

MARCH MEETING

Discovering Lost Dover

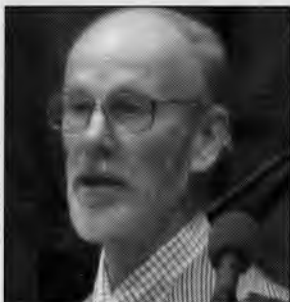
*A report by Alan Lee on a talk by
Brian Philp, Kent Archaeological Rescue Unit*

IN FEBRUARY 1952, the exams Brian was due to take were cancelled because King George V had died. At a loose end Brian started reading about Roman forts and from that began a lifetime of interest in archaeology. Seventeen years later he was involved when, originally only given eight weeks, the York Street area was being excavated for ancient finds.

Years before this Sir Mortimer Wheeler had suggested that a long lost Roman shore fort was located within the area, one reason being that this was the only gap in the cliffs for approximately twenty miles. Many experts of the day mocked this, having come to the conclusion that such a fort never existed, but Brian and his team were to prove them wrong. The fort was found and it turned out to be only seven feet from where Mortimer had said it would be.

An old burial ground was discovered adjacent to the site of the old National School; this was located about where the York Street roundabout is today. Originally locating eighty-two head stones the team ended up finding two thousand, the bodies discovered were reburied in Charlton Cemetery.

The well known public house, the Cause is Altered, once stood on the site of



Brian Philp

part of the Cow Gate, the old town wall and part of a vast military ditch.

All this time the archaeology team was attempting to have these ancient sites preserved. After one hundred and forty days they won their battle against the contractors and the Dover Express at the time

described it as Dover's Pompeii. At least twenty buildings were preserved and these are still beneath the York Street roadway which was raised seven feet as a consequence. Whilst these were saved four public houses, two schools and some one hundred buildings were demolished as the area was redeveloped.

North of the Market Square the dig also found the Roman Painted House, now well preserved and open to the public. Built about 200 AD it formed part of a large mansio or official hotel, for travellers crossing the Channel. It stood outside the great naval fort of the Classis Britannica, demolished in 270 AD by the Roman army during the construction of the larger Roman shore fort. All told some 26,000 fragments of plaster were found in the Roman Painted House; this was the largest and the highest quality find in Britain, with over 400 square feet of painted plaster, the most extensive ever found north of the Alps. The wall



'The Roman Painted House

paintings are considered some of the best in Northern Europe. Quickly £70,000 was raised to protect and house the finds. Finished in 1977 the building work took 404 days at a cost of £76,000. The most notable visitor has been the Queen Mother who stayed one and a half hours to view and talk about the site. A visit to the Painted House is a must for any visitor to Dover.

Apart from damage caused by the piles in the foundations which support the Discovery Centre (formally the White Cliffs Experience) all of the buildings uncovered by excavation work have been successfully protected and backfilled.

Many thanks must go to Brian for a most fascinating talk, illustrated by many interesting pictures; this gave his audience an insight into what treasures lay beneath our town.

Roman Painted House Opening Times

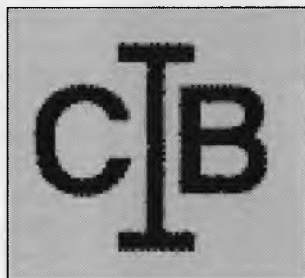
April to end September:

Tuesday to Saturday 10am - 5pm.

Sunday 1pm - 4.30pm. Closed Monday

October to March:

Open for pre-booked groups.



*The logo of the
Kent Archaeological
Rescue Unit*

C I B: The Cohors I Baetasiorum, the first cohort of the Baetasii was the garrison of the Roman fort at Reculver. Since Brian Philp's team started off as the Reculver Excavation Group, they adopted the name of the garrison as their insignia to show that they work with the discipline and precision of the Roman army!