

## March Meeting 1st Talk

### The Western Heights

A talk by Jon Iveson reported by Terry Sutton

There was a packed meeting on Monday, 18th March, at St Mary's parish centre to hear Dover Museum curator Jon Iveson give a most interesting talk about the military fortifications on the Western Heights. Among the audience were residents of the Heights opposed to plans to build more homes there.

Using screened maps, sketches and paintings, Mr Iveson explained that early fortifications began in 1779 when defences were constructed when Britain's enemies were American "rebels," and their allies the French and Spanish. At the same time defences were also provided on Dover sea front.

At that time the road to Folkestone ran through the Heights and the fortifications were constructed there to counter any French invaders approaching to capture Dover from that direction. Mr Iveson pointed out that was the same expectation (and indeed enemy plans) if the Germans had invaded in 1940.

Mr Iveson, a military historian, showed how the type of fortifications on the Heights changed as gunnery, especially from ships, became more sophisticated. He screened images of what the Grand Shaft barracks, and its parade ground, looked like even before the Grand Shaft was constructed through the cliffs. He pointed out that using the Grand Shaft it took just 11 minutes for 600 soldiers to clamber down the 140 feet drop from their very large barracks on the Heights to the harbour below. Construction of

the Grand Shaft (to be seen from Snargate Street) was twice hampered by cliff falls.

One historic photograph showed how excavations for fortifications revealed the foundations of Dover's second Roman Pharos (twinning the existing Roman lighthouse on the Eastern Heights), a few remnants of which remain on the Heights.

Going forward in history he displayed photographs showing Lord Lovat's commandoes in training at their Dover base in the Drop Redoubt in World War II and the destruction of some of the fortifications and barracks after the war, to provide road access through the Heights.

He also recalled that at least one of the deep moats, built to surround the Heights, was filled in by Dover Corporation to provide a rubbish dump for the town! The Citadel, the centre of the fortifications, had a series of uses post-war from a prison to now an immigration removal centre.



*Western Heights from Marine Station*