

Dover 100 Years Ago: 1926

Patsy Mary Allan

On the dawn of the New Year of 1926, Friday the 1st of January, the residents of Dover, the "Dovorians" woke up with a sense of both anticipation and anxiety for the coming year. An industrial depression was prevailing throughout the country due to the hardships and the tough economic times endured after the Great War. But for some people it was time to reflect on the past with gratitude and move forward with renewal and a fresh start.

Dover was a bustling port town on the southeast coast of England, renowned for its iconic white cliffs but the aftermath of the First World War was still evident, with many buildings and infrastructure showing signs of wartime use and repair. The town having been a frontline military hub and fortress was slowly transitioning back to civilian life. Dover's harbour remained extremely busy with both commercial and passenger traffic, as ferries and cargo ships made regular crossings to France. The 1920s had seen an increase in cross-Channel passenger traffic after the introduction of luxury Continental Express boat trains from London to France.

Life in Dover during the previous years was shaped by both tradition and change. The town's military significance continued,

several battalions of Infantry were stationed here for the very first time. The 4th Battalion of the Queen's Royal Regiment had arrived in 1925, and the 2nd Battalion Worcestershire Regiment left in January 1926. The town awaited the arrival of the 2nd Battalion Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Regiment which was due to arrive in the middle of April. The 1st and 2nd Battalion the Buffs (East Kent Regiment) was already firmly established here.

The population of the town was around 40,000. Employment was mainly centred on the port with its associated connections like shipping, dock work, sail and rope making and the many maritime services needed. There were military connected jobs and many local industries like mills, (corn, paper, timber, and oil) brewing and mineral water factories. There were lots of jobs available for women too, such as shop-work, domestic service, seam-stressing, laundry work and countless typist and service positions. The picturesque seafront and the imposing Dover Castle were popular attractions, drawing visitors eager to experience the historic and strategic heart of England's gateway to Europe, which provided many jobs in the hotel trade.

The Eagle Hotel on London Road had a vacancy for an experienced general help, able to do a little plain cooking if required, for good wages. The Marquis of Granby wanted useful help immediately - cooking was essential - and a smart lad was required in the ice cream trade by Grilli's Dover. A bold advertisement in the local newspaper, the Dover Express and East Kent News printed on New Year's Day, incidentally, priced at 3 halfpence, announced Hookways Great Winter Clearance to be held the following week in their premises at 29 Biggin Street.



Biggin Street

Real Velour Winter Coats for sale at 15s, down from 5 guineas or perhaps a Paris Model in Mole Velour-trimmed Nutria Beaver offered at 30s.

Florence Igglesden at 79 Castle Street, was the place to go for a new hat, jumper, blouse, or skirt. Or perhaps pay a visit to A. Dewar's shop at 42 and 44 High Street; they had a full range of ladies' and maid's costumes, including Coat Frocks.

At Kearsney Motor Garage a brand new 7/5-h.p. 3-seater Citroen Cloverleaf could be yours for the modest sum of £145. If you could not afford a brand-new model then a second-hand car, a 1924 11/4-h.p. 4-seater Citroen was available for sale at £110, or a 1922 6-h.p. Rover Combination. Or for the average working-class man, a gent's bicycle, a bargain, was for sale at 27 Tower Hill for £3 with new tyres and tubes.

A.T. Blackman at 26 Castle Street was offering readers a new grate for their fireplace, Ground and Berlin Blacked, for 12s 6d.

The Annals of Dover and The Records of Dover written by John Bavington-Jones 1840-1922 who was the librarian to Dover Corporation and the Editor and proprietor of the Dover Express, could be purchased from all good book sellers or the Dover Express Office for 7s 6d each.

Henry Slade, the modern and antique furniture dealer at 7 Snargate Street, was selling Superior Manufactured Household Furniture at reasonable prices. A hide leather suite, very handsome, could be bought for £30, or a Rexine covered Chesterfield suite consisting of a settee and two lounge chairs, for sale at £15. An oak bedroom suite of the finest quality and best manufacture for £30 and to go with it perhaps a handsome brass double bedstead with box spring and wool and hair overlay for sale, 5 Guineas the lot.

There appeared to be ample accommodation in the town available for rent, either privately or through Estate Agents Messrs. Worsfold and Hayward, John Youden and Son or Flashman & Co. A ground floor flat on Godwyne Road with two bedrooms, a bathroom, sitting room and kitchen could be rented for £45 a year. Or a central, freehold house could be bought for the sum of £500. Help could be given for the purchase of a house by one of the many building societies that were operating, the Hastings Permanent Building Society for instance. Turnpenny Brothers Ltd. on 2, 3, 4 and 5 London Road and the High Street led the way with household removals, and their fully stocked showrooms of dining room furniture, drawing room furniture and bedroom suites were always on display.

At the Queen's Hall, Conan Doyle's stupendous story 'The Lost World' with Bessie Love, Lewis Stone, Wallace Beery, and Lloyd Hughes, was showing continuously each day. It was described as absolutely astounding. "Never before have you seen anything like it... a group of men and a woman trapped in a lost world where ape men roam, and animals the size of 15 elephants and gigantic flying reptiles still live." The Regent Picture House was showing Jack Hoxie in 'The Sign of the Cactus' and 'The Fighting Ranger' episode 13. The Wellington Cinema on Snargate Street was showing 'Eve's Lover' with an all-star cast and Betty Balfour in 'Squibs'.

The Lord Warden Hotel was advertising dancing every Saturday Evening from 8pm to 11.45pm. Dinner and Dance 8s 6d, Dance and Refreshment 5s 6d, a Double ticket, 10s. The Hostess was Miss Connie Long. The Hotel Phone Number ... Dover 413.

Easter Sunday fell on the 4th of April that year and it was joyfully declared in the Dover Express that it had been the finest Easter the

town had ever known. The weather was lovely and warm, a little hazy due to the fog in the channel but no rain. On Good Friday, the maximum temperature in the shade was 62 degrees, on the Saturday a warm 65, Sunday sunny with a gentle breeze 60 degrees and Easter Monday sunshine all day and a high of 63 degrees. There were large numbers of visitors to the town, and the sea front was thronged every day of the holiday. The band of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry performed, and the vocalists Miss Alice Naylor and Mr Austen Carnegie attracted large crowds to the pavilion. In addition, there were more than 3,000 people at the match at Crabble on Saturday between the Kent boys and the Yorkshire boys.

On April 21st, early dawn, a momentous event quietly unfolded at 17 Bruton Street in London, a large 18th century townhouse next to Berkeley Square in Mayfair. The Duke and Duchess of York welcomed their first child, Princess Elizabeth Alexandra Mary, into a world very different from the one she would one day help to shape. Born into the heart of a loving family and the happiness of a nation, the arrival of the princess brought joy and hope to an interwar Britain still finding its feet after the turmoil of the Great War.

The Dover Express and East Kent News of Friday 7th May announced, "The Duchess of York and her infant daughter are making entirely satisfactory progress." On the 28th May the same newspaper reported that the Duke and Duchess of York and their infant daughter would be staying for some time in Sandwich at the seaside home of Lady Astor and Viscount Astor from June the 9th. American born Nancy Astor was the MP for Plymouth, the first woman in British history to take a seat in Westminster. The famous house, 'Rest Harrow' was built for the Astors around 1910, on the exclusive Sandwich Bay estate as a summer retreat.

The country had been sliding further into economic depression since the end of the First World War. The import of cheap coal severely affected the local mining industry, forcing miners to work fewer hours and accept lower wages. A further price reduction in the cost of coal and a further cut in the miners' wages brought the miners out on strike.

A state of emergency was declared and the first and largest general strike in British history began on May the 3rd 1926 and lasted nine days. The railway and tram workers came out in sympathy, then the employees at Buckland paper mill, and the Packet Yard. Next, Palmers Coachbuilders joined the strike followed by most workers in other Dover industries. The country came to a standstill; the number of people on strike was estimated to be 1.75 million. The government relied heavily on volunteers to keep essential services running. In Dover, Cambridge University undergraduates were recruited to work at the docks and help keep some boat trains and mail services running.

The Dover Mayor during this dispute was William Henry East who had been elected to the post in 1925. He was extremely well known and respected in the town. During the Strike 500 local people answered his call for



*Cambridge University Students Dover Marine Station.
General Strikes May 1926*

volunteers to help man the electricity and gas works, the railway station, and the post office. He had moved to Dover in 1878 to take up the post of Headmaster at the Dover Art School which he successfully ran for 48 years. He lived with his wife Emma and their two daughters in the family home of East Lea at 108 Maison Dieu Road in Dover. Their son Captain Hubert James East of the 1st Battalion Yorks and Lancaster Regiment had been tragically killed in action near Ypres during the Great War, aged 30 years.

During the General Strike, Mayor William East had caught a cold which steadily worsened. His health was neglected in his quest to see his beloved town of Dover getting back to normal. Sadly, his health deteriorated and he died of pneumonia only months into his office on June the 2nd, he was 78 years old. The funeral of the late Mayor took place on Monday the 7th of June at St Marys where he had been a churchwarden for many years and the burial was at Charlton Cemetery. The shops in the town closed for business from 2pm until 3.30pm as a sign of respect. In October that year his widow Emma East was admitted as an Honorary Freeman of the Borough for her eminent services rendered in conjunction with her late husband during his time as Mayor.

Typical family meals of 1926 were hearty filling meals like stews, suet puddings, and roasts, which were heavily based on bread, potatoes, and cereals. Meat was relatively cheap, including game and rabbit. Liver, oxtail, and tongue were all consumed. Bones and carcasses were boiled to make soups and stews. Nothing went to waste, all the animal was used. Kentish local produce provided a variety of fresh, seasonable fruit, and vegetables such as onions, leeks, turnips, cabbage, peas, and beans. In summer strawberries, apples, cherries, gooseberries, and plums were enjoyed.

International Stores 'The Greatest Grocers in The World' were selling Sylvan Glen Butter for 1s 8d, Ceylondo Tea for 1s 10d, Mitre Margarine 5d for a half pound packet and freshly ground and roasted coffee from 1/10d. For fruit between seasons tinned was available from 10d a can. Knowles the Greengrocers, next to the Town Hall, was extremely popular for their fresh local produce and imported fruit on offer. Choice Denia oranges and lemons were available at 16 for 1s, choice Almeria grapes 5 and a half pence for a lb. English apples were considerably cheaper at 5lbs for 6d. Choice King Edward potatoes 7lb for 6d.

Traditional Kentish desserts were extremely popular and included Gypsy Tart, Canterbury Tart, and Folkestone Pudding Pie. Tea was a common drink, and locally brewed beer was commonly consumed. In 1926 Alfred Leney & Co., famous for their fine pale ales brewed at the Phoenix Brewery on Dolphin Lane, merged with Fremlin Brothers.

There were hundreds of public houses in Dover in 1926. They were an important and significant part of the community, they held gatherings, hosted business meetings, inquests were conducted in their private rooms, men met, chatted, relaxed, made deals, broke deals. Indeed, they were integral to the traditional life of the town. Respectable women rarely frequented a public house; they were still predominantly male dominated!! In the mid-twenties brewers began to offer improved facilities to make women feel more welcome and comfortable in their establishments, providing a separate room, a 'snug', improving hygiene and offering refreshments. On the 15th of January at the Dover Police Court, plans for the alterations to the Duke of Wellington on London Road were approved. They provided for moving the counter, so that access to the street could be obtained without passing through the bar. Plans to elongate the bar in the Granville on Limekiln Street were also approved.



Gertrude Ederle

There was huge excitement in the town when on August 6th, 1926, the first woman crossed the English Channel and did it in record breaking time. The American teenager Gertrude

Ederle, a 19-year-old from New York, crossed from the French Coast to England in 14 hours and 40 minutes, the 6th person to complete the crossing. She began the swim at 7am from Cape Gris Nez and after about an hour a strong southwest wind sprang up and made the sea rough. However, after 6 hours swimming, she was 10 miles off the French coast. Miss Ederle's tug the *Alsace*, which had a group of her friends onboard, encouraged her in her efforts. She made good progress and about 5pm she was roughly 7 miles south easterly off Dover and the wind was moderate and the sea fairly calm. Shortly before 8pm her tug was seen from the shore, and it was thought that she might land at St Margaret's Bay. However, the current carried her towards Kingsdown, and as she got nearer the shore residents and visitors built big bonfires on the beach to act as beacons. The crowd steadily increased to thousands and every man, woman and child became frantic in their excitement. At 9.45pm Gertrude Ederle walked out of the water wearing her distinctive pink swimming cap. She stepped onto the beach near Kingsdown Lifeboat Station remarkably fresh considering her ordeal. The crowd roared with rapture and excitement, as the cheers went up; they must have been heard right over the Channel. The Dover Regatta took place on August the 18th with a large programme of events, and once again the seafront attracted rapturous crowds. Unfortunately, the day was wet, but it did not stop play. A day of various sailing and rowing races, in Sculls, rowing boats, racing skiffs and four-oared regatta-built galleys were enjoyed

by everyone. The Dover Swimming Club organised the aquatic events, the swimming races, and the amusing competitions like walking the greasy pole, riding hobby horses, and mop fighting. The Deputy Mayoress presented the prizes in the Granville Gardens Pavilion. In the evening large crowds watched the fireworks which were discharged from the Prince of Wales Pier.

In September, a commercial side-car demonstration was advertised, inviting all traders to come and see the event at Cambridge Road near the Monument on the seafront. Further particulars could be obtained from H. Brockman and Sons on Castle Street, Kearsney Motor Garage in Kearsney, W. J. George 192 Snargate Street and P. J. H. Niblett and Son 8, Park Place and 3, Priory Place.

In the Dover Express and East Kent News of the 1st of October a column in the Colliery News section announced that a new colliery village was in the process of being constructed to the northwest of Snowdown Colliery, which is to be named Aylesham, the name of the adjoining farm. The work was being carried out by the Dorman Long Construction Company. 600 houses are to be built. At Snowdown Colliery two hundred and fifty men and boys were employed at work underground and were turning out about 160 tons of coal per day from 12 headings. Each householder employed below ground received 5cwts of coal that week. Betteshanger Colliery proudly announced it had found a seam of pure coal 3 feet 3 inches deep on the Sunday night shift in No. 2 shaft. At Tilmanstone Colliery the extension to the powerhouse was nearly complete and building of the new chimney stack was shortly to begin. Elvington Village was to have 102 new houses built by Mr. R. J. Barwick for the housing of Tilmanstone miners. In November it was reported that a 16-year-old Dover boy from Woolcomber

Street had been tragically killed at Snowdown Colliery whilst working. He had slipped and then been knocked down by a coal tub.

On a lighter note, the Town Clerk R. E. Knocker announced that tickets were available for the Mayor's Annual Banquet to take place at the Town Hall on Wednesday the 17th of November at 7pm. precisely. Tickets exclusive of wine are 10s 6d each or £1 for a lady and gentlemen couple. Christmas was coming and George Prentis & Son the wine merchants established in 1716 at 11, Last Lane, were offering good cheer. Ports, sherries and tarragons were on sale at 3 shillings a bottle. Three large bottles of white port packed in a case with a handle for 13s 6d made a good present for someone.

Dawson's Xmas Toy Bazaar at New Bridge in Dover was Dover's biggest brightest and best toy shop selling Hornby trains, Meccano, steam and electric locomotives. They had the latest dolls, building bricks, farm toys, fairy cycles and for extremely lucky boys, toy motor cars.

In December, the nice weather encouraged a fair number of anglers to visit the Southern Breakwater. Dabs were plentiful, going over half a pound in weight. One flounder caught, weighed nearly two pounds. The whiting was plentiful but mainly small. One cod caught weighed 16 pounds. A fine John Dory was seen but would not accept the bait.

There was an outbreak of influenza in the Dover hospital in December. Christmas festivities were completely cancelled but through the kindness of those who donated money or items to the Christmas Fund, 30 patients still had a lovely time. The wards were nicely decorated, and a large, decorated Christmas tree was on display in the Children's Ward where there were about 12 children. Every patient received a large and

well-filled stocking on Christmas morning. They also enjoyed a delicious Christmas dinner of turkey, and Christmas pudding with custard. The elementary schools in Dover were all given Christmas treats by the generosity of Major and Lady Astor. The treats were enjoyed on the last day of term except for two infant schools, St Jame's and St Mary's who were experiencing an epidemic of influenza. At Saint Paul's Roman Catholic Mixed School there was a large Christmas tree from which each child had a toy. At Charlton school the boys produced their own entertainment, 'The Babes in the Wood' and they were treated to a splendid tea. A large Christmas tree at the girls' school was decorated extremely prettily. They enjoyed a concert and afterwards Father Christmas came on his sleigh and distributed gifts from his sack. Saint Bartholomew's School senior boys went to the Regent picture house on Thursday for their Christmas treat: The younger children had a Christmas tea at the school.

The old people of York Street Almshouses were once again kindly entertained by Mrs Rubie and her friends. About 50 of them sat down to tables well spread for a Christmas tea. After the meal, some of the old folk provided entertainment for the other residents. Mrs Rubie estimated that the combined ages of her guests amounted to 3,500 years! Father Christmas arrived with the Christmas fairy in his handcart and each person received a nice gift. They were also given a slice of delicious Christmas cake from the fairy, and all in all it was a beautiful day and enjoyed by everybody present. Finally, on the very last day of that year of 1926, the 31st of December, a daughter was born to Mr. and Mrs. J Gregory who lived at 33 Wyndham Road. What of this child who grew up amidst the hardships of the Great Depression, the wartime austerity of World War Two, the world that was shifting with social and political change?