

"MATTERS OF MOMENT FOR KENT"

HOSTED BY THE OTFORD SOCIETY

by Jack Woolford

We were very handsomely hosted by the Otford Society on September 19 with splendid accommodation, superb refreshment, efficient visual aids and excellent management. However, the turn-out (50) was only half what it has been on the two occasions when the DOVER SOCIETY was the host society. The following report admirably catches the spirit of the occasion. Detailed reporting of the addresses will follow in the next issue of "Kent Matters".

A REPORT BY BEVERLEY BINGHAM - from the *Bearsted and Bingham Residents Association*

I would like to say, quite formally, that the conference really was a truly stimulating event. Where on earth did you manage to find the contacts for a bevy of speakers with not a single misfire between them? People holding prestigious posts, well informed and with a flair for presenting their case, which was admirable for the size and mix of the audience for that day, are not easily found.

The topics, too, were very relevant when one thinks about our situation in Kent. I liked Peter Raine's emphasis on the need to be acutely aware of people, and of the consequences of almost every decision-making body on people. Sometimes the authorities seem to be preoccupied with rules and procedures to the point where they become unaware of, or insensitive to, the actual effect upon human beings.

The Department of Environment Transport and the Regions spokesman, Michael Bach, was interesting, giving, as he did, the basic framework for discovering what the targets would be for housing needs up to 2016. Of course, even the most reliable data are of little use when the nation, and the world, face an economic downturn of the kind which is now affecting world markets. Nevertheless his background information about recycling, a good mix of style and size of buildings, and the fascinating comparisons to be made between "households" and "population" were thought-provoking and extremely useful when one is hoping to make rational criticisms and proposals in the future.

Dr. Richard Simmonds' talk on County, Unitary and Regional Authorities was good; one might call it the pseudo-science fiction image of local government in the future. What was it he said, in answer to a question about the future of KCC if Unitary Authorities are introduced? I seem to recall a charming smile and a gesture

which seemed to say: "Ah, well, these things happen. So sad!"

Personally, for me, as a member of our Planning Committee, Dr. Wendy Le-Las, speaking on "The Local Plan Jigsaw" made the day, and our Chairman agreed, there and then, to buy a copy of her book (*UNDERSTANDING THE DEVELOPMENT JIGSAW. Vine House Distribution, 01825 723398 or 01227471367. £25.95*). Listening to her for forty five minutes one quickly became aware of her depth and breadth of knowledge in the fields of planning and development. It is hardly surprising that she is in such demand throughout the country when people need an expert on such precise yet convoluted matters.

Bernard Gambriel (*of London Continental*) gave a presentation on the CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK which was invaluable for us as a society. Many local people are extremely worried about the effect of the new rail link throughout Kent, and, of course, the lack of information has blighted properties along the supposed route - a somewhat elastic image - between London and Cheriton. At least we now have it on paper, and the handout provided included the splendid map of 1/50,000 scale which really does give people a sound idea of the proximity of the line to their own property. I made a note, for the benefit of the local people, of PROFESSOR TONY KENNEDY's name as COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER, and also the policy of considering provision of sound insulation even for single properties where necessary, where some form of "sound mitigation" is needed. One has to keep up with the technical vocabulary or one is regarded as a fuddy-duddy...

Very many thanks for the opportunity to join in a really splendid day. I shall take every opportunity to ensure that our members, and prospective members, benefit from the contents of the programme.