

THE WYE CONFERENCE

Eighteenth Annual Conference of Amenity Societies & Local Authorities

The theme of this year's conference which was held at Withersdane Hall, Wye College, on the 15th and 16th September 1990 was 'ENVIRONMENT & DEVELOPMENT - PARTNERSHIP OR CONFLICT.'

The conference was attended by 45 delegates whose interests and affiliations covered a wide range of organisations throughout Kent.

Under the able control of our own Chairman, Jack Woolford, the conference commenced on a prestigious note with a keynote speech given by K.C.C. Chairman Tony Hart who emphasised the importance of promoting joint partnerships between county and local authorities, commercial undertakings, statutory bodies and local amenity societies.

The same theme but with a political bias was eloquently continued by Roger Moat, M.P. for Faversham, who described central government's rôle in dealing with many of the transportational and environmental planning issues confronting our county.

TOWN PLANNING.

The final session of the first morning was addressed by Martin Bacon, Director of Technical Services, Canterbury City Council, who described the many and complex problems confronting a city that has enjoyed almost too much success for the benefit of the environmental well-being. Here was a young man fired with enthusiasm and obviously deriving immense job satisfaction in getting to grips with some highly challenging problems and it was good to think that such an able enthusiast was so closely involved in such matters. As we were later to discover on our afternoon site visit, his interests didn't stop at Canterbury City walls when we were given a comprehensive tour of the seaside towns of Herne Bay and Whitstable to see the improvements that these two somewhat run-down Victorian seaside towns have recently experienced. It was particularly interesting to visit the offices of the Whitstable Trust to see just how much local enthusiasm and self help can achieve in improving such towns.

ARCHAEOLOGY.

Upon our return we had a fascinating insight into the County's rich archaeological heritage given by Dr. John Williams, the County Archaeological Officer. He described the careful recording of the thousands of sites around the county now being stored by computer in the county's central archives so that all future planning applications can be rapidly processed in order to check that there are no conflicts of interests in archaeological terms.



58 ARCHITECTURE.

The final evening session was given by an eminent architect, Richard MacCormac, M.A., R.I.B.A., who launched into a splendidly aggressive attack on those such as the Prince of Wales who advocate a slavish copying of the designs of earlier times. Mr MacCormac has been responsible for the design of some extremely prestigious halls of residence at Cambridge University and certainly demonstrated with his superb slide collection that old and new can be beautifully harmonised with careful attention to detailing and form.

(Jack Woolford's fuller report on this lecture appears at the end of this article.)

Local interests in the form of the 'White Cliffs Countryside Project' were well demonstrated by Kirk Alexander at the start of the second day and we were all reminded of the wealth of flora and fauna that exists on the cliffs and seashore around Dover. Again, it was most encouraging to see a young man who was so obviously enthusiastic about his project and how, as a consequence, other groups of young people (and older) were giving their free time to help in conservation matters.

This particular theme was repeated when we heard details of the Medway Trust from their Project Manager, Brian Smith. He described the many voluntary activities of youngsters in developing improved riverside walks (a theme that is near and dear to our own hearts).

Following this we had the benefit of a long and at times witty address from the President of the Federation of Amenity Societies, Roger de-Gray, who appeared to lead the sort of artistic life that many of us would aspire to but few could afford.

WATER SUPPLY

The final speaker was Peter Herbertson of the National Rivers Authority who gave a most interesting and authoritative account of the problems facing the water supply industry in Kent and the means of maintaining adequate future supplies. It was interesting to note that in the final speaker's panel session almost all of the questions related to the water industry and demonstrated an increasing concern that many of us have for the quality of our drinking water, adequacy of supplies and the need for improvement of waste water management.

All in all, a most interesting and stimulating conference. Next year's theme will, I suspect, be transportational and water issues.

JOHN GERRARD

7000-YEAR-OLD LINK RENEWED.

The Continent is no longer cut off from Kent! With the meeting of Graham Fagg and Phillipe Cozette in the Channel Tunnel in December it became again, theoretically, possible to walk between England and France and the Continent's isolation was finally broken!

ARCHITECTURAL PLANNING AND DESIGN⁵⁹

Richard MacCormac's Address
to the Wye Conference.

In introducing Richard MacCormac, Executive Committee member Ann Voelcker, herself an architect, noted his original and controversial designs for Spitalfields and for Tonbridge School and compared them more than favourably with the "replica" buildings we had seen in Canterbury. She deplored British architectural illiteracy and said that great labour was needed to overcome the blind timidity of respect for tradition only. Revitalisation did not mean pantiles on a supermarket roof!

Mr MacCormac's address was splendidly illustrated by simultaneous side-by-side slides. He commented that Wren's St Paul's was unpopular at the time it was built, and denounced as a barbarous and unscholarly new building, as were the works of Hawksmoor, and the Sydney Opera House would probably not get planning permission now. He praised the "admirable boldness" of the beautiful Mitterand Glass Pyramid at the Louvre. The Liverpool Albert Dock, so admired today, was attacked at the time of its construction for its ugliness and shamefully cheap construction. Similarly, the four façades of London's Bedford Square, which we regard as the epitome of Georgian quality, can be seen as stripped down versions of the elevations of Woburn, and much Georgian architecture was originally derided for its repetitiveness and lack of character, he said.

Modern imitative buildings were the work of unpractised architects and their craft delicacy was undeveloped. They confused association with intrinsic worth. John Ruskin, in the 19th century, helped create the mania for Gothic, which he came to regret as it appeared even in the designs of pubs and railway stations. This attitude to architecture was particularly English and resulted in buildings which were not about themselves, but something else - past styles or historic surroundings. Sainsburys at Canterbury was perhaps too much about itself and its technology, but remained an intrinsically fine building, probably more valuable architecturally than any pastiche supermarket. Mr MacCormac described some of his own buildings, such as that at Worcester College, Oxford, which have made historic references without imitating past style.

Mr MacCormac praised the Estonian-American architect, Kahn, for his Center for British Art and Studies at Yale, and his library for St Phillip's Academy at the University of Exeter, New Hampshire, as buildings of spiritual power which would never obtain a planning consent in Britain today. He thought that Lasdun's National Theatre was great but flawed by its external use of concrete. Architects concerned about the past should seek its meanings and find new forms to express them. He agreed with a member of the audience that the Prince of Wales, who liked only customary beauty, might inadvertently be promoting provincialism.

JACK WOOLFORD