

RIVER DOUR UPDATE

15

.....*from Leo Wright*

In this very rainy Autumn we can easily forget that the flow in the Dour, which once powered five mills, is always under threat.

As a concerned environmental society, we received from the Environmental Agency their overview for Kent - nearly two hundred pages of it!

Firstly, we were very pleased to learn that the Dour is now designated as a river, not a stream. The Dour is the shortest river in Kent but gracing, as it does, three parks and a riverside walk it is an important amenity.

Basically, Environment Agency policies have not changed since Jeremy Cope and I wrote about this in the April 1997 Newsletter, but the measures proposed at the time have been put into effect. These can be summarised as pollution control, extraction control (both volume and location) and, exceptionally, source control.

It is recognised that the Dour catchment area is subject to an environmental deficit, as the result of over-abstraction. It is therefore included in the Agency's national low-life alleviation programme.

Pollution control

It is the upper reaches of the Dour which are affected by low flow while the lower part is polluted by urban out-put. However, the quality of the lower Dour appears to be improving as a result of Southern Water's efforts to deal with cross connections in surface-water drains.

Extraction control

Folkestone and District Water Company score maximum points for demand management. The Environment Agency, for their part, have been pursuing their policy of river basin management for extraction; volume and location and, exceptionally, diverting water into the Dour flow.

Our member, Joe Harman, has been watching this latter activity and writes as follows:

.....*from Joe Harman*

You may have noticed that the flow of the river Dour has decreased in spite of the frequent rain this autumn. The lake in Russell Gardens has not contained enough water to discharge much over the lower end and opening up the sluice at Bushy Ruff has not made much improvement.

There has also been no water coming over the waterfall from the lake on the seaward side of the Alkham Valley Road. Kearsney Manor Lake has been rising and falling, with very little water coming in and none going out. We know that the Water Company has been pumping from the Stonehall bore-hole and this must have lowered the water table and prevented the springs from flowing. It takes two months for rainfall to raise the water level in the chalk and reactivate the springs, so we shall need a great deal of winter rain to recharge the aquifer and allow generous abstraction by the Folkestone and District Water Services.

Recently I attended a conference at Wye College organised by the C.P.R.E who are concerned about the house building proposed for the area, which will cause increased demand for our precious water. It rained all the way there and also when we viewed the rain fed garden. We listened to a panel of experts who covered all aspects of water conservation. We were enlightened about the losses due to evaporation, run-off and

16 climatic changes which will worsen the situation. Although this explains what happens to the rain that falls in East Kent it will not solve our park problems.

Also, this October, I joined Environment Agency officials from Cambridge who were preparing a scheme to maintain the water level in all the lakes. We can only hope that our grandchildren will be able to enjoy these attractive features that we once took for granted.

Stop Press: Early November. Joe reports that the lake in Russell Gardens is full again.



Dover Bells 2000

Peter Dale

Hon Appeal Secretary - Bell Restoration Fund

In 1725 Samuel Knight, bell founder of Holborn, installed a ring of eight bells in the Parish Church of St Mary the Virgin, Dover. It was typical of the time that the clappers were suspended from iron staples cast into the crowns of the bells. The oak frame would have stood upon the mediaeval timbers, which experts suggest may have supported an early spire, before the tower was built up to its present height.

Even if that was the case, it is not a stable platform for a heavy peal of bells. Records indicate that there was an active band of ringers in Dover during the eighteenth century but the constant pounding of the moving frame upon the tower walls for so long had its inevitable effect. The bells were silent for much of the last century and by 1898 the oak frame was deemed to be in such a poor condition that it had to be scrapped.

In that year, possibly as a project to welcome the twentieth century, major restoration work was carried out. Victorian concerns were for the safety of the tower and the spiral staircase was filled completely with concrete to stabilise the structure, alternative access being provided via a series of new step ladders. Window arches for the old stairs can still be seen clearly in the masonry of the South West corner of the tower.

The oak frame was replaced by massive cast iron sections, John Warner of London being the firm entrusted with this work. At the same time they "turned" the bells to allow the clappers to strike in new unworn places. Alas the lightest bell, the treble, was found to be cracked and a new one was cast from the old metal. Although the clappers of the seven surviving bells had to be modified, the original iron staples were left in place.

The shortcomings of the 1898 restoration became increasingly apparent over the next fifty years and in 1947 the bells were re-hung on ball bearings. The improvement was only marginal, however, because the whole installation still stands upon the unsteady ancient timbers. "Dover Bells 2000" is our project to welcome the new millennium. Rather than allow St Mary's tower fall silent once more, a complete restoration and modernisation is planned.

The bells will be removed to a foundry to be tuned and to have the old iron staples drilled out. Completely new fittings will be provided and a new frame built. While the tower is empty steel foundation girders will be built into the walls to lift the installation clear of the rickety historic timbers. All this will cost some £60,000 with an additional £40,000 for the associated building and other works.