

Farthingloe – The Historic Valley of Legends and Outstanding Natural Beauty

Part II

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Following the outbreak of World War II (1939-1945), the number of military personnel in Dover increased significantly and defences were strengthened. Initially, it was hoped that Allied forces on the Continent would deter a German advance west to the Channel ports and therefore attack from the air was seen as a greater risk. Anti-aircraft batteries were built along the cliffs, including Round Down, in groups of four or more and directed from their own command post. Following the German invasion of Norway in April 1940, anti-invasion measures were increased and the arrival of the German forces on the Channel coast followed by the Dunkirk evacuation led to an expected invasion and pillboxes were erected.

Along the coast, barbed wire and guns commanded every likely line of approach and Round Down Cliff was heavily defended. By 1941, the batteries were equipped with radar for target-detection and gun-laying and although most were later destroyed,

remnants can still be seen. In the valley, troops trained in the art of mechanised warfare and carried out manoeuvres in readiness for the day when the enemy should come. Air photographs following the Battle of Britain (10 July-21 October 1940) show both Round Down cliff and Farthingloe valley to be heavily and extensively cratered from the bombs and shells. In 1944, the batteries were incorporated as part of trip line batteries along the Kentish coast to counter the V flying bomb offensive. Locals, however, still lived in the valley and the town was subject to both bombing and shelling until the end of September 1944.

Before War was declared, the vulnerability of Britain being an island nation would lead to food shortages and women for the Land Army were recruited from June 1939. Administered by the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries the figurehead was former Women's Suffrage movement stalwart, (Gertrude) Trudie the Baroness Denham (1884-1954). Initially, the Army was made up



WWI Gun Emplacement Round Down Cliff
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Little Farthingloe Farm Womens Land Army Museum
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of volunteers but as the war progressed conscription was introduced. Coming from all walks of life, the women had to be single and if they did marry they were obliged to leave.

The Women's duty was to aid the farmer for which they received low pay, worked long and very hard hours. Their duties included tending poultry and animals, digging, sowing, hoeing, weeding, driving farm machinery, threshing and sacking. To give more daylight in the evening double summertime was introduced when clocks were put forward by two hours. The Women's Land Army was finally disbanded on 21 October 1949 and the only museum in the country dedicated solely to them is at Little Farthingloe Farm. The exhibition consists of personal letters from ex-Women's Land Army girls, authentic uniforms and information and is well worth a visit.

Following the War, the north side of the valley, including Little Farthingloe farm, was returned to the Church Commissioners. The south side including Great Farthingloe farm remained in the hands of the War Department. Folkestone Road (A259) through Farthingloe was the less used of the two main roads out of Dover to London, the more popular was the A2, via Canterbury. In order to improve the A259 the Ministry of Transport sanctioned modern street lighting along the road as far as the boundary with Folkestone that was, by this time, on the west side of Capel.

However, the inadequacy of both trunk roads became evident in January 1955 during particularly heavy winter snow. The A2 was already blocked so all traffic was using the A259 when a four ton lorry overturned at Farthingloe blocking the only access and egress to Dover town and port. Two years later, in order to alleviate such problems, the road through Farthingloe was

widened and an application was made to the council for planning permission to build a petrol station next to the Plough Inn. However, this was refused.

In April 1955, the War Department proposed to erect new gun practice ranges on the Round Down Cliff side of Great Farthingloe farm. There had been ranges along the south side of the valley and cliff top since the beginning of the War. The new ranges, they said, would be for the firing of rocket-propelled weapons and this caused public outrage. Albeit, the council were obliged to accept the proposal but did make stipulations. These included reassurances that live ammunition would not be left on the ranges, a baffle wall to keep down noise and they forbid army vehicles accessing the ranges by the Old Folkestone Road through the Aycliffe housing estate.

The Church Commissioners put Little Farthingloe Farm to auction in 1963 when it was stated that the 174 acre farm, had a good main residence, farm buildings and out buildings. At the time the tenants of Great Farthingloe farm was the Miller family who were great supporters of the Dover carnival and each year would enter a float with a thatched roof. When Peter Miller's father died, his mother moved to the Gateway and Peter took over the running of the farm. However, on 4 December 1975 he died in tragic circumstances.

His close friend, Barry Sheppard, takes up the story. 'While Peter's wife was in hospital after giving birth to their first child, two soldiers from Folkestone who had been out for the night in Dover were walking back to barracks. When they reached Farthingloe, they were very cold and decided to seek refuge. They entered the cellar of the house, in which was stored straw. They lit a fire for warmth but it got out of hand. Peter's bedroom was above and became filled with

smoke. He and his faithful sheepdog died.' The soldiers were from the 1st Royal Green Jackets, based at Shorncliffe, Folkestone. Rifleman Christopher Radmore age 23, a married man with two children, also died as a result of the fire. Great Farthingloe farmhouse was not badly damaged.

In 1979, National Trust purchased part of the 67-acre Great Farthingloe farm from the Ministry of Defence for £25,000. This included the top of Round Down Cliff. They also tried to purchase the beach below that was, by this time, owned by British Railways, Southern Region. Although they were not interested in selling it, as they needed to retain access to the railway lines, an arrangement was made with the National Trust to look after it. Great Farthingloe farm remained a tenancy of the Ministry of Defence.

The following year, 1980, the Saxon Shore Way long-distance footpath opened. Starting at Gravesend, Kent, it follows the Southeast coast as it was in 3rd century AD when the Romans occupied Britain against marauding Saxons. The path is 163 miles (262 km) in length and finishes at Hastings, Sussex. At Farthingloe, the path runs along Round Down Cliff top having come from the Western Heights. Farthingloe, by this time, had become a tourist destination and for years there had been an accommodating caravan park next to the Plough Inn. In 1987, the pub owners, Beefeaters, applied for planning permission to build a 50 two-bed roomed Travel Lodge but this was refused. They applied again, two years later, having modified their plans to 32 bedrooms and permission was given. In 1995, they successfully applied to erect a second block of 32 bedrooms and in 2007, the pub underwent a major refurbishment. In the summer of 1990, a farm trail opened at Little Farthingloe farm that gave visitors and locals the chance to see a working farm.

Prior to building the Channel Tunnel, Eurotunnel had looked for a site for its construction workers camp. They did not get their ideal location at Aycliffe but accepted 36 acres east of Great Farthingloe farm. Eurotunnel then made a bid to buy the land but the Ministry of Defence, who still owned it, declined. Dover District Council (DDC), were delighted at the decision over the location of the camp and hoped that the 'after use' of the site would be tourist related. The Chamber of Commerce also gave its backing, but made it clear that they saw the 'after-use' as an industrial/ business park.

Over the latter there was major opposition, not only from those who lived in the in the Valley but from Dover folk, Kent Trust for Nature Conservation and the Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE). The site under consideration was in an Area of Natural Beauty (AONB) and a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and therefore should be protected. Following discussions, the 'after use' of the site was dropped and temporary planning permission was given for a Channel Tunnel workers camp.

Archaeological work was undertaken at the site in advance of the camp being built but nothing of interest was reported. The Tunnel-related work involved the terracing of land up the slope and the construction of an access track to the Channel Tunnel workings at Aycliffe. The workers camp, which formally opened in 1988, contained some 1,600 rooms, in 38-bedroom blocks, cost Eurotunnel £9million and was nicknamed Stalag 15. There was a chapel dedicated to St Patrick in the 18th century thatched barn, spacious bars and a subsidised canteen.

Workers, earning on average £1,000 a week, paid £45 for this accommodation and the wartime Hougham battery complex was used for fire safety training. Ventilation



Farthingloe Workers Camp Courtesy of Dover Museum

shafts were built for the tunnel at the base of the cliffs and the spoil was deposited mainly along the foot of Round Down Cliff. Tunnelling was completed in 1991 and by 1993 the camp was empty. The contents were put for auction and each 38-bedroom block was sold for £16,000.

During this time, consideration was being given for the new A20 road to Dover's Eastern Dock. Several routes were under discussion and there was a public inquiry in spring 1988. Nonetheless, the route chosen was the one preferred by the Department of Transport and stated by DDC Chief Executive John Moir, to the House of Lord Select Committee on 18 March 1987 (Hansard pp343-345), as the council's preferred route. This is the route we see today going across the west of Farthingloe Valley, then along the cliffs separating Farthingloe from Round Down Cliff and Aycliffe from Shakespeare Cliff, then into Dover close to Western Docks. From there it separates the town from the seafront before finishing at Eastern Docks. Started in 1989 and completed in 1993 it cost £24million to build. It has since been stated that this was not DDC's preferred route, that they wanted the link to the M20 via an improved A2 and A249.

Because of the new A20, the first major modification to Dover's sewerage system took place in 1994. The original main outfall near Western Docks was replaced with a 1,500mm diameter concrete pipe. At about the same time a well-landscaped, virtually automatic water treatment plant was built on Broomfield Bank, on the north side of the Farthingloe Valley. This was completed in 1999 at the same time as the pumping station in Elizabeth Street was upgraded to take the town's wastewater to Broomfield Park for treatment. Another change, due to the new A20, Folkestone Road was redesignated as B2011. As it was no longer a trunk road many of the former hotels and guest houses were turned into one-bedroom flats – which put an unforeseen strain on the new sewerage system!

With tourism in mind, a consortium of DDC, KCC, Eurotunnel, Kent Trust for Nature Conservation, Countryside Commission, Shepway District Council and the National Conservancy Council launched the White Cliffs Countryside Project in December 1989. Run by full time staff and volunteers, the initial aim was to attract more visitors to the area as well as protecting and managing areas directly affected by the Channel Tunnel. The Project, led by Dr Kirk Alexander, was scheduled to last three years

but was so successful that it became permanent and the name was changed to White Cliffs Countryside Partnership (WCCP). The headquarters are at the Council Offices, Whitfield.

In 1998, the WCCP took over the management of Samphire Hoe, at the foot of Round Down Cliff, the 75 acres of newly created land from the Channel Tunnel spoil. Samphire, after which the Hoe is named, is a succulent plant that grows in crevices on the cliff face and used to be pickled as a delicacy. The samphire gatherers, mentioned earlier, drove iron bars into the top of the cliff, attaching a rope that they climbed down to gather the plant. They were immortalised by William Shakespeare (1564-1616) in the tragedy, King Lear (Scene 6 Act 4):

*'There is a cliff, whose high and bandy head
Looks fearfully in the confined deep...
Show scarce so gross as beetles, halfway down
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful
trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice...'*

Even though temporary planning permission had been given for the Channel Tunnel Workers camp before it was removed, Eurotunnel Developments Ltd applied for a further two-year extension to the temporary planning permission. By this time, it would appear that they owned the site on which they wanted to develop a high quality low-density business park. It was envisaged that the business park would provide 19,510 metres of office space and research accommodation and that the site would be landscaped to include a lake. The thatched barn was to be turned into a restaurant and belts of woodland were to be established. Actively supported by Dover's Chamber of Commerce, outline planning permission was given and the designation of the site was

changed from temporary to permanent. Renamed Farthingloe Technology Village, hard core was laid at the entrance to the site.

Nothing more happened until 2000 when a planning application was made by Eurotunnel Developments Ltd for a temporary call centre at the Technology Village. Thereafter, the holding appears to have been sold and various planning applications have been submitted all of which, it would seem, have been refused or withdrawn. In March 1998, Old Park was formally bought by Dover Harbour Board (DHB) with the stated intention of creating a Lorry Park and Port Zone. The lorry park was desperately needed to ease congestion to Eastern Docks but it never materialised to any extent on that site. Then, in November 2005, DHB announced that they were going to build a £30million lorry park off the A20. Several sites were being considered all of which were met with opposition from environmental campaigners as they were designated AONB sites.

By this time much of the south side of Farthingloe valley was either in the hands of /or being considered by China Gateway International (CGI) – a development company. They had divided the south side of the Valley into four plots designated A to D. Plot C was at the west end and, they stated, was, 'subject, in part, to contractual arrangements that have been concluded with the Dover Harbour Board. This comprises an area of 135.94 acres and the Company has granted the Dover Harbour Board the option to acquire between 50 and 70 acres at a price of not less than £25,000 per acre which it proposes to use for the purpose of providing a buffer zone/marshalling area for the Port of Dover.'

CGI went on to say that the lorry park was to alleviate traffic congestion at peak times and that, 'the Dover Harbour Board will be

obliged as a condition of the sale to provide a new entrance and exit from the land purchased onto the A20.' According to Bob Goldfield, former Chief Executive of DHB, negotiations with CGI were terminated by DHB about 2008 when it was evident that DHB would not get planning permission for the proposed lorry park.

In 2012, CGI sought planning permission for a housing development around Great Farthingloe farm together with developments on Western Heights. This was outside DDC's Core Strategy, adopted in 2010, and neither sites were listed in the supporting Strategic Housing Land Allocations Assessment. In the part of the planning application applicable to Farthingloe, CGI proposed to build 521 residential units, a 90-apartment retirement block and the conversion of the Great Farthingloe farm and thatched barn to pub/restaurant plus the conversion of the stable block to a retail shop. Although for many environmental and historic reasons, this was seen as detrimental to Dover, outline planning permission was given. For this DDC could receive monies on account of the New Homes Bonus fund – this is a levy on money raised from the development that can be spent on the District.

At the time of writing, Farthingloe remains one of the most historic, beautiful and enchanting areas close to Dover's town centre, but for how long?

The story above was first posted on 29 November 2014 since then:

December 2015: The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) tried to gain a Judicial Review against the Farthingloe development proposals pointing out that it is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and as such protected by law. However, Dover District Council (DDC) encouraged by,

amongst others, the local Member of Parliament – Charles Elphicke, spent £75,000 of council taxpayers' money to fight CPRE and won. As CPRE are a registered charity, they are obliged to pay £10,000 towards these costs. Further, the ruling has put in jeopardy AONB protected sites throughout the country.

This is the second precedent the DDC Planning Committee has set, not long ago they allowed a carwash to exist in close proximity to the 18th century Grade II* Listed Castle Hill House. One councillor was reported as saying that he voted for the carwash, as he could not hear it when he was in the local pub!

September 2016: Following a second attempt to gain a Judicial Review on the proposed Farthingloe Development the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) were successful in saving the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty from developers.

Lord Justice Laws and Lord Justice Simon at the Court of Appeal quashed the planning application to build 521 homes and a 90 apartment retirement village. They said that Dover District Council's planning committee failed to give legally adequate reasons for granting permission, contrary to an officers' recommendation which had made 'trenchant criticisms' of the density, layout and design of the proposed development.

They went on to say that the Council planning officers had made huge efforts to mitigate the harm while ensuring the scheme was still financially viable. They recommended a reduction in the number of homes to 375 and changes to the density and design to protect the most sensitive part of the landscape. This was ignored by both the developer, China Gateway, and the planning committee!