

# A.G.M. and Spring Conference

## *'Leisure in Kent'*

Ken Wraight

THIS year the conference, under the chairmanship of Jack Woolford, was held at St. Nicholas, Maidstone.

The President, Sir Roger De Gray, opened with an address in which he implored all members to look to the appearance of their own homes and front gardens to improve their local environment.

Then Helen Drummond, a Maidstone Councillor, gave a brief listing of the main elements making up the town, their conflicting interests and the problems this set the planners and the planning committee of which she was a member.

Dr Brian White, the host of this year's conference, talked about Maidstone's rôle in the tourist industry. He made the point that whilst Maidstone may not be a very good 'place' for a holiday it did make a good 'base'. Too many tourist venues were being damaged by over-popularity – there could be a greater spread of people staying throughout Kent.

After lunch, the next speaker was Alan Smith, Operations Director of Heritage Projects Ltd. – who runs the White Cliffs Experience and the Canterbury Tales. The point he made was that Tourism needed to be managed if it was to achieve the greatest impact both for the area and for the individual tourist. He described how his company had gone about setting-up their various centres. He also spoke of the need to convince local people that recent developments were in their interests and that we could all help the tourist initiatives to succeed and improve our local economy.

The last speaker was Mr J. Hughes, Countryside Officer for KCC Planning Department. He said that whilst Kent had 4,000 miles of Rights of Way the amount of open space, at 3.5 acres per 100 people, was only just over a quarter of the national average. The need was to improve facilities. He said no more development would be allowed along the North Kent Coast – not defined – and that progress was being made with the establishment of Horse Trails, one of which will be in the Alkham Valley; there will also be a Picnic Site on or near the Eastry By-pass. Any new Golf courses would need to be small, local and 'look like Kent'. Landowners should be assisted to develop open space for its own sake. However, no Forestry Commission Land in Kent had yet been opened to the public.