

Following Lorraine's talk to the society at the October 2013 meeting it has been decided to publish the full story part 1 appeared in the last newsletter. Editor

Dover, St Margaret's and Martin Mill Railway Line Part 2

Lorraine Sencicle

The Dover, St Margaret's and Martin Mill Light Railway Company, formed in 1909, was owned by: Sir William Crundall - Chairman of Dover Harbour Board; Weetman Dickinson Pearson, 1st Viscount Cowdray - whose company, Pearsons, had successfully tendered to build the Admiralty Harbour and Sir John Jackson who had been involved in the building of the Admiralty Harbour. The railway line was generally known as the Pearson Line.

The company had applied, in 1914, for the renewal of their powers to carry coal through the streets of Dover with a view to extending the line from the Western docks to the Eastern Dockyard. The Town Council opposed this, but due to outbreak of World War I (1914-1918), the case was deferred. In order to carry explosives to war-ships berthed in the Camber, at the eastern Dockyard, the War Office decided to build a Sea Front Railway, using the powers that were likely to have been awarded to the Light Railway Company.



Pearson's successfully tendered and work on what was to become the Sea Front Railway was eventually started in 1918. Single-track and running the length of the promenade from the Prince of Wales Pier to the Eastern Dockyard, the lines that had been used for the Pearson Line and belonging to the Light Railway Company, were taken up and used. It had passing loops and catch points so that trains could run in both directions but soon after the line was laid an accident occurred so a low fence was erected on each side.

Following the death of Sir John Jackson, in December 1919, the Light Railway Company was taken over by the Channel Steel Company. They applied, in 1920, to run a line from the Sea Front Railway at New Bridge, along Camden Crescent, then

Liverpool Street (now the rear of the Gateway flats), and following the base of the cliffs to Eastern Dockyard. It was expected that the cliff side residences of East Cliff and Athol Terrace would be demolished.

At the Eastern Dockyard it was envisaged that a railway station would be built and the previously cut road would become a railway track that via a newly constructed tunnel, would join the track of the old Pearsons line. This would be extended to Sea Street, St Margaret's where another station would be built. The line would then cross the countryside to join the Dover-Deal railway line at Martin Mill.

The new proposal was given outline approval by Dover Corporation with the preference for the construction to be a road not a railway track. This was due to the continuing rise in unemployment in the town - a situation that was prevalent throughout the country at the time - more men could be employed to build a road than a railway. If, however, the company were mindful to create a railway then, the Corporation said, their preference was for the facility to be a tramway, similar to that, which already existed in Dover at the time. Finally, whatever the company decided,

colliery trucks could only be used on land purchased by the company and the track could not go through the town.

The Company chose the road option following the route given in the outline proposal. It was to be 50 feet (16 metres) wide with a 15 feet (5 metres) wide pavement on each side. The estimated cost was £43,000 and it was expected to provide employment for up to 300 men. The council suggested that Pearsons paid one third, the Corporation a third and it would be expected that the government's Unemployment Grants Committee would pay the remainder.

In the autumn of 1922, Pearsons joined forces with steel makers Dorman Long, to form Pearson & Dorman Long Company and take over most of the rights from the Kent Coal Concessions. The latter company had been set up by Arthur Burr, the East Kent mining entrepreneur, in 1896 with the purpose of buying potential underground coal fields but not surface land. By 1906, the company had secured coal mining rights in East Kent sufficient, it was said, for 20 collieries. Burr's large portfolio of mining associated companies in East Kent were consolidated in 1913 under the name of Kent Coal Concessions.



Eastern Arm Reclamation April 1900 © DHB Archives



Eastern Arm - Blockyard 1902 - DHB Archives

The giant steel makers, Dorman Long held 30,000 shares in the consolidated company as borings had confirmed the existence of iron stone. In 1917, a partial consolidation had created the Channel Steel Company and included Snowdown Colliery. Although Kent Coal Concessions did retain some mineral rights, due to the economic depression no one was interested in leasing them and in 1925, the company folded.

Having amalgamated, the newly styled Pearson Dorman Long company immediately started the preliminary work on what resulted in Betteshanger Colliery. However, as they did not own the surface land they were unable to sink the pit. Albeit, through the subsidiary, Channel Steel Company, they proposed building a steel works between Dover and St Margaret's adjacent to the proposed new road and Dover Corporation gave their approval.

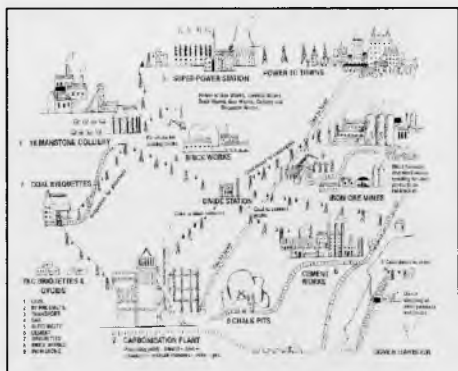
The council applied to the Unemployment Grants Committee stating that the cost for the new road was £56,000. The Committee asked for the plans to be modified and suggested that the Ministry of Transport and Kent County Council (KCC) should contribute towards the costs. While these applications were being made the road was

put on hold. During the winter of 1923-24, the revised estimate had increased to £129,000 but government finance was not forthcoming.

On 29th September 1923, the Admiralty formerly handed the port over to the Dover Harbour Board (DHB), still headed by Sir William Crundall. This included the Sea Front Railway line but the Eastern Dockyard was retained by the Admiralty and let on lease to Stanlee Ship-breaking Company. The Camber was retained for Admiralty purposes.

During spring and summer of 1924, Dover's Mayor, Richard Barwick, and the Town Clerk, Reginald Knocker, visited various government departments laying before them the urgent need for unemployment relief. The Ministry of Transport relented and sanctioned the borrowing of £45,000. In the autumn of 1924 sites near Kingsdown were put on the market through Protheroe and Morris of Cheapside, London. Channel Collieries Trust held the mineral rights under the property and the sites were bought by Pearson Dorman Long - at last, they could sink Betteshanger Colliery.

Unemployment continued to rise and in



Tilden's Industrial Eden.



Eastern Docks - Aerial Ropeway Tunnels - LS 2010

1925 DHB applied to Parliament to close Dover harbour's Western entrance. They wanted to run a railway line along the Southern Breakwater to load Kent coal onto ships for export from there. However, the disparity in exchange rates between the UK and the Continent meant that the country was *importing* coal and the application came under a lot of criticism.

On the subject of Exchange Rate parity and the negative effect it was having on British industry, Sir Arthur Dorman made a powerful and well reported speech (Economist 19.12.1925). He begged the government for equal parity in the exchange rates but the response was: *'a strong £ was the sign of a strong country.'* Pearson Dorman Long wrote to the council saying that they could no longer afford to contribute to the cost of the road.

Cheap imports of coal continued to affect the domestic industry but in February 1926, the government did give a grant of £2m to the Kent coalfields. However, midnight on 3rd May 1926 saw the beginning of the General Strike. In October, that year, the council finally heard from the Unemployment Grants Committee through a letter sent to the town's Member of Parliament (1922-1945), Major the Hon. John Jacob Astor. The Committee had declined to provide a grant for the East Cliff Road, the reason given was that *'unemployment in Dover was not sufficiently exceptional to warrant relief.'* It was generally felt that the refusal was retaliatory because East Kent miners had joined the national strike.

Richard Tilden Smith, who had been involved in a bitter legal action against the



South Foreland © Dover Museum

Dover, St Margaret's and Martin Mill Light Railway Company in 1913, bought Tilmanstone Colliery from the Official Receiver in November 1926. At the same time an application was made by Tilmanstone (Kent) Collieries Ltd for the right to carry an aerial ropeway for a distance of 6½ miles (this was stated in the original application) from their colliery. This was to include a tunnel being cut through the cliffs to the Eastern Dockyard. The proposed course extended over land owned by 18 different personages one of which was Southern Railway. Although permission was granted, Southern Railway, and the Pearson, Dorman Long's Channel Steel Company appealed but this was overturned and works started.

At the same time, Tilden Smith leased 24 acres of land at Langdon Hole from the War Department for cement works that would utilise chalk from Dover's white cliffs. He also planned steel and brick works nearby - that was to be part of his plan for East Kent to become the *New Industrial Eden*. While on 17th March 1927, Southern Railway sought permission to carry coal on the Sea Front Railway and along the Eastern Arm of the Eastern

Dockyard to specially built giant bunkers. In 1927 Weetman Dickinson Pearson, 1st Viscount Cowdray, died. Under the 1896 terms of agreement between the War Department and Pearsons, the line from East Cliff to Langdon Hole had to be restored to its original condition. In May 1929, the War Department took legal action forcing Channel Steel Company to pay £1,300 compensation for the breach of covenant. The next month, the same Department sold the land to ... the Channel Steel Company!

Tilden Smith's, now 7½ mile, aerial ropeway from Tilmanstone colliery to the Eastern Arm was formerly opened on 14th February 1930. The ceremony was simple, as Tilden Smith had died suddenly in the House of Commons on 18th December 1929. The tunnels, through which the ropeway ran to the Eastern Arm, can still be seen.

Bunkers were built but in August 1928 a huge coal staithe, to be installed at the end of Eastern Arm, was commissioned by Southern Railway. It was built of ferro-concrete by the Yorkshire Hennebique Construction Company and held 5000 tons of coal. The Staithe was fitted with electronic discharging mechanism that enabled a vessel to be loaded with 500 tons of coal an hour and cost £22,000. At the same time, DHB withdrew its proposal to close the Western entrance and focused on increasing the number of coal sidings at the Eastern Dockyard. It was clear that this was to enable the export of coal from Pearson Dorman Long's Snowdown and Betteshanger collieries. The electronically operated coal staithe officially started operating on 19th April 1932. The first ship was Dover's steamer *Kenneth Hawksfield*, which was loaded with 2,450 tons coal from Snowdown Colliery.



Dover, Martin Mill Railway Funicular
© Norman Johnson

It was suggested that a rail link would be built through a tunnel from the Eastern Arm to join the Deal railway line at Kearsney, until such time the Sea Front railway was to be used. It was anticipated that the railway would be in use 14 hours a day and would carry 800,000 tons of coal a year together with scrap iron and oil for refuelling ships. The coal was transported on the Sea Front Railway.

The first train ran from Snowdown Colliery at 09.00 and in the next 23 hours, 18 trainloads of coal was carried on the Sea Front Railway line choking its whole course with dust. 17,000 Dovorians signed a petition that was sent to the House of Lords. Parliament restricted the use of the Railway to carrying a maximum of 500,000 tons of coal a year and only during day light. In 1933, Parliament approved a DHB Bill for a 1.75 mile railway line from the Kearsney junction, on the Deal line,

through a tunnel to the Eastern dockyard. Although this would have obviated the need of the Sea Front Railway to carry coal, with the death of Sir William Crundall, the Chairman of DHB, in 1934, the scheme was abandoned as too expensive.

On 1st April 1934, Dover Borough municipal boundaries were extended, bringing in to the Borough, Eastern Dockyard and Arm but the cliffs overlooking the area remained part of the Rural District. That same year, the council resurrected the idea of finishing the Cliff Road to St Margaret's utilising the earlier Light Railway Company's permit. This had been renewed every year and was given added impetus in 1937 when, due to war preparations and the shortage of scrap iron, the remaining track of what had once been the Pearsons line was lifted.

Following the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945), the War Office instigated the building of the Martin Mill Military Railway, operated and manned by the Royal Engineers and using diesel locomotives. The line followed the original Pearsons route from Martin Mill to a point called RDF Junction, about 900 feet (275 metres) past the then Dover-Deal road bridge. Here it divided, with the 'main line' turning north-east to service the guns, Winnie and Pooh. Passing beneath Winnie's gun barrel it crossed the St Margaret's - Martin Mill Road to Pooh's position.

A second line, from the RDF Junction, went straight ahead for about half a mile, then in a north-east direction for another half a mile. This served the Wanstone and South Foreland Batteries. The battery close to the Dover Patrol Memorial Point at Leathercote Point was served by a branch line from Decoy Junction - this was named after a dummy Winnie, on the 'main line'.

St Margaret's at Cliffe Golf Club

*Founded in 1899 as a 9 hole course
with 40 members.*

By April 1901 there was a clubhouse Rose Bank close to the links where light lunches and refreshments served. In 1906 the course was extended to 18 holes and a new clubhouse was built for £1400. Furnishings, stock and for the extra nine holes the cost was about £400. In 1914 the membership was 120 gentlemen and 80 ladies.

Card of the course

Hole	Name	Yards	Par
1	Ditch	325	4
2	Chalk Pit	450	4
3	Road	295	4
4	New	297	4
5	Corner	577	5
6	Warren	215	3
7	Tree	312	4
8	Pond	332	4
9	Punch Bowl	154	3
10	Long	485	5
11	Swingate	215	3
12	Hedge	501	5
13	Short	115	3
14	Farm	268	4
15	Cottage	387	4
16	Valley	323	4
17	Majuba	263	4
18	Home	242	3

<i>Outward 9 holes</i>	<i>2957</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Inward 9 holes</i>	<i>2799</i>	<i>35</i>

Course total was 5756 yards with a par score of 70. In 1923 there were 200 members. In the mid-1930s the par score changed to 71 but by 1938 it reverted to 70 and the club had about 250 members. 1939 was the final year of the clubs existence.

Editor

Winnie and *Pooh* were two 14 inch ex-naval guns manned by the Royal Marines and were capable of firing their missiles across the 21 mile wide Dover Strait to France. *Winnie* was installed during the Battle of Britain, in 1940 on St Margaret's golf links and was soon after joined by *Pooh*, located along the Kingsdown Road.

In August 1942 *Jane* and *Clem*, two 15 inch guns, came into operation overlooking Fan Bay Battery, an emergency battery with three six inch guns. *Jane* was originally designed for HMS *Repulse* and named after a Daily Mirror cartoon character. *Clem* was said to be named after the Labour leader Clement Attlee (1883-1967) or Winston Churchill's (1874-1965) wife Clementine (1885-1977)! These were wire wound guns made of a composite of steel and steel wire. The construction was introduced in the 1890's to deal with the increased pressures in the barrel caused by the use of the then new propellant - cordite. Radar was installed and linked with the guns that proved successful.

There were also three 13.5 inch calibre railway guns manned by Royal Marines and called *Gladiator*, *Piecemaker* and *Scenesifter*. During periods of inaction, these guns were normally hidden in the Guston tunnel but sometimes in tunnels at Shepherdswell and Martin Mill.

The Battery at South Foreland was equipped with four 9.2 inch guns, while near the Dover Patrol Memorial was the *Bruce* gun an experimental, hypervelocity gun built by Vickers and weighing 86 tons. The barrel was 60 feet long and could fire a shell weighing 256lbs over a distance of 100,000 yards - 57 miles. However, it was never fired in anger due to the enormous pressure affecting the shell fuses causing some to explode prematurely in mid-flight. All the real guns were hidden under

camouflage netting, while dummy ones were partially concealed on the cliff top site, which accounts for the reason why the cliff top is pitted with craters.

By late 1944, the operational use of the Martin Mill Military Railway was declining, only being used to move stores and equipment. Following the end of hostilities, the Light Railway Company resumed management and some of the track was sold for export to Tanganyika as part of the ill-fated Groundnut Scheme



Above: Line of the Dover Martin Railway today
Below: Martin Mill line track bed looking towards the Castle. Photos © Alan Sencicle



(1947-1951). However, beyond that and seeking repeated extensions, nothing else happened and in 1952, the company officially ceased trading.

By that time, the route across the cliffs had become a favourite walk, but in the spring of 1954, due the Cold War, the military began erecting a 5 foot chestnut fence on either side of what had been the 6 foot wide track. Vigorous protests were made and the military agreed to remove the fence from the seaward side except where it enclosed military installations. Three years later the Big Guns - *Jane, Clem, Winnie* and *Pooh* were dismantled and uprooted from their reinforced concrete emplacements. The smaller guns were also removed.

About 200 acres of land, which had been commandeered by the military between

Dover and St Margaret's, was de-requisitioned following the stand-down of Coastal Artillery in 1956. Much of the remaining railway track was lifted although the rails and bridges at the Martin Mill end were still in situ in 1960. At that time, the Ministry of Transport was considering using the track for a motorway approach to the Eastern Docks.

Finally, during the post-war period, Marine Parade was widened and the Sea Front Railway safety fence was removed. In order to tell tourists to remove their parked cars off the track, a man with a red flag walked in front of the trains! Robert Eade, Dover's Mayor in 1961, was one. By that time freight traffic using the service was declining and the last train - a diesel locomotive pulling three wagons, ran on the 31 December 1964. The lines were eventually covered with tarmac.

il Rustico

No 4 Bench Street
Dover, Kent CT16 1JH

Tel: 01304 211110

www.ilrusticorestaurant.org.uk

***Traditional Italian Restaurant
And Pizzeria***

Take-Away Menu Available

Opening Hours 12 - 2pm and 6pm - 10pm