

# OCTOBER MEETING

## The Coastguards

*A talk by Andy Roberts reported by Terry Sutton*

Andy Roberts, the Maritime & Coastguard Agency's sector manager (East Kent) proved to be one of the most amusing speakers of the many we have enjoyed at our public meetings at St Mary's Parish Centre. Andy was our guest speaker on October 20th when he had a packed audience.



On a macabre note he suggested some people reported missing were never found because their bodies remained unseen in the undergrowth, such as at The Warren near Folkestone, and were eventually devoured by wild cats and other animals, resulting in the bones being scattered over a wide area.

He shone when the PowerPoint presentation failed to react immediately and kept talking until eventually photographs appeared on the screen.

Andy had the audience in fits of laughter as he related the extensive work of HM Coastguards that ranged from beaching stranded whales to rescuing people trapped on the cliffs. More seriously he told of the many bodies he and his team of volunteers had been called upon to haul up the cliffs.

Andy explained that his responsibility stretched along the coast from Herne Bay to Rye and out into the English Channel. He had also been involved in cliff rescues and body recovery at Beachy Head - illustrated with pictures.

He told of one incident at Capel when the rescue team recovered a body from the cliff face and a woman spectator was so interested in the action that she fell over and had to be rescued herself! He also related domestic quarrels that at times ended up on the cliff top.

Andy also spoke of the wider duties of the MCA controlling the busy shipping lanes in the Dover Strait. He explained that each day there was an average of 500 commercial shipping movements through the Strait along with leisure craft, fishing boats and, at times, Channel swimmers. He pointed out that Channel swimmers and sailing boats had no right of way across the designated traffic lanes in the English Channel.

With some 40,000 ferry sailings a year he thought it "long overdue" there would be an incident involving one of the ships and he wondered how some of the young stewards would react when it came to directing passengers to the lifeboats. He regretted the departure from Dover of the hovercraft which would have proved ideal for "hoovering up" survivors from the sea or from lifeboats. He also wondered how the hospitals at Canterbury and Ashford would be able to cope if a major Channel disaster resulted in many survivors requiring treatment.