

ministerial intervention increasing the original SERPLAN estimate of new housing requirements in the South East to 1.1 million units, he felt that Ashford would be the town most affected in Kent, although Councils were being urged to loosen village "envelopes". On the future of the existing system of local government, he recalled that a regional assembly for the South East would require a referendum in favour. If that were to come about, then unitary authorities would be required and both KCC and districts like Dover would probably disappear. This was a fate he was not prepared to lament, favouring as he did an East Kent authority based on Canterbury. However, Government audit requirements that new systems should not cost additional money were unlikely to favour change.

Responding to another question on eyesores in the town which were likely to inhibit potential developers, he hinted obliquely that two of these, Burlington House and the Bench Street newsagents site, were both the subjects of negotiation, which he hoped would bring results, although he felt unable to expand further.

In proposing a vote of thanks Mrs. Lesley Gordon remarked on how cooperation between a number of different agencies seemed to be the new order of the day. She expressed gratitude to Mr. Moir for a lucid explanation of current and future plans for the district.

Christmases Remembered

A talk by Lillian Kay

Reported by Merril Lilley

Before taking us on a nostalgic trip through her memories of all the Christmases which stood out for her, Lillian Kay gave us a brief but fascinating glimpse of the history of Christmas and some of the customs that go with it.

It was in 350AD that Pope Gregory designated the 25th December Christmas Day, but it was 597AD before we in Britain knew anything about it, at which time it

was called Christ's Mass. The continent already celebrated it. Perhaps St. Augustine introduced it here.

The Vikings called it YULE and brought us the boar's head, evergreens indoors and the blazing log (hence Yule log!) After 1066 the courts held splendid spectacles at Christmas and indulged in long, extravagant feasts. In 1252 Henry V had 600 oxen roasted for a feast. In 1482, at Eltham Palace, Edward IV entertained 2000 guests for 12 days. They had 1000 sheep, 2000 swans, 6 boars, 400 peacocks, 4000 dishes of jelly, 1000 venison pasties, 500 calves, 1000 geese, 2000 hot custards and countless other delicacies.

Henry VIII spent some Christmases in Kent and accounts of the revelry include a recipe for cooking peacocks. They were stuffed with spices and sweet herbs, basted with egg yolks and when they were cool they were decorated with the King's Arms and gold leaf and the beak was gilded. Accounts of all these events include incredible lists of all the food cooked and prepared for the feasts. Queen Elizabeth the First once had seven plays by Shakespeare performed at the court at Christmas.

Under Oliver Cromwell Christmas virtually disappeared, being dubbed "part popish idolatry and part secular licentiousness". Cromwell abolished Christmas and outlawed plum puddings and mince pies in a statute which has never been repealed! Town criers were sent out, calling "No Christmas. No Christmas"

With the Restoration came wassail and games like Blind Man's Buff. With Victoria and Albert came the Christmas tree - introduced by Albert. In 1840 Christmas cards came into being, when the customary "calling cards" were printed with Christmas additions. Also in Victorian times people began to use half-penny stamps, old carols were revived, churches were decorated and people took joints to the bakers to be cooked. Characters from Dickens celebrated

12 Christmas in many of his novels. Lillian recalled, in particular, the scene of the wedding in Dingley Dell on Christmas Eve.

After this breath-taking introduction, Lillian came to her own Christmas memories. With no television and no wireless, Christmas started on Stir-up Sunday, when Lillian and other members of her family sat down to take the stones out of the raisins. When there were 20 stones on the plate she could eat one raisin. The family had never heard of turkey and chicken was expensive. Meat was rabbit or pork. Decorations were evergreens and paper chains, homemade with paste.

On Boxing Day the family walked to the grandparents at Riverdale, where, on arrival, the first job was to dig the horse radish, then wash it under the pump and scrape it, with much weeping! At River they had beef for dinner. Grandfather always said grace - at least twice - and, one year, three times! Rhubarb wine was the only potent drink. The Christmas pudding was filled with thrupenny bits and there was cake! Afterwards there were games like tippet, snakes and ladders, ludo and draughts, then the long walk home.

On the day after Boxing Day everyone descended on Lillian's family. There were more games: spin the plate and many card games. They had one bottle of port wine and one bottle of sherry. They never had many presents. There was not enough money for presents.

She remembered Christmases in school, Christmases with friends, and one Christmas which she spent alone and ate a tin of sardines. She felt that, in a way, television has spoiled Christmas. People do not play as many games together on Christmas Day. Nowadays cards and letters constitute one of the joys of Christmas. After reflecting on the meaning of Christmas and what it means to different people, Lillian ended by reading John Betjamen's popular Christmas poem.

John Gerrard, in giving his vote of thanks to Lillian, reminded us that he lived, for many years, at the foot of her garden and that at Christmas time, when she could see the lights from the Gerrard's tree, she referred to them as "the fairies at the bottom of the garden".

THE DECEMBER MEETING

The Christmas Feast

By Valerie Mason

AGAIN THIS YEAR the Christmas Feast was a highlight of December as members of the Society gathered in the refectory of Dover College. At the start of the proceedings our two guests, the Town Mayor, Margaret Sansum, and Councillor Tranter, were officially welcomed by our chairman, Jeremy Cope.

We very much enjoyed the splendid spread prepared by the catering staff of the college - a wide choice of meats and fish with delicious salads. The desserts were certainly topical, some in the shape of the Millennium Dome, and much appreciated by the chocoholics among us.

While we were enjoying our coffee, Terry Sutton and Derek Leach, our two Vice-Chairmen, were busy selling raffle tickets. Our thanks go to them and to Sheila Cope for organising the raffle and to all those who donated prizes. Where would societies like ours be without the proceeds of raffles?

We were very grateful to Mike Aylen who stepped in at the last minute to accompany the carol singing so ably on his accordion. It was quite tricky playing "The Twelve Days of Christmas" with different tables singing for the various days. Our other accompanist, Lillian Kay on the wineglasses, added to the festive feel of the occasion. Our thanks to Nicholas who encouraged us all to sing heartily.

Such an enjoyable evening is not possible without a lot of hard work beforehand. I know that all those present would like to thank Joan and Dick Liggett.