

The Chairman's Report

Annual General Meeting

of the Dover Society, 2007

◆ ◆ ◆ by Derek Leach ◆ ◆ ◆

Your Executive tries to keep members up to date on most issues via the Newsletter and so only a brief review of the past 12 months activities is necessary, although, as always, it conceals considerable activity.

Membership

Membership remains healthy around 460 and we are grateful to Sheila Cope, as membership secretary, for her hard work and members who recruit friends. As always, unfortunately, we have lost some members through death.

Planning matters

The Planning Committee under its enthusiastic chairman Jack Woolford was busy as usual monitoring planning applications and other issues. Several important matters were referred to the Executive. We resisted plans for an open prison at the vacant Connaught Barracks and are keeping a watchful eye on any plans for the site, including Fort Burgoyne. We have raised concerns about local air quality caused by shipping and heavy lorries and gave a cautious welcome to plans for a lorry holding area between Dover and Capel. After due consideration, on balance, we welcomed Dover Harbour Board's Western Docks



Chairman Derek Leach

redevelopment proposals to cope with the expected doubling of freight traffic over the next 30 years, but expressed a number of concerns. Plans for the St. James' redevelopment area, including the controversial Asda superstore, have moved forward and we have had to accept, albeit reluctantly, that it is the best on offer. Our concerns about the

quality of any development may be alleviated by the news of a regional grant to improve the appearance of this important site.

We supported plans for redevelopment of the Buckland Paper Mill site over the next five years and welcomed occupation of the Co-op supermarket site. We also welcomed the refurbishment of Priory station and news that the high-speed rail link will be extended to Dover, although whether we shall be able to afford the fares is another matter! Concerns were expressed about proposals for thousands of extra houses in the District over the next 20 years unless accompanied by appropriate infrastructure and employment opportunities. We note that after much dithering Wetherspoons intend to redevelop the Snoops nightclub site, which can only be an improvement and we have backed efforts to save

Buckland Hospital, although the writing does appear to be on the wall. We were able to compliment Dover District Council for its refurbished skateboard park in Pencester Gardens coupled with the hope that skateboarders would refrain from using the bandstand and other facilities. Recently, we have also given support to the outline plan for a segregated cycle and footpath from Crabble Athletic Ground into the town centre.

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. She also attracted a record 122 people to our Christmas Feast, although we have decided that in future we should not exceed 100. Jack Woolford, as ever, arranged an excellent winter programme of speakers.

Our sincere thanks are due to Joan and Jack and the team that prepares this hall, organises the refreshments and the raffle. The Christmas Feast was Joan Liggett's swan song as social secretary and we were pleased to welcome Pat Hooper as her successor. Pat started as she means to go on with a record attendance at our February wine and wisdom evening, but is worried about the lack of bookings for an excellent day trip to Greenwich in May. Please book soon. Forms are available tonight.

Newsletter

Thanks are due to Alan Lee, our Newsletter editor, and all the contributors for an excellent Newsletter, which contributes significantly to the reputation of The Dover Society. We are also most grateful to the envelope stuffers, the proof readers and all the volunteer distributors.

The lack of an advertising manager for the Newsletter was causing concern until Jean Marsh volunteered to fill the vacancy and we have made good any lost ground. Thank you, Jean for stepping into the breach.

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, not only for the website but your other efforts for Dover: the annual Film Festival, the European Archery Event in August and the Pageant next year.

Projects

Maintenance of Cowgate Cemetery by a small, dedicated team continues almost as a matter of routine now. The fortnightly work parties show no signs of flagging, but reinforcements are always welcome for this open-air exercise. Thank you Jeremy and your team - strimmers anonymous. Jeremy represents us on the River Dour Steering Group set up to improve this valuable facility. The Group suffered a setback with the withdrawal of Dover Town Council from the Group, but much progress has been made in the last 12 months with monthly litter clearances outside the fish breeding season, the installation of riverside walk signs, training for volunteers and ten initial projects funded by the Environment Agency. Jeremy has used his diplomatic charms to revive the Steering Group in revised form. Once again, thank you Jeremy.

A disappointment during the year was to see most of our ten town centre trees vandalised soon after planting after all the difficulties that had to be overcome. Fortunately, Dover District Council has

now replaced them with more robust specimens.

Once again The Dover Society coordinated national Heritage Open Days in Dover with four historic properties opened free last September. This year St. Mary's Church will also be open and I am hoping that Dover College will also open the Norman refectory and chapel of the old priory.

With the centenary of Bleriot's historic flight in 1909, the Society is lobbying to make something of this. As a minimum we expect a suitable ceremony at the Bleriot Memorial, but also want some improvements to the site and better access and parking. English Heritage, which owns the site, is supportive but cannot fund anything. Dover District Council leases the site and has joined with us in trying to make it a great occasion. Since Bleriot's flight marks the beginning of international air travel an air show with sponsorship from airlines is being explored.

During the year we were approached by les Amis du château de Condette, a village history society near Boulogne, who suggested a twinning arrangement as we had similar interests. A small group has visited us and we have been there and agreed exchange visits for members this year. Our members will be able to join them for lunch at Dover Town Hall during their visit on 6 June. Our visit to them will be on 22 September.

Finally, another new venture for the Society were packs of Society Christmas cards, using images of old Dover from Budge Adams' collection. They were very well received and attracted orders outside the Society. Our thanks are due to Adeline Reidy and Alan Lee for producing and selling them.

Grants

Your Executive has also given away some money during the year to further the aims of the Society. We donated £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 also donated £300 to the Trustees and we supported 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 on a number of occasions, including the Zeebrugge ceremonies on St. George's Day and the Remembrance Day service at the war memorial for rail employees at the Cruise Liner terminal. Terry Sutton laid a wreath on behalf of The Society at the Dover War Memorial. I also attended the dinner last October to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the granting of the royal charter to the Harbour Board.

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 Joan Liggett who is not standing for re-election. After such a long and valuable stint as social secretary we would normally make a suitable presentation, but Joan refused. However, we could not let Joan go without expressing our gratitude in some way and so the Executive Committee recommends that Joan Liggett should be elected a Vice President of The Dover Society. As Chairman I propose this to the meeting. (This was passed unanimously.)

Perhaps, before he presents his financial report, I can also thank at this point another hard working member of the Executive, our treasurer, Mike Weston, for his meticulous book-keeping.