



A REPORT by
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To mark the 5th anniversary of the Festival of Dover the theme chosen was "Spirit of the Sea", based on the town's maritime history and heritage. This attracted keen interest from local and regional businesses and some new items were included in the programme at the last minute.

Lessons have been learned over the past five years and the programme adjusted accordingly. Old favourites such as the Teddy Bears' Picnic and the fireworks display were scheduled to capture a large proportion of the market. New additions were not always successful, for instance the Comedy Club evening at the Swingate pub, where the allocated budget did not provide for quality acts. However, in the town centre the Festival Showcase and The Jolly Roger Fun Day proved most popular and, no doubt, will become a regular feature.

Everyone has their own favourite events, acts and performers and taste in the arts is, of course, individual. So I will choose my top five events of this year. These are in no particular order.

Firstly, I was most fortunate to attend the schools' workshop with the children's author, Jeremy Strong, held at Sandwich Library. Jeremy, based in Kent, had me in stitches with his wonderful story telling of a book called "The Indoor Pirates". His interpretation of the frightened pirates attempting to kidnap the postman for ransom was superb and would have been appreciated as much by adults as children.

Another choice is the Dover Youth Theatre's performance of the maritime drama "My Love is Drowned in the Far Off Seas", written by Michael Thomas of Dover Boys' Grammar School especially for the sea based festivities. The talent of our local young people is quite astounding. Despite the fact that I regularly see such performances I found this one outstanding. There was a full house and the atmosphere in the basement of the Keep of Dover Castle added to the effects.

A sunny evening in St. Mary's Church was the setting for my third choice, where the Snowdown Male Voice Choir performed a programme of old and new melodies, including some pieces recently learned for their performance at the Albert Hall in London. The light through the stained glass windows with the sound of their voices singing "You'll Never Walk Alone" filled my eyes with tears.

Our experiment in using venues in Deal and Sandwich proved how little residents move from one town to another to enjoy the events. One such evening was the performance by the Gower Wind Quartet at the Astor Theatre in Deal. The group

comprised tutors from the Kent Music School who, with their Director, Steve Migden, had spent a rather hot and humid day working with 22 young people from all over Kent who all had a keen interest in and played a wind instrument. This performance had a very select audience, a high proportion being the students involved in the workshop and their parents. The small gathering did not perturb the group who provided a lively programme including a series of Lettish dances, to which the audience requested an encore.

Finally, I choose the major artistic production of the Festival, the performances and workshops of Shakespeare's "The Tempest", produced by Deal's Kent Shakespeare Project in association with the London-based SOHO group. Three schools were offered the opportunity of being involved with the project. Sandwich and Walmer Secondary and Archers Court, Dover, took up the challenge. The exceptionally warm, still evenings on Thursday and Friday were an Events Organiser's dream and the performance at the end of the Prince of Wales Pier was an absolute delight. For once!

However our fate was to change. On Saturday, with the prospect of a full house and a number of special guests, the wet weather option was Shed 4 on Esplanade Quay. However, some things work out for the best. The backdrop of static yachts in for renovation and other natural props on site made the performance even more magical than it had been on the end of the pier! It looks as though this could become a regular venue for theatre productions in Dover. The Kent Shakespeare Project are

keen to utilise the site next year!

Much time and effort goes into the planning of each Festival. This year we were fortunate to secure over £26,000 in sponsorship from the commercial sector. Without this assistance the programme, marketing and publicity would be drastically reduced or even withdrawn. This year sponsorship provided for the distribution of 80,000 brochures and diaries through Royal Mail door-to-door service and full page advertisements in local newspapers. There was coverage on Meridian Television on the opening weekend and daily reports on Radio Kent.

Over the past years, through market research or from talking to regular festival attenders, we have learned a lot about programme planning and increasing awareness. Shortly, with colleagues from Dover Museum and Kent County Council Arts and Libraries, I will be compiling the outline package for 1997. The international theme will be "CONNECTIONS". This theme was chosen as the District will be hosting the World Shore Angling Championships and also participating in the Francosonic '97 festivities in celebration of French speaking countries all over the world.

I hope that many of you enjoyed the celebrations of the two weeks of Festival 1996.

Please note the Sea Shanty Festival in Deal in September to mark the end of the "Spirit of the Sea" in White Cliffs Country. Just because it's in Deal is no good reason not to participate. I'm sure we will provide something you will enjoy. <>

Great Expectations

Professor George Curry from North Carolina, who gave us a Dickens Evening in 1992 in St Mary's Parish Centre, is in England again this year.

As part of the Canterbury Festival he will perform in his interpretation of GREAT EXPECTATIONS at the Gulbenkian Theatre on Sunday, 20 October, 1996.