

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Dover Society AGM 2020

Derek Leach

Once again my annual report to be presented formally at the April AGM is with your March Newsletter, which means that I can only cover up to the middle of February 2020. Anything new of import in March or early April I shall add verbally at the AGM.

As always, your Executive, sub committees and volunteers have been very active trying to conserve and promote our heritage, improve the quality of life for those living now and participating in all that is going on to regenerate our town for the future. We are still heavily involved in various project groups and forums such as the Port and Community Forum, Town Hall Refurbishment Steering Group, DDC's Local Plan Advisory Group, Dover Town Neighbourhood Plan Group, Dover Community Network, Coastal Communities Fund Team and White Cliffs Country Tourism Association. Our occasional meetings with DDC Directors to air concerns and discuss developments continue as do meetings with the local police chief.

Passionate about conserving and promoting Dover's past

The Town Hall Refurbishment Project has seen a considerable amount of detailed work during the year with many technical surveys undertaken to provide the detailed plans for the Heritage Lottery Fund. Most exciting was the paint conservators revealing that William Burges's original 1883 decoration of the

Connaught Hall, Mayor's Parlour etc. is still intact under the present emulsion. Samples are left exposed for you to see. The detailed plans will be submitted to HLF by June 2020 and we shall know in September whether the HLF grant is confirmed. If so, this will allow the delivery of the project to start in earnest. The downside will be that the building will have to close for up to two years probably from September 2021. A significant benefit will be that the Museum will have to move its storage from the very unsatisfactory conditions of the old cells to a much better facility elsewhere. Our Town Hall guided tours continue with our dedicated band of volunteers – more are needed.

As usual we welcomed many visitors to Dover's Heritage Open Days weekend in September with 10 buildings open free of charge. The Bluebird Heritage Trail guide booklets continued to be popular with cruise passengers and other visitors.

Passionate about making the best of what Dover already has

The River Dour Partnership operates under the Society's 'umbrella' and at last our campaign to restore the Barton Path Edwardian railings has succeeded. In addition, the River Dour Centre, using the former Buckland Bridge toilet building, has opened. There are now 32 voluntary River Wardens, River clean-ups continue and more volunteers are always welcome. The excellent maintenance of Cowgate Cemetery by Society volunteers

goes on with fortnightly work parties. If you like fresh air and good company why not join them?

Our Refurbishment Committee continues to lobby to improve the appearance of the town regarding cleanliness, litter, state of pavements and antisocial behaviour. A safe pedestrian route between the castle and the cliffs still eludes us and we are pressing the need for public toilets. We were pleased to see the replacement of part of the paving in Biggin Street and the improved floral displays. The number of empty shops and their neglect is of great concern. The 'plastic free Dover' initiative was welcomed. With others we lobbied about when cross Channel traffic is disrupted Dover is often gridlocked by freight lorries taking any route to get to and from the docks. Adeline Reidy's initiative to get signage improved was welcomed.

Following consultation and our submission to DDC regarding its proposed Dover District Tourism and Visitor Strategy, the strategy was published with its aims of protecting and enhancing what we have, promoting what we have and producing more visitor opportunities. We welcomed the contents, but having had similar initiatives in the past, we await delivery!

Passionate about the future of Dover

The redevelopment of the Western Docks progressed during the year with the new bridge over the Navigation Cut opening as well as the new pier, which is proving very popular and our concern about the lack of any seating is being addressed. The new cargo terminal also opened and we await the opening of the extended marina and the Marina Curve Pier in 2020. With continued economic

uncertainty over Brexit, DHB has not yet started on infilling the Granville Dock and Tidal Basin.

The St. James area redevelopment still has several empty units and we have expressed concern about the lack of care and maintenance of the limited tree and shrub areas.

Dover Town's six wards are now all within the top 20% of deprived wards nationally compared with only two in 2010, despite the current DDC Core Strategy aiming to have none! Our campaign to limit the number of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs), usually one bedroom flats, continues. Dover has a much higher incidence of HMOs (41 with 465 residents) than Folkestone or Thanet. We are also concerned about the rarity of DDC inspections of HMOs. Whilst we support making use of empty floors above ground floor shops, any conversions to flats should meet 2006 national space guidelines, which DDC has so far failed to adopt. Despite DDC assurances in 2018 that we could expect more Section 215 actions forcing owners to improve the external appearance of their properties, it has not yet happened in Dover.

Our Planning Committee and its dedicated Chairman, Patrick Sherratt, continue to monitor planning applications and comment when appropriate. We have welcomed an application to convert the former St. Mary's Care Home into apartments rather than the previous bed and breakfast facility proposal. We await developments regarding the Farthingloe/Western Heights revised proposals and have learnt that the former Immigration Removal Centre at the Citadel has been sold subject to

contract but to whom and for what purpose is unknown. We were pleased to see that the former Kearsney Manor Nursing Home is being put to good use as a centre for those with learning difficulties. DDC was congratulated on its redevelopment plans for the William Muge and Snellgrove buildings in Harold Street/Leyburne Road.

Whilst, on balance, supporting the controversial application to replace the Boys' Grammar School with a new building, we have complained to KCC (the planning authority in this case) for a lack of transparency in making it better known to the local community.

Regarding Conservation Area Appraisals, our team submitted our draft Dour Street area report to DDC in July, but to date it has not been considered by cabinet and we are concerned about an apparent lack of enthusiasm on the part of some councillors for conservation areas. Despite this, we have also completed and submitted to DDC our draft report on the larger and more complex Town Centre area centred upon Biggin Street and Cannon Street.

Society matters

Our Marketing Strategy subgroup has made progress with the aims of retaining all our faithful, existing members, but also to appeal to a wider age group, promoting the Society and making the Society more inclusive and transparent to members. Our updated website (thedoversociety.co.uk) is proving popular and we are using our Facebook page to advertise events etc. All our Newsletters are now available to view on the website.

Disappointingly, membership has dropped from the 470s to 460s this year.

Please encourage relatives, friends and work colleagues to join. It's good for Dover and excellent value. Our thanks as always go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope.

Now, as usual, I must mention our bread and butter activities, which are part and parcel of the Society and easily taken for granted, but no less important.

I represented The Society at the moving St. George's Day commemoration of the Zeebrugge Raid. We also laid wreaths at the Remembrance Services at the Town war memorial and at The Society's plaque to the Unknown Warrior at the Western Docks. 2020 will be the centenary of the arrival of the Unknown Warrior at Dover and we hope to commemorate the historic event.

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank our band of kitchen volunteers, including Dover Greeters (we could do with more volunteers for this occasional rostered task), Mike Weston, our wine waiter, and Denise Lee, our Queen of the Raffle. Our Christmas Feast and Wine and Wisdom evening were again well supported. Rodney and Doreen Stone organised successful summer outings and the holiday to York and Harrogate was very enjoyable. Thanks also to Alan Lee for arranging our pre-meeting meals for guest speakers. I have found the speakers for many years and it would be good for somebody else to take on this task – have a word with me about it!

Our Newsletter edited by Alan Lee continues to be highly regarded and we are indebted to all the contributors, Jean Marsh our advertising manager, the proof readers, the envelope stuffers and all our distributors for their efforts. Terry

Sutton's regular press reports help to keep the Society in the public eye. Behind the scenes Mike Weston continues to cook the financial books; thanks also to Yvonne Miller, who has the thankless task of taking the Executive minutes and to every other member of

the Executive, subcommittees and groups for their contributions.

Finally, can I urge you strongly to consider standing for our Executive Committee? Some of us are well past our use by date!

Dover Society Christmas Lunch

December 2019

Denise Lee

On 1st December, somewhat earlier in the month than is usual, a well-attended Dover Society Christmas Lunch was held in the Stone Hall of the Maison Dieu. Society members and their guests were warmly welcomed with either mulled wine or fruit punch.

Entertainment was provided by Quadlibet: Peter Cox, bass, Belinda Lewis, soprano, Richard Pond, tenor, Jane Farrell, alto and Peter Giles, conductor and pianist. During the meal they sang a varied selection of about twenty carols, with everyone joining

in for *Good King Wenceslas*, *The Holly and the Ivy*, *God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen* and, one of the all-time favourites, *Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer*.

At the end of the proceedings Derek, our chairman, thanked all who were involved with the planning and organization of the event. He then thanked the efficiency and friendliness of the serving and kitchen staff for contributing to the smooth running of the excellent meal on the day. Derek also gave thanks to Quadlibet for providing top class entertainment for all who attended.



Quadlibet Dover Society Xmas Lunch 1 Dec 2019

I would like to thank the individuals who most generously donated a prize towards the raffle; we ended up with a total of seventeen. I would also like to thank everyone who supported the raffle by purchasing tickets. This meant that we were able to raise over £200.

A good time was had by all. We look forward to the 2020 lunch with great anticipation.