

JANUARY MEETING

— First Speaker —

Fan Bay Project

A Talk by John Barker – National Trust

Reported by Terry Sutton

Seventy volunteers are being sought by the National Trust to go on a rota to act as guides in a network of wartime underground tunnels about to be opened to visitors at Fan Bay, east of Dover harbour.

This was reported by Jon Barker, National Trust's visitor experience manager for the area, when he and volunteer Gordon Wise spoke at our public meeting at St Mary's parish centre on Monday, January 19th. Jon, a caver, and Gordon told of the discoveries made at Fan Bay since the National Trust provided a budget of £117,000 to excavate the tunnel network and two historic sound tunnels that were buried in the cliffs. They told it was hoped to open the tunnels to visitors in May when the admission charge would be £10 for an hour's tour.

Jon explained that much of the 18 month clearance work had been carried out by a team of volunteers, including NT members.

The Fan Bay tunnel system, excavated in one hundred days in 1940, was provided for the three six-inch gun battery that guarded the Strait and the approach to Dover harbour. The men of the battery claimed to have sunk four enemy ships before it

was decommissioned.

The battery and tunnels, with its 125 steps, provided accommodation for four officers and around 184 other ranks. Their graffiti on the chalk walls, averaging 70 feet underground, made interesting reading, said Jon. There was also a small hospital and power plant chamber.

Part of the clearance work involved uncovering two sound mirrors, one provided around 1914 and the other some ten years later. They were constructed to listen to the approach of enemy aircraft, which they did successfully in the First World War, only to be superseded by radar. The 1914 mirror, found to be in excellent condition, offered a range of up to 15 miles (usually five to ten miles) and in October 1917 clearly picked up German aircraft bombing Boulogne. A year later the mirror gave early 5-10 minute warnings of the approach of enemy aircraft, early enough to be intercepted by British fighters.



Fan Bay Deep Shelter



Fan Bay Sound Mirror



Surface Works