

# MARCH MEETING

—————Second Speaker—————

## A Strange Life – Mrs Beresford Baker

A talk by Derek Leach – Reported by Terry Sutton

The scheduled speaker was unable to attend so, at very short notice, the society's chairman Derek Leach gave the talk. He selected as his subject the life of Mrs Baker who set up the Day Star Mission Hall, Durham Hill, off York Street.

Derek, investigating the life of Mrs Baker, born Isabella Wilson, discovered she was a religious woman, very wealthy and, according to gossip, had been presented at court when young.

She married an Irish army officer William Beresford Baker in 1877 and had the money to buy her husband out of the army. But the couple didn't always live together. By 1908 he was living at 25 Waterloo Crescent on the sea front, while his wife's address was a Home of Rest at 11 and 12 Princes Street. The Day Star Mission Hall (Prospect House) on Durham Hill also appears for the first time in the 1908 Dover Directory. (This later became the Sea Training Schools gymnasium. Today the complete building has been converted into occupied flats.)

This remained the case until 1921, then the directory entries were: at number 11, Christians Home Mission, Mrs Beresford Baker but at number 12, Prospect House, Captain William Beresford Baker. This

situation remained unchanged until 1934 when Mrs Baker is shown both at the Christians Home Mission and at Prospect House, her husband having died.

To people living in what was a poor area Mrs Baker was known as "Lady Baker" At one stage she had ten ladies living at her address and they were regarded as her "ladies in waiting."

At Christmas she would present two garments to each child who attended her Sunday school at Prospect House. The garments were made by women living at the property. She was known to be very kind to everybody, especially the poor living in the locality.

Whenever Mrs Baker, always well dressed, ventured out, all the people in the area would come out of their houses to see her.

She enjoyed the company of young men and, after her husband died, she linked up with another army officer who inherited the mission centre after Mrs Baker died in 1938, aged 86. The large property, facing Princes Street, went through a series of ownerships and during 1939-45 war was occupied by the Woman's Royal Naval Service (WRNS).

*Isabella died 23rd October 1938, age 86, and was buried in Charlton Cemetery 27th October 1938. William, a right hand bat, played one first class game for M.C.C. and was Captain of Dover Cricket Club. Born 31st Oct 1847 and died 20th Feb 1933, age 85, at Buckland.*

*Editor*



*Prince of Wales Sea Training School*