

# APRIL MEETING

## Annual General Meeting of The Dover Society, 2010

Report by the Chairman Derek Leach

This is my 6th annual report and I must say that the longer I stay in the job as chairman, the busier both the Executive and I seem to be. My boss used to say that I created work - perhaps I do but I don't think that it's just me! Unfortunately, there are many issues that need addressing in Dover today.

### Membership

Regrettably there has been a net drop in membership in the past year from around 450 to 425. Whilst this is still a healthy number, it does not compare with Harwich, a similar-sized town, where its Society's membership is 1800. The more members we have, the stronger our voice becomes. So please encourage relatives, friends and work colleagues to join. Our thanks go to our membership secretary, Sheila Cope.

Now would you stand whilst we remember those members who have died in the past year.

### Civic Trust

Something of a bombshell was the financial failure of the Civic Trust, which has provided a national voice for amenity societies for many years. The Executive has had to consider the purpose and financing of a successor

organisation called Civic Voice, looking for a much smaller outfit concentrating upon providing a national voice rather than supporting local societies like ours that are very much self sufficient. We shall debate an Executive motion regarding membership of Civic Voice later.

### Planning

Our Planning Committee under its tireless chairman, Jack Woolford, continues to monitor and comment upon every planning application for Dover and the surrounding villages. We still await progress on providing a new health facility, the long-awaited redevelopment of Buckland Paper Mill and the St James' area - DTIZ now back in the melting pot (let's hope that an alternative with quality and style will emerge from the Asda ashes). The big screen in Market Square proved to be as ugly and as intrusive as we feared and has yet to attract an audience of any size. Another controversy was the bid put together for Dover by SEEDA, KCC, DDC, DHB and EH for grants under the Sea Change programme to improve coastal resorts. No consultation was held until grants had been received and ring-fenced for specific projects which had

to be match-funded locally. These included refurbishment of the Bleriot Memorial, the expensive and grand furnishing of Dover Castle's keep, a new reception building for the castle, renovating the officers' mess, a feasibility study for a cable car project and yet another improvement to the sea front. We objected to spending £2m on what is already an attractive promenade in front of Waterloo Crescent when so much of the town centre is in desperate need of a facelift. The money could not however be spent anywhere else. Concerned about the cost effectiveness of the DDC wind turbine at Whitfield we discovered that it will take 55 years to recover the capital and running costs! We fired a broadside at DDC for closing two of Dover's public toilets without warning in its attempt to transfer the cost to DTC and were pleased to see them reopened. DDC's Local Development Framework for the years to 2026 was approved by government including 14,000 new homes in the District and an expectation of 6,500 new jobs. We can but hope!

We welcomed the occupation of large empty premises by Peacock and then Morrison, but remain despondent about the 26 empty premises between Townwall Street and the Town Hall.

The unauthorised enclosure of some land, including an established public right of way, has resulted in the Executive taking steps to protect the path. A motion to that effect will be put to you later this evening.

Considering our response to the

formal proposals by DHB for redevelopment of the Western Docks (called T2) and for restructuring of the Harbour Board took up a great deal of time in the last three months. These proposals were considered so important that we consulted the membership by post (at a cost of £170) about the Executive's recommendations before finalising our submissions to the Secretary of State at the end of March. Thank you to those who commented. We had already agreed in principle the Western Docks T2 development with certain provisos, most of which have already been met. Our formal submission to the Secretary of State confirmed our support but with a number of conditions. Regarding restructuring of the Board, we covered all possibilities. Whilst preferring to retain the status quo, ie Trust Port status, we considered this unrealistic in the present economic climate with any government looking to sell some of the family silver and the need for the Board to borrow money for T2 development without increasing the national debt. In which case we suggested an amended Trust Port status with the ability to borrow money without increasing the national debt and enabling the Board to support the local community financially via a charitable trust. If the government opted for privatisation, then we would prefer retaining a 51% share in the new company with a number of provisos which applied equally to 100% privatisation, including guaranteed income for a charitable

trust managed by and for the community and an employee share scheme.

### **Initiatives**

Frustrated with the state of the town centre with its empty and boarded up shops, litter, cycling in the pedestrian precinct and other antisocial behaviour, we have formed a Refurbishment Committee, which has quickly identified targets for lobbying and improvement. English Heritage is undertaking a survey of Dover's buildings to review listed buildings and whether other buildings should be listed. Our Refurbishment Committee is conducting its own review.

Following an unsuccessful attempt by member Martyn Webster to have the Copt Hill cemeteries listed by English Heritage, we are now investigating the possibility of a conservation area instead and possibly listing some of the headstones. We have also taken an interest in St. Mary's Churchyard where all trace of the grave of Thomas Pattenden, a Dover diarist, was removed in the 1990's. To remedy this we are erecting one of our blue plaques on St. Mary's Parish Centre overlooking the churchyard.

Our efforts continue regarding the refurbishment of the 20 historic panels around the town, some of which are in desperate need. DTC has agreed to pay for three and we have offered to pay for another - about £400 each.

Another neglected area of our town is its Roman remains and we have taken the first step to raise awareness of their potential.

### **Consultation**

We continue to be consulted on a range of topics by DDC, DTC, the Chamber of Commerce and, of course, DHB. We have welcomed the enthusiasm of our mayor, member Sue Jones for our move to restore the Town Hall, which is one of our long-term projects. We have discussed with Sue and the Museum a joint approach to provide guided tours to raise public awareness of the building, parts of which are not normally seen. We have agreed in principle to the possible erection on the Western Heights of a memorial to the 1,700,000 commonwealth troops from 54 countries who died in both world wars. During consultation about the state of some retail properties between Bridge Street and Beaconsfield Road it was agreed that conversion to residential use would be a significant improvement. We were also consulted about a major project to regenerate Ostend's East Bank with an interpretation centre and monument to the 1918 Zeebrugge Raid.

### **More of the same**

Now I turn to what you may call 'more of the same' - regular activities which are part and parcel of The Society and perhaps taken for granted, but no less important for that.

### **Social programme**

Our winter series of meetings continue to be well supported and I thank Patricia Sherratt, Jack Woolford, Georgette Rapley and the happy band of kitchen helpers - not to mention the wine waiter for all their hard work.

Once again support for most of the summer outings was disappointing and so we are only having one this summer although members will be welcome to join the Friends of Dover Museum on their outings.

### **Projects**

Our regular working parties at Cowgate Cemetery, led by Jeremy Cope, continue to keep the whole cemetery attractive as a haven for wildlife and for people, both living and dead. There is always a warm welcome to new workers. The Society continues to play a leading role in the River Dour Steering Group and we continue to coordinate and publicise arrangements for Dover properties to be open free of charge on a weekend in September under the national Heritage Open Days umbrella. These are increasing every year and St Radigund's Abbey was added in 2009. Jeremy represents us on the Dover Heritage Group attempting to make the best of our heritage potential.

### **Publicity**

Our Newsletter expertly edited by Alan Lee continues to be highly regarded by members and others. We are indebted to all the contributors, Jean Marsh our advertising manager and all our distributors for their efforts. The excellent website, managed by Mike McFarnell, also keeps members up to date and helps to interest internet browsers not only in the Society but in Dover as well. Its popularity has increased this year with the extensive Dover History Scrapbook, making use of Kathleen

and Bob Hollingsbee's fascinating archive. Terry Sutton's regular press reports helps to keep The Society in the public eye.

### **Events**

As usual I represented The Society at the St. George's Day commemoration of the Zeebrugge Raid and we also laid wreaths at the Remembrance Services at the Town war memorial and at The Society's plaque to the Unknown Warrior at the Western Docks. Having lobbied DDC several years ago to commemorate the centenary of the first successful flight across the Channel and to refurbish Bleriot's landing site, five of us were delighted to represent The Society on the day.

### **Conclusion**

One administrative change was that Bill Naylor relinquished the task of Minutes Secretary when Barbara Stapleton kindly volunteered to take over. Thank you Bill for your many years of note taking, but you are willing to stay on the Executive and as Secretary. I have not mentioned the sterling efforts of our Treasurer, but Mike Weston will shortly dazzle you with his annual accounts. That concludes my report of a very hectic year for The Society except for thanking every member of the Executive and all those members who have contributed in some way to the work of The Society during the past year.

I submit my report for your consideration and welcome any questions.