

SECOND ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

A light-hearted talk by Sir Donald Murray entitled 'Diplomatic Bag and Baggage' amused and enlightened us all. Sir Donald, who is an ex-Marine as well as an ex-diplomat, is now the Complaints Commissioner of the Channel Tunnel.

He vividly recalled his days in the Diplomatic Service as he described a diplomat as a communicator between his government and another, passing on confidential information, trade literature, letters as well as making contact with his opposite number in that country. He must be prepared to travel anywhere at a moment's notice as quickly as possible, usually by jet first class: not on horseback, paddle steamer or slow train as in days of yore, carrying his diplomatic bag.

The British couriers or messengers are known as Queen's (or King's) Messengers - a corps comprised of ex-officers. This corps was created by Charles II to deliver personal and confidential messages to persons abroad. Then, as now, they wore the insignia of a silver greyhound lapel badge and carry (uniquely!) red passports.

In 1815 it was agreed in Vienna that all couriers, messengers, heralds, and diplomats should move freely and safely, immune from any hindrance, between their home countries and embassies abroad. And so it continues today.

The diplomat usually remains at his post 2 - 3 years. When a posting comes it means big decisions have to be made about which possessions will be needed in a new home and a new climate, how best to pack the heavy diplomatic baggage so that it doesn't go astray or get damaged by unusual means of transport. Once in the new home little notes are often found giving useful information about how the electricity does (or doesn't) work, the best schools, shops and what to expect from the climate.

The diplomatic bag which comes by post will bring papers, and, just as important, a favourite cough mixture, DIY magazine, etc, to make life a little easier in the more remote parts of the world. The qualifications for a diplomat would seem to be resourcefulness, patience and a sense of humour as well as diplomacy.

Not so very different, suggested the Chairman, from the days when "a diplomat was an honest man sent abroad to lie for his country" or the alternative version offered by the speaker: "a diplomat is an honest man sent to lie abroad for his country".

THE WHITE CLIFFS COUNTRYSIDE PROJECT

Kirk Alexander, Manager of the project, told us that its aim is to protect and manage the green spaces in and around the town and on the Western Heights.

It is proposed to have a volunteer warden scheme to protect the livestock on the Heights from being harassed by dogs and the trees and woodlands from damage. It is also planned to have guided walks on the Western Heights for the public to see what is being done.

If anyone would like to volunteer to help clear up the rubbish that has been dumped by thoughtless people and generally tidy up the scrubland, or to act as a guide, please contact Kirk Alexander at 6, Cambridge Terrace, Dover.

Jean Pearce