

THE WINTER SEASON

Five Reports on Meetings from October to February

THE OCTOBER MEETING

Reported by Capt. Mike Weston

MONDAY EVENING, 25TH, OCTOBER 1999 brought together a somewhat smaller gathering of Society members than usual, to hear two speakers give very good and interesting talks on their diverse subjects. The first part of the evening was given over to Mr. Bob Ratcliffe who as a retired Kent County Council Architect and an expert on transportation spoke on the Development of Cross Channel Ferries. The second half of the evening was to have had a speaker from BBC Radio Kent but at the last minute they had to call off. Once again Terry Sutton, one of our two vice-chairmen ably stepped into the breach with a talk entitled Fifty Years of Headlines!

Bob Ratcliffe's extremely interesting talk, illustrated with many slides, started by showing us early nineteenth century paintings of sailing packet boats to Boulogne and Calais undertaken in both

calm and extremely adverse weather conditions and as he rightly said 'a bit of a hit and miss way of travelling when you are relying on wind'. From these very early days of travel between the United Kingdom and the Continent, he moved on to give a brief explanation of the coming of the railway to Dover and also Folkestone by the two railway companies involved, namely The London and South Eastern and The London, Chatham and Dover which were eventually to amalgamate but not before they had run for many years their own separate and opposing operations. Bob showed us fine slides of various aspects of the lines to Dover with passengers alighting on the Admiralty Pier before the construction of the Marine Station. A windswept operation in bad weather as passengers had to cross to whichever side of the Pier was being used on the day, as in those times either side of the Pier could be used by vessels dependent on the direction of the wind. A brief history was given of how

before the Admiralty Pier was constructed passengers had to walk from Dover Station on the foreshore near Archcliffe Fort through a bit of down town Dover to the tidal harbour to join their packet boat.

We were then shown photographs of various aspects of the development of Dover Harbour with the Royal Navy's Home Fleet anchored in the outer harbour and the start of



Reclamation from the Lord Warden Hotel. 5th September 1911

View of Dover Harbour from Cliff Balcony 1944. (Seaplane sheds, wreck of 'HMS Fodrinton', Prince of Wales Pier, Pillbox at end of Castle Jetty, two tankers in harbour)



the construction of the Prince of Wales Pier. As Bob explained, the Prince of Wales Pier was built as part of a scheme for berthing transatlantic liners. Unfortunately this failed to take off. It started with transatlantic liners of a German company in 1903/4 but only lasted briefly due to damage sustained by one of their vessels when leaving port and the company concerned did not return to Dover. We were shown photographs from the beginning of the twentieth century showing the two additional arms being built and the extension of the Admiralty Pier from the turret area to the end where it is at present.

Bob then gave us a resume of the building of the Marine Station. The work involved having to construct a temporary station at the end of the pier, (using wooden piles to widen the pier temporarily), this station being used by passengers whilst the Marine Station was being built. This was completed in 1915 in time to be used as a casualty clearing station in the First World War. Bob had some fine photographs of the interior of the Marine Station showing the vast area within the station and of the memorial erected in memory of the staff of the railway companies lost in the First World War and bemoaned the fact that this memorial is now behind locked doors in the new cruise terminal. He personally has been unable to view it since the

construction of the cruise terminal and hopes that the Dover public has better luck.

Photographs of the 1930's were produced showing further developments of the port - the conveyor belt system on the Eastern Arm bringing coal from Tilmanstone Colliery to be loaded onto ships for export, ships using the Wellington Dock for lay up and the start of the construction of the Train Ferry berth in the Western Docks. The 'Ferry Dock' was opened in 1936 to transport trains across the Channel as at that time the Southern Railway decided the Channel Tunnel would 'never happen'. The service carried both freight and passenger trains (the night sleeper) across the channel and latterly freight on 'rubber wheels'.

Bob went on to give us a brief history of Dover's rival port at the time, Folkestone. He pointed out that in the days of the old London and South Eastern Railway, Folkestone was their main cross channel port and so consequently the vessels belonging to that company were mainly based at Folkestone. Various photographs of these ships were shown together with the port infrastructures at Folkestone.

Members were then entertained to a extensive selection of drawings and

photographs of the many and varied cross channel vessels which plied over the years between Dover and the French and Belgium ports and which of course were instrumental in the development of the Port of Dover. This selection of photographs brought home dramatically to the audience how the ship types changed in size from sailing craft to small paddle steamers, to the early turbine steamers dwarfed by the Marine Station and other port installations, through to the early motor ships and eventually the coming of the huge multi-purpose ships of today which themselves now dwarf the port installations. As Bob said 'there is nothing beautiful about the present slab sided vessels'. I think I have to concur.

After the interval Terry Sutton, in his inimitable style, spoke of the half century he had been a reporter in the town. He recalled when he started work, after completing his military service, he joined the Dover Express in July 1949 at a time when there was still much rationing and much of the town remained in ruins after the war. At that time the Dover Express, based in Snargate Street, had its printing works at the back of the office and only a matter of hours divided the time of the deadline and the newspaper being sold on the streets.

Terry, still working part-time on the newspaper, recalled memories of some of the strange people he had met over the years, memories of famous people he had interviewed and of course memories of the many varied and dramatic changes which have taken place in the town and port. He also gave an insight into a number of national newspapers he had worked for and also radio and television. He still occasionally contributes to these news outlets.

An interesting evening with a wealth of information and nostalgia for the audience.

THE NOVEMBER MEETING

THERE WERE TWO SPEAKERS at the meeting at St. Mary's Parish Centre on November 22nd, John Moir and Lillian Kay. In the interval there were the usual refreshments and raffle and Lillian Kay signed copies of the new book, which she has written with Derek Leach, entitled *The Life and Times of a Dovorian*.

Millennium Dover *A talk by John Moir*

Reported by Lesley Gordon

The first talk of the evening was by John Moir, since 1984 Chief Executive of Dover District Council, which now runs a £60 million gross budget.

His first task was to update the members of the Society on the current state of various schemes, including the Heritage Scheme for old buildings, a joint enterprise with English Heritage and Kent Council, now progressing after a late start. As part of this scheme Dover's long shopping street could, he said, eventually be transformed, like Snargate Street.

He went on to say that he hoped the South East England Development Agency would help the Council achieve a big impact with the proposals for the St. James' area of the town. The Council's aim is to support developments which will bring people back into the town centre, both for commerce and to live, with environmental enhancement to support both. The White Cliffs Experience had helped serve this purpose by attracting people to the town but attendances were now falling after 10 years and consultants are looking at options for different attractions. With the new cruise terminal, De Bradlei Wharf and Woolworth, etc. the town centre showed signs of becoming self sufficient.

The Council is in discussion with Arjo Wiggins about the future of the paper mill. The Local Plan inspectors have reported on plans for the Royal Marines School of Music site and there is agreement with the developer on what would be acceptable. He