

— — *The Chairman's Report* —

— — **Annual General Meeting** —

— — *of the Dover Society, 2006* —

by Derek Leach

Your Executive keeps members up to date via the Newsletter and so only a brief review of the past 12 months activities is necessary, although it conceals considerable activity.

Planning matters

The Planning Committee, under its enthusiastic chairman Jack Woolford, has been showered as usual for comment upon initiatives, plans and strategies for the South East, for Kent and for Dover District. All seem to agree upon the need locally to strengthen and diversify the economy, more jobs, the extension of the high speed rail link to Dover, upgrading the railway station, dualling of the A2 and putting an end to traffic gridlock in Townwall Street and beyond. We wait patiently for some action.

DHB plans to build, at its own expense, an additional dock exit road and for a buffer zone (lorry holding area) between Dover and Capel to ease congestion in the docks and in Townwall Street have been cautiously welcomed. Recently we have been dazzled by the DHB's development proposals at the Western Docks to cope with the expected doubling of freight traffic over the next 30 years. We await more details but in the meantime we are raising various concerns.

We are still waiting for redevelopment of the Buckland Paper Mill site and for progress on plans for the St. James' redevelopment area, including the controversial Asda superstore. At long last Netto is converting the Co-op site for its own use and four other retail outlets. Phase

2 of the White Cliffs Business Park has also come to life with B&Q the likely anchor store.

A substantial expansion of Whitfield is threatened as a consequence of the government's demands for many more houses in the South East. Whilst DDC favoured up to 8,000 new houses in the District by 2020, the county council is recommending 6,000. Currently, there are some 500 empty houses and 50 empty shops. We believe that job creation to be an essential precursor to any substantial increase in housing.

Conversion of many of Dover's older properties into flats continues unabated despite objections and we await an improvement of the Crabble Hill/River junction sought by The Dover Society.

Thank you Jack and your committee for your sterling efforts throughout the year.

Social/educational programme

As always Joan Liggett produced a varied and interesting summer programme including trips to Chartwell, Chatham Dockyard and St. Omer - to improve our French, of course. She also arranged what many thought was our best Christmas Feast yet. If you have not been then you are missing something! Our winter programme of speakers' topics, arranged as

ever by Jack Woolford, have ranged from Captain Cook and Hubert de Burgh to the Future of Kent and Bananas - not forgetting another highly successful wine and wisdom evening.

Our sincere thanks are due to Joan and Jack and the team that prepares this hall and organises the refreshments. The evening raffle is part of our tradition. After many years Sheila Cope laid down the burden of organising the raffle, but Adeline Reidy has proven to be a worthy successor. Thank you both. Sheila remains our efficient membership secretary, which is no mean feat with over 440 members.



Jeremy and Denise looking for a raffle winner

Joan Liggett has given notice that she will retire as social secretary at the end of 2006 and we need a replacement to work alongside her for a few months before going solo. Please consider yourself for this rewarding job and also sign up for this summer's programme of outings.

I hope that you are finding our new lapel microphone an improvement.

Newsletter

Our excellent Newsletter contributes significantly to the reputation of The Dover Society. Following the retirement of our editor, Merril Lilley, Alan Lee, her replacement, took over the reins very quickly and has maintained the high standard set by Merril. The Newsletter would be nothing without reports and

articles by members, so thank you Alan and all the contributors. Neither should I forget to thank the unsung heroes who stuff the Newsletters into envelopes and the distributors who act as postmen. We are still without an advertising manager. Advertising income helps considerably with the cost of the Newsletter and we do need somebody urgently for this task. Please see me this evening if you can help.

Website

An activity easily overlooked is the work of Mike McFarnell, our website manager, who makes the work of The Dover Society available to the whole world via the internet. Thank you Mike.

Projects

Some of our projects are long term and others are quite short. Sometimes what we expect to be a short sprint turns into a marathon!

Our Cowgate Cemetery maintenance team is there for the long haul. The whole cemetery has been cleared and now 'only' requires maintenance. The fortnightly work parties show no signs of flagging and you should feel their biceps! Thank you Jeremy Cope and co... The plotting and recording of the gravestones was completed last year and the records handed over to Dover District Council and the Museum. In addition the Kent Family History Society has made the information freely available on microfiche. Ian Merton, Lesley and Hughie Gordon did a grand job.

Another long haul has been putting all Budge Adams' slides of Dover onto the Dover Museum database. All 2000 slides with supporting text are now on the system after several years of effort by Bob Hollingsbee, Julia and Peter Burville and myself.

Jeremy Cope represents us on the River Dour Steering Group set up to

improve this valuable facility. I think that it is fair to say that without the considerable input by Jeremy the Group would have made little progress. Having been bogged down for over a year with constitutional problems, it was Jeremy who led the way out of the maze and now we are seeing real progress with clearly established roles for all the participants, riverside walk signs, training for volunteers and ten initial projects funded by the Environment Agency. Once again, thank you Jeremy.

A project that was bogged down for many months was the plan to plant trees in the pedestrian precinct to soften the townscape. Having quickly raised over £1000 from members and receiving a grant of £1500 from the town council, funding was not a problem. The two big problems were underground services and CCTV cameras. These were eventually overcome, although we had to accept trees in planters rather than in the ground. By now, the ten trees should be in place. Thank you Jack and your planning committee for your perseverance.

A new initiative last year was The Dover Society encouraging owners of five historic properties to open them last September during national Heritage Open Days and coordinating the publicity. I hope to repeat it this year and to add the Admiralty Pier Gun Turret, although this is dependent upon finding sufficient voluntary stewards. Again, please see me if you can spare a few hours.

The campaign to demolish Burlington House was boosted by Sheila and Jeremy Cope assisted by Mike McFarnell entering this eyesore as a contender for Channel 4's demolition programme. Whilst the need to demolish was not in doubt, Channel 4 decided to leave it to the St. James' redevelopment scheme to achieve. Once again, we wait patiently!

With the centenary of Bleriot's historic flight in 1909, the Society is lobbying to make something of this, but first improvement is necessary at the Bleriot Memorial and access to it. We await a meeting with English Heritage that owns the site. With the closure of Connaught Barracks we are also concerned about the future of the historic Fort Burgoyne.

Finally, another new venture for the Society which we shall trial later this year is a Society Christmas card, using images of old Dover from Budge Adams' collection.

Grants

Your Executive has also given away some money during the year to further the aims of the Society. We have offered £250 toward the cost of publishing the report of the 1996 Townwall Street archaeological dig by the Canterbury Archaeological Trust. With the Roman Painted House in dire straits financially, we have also offered £300 to the Trustees and we have shown our support for the international Bronze Age Boat Conference in Dover in October by donating £200 toward the cost.

Chairman

As your Chairman I have represented the Society during the past twelve months at the installation of the new Lord Warden, the moving Zeebrugge ceremonies on St. George's Day, the Mayor making and recently at the final parade of the Parachute Regiment.

This concludes my report on behalf of the Executive whom I should like to thank for all their efforts during the past year and particularly Merril Lilley and Lesley Gordon who are not standing for re-election.

Perhaps I can also thank at this point our treasurer, Mike Weston, for his meticulous book-keeping, before he presents his financial report.