

OCTOBER MEETING

— Second Speaker —

The Dover Tram System

A talk by Brian Flood — Reported by Alan Lee

Brian opened by stating "Leeds first, Dover second, the rest nowhere". He was quoting the "Railway World" journal of 1898 when it recommended that "London should ask the Dover Council for advice", about building a modern tram system. Dover's first public transport tram service opened in 1897 and the overhead powered system was greatly admired

Dover Corporation had a strong financial interest in allowing Dorvorian a cheap method of travel to work. The trams were seen as key to the harbour expansion, its growing workforce and to Dover's growth and prosperity. With wages of £1 a week the 4d bus fare from Buckland to the Pier was expensive. The initial tram fare of only 1d brought daily transport within the reach of most people for the first time. In July 1890 the first designated omnibus stops appeared at the Bull in Buckland, the Flying Horse in King St, Market Place and the Town Station.

The Park St power station, built in 1895, was Dover's first public electricity supply. Councillors G Fry (Chairman of the London St Tramway Co.) and Sir William Crundall (Chairman of the Dover Electricity Co.) pushed to set up an electric tram system. (No conflict of interest then!). Opposition came from the Dover Gas Co. on the grounds of gas being cheaper. January 1896 J Bavington-Jones, editor of the Dover Express, read a paper to the influential Dover Working Men's Institute who voted unanimously in support of overhead electric powered trams. The Chairman that evening was one T. Sutton. In November

1896 the council approved the plans. The council, £250,000 in debt, close to the maximum allowed, borrowed a further £28,000 to fund the works but throughout its life the system was always underfunded. Compared to other boroughs Dover trams paid over the odds for electricity, particularly after the council took over the power station in 1902.

The system consisted of two connected, but separately run lines. One ran from the depot at Buckland to Clarence Place in the Pier District. Soon to terminate at Strond St. The second from Worthington St to the depot at Maxton, next to the Orange Tree pub, now a private house. By 1905 the River line was completed. Plans to continue to Alkham and to create a line from New Bridge via East Cliff to St. Margaret's and on to the main line at Martin Mill both fell through, owing to a lack of finance.

The first 10 tram cars arrived in 1897, the Buckland depot being unfinished their final assembly took place in a nearby field. During its existence Dover used 45 trams.



River to Pier Tram Car 22
at Bethel Corner, Snargate Street Dover 1936

Before 1926 all 27 were purchased new and open top. After 1926, with money in short supply, cheaper second-hand trams were bought from; Darlington (2), West Hartlepool (5) and Birmingham (11).

On 6th Sept 1897 Mayor Henry Baker drove tram No. 3 from the Town Hall to Buckland then down to the Harbour Station. On 1st Dec the first test run by car 7 on Folkestone Rd. Services commenced at the end of the month. The first year saw 1,794,905 passengers carried and by 1936 this had grown to 4,752,309. On the Maxton line trams bedecked with streamers would frequently carry wedding parties to church.

On a darker note the press reported accidents that had caused injuries or death. In 1902 in Folkestone Rd, 3 year old Catherine West ran in front of a tram and was killed. In 1917 at Crabble Hill the worst tram accident in British history occurred when 11 died and 61 people were injured. A second accident there in 1923 saw a tram, derail and hit another tram with no seriously injures. In 1926 James Driscoll coming from the Engineer pub was killed crossing the Folkestone Rd. In 1929, at the junction of Biggin St and Worthington St a lorry driver ignored the point duty policeman's signals, drove through the tram queue waiting to board and 17 people were injured. The driver was fined 17/- and banned from driving for 12 months. Often

newspapers had reports of drunken male and female passengers assaulting staff or avoiding the 1d or 2d fares. In February, 1933 at the Pier Terminus, the crew had alighted and the tram, started by children, moved off picking up speed. Postman Bradish, who was on-board managed to stop it before it ran into a stationary tram at the Strond Street loop. One child and a woman passenger fell off and received minor injuries.

After a town poll in 1911 Sunday services were introduced. In 1904 led by the Sabbatarian party the poll had turned this proposal down. In 1928 a tram postal service was introduced on the 8.30pm River line tram. Letters could handed to the conductor at any stop to be delivered to the main post office near the Worthington Street stop.

Following a public poll in 1936 motor buses were introduced, run by the East Kent Road Car Company they would replace the trams. It was agreed that the council would receive three quarters of the profit. The last tram ran on 31st Dec 1936 driven by the Mayor under supervision of driver Percy Sutton. It arrived at the Maxton depot at 11.30pm. An awaiting East Kent bus took the Mayor and dignitaries back to the town hall. 80 years later a brass locking handle from that last journey, taken by Percy Sutton, was donated to Dover Transport Museum by his family. No trams survived, many being dismantled and sold for scrap and parts. The remaining fleet of open top trams was driven to River and burned.



*Biggin Street Bus and Tram Stop
at Junction of Worthington Street*

The only remaining memory of the Maxton line is the passenger shelter at the junction of Folkestone Rd and Elms Vale Rd. The last 50 yards of track, still in granite setts, survive in the car park of De Bradelei Wharf, once Northampton St. A sad end to the era of Dover Trams.