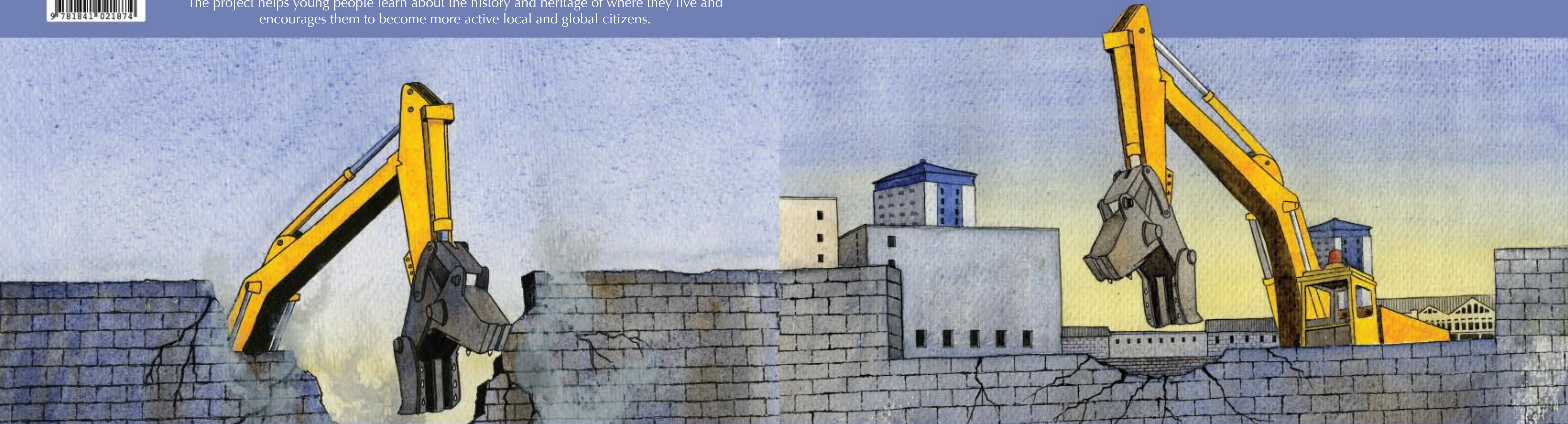


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The project helps young people learn about the history and heritage of where they live and encourages them to become more active local and global citizens.

# THE DAY A DIGGER ATE OUR WALL



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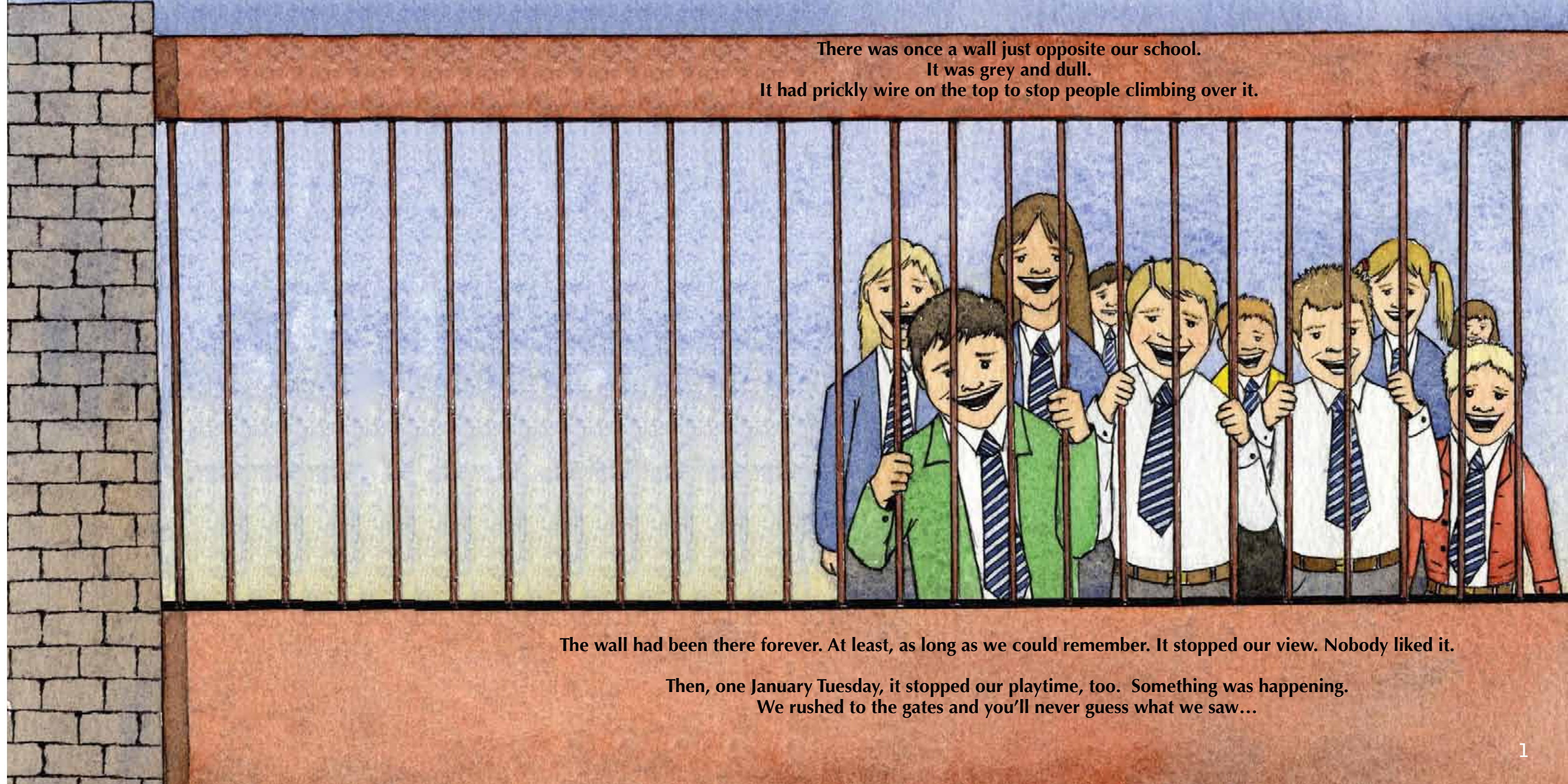
Photographs of old Devonport courtesy of Plymouth Library Service.

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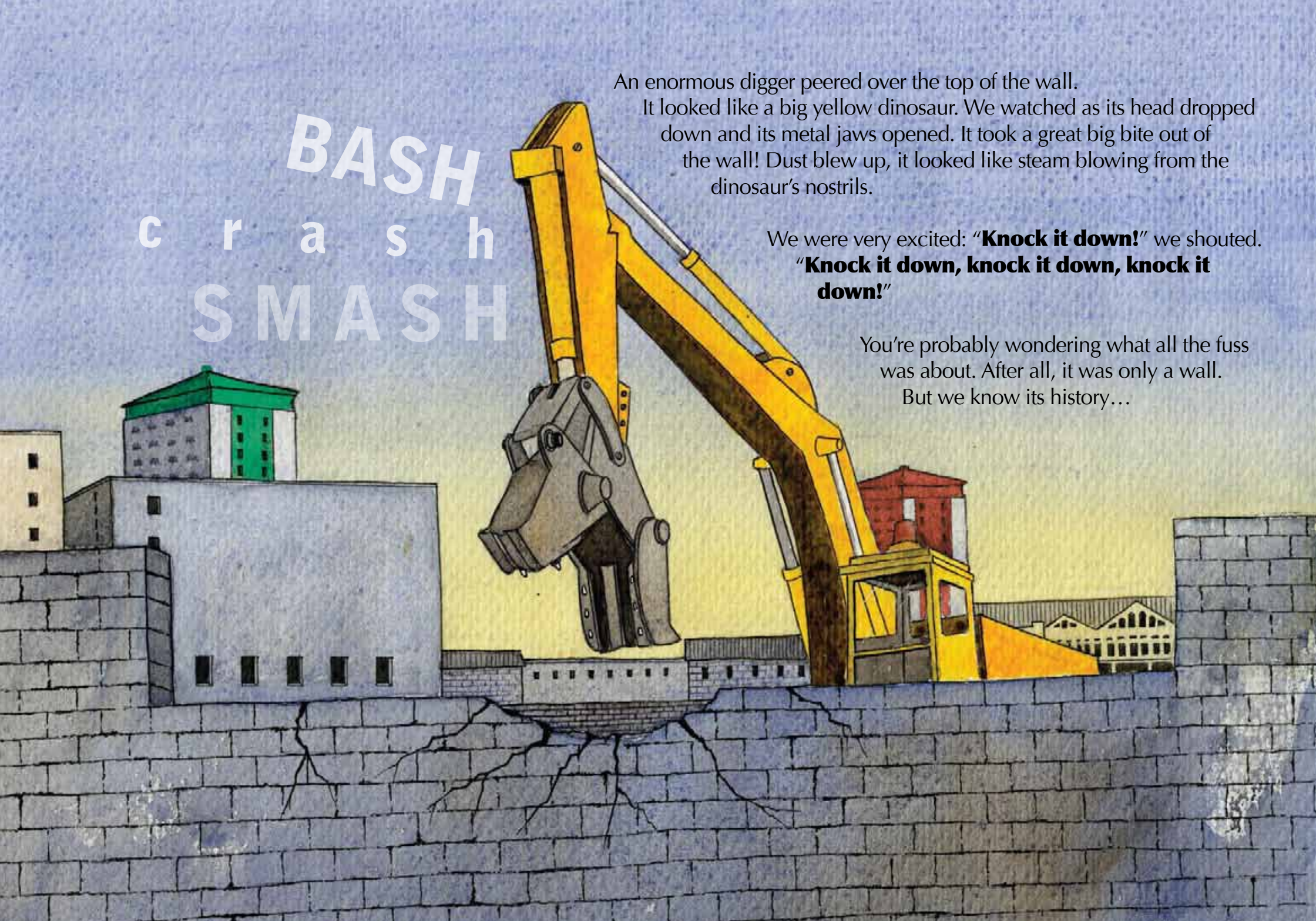


**There was once a wall just opposite our school.  
It was grey and dull.  
It had prickly wire on the top to stop people climbing over it.**



**The wall had been there forever. At least, as long as we could remember. It stopped our view. Nobody liked it.**

**Then, one January Tuesday, it stopped our playtime, too. Something was happening.  
We rushed to the gates and you'll never guess what we saw...**



An enormous digger peered over the top of the wall. It looked like a big yellow dinosaur. We watched as its head dropped down and its metal jaws opened. It took a great big bite out of the wall! Dust blew up, it looked like steam blowing from the dinosaur's nostrils.

We were very excited: "**Knock it down!**" we shouted. "**Knock it down, knock it down, knock it down!**"

You're probably wondering what all the fuss was about. After all, it was only a wall. But we know its history...

Just over 300 years ago the land behind the wall was just green fields. They belonged to one big estate called Mount Wise.



King William and Queen Mary were England's new King and Queen. They wanted a brand new port for their navy. The King himself came to visit Mount Wise. He thought it was a perfect spot for the dock.

Buying the land was easy. The owner was Sir Nicholas Morice and he was only 13 years old!

The new port was right next door to Plymouth, so people called it Plymouth Dock. Soon barracks were needed to house sailors and their officers. Houses were needed for the dockyard workers, too.

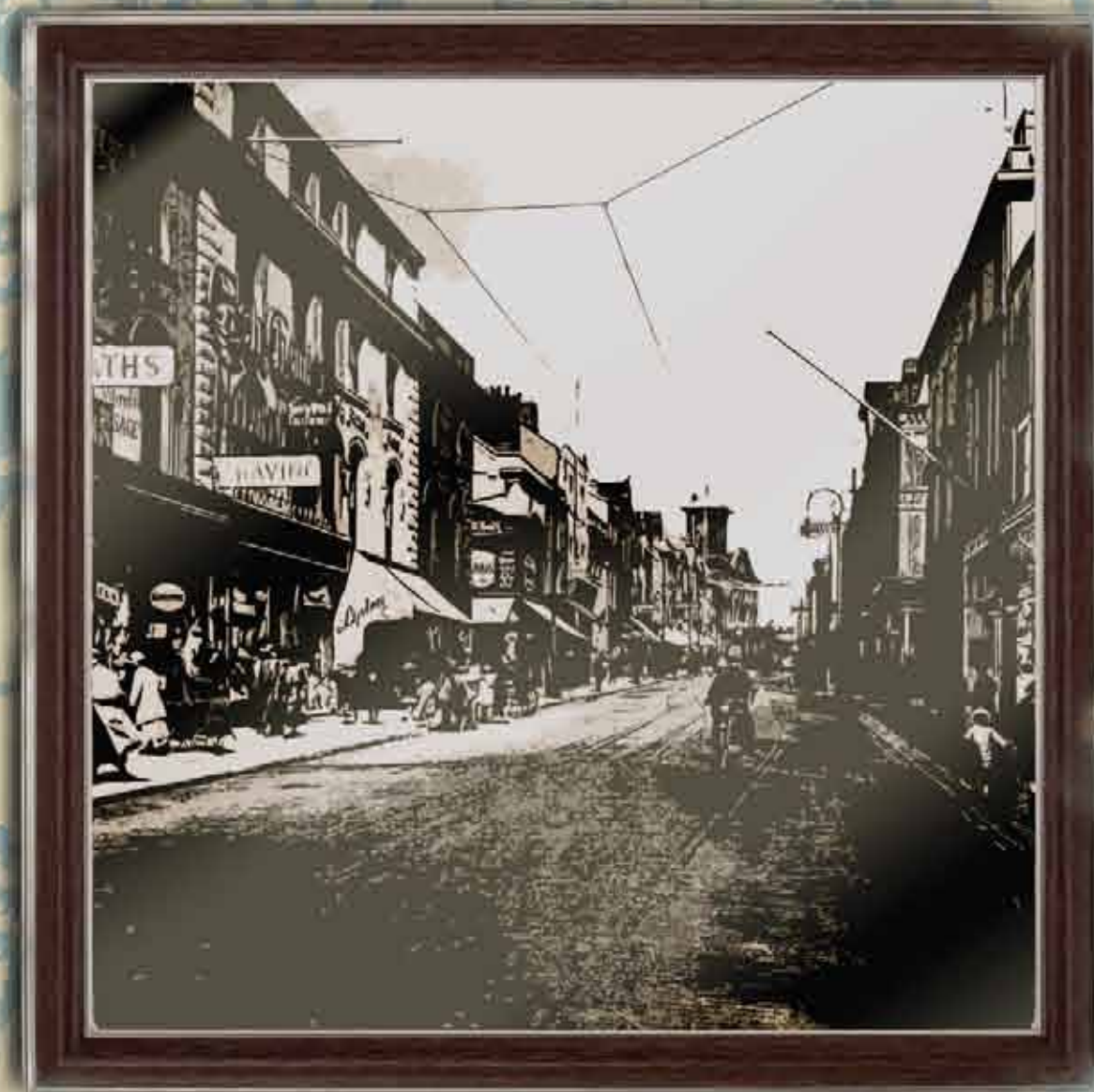
A wall protected the dock from enemy attack and only two roads passed through it. If you came in on one of them, you had to cross a drawbridge!

Over the next 100 years, Plymouth Dock grew and grew. Soon it was bigger than Plymouth. So the people asked for a proper name for their town. King George agreed. And that's how Plymouth Dock became Devonport.



**Devonport dockyard had a gibbet all of its own. Over the years 170 criminals were hanged there!**

**DIGGING UP THE PAST**



The First World War started in 1914. It brought jobs to Devonport, but local men went off to fight and never came back. By then Devonport and its neighbours were growing so fast they were bumping into each other. So East Stonehouse, Plymouth and Devonport agreed to become one big town.

Fore Street was a busy high street now, with shops, cinemas, a theatre, banks and a post office. But there were hardly any cars to drive down it. Devonport had a busy market too. Farmers brought goods to sell in Market Hall by boat or train or horse and cart!

Market days were long. They started at 6 o'clock in the morning and didn't finish until 11 o'clock at night. People liked shopping late at night. That's when the prices were cheapest.



If we lived in Devonport then, there'd be no traffic so the streets would be safe. We could play outside with our friends all day.

We'd be expected to keep our boots shiny and our hands clean. And we'd never dare to interrupt a grown-up!

At home we could play games, like dominoes and Ludo, or read books, like *Treasure Island* and *Alice in Wonderland*.

We could earn some extra pennies helping farmers unload their steam boats and carts for the market.

**For around two shillings and sixpence our mums could buy meat to feed the family for a week. We couldn't buy a comic for that money now. That's just 12.5p!**

**DIGGING UP THE PAST**



But over 60 years ago the Second World War started. It was bad news for Devonport. German planes bombed military targets, like Devonport dockyard. The attacks had a nickname: "The Blitz".

***If we lived through "The Blitz":***

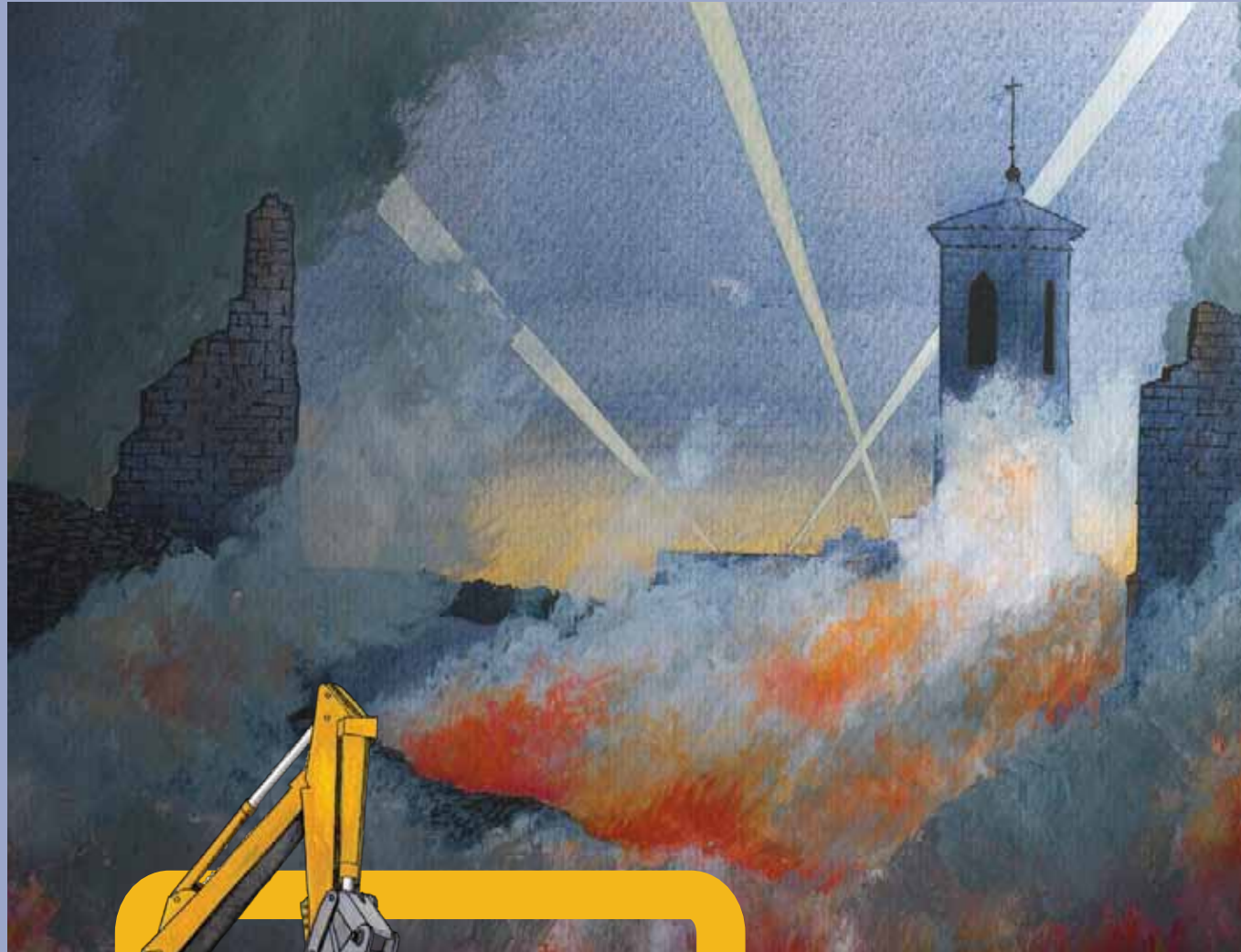
We would see vegetables growing in some very strange places. Everyone had to "Grow More Food"!

Some cities sent their children away from the danger. But we'd be sent away after the worst bombs had been dropped.

The railings and gates on our houses would be melted down to make weapons and planes.

We'd still go to school although 90 Plymouth schools were bombed!

We'd carry on as normal, stepping over rubble from bombed-out buildings.



On the night of 23rd April, 1941, nearly all of Fore Street was destroyed by enemy bombs.

**DIGGING UP THE PAST**

**At night-time:**

Everything closed by 8.30pm. Then the lights went out. At home we'd black out our windows so the Germans couldn't see us.

We would listen out for sirens warning us of air raids.

We would leave the city for the night if we could.

Often the bombs didn't come. But when they did the noise of planes, guns, bombs, fires and shouting was deafening. The sky was thick with smoke and dust. It blocked out the stars.

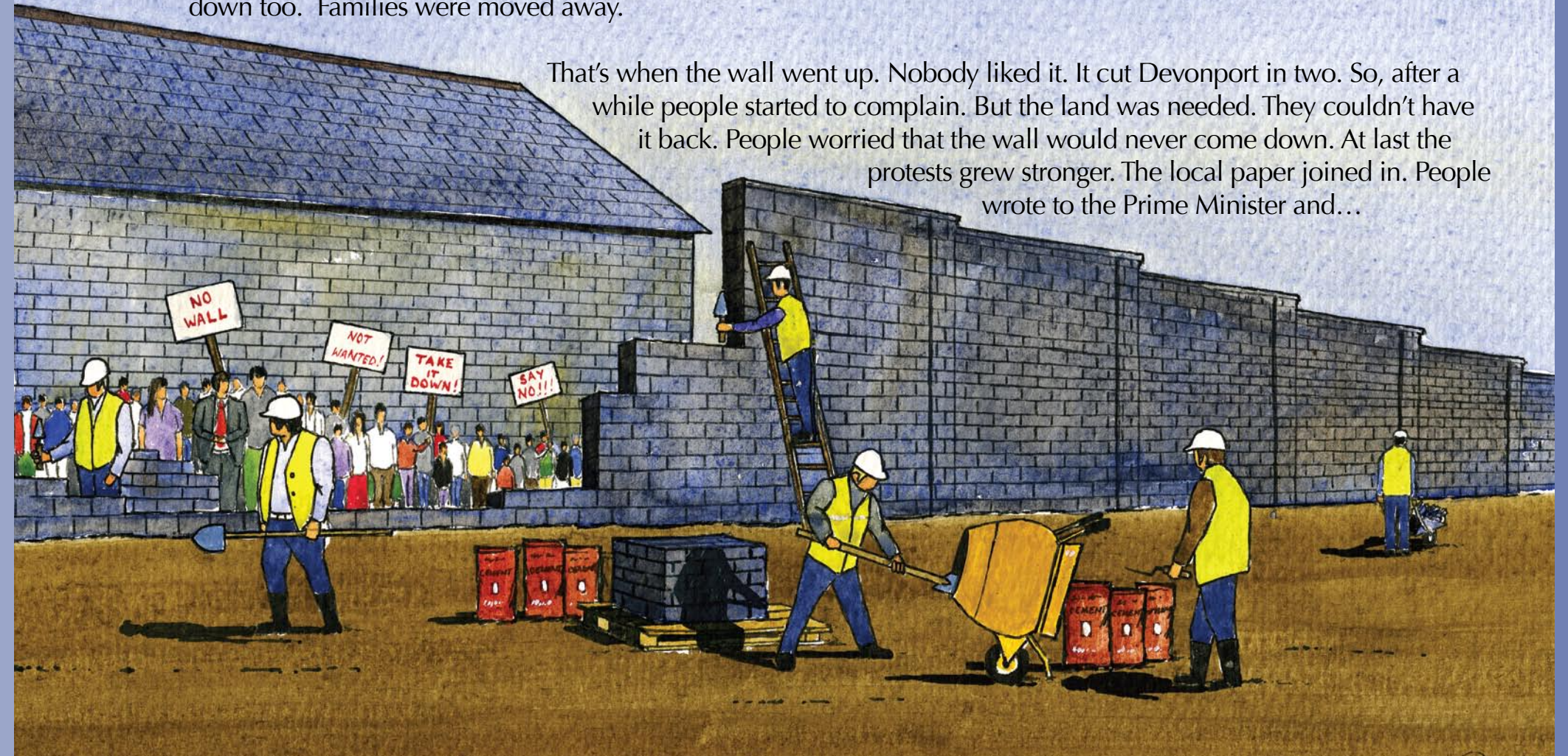
When the siren wailed we'd run for the public shelter or huddle in our garden shelter. Sometimes we would hide indoors under a table or under the stairs.

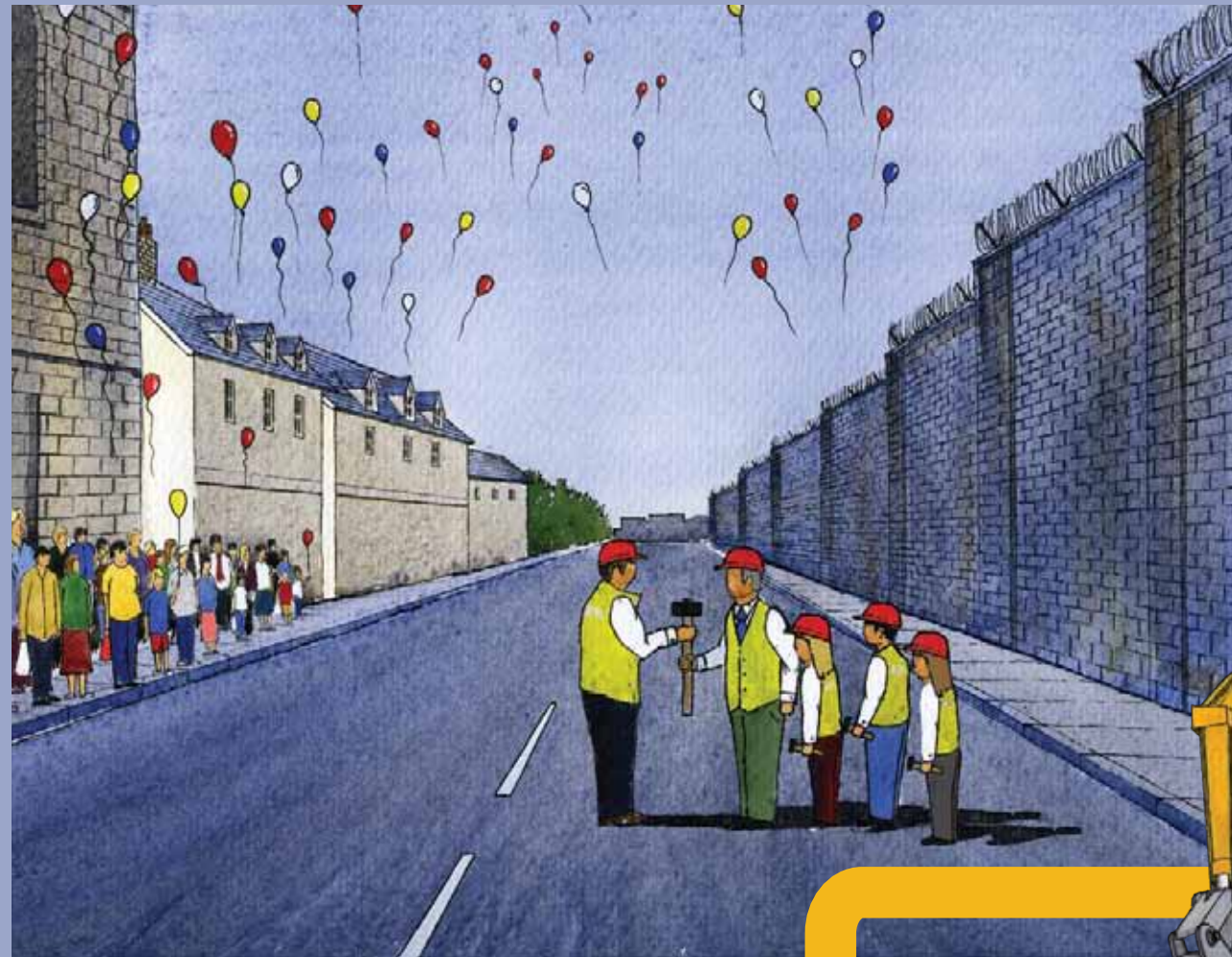
After the war not much was left of Plymouth city centre. Not much was left of Devonport either. Decisions had to be made. Buildings had to be built. The council came up with a plan. Plymouth would have a smart new centre. Devonport would have to wait.

Then the government decided to expand the dockyard. That was good news. It meant more jobs for Devonport. But the dockyard needed more land, it needed more storage space for all its supplies. And there was land... in Devonport. Why not use the bombed-out town centre?

The land was cleared of dangerous, bomb-damaged houses. Houses and shops that weren't damaged were knocked down too. Families were moved away.

That's when the wall went up. Nobody liked it. It cut Devonport in two. So, after a while people started to complain. But the land was needed. They couldn't have it back. People worried that the wall would never come down. At last the protests grew stronger. The local paper joined in. People wrote to the Prime Minister and...





Some local people were given a small piece of brick to keep. Soon those pieces will be all that is left of the Devonport wall!

**DIGGING UP THE PAST**



... the government agreed. The wall had to go! In 2007 part of the wall came down. Lots of people came to see it. Some of those people had fought to get rid of the wall.

Councillors came to the ceremony. The guest of honour was an old man called Bill. He was 88 years old! Before the wall went up, Bill had lived in the area behind it.

Bill and three children from local schools bashed the wall with hammers. They wore red hard hats for safety. With a little help, the first brick came out.

Everyone cheered.

Children from other schools in Devonport let go of red and white balloons. People smiled and watched them float away.

Then the dinosaur digger got started and we were there to see it. Its big yellow jaws opened and closed. They bit away brick after brick.

The digger moved along the wall. We held our breath and watched. At last a great gap opened up in the wall! Everyone cheered again. We couldn't wait to see the other side.

Some people remembered the days before the wall. They gasped when they looked through the gap. Nearly all the old buildings were long gone, but Market Hall was still standing. It looked just the same. Just as beautiful as the last time they had seen it - 50 years before.

Another old building called the bank was still standing behind the wall. It was going to be carefully taken down and cleaned brick by brick. Then its front would go back in exactly the same place and two apartments would be built behind it.



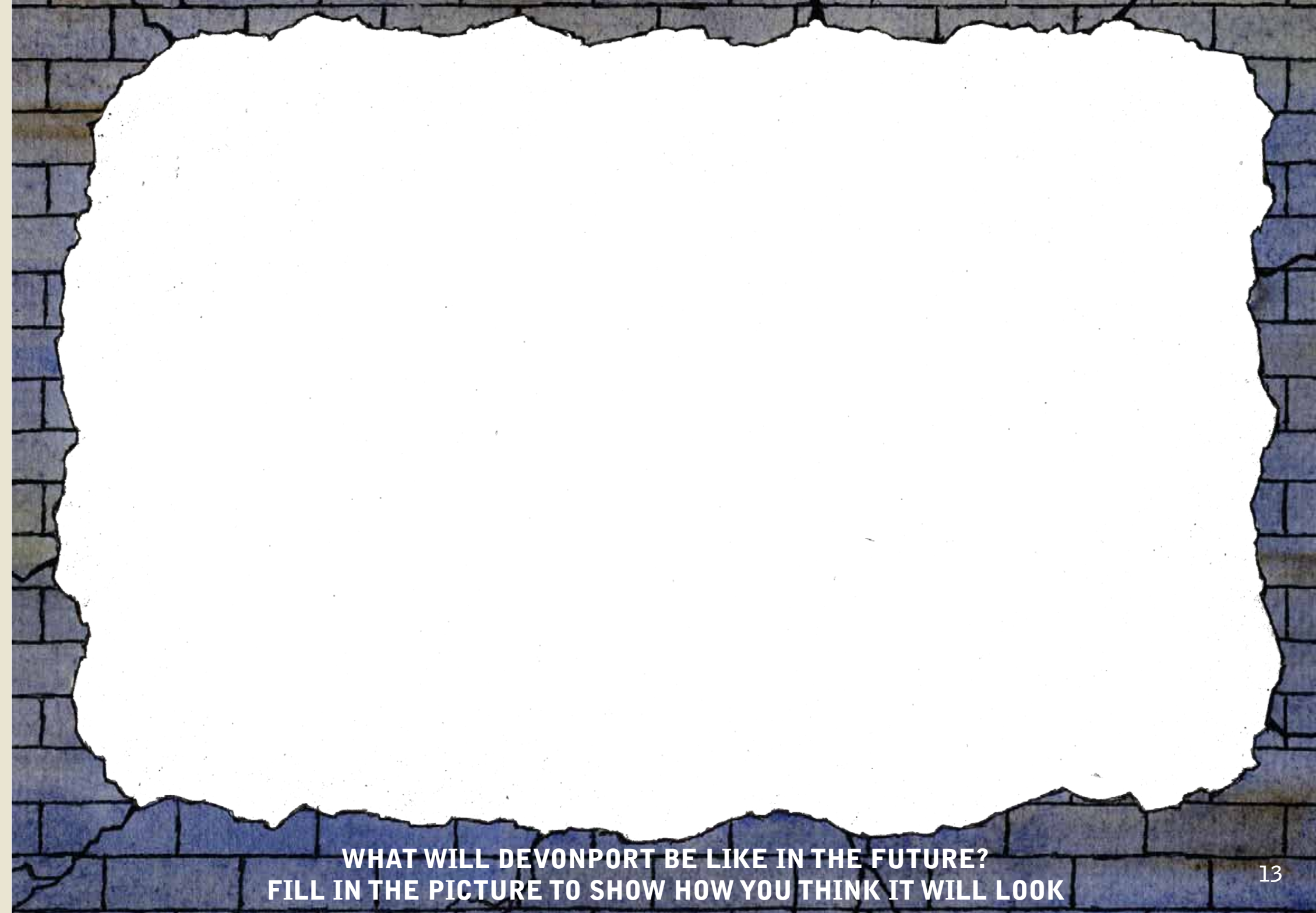
Bit by bit the wall is coming down. But what will take its place? Well, we've seen the plans and we're really excited about the future. In the land behind the wall, there will be:

- Houses, flats, business units and shops
- A new police station
- Green open spaces and plenty of trees
- New bus routes to take us to other parts of the city
- Old roads, like Fore Street, joining new streets with new names
- Market Hall still standing in the middle of it all

By 2013, Devonport will have 450 new homes. People will be able to move back and Devonport will have a busy town centre once again.



**So now you know the whole story. You can see why the wall was so special, and why the day a digger ate it up was such a brilliant day for Devonport!**



**WHAT WILL DEVONPORT BE LIKE IN THE FUTURE?  
FILL IN THE PICTURE TO SHOW HOW YOU THINK IT WILL LOOK**

**WORLD EVENTS**

**EVENTS IN DEVONPORT**

William and Mary crowned King and Queen	1689	
	1690	Royal Dockyard built
George IV crowned King	1820	
	1824	Devonport gets its name
First postage stamps	1840	
	1849	Devonport gets a post office
First motor car is built	1885	
	1914	Devonport, Plymouth and East Stonehouse become one town
First World War	1914 - 1918	
Television invented	1923	
	1924	Plymouth becomes a city
Second World War	1939 - 1945	
	1941	The Blitz hits Devonport
Elizabeth II crowned Queen	1952	
	1955-1957	Devonport wall is built
First mobile phone call	1973	
	2007	First section of the wall comes down
Olympic games in London	2012	
	2013	Building work completed