

NOVEMBER MEETING

1st Talk

Dover's Caves and Tunnels

A talk by Derek Leach *reported by Terry Sutton*

Our chairman Derek Leach OBE treated a packed meeting on Monday evening, November 21st, to a most interesting talk about the scores of tunnels and caves that riddle the ground under our feet.

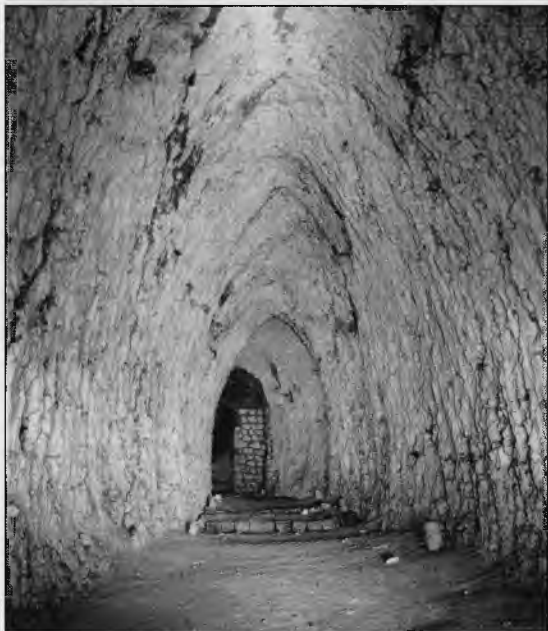
Derek admitted he had little idea of the extent of tunnelling around Dover until he began researching for his latest book *Dover's Caves & Tunnels* (Riverdale Publications).

He told us how he was greatly assisted in his research by former Dover firemen John Walton and Allen Cook who, in their spare time, collated much information about the tunnels to assist the fire brigade when they were called to fires or trapped people in tunnels.

One set of helpful documents about tunnels around Archcliffe Fort were marked "Secret" but that problem was overcome when the donor just ripped off the corner bearing the notice!

Derek detailed some of the reasons why many of the civilian-constructed tunnels were built or used. They were provided as living accommodation, for the storage of wine and champagne, smuggling, and even the growing of mushrooms. A number of the tunnels were extended to provide air raid and shelling shelters in the wars.

Much work was carried out on the various tunnels, especially those in the cliffs, by the military in the two world wars



Guston Mystery Cave

© Paul Isles

to serve as observation posts and gun sites.

Derek's tour of tunnels and caves ranged from Capel gun site (now the Battle of Britain memorial complex), to Dover Castle and on to St Margaret's Bay where the latest system at The Droveway was constructed in the 1950s for the RAF to accommodate a top secret radar system to give early warning of a nuclear attack.

Although "top secret" the pile of excavated chalk from The Droveway complex was as high as the Dover Patrol memorial and when the work was completed (it is alleged) the Russian Embassy sent a letter of congratulation to the Ministry of Defence!

Derek also described the massive storage tunnels built into the cliffs with 32 entrances from the Eastern Docks. Here mines and fuel for warships were stored in the 1939-45 war.

There is one tunnelling system that remains a mystery to Derek. He told us of a well shaft leading to a brick-lined 40 feet long tunnel, with passages leading off, that has its entrance underneath a cottage at Guston.



Winchelsea Cave

© Dover Museum



Winchelsea Cave

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Capel Battery Underground Construction

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