

# Dover Castle on the road to Runnymede

A Talk by Professor Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL - Reported by Peter Sherred

The political, democratic, social and financial repercussions of Magna Carta, a document that laid the foundations of Britain's common law and which was sealed at Runnymede on 15th June 1215, were addressed by a distinguished visitor to the town, Professor Sir Robert Worcester KBE DL, at the Marina Hotel and Spa in September when he spoke to an audience, including Society members, in a packed room at the hotel using the above title for the talk.

Introduced as a sprightly octogenarian, psephologist and Atlanticist Sir Robert, who hails originally from Kansas City in the United States and is a graduate of Kansas University, told of how the 13th Century English document was revered in the States and of the fact it was used in the justification of the American War of Independence. When Britain wanted to introduce heavy taxes on the largely English colonists the latter argued this was "taxation without representation" and against the liberties guaranteed by Magna Carta. Sir Robert, as Chairman of the Magna Carta 800th Anniversary Committee, advised of a number of commemorative events scheduled for this year (2015) to highlight the anniversary of the sealing of the first version of the document and also indicated how, as he travelled the world, representatives of many countries from Germany to Trinidad and Japan reported how the principles enshrined in this great document of English history shaped and influenced their laws and constitutions. Among other matters Sir Robert reminded his audience that Magna Carta guaranteed freedom of the church, the liberties of the City of London and due process under the law set out in article 39. The first document originated in 1215 because of the disastrous reign of King John, "bad King John", who upset the church, lost most of the

English lands in Europe, levied extortionate taxes on the people and increased "scutage" - money in place of military service - from his nobles. Civil war ensued and the Great Charter was forced on the bankrupt king by barons, bishops and abbots, but within months John repudiated the document and it was annulled by Pope Innocent III. However, rather conveniently it seems, the king died of dysentery within the year and the Regents of the new king, Henry III who was nine years old when he succeeded to the throne, re-issued the Charter again in 1216 and 1217. The importance of the revised editions of the Great Charter became apparent in later centuries and proved an inspiration for the American colonists in the 18th Century. Controversially Sir Robert opined that the referendum on Scottish independence may have breached basic tenets of Magna Carta!

Sir Robert is perhaps best known as the founder of MORI, the organisation that charts public opinion, but he is also a media savvy individual, the author of many books who has held various positions in business and voluntary organisations including being a Freeman of the City of London and the fifth Chancellor of Kent University. He lives in Allington Castle near Maidstone with his wife Margaret. A vote of thanks to Sir Robert was proposed at the end of the meeting and this expressed the appreciation of those present for Sir Robert finding time in his busy schedule to visit Dover and to give an inspiring talk on such an important feature of English History. In particular he was thanked for his lucid explanation of the key events in English History associated with such an important document and for the humour he introduced into his talk - particularly in respect of the misrepresentation that the first document had been signed by the king - when

it hadn't! Sir Robert was presented with a cheque as a donation to the 2015 commemoration. Various commemorative events are being held throughout 2015 for the 800th anniversary of the sealing of this document, important both nationally and internationally, with The Queen attending a major event at Runnymede Meadows on June 15th. Lectures, debates, theatre presentations and exhibitions are just some of the elements of the commemoration this year (details of which can be found on the Magna Carta 800th website). It is also intended that The British

Library will celebrate the 800th birthday of Magna Carta by uniting all four surviving original copies of the original document under one roof for the first time for three days only. Multiple copies of the document were written up originally and sent to the bishops and other officials across England and it is four of those that survive - two of which are in Library's collection while the other two are usually to be found at Lincoln and Salisbury cathedrals respectively - that will feature in this venture by the British Library.

## River Dour Partnership Ray Newsam

Things have been progressing slowly but steadily on our plans for improvements to the river. In October we had a visit from the Environment Agency with their fish pass expert in attendance. They were looking at the weirs by Morrisons and Halfords, and other environmental improvements that might take place in that area. This is only the first step in getting plans together, which as well as funding will require consultations with the relevant owners and authorities.

We have also had some discussions with Dover Town Council regarding the potential for opening up the millpond at the Old Flour Mill in Lorne Road. Much work has to be done looking at possibilities and liabilities and hopefully we can report further on this in the next issue. While mentioning Morrisons, we have had some very productive discussions with their new Community Champion who had several suggestions as to how they might support us, the immediate one being giving us three dates during the year when we will be able to have a collection and leaflet hand-out at their entrance. The first date was 28th February, too early for notification through the newsletter. If anyone feels able to help with future collection and leaflet hand-outs then please get in touch via our secretary

Jeremy Cope, (contact details inside the front cover).

One funding success is securing a grant from the DDC and KCC supported You Decide program for a waterproof video camera under a project entitled 'Promoting the Dour'. This came about after a similar camera was used by the BBC on one of their Urban Jungle episodes to record the brown trout in the river by Barton Path, very good publicity which resulted in a significant number of visitors from out of town. As well as producing short films showing various aspects of the underwater ecology for educational use, the equipment can be used for underwater structural and environmental surveys - hopefully there will be something on show at the 2016 Dover Film Festival!

Finally, the usual appeal for volunteers! We have the regular gang who do the river clean-ups organised by the White Cliffs Countryside Partnership that will start again in April, and volunteers are always welcome at these sessions. But we also need volunteers with all sorts of skills and interests - please get in touch if you have anything to contribute to help with planning, fundraising or implementation of our many projects.