

OCTOBER MEETING

2nd Talk

Behind the Scenes at Dover Museum

A talk by Samantha Harris *reported by Terry Sutton*

The time is coming when people will be able to stay at home and, with their computers, see on the screen the many digitalised artefacts held at Dover Museum.

This was told to us at our public meeting held at St Mary's parish centre in October when one of our two guest speakers was Miss Samantha Harris, the museum's assistant curator.

Miss Harris also explained that Dover district ratepayers now have to pay to visit Dover Museum like everyone else, thanks to an EU ruling. Until now local people, because they were paying for the museum through council tax, had free admission when they proved they were local residents. Apparently the EU ruled the free admission discriminated against non-locals!

Samantha reported that only five per cent of the museum's collection of artefacts was on display to the public because of space reasons. She told of the establishment of Dover museum by the Philosophical Institute in 1836 (mainly concerned with lectures), its setting up in the old Market Hall in the Market Square in 1849, war damage transfer to Ladywell in 1942 and then back to the Square in 1989. One expansion at the museum was in 1999 with the display of the Dover



Students at work in the gallery and examining boat remains
©Dover Museum

Bronze Age Boat in its special gallery that created national interest.

The first donations to the museum were mainly natural history specimens with the first donor being the mayor, Councillor Edward P. Thompson, according to the gift book. His donations included 470 specimens of vertebrate zoology and 50 fossils. One of the museum's prize exhibits was a model of a ship made by French prisoners-of-war donated in 1894 by a Captain Lang.

Forty per cent of the museum's visitors were school groups and they dealt with about 60 enquiries a month, especially from those researching their family history. They were digitalising a number of artefacts, including paintings and photos, so that eventually they could be viewed on home computers.