

Following Lorraine's talk to the society at the October meeting it has been decided to publish the full story part 2 will appear in the next newsletter. Editor

Dover, St Margaret's and Martin Mill Railway Line Part 1

Lorraine Sencicle

At the cliff end of Athol Terrace, near Eastern Docks, Dover, a steep footpath leads up the cliff and then along Langdon Cliffs towards St Margaret's. From the footpath, one can watch the daily activities of Dover's Eastern Docks and Channel shipping beyond. On clear day, the coast of France with the Strait of Dover, like a wide river, in between is quite a sight. As one traverses the path, it becomes apparent that it was once a railway track.

The story begins in 1892 when Dover Harbour Board (DHB) accepted the tender of John Jackson (1851-1919) for the building of the Eastern Arm of the new Commercial Harbour - the Prince of Wales Pier. Four years later, in August 1896, the Undercliff Reclamation Act received Royal Assent. The Act was for laying out land on the South Foreland, near St Margaret's, where a new 'Dover' was to be built.

The Parliamentary Bill had been sponsored by Sir William Crundall (1847-1934), thirteen times Mayor of Dover from 1886 to 1910. Crundall owned a cons-

truction company that had been founded by his late father, also called William. Both father and son were the prime movers in the development of Dover's town planning:

- On the west side of the Dour cottages for the working class - Clarendon estate
- On the east side homes for the lower middle class i.e. Barton Road neighbourhood - Below the Castle and nearer the sea, villas for the upper middle class i.e. the Castle Avenue estate. The next part of their dream for Dover was to be a private estate on the South Foreland for the well-to-do upper classes.



Sir William Crundall
(1847 - 1934)

Crundall had been appointed to DHB in 1886 and twenty years later, in 1906, he was elected Chairman of the Board. He was to hold the office until his death in 1934. Two other businessmen were involved in the proposed South Foreland scheme, Sir John Jackson, who had won the contract for building the Prince of Wales Pier. The third person involved in the South Foreland enterprise was the eminent construction engineer



*Sir John Jackson
Civil Engineer*



*Weetman Pearson
1st Viscount Cowdray*

Weetman Dickinson Pearson, 1st Viscount Cowdray. His company had tendered to build the proposed Admiralty Harbour, which would enclose the whole of Dover bay.

The three men decided that access to the South Foreland site was to be by a road starting from the shore by Castle Jetty, at the east end of Dover's seafront. It would then run along the base of the cliffs before gently rising to South Foreland at St Margaret's. To reduce anticipated opposition while the Undercliff Reclamation Bill was going through Parliament, the main purpose given was the prevention of sea erosion at the base of the cliffs. This was substantiated by Sir John Jackson calling an expert witness who proclaimed the necessity. Dover Corporation echoed this and showed that over the previous 25 years the encroachment of the sea had given rise to numerous cliff falls.

It was agreed that in time an Undercliff marine road would be built on the inside of a seawall between Dover and St Margaret's Bay but not in the foreseeable future. In the immediate future a road if built, they implied, would go over the cliffs. Thus the opposition centred their argument on this saying that if the over-cliff road were to go ahead, it would effectively put public land into private

hands. This was dealt with by amendment to the Bill by giving the over-cliff road a lower priority than the Undercliff marine road ... either way, the three men got exactly what they wanted!

Before the Bill had received parliamentary approval, excavations began. Initially, the men stated that 500 convicts from the then Langdon prison would be part of the workforce. However, Herbert Asquith, the Home Secretary, refused to comply! For the residents of Athol Terrace, permission for the compulsorily purchase of their front gardens was given and the road we see today was laid at their doorsteps.

The Admiralty Harbour, we see today, was given the go ahead by the government on 5 April 1898 when the contract was signed. Viscount Cowdray's company (Pearsons) were the main contractors, Sir John Jackson was a



The road to St Margaret's in the making

subcontractor and Dover Harbour Board, under Sir William Crundall, was actively involved.

To build the Piers and the Breakwater of the new Admiralty Harbour, Pearsons used locally made concrete blocks and faced them with granite. The concrete blocks were made at two blockyards, one on Shakespeare beach in the west and the second on reclaimed land to the east of Castle Jetty, where the Undercliff marine road was proposed to start. To reclaim land the cliff face was blasted and the surplus chalk was removed by steam-navvies - locomotive driven excavators made by Ruston, Proctor & Co, Sheaf Ironworks, Lincoln. Soon a level platform, some 24 acres (9.915 hectares), was created at the base of the eastern cliffs where the massive blocks were made and stored.

The blocks were made out of sand and

shingle brought by ship from Stonar, near Sandwich and unloaded into trucks at the Castle Jetty. From there the trucks were manually pushed along a narrow-gauge track to the blockyard. However, the sea journey was subject to the vagaries of the weather and so it was decided to run a Standard gauge Light Railway line (engines could not go more than 25 miles an hour) from Martin Mill, the nearest station on the South East and Chatham Railway line between Dover and Deal.

The three and a half mile track was pegged out by June 1898. It ran from the Dover side of Martin Mill main line station parallel to the Dover - Deal line for about a mile, crossing two roads on bridges made of brick abutments with supporting iron girders. Just before the main line Guston Tunnel the Pearson line veered south towards the coast and then along an embankment passing under the Dover-Deal road (A258) near the Swingate Inn. Past Bere Farm, West Cliffe, the line continued south-east crossing the Dover - St Margaret's Upper Road by a gate. It then turned south-west, following the cliff contours, skirting Langdon Bay. Running west, it followed the edge of Langdon Cliff for about half a mile where metal frames were erected on the cliff edge to stop chalk falling on the works below.

Much of the land that the Pearson railway, as it was called, crossed, was owned by the Cliff Land Company the principal owner of which was Frederick George North, 8th Earl of Guilford (1876-1949) of Waldershare Park. Back in 1844, with the coming of the South Eastern Railway to



Eastern Arm - Reclamation April 1900. DHB Archives



Eastern Blockyard 1901. Bob Hollingsbee

Dover, the Guilford family had made an application to build 1,500 houses on land to the north of the Castle with an approach road from Castle Jetty. The family still had this dream and the 8th Earl made a deal with Pearsons to charge £25 per year ground rent with the option to buy the standard gauge line, once the lease had expired, for £3,000. It was planned that the Cliff Land Company would use the railway for a passenger service to the development. From Langdon Hole to East Cliff the land was owned by the War Office. They stipulated that the track was to be completed by December 1899. Further, that the Pearson railway was only to be used for carrying materials and the site had to be restored to its original condition.

At the end of the line was a chute down which the materials were fed to the block yard. This quickly proved a problem and was replaced by a funicular, down the cliff face, with side tipping skips to ease unloading. At the bottom, the skips were pushed by hand along a narrow-gauge track built on trestles to the blockyard and emptied into one of six lines of mixers where some 250 blocks were

made at once. These were moved by blockyard goliaths - cranes with a span of 100-feet that could lift 50-tons.

The excavations were not without problems. In October 1898, fuses and explosives were taken and deliberately fired at the rear of the sea front East Cliff houses. In September 1899, Albert Knowler was killed during blasting and three months later, a fire in the East Cliff office burnt a man to death. Then, on 19 January

1900, as men were preparing to blast some more of the cliff face there was a massive explosion. Five men, George Jeffries, aged 24, who later died, James Murton, Ernest Dutton, William Davies and Algenon Gibbs were all injured. In May 1900, labourer Bill Chadwick age-32, was killed by a lump of chalk during blasting at East Cliff.

Neither was the new railway line without controversy, much to the annoyance of the local tourist industry it caused the North Fall Tunnel, a pathway created by the Dover Chamber of Commerce in 1870 to provide a short cut from the beach to the Castle, to be destroyed. In its place, a new path with a steep gradient was excavated up to Broadlees, some distance east of the Castle. This path was expected to be extended in the direction of St Margaret's Bay and eventually to become the over-cliff road, one of the two options that was envisaged to connect Dover with New Dover - the superlative estate that Crundall, Jackson and Cowdray planned to build at the South Foreland.

The actual building of the Eastern Arm was started in January 1901 and

Crundall, Cowdray and Jackson applied for a Light Railway Order to extend the Pearson railway to the South Foreland. A Light Railway order would allow the trains to run on a standard track but at no more than 25 miles an hour, however, this the degree of regulation was less than that applied to main line services and therefore cheaper to set up, run and maintain. The proposal said that the line would run from Athol Terrace, up a 1-in-28 gradient along a 60-foot wide 'road' cut into the face of the cliff to Langdon Battery. It would then cross the fields to St Margaret's to the proposed site of New Dover, before continuing to Martin Mill and joining the main line.

The application stated that it would be a tram/railway service powered by electricity - the local electricity company was then in private ownership and Crundall was the Chairman. There was also the stated intention of extending the line from the Eastern Dockyard, as it came to be called, along Dover's seafront, Union Street, Strond Street and then to the Harbour station, on the western side of what became the Western Docks. There the proposed line would join the main South East and Chatham Railway line. Another line would go from the existing Deal line at Buckland and then via River to Bushy Ruff in the Alkham Valley.

In April 1902 a public inquiry, headed by the Earl of Jersey, was held into the application. It was agreed that the Company could lay down lines for a light railway in the Borough of Dover, but they could not exercise that power for two years. This was to give time to Dover Corporation, if desirable, to obtain the authority to extend their tramways. Further, on the proposed light railway to Bushy Ruff in the Alkham Valley, this

was to terminate at River church and go no further. The application explicitly stated that the tram/railway would be a passenger service, which contravened the agreement with the Earl of Guilford. He immediately sought legal advice and eventually laid out his landholdings on the cliff top as a seaside residential resort.

Crundall, against considerable opposition, in 1907, gained permission to develop the area around the South Foreland. This would, claimed the local paper, Dover Express, turn the acres east of Dover into a '*land flowing with milk and honey, with many noble marine residences.*' In the meantime, the land from Bere Farm to Langdon Hole, owned by the Earl of Guilford and designated as a seaside residential resort, was taken over by the War Office.

At the western end of the harbour, the Admiralty Pier extension was completed in 1908 and South Eastern Railway Company, with representatives on the Dover Harbour Board, proposed to erect a grand new terminal station at the landward end. Early the following year, Crundall, as Chairman of DHB, invited tenders to widen Admiralty Pier for the possibility of a new railway station. The Lords of the Admiralty visited and discussed the proposals and on 9 December, Pearsons were given the contract.

The Admiralty Harbour was officially opened on the 15 October 1909 by the Prince of Wales, later George V (1910-1936) who unveiled a stone commemorating the event on the Eastern Arm. Two months before, on 9 August, the Dover, St Margaret's and Martin Mill Light Railway Company (Light Railway Company) was formed. Crundall, Cowdray and Jackson owned

25 shares each and four others owned one share each. One of these shareholders was Richard Tilden-Smith who later became the main shareholder of Tilmanstone Colliery.

Later that month planning permission was given by Dover Corporation for the utilisation of the Light Railway Company line as a public tramway. The residents of East Cliff objected but their concerns were dismissed by the Corporation and John Bavington Jones, of the Dover Express.

Work started on 21 July 1910 to widen the shore end of the Admiralty Pier for the new railway station comprising of over 11 acres. Chalk for in-filling was taken from East Cliff excavated by the steam-navvy machines. The excavations also created a new road. However, because the cliffs are so steep, when the 'road' reached the top it had to be cut in a series of zigzags. This problem was expected to be dealt with later, when the rest of the road was nearing completion.

At the base of East Cliff, railway lines were used to transport the chalk to Castle Jetty where it was loaded onto barges and taken across to Admiralty Pier. In 1910, while the excavations were going on, Channel Collieries Trust was set up to purchase land near South Foreland. Their remit stated that they would build a residential estate, approached by a Cliff Road and the St Margaret's Light Railway from Dover. The Trust syndicate was composed of Crundall, Cowdray and Jackson. The road from the excavations was started on 21 July 1910.

The last coping stone on the Admiralty Pier extension was laid by Crundall on 2 April 1913. A month later work started

on building the Marine Station, the foundations having been filled in by 1 million cubic yards of chalk from the eastern cliffs.

Two months before, in February 1913, DHB chaired by Crundall, filed a Parliamentary Bill to make changes to the Tidal Basin at the Western Docks. As a supplementary, the Channel Collieries Trust sort consent to replace the western half of the seafront and beach with a 5.75 acre dock and terminus for a Light Railway Company. This went down badly in Dover and a petition was raised followed by a poll that took place on 20 May 1913. Of those eligible to vote, 2,265 voted against the Bill's Supplement and 1,508 for it. The Supplement was withdrawn.

On 13 April, a closed meeting of the Light Railway Company was held when it was announced that Cowdray and Crundall had sold their shares, by transfer, to the Channel Collieries Trust. The four holders of the single shares in



Richard Tilden Smith. Courtesy of Dover Museum

Light Railway Company were not invited to the meeting - the first they heard about it was when they read the national newspapers. A bitter legal battle ensued with Richard Tilden-Smith unsuccessfully trying to seek redress. In the event, Sir John Jackson and two nominees owned the controlling shares in the Light Railway Company.

At the time, the East Kent coalmining industry was taking off. Arthur Burr, a mining entrepreneur and major shareholder of several companies with interests in the Kent coalfield, was the leading light. One of these companies was Kent Coal Concessions. Arthur Burr had formed it in 1896 with the purpose of buying potential underground coal fields but not surface land. The intention was lease the coalfields for a share of the royalties. By 1906, the company had secured coal mining rights in East Kent sufficient, it was said, for 20 collieries. East Kent Colliery Company also was part of Burr's portfolio and its holdings included, Shakespeare and Snowdown Collieries. Shakespeare Colliery was sunk in 1896, but had not proved viable and was finally abandoned in December 1915. However, Snowdown, north of Dover, saw the first commercial East Kent coal raised on 19 November 1912. About that time, Burr announced the intention of floating a new company, as a subsidiary of Kent Coal Concessions, to *'exploit undeveloped areas of East Kent.'*

A previous similar floatation had not been a commercial success and the Company Board were not happy. The situation came to a head at a meeting on 31 July 1913 when Burr, along with his son, Dr Malcolm Burr, were 'retired' from the Board. The remaining directors consolidated Kent Coal Concessions with allied companies including Kent

Collieries Ltd that had extensive mineral rights and had been undertaking mineral exploration. Towards the end of 1913 the giant steel firm, Dorman Long, in which Cowdray was involved, reported that they held 30,000 shares in the Channel Collieries Trust Company, whose holdings included the East Kent Colliery Company, part of the Burr portfolio. Borings had confirmed the existence of iron stone. Dorman Long also had interests in Kent Collieries Ltd.

Just prior to World War I (1914-1918), in May 1914, Burr attempted to raise £77,000 in debentures and £800,000 in income bonds for his East Kent Colliery Company. However, little interest was shown and the holdings were handed over to Kent Coal Concessions, by the Official Receiver, with the remit to consolidate. Following consolidation the company held mineral rights under some 20,000 acres of East Kent. In December 1917, Burr was declared bankrupt with debts amounting to £53,176 but he died in September 1919 age 70.

At Dorman Long & Co's AGM held in August 1917, it was reported that their investments, through the Channel Collieries Trust Ltd, were a satisfactory £877,304, even though the War had stopped any further excavations. Albeit, with the consent of the Treasury, a fusion of the different East Kent coal interests was agreed with the two chief companies, Kent Collieries Ltd and the Channel Collieries Trust put into voluntary liquidation. Out of this, the Channel Steel Company was formed with a capital of £750,000. It was reported to the assembled shareholders that it was the existence of a large deposit of ironstone in East Kent that had provided the name of the new company.