

First Birthday

It was a landmark: the Society's First Annual General Meeting; a report on an infant's first year of life. The birthday party, so to speak, was held at St Mary's Parish Hall with its large rear window curtains drawn back to reveal our Castle, reminding us of our heritage and of our purpose in promoting change and renewal in the town.

Jack Woolford, our Chairman, ran the event with skill; the formalities of AGMs tend to dull the mind of an audience, but not this one. However, the start was not without some sad reminders. Our President, the Countess of Guilford, could not be with us because of illness and the meeting stood as a mark of respect in memory of the late member Councillor Alan Dale and Committee Member Terry Khambatta.

Terry Sutton, who must be one of the best known people in Dover, was appointed a Vice-President to join the great and the good. Jack reminded us of the support given by Terry to the Society and to the former New Dover Group. Barry Smith retired as Secretary having worked hard for the Society, helping to get it off the ground in the first year. He has saved us considerable postage by delivering newsletters and he also found time to run the "Astor Grime Squad" last summer as part of the campaign to keep Dover tidy. His place is taken by Leo Wright but with the membership secretarial work transferred to Ken Berry who also becomes Treasurer in succession to Norman Willis. Norman, the careful guardian of our fortunes during the first year, was able to report a surplus of £67 on the first year's accounts.

Jack then reported on what we have done to further the aims of the Society and how we have tried to influence events. David Shaw, our MP, has received our New Dover Plan and his comments are awaited with interest. Jack, Ken Wraight and Linda Clackett have attended the Eurotunnel Consultative Committee and Jack both the Kent Action Group on the Channel Tunnel and the Kent Rail Action Group on the Channel Tunnel High Speed Rail Link. Jack cited pressure from KRAG to pressure British Rail into spending an extra £500 million to make the rail link more environmentally acceptable.

Most importantly we have had a positive dialogue with Dover District Council. John Clayton, Director of Planning and Technical Services, gave a presentation to the Society on the proposed Heritage Centre which is to be entitled "The White Cliffs Experience". Brian Philp of KARU addressed the Committee on his ideas for the Centre but the Council's scheme was preferred by the Committee with the strong recommendation that the Painted House and the Roman Baths be included in the next phase of the Heritage Centre.

Our Planning Committee, chaired by Ken Wraight, had received early notice of planning proposals and Ken's Committee has regularly made suggestions and objections to the Council when appropriate. It had, in particular, made its views known on the land that should be made available for industrial use. Complaints were made about very poor public relations in the timing of the demolition of Brook House. B & Q has been approached and asked to include a Riverside Walk in their new Bridge Street development, although with only partial success.

John Gerrard, our very effective Vice-Chairman, is also Dover Harbour Board's Chief Engineer. DHB's help to the Society with use of premises for committee meetings, and printing facilities, is highly valued as is the Board's support and

actions for a better Dover.

Jack drew attention to the support services within the Society. Peter Johnson, a Vice-President and fast becoming a radio personality, inspires confidence in people who know him. Philomena Kennedy, our founder, produces our Newsletters, the praises of which have been sung far beyond the borders of Dover and of Kent. Lin Clackett's effective work as Social Secretary is important in maintaining interest amongst members and augmenting the funds of the Society.

The meeting then elected the officers and committee members proposed by the Executive Committee including four new members. At this point Peter Johnson paid tribute to Jack for his work as Chairman and for the central role he plays in the affairs of the Society.

From then on it was fun all the way. Wine was followed by Christine Waterman's fascinating slide show on the past and future of the Dover Museum. We learned a lot. Our Museum, founded 150 years ago, is one of the oldest in the country, which again emphasises the richness of our heritage. Started by the Philosophical Institution and then taken over by the Town following the Act of 1845, it started off in the old Guildhall in the Market Square. With the demolition of the Guildhall (an earlier example of Dover's capacity to knock down anything interesting or old) it moved to new premises on the south side of Market Square. The Museum was situated in the upper storey of the Covered Market whose facade is to be incorporated in the Heritage Centre.

Huge quantities of stuffed birds, animals and reptiles flooded in, with Lord Rothschild as one of the donors. We heard of smells from the market, overcrowded exhibits, visiting school parties, a Maori head (lost in the war) and, pride of the collection, a model ship made in bone by a Napoleonic prisoner. There was much dedicated work in the 1930s by Mr Knocker to sort things out after earlier neglect. The war saw the Museum damaged and much of the collection lost, damaged or destroyed. KARU even found some specimens during excavations in the 70s!

In 1949 the Museum opened in its present cramped premises in Ladywell. Christine told us of the present policy of giving priority to the exhibition of local items and to temporary exhibitions. It was encouraging to hear of the work to renovate and develop the Drop Redoubt, the Grand Shaft, the Town Gaol and the Deal Time Ball Tower as well as the technical work of cataloguing etc.

The Museum is to go back to its old location in the Market Square as part of the Heritage Centre, complementing the exhibitions there. Hearing of the plans to double the floor space, the databases and facilities for people to enquire about Dover was exciting and provided a solid hope that the town, and Christine and her staff, will get the Museum they properly deserve.

Leaving the meeting and talking to an older Dovorians than I, we agreed that there is nowhere quite like Dover, even though it has been sadly abused since the war. The meeting gave both of us a sense of optimism for the future.

