

English Heritage on Dover Castle, the Drop Redoubt, the Emmaus building at Archcliffe Fort and 50 others including the Territorial Army HQ in London Road and, currently, the Ladywell Development and a warehouse in Whitfield.

In 2003 he helped establish the Independent Alliance and became a town councillor, helping to save Maison

Dieu House from private sale.

With a long sequence of illustrations, accompanied by witty and ironical remarks which excited (rueful?) laughter from all quarters of the gathering, he asked the question: "Was Dover in better shape now than fifty years ago"? His answers were that the Port but not the Town was better but that we were all trying.

## April

### "FRENCH AS SHE IS SUNG"

A talk by Philip Robinson

- Reported by Jack Woolford

**S**tanding in at short notice because Cllr. Paul Watkins could not, as a parliamentary candidate, speak on "Dover Pride", Philip Robinson, Professor of French at the University of Kent at Canterbury, gave as much a musical and dramatic recital as a talk. It was, indeed, entertaining; but the instruction was real. His subject was the radical difference between French and practically all other European languages as far as the principles of speaking were concerned. He started with some examples of English from Shakespeare and Thomas Gray, to remind us that the basic building-block of our language, and therefore of our verse, is the stress-pattern in words: in words of more than one syllable, one or more of the syllables would be stressed whilst others would not, eg "The CURfew TOLls the KNELL of PARTing DAY". He then (incredibly) sang and acted the Duke of Plaza-Toro's patter song from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* (unaccompanied but superbly) to demonstrate how the stress patterns of "That celebrated, underrated nobleman" matched the music in an amusing and necessary way.

But what happened when the language did not have any given pattern of stress within words, when all syllables had equal weight, as was the case in French? One thing that happened was that foreign learners of French, including Anglophones, found it very hard to have to do without the basic building block of their own language. A French word or phrase was a string of equally-weighted syllables, with only the slightest stress, and pause, on the last syllable of the string. This was one of the most important things to remember when speaking French, if one hoped to be understood at all.

The Gallic ear was as offended by unwanted stress as the English person's was if a native French speaker tried to leave out the stress patterns when speaking English! The nature of the French language meant that French verse was not characterized by the number of 'feet' but by the number of syllables in a line. The point was illustrated by showing a few lines from Racine's *Andromaque*. The rhythmic interest of French verse was maintained, in the twelve-syllable lines of French tragedy, by varying the length

of syllable-strings within the lines, whereas Shakespeare made sure that not all his pentameters slavishly followed the pattern of "tee-tum - tee-tum - tee-tum - tee-tum - tee-tum: e.g. "Friends, Romans, countrymen, LEND me your ears".

Philip Robinson then, again without accompaniment (or help from members of the audience who didn't know it) performed a comic donkey song "*Mon Ane*" by Pierre Dupont from 1848-51 to

demonstrate how the musical stress could fall anywhere in a French line of verse. To end the evening, some of the audience learned that "*For he's a jolly good fellow*" is really a very ancient French tune as they (eagerly) sang along to several verses of "*Malbrouck s'en va-t-en guerre*" and enthusiastically applauded the command to "Go forth and utter your strings of French syllables, leaving your stress at home"(!).

Chateau de Malmaison set in the grounds of the Bois-Preau 10 miles west of Paris was the home of the Empress Josephine. Between 1800-1804 Napoleon would visit at weekends, though his presence would hardly make the party go with a bang. Only twenty minutes was all the time allowed for meals, and when called upon to sing, he always gave a rendition of "*Malbrouck s'en va-t'en guerre*" (Malbrouck Goes to War), out of tune. An odd choice, when you remember that it was Malbrouck, the Duke of Marlborough, who had beaten the French armies a hundred years earlier.



## MEMBERSHIP NEWS

**SUMMER 2005**

At around 450 our membership is about the same as it was this time last year and we have recruited a record 19 members since the spring. We are indebted to those who introduce friends and also to Terry Sutton who, as our press correspondent, works hard to keep Dovorians aware of the Society. Thus we manage slowly to increase our numbers year by year in spite of inevitable losses.

Our new members are:- Mr R Markham, Mrs L Young, Mr S Perkins, Mr D & Mrs J Downie, Mrs D Hodgson, Mr R & Mrs J Marsh, Mrs S Langley, Mr M & Mrs J Bates, Mr K & Mrs S Munday, Mrs C Dennison, Mr P Sherratt, Mrs J Baldwin, Mrs J Laws, Mr S & Mrs C Crowley.

In the Spring I thanked all raffle helpers. Adeline Reidy has kindly offered to organise raffles from October and I feel totally confident that with the support of members Adeline will find the task satisfying and even entertaining.

*Sheila Cope, Membership Secretary*