

The Dover Society

Newsletter

No 1 June 1988

Registered with the Civic Trust.
Affiliated to the Kent Federation
of Amenity Societies.

Editorial

As a result of considerable concern over recent events in and around Dover a number of people met on 18 March to discuss the possibility of forming a civic society. The futures of Connaught Park, Brook House, Pencester Gardens and River Recreation Ground, combined with anxieties produced by the building of the Channel Tunnel and a desire to be involved in the development of tourism, were among the issues which brought us together. Information provided by the Civic Trust proved very useful.

The first meeting of the Dover Society took place on 25 April with about a hundred people present. After Peter Johnson had proposed that the Society be formed, in an interesting speech reprinted later in this Newsletter, members of the temporary committee were confirmed in office and others proposed and seconded from the floor.

The Chairman, Jack Woolford, then gave a commentary entitled "Dover: Assets and Liabilities" to a selection of slides taken by Ray Warner and Philomena Kennedy.

We are very grateful to the Headmaster of Dover College, Mr Jack Ind, who kindly allowed us to use the Menzies Hall for the occasion.

The Dover Society was registered with the Civic Trust as a civic society on 16 May and is also now affiliated to the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies.

Unfortunately members of Dover District Council felt unable to accept an invitation to send representatives to take part in a Public Meeting to be organised by the Society. However they did offer to meet members of the Committee on 1 June at the Town Hall. So ten of us met Mr John Moir, Chief Executive, Mr David Sturt, Director of Planning and Mr Richard Bowditch, Finance Officer and Councillors Watkins, Forster, Smith and Tatum in the Council Chamber.

The objects of the Society were outlined and the hope expressed that we could make useful contacts with the Council which would help to avoid misunderstandings and enable us to offer informed comment in the future.

The usual procedures in regard to planning applications were outlined and the best course for investigation and comment by the Society were summarized by Mr Sturt. It was pointed out that some decisions were not theirs or theirs alone, Kent County Council, English Heritage and the Dover Harbour Board being among those bodies which might be involved.

No decisions have yet been reached concerning Connaught Park or Pencester Gardens. It was felt by the Council that premature disclosure of discussions at a very early stage had provoked much unnecessary concern over these and other matters.

It was pointed out that expenditure had to be spread as fairly as possible for the benefit of the whole Dover District which, of course, also includes the towns of Deal and Sandwich and a number of villages

The upgrading of properties in the Conservation Area of Castle Street and East Cliff is being encouraged by the provision of small grants.

We were then taken for a tour of Brook House. The sad state of its interior is all too obvious. Despite continuous pumping the high water table and unsatisfactory foundations have resulted in severe damp everywhere. Poor maintenance over many years has compounded the problems. In spite of peeling walls, unsafe floors and general deterioration some rooms are still quite attractive. However it is hardly surprising that so far several potential purchasers have considered that its problems outweigh its possible usefulness. It is a pity as the Victorian house makes such a pleasing focus in this area.

Members of the Committee were glad of the opportunity to begin making useful, friendly and informed contacts with representatives of the Council which will doubtless be fruitful. Members of the Council also welcomed our interest and possible cooperation.

A copy of the Constitution of The Dover Society is deposited in the Reference Department of the Public Library where it may be consulted.

We offer our congratulations to the people of River on their determined and ultimately successful fight to retain the whole of River Recreation Ground for leisure purposes.

We hope and expect that The Dover Society will be able to make a lively and positive contribution to the future of our ancient and famous town and that of the pleasant villages nearby.

We are delighted that the Countess of Guilford has agreed to be our President.

Philomena Kennedy

VICE PRESIDENTS: *Mr 'Budge' Adams, Lord Ennals, Mr Jack Ind, Mr Ivan Green, Mr Peter Johnson, Miss Lilian Kay, Mr Jonathan Sloggett, Mr Ray Warner.*

COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN: *Mr Jack Woolford, 1066 Green Lane, Temple Ewell, Dover, CT16 3AR
Telephone 822871*

VICE-CHAIRMAN: *Mr John Gerrard, 77 Castle Avenue, Dover, Telephone 206579*

SECRETARY: *Mr Barry Smith, 51 Glenfield Rd., Dover CT16 2AL*

TREASURER: *Mr Norman Willis, 24 Danes Court, Dover. Telephone 202285*

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SOCIAL SECRETARY: *Mrs Linda Clackett. Telephone 201158.*

EDITOR: *Philomena Kennedy. Telephone 852042*

OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ARE:

Mr Ken Berry, Mrs Phyllis Dobbins (Dover Action Group), Mr Jeremy Cope, Mr David Ehms (River Dour Society), Mr Michael Foad (Advisory Member), Mr Peter Johnson, Mr Terry Khambatta, Mrs V. Liggett, Mr Mike McFarnell (Advisory Member), Mr Jim Truelove, Mr Ken Wraight.

We now have 110 members in the Society.

SUMMARY OF MR. PETER JOHNSON'S REMARKS MADE AT THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE DOVER SOCIETY ON 25th APRIL 1988 WHEN PROPOSING THE RESOLUTION:

"That The Dover Society be Instituted and the Civic Trust Constitution adopted."

Thanking the Headmaster of Dover College for making the Menzies Hall available for the meeting, Mr. Johnson reminded those present that the College lay within the precincts of the ancient Priory of St. Martin, one of the great monastic establishments of the 12th century, some of the buildings of which were still in use by the college. The Menzies Hall itself had previously been a Wesley Methodist Church and had contained a plain but distinguished pulpit, now at Shepherdswell, from which John Wesley himself had preached. These were, he said, parts of Dover's history and one of the objectives of the proposed Dover Society was to help to seek out, preserve and publicise the historic features of the town.

"If, like Wesley, I were here to preach a sermon I would take for my text the words of St. Paul when he explained that he came from Tarsus: 'I am a citizen of no mean city'. That is how I believe we should all be feeling about Dover at the present time.

"Many people in Dover have felt a growing concern about what is going to happen to the town in the future. That concern stems to some extent from events during 1987 and the sometimes bitter conflict between the people and the district council, mostly about the selling off of public open spaces. But the issues are far wider than that.

"It is this concern that has brought together a body of people who have felt strongly the need to care for the town, for its people and for its future.

"Let me at this stage say what we are not.

We are not a protest group

We are not party political in any shape or form

We are not demonstrators and, I hope, we are not cranks.

"What are we then? I can only say what we aim to be, namely a body of people concerned about the future of Dover, informed, experienced in a wide range of skills and activities, responsible in our actions and constructive in our criticism.

"We hope also to be influential. This will depend on the breadth of support we can win from the people of Dover and on the input those people can in turn provide from their knowledge, experience and wisdom.

"We hope to work with the district council and not against it. I think the majority support the council's plans for making Dover a mecca for tourists but there is some thought that those plans are too

narrow and lacking in vision, too heavily influenced by outside commercial advice and lacking in in-depth knowledge of Dover. They ignore little things, relatively insignificant themselves but an essential part of our history and our environment.

"As an example I would remind the meeting that yesterday was St. George's Day and the 70th Anniversary of the Capture of the Mole at Zeebrugge, one of the most historic and heroic naval engagements of all time. The bell from the mole hangs on the balcony at Dover Town Hall and yesterday at noon the Town Mayor rang eight bells and buglers from the Royal Marines at Deal sounded the Last Post and Reveille. The Charter Trustees, representatives of the Services and Youth Organisations and of the Royal Society of St. George were present and there followed a moving service in St. James' Cemetery where many of those who lost their lives at Zeebrugge on St. George's Day 1918 are buried.

"How many visitors to Dover, and indeed Dovorians themselves, know of the bell and its history engraved on the stone tablet set into the front wall of the Town Hall, dirty with age and neglected?

"This is just one small example of the little bits of history to be found in the town. The Dover Society as we see it would look at every aspect of the town and, among other things, ferret out the smaller matters and perhaps initiate action to bring them to the fore.

"The Society would also wish to make informed and constructive contributions to major development and pursue a quest for quality. Civic quality stems from good design, good taste and attention to detail.

"The resolution which I put to this meeting tonight is that the Dover Society be instituted, that it be included in the national register of Local Amenity Societies sponsored by the Civic Trust and that the model constitution prepared by the Civic Trust be adopted."

Mr. Johnson went on to explain the role and influence of the Civic Trust which was founded in 1957 and now has about 1,000 registered amenity societies.

He concluded: "I believe that Dover has a great future. I am one of those who does not believe that the Channel Tunnel will have as disastrous an effect on Dover as some have forecast. On the contrary I believe the port will continue to flourish in handling both freight and passengers. It is right, however, that we should be looking to the future by making the town itself a tourist centre. Dover is unique in the breadth of its history extending from Roman times to the present day and there is no reason why it should not become a 'must' for tourists comparable with Canterbury, York and Bath.

"I am not a Dovorian by birth, only by 35 years of adoption, but I regard myself as a citizen of no mean city. If I may borrow a phrase of today from the Dover Express 'I'm backing Dover' and I invite you to join me by launching the Dover Society."

Footnote: I think it appropriate to record here that although I proposed the resolution at the inaugural meeting I did not make the first moves in bringing together the group of people who formed the original steering committee. The initiative was taken by Miss Philomena Kennedy, the editor of this newsletter, and we are indebted to her for her concern for Dover, her enterprise and her powers of persuasion.

THE NEW DOVER GROUP 1964-1981

The New Dover Group was formed by David (now Lord) Ennals when he became the MP for Dover in 1964 to supply him with information and ideas about his new constituency. Initially membership of its various committees for Education, Trade and Industry etc etc was by invitation. When I asked for an exhibit on "Dover 2000" for a history exhibition I was organising for the Borough Council in 1964 I was invited to become Chairman of a new Planning Committee which, with the help of locally born architects and planners, produced a Plan and, with the help of the then Borstal, a Model of Dover in the year 2000. This model is still in the custody of the Dover Museum.

The party-political link was clearly inappropriate for what was in effect an amenity society and a number of us successfully urged adoption of the Civic Trust model constitution which made membership open and secured democratic control. The New Dover Group then expanded in membership and achievement. It saved the trees in St Mary's churchyard from felling and pioneered the concept of a Riverside Walk from Kearsney Abbey to the seafront. The Borough Council accepted in principle the dedication of a metre-wide strip adjoining the Dour whenever planning consents were to be granted.

Its record is impressive. On two occasions it helped to preserve Kearsney Abbey from housing proposals and attempted to preserve Whitfield and Guston from the Eastern Bypass (for which it had campaigned). It helped to defend Alkham Valley from the assaults of a predatory farmer on Sites of Special Scientific Interest in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and took the lead in attempting to safeguard the seafront from the noise and smell of the new Hoverport. Equally it first opposed and then attempted to mitigate the adverse implications of the 1970s threat of the Channel Tunnel. It initiated the archeological excavations in York Street, preserved part of the revealed Roman fortress from destruction, and its members contributed labour and cash to the preservation of the Painted House. It was controversially involved in the design and construction of Burlington House and produced a second plan for the District in 1980. It initiated the conservation and renovation of Priory Terrace but failed to save "The Cause Is Altered." It formed an Action Group to coordinate representations to the Dept of Transport on the route of the proposed new A20 from Folkestone.

Why did it die? The Group failed to provide a social programme or to produce an attractive newsletter. None of its achievements (or failures) pleased everyone and Doverians on the whole were more concerned with employment than conservation. Recruitment declined and the officers who died or retired were not effectively replaced.

The new challenges of the Channel Tunnel with its threat of mass unemployment and of the proposed remedies of tourism and other industrial and commercial developments has stimulated the creation of The Dover Society. May it avoid the errors and repeat the successes of its predecessor.

Jack Woolford

RIVER REC

On May 19th 1988, at a special meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee of DDC, the following resolution was passed. "Subsequent to discussions with River Parish Council, the decision to sell part of River Recreation Ground has been rescinded".

Many hundreds of local residents breathed a huge sigh of relief. A recreation ground which had been the playground and walking area of several generations of River residents and their children had been saved, and the open vista, looking across the Rec to Crabble Mill, was no longer under threat. Once again it had been demonstrated that determined local feelings

could halt the destruction of valuable green breathing space, and the necessary lungs of a residential area had been preserved.

It was back in 1921 that the bulk of the land was acquired by the then Dover Borough Council from a local landowner, Mr Banks, at the cost of a little over £930. A further strip along Lewisham Road was purchased from Mr Dunford and the entire area declared recreational land. The land had originally been known as Crabble Court and a house of that name is still in Lower Road and occupied by the Child Welfare Clinic. It was decided to call this land River Recreation Ground and so avoid confusion with Crabble Athletic Ground.

In its first years of life it only had football and hockey pitches and a rough tennis area, but soon, with increasing unemployment in the early 20s it was decided to use some of these men to level an area for a Bowling Green and in the summer of 1923 River Bowling Club came into existence. Following this the tennis courts along Lower Road were improved and the River Originals Tennis Club was formed. The club still flourishes with the recent reinstatement of three more courts and is the only club catering for junior players in the District.

The Woodpeckers Cricket Club is a more recent arrival and was only properly established after World War II but it is now thriving and has added River to its title. The two football pitches are of excellent standard and are in constant use during the winter season, both mid-week and at weekends. The Junior pitch at the eastern end of the ground is the only one in the District and is the venue for ace Dover Junior League games and sees many a final fought out between the teams from local Primary Schools.

The ground will now pass into the care of River Parish Council who, we hope, will be mindful of their responsibilities and together with the people of River preserve this open space and continue its traditional use as a recreation ground for generations to come.

Alan Dale



FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF DOVER

For one whose previous knowledge of Dover was confined to the Western Docks when travelling to Europe, arrival in the 1950s was an exciting experience.

Despite the daunting task of finding somewhere to live, as so many properties were uninhabitable or badly damaged, the stranger was immediately struck by the salient fact. Here was a town, battle-scarred as it was, which was steeped in history and experience, and whose inhabitants were full of hope and confident that it was on the brink of great things.

Councillors and Aldermen, volunteers in those days, were determined to tackle all the shabbiness, and the shopkeepers were eager to please. How often one heard the helpful remark, "We haven't got it but try Clout's or Morecroft's".

I remember walking, pre-war map in hand, amongst the piles of rubble on the Sea Front, trying to locate the site of the Fox Inn or the Gordon Boys' Home, later rejoicing in the refurbished St Mary the Virgin with its new East window.

Dover to me seemed a comfortable town. It was possible to park outside Hatton's and drive both ways in Maison Dieu Road; a man selling crabs stood by the steps to the old lock-up in Townwall Street; one could take tea at the Pharos in Castle Street or eat dinner at the Café de Paris or the Crypt. Soon flowers appeared in the beds at Connaught Park, and as one walked under the whale-bone arch the goldfish in the pond caught the eye. Then there were tennis courts in the Park^{and} in the front of Brook House, and

in the newly opened Museum in Ladywell were exhibited the Town Plate and the old Burghmote Horn, now, alas, vanished.

Although at the time the Eastern Docks seemed busy, there were but two ferry berths, land reclamation was just beginning, and the Hovercraft was as yet in the experimental stage.

Maybe it is wrong to look back over 30 years. I no longer wonder what on earth is a flead cake, and perhaps have almost ceased to regret the disappearance of the Salutation Inn and the lovely catalpa tree by the Library, although it would be nice to have a Cricket Week again. But I, and thousands of true Dovorians, care desperately about the future of the Town, and would dearly like to see it regain its old enchantment.

Marion Horsfield

I came from the Midlands to live in Dover on January 1st 1946. It was not the bomb and shell damage which I remember most clearly, for I had experienced both having spent the war years in Coventry, but the incredible kindness of the Dovorian people, not least that of the shopkeepers. Rationing was still the order of the day. I have not forgotten dear Mr and Mrs Morris, Family Grocers, and 'Daddy' Morris's superb ham sandwiches, Albert Decourt, Butcher of 'The Hole in the Wall', Bench Street, with his advice in plenty on 'best buys', pleasant Mrs Emmons in the Orange Shop and Charlton Creamery, Frith Road, run by Mr and Mrs Savage.

Living by the sea was a totally new experience. A Sea Front shared with a railway, and long, pleasant walks on cliffs littered with barbed wire entanglements, to St Margaret's Bay and Kingsdown, offering splendid views of the magnificent harbour and across the Channel. More than 40 years on, I have no wish to leave. Dover is still very much home for me.

Freda Brook

I hope that these two articles will be the first of a series. Contributions of First Impressions of any time between 1888 and 1988 invited. Editor.

DOVER - The View from a Wheelchair ♿

I have lived all my life in Dover. I was born here, I grew up here and it was here that I was struck down by Multiple Sclerosis, so gradually that for a while it was barely noticeable. But now, twenty-three years later, I have it rather badly. This makes me very aware of facilities for disabled people, especially those in wheel chairs.

Like other disabled people I have a great deal of time on my hands and I would love to take a course. Unfortunately Further Education is not possible in Dover because there are so many steps at both Westmount and the College of Technology. The staff are most willing but there are limits to what they can do and disabled people are often very independent and don't like making a fuss. At Westmount the toilets, so vital to people like me who don't get much warning, are in the basement.

Dover is not well supplied with toilets for the disabled and even those that exist are not adequately sign-posted. Some of them need a special key which I feel should be more widely advertised or, better still, should be given out with the Orange Badge for disabled drivers.

Another thing that really bothers me, not only in Dover, is that when I go out for refreshments the cup is invariably filled to the brim and I just cannot manage a full cup.

One of the most difficult things to do in a wheelchair is to open a door, especially outwards. It would be greatly appreciated if this problem could be considered when buildings are designed.

This leads me to a personal bug-bear - the Health Centre. On one occasion I was asked to attend a doctor's surgery but, as the doorway was not wide enough for a standard-issue wheelchair, I had to be physically assisted into the room.

If only more were done to encourage the disabled to take part in ordinary life! If you would like to know more about how to do it why don't you come and ask us?

April Nye

Arthritis Care is an organisation with branches all over the country. In the South-East a list of places to visit has been compiled. It does not include Dover as only the seafront is suitable, being flat and having toilets for the disabled.

Dover Town Hall is the place for the Operatic and Choral Societies' performances, for exhibitions and dinners as well as other activities. It is barred to the disabled unless they are prepared to be carried up the steps in their wheelchairs.

The Library, the Citizens' Advice Bureau, the Police Station, the Bus Station Office, the Gas Showroom and other places are impossible or difficult to enter.

At Charlton Centre there is a lift to the upper floor but then a few steps. The ramp is outside and the parking space for the disabled is also not under cover.

Any improvements made for the disabled in wheelchairs would also benefit those with prams, pushchairs and in battery cars.

Ellen Fraser. Secretary of Arthritis Care - Dover Branch



THE DOVER SOCIETY in the 18th CENTURY

No, our Society is not a revival. On 28 January 1756 John Wesley made his first recorded visit to the town and established the Dover Society. He wrote in his journal:

'I preached at noon at Dover to a serious, but small, congregation. We afterwards walked to the Castle, on the top of a mountain. It is an amazingly fine situation. From here we had a clear view of that vast piece of the cliff which a few days ago divided from the rest and fell down upon the beach'.

On 3 December 1760 when he was again in Dover for his annual visit he wrote:

'I rode to Dover [from Canterbury]. Who would have expected to find here some of the best singers in England? I found, likewise, what was better still, a serious, earnest people. There was a remarkable blessing among them, both in the evening and the morning, so that I did not regret having been wet to the skin on my way to them'.

In 1765, on 3 December, he had occasion to rebuke members of his congregation who were engaged in the popular local trade of smuggling.

'While several of them continued to rob the king, we seemed to be ploughing upon the sand...'

On 23 November 1767 he wrote 'I have not found so much life here for years'.

With difficulty he climbed to the top of Shakespeare Cliff on 5 December 1770:

'It is exceedingly high, and commands a vast prospect both by sea and land; but it is nothing so terrible in itself as it is in [Shakespeare's] description. I preached to a very serious congregation in the evening as well as in the morning'.

'On Tuesday December 17th, I preached at Dover; Wednesday about eleven at poor, dry, dead Sandwich, but I now found more hope for the poor people'.

December 15 1789 John Wesley made his last visit to Dover. He travelled from Canterbury:

'It pleased God to give me uncommon liberty of spirit, as also at Dover the next evening, where the New House, large as it is, was far too small, so that many could not get in'.

This sermon was preached when he opened the new chapel in Elizabeth Square in the Pier District. A pulpit used by the Founder of Methodism was formerly in what is now the Menzies Hall, as Peter Johnson mentions in his article.

When John Wesley died, a very old man in 1791, his followers numbered 100,000

The Dover District Council has recently added an attractive sheet on John Wesley to its 'Discover Dover' series. It can be obtained from the Tourist Information Centre.

Philomena Kennedy

NEWS FROM OTHER DOVER SOCIETIES AND GROUPS

We are pleased to print brief items - reports or dates.

WOMEN'S GAS FEDERATION & YOUNG HOME MAKERS - Dates:

JULY 11 More Naval Reminiscences - Talk by Lt. Cmdr. N. L. Smith.
AUG 8 Social Evening. SEPT. 12 The Wildlife of Kent. Illustrated Talk by Brian Hawkes. OCT. 10 A Taste of Italy - Cookery Demonstration by British Gas. NOV. 14 Royal Family Special - Illustrated Talk by Mr R. Fullagar. DEC 12 Annual Dinner. Contact Mrs Jean Cosham for details: Dover 211043.

Dover Tourism Initiative

The Dover Society was invited to participate in the Brainstorming Syndicates organised by consultants Peat Marwick McClintock (with American assistance) on behalf of Dover District Council, KCC, Eurotunnel and others involved in finding alternative employment for Dover when the Channel Tunnel is completed. Tourism is one obvious expedient.

The preliminary findings are that despite the world-wide growth of tourism and the world-famous assets of Dover, Dover is seen only as a transit town and its touristic image is bad. Compared with its competitors, like Canterbury or Tunbridge Wells (not to mention Glasgow and Bradford), the town is tatty, with poor shopping, catering and accommodation facilities and poor marketing and entertainment attitudes.

Consequently Dover Castle should be improved (!), there should be a Heritage Centre and a Maritime Quarter, a White Cliffs Country Park including a golf course, a White Cliffs Viewing Area and a caravan park with appropriate coach and car parking facilities and improved signage. The Military Tattoo and Cricket Week should be reinstated and there should be public transport linking, for example, the Maison Dieu, St Mary's, the Painted House the Castle and the Harbour. There must be fun elements like Sea Festivals and firework displays for children as well as adults and cooperative ventures with other towns on both sides of the Channel, with English Heritage, British Rail and the ferry companies.

Brainstorming breeds ideas and there were very many suggestions: rate reductions for window boxes on upper storeys; rating of empty properties; 50% grants for repair costs; deplasticated shop frontages with awards for achievement; better use of the Churchill image and of Dover's literary fame; commemoration of the Battle of Britain in 1990 using the underground works at the Castle (including David Niven's room!); rebuilding of the Pharos on the Western Heights; harbour trips; a sandy beach; self-catering accommodation; a Channel Tunnel Viewing Platform at Aycliff; junior cycle races; a water sports centre with power boat and rowing regattas; Xmas Carols at the Castle; son et lumière; buskers; a cable car for the cliffs; a town road race; a Tour de France stage; a wine and/or beer festival; history trails and town trails; refurbishment of Marine Station and its approach; mid-price hotels; training seminars for shopkeepers...

What emerged was agreement on the need for coordinated effort between all the professional and voluntary societies involved and I was confident in promising the best that The Dover Society could do to improve the town's image. As was said at our Inaugural Meeting: "We're Backing Dover!"

Jack Woolford

HELP! The RIVER DOUR ASSOCIATION urgently needs new members. Since its foundation in 1974 it has done much to enhance the Riverside Walk by tree-planting, rubbish-clearing etc. It would like to introduce canoeing on a stretch of the river. The Dour could and should be a great asset to Dover. Please contact David Elms on 213392.

Please publicize The Dover Society; show this Newsletter to your friends & invite them to the next meeting.

Public Meeting

organised by

The Dover Society

MONDAY 27 JUNE, 7.30

in the Methodist Church Hall, London Rd. (corner of Beaconsfield)

The Improvement of Dover

by an Officer of the Council

The booklet 'CONTACT' (CONcerted Townscape ACTION) will be available

Refreshments
