

Initiative

G. NICHOLAS HARBY 117

and BRICKS

A Report of the Meeting on 23rd October 1995

OUR CHAIRMAN, Jack Woolford, began the meeting by welcoming guest speakers Mr. Ian Gill and Colonel Bolton, vice-presidents Peter Johnson, Lillian Kay and Budge Adams, David Bevan, former Dover Borough Engineer, and the rest of the gathering of Dover Society members.

He then introduced the first speaker, Ian Gill, of the East Kent Initiative, recalling that Ian was once Town Clerk of Dover and succeeded James A. Johnson as President of the Kent Federation Of Amenity Societies. He is an amateur archaeologist and once, on a dig organised by Brian Philp, he prevented the barbaric destruction of a corner of Dover Castle. In 1979 he became Chief Executive of Thanet District Council. He has now returned to Dover in his present post as Managing Director of the East Kent Initiative.

The East Kent Initiative, Mr. Gill explained, began in 1991 on the recommendation of the Kent Input Study, one of its main objectives to assess the impact if the Channel Tunnel on the economic infrastructure of the East Kent area. A task force was put together to look at the areas of Ashford, Canterbury, Dover, Shepway, Swale and Thanet. Its aims were "to redress economic changes, build on the strengths of organisations and enterprises already in existence and to provide a 'window of opportunity' for work and economic development - a 'kick-start for East Kent'.

The main priorities of the EKI are to:

- reduce unemployment
- improve the infrastructure
- raise the profile of tourism

- ensure an adequate supply of suitable development sites
- improve services to businesses
- maximise European funding opportunities

Ian Gill said that East Kent had suffered severe unemployment following the closure of the coal mines in the period from 1975-85 but it should have been able to benefit more from its favourable geographical position as "the Gateway to Europe" and the intention was to "market East Kent aggressively". Improvements in the infrastructure have been made with the opening of the A20 in 1993 and work has started on the A2 Whitfield by-pass. Rail links leave much to be desired, especially in the quality of rolling stock compared with the rest of the country.

Mr. Gill felt he needed to justify the existence of the EKI to those who might regard it as 'just another quango'. He said it was important to have a single powerful voice to represent East Kent's interests and to gather support from a wide range of organisations, to help promote local and regional strategies and to maximise opportunities to secure government and European investment.

Some people in positions of authority in central government still thought of Kent as being part of the prosperous South-East, said Mr. Gill, and were ignorant of the facts. He went on to give us some statistics. The area with which the EKI is concerned covers 786 square miles with a population of 650,000, — 40% of the population of Kent. There are 16,000 companies in this area, 80% of them employing less than 10 people. Unemployment is high.

Mr. Gill quoted from the 1995 August figures:

For the whole of the UK - 8.4%, Ashford 7.1%, Dover & Deal 8.2%, Folkestone 10.8%, Canterbury 8.2%, Thanet 13.6%, Sittingbourne and Sheerness 11.1%. (Figures calculated by expressing the number of unemployed as a percentage of the total work force). For the area covered by East Kent there are 27,000 unemployed.

Next Mr. Gill explained the structure of the EKI. The Chairman is Alan Willett, a successful businessman in the field of electronic bar-coding. The Vice-Chairman is Hugh O'Connor, Chairman of Pfizer Ltd., the highly-successful pharmaceutical company operating in East Kent. Other officers were drawn from a variety of backgrounds, with responsibility for coordinating different areas of the work of EKI, for example, skills, businesses, infrastructure, public relations, European links and Tourism. There is a large number of private and public sector partners and working in collaboration with these the EKI has been able to proceed in conjunction with their ideas, aims and philosophies.

Mr. Gill finished by describing the achievements of the EKI so far.

They have:

- secured Assisted-Area Status for most of the coastal areas
- secured £30,000,000 of European funding
- obtained eligibility for the following programmes
- SME - funds for small and medium-sized businesses
- KONVER - to help with conversion of defence industry establishments
- PESCA - to help with diversification of the fishing industry
- won more than £14,000,000 from the Single Regeneration Budget, Round One Competition

Mr. Gill gave numerous examples of EKI achievements; for business development in the area, encouraging and establishing new business enterprises and promoting the benefits of Assisted Area status to local companies. Some EKI officers have recently returned from Japan

and hope to persuade the Japanese to set up business in East Kent. EKI also aims to raise the skill levels of the existing work force and participate in a scheme to pay employers £3000 per person in training. The EKI awards grants for business parks and for tourism. 13 grants had been awarded for several business parks, including the White Cliffs Business Park. £100,000 had been received from the English Tourist Board for a marketing and development programme and the Travel 2000 Initiative had been established.

There had also been investments and creation of new jobs. In Dover alone grants of £1,925,000 had generated investment of £20,000,000, which had created 415 jobs. The number of jobs created for the year ending August 1995 in the whole area was 1647.

In the next three years the EKI would continue with their aims and hope for greater success in all their enterprises. Already there were many schemes in hand to this end and Mr. Gill described some of these when he attempted to answer a wide range of questions from the floor. These included questions on agriculture, French imports, animal rights, grants to small businesses, the environment and unemployment figures. The EKI would, he said, be working to try to prevent job losses and to create new job opportunities in all the areas within the scope of the EKI.

When its services are no longer necessary the EKI will cease to exist. Mr. Gill said he would then do himself out of a job and nothing would give him greater pleasure than to reach the stage when he could declare that the economy in East Kent had picked up so well that his work was no longer necessary - perhaps by the year 2000.

During the interval refreshments were served and a raffle was held.

Kent: Brick by Brick

The second speaker of the evening was Colonel Dick Bolton, ably assisted at the slide projector by his wife, Dorothy.

Colonel Bolton began his address by humbly disclaiming any professional expertise in

bricklaying, but said he was an enthusiast when it came to bricks, of which he had several samples and about 350 slides with him. Explaining technical terms like header and stretcher, he treated the Society to an extensive lecture on the history of bricks from Roman times to the present day.

He began with slides of Roman bricks, showing brickwork from Richborough Castle and the Roman Pharos at Dover Castle, and reused Roman brick from St. Martin's Church, Canterbury, reputed to be the oldest place of Christian worship in the British Isles.

He described the processes by which bricks were produced, their various colours and the many beautiful patterns into which they can be assembled. In the course of the lecture we were introduced to most of the major buildings in the county, some familiar like Maison Dieu House, with the insight of Colonel Bolton's extensive knowledge of his subject, illustrated by many beautiful slides.

He concluded his excellent talk and slide show with a set of unusual bricks, the last being a picture of the Queen Mother's brick at Walmer Castle, which is used as a door stop.

DOVER ST. JAMES — TERRY SUTTON

The Dover Society was well represented at the public meeting in the Town Hall on 17 October when Dover District Council outlined long-term plans to upgrade the St. James's area of the town. Our members, headed by our chairman, Jack Woolford, were prominent in the questions they posed and the suggestions they made.

The St. James's area under review is bordered by Woolcomber Street, Townwall Street, the river bank and the backs of the properties in Castle Street.

Steve Bee, of planning consultants Llewelyn-Davies explained the master plan for the St. James's area.

These are the main features:

- New town centre housing in two-four storey blocks to be built on part of the council-owned Russell Street car park.
- Demolition of the MFI building, if the site became available, for more housing.
- Leisure, retail or office use of the "opportunity site" in the prime position at the junction of Woolcomber Street and Townwall Street — where a new petrol filling station is under construction!
- The creation of St. James's Square, the focus for the whole area, surrounded by cafés and restaurants, on the site of part of the Stagecoach East Kent garage.

- Shops, offices and flats in Dolphin Passage, off Castle Street.

- Enlarging St. James' multi-storey car park, with a new south side entrance and with commercial development on the east and west side.

- New pedestrian areas along the riverside walk, with pedestrian access over Townwall Street linking up with the Granville Gardens and the sea front.

- Improvements to Townwall Street (A20), creating a boulevard effect with more trees and feature lighting.

- An hotel with car park on the south side of Townwall Street, where the riverside walk would take pedestrians into Granville Gardens. A new layout to encourage people to use the gardens on the sea front, possibly with the provision of a bandstand.

The District Council's Chief Executive, John Moir, said that for too long this area had presented a negative image of Dover to visitors and for nearly fifty years had contributed little to the viability and vitality of the town centre. But, he stressed, the Council was looking at the long-term future of the area — possibly fifteen to twenty years ahead.

After hearing of the proposals, one of our members, Mrs Deborah Turner, told the meeting the council was not thinking big