.30 p.m.

R. E. Knocker,

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Officers' New Barracks

DOVER CASTLE

BY ROY PORTER, English Heritage Territory Properties Curator (South)

Since its construction in the mid-19th century, the Officers' New Barracks has loomed large over the southern half of Dover Castle. Without doubt the grandest Victorian building to survive in the castle, it was designed to provide accommodation for the officers garrisoned there. When first completed in 1858 it afforded the officers a degree of comfort which must have been the envy of the other ranks accommodated elsewhere in the castle.

During the 1850s the castle garrison expanded, partly because of its use by

returning troops after the Crimean War, and this together with concerns about the sanitary arrangements in existing barracks resulted in the construction of new accommodation for the soldiers throughout the castle.

The Officers' New Barracks were a product of this provision of accommodation. Preparation for the new building began in 1855, when plans were made for clearing the ground for it. This involved the removal of earlier structures and widespread landscaping. The site of the barracks was excavated to