

# *The Future of Dover in the New Millennium*

MERRIL LILLEY

AN ADDRESS by M.E.P. MARK WATTS at Biggin Hall on 27 March 1995

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This reconvened meeting, postponed from 20 February, was well attended by members of the society and by members of the public.

Our Chairman, Jack Woolford, introducing the speaker, seemed slightly worried about the subject of the meeting, seeing the topic of Europe as "a hot potato". However, as Mark Watts got into the main flow of his speech it was evident that we had no need to worry. Our speaker sees himself not only as a member of the European Parliament but as a representative of Dover and East Kent. He works on the committee for Transport and Tourism and this takes up a large percentage of his time. However, as he pointed out, he sees his job in terms of a mission for East Kent and, in his concern about the place of East Kent in Europe, he aims to liaise with the people he represents.

First, he wants to establish close links with the community and to tackle issues of local concern. Some areas, he said, have been ignored too long. Some areas have great prospects for future development.

Secondly, his mission embraces the whole of Kent, as the most European County. Kent, and Dover in particular, he said, can establish the closest links with the continent and become a critical part of the European Union. This burden falls on the shoulders of the MEP and indeed on Dover and other parts of Kent.

Can we establish links with Europe without forgetting our roots? Here we are in a unique location and must do all we can to further links with Europe. Agencies which are trying to do this should be supported and encouraged. There is a vast potential to be tapped. Nord-Pas-de-Calais is nearer to us than many places in the UK. We must put more into Europe in order to get more back. £14 million will come to Kent this year from Europe but there is far more we can do to exploit the potential here. Kent's roots lie in its maritime tradition and we have a

duty to maintain this maritime connection. Our ports are undervalued and are assets to be appreciated and developed, said Mark Watts. He talked of the Kent Ports Strategy, which had just been published, and stressed that he would push for improved road links to Kent ports. He feels strongly that Kent's future lies in being part of Europe.

Thirdly, Mr Watts went on to talk of Europe itself, saying he thought that the European Parliament should be more democratic. It is the "only international parliament in the world" yet it cannot legislate on behalf of its citizens, he said. But it must be fair, it must tackle differences of injustice and poverty. We must, he stressed again, work as partners with Europe, so that we can achieve more control over our trade, our economy and our own future.

Where does Dover fit in to this overall picture? Mark Watts pointed out that 90% of world trade is still by ship and that we are still the largest maritime nation in terms of goods carried. In Dover the port is the principal employer in the busiest ferry terminal in the world. We can, he said, capture more trade in the maritime sector and businesses can prosper by becoming more European in outlook. Here we have a prime business location and we must sell it as such.

He went on to talk about tourism, saying that Dover's tourist facilities are not good enough to exploit the tourist potential here. There are social and economic problems to solve and more job opportunities must be created. Our destiny is in our own hands, he told us. All authorities, national, county, local and European, can work together to achieve these ends.

The audience warmed to the speaker and an invitation for questions from the floor was taken up with enthusiasm. Mr Watts very competently fielded a battery of

questions on liaison with the local MP and with local and county authorities, farming, fishing, road and rail links, the port, environmental issues and, finally, on the European Parliament.

Asked how he could best help the district, he referred the audience to his local office in Ashford, saying he was always ready to talk to his constituents.

After a short interval, when tea and coffee were served, Lawrence Gage, Chairman of the society's Planning Committee and Chairman of the Millennium Steering Committee, addressed the meeting on the progress of plans for an application for Millennium funds for Dover.

The first submissions had been approved and the committee was now preparing a full application to be forwarded to the Millennium Commission by the end of April.

The plans for the project, to be called Britain's Maritime Odyssey, included a Maritime Museum, which would include a National Boat Collection from Greenwich Maritime Museum, a centre of Maritime Excellence, a maritime Observatory and a European Trade and Exhibition Centre.

All these would link with other developments either already existing or in planning stages. These include the development of the Cruise Liner Terminal, already being built by Dover Harbour Board at the Western Docks, the development of a new programme of investment by English Heritage at Dover Castle, the existing White Cliffs Experience, which will house the recently discovered Bronze Age Boat, the new Marina currently under construction and the Sea Training and Activity Centre planned for the sea front.

There would be transport links between all the centres and exhibitions, possibly including trams, cable cars and shuttle buses – even a paddle steamer! This all fitted so perfectly well with the idea of a Maritime Heritage advocated by Mark Watts that the two halves of the evening blended into such a grand vision of Dover in the year 2000, that the audience found it difficult to grasp the scale of the undertaking.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Unfortunately Dover's first application for Millennium money was turned down by the Commission. See *Planning Report*

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## The Dover Society's Annual General Meeting

JEREMY COPE

When I was asked to report on the 1995 meeting I felt uncertain because of all the meetings the Society holds, the AGM is the one I least enjoy. I do not look forward to the necessary formalities, a view shared I guess, by most members. I prefer meetings which foster an interest in Dover and its amenities, with illustrative slides, and the interaction of questions and answers. It is in this slightly critical and questioning vein that I prepared my personal view of the meeting.

It started well with our Chairman announced as "*Secretary*" by the gentleman who bade us rise for our guests, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Birmingham. We can certainly boast an impressive list of speakers! Notwithstanding his new rôle, Jack Woolford stood in as Chairman and gave us his summary of the

past year's events in his own inimitable style. The Society has had a good 1994/95, with the Millennium Project, Rolls Statue, *Newsletter* as good as ever, publications in the pipeline and many other achievements that made Jack's job easier and to his liking.

He paid tribute to the various committee members who had done so much in the past year. Although a committee member, I am sure that the whole of the Society recognises the part an active and energetic committee plays in our success and the AGM is the time for the acknowledgements to be made. Among those sometimes overlooked I was pleased to hear mention of the *Newsletter's* proofreaders, May Jones and Pam Taylor. As an accountant I appreciated the tribute to our treasurer's careful management of our funds. As a result