



THE
COASTGUARD STATION
STRATEGICALLY
SITED ON THE CLIFF
ABOVE THE
EASTERN ARM.

MEMBERS OF THE SOCIETY VISIT

The Coastguard Station at Langdon Battery

----- STEVE PETERS

DOVER COASTGUARD STATION at Langdon Battery is the base for the Regional Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), its responsibility extending from Norfolk to the Isle of Wight. It is on the cliffs above the Eastern Arm and has uninterrupted views of Dover Harbour, the Channel and the French Coast beyond.

Langdon Battery gets its name from the battery of defence guns that were installed here in 1910 and it was actually on the circular bases of the larger 9.2 guns that the control rooms were constructed in 1979.

On Saturday 25 May 1996 eight members of the Dover Society met in the Battery car park. Arriving early we took

advantage of our waiting time to look at Dover from this hitherto inaccessible vantage point. The Castle looked very impressive from this more lofty perch, the Pharos, at this particular angle, being hidden behind the church. Visibility was good but the French coast was just obscured by mist.

Once an aggressive gun site, this is now a tranquil base surrounded by lush grass, shrubs, brambles and attendant wildlife. We saw rabbits, magpies, jackdaws, starlings and a variety of gulls. This must be one of the finest working environments in Kent.

Our host for the visit was Andy Roberts whose seventeen years Merchant Navy



THE "RADAR INSTALLATION — THE COASTGUARDS' "SEEING EYE"

experience was typical of most coastguards. A maritime background is essential (includes ex-Helicopter Rescue personnel) when making appraisals of Channel situations and subsequent communication with the seamen concerned.

Andy explained that the Service made radio broadcasts every hour (every half-hour in conditions of bad visibility) known as the Channel Navigation Information Service (CNIS) giving details of weather, tides and any navigation difficulties. This service was commenced in 1972 at the same time as they introduced a separation traffic scheme in the Channel which became compulsory for all UK ships. In 1979 this was extended to all Channel

traffic when the new Operations Centre was opened and full radar was commenced. The system was further updated with Automatic Data Processing in 1983 and extended to full radar monitoring in 1993.

After a video display Andy took us to the Control Room. We half expected to see bluff seafarers with eyes glued to binoculars peering into the far distance — far from it. We found crisp, alert computer operators monitoring their screens controlling the most modern computer/radar linked maritime coordination system in the world, with just an occasional relaxing glance from their windows at the panoramic view. The location of the Coastguard Station is irrelevant, we were told. It could just as easily operate from Birmingham.

We were able to see on screen the radar image of maritime traffic actually

in the Channel at that time. It was possible to focus on any section of the Channel for closer scrutiny. This was applied to the Margate area, where we were able to see a flotilla of yachts racing from Harwich to the French coast. The screen was then diverted to the Dover area where we were able to watch ferries crossing between the two coasts and weaving through the other traffic using the separation scheme.

Each vessel, entering the control area is given its own number on the computer and it is possible to home on to a vessel within a computer square when the identifying number is instantly revealed. Thus if two 'blips' appeared to be converging they can quickly be

identified and contacted by radio should that be necessary.

Automatic Data Processing ensures that a continuous record is made of all movements, thus if there is a maritime incident the data can be recalled at any time revealing a vessel's movements before, during and after the incident. This was demonstrated by bringing on to the screen a day in the previous week when a member of the group made a ferry trip. On fixing the time of departure and speeding up the data we were able to monitor the progress of the ferry from departure to arrival. We were spellbound.

This Control Centre, as with other regional centres, has access to many other services and facilities which it must coordinate, including aircraft, Helicopter Rescue Service, Fire Service and Auxiliary Coastguard Rescue Service. This last named service was brought to our notice when we found that one of the computer operators was none other than our own Dover Society member Maurice Palmer. In common with other volunteers he puts a few hours duty each week and was working on this day from 8am to 2pm to make up the full-time personnel shift to six. Well done, Maurice ◇

A DAY ASHORE

A day as a Shuttle Bus Co-ordinator — MERRIL LILLEY

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It is 8.30. am on Monday, 10th June. At the Cruise Terminal the SS MAASDAM of the Holland- America Line is disgorging its passengers. A fleet of coaches awaits to transport more than 800 of them on pre-booked tours to London, Canterbury and other places in Kent. The ship carries 1200 passengers so that means that more than 300 of them will remain in Dover or make their own plans for the day ashore.

There are to be three shuttle buses operating all day between the quayside and the Market Square. The shipping line has appointed Aragon Tours as its agent and they, in turn, have found some local people (four of us) to act as shuttle bus coordinators. From 8.30 am until 5.30 pm there will always be one person at the dock and one in the Market Square. (We are operating our own rota system for this.)

8.40 am and the first shuttle bus is ready to leave. The first passengers to board are a couple who have booked a Hertz hire car in advance and want to know where to pick it up. The first bus fills

up with early risers and sets off for the town. We drop off the couple at the Hertz office and wish them a good day, then proceed to the Market Square to begin our task of aiding, directing, advising and answering questions. Every bus is busy and this continues non-stop until midday.

Where is the train station? Boots? Marks and Spencer? The local bus stop? A camera shop? An optician? The Post Office?

Which is the best way to get to the castle? How long will it take to walk there ? Is the way steep? What is the entry fee? How long should one allow for the visit? How much to go by taxi? Is there a local bus?

Is there time to go to London and back by train? Should one go to Canterbury by train, bus or taxi? How much will it cost? How long will it take?

We can cope with most of this and after an hour or so the local taxi firms have realised what is happening and there are always one or two taxis stationed across the road outside Courts. It becomes easier as the morning progresses. >