

84 DIGGING BY THE DOUR

The River Dour and the Archaeologists

The Dour is regularly on the agenda of the Dover Society Committee meetings. How to keep it clean, how to deal with the supply of plastic bags and empty cans which proliferate in its waters and how we can persuade the District Council to take responsibility for the stream. Members will remember the Sunday when we organised a competition between local pubs to clean out the river. That was just over a year ago. I believe the primary schools have also had a go since, but if you walk along by Pencester Gardens now you would never believe it. On the 28th October, however, many of us had a different view of our rubbish filled stream, made so short of water by the drought that even the ducks could only paddle. A meeting was organised by the District Council to give members of the public a chance to meet Professor Barry Cunliffe and the members of his advisory team who are concerned with the archaeological possibilities and developments arising from the construction of the Heritage Centre. Also present was Dr John Williams who has just been appointed County Archaeologist for Kent and Drs Tony Barton and Martin Bates who have been surveying the Dour at the behest of Professor Cunliffe and his advisory body. After an introduction by Professor Cunliffe, first Dr Barham and then Dr Bates explained the survey of the Dour which they had been conducting for the last month or so and gave an initial assessment of their discoveries during that time. Aware of the presence of many laymen in their audience both lecturers were well supplied

with diagrams and examples of borings and did not hesitate to explain the technical jargon involved. Thus we soon discovered that we were not to concern ourselves with happenings of two million years ago (Pleistocene) but would concentrate on the more recent 10,000 to 20,000 years ago of the Holocene period since human habitation lies within this range. The Ice Sheet of some 18,000 years ago did not reach much farther south than the Midlands but the dust from the ice fields was deposited in this area and so contributed to the development of the Dour as we know it.

After Dr Barham's introduction, Dr Bates explained how they had decided to concentrate their investigation on three sections of the Dour. At Crabble Paper Mill they had sunk five boreholes and had also been given permission to dig a trench. This had confirmed the presence of Tufa Gravel from which the Roman Pharos might well have been constructed and also the existence of layers of peat indicating the bed of a channel. The site selected at Buckland also revealed peat and Tufa gravel and the bores taken from both sites seemed promisingly full of pollen, molluscs and pieces of wood. These cores have been sent to London Museum where they will be subjected to tests by experts using modern equipment which will confirm the impressions gained by Drs Bates and Barham in Dover.

The third location on this introductory survey has been in Russell Street where four layers of strata proved of great interest.

These are an upper layer of gravel, then chalk rubble, fining sands and a lower layer of gravel. Differences in the shaping of the two layers of gravel indicate that the lower layer was part of a stable beach, possibly the old beach, whilst the upper layer may well be part of a storm beach, deposited almost at one go and, apparently, there was such a storm in the Twelfth Century. The finings sands indicate the presence of an estuary after the sea had moved from the area.

Roman Dover may well have existed on a ridge coming down from the Western Heights to where the Heritage Centre is now and proceeding along Pencester Gardens. On the other side of the valley was the Russell Street area. Large gravel movements have taken place over the last 10,000 years contributing to variations in the drop to the sea level — variations of perhaps a metre since Roman times.

Drs Barham and Bates gave a fascinating description of their work and mentioned the interest of the non-archaeologists in their audience. They also dealt expertly with questions that were asked and finished with an appeal for help and information. Some members of the Dover Society may well be able to respond to

their appeal. If anyone involved in the building of hotels, shops, houses etc in Dover over the last 50 years has any records of the contents of the site concerned, especially records made by consultants, architects, builders, and so on, they would welcome the chance to see them. If you have any such records the Society will put you in touch with the archaeologists. Further they said, they had no opposition when asking if they could sink a borehole or investigate an already open trench. So if a knock comes to your door and a request comes to drill in your garden let your pride in Dover prevail and say "Go ahead, please do!"

K. W. BERRY

Dover Archaeological Advisory Board

Professor Barry Cunliffe,
European Archaeology, Oxford.
Chairman

Professor David Harris,
University College, London

Professor Peter Salway,
The Open University

Professor Philip Rahtz,
Emeritus Professor Archaeology,
University of York.

DOVER HARBOUR

Marjorie Wiggins would like to recommend the romantic and historical novel DOVER HARBOUR by THOMAS ARMSTRONG to other members.

The novel is set between 1792 and 1800 when the prospect of an invasion from France was greatly feared. The harbour, not for the first time, was in danger of being choked by the shingle brought up the Channel by south-westerly gales. Smuggling was a very common part-time occupation among the inhabitants.

Fiction is interwoven with fact in the story of the rivalry between two families. Detailed descriptions of the town and port in the late 18th century provide the setting for the lives of these and other characters.