

YHA BUILDING, LONDON ROAD, DOVER - HOME OF THE KOETTLITZ FAMILY

by Derek Leach

On 11th May I responded to the invitation in the local newspaper to visit the Youth Hostel Association building on the London Road. The YHA had occupied what was known as Charlton House since 1965. I was free to wander round the ground floor, which still has some of the original features of the house, built circa 1825. Around the walls of the hall was displayed information about its previous occupants. In 1881 George Fielding, Solicitor Registrar of the County Court and a JP, was living there with his three daughters, a son-in-law and five servants. He was still there in 1905.

The main claim to fame of this house is that it was home to the Koettlitz family.

Reginald Kooettlitz's father was a Belgian but he married an Englishwoman and settled in Dover in the 1860s. Reginald was born in 1860 and was educated at Dover College until 1876, later studying medicine at Guy's Hospital. Reginald went into practice in Durham in 1885 and stayed there for nine years. Geology was his great passion, coupled with a desire to explore. He

gave up his practice in 1894 and toured Britain by bicycle. On arrival at Dover he offered his services to an Arctic expedition, which lasted three years. Then he went on an Abyssinian expedition in 1899, followed by another by steamer 1000 miles up the Amazon. These trips were interrupted briefly in 1901 by his marriage to a French lady whom he had known for many years. Incidentally, both his marriage certificate

and his will were witnessed by Sir Ernest Shackleton.

In 1901 he left England with Captain Scott on Discovery bound for the Antarctic where he stayed for two years acting as the medical officer and the botanist/geologist. During this expedition a glacier was named after him. On his return Dr. Koettlitz gave an illustrated lecture on his exploits at the Dover Institute. After all this excitement he settled in South Africa as a surgeon, although he did try ostrich farming, unsuccessfully. Both he and his wife died in the same year, 1916. He died of dysentery and she of heart disease. By his request, only freemasons carried his coffin to his grave.



YHA building, London Road

Maurice Koettlitz, Reginald's brother, had a doctor's surgery at 20 London Road near Churchill Street and Maurice's son, another Maurice, joined the practice, which had moved to Charlton House by 1917. In the surgery was his uncle's stuffed polar bear, serving as a standard lamp, which was later given to the Museum and can still be seen there. Maurice junior died in 1960 and would be remembered by Dover folk today.