

# APRIL MEETING

## The Dover Society AGM 2014

Report by the Chairman Derek Leach

This is my 10th annual report you have had to listen to. How time flies when you're having fun!

### Membership

Our membership has risen to the highest number ever, 477 and gives me hope that we shall reach 500 ere long. It does mean that you have to continue your membership as well as encouraging relatives, friends and work colleagues to join. It is also pleasing to see some younger new members. If you are new and want to be actively involved in the Society's work please have a word with me or any of the executive. Our thanks as always go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope. During the year we lost two of our valued Vice Presidents – Lillian Kay and Peter Marsh. Now may I invite you to stand whilst we remember all those members who have died in the past year: Lillian Kay, Peter Marsh, Jean Walkden, Muriel Goulding, Marjorie Bullock, Charles Nelson and Bruce Lilley.

### So what have we been up to?

We continue to meet DDC Directors every 6 months to raise concerns and to hear about any progress on local projects.

### Planning

On the planning front Patrick Sherratt and his committee continued to keep an eagle eye on routine planning applications making representations to DDC when necessary.

We have continued to monitor progress



*Derek Leach Chairman*

or lack of progress on the various regeneration schemes. We were pleased to see more progress on the Buckland Paper Mill Site and the relocation of the Visitor Information Centre to the Museum. At long last the blighted St. James area has moved forward with a multiplex cinema and associated restaurants signed up plus M&S agreeing to move there but, unfortunately, without any clothing. Where will I buy my pants now? What will happen to its Biggin Street site? Compulsory Purchase Orders have been issued for the

remaining buildings on the site. Connaught Barracks still stands empty.

The rather tortuous River Dour cycle route through the town opened and gave us a number of safety concerns.

Other major issues continued to stretch us: the future of DHB (although not strictly a planning issue), development on the Western Heights and at Farthingloe and health provision.

Following the rejection of the DHB's privatisation scheme, there was a new CEO, Chairman and some Board members. These changes were accompanied by a marked improvement in DHB's relationship with the local community. In the autumn the Port Consultative Committee was replaced by two new bodies: the Port Users Group (ferry operators etc.) and the Port and Community Forum (comprising representatives of the Board, local authorities and community organisations including The Dover Society. I was elected as its independent chairman. Initially intended to enable DHB to inform the local community and to seek views about its operation and plans for development including how it could assist regeneration, it is also evolving into a partnership between all the parties in which all our efforts to improve the town for residents and visitors can be coordinated to ensure that together we can make a bigger difference than by acting separately. Our first project is to bring all our heritage assets, including those owned by the Harbour Board, together in the Bluebird Heritage Trail. Promoting them as a package will hopefully bring many more visitors into the town. We were represented at the consultation held last November by the Shipping Minister regarding the future of

the Port. We welcomed the debate caused by the People's Port initiative and the need for local accountability. Our view was that Trust Port status should remain, but powers should be extended to allow the Port to finance future development and to make a financial contribution to the local community; any future privatisation proposals should be subject to a local veto. The local community was taken by surprise in February when DHB announced plans to redevelop the Western Docks area much sooner than expected – not for additional ferry berths, but in order to relocate the Eastern Docks cargo terminal to allow for larger ships, increased storage capacity and possibly attract associated operations with the prospect of some 600 new jobs. Another surprise was an invitation last week from the Shipping Minister to hear how his thoughts were developing on the way forward for the port. It was more than thinking; in fact rather a clear framework for the future, starting now. Whilst he commended DHB, the DPPT and the formation of the Port and Community Forum and the Port Users Group for bridging the gap between port and town, more was needed to ensure an enduring meaningful relationship between the two to guarantee a thriving port and a thriving town. There were 3 elements: more community involvement in the port, commercial development and regeneration. He envisaged 2 non-executive DHB directors elected by the community (how to achieve this would be a matter for the community and DHB to decide), up to date financial powers to allow joint ventures, ability to borrow against its assets and to enhance DHB's contribution to town regeneration. In order for DHB to play a significant role in regeneration he envisaged a DHB Regeneration Division, which could possibly become a subsidiary company

or a trust to enable grants from heritage and other funds. All this would require a Harbour Revision Order to make it legal, but in the meantime it was hoped that DHB could create a community fund from its pre-tax profits. Dover would remain a Trust Port. So, the Dover Society's original preference when first faced with privatisation proposals in 2010 will be largely fulfilled: retain Trust Port status, extend DHB powers to enable the financing of future development and to make a financial contribution to the local community. Too big an ask, apparently, was a guarantee of no future privatisation. Now that we have a framework, the community will have to work hard with DHB on the detail to ensure that this new model works effectively for both the port and the town.

As you know the Society did not feel able to support the planning application for housing on the Western Heights and at Farthingloe (in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) without a firm guarantee that the benefits for the Drop Redoubt were guaranteed as well as concerns over quality of materials and design of any housing and hotel. The application was approved minus proposals for new housing on the Heights and with a financial package for the Drop Redoubt. After months of silence we attended the Western Heights master plan consultation this March, but it did not progress the CGI planning application. It was a workshop with interested parties to help draft a strategic plan for the Heights to assist the local authority when considering any future planning applications.

The long running saga of where to site any new health facility moved a step closer with approval of the planning

application to build a clinic, rather than a hospital, in the present car park of Buckland Hospital. Since there were no overnight bed facilities included for intermediate care, we have lobbied to ensure that surplus land is not sold off for housing but retained for possible future expansion. Construction is moving apace.

We have badgered our MP and the local authority about the delay in providing a multi-storey car park by Priory Station so that the town can really benefit from the high speed railway link.

We made a submission to the Department for Transport regarding a third Thames crossing, supporting the most easterly option and we also gave DDC our views on its draft Parks and Amenity Open Space Strategy.

**Refurbishment** or making the best of what we already have in the town:

In cooperation with DDC Patrick Sherratt and his small team have continued to identify properties that are blighting Dover where enforcement action may be required under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. After 2 years' effort 70 properties in the Town Centre were identified with 66% repaired or with work underway. In addition, another 38 properties have been identified in Folkestone Road. Only 3 legal notices, rather than warning letters, have been needed, including one for the former cinema in Castle Street.

We are also very concerned about the impression of Dover that the Bench Street area fronting Townwall Street gives to travellers. Talking of eyesores, the Big Screen in Market Square was removed.

Our Refurbishment Committee, chaired

by Jeremy Cope, continues to make an impact. Our campaign for so-called zero tolerance of antisocial behaviour and litter dropping eventually bore fruit with DDC recruiting 3 dedicated officers to cover the whole District but in its first 3 months of operation the team managed less than 1 fine per day. Perhaps they concentrated upon educating offenders. Have you noticed any improvement? Litter on the main roads to Dover is another concern as is the impact on our present town centre of the St. James development.

We now hold quarterly meetings with the Dover police inspector to discuss policing issues and welcomed the creation of his 8 man team to improve matters in the town centre.

Our campaign to have Godwyne Path registered as a public right of way has succeeded thus protecting it from any more take overs in the future.

Jeremy & Co have also battled with KCC to make a safe pedestrian route from the Bleriot Memorial to Langdon Cliffs and have had some success with the help of some DIY. Another success was the repair of the Connaught Pond and fountain.

Having shown us and the town with her Brighter Dover project how to get something done if you are really passionate about it, Sylvie Parsons felt it necessary to disband her volunteers to protect them from discarded needles and other dangers. We are hoping that others may answer this challenge.

Several members of the Society have become actively involved in the Big Local 10 year project with £1 million of lottery money to be spent over the next ten



*Jeremy Cope Vice-Chairman*

years on improving the town and the life of its people. The Society is acting as the Big Local 'treasurer', as they have similar aims to ours.

### **Projects**

On the heritage front the success of Heritage Open Days in Dover continued with 10 properties once again open free of charge for the September weekend. Our long term campaign to restore the Town Hall to something like its Victorian splendour in partnership with DDC and DTC made no progress for the second year with DDC officers unable to give it any time at all; however, a suitable consultant is now being sought to make recommendations about the future use and management of the Town Hall with a major Heritage Lottery Fund application in mind. Despite this frustration, our gallant band of volunteers continued

with guided tours of the building every Wednesday. Up to the end of 2013 we had attracted over 1,100 people from the town, the UK and overseas with gross income of £2,561. In addition to postcards of the magnificent stained glass windows a much needed guidebook cum history of the building's 800 year history was produced during the year financed by the Society with profits going to our Town Hall Fund which now totals £3,330 including a generous member donation of £1,000 and £286 collected during this year's Film Festival.

Another dedicated band of volunteers led by Jeremy Cope continued to maintain the whole of Cowgate Cemetery with their fortnightly work parties.

Taking the River Dour Group under our wing enabled the group to start raising funds for river improvements. Its first success was a bid with other groups to form an East Kent Catchment Partnership, allowing it to draw on the skills and expertise of others. The formal aim of the partnership is to implement the EU Water Framework Directive by raising the quality of the whole river to a 'Good' standard by 2027 rather than the present 'Poor' grading. This is more to do with the lack of a wide variety of fish rather than water quality. The group also obtained a grant from the local authorities (KCC and DDC) toward re-equipping the river clean-up volunteers – gratifyingly the group's application came top in the public vote. As the role of the group increases one or two more volunteers are needed to work on the organisational side of the project. Please think about it and have a word with Ray Newsam, the group's energetic new chairman or Jeremy Cope, its secretary.

Members Denise Smith and Liz Dimech

have formed a new group under The Society's umbrella, Dover Heritage Volunteers, offering cruise passengers and other visitors guided walks around the town.

We erected yet another Society blue plaque in March, this time to commemorate composer Thomas Tallis's connection with St. Martin's Priory in the 1530s. Sheila and Jeremy Cope are now starting on the next one on our list – the tragic River tram accident of 1917.

Member Alan Sencicle has conducted a vigorous one-man campaign to shame South Eastern trains to make advance rail fares available so that Dover can compete on level terms to attract visitors and local people can also get to London at a reasonable price. The company has resisted so far but has brought out a number of special offers although with little publicity.

We must also congratulate member Lorraine Sencicle for the worldwide success of her Dover history website.

### **More of the same**

Now I turn to regular activities which are part and parcel of The Society and perhaps taken for granted, but no less important.

### **Social programme**

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank Patricia Hooper-Sherratt, Patrick Sherratt, Sheila Cope, Mike Weston, the happy band of kitchen helpers and Denise Lee our Queen of the Raffle, for all their hard work. Our summer outings were also well supported.

Our Christmas Feast held in the Town Hall at lunchtime was a big success,

enabling us to meet demand in the larger venue.

Patricia will continue to organise the summer programme but has handed over the winter programme arrangements to Beverly Hall.

### **Publicity**

Our Newsletter expertly edited by Alan Lee continues to be highly regarded and we are indebted to all the contributors, Jean Marsh our advertising manager, the proof readers, the envelope stuffers and all our distributors for their efforts. The excellent website, managed by Mike McFarnell keeps members up to date and helps to interest internet browsers not only in the Society but in Dover as well. Terry Sutton's regular press reports also help to keep The Society in the public eye and we continue to provide a Dover Society article in the Dover Life magazine. We have not yet ventured into the world of Facebook or tweeting!

### **Representation**

As usual I represented The Society at the moving St. George's Day commemoration of the Zeebrugge Raid and we also laid wreaths at the Remembrance Services at the Town war memorial and at The Society's plaque to the Unknown Warrior at the Western Docks.

### **Thanks**

In my report I have mentioned a number of people, but have not thanked that essential backroom boy, our efficient treasurer, Mike Weston, who will shortly dazzle you with his annual accounts, and Yvonne Miller who has the thankless task of taking the Executive minutes. That



*Brigadier Maurice Atherton President*

concludes my report of a very busy year for The Society except for thanking every member of the Executive, including Sue Jones who has decided not to seek re-election. I also thank our Audit Committee and all those members who have contributed in any way to the work of The Society.

Just one final plea – your Executive, with one or two exceptions, is aging rapidly and we can't go on forever. We need fresh, younger blood. If this description fits you then please consider putting yourself forward before age gets you as well!

I submit my report for your consideration.

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