consistent and deserving long term contribution. The proposal was duly passed with acclaim. In response, the new Vice President spoke of his keen sense of pleasure and pride in his service to the society.

The election of the committee passed without dissent, as follows

OFFICERS

Chairman & Press Secretary	Mr. Terry Sutton
Vice Chairman	Mr. Derek Leach
Treasurer	Mr Mike Weston
Secretary	Mr. William Naylor

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Membership Secretary	Mrs Sheila Cope
Editor	Mrs Merril Lilley
Social Secretary	Mrs Joan Liggett
Chairman of the Planning Committee	Mr Jack Woolford.
Projects Coordinator	Mr Hugh Gordon
Archivist	Dr. Glyn Hale

Also Mr Jeremy Cope, Mrs Lesley Gordon, Mr Mike McFamell, Mrs Audrey Wood, Mr Leo Wright and Mrs. Tessa George (new committee member).

There being no other formal business, the former chairman reminded members of the dates for work at Cowgate Cemetery and drew attention to a (paper) boat race, due to take place in Pencester Gardens in aid of the Carnival and a number of charities. He asked interested members to contact Mike McFarnell.

The meeting closed with members looking forward to a talk by Michael Hinton after

General Elections 200 Years Ago

• • • Report by Lesley Gordon • • •

FOLLOWING THE FORMALITIES of the AGM, members relaxed in anticipation of a talk by Dr. Michael Hinton, well known as former head of The Boys' Grammar School, as scholar and as vicar, active in the community on behalf of the Church for many years.

He drew on his researches for his Reading University Doctorate to conjure up for his audience general elections held in 1806 and 1807 and compare them with more recent manifestations of the electoral process.

In the early nineteenth century, before the Great Reform Bill of 1832, there were 651 MPs for the United Kingdom and the whole of Ireland. Now there are 659 including N. Ireland. Whereas today all constituencies return a single member and a good two thirds of the entire population is eligible to vote, in 1806 most constituencies returned two MPS. In the counties, only landowners had the vote, whereas in boroughs, the electorate varied from one to many thousands and bore no relationship to the actual population. Westminster had 12,000 voters, Old Sarum 1, none of whom were women. Today, general elections usually hinge on 90 or so marginals, and a majority of votes does not necessarily guarantee the success of a party. Although the results in a large number of constituencies are a foregone conclusion, it is a matter of honour that major parties contest every seat. In the early 19th century, contested seats were rare - only a quarter of constituencies were put to the vote. Party candidates were also rare as candidates valued their freedom. Today, voting usually follows first a party, then a leader and only then, individual policies or candidates. Then the ruling considerations were first, bribery and threats, with persuasion a poor second.

The existing government in the early 19th century invariably won general elections, which were a lot less decorous and dull than today's. They could be rowdy and violent and evasions of the law were commonplace. Then, in 1806/7, as now, the House of Commons represented the state of the nation. Power in Parliament lay with the Crown, the aristocracy and county landowners. A quarter of the House was made up of peers or their relations and a third of

landowners, whose power made seeking an official government position unnecessary. About a fifth were merchants, (there being no real industrialists then). Today, the professional middle classes dominate, with a large sprinkling of teachers, trade union officials, and women. The working class is still poorly represented.

Two hundred years ago, the absence of well oiled party machines made seats more available, but only to the rich and well connected, for not just votes, but whole constituencies could he bought - by buying the land and houses of the voters. £80,000 then (£2m today) was enough in some cases to ensure a constituency was beholden to you for life - over a quarter of MPs were returned in this way. Alternatively, £4000 - £6000 bought a single seat for one election from the owner. (40 seats, especially Cornish ones, were sold in this way in 1806 and 1807). Obviously, a contested seat could prove more expensive than buying an uncontested one. People owning property in the constituency were bribed with jobs, allowed to overcharge or paid for services. Job offers were disallowed later in the century, to the detriment of the government of the day who had jobs to give, (rather as in America today). Bribery, (paying for votes) and treating (paying voters' expenses) were rife in 1806 and 1807. Only the latter was legal and, as voting took place at the hustings which could last several weeks and involved voters travelling (even being herded) to the appointed place, their food and lodging expenses, met by the candidate, could be enormous. Contests were extremely expensive, rowdy and often resulted in litigation. (Police and troops were not allowed near the hustings). Candidates would visit the local hostelries, generously contributing to the expenses of potential voters. Daily barracking at the hustings was common and the candidates raised private armies to protect themselves. For the voter, jobs, tenancies and trade could be lost if the wrong person was voted for.

Today there are limits on the amount candidates can spend and election laws against bribery are stringently enforced, although the rich can still fund the candidates themselves. Money still talks.

Dover in 1806/7 was a borough of freemen who had the vote, though half did not live in Dover. The local corporation could make freemen by birth, marriage or apprenticeship. Freemen loved a contest. The money flowed - in the form of jobs from the Government who were big employers and other inducements from candidates. The Lord Warden of The Cinque Ports, who appointed pilots, was likewise influential and not necessarily on the same side of the government. In 1806, one government supporter and a cousin of the Lord Warden became MPs, a third candidate was defeated. In 1807 a London merchant was elected, not the candidate supported by either the government or the Lord Warden.

Issues of the day sometimes influenced voting in affected constituencies - in 1806, the abolition of the slave trade was of concern to Liverpool and in 1807, 'No Popery' supporters brought influence to bear, even though Catholics were ineligible as MPS. Today the issues are more questions of self interest. 'What's in it for me' is usually the biggest issue of recent elections.

'Elections 200 years ago were rough and ready', concluded Dr. Hinton, 'much influenced by wealth, power and property, but then, as now, they reflected the state of the nation and the political will of the country'.

In response to questions from the floor, Dr. Hinton surmised that the cost of being elected in the past was worthwhile for the influence it gave. It was a passport to jobs, patronage and making money - and MPs could not be arrested for debt. General elections were held at least every 7 years by law. Shorter intervals were unusual. MPs were not paid until 1911 and university MPs were abolished after the Second World War.

In thanking Dr. Hinton, Wendy Atherton recalled dipping into some tomes on the history of Parliament, while pursuing her interest in the history of Dover Castle and finding military orders of 1752 requiring troops to march to 'the next place' three days before the election and not return until after it. She thanked Dr. Hinton for his fascinating talk, a sentiment echoed by the warm applause of the audience.