The Gateway Flats

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Have you ever wondered what pre-war Dover looked like in the area now covered by the Gateway flats? Where would you locate the Gateway on the 1937 photograph of pre-war Dover? Today so many roads around the Gateway have retained their original names but are in different positions and this can cause some confusion. There are very few pre-war buildings left in the area to help; however, there are some clues. The following are more or less unchanged: Camden Crescent, though more than half was destroyed during the War. Granville Gardens, except all the buildings including the bandstand have gone. New Bridge Street. Marine Parade, although thankfully the railway line on the promenade side has gone. Wellesley Road. Douro Place. Woolcomber Street, though today it is wider in parts.

On the site of the new hotel in Marine Parade to the east of Douro Place was, until recently, Marine Court. There were similar buildings to Marine Court all the way from Douro Place to Wellesley Road.

The public house on the corner of the pre-war Townwall Street and Mill Lane was the Britannia. The present short service road is the original line of Townwall Street, which was not much wider and went only as far as Fector Place, until recently an extension of Russell Street and now part of the St. James development. The pre-war Townwall Street crossed over the present Russell Street into Clarence Street, sometimes shown on street maps as Townwall Lane, and ran approximately behind the present BP service station to Woolcomber Street.

Where does the Gateway fit into all this? I think that the straight block is built on the seaward building line of what was Liverpool Street. Using this as a datum point, you can get some idea of where the rest of the flats are situated on the pre-war map. Pre-war there were two open grass areas, named Guilford Lawn and Clarence Lawn, which ran from Marine Parade through to Liverpool Street. Guilford Lawn would have been approximately where the present sunken garden is in Marine Gardens in the centre of the main block and Clarence Lawn would have been further east. Pre-war Woolcomber Street continued across Liverpool Street to Marine Parade, but was called Marine Place. The seaward end of Marine Place was more or less where the present sunken garden is situated in front of the Gateway crescent. The Captain Webb Memorial was unveiled in June 1910 on the Clarence Lawn. The Rolls Memorial was unveiled in April 1912 on the Guilford Lawn. It is good that in recent years they are now back approximately where they were first situated. Because the Burlington Hotel was the highest building near the sea front with the open Clarence Lawn in front, it was used as a sighting mark by the German cross Channel gunners during World War II.

Regarding the building of the Gateway, below are notes made by David Bevan in 1997 who was Borough Engineer when the flats were planned and built. The planning and construction of 221 flats now known as the Gateway covers a period of about 7

years from 1953 to 1960.

1953: In 1953 some 6.5 acres of war-damaged buildings, mainly houses, were demolished to clear the site for redevelopment. All the buildings had been damaged or destroyed by shell-fire and bombing. The site was acquired by Dover Corporation by Compulsory Purchase Order made pursuant to the Town and Country Planning Acts of 1944 and 1947.

Preparations were made for an architects' competition. The general conditions and information instructions to competing architects, with the schedule of requirements, were drawn up by Arthur Kenyon, the assessor for the competition appointed by the Corporation, James Johnson, Town Clerk and David Bevan, the Borough Engineer. The competitors were advised that the site afforded 'a unique opportunity for a fine, dignified, architectural treatment.'

The design selected by the Corporation would require the approval of Kent County Council under the Town and Country Planning Act, 1947 and also of the Ministry of Housing and Local Government under the Housing Acts.

1936 and 1942: The conditions for the competition provided for premiums to be awarded to each of the first 6 submissions placed by the assessor: 1st design - 1000 guineas, 2nd 500 guineas, 3rd 250 guineas, 4th 150 guineas, 5th 75 guineas and 6th 50 guineas. Designs were required by 10 September 1953 and 144 designs were submitted. The winners were Dalgleish and Pullen with their design for 301 flats of which only 23 would not have a sea view. All the designs were put on public display for one week in October 1953 and a model of the winning scheme was prepared.

1954 and 1955: Objections were raised about the height of the curved block of flats at the eastern end and after discussions with the assessor, the Borough Engineer, the Consulting Architect of KCC, the number of flats was reduced from 301 to 283 by reduction of the height of the curved block. An outline planning application was made to KCC based on the amended design. The Borough Engineer's recommendation that Messrs. White and Gummersall be appointed as Consulting Engineers was agreed.

1956: At a meeting on 10 January the architects and consulting engineers were instructed to proceed with detailed plans with the intention of issuing invitations to tender by the end of June 1956. The Borough Council agreed to invite tenders from a selected list of 12 contractors in view of the size of the scheme and 12 tenders were submitted. The lowest tender, £1,044,613, was submitted by Rush and Tomkins Ltd.

It was in 1956 that pronouncements by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on the economic policy of the government caused the Borough Council to suspend all activities on the scheme pending the outcome of discussions with the Ministry of Housing and Local Government regarding the application for a loan. There was a move by 2 councillors to abandon the scheme, but it was finally agreed by a small majority that, subject to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government sanctioning a loan, the tender of Rush and Tomkins for 221 flats should be accepted.

1957: The revised estimated tender figure for submission to the Ministry was agreed at £872,958 for 221 flats. The Borough Treasurer reported that the total estimated cost of the scheme was £948,558. The Borough Engineer was authorised to issue

instructions to commence the works.

1958 and 1959: It was decided to name the flats The Gateway. Construction started and the architect, Mr Pullen, gave progress reports to the Borough Council during 1958 and 1959. Grey coloured bricks were used to comply with the requirement that the large mass of this building should not intrude unduly on the general view of the castle situated behind and above the Gateway. A sub-committee was appointed to agree the applications received for leases and the first 64 were agreed during 1958. The rents varied between £169 and £275 to commence in November and December. Leases were granted as groups of blocks of flats were completed.

1960: The Borough Treasurer reported that the charge to the General Rate Fund, after deducting subsidies received etc. would amount to £7,573 per annum. The final list of tenancies granted was approved in January. In February the Borough Engineer's proposed design for the layout of the gardens fronting the flats was agreed, as was his proposal for a mosaic to be provided at the western end of the gardens on the corner of Wellesley Road. The design adopted for the area between the flats and Marine Parade was based on the following concepts: to landscape the area to provide open space and an appropriate setting fronting this multi-storey building; to encourage only limited use of this area by the general public to avoid unwelcome intrusion into the privacy of the flat tenants; to provide some seated areas sheltered from the wind.

I have been unable to find any reference to the date of completion of this project but I assume it was toward the end of 1960.

1961: An arbitration case started in 1961 between the Borough Council and the Contractors regarding some of the work in the flats. It was not settled, in favour of the Borough Council, until July 1964.

During the immediate post-war years, until about 1956, there was very little redevelopment taking place on the many war-damaged areas of the Borough, other than the provision of both temporary and permanent houses, mainly on the Buckland Estate. The building of the Gateway flats seems to have triggered a start on other much-needed reconstruction in the town.

NB Written by David Atwood in March 2001, the text has been edited where necessary to reflect changes since that date.

The Gateway site post war cleared of the damaged properties

PS An unplanned feature of the development occurred when green glazed tiles failed to arrive and, to avoid delay, the site engineer used instead a large number of dark green gin bottles obtained from Lukey's the Bench Street wine merchant. They can still be seen, bottoms protruding and spaced at intervals, on the Townwall Street side of the building – see if you can spot them!