

# <sup>60</sup> THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 1994

at St. Mary's Parish Centre, Dover on Monday 18 April

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WE shall have to wait until the 24th April 1995 before we see the Minutes of the AGM., so this is just an impression, while memories are fresh, for those who were unable to attend – or a snapshot record for those who were present.

I have heard it said that “you should never attend an AGM as you may be roped in for a job.” Such was not the thinking of our members who turned out in strength. There was a very full house, even though it was one of the colder evenings of this late, cold spring.

The Chairman welcomed our President, Brigadier Maurice Atherton, who has attended several of our meetings, and Vice-President Terry Sutton, M.B.E. He regretted the resignation of Press Officer Jenny Olpin and invited a volunteer to replace her.

The business of the meeting was quickly completed. The Committee was re-elected and Terry Sutton, who had been a co-opted member, was duly elected to the Committee. The Treasurer lucidly and concisely presented the accounts, which were approved.

There followed the Chairman's Report which was, as always, the main item of the first half. When giving notice of the AGM at the March meeting, the Chairman promised that the AGM '94 would be even more ebullient than its predecessors. It was.

If comparisons are odious it nevertheless sometimes casts light to compare the greater with the lesser. Peter Ustinov at 73 is presenting a one-man show in the West End. This is the sixth year that our Chairman's one-man report has entertained the Society's AGM. A Chairman's report may seem like a mere factual statement, a description of the Society's year but as he proceeded with his carefully constructed sentences you could literally hear the audience smile as a phrase here or a word there revealed what lay behind this suggestion to DDC., that comment to DHB., those submissions to the County or the Local Government Commission.

There were plenty of facts and achievements to report in a very full year. Membership was touching 400 and Budge Adams was initiating a drive for more new members. The completion of the Lydden Pond, the maintenance of Lousyberry Wood, the re-painting of the heraldic bollards and clean-ups of river, beach and town centre had been the major projects of 1993-94. Plans and proposals for the

town were under constant review for comment, praise or criticism. We had even been asked to advise the young environment movement in Japan. As in previous years, the Society had continued to offer an attractive social programme to members and had assisted with Council or privately-led events whenever possible.

Before the break Lawrence Gage, Chairman of the Planning Sub-committee, outlined the Society's thinking on proposals for a Millennium Project and called on members to attend and bring their friends to the public meeting to be held in the Town Hall on 12 May.

The second half of the evening was devoted to a talk by R. L. Ratcliffe. Those who went on the Society's Rochester trip in June 1989 – one of our first and most successful excursions – remember the hospitable guiding by members of the Rochester Society of which Bob Ratcliffe is now President. We knew his style from his entertaining and informative article in our August *Newsletter* about his 1993 trip to the Goodwin Sands, so that we were looking forward to his account of "How the Railways came to Dover."

He told the story, from the Canterbury to Whitstable line – the first in Kent and the very first steam powered anywhere – right up to Network Southeast. He is an expert on the history of transport in Kent and after his talk we look forward to a book by him on the subject, should he find time to write one.

His talk was fully illustrated by a superb collection of slides of Victorian engravings, early photographs, later postcards and recent photography. The pictorial slides were punctuated by illuminating maps showing the proposed and progressing rail-lines snaking across the county, as the commercial interests vied aggressively with each other as they may do once again after re-privatisation! Some of the routes are seen no more, such as the Elham Valley Line, the Shepherdswell Loop or the Sittingbourne and Kemsley Light Railway, except where they are now, here and there, enjoying a partial resurrection.

The rivalries led in the end to Dover being served by both the London and South Eastern Railway and the London, Chatham and Dover, so that we still have the two rail routes from London to Dover and the lecturer and we are anxious about the long-term future of the Shakespeare Tunnel route.

He also vividly described and showed the successive developments of Dover and Folkestone harbours, as they kept up with the pace of change in the rail-sea link. We followed the evolution of the ferries to car-ferries and remembered with nostalgic pride the Golden Arrow service.

Caught up in historical time, we lost count of time and were sorry when the lecture had to stop.

The evening wasn't quite over. The Mayor, Councillor Kevin Mills, who had been invited to dinner before the meeting and had apologised that he would be delayed by other meetings, arrived just in time to say the last words of the evening. He set out his concerns about present day Dover and his hopes and wishes for Dover's future. His concerns, hopes and wishes are very much also ours. ◇