

NOVEMBER MEETING

Scoop

A talk by Graham Tutthill

Reported by Alan Lee

Why, and how, local journalist Graham Tutthill came to be known as “Scoop” by the emergency services was revealed at the society’s open meeting in November.

Graham, who worked for the *Dover Express* from 1965 to 1973 and then for the *East Kent Mercury*, *Dover Extra* and *Dover Mercury* (part of the Kent Messenger Group) until his retirement ten years ago, said he was so keen to cover local stories that he would often be seen following fire engines and ambulances to the scenes of fires and accidents. On two occasions he arrived before the fire appliances, and it was the firemen who first called him “Scoop.”

Graham was born at the Royal Victoria Hospital, (now Royal Victoria Place, High Street, Dover), 75 years ago this month. He attended Shatterlocks Infants School, Barton County Junior School and Dover Boys’ Grammar School. The photo of his class at Barton school also included Dover Society chair Jenny Olpin as they were in the same class. It was while at the Grammar that Graham joined an after-school club which researched what had happened to former

pupils since leaving school, and as part of that research he arranged to go to the *Dover Express* office on Saturday mornings to look through the old files. “It was while I was there that I became interested in the work of the journalists – including Terry Sutton, of course – and they took me on for work experience in 1964, the year before I left school,” said Graham. He became a cub reporter there in 1965. *The Express* office was then in Snargate Street, near where the junction with York Street now is, with the reception office at the front and the printing press at the back, thundering away each Thursday night as the papers were printed. In those days, the reporters wrote their stories using typewriters and carbon paper, and every word was read and checked by proof readers, with every page being read again by the journalists. “It’s a very different story today,” he said.

Graham called at Dover Police Station, Ambulance Station and Fire Station each morning, and attended magistrates’ courts in Dover, Deal and Sandwich. Once he was threatened by a defendant who said he would cause him serious injury if a word of his case



Barton School Class



St Paul's Church fire

appeared in the paper. The magistrates gave him six months, so Graham knew he was safe for a while!

Along with other reporters, Graham scratched his name on the press benches in both the court and the council chamber at Dover Town Hall – and they can still be seen today.

Council meetings, wedding and funeral reports, golden weddings and Women's Institute reports were all part of the daily schedule.

When Dover District Council was launched in 1974, Graham wrote a series of articles for the *Mercury* on each of the council's departments, explaining what they did and how the council worked. In 1988 a Dover office for the *Mercury* opened in Church Street and in 1998, when the *Dover Mercury* was launched, the office moved to the High Street. Eventually the office was closed, at the same time as the *Dover Express* closed their office, and Graham worked from home and then from Deal.

There were many major stories Graham worked on including fatal accidents, the Crypt Tavern fire in 1977 which claimed seven lives, the hovercraft crash in 1985 and, of course, the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster in 1987. He spent five weeks covering the inquest into this tragedy. He also reported on the deaths of fifty-eight Chinese people discovered in the back of a lorry at Dover's Eastern Docks in 2000.

Always looking for the positive side of stories, Graham wrote a series of articles about some of the refugees and asylum seekers who arrived in Dover in the 1980s and 1990s. In these he set out to explain the difference between our cultures and how they came together. As a result, he was invited to speak at a national conference

about the way the authorities could encourage the media to approach these issues.

During his career Graham met and interviewed many famous people, ranging from Margaret Thatcher, William Hague and Tony Blair to Myleene Klass, Cilla Black, Andrea Bocelli and Sophia Loren, not forgetting Dover's own Joss Stone (whose aunt was also in Graham's class at Barton school).

Graham noted that over the years there had been a huge increase in the number of people attempting and succeeding in swimming the Channel, from six successes in 1963 to two hundred and thirty-three in 2019.

In his spare time, Graham enjoys researching his family tree and discovered a link with Walter Tull, one of Britain's first black professional footballers and the first black British Army officer at a time when "men of colour" were banned from being officers.

Graham stressed the importance of having a balanced news content, with positive as well as negative stories, and he has always been keen to publicise the good work done by local people.

In the run-up to his retirement, Graham adapted to the changing media scene, providing stories for local radio and television outlets within the KM group, as well as websites and social media.

He warned of the dangers of social media and said many people did not seem to realise that what they wrote on forums and other platforms could be reported in main-stream media and were still subject to libel laws and all other legal restrictions.

But overall, he said, he thought he had had the best of times as a local journalist.