

The New Playground  
of Kent

Greatstone and Littlestone

Then and Now

Keith Swallow

### 3. Littlestone from the 1920s and the Birth of Greatstone

Notwithstanding the factual inaccuracy as to what exactly had taken place within the preceding 35 years, this was not empty rhetoric; Andrews was genuinely taken with the area and, after setting up an estate office adjacent to the RH&DR station,<sup>9</sup> he soon after made Littlestone his main home. He would later take over the running of one of the village's market gardens, too.

*Littlestone-on-Sea: the Coming Kentish Seaside Resort* makes clear that what we now know as Littlestone was favoured for permanent and more upmarket residential properties (reflecting its earlier development), whilst Greatstone was earmarked for the smaller type of dwelling, such as bungalows likely to be used primarily as summer holiday homes. This is also borne out by the sale prices for the plots: those within the Avenue estate were being marketed at £80; whilst those on the Greatstone Dunes estate (although only marginally smaller in size) were priced at £50. Prospective purchasers were enticed by the offer a deposit of of just £5 to secure a plot.

The same booklet gives some further historical insight into the nature of Greatstone at the time:

Space has been allocated to the South, in the vicinity of Greatstone dunes, for bathing huts and tents and as the car park is to the immediate rear, the site is a most unusual one. Many visitors, as a matter of fact, use the cars for toilet<sup>10</sup> purpose and when the tide is high, experience the novelty of being able to enjoy a dip in the briny within a few seconds of stepping from their vehicles, . . . arrangements for catering are easily



*The supply of fresh water, referred to in C.E. Andrews' booklet, was courtesy of a pump situated close to where the public toilets are now (near to the Dunes Road junction and Jolly Fisherman pub)*

9. This building was later taken over by estate agents' Robertson & Colyer, and currently serves as the RH&DR office.
10. For younger readers, it should be pointed out this is an old-fashioned reference to changing into beach wear!



*An example of the type of temporary accommodation that so exercised the local councils and freeholders. This was sited on plot 927 (29 The Parade), c. 1929. The interior shot of the hut demonstrates that they could be quite comfortable*

On this last point, they were certainly correct. It has already been established that there were tensions at various times between New Romney and Lydd Town Councils, and this issue was a further point of conflict. For, whilst New Romney TC was taking a demonstrably responsible stance, its councillors clearly felt that Lydd TC were not. In reality, the Lydd authorities had been no more negligent, just slower to take action. In June 1931, New Romney TC formally wrote to its Lydd counterpart stating that ‘certain wooden garages at Greatstone which came under the Lydd Council’ were being used as bungalows, although they were not fit for human habitation. They requested that the matter be given urgent attention. This was about more than planning or health, however. New Romney TC had by now invested quite heavily in infrastructure and councillors were concerned that, without similar commitment from Lydd, chaos might result. It would take a couple of years for matters to be resolved, by which time freehold owners had been persuaded that the Town Planning Act legislation could be used by the authorities, if necessary, to compulsorily demolish any remaining temporary dwellings. In 1932 came the first reported prosecution for construction of a bungalow at Greatstone without prior submission or approval of plans to the council – Mr Henry Robert Schofield of London being fined the sum of £3 plus costs.

Meanwhile, deliberations were also taking place to clarify New Romney and Lydd Town Council boundaries. Throughout 1932, numerous meetings of a joint boundaries committee were held to try and resolve an ongoing dispute. A settlement was reached in September of that year, when it was agreed that New Romney would ‘give up a hotel site and a portion of bathing hut beach, and gain two building plots, some other land and the whole of the railway, Greatstone Station and a little land’. The rationale behind this is not obvious, although it has been suggested that Andrews agitated for this outcome, as his plans for the development of the hotel site (which would become the Jolly Fisherman) would have more chance of being approved by Lydd rather than New Romney Council.

In his re-election address at the end of the year, the Lydd mayor drew attention to the improvements that had been made at Greatstone, as well as plans for development, with elec-



*Anchorage (left) was purpose-built for PLUTO operations and accommodated two 10,000 gallon fuel tanks at the rear. Green Shutters (also in Coast Drive; right) was one of numerous properties to be adapted*



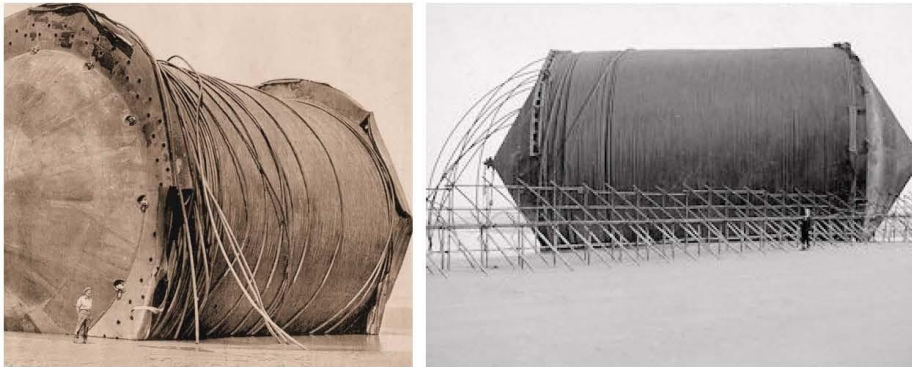
*PLUTO bungalows in Leonard Road (Numbers 51 and 53), as built (left) and in 2013 (right). Opposite them (numbers 54 and 56) were PLUTO staff quarters*

For similar reasons, the pipes were laid mostly at night, and great care was taken to cover any damage to vegetation.

Although Dungeness was central to the PLUTO operation, Greatstone, Lade and Lydd-on-Sea also had major roles to play. The Jolly Fisherman was taken over as the officers' mess for this operation, and numerous other houses within the villages were involved. The heaviest concentration was along Greatstone's Coast Drive and Parade, with probably a dozen or more properties taken over for the purpose. There were a further five in Leonard Road (three on the west side; and two on the east side), five more in Williamson Road and others in Kerton Road.<sup>8</sup> These were normal-looking from the outside (and even more so from the air). They boasted extremely thick interior walls, reinforced to protect the pumps and tanks in case of a direct hit by enemy bombs.

There are those who will tell you that they can tell a PLUTO building by its style. But this is a little disingenuous: probably only one of the buildings in Greatstone was purpose-built,

8. Rumours of the existence of further PLUTO properties (including two in Roberts Road and one in Seaview Road) persist, but are difficult to confirm.



*After breaking away from a convoy, this conundrum washed ashore at Greatstone, opposite Maddieson's Camp. The tiny human figures give an indication of the size of these Leviathans*

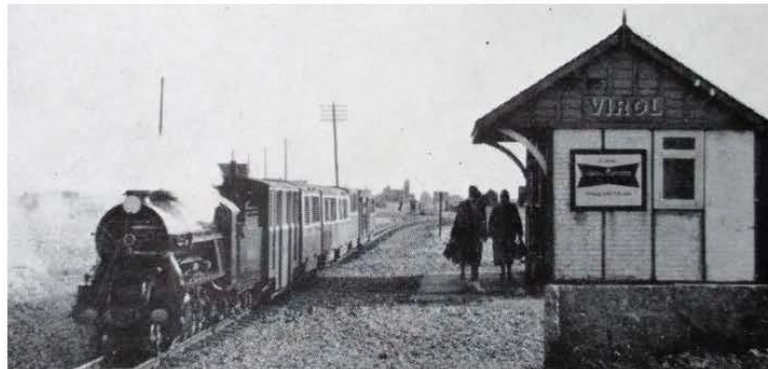
The strange structure that can be seen just offshore at Littlestone, opposite the Littlestone Road entrance, is also a legacy of WWII. It is part of a Mulberry harbour, the portable temporary landing stage developed by the British to facilitate the rapid offloading of cargo onto the beaches during the Allied invasion of Normandy, as part of Operation Overlord. Some 250 caissons were constructed and filled with compressed air in preparation for being floated across the channel, and a number were stored in the East Bay off Littlestone. Three of these caissons, however, became stuck in the sand and silt of Romney Bay and it proved impossible to refloat them. After the war, the other two (one of which was opposite The Mustard Pot)<sup>11</sup> were blown up, but this action did not entirely destroy the structures below the waterline. The fear that a similar failure could leave a considerable hazard to fisherman (being much closer to the shore) resulted in the decision to allow this third caisson to remain. Although not unique, there are only a few other examples that can still be seen today in British waters.<sup>12</sup>



*The Mulberry Harbour in January 2015, at the time of a maintenance inspection*

11. See Chapter 3.

12. Others are at Shoeburyness, Langstone Harbour (Portsmouth), Pagham and off Portland Harbour.



*Pilot Halt c. 1960, with a train bound for New Romney and Hythe (Photo: P Ransome-Wallis from The World's Smallest Public Railway; used with permission of [www.crecy.co.uk](http://www.crecy.co.uk))*

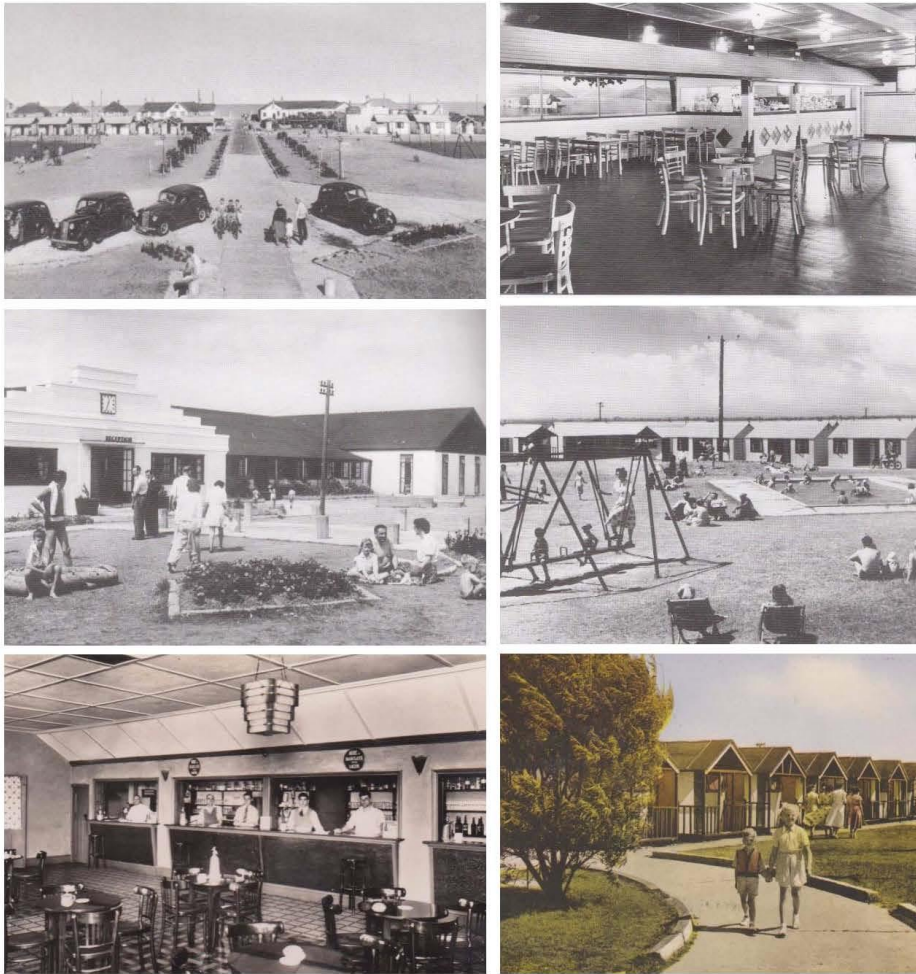
shelter of breeze-block construction, with an open front. By this time, the Pilot Inn had itself moved and the Dungeness–Lydd Road opened. It continued to serve as a request stop until 1977, when its closure was announced. From 1978 to 1983, however, there was some renewed activity, with special trains calling there by arrangement, and it continued to be listed in railway timetables. It was also shown in the railway's 1984 timetable, although no advertised trains stopped there. During the mid-1990s, the shelter was demolished. Nevertheless, it is still possible to see the concrete foundations of both this and the 1929 station building in the shingle.

### **War Department siding**

In addition to providing two of Greatstone's three stations, the RH&DR was also heavily involved in both the war effort and gravel extraction – and sometimes the two were linked. A little way south of Maddieson's/Romney Sands was, from 1929 until 1951, a spur heading off to the west, known as the War Office or War Department (WD) siding. This was first used to facilitate the building of the sound mirrors (see Chapter 6) and ran at a right angle from the up line. When the Southern Railway branch line was rerouted in 1937, a bridge had to be built, with the WD spur passing underneath. The story is widely told that the Southern Railway (SR) wanted to cross the WD siding on the level, but that the WD's local technical adviser determined that this would compromise national defence, and insisted that SR paid for a bridge. The local technical adviser was none other than RH&DR owner Captain John Howey, who had been involved in a long-running dispute with the SR! The bridge that carried the standard-gauge line is still very much in evidence and, from the top of this, it is possible to identify the course of the former WD line, which was removed in 1951, beneath.

In 1936–37, a high local demand for ballast resulted in the construction of a further siding between Maddiesons and the WD spur, to an intermediate shingle bank. This enterprise was

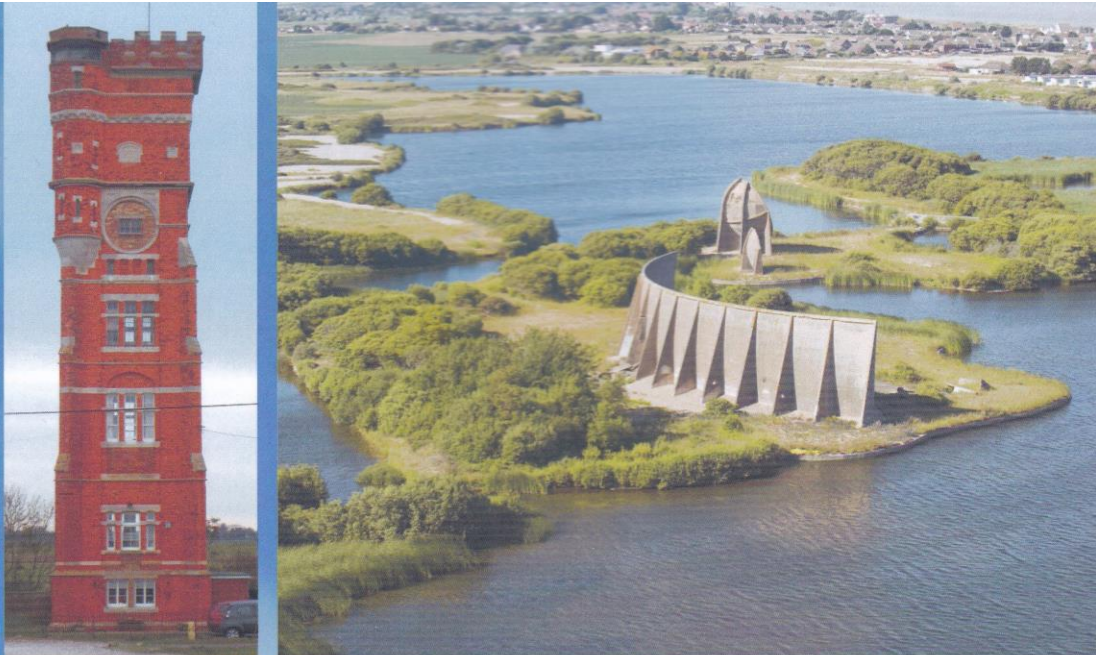
## 10. Sport, Leisure and the Community



*Pure nostalgia: post-war postcards and promotional photographs for Maddieson's Camp*

### **The holiday camp that never was**

By the mid-twentieth century, it was widely acknowledged that the area was not going to take off in the way that had once been anticipated. There were, nevertheless, occasional signs of further development activity and, in 1960, an application was made to build a new and sizeable holiday camp in Greatstone, just to the west of Leonard Road. This, however, was rejected by the County Council, although an amended proposal submitted in June 1964



Many are familiar with Dungeness, but few are as aware of the charms of its neighbouring coastal villages. At the turn of the twentieth century, anyone who was anyone was a member of Littlestone Golf Club. Many, including serving and former Prime Ministers, members of the judiciary and even a Hollywood starlet, bought second homes here just to play the course.

In contrast, Greatstone – much of which was still under the sea in the 19th century – was marketed as the New Playground of Kent in the 1930s. Both these villages were in the invasion front line in World War II; and Greatstone was at the forefront of pioneering work that predated the invention of radar, also playing a pivotal role in the remarkable Pipe Line Under the Ocean (PLUTO) project. Whilst a glittering future was mapped out – plans included a pier at Littlestone – the area did not take off in the way envisaged; although it was not the quiet backwater that one of the Great Train Robbers had hoped when he tried unsuccessfully to find anonymity here. This book – which also covers the villages of Lade and Lydd-on-Sea – traces the history of this unique part of Romney Marsh and the individuals who have shaped its development.

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