

The January Meeting : A Double Affair

ARTHUR
GOODBURN

CONSERVATION & EXPLORATION

The January Meeting of the Dover Society on the 30th was very well attended and we all greatly appreciated the two excellent talks.

Firstly Clive Alexander, Conservation Officer for the Dover District Council drew our attention to what is being done in our area to preserve the best of the past and to build the best for the future. As Conservation Officer he explained he has two tasks: (i) to identify conservation areas and (ii) to see that care is taken of Listed Buildings.

Once conservation areas have been identified it is important to accommodate change (for change is always with us) within these areas. St. Margaret's Bay is a good example of a conservation area, as also is the Dour Street area in Dover. Such areas contain buildings of architectural or historic interest and within them Conservation Officers have some control of unlisted as well as listed buildings. Another example of good development fitting in with the townscape, is the Charlton Green group of terraced accommodation. Some developments in Dover have been rather less successful. Which would you place in this category?

Clive Alexander then drew our attention to the preservation of Listed Buildings, which also include structures other than accommodation such as parks or grounds. Here he showed us what a wonderful building we have in Waldershare Park, the strange Belvedere and the beautiful grounds there. All are listed. Listing is done by English Heritage and permission must be obtained by the owners of listed buildings for any work to be carried out on the property. Grants are available to owners who need to carry out essential repairs. An example of a highly successful repair job was shown to be the corner shop almost opposite the Town Hall. Other cases where the owners operated without permission, sometimes allowing objectionable bill-boards to be fixed to façades, were always condemned and steps taken to force the owners to return the property to its original condition. Sometimes it was only a matter of colour. If one looks at the vast improvement in Snargate Street one can see how important colour is. Clive brought his talk to an end with a very apt quotation from William Morris,

"A place without buildings is like a person without a memory."

Our second speaker that evening was English Heritage Custodian Phil Wyborn-Brown who took us behind the scenes at Dover Castle. The wonderful sight of Dover Castle sitting high above the town on the white chalk cliffs has thrilled generations for about 800 years; but Phil had come to tell us about the part which we cannot see;

over seven miles of underground workings which very few people have ever seen. First he dispelled the legend that these workings went down under the town, perhaps as far as St. Radigund's Abbey. All the workings are contained within the Castle grounds. Some of the workings are 200 feet below ground – only some seventy feet above sea level. These are at the “Dumpy” level and he left us waiting until the end of the talk before telling us that “Dumpy” was an acronym for Deep Underground Military Position Yellow. 7

Tunnelling has been going on for centuries and there are even the remains of one tunnel where the French besieging the Castle dug from the Guston turning to beneath the main gate and there set off explosives to attempt an entry.

In this century the tunnels were used as a military headquarters during the Second World War, with a hospital and living quarters. Here the evacuation from Dunkirk was planned and executed. Later, in the years following the war, new levels were cut for use as a base for a Regional Seat of Government in the event of a nuclear war. (Dumpy).

Some three-quarters of a mile of the tunnels at Casement level, now named Hellfire Corner, have been open to the public for several years. Here many areas, such as the telephone exchange and the Aircraft Operations room, have been restored to their original wartime state. Gradually other areas are being restored and it is hoped to open Annexe level in 1996 and Dumpy level some years later.

Our speaker described all these plans in detail and gave the audience insights into many aspects of the tunnels which we had not previously considered.

When the Chairman finally gave the audience the opportunity to question both speakers the response was fast and furious and the time allocated was (as ever) insufficient to answer all our queries after two such fascinating talks.

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Wine & Wisdom Monday 13th February

ELIZABETH SENYARD

There were ample supplies of both wine and wisdom at St. Mary's Parish Centre when the Dover Society members met to test their knowledge, though I suspect that the supply of wisdom tended to diminish as the consumption of wine increased – at least, that was the situation on my table.

The occasion was well attended, there being thirteen tables each seating six people. All were totally absorbed in the art of brain-stretching and memory-jogging – as well as some inspired guesswork. The eight rounds of quite difficult questions