

FRENCH CONNECTIONS : *Hands across the Channel*



A Compilation by Leo Wright, Jack Woolford, Joan Liggett and Jeremy Cope

LEO WRIGHT sets the scene:

It is a commonplace that coastal towns, unlike inland towns, have only a semi-circle for recruitment, refreshment, custom and export, immigration and emigration of labour etc. Dover, however, at the nearest point to the continent – and particularly with modern transport – can so easily complete the circle. The East Kent Initiative and South Kent College are two organisations which are well aware of this. It is appropriate that the Dover Society, whose central aim is to work for Dover, should also look across the Channel.

Because local government in France – the reverse of this country at present – is very strong financially and politically and every commune has its professional *syndicat d'initiative* – we were not going to find the exact equivalent of the Dover Society in the Calaisis. We have, however, very happily established ties with two organisations whose aims are very congenial.

THE ACCUEIL ORGANISATION (the Welcome to French Cities Association) was founded in 1964. Article I of their Charter

is “to welcome and promote the integration of persons and families recently arrived in the town and/or region. The activities are extended to all persons wishing to take part in it.”

It was in May 1991 the Calais Accueil welcomed the young Dover Society with a conducted visit to the Lace Museum and a Mayoral *vin d'honneur* when we drank to the Entente Cordiale. Last May we welcomed a group of their members in our Town Hall. On Friday 22 November five of us were invited to a day in Calais.

Merci! Calais Accueil ——— JACK WOOLFORD

We now know what “Accueil” in Calais really means : to translate it as “welcome” is an understatement.

We were met off the boat by English-born Mme Lefebvre and whisked off in two cars to the restaurant of the Calais College of Catering for a “light lunch” (of four courses). Two-and-a-half hours later we were driven to the Port Control Tower to watch the sea traffic arriving and departing, both in reality and on the radar and television screens. Our Swedish-born hostess, wife of the Controller, showed us the charts and explained the procedures in English whilst participating in the

work in equally fluent French. An hour later we were driven to a magnificent 19th century hotel for tea, biscuits and conversation and were then taken home for further “refreshment” by two Calais families – a rare opportunity in my experience. The lady of the house which I visited spoke some English, whilst her two adopted daughters, one of Malaysian and one of Vietnamese descent (who works for Eurotunnel) both spoke better English than our French. An hour-and-a-half later it was time for dinner in a restaurant on the sea-front and three hours later still we returned to the boat.

10 Each in our best French, Secretary Leo and I thanked our hosts. Leo stressed the many welcomes he had enjoyed in Calais before and immediately after the war and in France ever since. I said that we had not forgotten the Norman Conquest or Napoleon but also remembered the Field of Cloth of Gold and the Anglo-French Entente of 8 April 1904. There have been lapses of friendship but with Calais Accueil and the Dover Society they were unlikely to recur.

One may well say "a busy day" but it was instructive as well as pleasant and we now better understand the differences between Calais Accueil and the Dover Society. Although we, too, have a social programme which includes instruction as well as entertainment, we concentrate on taking part in the local economy, local

planning and local government. Calais Accueil, branches of which are nationwide, was a response to the massive internal shifts of population from post-war economic changes and was, by contrast, designed to minimise the inevitable resulting tensions. Consequently the programme, whilst organising visits (e.g. to Rochester for Christmas shopping) and walks, concentrates on offering classes in languages, French as well as English, German and Russian. Astrology and "Sophrologie" are also taught, there are "Keep-Fit" and sewing classes and lots of meetings for philatelists. So, as ever with our cross-Channel neighbours, there are important differences of emphasis and detail in shared concepts of voluntary educational and social activity.

L'Association France Grande-Bretagne

LEO WRIGHT

The second organisation has aims which are expressly pro-British. The Association was founded in Paris in the dark days of 1917, looking back to the Entente Cordiale of 1904. Their central aim is to work for ever closer understanding between our two countries. The Calais branch was founded

in 1947 when Dover and Calais were both in ruins.

We received a group of their officers at the Churchill in March last year and some of their members joined our Côte d'Opale trip. They have since invited us to three of their functions, two of which we were very pleased to be able to attend.

Assemblée Générale

JOAN LIGGETT

It was with some trepidation that Richard and I agreed to represent the Dover Society at the Assemblée Générale of the Association France-Grande-Bretagne which took place at the Restaurant du Cap. Escalles (a restaurant to be visited again!) In the event, the experience proved highly enjoyable due to the friendliness and hospitality of our French hosts. We were delighted that our schoolboy French enabled us to commun-

icate, helped no doubt by the wine!

The business part of the meeting was concluded with commendable brevity and informality and followed by an excellent meal and much conversation. The time flew by until we were almost too late to reach Calais for the last ferry. Our return to the port, driven by M. Tailliez under instruction from his wife, will remain an exciting memory for some time, culminating in a spirited dash to the Terminal!