

ST NICHOLAS DAY

Fr. Peter Sherred

The Church of Our Lady of Dover may not figure highly, if at all, in the annals of Dover in terms of history but it does provide arguably the most significant Christian building on the Buckland Estate serving the Roman

Catholic community there and from a wider area. Located on a road junction where Old Park Avenue, Old Park Hill and Roosevelt Road meet it provides a prominent brick footprint that dominates the immediate neighbourhood. It was designed by F G Broadbent FRIBA and built by the local firm of R J Barwick & Sons. Fr. Terence Tanner was the Roman Catholic priest of Dover when it was completed, enabling it to be opened by Bishop Cowderoy on 11th November 1960. This was a significant date for not only is it Remembrance Day but it is also the Feast of St Martin of Tours, the patron saint of Dover. Visitors can admire its internal layout, in particular the main focal point, the Pieta, carved by Robert Forsyth who was responsible for the statue of St Richard in the Maison Dieu.

It was at this church on 6th December 2007, the Festival of St Nicholas, that civic dignitaries, members of the Emergency Services, the Pharos Choir and members of the public gathered for an evening of Christmas Word and Song in thanksgiving for and celebration of the work of the Emergency Services. The evening had added poignancy in view of the death of the female police officer knocked down



The Church of Our Lady, Dover

by a person she and others sought to detain and of course the tragic loss of life of four fire fighters in a Warwickshire warehouse fire, both incidents occurring not long before the evening function was scheduled to take place.

The evening of carols and readings was deliberately designed not to be a traditional service. Lessons were introduced that not only led up to the nativity of Christ and the Incarnation but took people beyond to help understand the meaning of the divine birth and to be able to reflect on what they understood to be the Kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus Christ. Additionally, the readings were to help people understand, through poetry and prose, the impact of Christmas on their lives. Various people read lessons which were interspersed with readings, from *A Visit from the Christ Child* by Père Robert, *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens, *St Nicholas* by The St Nicholas Society and *Christmas* by John Betjeman, the former Poet Laureate.

The Pharos choir began the proceedings with the church in semi-darkness, processing with candles and singing the first verse of *O come, O come, Emmanuel!* The only other light was from a camera belonging to Meridian Television. The programme continued with a reading from the gospel of St John, where he unfolds the great mystery of the

Incarnation, and continued with carols. The choir sang *Alleluia, a new work is come on hand*, *The Infant King, Nativity Carol, Coventry Carol* and *Hodie Christus natus est*. The congregation sang with gusto some of the old favourites: *Once in Royal David's City, Away in a Manger, While Shepherds watched their flocks by night, As with gladness men of old, Once upon a long ago, Good King Wenceslas looked out*, finishing with *O come, all ye faithful*.

A timely visitor St Nicholas (John Crowley) arrived during the evening and along with Val Crowley he read about the life of St Nicholas and distributed gold

chocolate coins to the children, the mayoresses and members of the choir. He departed before the end, adding a sense of mystery to the occasion. Following a blessing by Fr. John Panario the choir rounded off the programme with a rousing rendition of *Jingle Bells*.

There was then a reception that included mulled wine, mince pies and two superb themed cakes made by Chrissie Whitnall. They were in the form of St Nicholas and an ambulance and were much admired by all present. The St Nicholas cake was eaten quite rapidly, with the Dover ambulance station staff and crews having the benefit of the three dimensional vehicle cake in service colours after the evening.

A retiring collection, taken for the benefit of the Warwickshire fire fighters' families, raised the sum of £200. The next of kin of each of the dead fire fighters would then receive £50 as a modest token of remembrance and thanksgiving.

Despite the adverse weather, it was satisfying to see the church full, of people enjoying the evening and contributing to a benefit for the fire fighters' families. We are grateful to Fr. John Panario for making this beautiful church available for the occasion and for the support given by him and his congregation. This was the second evening devoted to the members of the Emergency Services who go about their work throughout the year confronting

all manner of difficult challenges and often with little appreciation or acknowledgement. It is hoped that by holding such evenings public awareness of their contribution is raised and the men and women involved feel valued and appreciated.

