
KFAS AUTUMN CONFERENCE 2004

reported by Jack Woolford

THE AUTUMN CONFERENCE of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies was hosted by the Bexley Civic Society on Saturday September 18 at Danson House, Danson Road, Welling, an 18th century Palladian Mansion recently restored from ruin to magnificence. Set in a fine park, offering superb views from its top storey (its fine stone stables now a splendid pub), it is architecturally fascinating because the interior behind the Palladian facade is octagonal from cellar and kitchen through spiralling staircase to dome. Original frescoes, paintings, library, salons and chamber organ have been meticulously restored.

The Conference was organised and chaired by John Mercer and it emerged from the address by Chris Donovan, of Bexley Environment Services (speaking on the 'Thames Gateway') that it was John Mercer and the Bexley Society who had saved the building from neglect and

demolition and, with the Borough Council, had persuaded English Heritage to restore it. What an achievement (amongst many others) for an Amenity Society!

Martin Wilson, also of the Society, entranced us for an hour with meticulous description and illustration of the fantastic refurbishment of 'The Crossness Engines' which, for more than a century, pumped London's sewage from the Thames to its tidal estuary (now the 'Thames Gateway') after 'The Great Stink' following the cholera epidemic of 1854 which forced even the House of Commons to run away holding its nose. The great engine house was a masterpiece of Victorian Gothic architecture as well as of Victorian civil engineering. Like Danson House it is in working order and open to visitors.

Bernard Gambrill, formerly of Union Rail which built the railway through the Channel Tunnel and sponsored KFAS Conferences, is now Head of Public Affairs at Crossrail which proposes to build a new underground from Paddington via Tottenham Court Road and Liverpool Street northwards to Stratford and southwards to Abbey Wood to connect with a new Thames Tunnel and Ebbsfleet in Kent. Mr Gambrill (still sponsoring KFAS) argued convincingly as always that the billions it would cost would relieve congestion and overcrowding, and facilitate essential



The Red House

financial and business growth and international links.

After a delicious buffet lunch we were skillfully guided not only through Danson House but also through the Victorian Gothic Red House, based on a 14th century monastery, built for the artist,

poet and craftsman (wallpaper a speciality) William Morris by architect Philip Webb in 1859. It was a shrine for the Pre-Raphaelites and consequently positively reeking in atmosphere. It gave me the pip but was well worth the visit. What a day!

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The work of the

PLANNING

Sub-Committee

Reported by JACK WOOLFORD, Chairman

Dover has many hanging fires. The response to our appeal to Biggin Street traders to contribute to the £2000 needed for the planting of Town Centre Trees to complement the Town Council's 'Dover in Bloom' was very disappointing: only Simmonds jewellers were forthcoming with £250. We are now applying to the Tree Council for a substantial rekindling grant and, if successful, will try appealing again. Furthermore, if Calais can be induced similarly to plant town centre trees, European funding may also become available.

We hope that the conversion of the 'Prince of Wales' building into housing, which we heartily support, will not be long delayed by reconsideration of the number of 'affordable' flats. We hope that conservation of the United Reformed Church by conversion into a restaurant with housing, will progress and that the construction of the Sea Sports Centre, unlike its predecessor, actually be funded.

We congratulate Dover Town Council for improving and safeguarding the 'Xmas Lights' but trust that the endless fiery bickering with Town Centre Management on the 'Switch-On' will ultimately subside.

The other two hanging fires are 'Dover Pride' and the St James Town Centre

Redevelopment. We have, of course, heard most, if not all of it, before from consultant after consultant and are entitled to ask why this time it should be different. We cannot but applaud expansion of the port, the attraction of new business activities, more and better housing, shops, restaurants and hotels and the improvement of tourism, but know that competition from the Channel Tunnel, cheap airlines, other cruise terminals and seaside resorts, fruit importers (like Sheerness) and other maritime teaching and research specialists (like Southampton) will not go away.

'Dover Pride' is indeed right to 'upgrade and improve transport links'. A2 dualling from Lydden, restoration of the rail link to the docks and extension of the High Speed Rail link to Dover are the indispensable keys to any rehabilitation of Dover. All of this we have all, Councils, Boards and Societies, been saying for a decade, some of it for more than a quarter of a century. There is only one exception to what is now technologically feasible: A2 can be upgraded and the Shakespeare Tunnel improved or replaced (at a cost). Alas, however, Townwall Street, cutting off Dover from its seafront, is irremediable. It can neither be lowered nor lifted. Pedestrian bridges are inconceivable. The proposed new superstore will compound congestion and the promised 'pedestrian super-crossings', across two lanes of HGVs, coaches, and cars (etc), beggar the imagination. Will the developers (and the government) fire it all up? We cross our fingers.