

Connaught Park: 125 Years of Service

Graham Wanstall, Park Officer for the Dover Society

Our lovely Victorian park celebrates its 125th year this July. In 1883, the Duke and Duchess of Connaught opened our park and the Connaught Rooms in the Town Hall. In recent years, the neglect of these great local Victorian landmarks has been marked, with Connaught Park becoming secondary to Kearsney Abbey and our historic town hall to the council offices at Whitfield.

Things changed for the worst after the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering under the Local Government Acts of 1988 and 1992. This led to the sale of the old lodge house so for approximately the last 15 years there has been nobody resident in the park with any responsibility. Things became even worst under 'Best Value', part of the 1999 Local Government Act which came into force in 2000.

Dover District Council will be working on a grand strategic policy over the next few years so it is vital that we retain the park as it is. One councillor suggested we sell off half the park to save the other half while others want 10% or more to become a car park. Both of these would be a fundamental mistake and betray the original purpose of the park, to be a well-kept large peaceful public open space with excellent views of the town and its harbour for all to enjoy. In our small-



The Lily Pond, Connaught Park, 1924

polluted country, dominated by the motorcar, it is so important we retain such public areas as havens away from noise and pollution.

Talk to people over 40 and most say the park was so much better when they were children, it is well laid out, just the right size and is only a ten-minute walk from the town centre. More activities could be held in the park and so encourage more people to walk.

When did you last visit our park? It is a treasure we must use, respect, enjoy and safeguard for future generations. When you next visit Dover Castle, why not take a walk through Connaught Park and enjoy what Dover has to offer!

A tree will be planted in the park in July, donated by the Dover Society, to mark the 125th year of the opening with the District Council arranging events throughout the day. Watch the local press for details.