

CHRISTMAS FEAST

2000 _____ by Sheila Cope

One of the minor dilemmas which the committee faces in deciding about a venue for our annual Christmas feast is that the event cannot be held at Dover College Refectory until after school has broken up. Thus we are restricted to a Saturday when some members may have alternative commitments. Last year on December 16th some familiar faces were inevitably missing. Nevertheless we welcomed several guests who were attending for the first time and who commented favourably on the unique character of the Refectory. College caterers cheerfully served a buffet which was outstanding in quality and quantity and the wine was commended too. Moreover we no longer need speculate on the hardiness of former monks and schoolboys because heating is now adequate.

Musical entertainment this year was of a partly background nature with Mike Scurfield bringing a fresh perspective to some familiar Christmas tunes. Subsequently we sang carols together and appreciated the surprise (to him) solo given at Mike's request by Gordon Cowan, the Town Mayor. Gordon and his wife Jeanette were our invited guests and his youthful choirboy training was apparent on this occasion.

The purpose of our Christmas Feast is simply to provide a happy occasion when members and guests may enjoy each other's company alongside good food, wine, music and a flutter on the raffle. The evening concluded with thanks to all our organisers, and especially to Joan Liggett who, in addition to being a superb Social Secretary, manages a very pretty curtsy.

Footnote: Joan welcomes suggestions for entertainment at the Christmas Feast, particularly in view of the need to book it several months in advance.

The January Meeting

There were two speakers at the meeting held at St. Mary's Parish Centre on Monday, 15th January. The first speaker was Jack Woolford, one of the founder members of the Society. His subject was 'The Prehistory of the Dover Society' and he has been kind enough to write his own summary of his fascinating talk.

The Prehistory of THE DOVER SOCIETY

*Jack Woolford's
Address to Members
15 January 2001*

The Dover Society was founded in May 1988 and its predecessor the New Dover Group which founded in 1982, in 1964. Obviously they were part of a trend: but when did it begin?

In between 11 and 14 billion years ago there was the original Big Bang, and 10 billion years later the formation of the Solar System including the Earth. In the last million years homo sapiens has evolved and (only) five thousand years ago became civilised. Pyramids (from 3/2000 BC) in the the first cities in Egypt were oriented to heavenly bodies, which means that town planning is as old as civilisation. Fifth century BC Athens with its Parthenon, Agora and Theatre, much influenced by Hipparchus of Miletus, the father of town planning, shows how far the process had gone. Moreover Athens had a democratic constitution (women and slaves apart) in which free citizens not only debated and voted but were elected to office. The Roman Senate was similar, and Roman cities even more impressively planned with their baths and aqueducts, fora (forums) and amphitheatres. Both Greek - in Asia Minor

and Sicily - and Roman colonies - including London and Bath - were designed in detail in advance.

Indeed, after the thousand year interim of Decline and Fall

and Dark Ages, it was Greek and Roman

models which inspired the

rebuilding of the fifteenth

century Renaissance cities of

Florence and Venice,

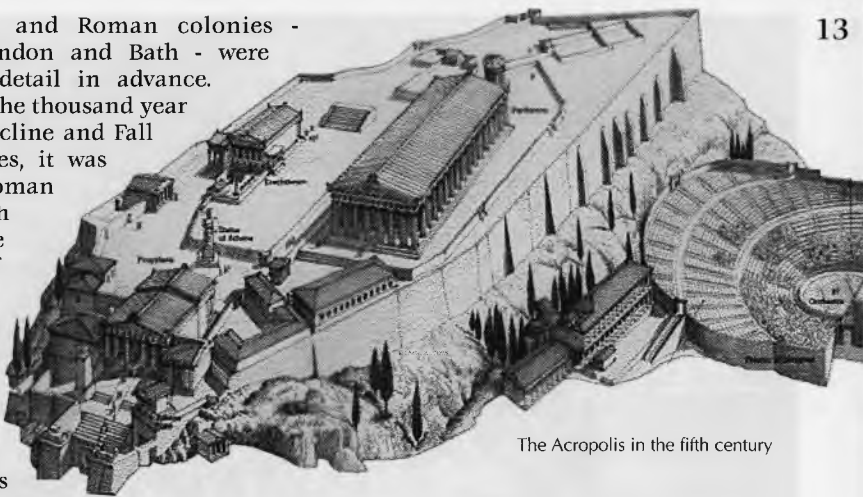
themselves later models

for London

and Paris, Cologne and Vienna (not to mention Philadelphia and Washington DC, etc, etc.)

It was not only Greece and Rome which had assemblies. The first Parliament (Alfing) took place in Iceland in the year 940 AD and in England in 1215 King John signed Magna Carta in which he acknowledged that the King was himself also subject to the Law. Kentish rebels, Wat Tyler in the Peasants' Revolt in 1381 and Jack Cade in 1450 fought and died to reduce royal power. Kentish Henry Hatch, Merchant Adventurer, of Faversham added another ingredient, philanthropy, to civic improvement. In 1533 he left his fortune for improvements to the town's water supply, wharves and highways: "Here I got my goods" he said, "and here I shall leave them, for I have no children". Queen Elizabeth I went much further. In 1580 she attempted to create a Green Belt.

"Be it enacted by the authority of this present Parliament, that no person or persons of whatever Estate Degree or Condition soever, shall from henceforth make and erect any new Buildings House or Houses for habitation or dwellings, within either the said Cities (London and Westminster) or within three miles of any



The Acropolis in the fifth century

of the Gates of the said City of London... It shall not be lawful... to enclose... any part of the Commons or waste Grounds... within three miles of any of the gases... to the hindrance... of walking for recreation comfort and health..."

Birds of a feather always flocked together and there were social, political and religious clubs in ancient Athens and Rome. Shakespeare had belonged to Raleigh's "Mermaid" Club and later in the 17th Century England's colonial trade and conquests had made possible coffee, tea or chocolate houses, and by this time there were enough merchants and professionals who wished to influence policy-making who used coffee houses to cut across social barriers and meet members of the ruling class informally. Although a government proclamation forbade them in 1675, one of them became Lloyd's - the Stock Exchange - in 1692 and by 1750 there were in London alone 551 Coffee Houses and 2000 clubs. The remedy had been the 1689 Bill of Rights after the expulsion of James II which asserted the supremacy of Parliament over King.

The Great Fire of London of 1666 made possible the redesign of London and Christopher Wren obliged with a



A seventeenth century London Coffee House



New Lanark
1800

magnificent Plan. Unfortunately (and characteristically?) business interests killed it, just as conservative clergy had forced Wren to build his new and classical St Paul's Cathedral on medieval foundations. In the 18th century town planning flourished - witness the terraces of Bath - but by its end two revolutions, the French and the Industrial, had transformed both politics and economics, necessitating in turn a revolution in urban planning. The steam engine and the railway train made Britain "the workshop of the world" by the time of the Great Exhibition of 1851 but the social cost of "dark satanic mills" was new overcrowded and disease-ridden industrial slumdom, prone to rioting if not revolution. There were, however philanthropic employers like Robert Owen who built healthy houses for employees in healthy factories with schools in New Lanark (1800) and Titus Oates in Bradford who built a new town, Saltaire, in 1853, with every utility (except a pub). In 1887 Lever Brothers' Port Sunlight and Cadbury's Bourneville

built model villages. Two years after he published "Garden Cities of Tomorrow", Ebenezer Howard built Letchworth, with low density building and wide streets in a rural environment. Welwyn Garden City followed in 1920.

During the same mid and late-Victorian and Edwardian periods, parliamentary reform, factory, health, housing and educational legislation siphoned off revolutionary protests and middle class liberals, like Octavia Hill, inspired by reformists like John Ruskin and William Morris, created (1865) the Commons Preservation Society, the Dartmoor Preservation Association 1883 and the National Trust For Places Of Historic Interest Or Natural Beauty in 1895. SPROL (sic) (1875) was the Society For Photographing Relics Of Old London. Conservation had been established not only as a minority middle class movement but with enough clout to force governments to take some action against industrialists.

Even more impressive from an Amenity Society point of view, in 1790



Port Sunlight, venue for the 1994 Civic Trust

16 the inhabitants of Abinger in Surrey successfully campaigned against a gunpowder plant and in 1807 a Chiselhurst campaign upheld a right of way against the closure of a footpath. The first Amenity Society as such was Sid Vale Association in Sidmouth in 1846. Birmingham Civic Society dates from 1918 and the Council for the Protection of Rural England from 1926. Its creator was Sir Patrick Abercrombie, later even more famous for his Greater London Plan to take advantage of the ravages of the Blitz (but no more successfully than Wren), not to mention his post-war Plan for Dover. In 1935 London County Council created a Green Belt, 355 years after Elizabeth I proposed it. By 1939 there were over a hundred local Amenity Societies in Britain.

The new Town and Country Planning Act of 1947, still inspired by Ebenezer Howard's principles of clustered housing, shopping and schooling, to shorten journeys to work and to reduce exhaust pollution and to decongest other overcrowded cities, created New Towns. In 20 years some 30 were built - from clustered Stevenage, Crawley and Harlow and Peterlee to spacious Milton Keynes in 1967. Changing economic circumstances, however, did not reduce the need for commuting and other "solutions" elsewhere generated the social disaster of Tower Blocks. Very many people concluded that they could not do worse than the planners and although their powers were limited, persistence fired by outrage worked. By 1957 when the Civic Trust was formed (with Lord Duncan Sandys as its first president) there were more than 200 civic societies and by 1989 more than a thousand, including the New Dover Group (1964-82) and the Dover Society (founded 1988). Environmental conservation had moved from the periphery to the very centre of public concern.

Unfortunately during the same period the powers of local government

were more and more clipped. The Bill of Rights transferred sovereignty from the king to parliament and the Cabinet, the committee of the majority group in the House of Commons, has been and is, no less jealous of its supremacy. Local government has no independent power and the new so-called Regions, including the South East, have no more autonomy than County, District or Parish Councils. Whitehall and the Treasury remain firmly on top. Fortunately, local amenity societies inherit the millennial tradition outlined above to fight for on-the-spot consultation and participation in decision making. Long live the Dover Society! It has a long way to go but plenty of time before the Big Crunch follows the Big Bang.

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Derek Leach gave the vote of thanks to Jack for his thought-provoking talk. Then followed the interval with the usual refreshments, organised by Joan Liggett and Mike Weston, and the ever-popular raffle organised by Sheila Cope.

The second speaker of the evening was Dover Society member, Bob Hollingsbee, who kindly came to our rescue at short notice to replace the advertised item, The Magic Lantern show by Budge Adams. Bob is a retired sub-editor of the Dover Express and is affectionately known as the 'Memories Man'.

We were shown an evocative collection of slides, many of which are 'treasures' from the Dover Express archives. They portrayed aspects of Dover from the nineteenth century onwards, many showing Dover before, during and after the war years. For most of us this was a nostalgic trip down memory lane. Bob has recently had a book published entitled 'Dover' which is a compilation of photographs showing the Dover of yesteryear. This book was reviewed in the last Newsletter by Terry Sutton, who on this occasion gave the vote of thanks to his one-time colleague.

Audrey Wood