

Society Meetings

THE NOVEMBER MEETING

The two speakers at the meeting on 19th November were John Moir, Chief Executive for Dover District Council and Dr. J. Coleman, who gave an 'Update on the Civil War'.

JOHN MOIR

By Jack Woolford

DOVER DISTRICT COUNCIL'S Chief Executive began by saying that he was now used to being the 'warm-up act' at our meetings, having addressed us 'two or three' times. We now know that it was, in fact, his "swan-song", because of the impending reorganisation of local government, after 18 years. Consequently (I conjecture) his address was, like Gaul, divided into three parts: retrospect, the current situation and the prospects.

John Moir briefly instanced the East Kent Investment framework, which justified the use of public money, but detailed the July 2001 Benchmark Investigation which had shown that four of Dover's wards, including Buckland and St. Radigunds, were far below both national and regional standards in educational deprivation, health and child poverty, skill base and aspirations. Nevertheless, in the background was the Discovery Centre (ex White Cliffs' Experience), Kent's first showcase for Further and Higher Education. The mixed development in the Town Investment Zone (St. James/York Street) envisaged a major store in the town centre and an hotel on the York St corner. He congratulated Jonathan Sloggett, retiring Manager of the Harbour Board, on the prospective establishment of Westport. The White Cliffs Business Park was successful and

the acquisition of Buckland Paper Mill by SEEDA for mixed housing and industrial development. A Lottery application for the refurbishment of Kearsney Abbey's tea room was being made.

Mr Moir answered questions on the future of Maison Dieu House and on Dover's prospects in the South East Region and on the possible disappearance of Kent County Council. He detailed possible transfers of power from the District to Parish Councils (including Dover Town Council), which were very much welcomed by Vice-Chairman Derek Leach - also Chairman of River Parish Council - in his speech of thanks.

I take the liberty of adding the Dover Society's thanks to John Moir for his part at the centre of so many positive Dover developments since 1984, with a special emphasis on conservation. I am also pleased to be able to add that the Moirs do not propose to leave East Kent.

THE EMERGENCY OF 1628

Reported by Derek Leach

FOLLOWING THE WARM-UP by John Moir (his words not mine), Reg Colman, the retired Head of Dover Boys' Grammar School and a student of history, treated his audience to an excellent example of how to make history interesting and why it is important to have an understanding of

history in order to tackle the problems of life today, because the ways people think and act never change. This was achieved without a single note or visual aid.

Reg began by recounting the outcome of Aristotle's analysis of Greek city governments: three ways to govern, each with its own corrupt form. First, there is government by a single person as in a monarchy, which can become a tyranny as in a dictatorship; secondly, there is rule by the 'best' such as the aristocracy, depending upon birth, or the most clever or the richest, which can become an oligarchy serving self interests only; finally, there is government by the people (democracy), which can descend into anarchy with mob rule or no rule at all. Our present government was said to combine all three with a strong prime minister, the interests of big business producing wealth and the involvement of the people.

Other important factors are: who takes the initiative, makes policy and takes decisions and how are decisions enforced - by violence or threats, by argument and persuasion or through respect.

Every age has its own emergencies such as the threat of foreign invasion, civil commotion or, as now, terrorism. In such times governments are expected to act quickly and decisively. The year 1628 brought Britain such an emergency for a number of reasons; the major powers in Europe were hostile - Spain, France and Holland, not to mention the Scots and Irish - and the incompetence of James I and Charles I in foreign policy did not help; in home affairs the rise of the middle classes and their desire for political power was coming to a head; there were social problems caused partially by the cost of food - the age of the sturdy beggar; and there was the religious problem.

From about 1485 to 1660 post-

reformation religion played a major role in the affairs of state until superseded by the age of reason. James and Charles had inherited Henry VIII's mantle as Head of the Church in England and both believed in the Divine Right of Kings (God's representative on earth). To criticise was blasphemy! This stance was being increasingly challenged by the Puritans who believed they had a God-given task and also believed in the rights of man being superior to those of the king.

In 1628 Charles I called his third parliament because he needed parliament to grant money to meet the foreign threat and domestic unrest. In return for money parliament presented the Petition of Rights in which the King was asked to acknowledge certain basic rights of his subjects, which were, perhaps, as important as Magna Carta to the development of modern government, since they invalidated the feudal authority of 'by special order of the king'. The four clauses were: no (direct) tax or forced loan to be collected without the authority of parliament; any prisoner had the right to be given cause for his imprisonment (Habeas Corpus), always threatened in times of emergency even now; no martial law (suspending the due process of law) in peacetime and no billeting of soldiers and sailors in private homes. Charles resisted but had to accept.

Following this success, more resolutions followed, including: anybody who paid import dues without the consent of parliament was a traitor; anybody who made changes to religion without consent of parliament was a traitor.

After this humiliation, Charles suspended parliament for the next eleven years until he needed more money! He became a virtual dictator and, to be fair, achieved much, which often happens with dictators who

10 tolerate no opposition! Parliament was recalled in 1640, but only for three weeks, to deal with the Scottish threat. It was all down hill for Charles after this with the Civil War and his execution in 1649.

The Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660 enshrined the achievements of the interregnum and curtailed government by royal prerogative. Following the

Glorious Revolution of 1688, parliament offered the crown to William and Mary and set Britain well on the road to the constitutional monarchy that we know today.

In conclusion, Reg returned to his opening theme that human nature and the problems that have to be faced are very much the same in every age: only the solutions differ.

THE CHRISTMAS FEAST 2001

Reported by Shirley Dowle

IN TRUE DOVER SOCIETY tradition we met for the now 'much-looked-forward-to' feast of 2001. It was held on Saturday, 15th December, at Dover College Refectory.

There were eleven long tables, filled by 79 members and their guests. We were greeted by a charming group of ladies who offered us sherry or juice. Everyone seemed in good spirits and the atmosphere felt very festive. As always the food was excellent, especially the salmon, and was enjoyed by all. I am sure we all gained a few pounds that evening. Even the strong-minded could not resist the tempting, delicious desserts. Many had second helpings.

After we had all partaken to the full the fun began in earnest. Lillian Kay had organised the entertainment which she led and she had recruited some others to help her. We listened to a story or two from Lillian, a poem from Derek Leach and some solo pieces from a brilliant, visiting flautist, Sarah Gooda, who played enchantingly and performed a piece in each half of the programme, accompanied on a keyboard by Mrs. Dunne, a former Music teacher from Dover Grammar School for Girls.

We sang a lot of carols and tried to sing in parts. I could not decide whether the ladies or gentlemen were the better singers. Some were not sure which part they were singing! We had great difficulty with the rounds. Where did all the high notes go? We did very well with a rendering of 'Three Blind Mice', with actions.

In the interval we had time to catch our breath as the Christmas raffle took place. As usual there was a large and varied selection of prizes.

Back to the main entertainment again, with Miss Kay leading us in a poem called 'My Hat'. We all tried hard with this action poem but - Oh dear! - I think we left Miss Kay doing most of it as a solo! The carol singing was much enjoyed by all. Miss Kay was, as always, very entertaining and enterprising in her choice of programme and we thank her for giving us such an enjoyable and amusing time. The evening ended with a hearty rendition by all of 'We wish you a Merry Christmas'.

Everyone left, I am sure, having thoroughly enjoyed the whole evening. I am looking forward to coming again next year. May I take this opportunity to thank everyone who helps in any way to make our events so enjoyable.