

1921 Parallel Times?

Terry Sutton

AS WE LOOK FORWARD WITH CONFIDENCE TO THE YEAR 2021, TERRY SUTTON LOOKS BACK ONE HUNDRED YEARS TO DOVER, IN TURMOIL, IN 1921

One hundred years ago, in 1921, Dover in turmoil was facing a slump with increasing unemployment, the threat of anger in the streets, and, until that December, the danger of civil war in Ireland to where Dover-based troops were sent.

To add to the town's problems there were severe epidemics of scarlet fever and diphtheria.

Dover's population continued to dwindle, down to 39,985 as industry suffered, but the number of unemployed in the town increased to more than 1,400. There was a fear of the spread of Communism throughout the nation.

Dover Town Council, trying the devise schemes to create employment, was facing financial pressures, with the rates higher than they had ever been. One of the job-creation ventures was the building of about 200 houses on Buckland Estate. Some other schemes were delayed over the issue of who, the State or local ratepayers, should meet the cost.

This was at a time when, nationally, there were political moves on the right wing of the Conservative Party to slash government expenditure. Newspaper owner Lord Rothermere founded an Anti-Waste party, demanding a cut in income tax.

A general election in Dover resulted in the Anti-Waste candidate, Colonel Sir Thomas

Polson, defeating the Hon. J. J. Astor (Conservative-Coalition) by 13,917 votes to 10,817 votes. Polson, supported in 1921 by the dodgy Horatio Bottomley, was defeated by Astor in another election the following year. The Dover Express reported that in November 1921 a Receiving Order was made against Sir Thomas Polson as a partner in a firm of leather merchants. By this time Horatio Bottomley was on his way to jail for massive fraud.

Following the war years of 1914-18, from which Dover and the nation was still recovering, there were ambitious expectations that East Kent would enjoy expansion through the increasing number of coal mines being opened, resulting in a big increase in Kent coal exports from Dover. But miners' strikes caused local coal shortages and in Dover street lighting was restricted, while Dover's electrical tram system was affected with no services on Sundays.

The wave of strikes in the mines resulted in a drop in the availability of Kent coal to be exported. American coal exporters were not slow to take advantage of winning coal markets in the UK and, in a few months, 200,000 tons of US coal was imported through Dover docks.

In September 1921 there was a packed meeting of the unemployed in the Connaught Hall of the Town Hall, when there were many angry words about the lack of progress in job creation schemes. The Dover Express pointed out that although up to 200 houses were being built on Buckland Estate there was little demand to live there because of the high rental and rates costs.

At the port, where the naval authorities had given up using the harbour, a number of big warships remained to be broken up but, with a worldwide drop in the demand for steel, little demolition of ships was in progress.

When the miners' strike began, a brigade of British army infantry was hastily brought home from the occupied Rhine to be stationed in Dover, such was the fear of a Communist-led rebellion. But by the summer that danger appeared to have passed and the troops were sent to Ireland, where there was plenty of trouble and the imposition of martial law.

In December, a historic settlement was reached, Ireland was to receive

independence with 26 southern counties to become the Republic of Ireland while the other six counties in the north remained in the UK.

There was no definite progress in 1921 in the provision of a 1914-18 war memorial in Dover, but at St Margaret's in July, on top of the cliffs, the Dover Patrol memorial was unveiled by the Prince of Wales.

Another bright spot in 1921 was the glorious weather. It proved to be a magnificent summer, resulting in a big boost of visitors to south coast resorts, including Dover, despite a drought in some parts of the country.

The Dover Lathams

— Derek Leach —

Based upon a Dover Express article in the Joe Harman archive

The story of the Dover Lathams begins modestly with the arrival in Dover in 1664 of Samuel Latham from Lewes in Sussex. Nothing is known of why he settled in Dover or how he earned his living. Perhaps it was business connected with the sea, preparing the way for the first well known member of the family, John Latham, born about 1720.

John Latham developed a large business as a merchant, shipping agent and ship owner, becoming wealthy in the process. A freeman by birth (his father having acquired it) he was elected to the Common Council and a Jurat/Magistrate. John was also mayor in 1767, 1779 and 1788. During this period England was fighting France, Spain and America. John

helped organise the local volunteer militia and was involved in construction of four gun batteries each with 28 guns to protect the town and harbour: North's Battery, Guilford Battery, Amherst Battery and Townsend Battery.

Dover's first Paving Act in 1778 was during his mayoralty and as Mayor he was Chairman of the Paving Commissioners responsible for enforcing the Act, being responsible for streets, paths and passages, paving, cleaning, lighting and watching (policing). He was also appointed Commissioner of the Court of Requests in 1784 to enforce the recovery of small debts. Turnpike roads appeared during his mayoralties including the new road to Folkestone