

# APRIL AGM MEETING

## St James' Area Recent Dig

A talk by Keith Parfitt  
Reported by Terry Sutton

The results of 215 days archaeological work on the acres in the St James' Street area were reported to a packed Dover Society meeting on April 18 by the researchers' site manager Dover-born Keith Parfitt.

Keith worked with a team of 12-20 archaeologists, assisted by about two dozen unpaid local volunteers, in advance of the redevelopment of the Dover Town Investment Zone bordered by Woolcomber Street, Townwall Street, and the river Dour. He explained the developers were meeting the cost of the archaeological work.

A major slice of the acres investigated was cut through by the remains of the line of St James' Street which was the ancient lane linking what was the built town of Dover (originally created by the Romans) and Dover Castle.

Keith told that his team had been able to



*Aerial view of the redevelopment area*

uncover and locate this route which had now gone and was unlikely ever to be seen again. Yet it was once one of the most important streets in the Dover area going back to around 1075.

He explained that before the Roman invasion the estuary of the river flowed where Woolcomber Street now runs and it was in this haven where Roman Imperial naval ships rode at anchor.

But over the years sand and beach gradually silted up the haven to make it unusable for seafarers and eventually the siltation became thick enough on which to build. It became one of the most packed populated areas of the town until wrecked by 1939-45 bombing and shelling.

Canterbury Archaeological Trust (CAT) received the contract to research the acres, following its earlier work on a Townwall site completed in 1996. Keith told the meeting how his team was assisted



*Examining Post-medieval levels*

by a 1641 map of the town as well as by the help of a camera-equipped 21st century drone.

He explained how excavations, mostly going down about three metres, were carried out in different sites, one of which was possibly where MP Rice had his mansion. They soon found the foundation of medieval houses that once stood in Arthur's Place, a thoroughfare that proved older than at first thought.

One of the mysteries remaining, following the dig, is the background to a large stone-constructed property, probably built around 1450-1480, that once faced Clarence Street. It must have been the home or property belonging to an important individual.

Further research was needed, he admitted.

One of their discoveries were the bones of a small baby buried beneath an old property. This was because in days of old children were not buried in cemeteries until they had been baptised!

Mr Parfitt said they now had a vast amount of recovered artefacts that had to be fully recorded and investigated while CAT hoped to get consent to excavate a few smaller sites including where Marks and Spencer is to provide a store facing Townwall Street.

The talk, with maps and other images screened, proved to be one of the most interesting of the many public evening events organised by The Dover Society.

## Mike McFarnell - Honoury Freeman of Dover

Terry Sutton

Dover paid its highest honour to another of our Dover Society members when Mike McFarnell was appointed an Honorary Freeman of the town. There are, at present, only four Honorary Freemen of Dover.

Mike, a member of the society's executive committee, moved to Dover in 1979 when he and his wife Anne opened a guest house in the town. Born in South Africa, Mike found the history of Dover fascinating and decided to promote the town. His first venture was the staging of the Dover Pageant at Connaught Park in 1983.

Since then Mike has played a major role in the social life of the Dover, especially with the Dover Film Festival for which he follows the late Ray Warner by producing an annual film of life in the town.

The presentation of the Freedom scroll to



*Mike McFarnell Freeman of Dover*

Mike was made at the annual meeting of Dover Town Council in May held in the ancient Stone Hall of the Town Hall.

Receiving the scroll Mike spoke of the great honour following in the footsteps of former Freemen including Winston Churchill and Field Marshall Montgomery.