

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 Strond 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.