

Birth of The Dover Society

With considerable concern over recent events in and around Dover Philomena Kennedy, artist and teacher at Dover Girls' Grammar School, approached several people and persuaded them to meet to discuss the possibility of forming a civic society. Issues included the futures of Connaught Park, Brook House, Pencester Gardens and River Recreation Ground, which was threatened with housing development. These, coupled with anxieties arising from completion of the Channel Tunnel with its threat of mass unemployment and with a desire to be involved in the proposed remedies of tourism brought the group together in March 1988. The inaugural meeting of The Dover Society quickly followed on 25th April in the Menzies Hall of Dover College with about a hundred people present. Peter Johnson, before proposing 'That The Dover Society be instituted and the Civic Trust Constitution be adopted' made these remarks: "Many people in Dover have felt a growing concern about what is going to happen to the town in the future. That concern stems to some extent from events during 1987 and the sometimes bitter conflict between the people and Dover District Council (DDC), mostly about the selling off of public open spaces. But the issues are far wider than that. It is this concern that has brought together a body of people who have felt strongly the need to care for the town, for its people and for its future. Let me at this stage say what we are not.

We are not a protest group.

We are not party political in any shape or form.

We are not demonstrators and, I hope, we are not cranks.

What are we then? I can only say what we aim to be, namely a body of people

concerned about the future of Dover, informed, experienced in a wide range of skills and activities, responsible in our actions and constructive in our criticism. We hope also to be influential. This will depend on the breadth of support we can win from the people of Dover and on the input those people can in turn provide from their knowledge, experience and wisdom. We hope to work with DDC and not against it. I think the majority support the council's plans for making Dover a mecca for tourists, but there is some thought that those plans are too narrow and lacking in vision, too heavily influenced by outside commercial advice and lacking in in-depth knowledge of Dover. They ignore little things, relatively insignificant in themselves but an essential part of our history and our environment.

As an example I would remind the meeting that yesterday was St. George's Day and the 70th anniversary of the capture of the Mole at Zeebrugge, one of the most historic and heroic naval engagements of all time. The bell from the mole hangs on the balcony at Dover Town Hall and yesterday at noon the Town Mayor rang eight bells and buglers from the Royal Marines at Deal sounded the Last Post and Reveille. The Charter Trustees, representatives of the Services and youth organisations and of the Royal Society of St. George were present and there followed a moving service in St. James' Cemetery where many of those who lost their lives at Zeebrugge on St. George's Day 1918 are buried. How many visitors to Dover, and indeed Dovorians themselves, know of the bell and its history engraved on the stone tablet set into the front wall of the Town Hall, dirty with age and neglected? This is just one small example of the little bits of history to be found in the town. The Dover Society as we see it would look at every aspect of the