

OCTOBER MEETING

First Speaker

The Dover Pageant

A talk by Lynda Pearce

Reported by Terry Sutton

People still talk and write about The Dover Pageant held 108 years ago. It was a costly, loss-making affair, but it is claimed to have added to the town's community pride.

Our members and guests enjoyed a most interesting and humorous talk on the subject of the pageant at a public meeting in St Mary's parish centre in October when our visiting speaker was Lynda Pearce, assistant curator at Dover Museum.

She explained that in the mid-1900s there was a national craze for pageants that focused on the days of yesteryear. Dover decided to hold its pageant in 1908 at the height of the craze.

She told how it took eighteen months of planning and work, with the design and making of hundreds of costumes, thinking up the sequences, the creation of songs and music, raising money for the show and the building of a 5,000 grandstand in the grounds of Dover College where the pageant was produced.

The Pageant Master was Louis Napoleon Parker (who died in 1944) who warned from the start that it might not make a profit but the vicar of St Mary's Church (the Reverend Canon Henry Bartram) hoped it would result in a donation to a St Mary's fund. It was he who, after hearing a talk about pageants, suggested one for Dover.

Mrs Pearce said those closely involved with the pageant were the town's "social elite" who had the time and money to

devote to the show. Most

of the elite made their own costumes but some were hired. Around 2,000 people took part in the 14 performances including, for one show, a group of French visitors.

Part of the expense of staging the event was the hiring of 1,700 wigs at a cost of £250 but there were also low cost conversions-for instance helmets were created from bowler hats. The wage bill stacked up to more than £1,600.

Mrs Pearce estimates that the total loss on the event was in the region of £3,000 when the loss of guarantees is added to the final bill.

But, she argued, the Dover Pageant added to the pride of the town in its historic and present background. And that spirit lives on today, she declared.

**One piece from the pageant is still sung. The patriotic Dover Triumph Song, words written by James Rhoades, is still sung lustily to the music of H. J. Taylor, then the town's organist.*

