

*the feasibility of restoring the Town Hall to something like its Victorian splendour aided, it was hoped, by a major Heritage Lottery Fund grant, making its history better known and increasing access to the building.*



*The first task was to make the public both near and far more aware of the building and its history. A modest start was made in May 2011 with guided tours every Wednesday morning once a month with guides provided by the Society and Kent Greeters. From September, with the opening of the new History Room in the old Court Room, tours are now available every Wednesday. By May 2012 500 people had visited. With this increased momentum, publicity was aimed also at groups attracting up to 40 people at a time. Attracting cruise passengers proved more difficult!*

*The project is now in its second and more difficult phase of preparing the ground for a major lottery fund bid considering what should be restored and how it should be used and managed in the future to maximise its potential for commercial, community and heritage use.*

A short, sharp campaign was waged to save a Second World War ARP post in Station Approach - one of the few surviving - which resulted in its listing. The Society pursued with KCC, thought to be the owner, the possibility of us cleaning it up

and keeping the area around it tidy. Unresolved ownership frustrated our offer to adopt the site.

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## 2009

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Having persuaded DDC to celebrate the centenary of Louis Bleriot's historic 37 minute first cross Channel flight on 25 July 1909 and to have a lasting legacy of the celebration by improving the memorial site and access to it, we were pleased with the work done and the ceremony on the day. The event was made more special by an original Bleriot XI plane flying across, a fly past by the Red Arrows and their French counterpart and a display of veteran aircraft at the Duke of York's School followed by dinner in the castle grounds and fireworks.



Concerned about the neglected state of the town's historic interpretation panels and with DDC too cash-strapped to help, we urged, with only partial success, DTC to take on their maintenance and we offered to fund the replacement of the Bleriot panel in time for the centenary. Our suggestions that the empty B&Q premises at Charlton Green should become a bowling alley and /or ice rink and that Snoops (the empty former cinema) should be compulsorily purchased for a community centre both came to nothing.

The proposed Local Development Framework taxed us - particularly the plan

for up to 10,000 new houses in the District, including 5,750 at Whitfield. We considered that jobs before houses were a must.



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. From installation until the 2012 Olympics no sizeable audience was attracted to justify the running costs paid locally or for the eyesore created. With DDC now responsible for it, this half million pound monstrous white elephant may be too expensive to demolish and so Market Square may be blighted for many more years.

We 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.

### **Refurbishment Committee**

*With all the grand regeneration schemes making slow, if any, progress, the Society was anxious to identify and lobby for a range of modest improvements to make the town more attractive to residents and visitors and to promote some civic pride in our surroundings. These ranged from tackling the continual litter problem and other antisocial behaviour to forcing some property owners to*

*maintain their buildings. The Refurbishment Subcommittee was set up to concentrate on these issues. In addition, it undertook a survey of Dover's buildings to review listed buildings and conservation areas, whether other buildings should be listed and to check the state of the buildings for possible enforcement action. As DDC lacked resources, we offered to monitor conservation areas for them and to report problems but DDC had to point out that, unfortunately, enforcement action would be very limited due to staffing cuts. After providing a priority list of buildings that we urged should be repaired compulsorily, DDC decided in 2012 to trial the application of 'Section 215 action'. DDC carried out legal checks and DDC issued warning letters, resulting in 50% of owners reacting positively without enforcement action. The initial scheme, covering Castle Street, has since been extended to other areas of the town.*

A new Society plaque was installed to commemorate Thomas Pattenden, draper and stocking seller, but, more importantly, a Dover diarist who recorded daily events for over 20 years throughout the Napoleonic period. Put on St Mary's Parish Centre it overlooks the churchyard where he is buried, but where all trace of his grave was removed in 1978.

Something of a bombshell was the financial failure of the Civic Trust, which had provided a national voice for amenity societies for many years. After careful consideration of the cost benefits the Society chose not to join the successor organisation at least for the time being.

With DDC and ASDA unable to agree over whether the associated car park should be free for users or not, the supermarket withdrew from the St. James's redevelopment throwing the whole scheme back into the melting pot. We wondered whether it was a blessing in

disguise offering perhaps an alternative with quality and style. A new scheme was unveiled with smaller retail units and retaining the old street layout, which the Society welcomed as much better than the ill-fated ASDA scheme, but with reservations regarding the quality of the buildings and landscaping.

Another controversy was the bid put together for Dover by SEEDA, KCC, DDC, DHB and English Heritage for grants under the Sea Change programme to improve coastal resorts. No consultation was held until grants had been received already ring-fenced for specific projects which had to be match-funded locally. These included refurbishment of the Bleriot Memorial, the expensive and grand furnishing of Dover Castle's keep (the Great Tower project), a new reception building for the castle, renovating the officers' mess, a feasibility study for a cable car project and yet another improvement to the sea front. We objected to spending £2m on what was already an attractive promenade in front of Waterloo Crescent when so much of the town centre was and still is in desperate need of a facelift. The money could not, however, be spent anywhere else.

Concerned about the cost effectiveness of the DDC wind turbine at Whitfield we discovered that it would take 55 years to recover the capital and running costs! After firing a broadside at DDC for closing two of Dover's public toilets without warning in its attempt to transfer the cost to DTC we were pleased to see one reopened after a public outcry. DDC's Local Development Framework for the years to 2026 was approved by government including 14,000 new homes in the District and an expectation of 6,500 new jobs! The subsequent exhibition of Phase 1 of the Whitfield Urban Housing Scheme raised concerns about density, A2

congestion and possible impact on town centre retailers.

We welcomed the occupation of large empty premises by Peacocks and Morrisons, but remained despondent about the 26 empty shops between Townwall Street and the Town Hall.

The unauthorised enclosure of some land, including an established public right of way, resulted in the Society taking legal steps to protect the path.

The December 2009 Newsletter carried an obituary of Peter Johnson (1922-2009), a Society Vice President and founder member.

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## 2010

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### ***Western Docks Redevelopment and Future Ownership of the Port***

*Considering our response to the formal proposals by DHB for redevelopment of the Western Docks (called T2) and for restructuring of the Harbour Board took up a great deal of time in the first three months of 2010. These proposals were considered so important that we consulted the membership by post about the Executive's recommendations before finalising our submissions to the Secretary of State. We had already agreed in principle the Western Docks T2 development with certain provisos, most of which had already been met. Our formal submission to the Secretary of State confirmed our support but with a number of conditions. Regarding restructuring of the Board, we covered all possibilities. Whilst preferring to retain the status quo i.e. Trust Port status, we considered this unrealistic in the economic climate with any government looking to sell some of the family silver and the need for the Board to borrow money for T2 development without increasing the national debt. Therefore, we suggested an amended Trust Port status with the ability to borrow money*