

The Chairman's Report

Annual General Meeting of the Dover Society, 2008

◆ ◆ ◆ by Derek Leach ◆ ◆ ◆

The Chairman's report has been reproduced in its entirety so therefore some items or events will already have taken place – editor.

Your Executive tries to keep members up to date on most issues via the Newsletter and our website, but perhaps it is only through this annual report that members can really appreciate something of the range and extent of the Society's activities for the past year.

Membership

I am pleased to report that not only has our membership remained steady, but has increased since this time last year from around 450 to 464 despite the loss of some members through natural causes and lapsed membership. This is due to recruiting efforts by some members and the hard work of our membership secretary, Sheila Cope. Thank you, Sheila.

I now ask you to stand as we remember those who have died.

Planning matters

Needless to say our Planning Committee under its tireless chairman, Jack Woolford, has kept busy monitoring, and commenting upon where necessary, all planning applications and related issues with several important matters referred to the Executive. Whilst we would have preferred the Connaught Barracks site used for higher education or something similar, we have welcomed plans for 500 eco-friendly homes, although we are keeping a careful eye on the future of Fort Burgoyne.

The controversial future of Dover's health

services has been prominent throughout the year and member, Lorraine Sencicle, has been in the forefront, trying to ensure that as part of Dover's regeneration we have adequate local health facilities.

An essential part of any such regeneration are Dover Harbour Board's outline proposals for major expansion at Western Docks to meet future traffic demands with associated commercial development; having welcomed them in principle with some reservations, we await more details about the development and the essential infrastructure.

We also await, but with some trepidation, the long delayed redevelopment of the St. James' area and the impact of ASDA upon both local traffic and local shops, but are eagerly awaiting the demolition of Burlington House. I may feel just a touch of personal sadness - perhaps The Dover Society would fund a plaque for the site stating, 'Derek Leach once worked here!'

Yet another key element in Dover's regeneration is the resolution of the Townwall Street problem - both traffic congestion and air pollution. Unfortunately,

there still seems virtually no prospect of the obvious solution - that is for Eastern Docks traffic to use a dualled A2 and for Western Docks traffic to use the A20. The recently announced proposal by Kent County Council for a 3000 vehicle lorry park off the M20 may offer an alternative to Operation Stack and even, perhaps, some alleviation to Dover's problems at other times.

We are pleased to see the refurbishment of Dover Priory station and its environs and to see the Sea Sports Centre take shape, but wonder when development of the Buckland Mill site will begin. We have supported Langdon Action Group's opposition to the proposed wind farm, and welcome Dover District Council's promise to replace the vandalized town centre trees.

The conversion of many existing buildings into flats continues apace, but a major concern is the growing number of retrospective planning applications and their subsequent approval, coupled with somewhat limited or tardy enforcement action by DDC.

Thank you Jack and your committee.

Social/educational programme

Pat Hooper has experienced a very demanding first year as social secretary. Pat spent considerable time arranging the successful visit by the Association des Amis du Chateau de Condette last June, which included lunch at the Maison Dieu and a hurried trip to Canterbury, as well as planning our return visit to Boulogne, which had to be cancelled for lack of interest. Undaunted, Pat organised a successful summer programme of outings, the traditional Christmas Feast at Dover Priory and the February Wine and Wisdom evening. We are also grateful to her and her assistants who provide refreshments for our public meetings, to the raffle organisers and donators of prizes and to Jack Woolford who,

once again, arranged our array of interesting speakers.

It would help Pat so much if people interested in summer outings booked early rather than late. If you have not booked yet for this summer, please do it tonight if possible.

Newsletter

Our newsletter goes from strength to strength and our thanks are due to Alan Lee, our editor, to our proofreaders and contributors, to Jean Marsh our successful advertising manager and to those behind the scenes who stuff the envelopes and deliver the newsletters to our door.

Website

Mike McFarnell, despite his involvement in promoting the archery event last August, his Film Festival in February, the Festival of Dover and organising the Dover Pageant this summer, still finds time to keep our website up to date and interesting.

Projects, initiatives and concerns

Jeremy and his team are still to be found every fortnight at Cowgate Cemetery - not pushing up the daisies but keeping the cemetery attractive for you and me and for its wildlife.

Jeremy, as our representative on the River Dour Steering Group and its secretary has successfully re-engineered the group, following the much greater involvement of the Environment Agency. We are pleased to see the progress of various projects to increase water flow, plant and wildlife and to soften the banks in addition to the work of the White Cliffs Countryside Project litter clearing volunteers. A welcome development is the recent adoption by Dover Town Council of the Charlton Green riverside area. We should also note the recent demise of Town Centre Management. Jeremy Cope was

our representative on its board and was heavily engaged in its winding-up. We have urged both Town and District Councils to fill the gap left by Town Centre Management.

Once again the Society acted as local coordinator for Heritage Open Days last September with six properties open to the public. This year we plan more and better publicity. Regarding the centenary in 2009 of Bleriot's historic cross channel flight which we wish to see commemorated by permanent improvements to the memorial site and some sort of celebration linked to flight, we met again with DDC recently to hear, in confidence, their plans. You must wait, however, for the public launch of these plans, but it should be a great weekend.

New initiatives and concerns

The 125th anniversary of the opening in 1883 of Connaught Park will be celebrated this year. Graham Wanstall has taken on, very enthusiastically, a watching brief not only for the festivities but also for the day-to-day maintenance of the somewhat neglected park. The Society has agreed to mark the event by planting a Holm oak tree with a suitable commemorative plaque. Expensive protective fencing is kindly being donated by Jackson Fencing of Ashford.

We are supporting the 2008 Festival of Dover by underwriting up to £1000 of the cost of the Tallis Concert by Canterbury Cathedral Choir at Dover College on 10 May. Tickets cost £10 and are available from Mike McFarnell tonight if you have not purchased yours yet.

We were pleased to see the Maison Dieu clock repaired, but would also like to see it illuminated at night once again if possible. We doubt whether DDC will provide any funding since it would cost £6000 apparently - mainly for scaffolding. A talk by John Clayton during the Film Festival has also resulted in the Society approaching DDC to see whether a case can be made for a major

lottery grant to enable a much-needed major refurbishment of the Maison Dieu.

From the sublime to the ridiculous - our concerns about the amount of litter in various parts of the town resulted in the DDC officer responsible discussing the issue with our Executive.

Participation in a short, sharp campaign to save an Air Raid Precautions post by Dover Priory station - one of the few surviving - from demolition resulted in protective listing. It will be a constant reminder to those who lived through the days of Hellfire Corner and those born since that terrible time.

Chairman

So, what have I been up to as your Chairman? In addition to keeping order at Executive meetings, which is sometimes difficult given the passion of committee members, and 'MCing' our public meetings, I have represented the Society at a number of functions during the year. Two in particular stand out: at the Zeebrugge ceremonies on St. George's Day and the remembrance service at the imposing war memorial at the Cruise Liner Terminal. This year for the first time I also laid a wreath at our plaque to the Unknown Warrior whose body arrived at Dover in 1920 on its way to London. Terry Sutton laid our wreath at the town's Remembrance Day service.

Conclusion

No chairman's report would be complete without thanking your Executive and others in the Society for all their efforts over the past year. Mention must be made of Mike Weston's meticulous book keeping as treasurer, not forgetting his role as purchaser of fine wines for Society events. I should also like to thank especially Adeline Reidy who is not seeking re-election to the Executive, but who assures me that she will continue to work for the Society on the 'back benches'.

The work of the

PLANNING

Sub-Committee

Report by

JACK WOOLFORD, Chairman

Kent County Council has thanked us for drawing to their attention unauthorized spoil dumping on Roman Road, which they have stopped. We are also pleased that Dover Harbour Board has accepted our argument that there should be a connection from the proposed new marina to the Wellington Dock via a lock and swing-bridge.

As always, other messages are mixed. The A20 upgrade proceeds with less than the gloomily predicted chaos despite predicted weather and French strikes. Thanks to all concerned and notably the A20 Action Group. The endless delay to the redevelopment of Buckland Mill is apparently not because Christie Homes has pulled out, but because it is undergoing some redesign to meet changing circumstances. The Eastern Dock relief road is at last under construction and it seems that after even longer Dover will get either a community or a general hospital, in either Whitfield, Coombe Valley, Connaught Barracks or the Health Centre, etc. The Society supports both options.

The new bus depot at Whitfield shows that the DTIZ St James Development is still alive but B&Q, which paid for the Phase II Business Park's infrastructure, has put its new superstore on the market and will (presumably) remain at Charlton Green, so that the rumoured Morrisons takeover of the site (presumably) evaporates.

The Society has accepted Dover District Council's Local Development Framework Option 4 for 10,000 new houses but points out that jobs must and should come before houses, and draws critical attention to cumulative former major planning errors.

We also applaud the massive plans for the futures of Connaught Barracks and Fort Burgoyne, although the current national and international economic climate, which may force Dover Harbour Board towards privatization, is, putting it mildly, unpromising.

Meanwhile we remind DDC of its undertaking to replace our missing town centre trees.

