

MARCH MEETING

2nd Talk

The Secret Wartime Tunnels

A talk by Deborah Newman, Head of Visitor Operations Dover Castle
reported by Terry Sutton

The crucial role of Dover in the 1940 Evacuation of Dunkirk is set to be highlighted when the "secret" wartime tunnels under Dover Castle are re-opened this summer.

This was told to members of The Dover Society in March when Deborah Newman, English Heritage's head of visitor operations at Dover Castle, was our guest speaker. Miss Newman said the tunnel complex will be re-opened to visitors on June 10 but, questioned, she added that the admission cost to the castle would be increasing by about 20 per cent to around £16 to help pay for the massive investment.

Deborah, using a PowerPoint presentation, explained that the number of paying visitors to Dover Castle had been declining and a five year market research investigation had resulted in recommendations designed to increase visitor footfall at the castle.

There were, she said, five phases in the planned upgrade of Dover Castle. The first was the new venture at the Great Tower (known to Doverians as the Keep) which was already reaping rewards in visitor numbers. The second phase was the current upgrade

of the wartime tunnels, due to open in June.

Visitors to the tunnels complex will be able to see how the Battle of France was fought in 1940; how it led to the Dunkirk Evacuation designed and implemented by Operation Dynamo headquarters in the castle's tunnels; how the majority of evacuated troops arrived at Dover and the part played by the town in that massive movement of troops. "Visitors will be able to see and hear the human stories of those based in Dover who witnessed the safe landings of the returning soldiers from Dunkirk at Dover," explained Deborah.

Other improvements were to the underground hospital and displays showing how the new work on the tunnels had uncovered a number of previously hidden historical features. Other work in progress including improving access to the tunnels, extending a lift, and improving ventilation in the tunnels.

One of the aims, said Deborah, was to persuade visitors to make Dover Castle a two-day experience with tourists remaining in the district longer, thus helping the local economy.