

The March Meeting

COWGATE CEMETERY

Report by Lesley Gordon

The March meeting opened with a talk on the Society's current major project, the clearance of Cowgate Cemetery by teams of volunteers and the recording of gravestones. Thanking the two teams of volunteers, who each put in a morning's work at the cemetery every month, Hugh Gordon, the co-ordinator, urged members to see for themselves the remarkable results now visible on the ground (a fuller report is contained in the December newsletter, p6)

Paul Hadaway, of the White Cliffs Countryside Project, explained to the meeting how the Society had been recruited to assist its work. WCCP manages vast tracts of land including Folkestone Down and Folkestone Warren, Western Heights and Whinless Down to South Foreland Valley and sister projects on Romney Marsh and the Kent coalfield. Limitations of staff and resources mean that they rely heavily on volunteers to supplement their work force and he expressed his gratitude to The Dover Society for its sterling efforts at Cowgate.

Management of the cemetery by WCCP was based on four basic principles. First, the cemetery had to be maintained and its appearance managed so as to look cared for, particularly around the entrance. Secondly, there was a need to improve the wildlife status of the site. The regime of hay cutting and tree clearance improved the habitat for chalk grassland species, especially the common spotted orchid, which had its stronghold on the Western Heights. Butterflies were proliferating and he had recently found a slow-worm, which by its size, must have been all of 30 years old. Thirdly, the management regime required that the site's importance as a cemetery should be respected and lastly, bearing this

in mind, the cemetery should be improved as a recreational and amenity resource. People should be encouraged to wander through it and enjoy its special qualities.

Next, Martyn Webster, a long standing member of the Society, explained how he had originally approached WCCP with a view to conducting guided walks in local cemeteries, something he had experienced in Brighton where he now lives. The first Dover walk had taken place in 2000 and included Cowgate, and this would be repeated on July 6th, 2002. These old cemeteries, many now closed, were suffering from great neglect through lack of resources. Studies of gravestones and research on families gave important insights into the history of the area. There were now government exhortations to preserve cemeteries, but lack of funds meant it was often left to voluntary societies like ours to come to the rescue. His interest now extended to cemeteries world wide, one of which, in Singapore, was about to make way for redevelopment because of land shortage. He was greatly concerned about this trend and there was an urgent need to act quickly or, in a hundred years time, much of the information available today would be lost forever. He hoped the good work of the Society would continue and prosper.

Lastly, the meeting heard from Lesley Gordon, in charge of gravestone recording. She explained that some 7,264 burials were recorded in the burial register for Cowgate cemetery, from 1837 through to recent years, although there were very few in the last decades. The cemetery consists of eight large plots, arranged in two rows of four, with a row of ornate vaults along the rear. Each plot contains about 250 graves, with many containing a number of bodies (up to 12!) Her small team, led by Ian Murton and helped by records already compiled by Joe

Harman, had tackled plot 2. It had proved a daunting task, but had now been completed and typed up, though there was much re-checking and map plotting to be done (the District Council have full burial records, but no plan of where individual graves are within the large plots).

Fortunately, over 400 graves in the cemetery had already been recorded by Mrs Jane De Bourbel in the 1980's and a valuable record lodged in the museum and library. As a result, it was hoped that outstanding, unrecorded gravestones and tombs could be dealt with quite speedily, though final presentation of all available data would take some time.

The gravestones are of great historical interest, recording shipwrecks and travellers dying in Dover on their way elsewhere. Of great poignancy are the large numbers of children dying in various epidemics in the mid 19th century - often three or four of the same family would die in a matter of weeks. Rather oddly, plot 2 has two separate occupants who are shown on the gravestone as one sex (e.g. Emily Jones) and in the register, as another (e.g. John Arthur Jones). Perhaps more investigation will explain the error!! Some names are not in the register at all - perhaps the stone commemorates someone who died and is buried away from home, or perhaps a later memorial shows the wrong date of death, thus frustrating a search in the register. Much remains to be done, but the Society can pride itself on a worthwhile undertaking, started in the nick of time.

DOVER'S INDUSTRIAL PAST

**Mark Frost, Senior Assistant Curator,
Dover Museum**

Reported by Derek Leach

Mark Frost began by pointing out the impossibility of covering Dover's industrial past in the time available since the town had been so industrialised and because of the massive amount of information available. Quite apart from the many individual

craftsmen, such as clockmakers and shoemakers, there are records of 150 shipbuilders and 50 breweries. Mark concentrated on the industry using, or sited on, the River Dour, which for its short length was just as industrialised as the Thames or Mersey from its source to the sea.

Beginning at Temple Ewell we heard of the Domesday corn mill owned by St John Commandery in 1535, which was rebuilt in 1790 and bought by the Pilchers in 1798. From the 1780s the Pilcher family owned, or leased, most of Dover's corn mills. They had to borrow money from John Minet Fector, the banker, to finance their schemes but went bankrupt in 1842 leaving John Minet Fector owning most of the mills. Temple Ewell also had a steam driven mill from 1870, which closed in 1967 and is now the Dover Operatic and Dramatic Society's base.

William Knocker built both white and brown paper mills at Bushy Ruff in the 1790s (as well as Bushy Ruff House). The mills were demolished in 1870 when Joseph Churchward bought the estate. The drying rooms and stable still exist albeit converted into dwellings.

There was also an ancient manorial mill at Kearsney Manor (then called Kearsney Court) to which tenants brought their grain. This was leased to the Pilchers by 1786, rebuilt in 1811, bought by the Stanleys from John Minet Fector around 1856, closed in 1902 and demolished in 1953. The foundations are still visible in Kearsney Manor gardens.

In 1812 John Minet Fector bought the old 1587 Town Mill and apparently rebuilt it in 1821 at his new home, Kearsney Abbey, to pump water to his house, which it did until 1924. He also bought rubble from old town houses and Dover's town walls to build follies in the Abbey grounds.

River Mill (at the bottom of Minnis Lane) is mentioned in the Domesday Book as a corn mill but by 1689 it was a paper mill. It was leased by William Phipps in 1765, who also leased Lower Buckland paper mill. River Mill