

# Dover: Its Economic Future

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A REPORT OF THE SOCIETY'S OCTOBER MEETING

St. Mary's Parish Centre, 24 October 1994

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TERRY SUTTON

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ECONOMIC and social changes in the past, those at work at the present time and those likely in the future were the subject of our interesting October meeting.

Chairman Jack Woolford welcomed our President, Brigadier Maurice Atherton and his wife Wendi and said members of the Society were rightly concerned about the economic future of the town. But, he said, to get the future in perspective it was necessary to understand the economic past and to do this he called on vice-President Budge Adams.

Budge, juggling successfully with a remotely controlled projector, explained that change was part and parcel of any urban community and submitted that history had shown that most town centres were largely rebuilt every seventy years or so. He urged members not to be antagonistic to change and pointed out that Dover had made, and dealt with, many changes over the years. It was up to the town and its people to make the most of opportunities resulting from change.

To demonstrate the changes in Dover's economic life he showed photographs of the Atlantic liners which, in the early 1900's used to berth at the Prince of Wales Pier. One of the photographs he showed was of the s.s. *Amerika*, flagship of the Hamburg-Amerika Line, with its huge bulk lying alongside the pier. Now, he added, Dover Harbour Board was proposing to establish a liner terminal in the area where those huge Atlantic liners used to berth.

Another series of interesting photographs was of some of Dover's larger hotels, the Grand, the Burlington and the Lord Warden, that used to attract holiday-makers and those passing through the port.

Yet another series showed the types of cargo that used to be imported through the Western Docks, including timber, in the years when wood was required for a rapidly expanding Dover. He also screened a series of pictures that showed how Dover is changing for the better, thus demonstrating that change is not always a bad thing and he urged the town to embrace the opportunities that were now being presented.

After the interval, Roger Madge, Dover District Council's Director of Economic Development and Tourism, looked at the economic position of Dover now and in the future. He explained that the Council, and others, were trying to tackle economic problems with a two-pronged attack. Most immediate was to boost tourism in an attempt to create new jobs as soon as possible. The second line of attack was to create

124 the opportunity for new industry to move into the area so that more diverse employment possibilities were available.

Our lecturer said that when he first arrived in Dover the majority of people nationally looked upon Dover just as a port, a place from which to depart on a ferry as soon as possible. But the construction of the Channel Tunnel – and its predicted impact on job losses in the ferry industry – had galvanised thought about the future. The Tunnel's impact arrived at the same time as the loss of port jobs through the creation of the Single European Market, and followed closely on the closure of the last of the Kent coal pits.

The impact of all this was a prediction that there would be 4,500–6000 job losses in the district. But, claimed Mr Madge, the district had moved forward since those days. People's perceptions of Dover were changing and Dover and the White Cliffs Countryside were being marketed as places to visit.

With the use of photographs and other visual aids, the speaker showed how this was being achieved – by the end of the year about a hundred Historic Interest signboards will have been erected; guided walks will have attracted about 10,000 extra visitors and around 750,000 visitors will have been attracted to the White Cliffs Experience, which, he said, had proved to be a tremendous success. It has been worked out that seventy per cent of those visiting the Experience would not have travelled to Dover but for that attraction.

He then spoke of the relatively new initiative of the Town Centre Management, which had been assisted by members of the Dover Society. And he demonstrated, with photographs, how the local authority-financed IMPACT partnership had and was continuing to improve the look of Dover.

Problems remained however and, said Mr Madge, it was still predicted that when the Channel Tunnel was properly up and running there could still be a further 2,000 job losses in the district.

After the lively question and answer session that followed, the Society's vice-Chairman, John Gerrard, said that the Dover Harbour Board believed that by the year 1996 there could be one hundred cruise ships arriving annually.

The Chairman, in thanking and congratulating the speakers said that "over the years

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## LILLIAN KAY, *a Vice-President of the Society*

You may have read, in the *Newsletter* for August 1994, the fine tribute of one Vice-President, Lillian Kay, to another, the late Marion Horsfield who was also a benefactor of the Society.

It may interest readers to know that Lillian Kay celebrated her 80th birthday in July this year. If you haven't heard any of her fascinating and amusing talks on her childhood in the Pier District of Dover I hope you will when you get the chance.

P. K.