

ST GEORGE'S DAY 2001

Reported by Derek Leach

THE TRADITIONAL ST. GEORGE'S DAY ceremonies in Dover to commemorate the historic and heroic raid by the Dover Patrol on the German U boat and naval base at Zeebrugge on 23 April 1918 had an extra ingredient this year which was the official unveiling of the new oval plaque on the Town Hall. This was the outcome of

wording and Dover District Council's Conservation Officer obtained the necessary listed building consent. Whilst unveiling the plaque the Town Mayor, Councillor Gordon Cowan, read the inscription.

The ceremony was preceded by an inspection by Colonel Smith, Royal Marines, of those on parade in front of the War Memorial - some 50 members of the Royal British Legion including twelve standard bearers, plus Jack Hewitt, representing the Scout Movement and, strangely, three members of the Dover Society who had also been put 'on parade'.



discussion amongst Dover Society members and in the local press about whether the Zeebrugge Bell and its associated stone panels mounted on the Town Hall were sufficiently prominent for passers-by to notice them and to realise what the bell represented. Various alternative sites for the Bell were mooted but it was decided that an additional plaque at eye level plus cleaning and relettering of the original stone panels would suffice. The Dover Society took the lead in the project and part funded it. Dover District Council, Dover Town Council and the City of Bruges also contributed. Dover Museum approved the



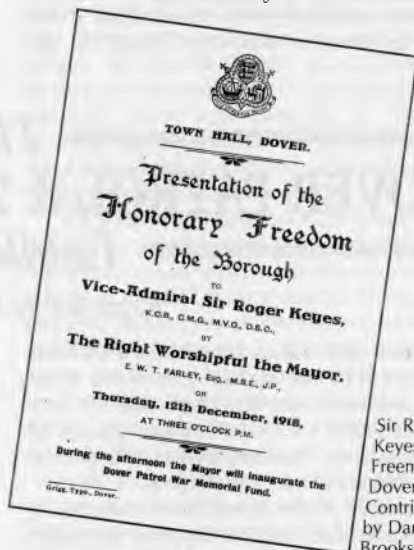
Ceremony at the Town Hall

Following inspection and the halting of the traffic, the parade was ordered to march to its position in front of the Town Hall. Unfortunately, the three members of the Dover Society were not keeping in step and were asked discreetly to drop out - which we did with relief!

We waited in silence for noon when the Town Mayor tolled the bell from the balcony and two young sea cadets from T. S. Lynx sounded the Last Post and Reveille. This was followed by an oration which mentioned that, whilst the success of the raid might be debated, there was no doubt about the audacity of the plan nor the bravery of all those who took part - endorsed by the number of decorations awarded. Finally, the Revd. Michael Hinton led us in prayer before the new plaque was unveiled. It was, as always, a short but moving ceremony marred somewhat by a failure of the public address system and by some passers-by. Perhaps in future the organisers could ensure that the pavement opposite the Town Hall is kept clear of onlookers (who could stand in the road in safety) to allow pedestrians who insist on passing through to do so without interfering with the ceremony.

Two coaches then took the whole party to St. James's Cemetery. On arrival the Royal British Legion representatives formed

up in front of the Zeebrugge memorial and graves with the standard bearers on the hill behind. The dignitaries, led by the Town Mayor and Lord Keyes, son of Admiral Lord Keyes who led the raid, processed through the cemetery to the memorial.



After the buglers again sounded Last Post and Reveille, the oration was repeated and Father Hinton led us in prayer.

Wreaths were then laid, first by the Town Mayor, then by Lord Keyes who also laid a wreath on his father's grave, by Colonel Smith, then by the mayors of Deal, Folkestone and Bruges, followed by the Royal British Legion, the Royal Naval Association, the Royal Society of St. George and the Dover Society which had chosen a striking wreath of red, white and blue flowers.

We returned to our coaches which took us to the Dover Museum



Zeebrugge Memorial St James' Cemetery

18 where we were able to view the special exhibition on the Dover Patrol and the Zeebrugge raid.

After 83 years it is good that Dover (and Zeebrugge, where a similar parade and commemorative service took place the previous weekend) still remembers those brave servicemen and can reflect on the

horrors of war and pray that one day war will be a part of history but not part of the present or the future.

Footnote: If there is anyone not aware of the details of the Zeebrugge raid, Newsletter 38 included a report of the talk to the Society by Donald Sykes about the raid.

Photographs by Derek Leach.

The **DOVER PATROL & ZEEBRUGGE RAID** *Exhibition*

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I visited the Dover Museum exhibition on 1st June during half term week when the Museum was holding a Family Day. It was crowded with families and groups of Brownies with Museum staff at full stretch answering their many questions.

The story of the Dover Patrol during the First World War will be familiar to Dover Society members but this exhibition helps to take the mind back almost a century to those momentous years for Dover, the British Navy and the country. Beginning as a very small naval unit, the Dover Patrol grew to be one of the most important and famous of the war with its key roles of protecting Channel shipping and supply routes (both to and from France as well as the essential convoys through the Straits), chasing submarines, manning the mine and net barrage across the Channel, bringing back wounded soldiers, bombarding German positions in Belgium and culminating in 1918 with the Zeebrugge Raid, perhaps the most famous raid in British naval history which is still commemorated every year in Dover on its anniversary, St. George's Day.

The exhibition was an interesting and varied mixture including paintings, photographs, artefacts (including an incendiary bomb), posters, permits, medals, sheet music (A Long Way to

Tipperary), poems, models of ships and a non-stop video film of the Zeebrugge Raid. I was particularly impressed by an excellent model of Zeebrugge Harbour showing the positions of the British ships, the actual wooden memorial to the Trawler and Minesweeping Patrol containing 300 names thought to have come from Old St. James' Church after it was damaged during the Second World War, a first-hand account of the raid from the actual diary of a leading seaman, a Dover Freeman's Casket made in 1919 for Lloyd George from decking and fittings of HMS Vindictive that played a leading role in the raid, Vindictive's grappling iron recently moved from the Sea Front on its way to a new location and a fine portrait of Sir Roger Keyes, the Vice-Admiral in command of the Dover Patrol and the Zeebrugge Raid.

The exhibition also included a section on Dover itself during the First World War but, as I am booked to give a talk to the Society on that subject later in 2002, I shall refrain from going into any detail.

In all this was an excellent effort by Museum staff to make today's Dovorians more aware of the role Dover and the Dover Patrol played during the First World War. The exhibition is on until 9 September, so if you haven't seen it yet, do go along.