

# JANUARY MEETING

— Second Speaker —

## The Quest for City Status

The Society's New Initiative

Peter Sherred

Those members who attended the meeting of the Society on January 17th, will recall that, at the request of Vice Chairman Jenny Olpin, I was asked to present to the membership the outline of an initiative recently approved by the Executive of the Society. This initiative is to collate information and appropriate material to be merged to form the basis of a submission for city status for this town of ours. I have offered to co-ordinate the project, and this has been accepted by the executive. My credentials for doing so include the fact that I am a Dovorian born and bred, of some seventy plus years standing, having spent most of my working life in the town. For the last 50 years or so I have been associated with many organisations, clubs, societies, and other groupings in the town - often in a leadership position in which role I have defended Dover's interests robustly. I have promoted Dover's interests and advanced Dover's needs and requirements. I was instrumental in encouraging "The Times" to provide a special comprehensive report on Dover, against the odds I may add!

The intention of the initiative or project is to invite stakeholders to submit and contribute material for inclusion in the proposed submission and to encourage the public and, indeed, members of the Society, together with organisations such as schools, to participate so that this is a grass roots upwards community project and not a top-down imposed initiative. It is hoped that by proceeding in this manner the finished

product will truly be able to be described as a community engaged project and submission.

As I indicated at the meeting, I make no secret of the fact I am passionate about Dover and its interests. Our town has so much to offer, being a unique product with a distinct identity, a global brand, and a history second to none. One of the key features of the town is the wonderful community spirit or engagement that exists in so many areas of life and which came to the fore brilliantly in the recent Covid pandemic. This initiative is an opportunity to highlight, among other things, the amenities of the town, its Royal associations, its history, and many aspects of the life of Dover in which, of course, the port and its activities play such an important role. All contributions will be welcomed, so Society members are encouraged to participate but it is worth mentioning from the outset the copyright of the end product will be that of the Dover Society, which reserves the right to amend, approve or reject elements that do not contribute to the overall aim of the initiative. The Society approaches this project with an air of realism. It will take time and effort to produce a compelling final product for submission and at the end of the process much will depend upon the political weight and support given to it at all levels. While success is not guaranteed, the Society proceeds on a 'nothing ventured nothing gained' basis. This initiative can be a project that draws all together for a common cause -

the enhancement of civic pride a key cornerstone of the Society's *raison d'être*.

City status can provide a boost to communities and open new opportunities for the people who live in them. It could place Dover firmly on the map of inclusion in an elite company of communities across the United Kingdom. One question posed at the recent meeting related to what defines a city. Many still believe that to qualify to be accorded city status a community must contain a cathedral. This is an historic feature that is not essential in the 21st century. City status is granted by the reigning monarch, on the advice of ministers, to communities which have been identified for inclusion in the select group of places that already have the status. Going back in history, it is recognised that in the past the presence of a diocesan cathedral was usually enough to almost guarantee a claim of city status. Community size did not appear to be uppermost in the consideration but power and importance, whether civil or religious, appear to have been defining factors. By the time of roughly the mid-19th century such an approach was manifestly dysfunctional when, through the impact of the Industrial Revolution, centres in the north and in the Midlands, such as Manchester or Liverpool for example, remained towns while St David's on the west coast of Wales with an extremely modest population, but with a cathedral, enjoyed the city status. The requirement to have an Anglican cathedral was dropped, therefore, in the late C19.

Today, the modern criteria for what constitutes a city seems to include a raft of different factors or features including, among others, a distinct identity, a centre of a wider area and a good record of local government. At present there exist sixty-nine cities in the United Kingdom.

So, city status is not granted automatically just because a town becomes very large through population growth, or because of the presence of a cathedral. City status is awarded through the issue of Letters Patent and remains in the prerogative of the reigning monarch (on the advice of the Government), but royal celebrations have more recently been the occasions for approving new cities. The Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty in 2022 has seen some thirty-nine communities vie for the status of city to be awarded to them. Sadly, Dover was not one of them.

In the Platinum Jubilee competition, the closing date for which closed at the end of 2021, the thirty-nine submissions have come from across the United Kingdom as well as from British Overseas Territories. The latter, and Crown Dependencies, were included for the first time resulting in places like Gibraltar, Stanley in the Falkland Islands, almost 8,000 miles away, and the Cayman Islands, throwing their hats in the ring of the current batch of submissions. An 'expert' panel (as yet undefined) will work with Government Ministers to submit recommendations to Her Majesty the Queen for her approval.

For the purpose of the recent competition, applicants were required to include in their submissions matters relating to the distinct identity which they felt deserved their community to become a city, as well as the royal associations with their area.

Winning city status can provide a boost to local communities and open new opportunities for people who live in them. Local economies benefit from an improved national and global standing. City status can deliver real benefits for businesses and the community with a corresponding enhancement for the local area, by increased local pride which probably accounts for the

high number of applications seeking to achieve the coveted city status. The final decision on the Platinum Jubilee submissions will be taken in spring 2022 and announced shortly afterwards as part of Her Majesty the Queen's Platinum Jubilee celebrations. Now is the time for Dover to pull together to create a submission in

readiness for another opportunity that is worthy of the enhanced status to guarantee a good and secure foundation for the town's future and the members of the community that form it. So, whatever area of expertise you may have, do make a contribution to this Society initiative – perhaps a once in a lifetime opportunity.

## MEMBERSHIP NEWS **Sheila Cope**

### **TIME TO RENEW SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Many members now renew by Direct Credit, or BACS, into the Society's bank account which is: sort code 20-02-62, acc. no. 80864803. Please use your name and/or membership no. as a reference. If renewing by this means you might like to consider setting up a standing order which will avoid the need for future reminders. Nevertheless, cash or cheques are equally welcome. The amount remains £10 for joint members living at the same address and £6 single.

We number 483 and rejoice in the fact that we have gained several new, younger members who have moved to the town and appreciate its qualities and wish to contribute toward its improvement. Several of the "old guard" are retiring from the executive and we welcome the energy and commitment that the newcomers may bring to our Society. Another change is the retirement of Maureen Morris and Danielle Sutton from newsletter delivery. We thank them both for their service to the Society. We are grateful to Jane Allcock who has taken over from Maureen and to Chris Blackburn who has extended his round at Whitfield. Keith Sansum has also kindly undertaken to distribute to some Dover members who live on the farther fringes of the town.

There has been a record number of recent new members. They are Mr M & Mrs E Barber, Mr D Donnelly, Mr M Tait, Mr J Parkin, Mrs J Langford, Mr J Horne, Mr S & Mrs O Brice, Ms S Amos, Mr J & Mrs J White, Mr R Holme & Ms R Goodwin, Mr J Kennett, Mr T Miles & Ms R Pressnell, Mrs C Mounce & Mr C Oliver, Mr W & Mrs E Veale.

Among the obituaries, we have lost Mr Arthur Vassey who attended meetings regularly and who delivered newsletters in the Elms Vale and Maxton areas from 1991 until prevented by ill health. Dr Glyn Hale was featured in the previous Newsletter. Other deaths include Mrs Ann Thomson, Mrs Agnes (Nan) Walker, Mr James Simmonds, Mr Graham Leadbeater, Mrs Nancy Sheasby, Mr Christopher Hall, Miss Joan Parkin, Mr John Lockyer and Mrs Norma Clayton. We send our condolences to the families and friends of these former members.

Finally, although Jeremy and I will continue to oversee newsletter distribution for now, at the AGM I am looking forward to handing over my role to Mrs Ann Burke who has kindly offered to take it on. With her warmth and enthusiasm, I feel confident that Ann will help to promote the Society and that she will enjoy making connections with existing members and forging friendships with new ones.