

Dover Bluebird Heritage Trail Launch and Inaugural Walk

— Alan Lee —

The Concept and Making of the Trail

Dover with its iconic White Cliffs and Dover Castle, attracting over 300,000 visitors a year, is known and recognised throughout the world. There are many more, not so well known historic treasures, throughout the town. The idea of the Bluebird Heritage Trail is to encourage visitors into the heart of Dover and discover what amazing heritage it has to offer.

Early in 2014 the Dover Port and Community Forum decided that to attract more visitors to the town it needed to raise public awareness of the many local heritage assets. From this came The Bluebird Heritage Trail project with The Dover Society agreeing to take the lead on behalf of the Forum.

The total cost of the project was estimated at £64,000. The Dover Society agreed to take the lead on behalf of the Forum. A grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £59,000 was successful and the Harbour Board provided the £5,000 balance. The grant also required a guarantee of local funding to maintain the trail for 10 years. This was met by Dover District Council and Dover Town Council agreeing to provide up to £1,000 a year each for the first 5 years and The Dover Society guaranteeing the further 5 years. The project was well supported by specialists, volunteers and various other organisations.

The local community became involved via a series of workshops which covered graphic design, website/app design and local history research. Local schools were involved in linked events and businesses

briefed as part of the promotion. A Dover company, Live Heritage, won the contract to develop the website and app. The pavement markers were designed and made. Detailed arrangements were made with the highways authorities and the Harbour Board, owner of the seafront promenade, regarding location and installation of the markers. Finally volunteers helped test the trail route, the booklet, website and app.

Launch Day

On Saturday 27th August 2016 over 75 people gathered in Dover's Town Hall, the ancient Maison Dieu to launch the Bluebird Heritage Trail. Derek Leach, Chairman of the Port and Community Forum and Chairman of the Dover Society, the lead on the project, opened the proceedings. He explained that the reason for the trail was to assist Dover's regeneration whilst major redevelopment took place. The aim is to tempt more people into Dover to make it more of a visitor destination through the use of the town's many historic assets. Derek said that he was extremely grateful to all the funders, helpful contractors and those locally who had made the project a reality, either by substantial time and expertise donated (valued as worth £30,000) or as very co-operative staff of the highways authorities, Dover District Council and the Port of Dover.

Work on the project will continue. The website and app, over time, will provide increased historical information, images and visitor facilities in the town. A team of voluntary webmasters will be trained to vet and load additional material on the website. This will include a page called My



Cutting the Red Ribbon to Start the Inaugural Walk

Bluebird where the public will be able to share their Dover memories of people, places and events. There will also be other opportunities for the community to participate.

Everyone then moved outside where a ribbon cutting ceremony signified the official opening of the trail and start of the inaugural walk. Following this those present then set off, individually or in small groups, in glorious sunshine. On the day the walk officially ended by the Seaports Centre where the walkers had their 'Bluebird Passports' stamped to mark the occasion. Many people carried a camera while others used their smart phones and tablets to take advantage of the app to obtain extra historic information. Taking part in the inaugural walk were DDC Chairman Sue Chandler, Dover Town Mayor and Mayoress Neil and Jackie Rix and Dover Harbour Board chief executive Tim Waggott.

The Dover Heritage Trail links 31 of Dover's historic buildings, sites and monuments. The initial simple idea trail has developed into an exciting self-guided trail with distinctive bronze Bluebird Heritage Trail pavement markers along the route. You can walk any part of the trail

and start or finish wherever you choose. The main section, from the Town Hall to the Clock Tower area, is 1.71 miles long and could take 2 hours; if you include the final section from the Clock Tower to the Admiralty Pier Gun Turret it is a further mile. There is a specially designed website and an app.

A free, attractive self-guide booklet with a route map is available from the Visitor Information Centre, the website or from various shops and pubs throughout the town.

Website:

www.doverbluebirdtrail.org.uk

The app can be downloaded via a link on the website.

The app contains historic information and images about the local heritage attractions and visitor facilities in the town, including comprehensive directions and trail map.

The app is GPS-enabled to determine your location when the app is running in the background and will trigger notifications when you are close to a point of interest. Content will be shown automatically as you move around the trail but you can manually access any of the content from any location.