

APRIL MEETING

Annual General Meeting of the Dover Society, 2009

The Chairman's Report, Derek Leach

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

In this my fifth annual report to members and once again I must try to present fairly briefly the many and varied activities of your Executive Committee during the past 12 months - some you will be aware of via our highly respected Newsletter or website. We have been accused during the past year of being 'talkers and not doers'. I leave you to decide.

Membership

Our membership remains steady hovering around 450 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

Both our Planning Committee, chaired by the seemingly immortal Jack Woolford, and the Executive have, in addition to scrutinising and commenting upon the many routine planning applications, had a number of major issues to

consider. Regarding the Harbour Board's proposals for the redevelopment of the Western Docks, we were pleased that our submission for a water link between the Wellington Dock and any new marina in the harbour was accepted. The proposed Local Development Framework taxed us - particularly the plan for 10,000 new houses in the District. We considered that jobs before houses were a must. Tentative proposals for eco-houses on the Connaught Barracks site were supported, but we continue to monitor the future of Fort Burgoyne. Our concerns about air pollution from Townwall Street traffic remain. We objected to the Langdon Wind Farm proposal and made representations at the lengthy and costly public inquiry, but were pleased with the outcome. The so-called Olympic Legacy in the form of a massive, intrusive TV screen in the Market Square, broadcasting daily from 7am to 11pm, received the thumbs down from the Executive, but despite many objections and no recommendation from its officers DDC's Planning Committee approved it. We have felt it necessary to support an appeal to the Ombudsman for maladministration on the part of DDC in respect of an application for back garden development in Maison Dieu Road.

Feelings in Dover have run high throughout the year about the controversial review of its health services and the Executive has supported efforts for improvements. Member

Lorraine Sencicle, as Dover's representative on the Patient and Public Involvement Forum - Primary Care Trust, and others have worked tirelessly to achieve the best possible health care services for Dover. Recently elected as a governor of the newly formed East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust we wish Lorraine success in helping to deliver a successful result despite a number of obstacles.

Whilst we regret the lack of progress in redeveloping the St. James area and the Buckland Paper Mill site, we were pleased to be able to thank Dover Town Council for taking on the improvement and maintenance of the land beside the Dour adjacent to the recently vacated B&Q. We have contributed the text for an interpretation panel outlining the history of the Dover Engineering Works. Rare indeed, we thanked Kent Highways for at long last improving the Crabble Hill traffic lights junction.

Social programme

Another interesting and varied programme of summer outings and winter public meetings were organised, although we are concerned about the viability of the outings. Some of them made a loss and we had to cancel the annual French trip. With the credit crunch in mind this summer's programme is less ambitious and cheaper and we have abandoned the French trip. To save Patricia Sherratt worrying whether she will have enough people, please book early. Non members are also welcome. It would be good to hear from you whether it is cost, the venues, or even the early starts, that are not attractive! As for our Christmas Feast we would also like to know whether members would prefer a hot meal rather than the excellent, but cold, buffet. Thanks are due to Patricia Sherratt, Jack Woolford and their many helpers. A special mention must be made of Muriel Golding who has organised our

Monday evening refreshments for many years, but has decided to call it a day.

Newsletter, website and press

Our Newsletter edited by Alan Lee continues to be highly regarded by members and others. We are indebted to all the contributors, Jean Marsh our advertising manager and all our distributors for their efforts. The Newsletter is a useful recruitment tool and spare copies are available from Jeremy to attract new members.

The excellent website, managed by Mike McFarnell, also keeps members up to date and helps to interest internet browsers not only in the Society but in Dover as well. Its coverage has been extended with Lorraine Sencicle's articles on Dovers around the world and we are now planning a Dover history page making use of Kathleen and Bob Hollingsbee's archive.

A high public profile of The Society is also maintained by Terry Sutton's regular press reports.

Projects

Our regular working parties at Cowgate Cemetery, led by Jeremy Cope, continue to keep the whole cemetery attractive as a haven for wildlife and for people as well as respecting those buried there. Sadly, the team lost a long-standing working party member with the death of Peter Hargrave. There is a warm welcome to new workers. The Society continues to play a leading role in the River Dour Steering Group, although with the Environment Agency and the WCCP taking the lead on improvements to the river and litter clearance, the group now has more of a monitoring role. The Society continues to coordinate and publicise arrangements for some Dover properties to be open free of charge on a weekend in September under the national Heritage Open Days umbrella. Our specially printed leaflets were well received last year and will be repeated this year when I

hope that the number of properties participating will increase from 6 to 9.

Initiatives

Moving from 'more of the same' I turn to 'what's new' with quite a list. We supported the retention rather than the demolition of the Second World War ARP post by Priory Station; refurbished the plaque to the Belgian workers who repaired war-damaged houses in Saxon and Norman streets as a tribute to the heroic people of Hellfire Corner; planted a tree in Connaught Park to mark the 125th anniversary of its opening; supported the George Cross Campaign for a memorial to the civilians of Dover killed during WW2; and joined those organisations seeking a coordinated approach to promoting Dover's historic assets. This list would not be complete without mention of the fantastic Tallis Concert by Canterbury Cathedral Choir at Dover College last May sponsored by The Society as part of the Dover Festival.

Concerns

Concerned about the poor state of many of Dover's historic panels, we have urged Dover Town Council to take over the refurbishment and maintenance from cash-strapped DDC. We have also offered to pay for the urgent refurbishment of the Bleriot panel in time for the centenary celebrations in July this year. Following our approaches to English Heritage and DDC 3 years ago to mark the event, exciting plans both for improvements to the memorial site and a celebration weekend have been announced.

Concerned about the state of Mote's Bulwark, lack of public access and the deteriorating buildings at its foot, we have been in touch with the private owner of the buildings who is not interested in selling and held talks with English Heritage who have commissioned a feasibility study regarding the Tudor fortification.

Concerned about the terrible state of the former cinema and nightspot in Castle Street, still undeveloped by Wetherspoons, we have urged compulsory purchase. The continuing need for public toilets in decent condition has been stressed as well as the need to keep our streets free of litter.

Consulted by Dover Town Council about a redesign of the War Memorial garden, our view was that the white stones should be removed and the grassed area retained. We opposed a proposed signboard area in front of the Memorial and this idea has now been dropped.

There is growing concern about the state of the Maison Dieu. DDC has welcomed our suggestion of making a lottery bid for its refurbishment after the 2012 Olympics when more money should be available. In the meantime we have started our own modest fund.

With no provision for a leisure facility in DTIZ - I don't rate a visit to ASDA as leisure - we have floated the idea of a ten pin bowling alley (or even an ice rink), either in the empty B&Q or Charlton Centre premises, managed by a non-profit making charitable trust in the absence of any interest from commercial operators.

Conclusion

I have been honoured to represent The Society at various functions throughout the year and would like to thank all those whose efforts throughout the year make this Society what it is. In particular I would like to thank the new member of the Executive, Georgette Rapley, who has been prepared to help in any way and is now Queen of the Raffle. Mention must be made of Mike Weston's meticulous bookkeeping as treasurer - you try getting money out of him - and not forgetting his role as purchaser of fine wines for Society events. I submit my report to members and welcome any questions.