

Speakers Day 2023

Martyn Webster

It was the annual Speaker's Day of the Confederation of the Cinque Ports on Saturday 7th October 2023. This year it fell to Dover to host the proceedings which are on a seven-year rotation between the five ports and two ancient towns, and so the office of Speaker is currently held by the Town Mayor of Dover, Cllr Sue Jones. The honour returns to Dover in 2030.

A colourful procession of officers, mayors, dignitaries and invited guests, many resplendently clad in red and trimmed robes, tricorne hats, wigs and gowns hung with mayoral chains and shoulder borne civic maces, assembled at St. Mary's Parish Centre. From here they moved off to the Market Square to join up with the remainder of the participants.

At 12 o'clock, a peal of bells from St Mary's Church was the signal for the procession to move off from the Market Square. Headed by a Scots piper, flanked by sea cadets, guides and scouts they followed behind a lifelike puppet creation depicting a channel swimmer. This eclectic parade processed via the underpass to the Esplanade, where a ceremony of "Thank You/Recognition to the Sea" was movingly conducted by the Rev. Catherine Tucker, the Dover Mayor's Chaplain. Pride of place was taken by the Town Sergeant bearing the Silver Oar, symbol



Speakers Day 2023

of the Lord Warden, whose post is currently vacant after the death of Lord Boyce, and whose replacement is anxiously awaited by a process described as "discernment". Present in his place was the Deputy Constable of Dover Castle, in full uniform, literally the Lord Warden's deputy.

A fine Mayors/VIP lunch, suitably addressed by Dover's Mayor, Sue Jones, was then served at the Dover Patrol Restaurant in surroundings which gave a superb panoramic view of Dover Harbour, perfected by a display by the two Dover Harbour tugs, choreographed with fire hoses.

The Dover Society was represented by Chairman Jenny Olpin and executive members Carol Duffield and Martyn Webster, who were in thrall to Freemen of the Borough Terry Sutton, Jeremy Cope (accompanied by his wife Sheila), Pat Sherratt and Adeline Reidy, all wearing their exquisite badges and sashes.

This was truly a unique historic and memorable occasion to savour in our minds in beautiful warm weather with clear visibility, which made all the difference.

Only to be greatly regretted was the fact that there had been next to no advance public advertisement given to it. To have done so would have alerted the good folk of Dover, especially the younger ones, to the depth of tradition, heritage and civic pride which this ceremony engenders. This is our loss, but all the better for those few who happened to be present in the streets at the time and were able to benefit from this great age-old spectacle.

The next Speaker's Day will be hosted in 2024 in Sandwich.