

motor mechanics, plumbing, electricians and physical education and can progress to taking City and Guilds examinations.

Offenders in the Dover institution have a background of a wide variety of crime; burglary, theft, robbery, reckless driving, breach of community service, wounding, wounding with intent, grievous bodily harm and rape. Many of the youths have records which show evidence of drug or alcohol abuse; many have been in local authority care; some have a history of suicide attempts. 40% of the young offenders had a background of family breakdown, foster homes or homelessness.

The number of young offenders in prison is growing fast. The sentenced young offender population reached a high of over 10,000 in 1985. It then dropped to just over 5,000 in 1993. Since then it has risen by half and currently stands at over 7,500. An additional 3,000 young offenders are held on remand. Half the crimes in the United Kingdom are committed by young males aged between 10 and 25 years and 60% of the victims of crime are young males aged between 16 and 25 years.

The members of the audience seemed temporarily stunned with the unexpected mass of information they had received about an institution on their doorstep, which they had not previously considered in detail. However, as soon as they recovered the speaker was swamped with a rush of questions which she answered to the best of her ability in the time remaining. She talked of help with allotments, with repairs and with disabled adults. She described community links and work with the Y.M.C.A. and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. She mentioned courses in gymnastics, in swimming, in life-saving and in first aid with St. John's Ambulance. She mentioned career advice and the possibilities which arose for temporary employment with local firms.

Lilian Kay thanked the speaker for her fascinating and informative talk on a subject which had never been tackled previously at a Society meeting. It had given the audience much to think about and an insight into the numerous problems faced by those who worked with young offenders.

DECEMBER *The Christmas Feast*

Report by E. Merrill Johns

On the 19th of December, 1998, some 93 members and friends of The Dover Society were, once more, for their Christmas Feast, the guests of Dover College. As always, we were welcomed with a sherry, though I suspect we did not need it to loosen our tongues as we exchanged greetings with friends, acquaintances and table companions.

We had honoured guests to welcome more formally. The Town Mayor, Paul Sheldrake, was announced, escorted to his seat and welcomed. Our Chairman, Jeremy Cope, presided over the proceedings and included in the welcome Mrs Gillian Sheldrake, our M.P. Gwyn Prosser and his daughter. I am sure the political guests were greatly cheered to know they had no responsibilities for the evening, except to enjoy themselves. We also welcomed ten guests from our sister organisation in Calais, led by their secretary Mme. Fabienne Tomas.

It was a pleasure to see our local historian Ivan Green, one of our Vice-Presidents, though we were sorry to learn that his wife Margaret had been admitted to hospital. The hope was expressed that she would soon be home and well. Sadly, there were four other members who had booked but were too ill to join us. Miss Kay, also a Vice-President, was absent for the first time. We missed her.

It was a first opportunity for some of us to see Howard Blackett, the new Head of Dover College, while for all of us it was welcome news that he had agreed to become one of our Society's Vice-presidents.

After Mr. Blackett had responded to his welcome into the Society, we were ready to line up for the splendid buffet. This is always an introduction to a real feast with wonderful food, magnificently presented and served with good-humoured efficiency.

During the serving of coffee we were encouraged to buy raffle tickets and I, for one, was disappointed not to win the bottle of claret from the House of Commons.

Following the meal, the Dover College music teacher, Roderick Spencer, conducted members of the school choir in a delightful selection of music, beautifully executed.

The evening concluded with a chance for us all to sing carols. It is always good to share

8 in audience participation and this occasion was no exception.

The success of such an evening does not happen by accident. Our thanks were extended to our Social Secretary, Joan Liggett and her husband Richard, to Mike Weston, who organised the wine, to the raffle team and to the catering staff, who gave us such a superb meal.

JANUARY

A Coroner's Tale and a Researcher's Report

EDITOR'S NOTE

At the meeting on January 25th there were two speakers. The first was Dover's coroner, Richard Sturt, and the second Derek Leach, who gave a talk on Prospect House.

Derek stepped in at fairly short notice, in place of the scheduled speaker from Neptune Radio, who was unable to attend. Derek agreed to write an account of his talk for the Newsletter and Terry Sutton agreed to cover the first half of the evening. However, on the night, Terry was unable to attend the meeting. Nevertheless, he has been kind enough to write the account of the first talk of the evening, taken from a tape made by Jack Woolford. So altogether we have to thank several members for the resulting reports.

John Owen proposed a vote of thanks to Richard Sturt for his interesting talk, commenting on two stories in particular. He said that the details of the Herne Bay murder and the post mortem discovery of a heavy duty needle in a prison inmate, was stirring stuff.

Dorothy Smith proposed the vote of thanks to Derek Leach. As the speaker pointed out, this was an opportune time to research the history of Prospect House, with the imminent reopening of the premises by the YMCA.

By all accounts the meeting was a great success and members who were unable to attend, including Terry and myself, missed two excellent talks.

A CORONER'S REPORT

A report by Terry Sutton of Richard Sturt's talk (taken from a taped recording).

Richard Sturt, HM Coroner for Dover and Canterbury and senior partner in the law firm of Mowll and Mowll, topped the bill with a talk on his duties.

He told the meeting how the appointment

of coroners was set up by statute in 1194. In those days, 800 years ago, coroners were also responsible for the collection of taxes, dealing with wrecks, forfeiture of property belonging to a felon and were also magistrates. They were selected from the "knightly class", wealthy enough not to stoop to financial corruption.

Our speaker then described a number of his cases, providing an insight into the death of dramatist and poet Christopher Marlowe, in an affray at Deptford Strand in 1593, by reading the coroner's inquisition. The verdict was lawful killing as the killer was considered to be acting in self-defence.

Apparently there was a theory that Marlowe was a government spy, was not killed in the disturbance (another body was used at the inquest) and was spirited out of the country to settle in Padua where he wrote many of the works now attributed to Shakespeare! A trust was set up, administered by King's School, Canterbury, of which Mr Sturt is a governor, to investigate this theory.

Mr Sturt also told of the Bride in the Bath murder at Herne Bay when the inquest was conducted by Rutley Mowll, Mr Sturt's predecessor but one. The publicity gained by that and other inquests led to the arrest of a man who had "married" several wives who all drowned in their baths.

But the inquest that proved the most difficult, and controversial, for Mr Sturt was that on the people who died in the Herald of Free Enterprise tragedy. In that case the jury returned verdicts of unlawful killing on 187 of the victims and an open verdict on a 26 year old woman who died in a British hospital six weeks after the sinking.

One comment made by Mr Sturt was that none of those who died were over the legal drink-drive limit and, as many of those on board were on a newspaper promotion trip, he wondered if any of those who survived were over the limit.

Another interesting inquest was that on a prisoner at Canterbury who died after a mailbag needle was found in his body.

Yet another inquest he had to conduct was following the IRA bombing of Deal Barracks when 11 bands men died. He revealed that part of the clock mechanism, controlling the bomb, was found in the body of one of the blown up victims.

It was a fascinating talk in which the coroner was able to give the audience details that jury members would not be allowed to divulge because they are sworn to secrecy.