

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.