

JANUARY MEETING

— Second Speaker —

Dover Greeters

A talk by Denise Smith – Reported by Alan Lee

I would like to extend many thanks to Denise Smith who stepped in at short notice to replace the advertised speaker.

Denise began by outlining a bit of the history that led to the setting up of the local organization.

Dover Greeters are part of an international greeter organisation. Started in New York and called the Big Apple Greeters, they used volunteers who loved where they lived to show visitors some of that fabulous city.

Kent decided to become part of that idea to help encourage visitors attending the 2012 London Olympics to visit Kent, which is, after all, only a very short journey from Stratford.

With money from Interreg Europe and Kent County Council they set up Kent Greeters using a volunteer recruitment and training system. They then spent quite a lot of money on showing the Kent Greeters the best places to visit throughout Kent. It was an exciting time and the volunteers in Dover, Deal and Sandwich as part of this organization then became the White Cliffs Greeters.

Unfortunately, not long after the end of the London Olympics the funding ran out. Dover Town Council then encouraged us to continue, giving us the uniforms and helping us with publicity. So the Dover Greeters was born. The Town Council did originally have an idea that part of the Greeters duties would be to identify serial smokers throwing cigarette butts down and to look out for owners allowing their dogs to foul the footpaths and public areas. Luckily both those ideas were lost along the way.

The Dover Greeters now meet visitors in the town, on the seafront or meet visitors from the cruise shuttle buses when they arrive in the Market Square. They

offer a free map, a smile and a 'Welcome'. They suggest and direct people to interesting places to visit, to help them get the best experience and to make the best of their limited time in the town. Small groups are offered free tours or guided heritage walks, in the town or on the seafront noting interesting places and telling stories of people who have formed Dover's history over the centuries.

The Greeters also work with The Dover Society in providing guides for visitors to the Maison Dieu.

Dover Greeters now are very careful about who they recruit as their lovely volunteers. The team in place today is very positive about Dover and they go out of their way to encourage visitors to want to come again and explore our unique historic town.

There really is never a dull moment as the volunteers regularly meet for social/training days and to visit other sites. They like to swap stories on the questions asked or on comments made. One favourite is when a lovely young lady, much struck by St James' Church, declared "but this building is older than New Zealand". Another was, years ago, when an elderly American interrupted Denise was talking about the arrival in Dover, after 23 years of exile, of Charles II. He enquired "Sorry, Chuck 2 who?"

Some of the most popular questions are often about where English food can be purchased, fish and chip, sausages and mash and Eton mess being the favourites! Denise was once asked where musket balls could be bought but she had to explain we don't seem to specialise in them in Dover anymore!

Do you love Dover and like meeting people to help them enjoy their visit. A lot of history is not needed, you learn as you go and the hours are flexible. Interested; Then contact Denise on Tel: 01304 206458.