

March 2009 Update

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REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN AND COMMITTEE

Marianne writes:

I am pleased to send you the report of the Committee in advance of the AGM to give you time to review our work over the past year.

As I complete my two-year term as Chairman of the Society and review the activities of the Society, I see that we have achieved a great deal in the time since I took office.

We are extremely fortunate to have The Lady Boyce as our patron. She takes a great deal of interest in the Deal Society, as well as in Deal and Walmer and is most supportive of our activities. In addition over the past years, I have had the benefit of the support and wise counsel of our President, Vice-Presidents and our tireless Committee. I wish to thank you all.

During the past 12 months, we have build on the innovations that we introduced in 2007. Our membership has continued to grow and has been able to enjoy a rich programme of talks arranged for us by David Bridgen; outings arranged by Pat Russell; and social events, which members of the Committee have willingly co-ordinated and "made happen". At the same time our Sub-Committee on Planning, Conservation and Development has been active in ensuring that the concerns of the Society have been brought to the attention of the Dover District Council, Deal Town Council and the Walmer Parish Council, as appropriate.

Members have been updated through our "new-look" News Updates and a special thank you is due to all those members who regularly act as Deal Society "postmen and postwomen". Members have also been using the website more frequently; this is a source of information about the Society for many others, including prospective members. We have arranged coffee mornings to give members an opportunity to meet each other and have recently held a very successful new members' drinks party at the home of David and Ann Bridgen.

In addition to giving our members name tags (some like them, some don't), wine and fruit juices have been provided at the beginning of each of our talks at the Town Hall. And we now have not only an up-to-date sound system but also an LCD projector for those of our speakers who wish to use "Powerpoint" presentations.

Collaboration with the other Societies in the area has increased, following the meeting that we arranged and to which we invited members of the Committees of the Dover, Sandwich and Ramsgate Societies. This collaboration is being taken further in the work currently underway on the Local Development Framework (LDF). I have also attended meetings of the Kent Federation of Amenity Societies (KFAS).

Finally, I would like to thank all of you, our members, for your commitment to the Society and for your support and good wishes during the time that I have been Chairman. It has been a great pleasure to work with you, and particularly with all those willing volunteers who have been there to help on so many occasions.

Membership

Ant writes:

The membership of 346 reported at the 2008 AGM has now increased to 380: a slow but steady increase for a small Society. Despite the difficulty in finding members to serve on the Committee, more are coming forward to assist in various areas, such as delivering mail, helping at parties and providing reviews and articles for the News Update - please keep on volunteering. Thanks to the skills of our webmaster, Richard Huggard, the Society's website is a mind-boggling way of keeping us all together and well-informed. And on the subject of information, may I repeat the mailing schedule, which members may expect:

February: Papers for the AGM to be held in April

Prospectus for the forthcoming social programme

March: News Update

July: News Update

“Yellow Card” with preliminary details of the forthcoming programme of talks, trips and parties

November: News Update

Sub-Committee on Planning, Conservation and Development

Robin Green and John Goodban write:

Representation: John Goodban has represented the Society at the Walmer Parish Council and Robin Green has been the representative at the Deal Town Council. Both have actively participated in the work of both Planning Committees and have made occasional objections to planning applications that were ill-conceived or detrimental to the environment of the town. John Goodban has, especially, found Walmer Parish Council to be more disciplined and scrupulous in its examination of planning applications. Robin Green has noticed a marked improvement in Deal Town Council's ability to scrutinise applications and make detailed representations on them.

Minters Yard: The Society raised very serious concerns about the planning applications for this site and the threats posed to the community of Middle Deal by them. At the time of going to press much remains unresolved about this matter. No traffic management plan has been forthcoming. It is also understood that the builder's yard has withdrawn. Other proposals for the site appear to be in the pipeline.

Astor Theatre: When the theatre became unoccupied in the summer of 2008 the Society made representations about its future. After detailed discussions between DDC and Deal Town Council it was agreed that the building would be conserved and the Deal Arts Management group would run it as a community theatre. Detailed legal discussions continue between all the parties to advance this welcome initiative. It is hoped that the theatre will be open again by the summer of 2009.

Kent Highways: Detailed questions have been asked of this authority about various issues concerning roads and pavements in the town. Most of this has been frustrating and time consuming, and without any real change. The matters are being carefully monitored.

Local Development Framework: DDC put out its documents for the development of the district in May 2008. A further consultation period began at the end of January 2009. The documents set out the strategic framework for the

development of the whole area for the next 20 years. Just to take one example: it is proposed to build 14,100 new homes in that time, 1,600 of which will be in Deal and Walmer. The documents are long and complex and have taken up a great deal of the Society' time. We have also been working on them with the other local Societies at Dover, Sandwich and Ramsgate. If they are agreed by the National Inspectorate they will form the planning framework for all planning decisions from January 2010. In the next 5 years the District Council intends to undertake a development study of North and Middle Deal leading to an Area Action Plan. This will require careful scrutiny by the Deal Society during that period.

Thanks are due to all the members of the Sub-Committee. They have worked hard this year to raise the profile of the Deal Society in the wider municipal area.

Talks and social programme

Ant writes:

The activities which have taken place over the past twelve months have been reported in the News Updates and on the website, so this is just a summary (particularly for the benefit of new members).

Talks: It was a treat to hear Christian Ball, in March, reminisce about "Deal - and things I remember". Her memory was as remarkable as it was colourful, and her talk was an object lesson in how to have an audience in the palm of your hand.

In May we learned about the dedicated and time-consuming work of Keith Parfitt and his fellow archaeologists, in this case culminating in the unearthing of the bronze age Ringlemere Gold Cup on our doorstep.

October brought us Frances Fyfield, the prize-winning local author, who made us realise what makes a "storyteller" tick and how important the environment (in her case Deal and the sea) is for a writer's muse.

Air Commodore Bill Croydon gave us a fascinating talk in November on the birth of flying in England, which all began at Sheppey - a story of courageous aviators mastering their fragile machines.

Due to the appalling weather conditions affecting routes to and from London, the February talk had to be cancelled, but we trust that Dr Vivienne Nathanson will speak next year on "More than just a Doctor".

In March we heard about the world of butterflies from Clive Farrell – a charming and accomplished speaker with boundless ambition: his Butterfly World near St Albans should be on everybody's visiting list next year.

Social programme: In April, despite cold weather, the Spring Drinks Party at Glenhill was a success, to be followed by a lively and enjoyable Coffee Morning in May.

The first coach trip was to Canterbury and Goodnestone Park, with an informative guided tour of the Cathedral city followed by the delights of Lady FitzWalter's renowned house and garden.

In June we asked author and actor Simon Gregory for another of his inimitable local walks - he obliged with "All in the Downs", which was, as expected, educational and very entertaining. Later in the month, Chapel Down Winery and Smallhythe Place were on the schedule. It was an interesting combination of a modern, prize-winning Kentish vineyard and the much-loved home of the actress, Ellen Terry.

July saw disappointing weather for the trip to Chatham Historic Dockyard, but I was told that the homeward bound coach was filled with tired but happy, smiling faces! The Summer Supper at the Golf Club, later in the month, kept members smiling.

Finally, two trips to London.

Sadly many members had cancelled their bookings for the September trip to Dulwich, so there were only thirty on the coach. A loss for the Society, but a good day for those who stood by their bookings. Members found a great deal to enjoy in Dulwich and its park, and then two guides took them on a memorable tour of the Art Gallery. October's "Hidden London" was a success too, thanks to City and Village Tours. The combination of walking through narrow streets, enjoying lunch at the Barbican and then navigating the Regent's Canal in a Thames Barge made for a long but appreciated day.

2008 ended with members gathering at the Town Hall for the Christmas Drinks Party, which was well attended.

SOCIETY BUSINESS

New members

Since the November 2008 News Update went to print, Mollie Field, Bill and Jean Methven, Doreen Shepherd, Ian and June Powles, June Broadhouse, Alf and Carol Burns, Ann Harrison-Brooks, Stephen and Carole Galpin, Maureen Savage, Ida Metcalfe and Monica Nettles have joined the Society – welcome to you all.

Subscription for 2009

The membership now stands at 380, although, as I send this off to the printers, 44 members have not renewed their subscriptions. I sent out reminders with the AGM mailing last month. If you have not paid this year's subscription by 31 March, you will not receive any more mailings from the Society. But thank you for your support in the past and please know that you can always rejoin the Society.

Annual General Meeting

Tim Lloyd will be stepping down as President at the AGM to be held on 7 April. After the meeting there will be a presentation to Tim on behalf of members past and present (please hold on to your wine glasses!).

Local Development Framework

Robin Green writes:

For most of the last year the Society has been monitoring the Dover District Council Local Development Framework. We made a substantial contribution during the first consultation period last May and we are now making a further one in the second and last consultation on the Core Strategy. This will set the overall framework for Planning decisions up to 2026! These are the key points we are making at this stage:

We are welcoming a Development study of North and Middle Deal but asking that a monitoring group drawn from the people of Deal is set up alongside it. We question at the same time the extremely negative picture of North Deal in the final report.

We question the soundness of the strategy for creating jobs in the whole district in the next 20 years not least because the two major sectors for jobs are said to be the financial services industry and local government. Have they heard about the credit crunch and do we really need MORE civil servants?

We question the soundness of the strategy in relation to the over 65 age group, which will double in the next 20 years. They have not properly made the connections to housing provision, the development of services and the new jobs and skills required, the creation of residential and non-residential facilities and the provision of health, welfare and leisure services.

We question the density, volume and type of housing provision proposed.

We question why there is no assessment and management plan for the conservation areas, and ask for the setting up of a Conservation Areas Advisory Committee. Other district councils have the latter.

Finally we question to what extent the world financial crisis, which will lead to a radically changed world in the period under consideration, will impact upon the levels of housing (14,100 for the whole district, 1,600 for Deal), the provision of proper infrastructure and the projected new jobs figures.

The Society had a valuable meeting with representatives of the Dover, Ramsgate and Sandwich Societies to discuss all these matters, so we hope that there will be a concerted response to them.

Social programme 2009

Amendment to the "Yellow Card":

We have cancelled the City and Village Tours outing to Clarence House next September, as the cost would have been prohibitive. At the same time, we have moved the trip to St Margaret's Bay from Saturday 11 July to Saturday 19 September. Please make a note of these changes.

Booking for events:

You will have received an application form for the first part of this year's programme with your AGM papers. The form for the second part of the programme will accompany the July Update. In last November's News Update I wrote that the Executive Committee recognised that the losses incurred during the 2008 programme (due to members cancelling their bookings) were unacceptable and that applications for the 2009 programme should be accompanied by a non-returnable deposit of £2.00 per person per event. Further thinking has shown that this would be impractical and might well put off members applying in the first place, so no deposits are required (but please stick to your bookings, or find friends to take your place(s); cancellations hit the Society's reserves, as I cost out each event to break even, given the number of members applying in the first place).

Talks programme 2009

Robin Green writes:

The meeting to be held in the Town Hall at 7.30 pm on Tuesday 5 May will be a BBC-style question time on the issues facing Deal and Walmer in the next twenty years, entitled "Towards 2029: what future for Deal?"

The panel will be Valerie Owen, Planning Consultant, Cllr Bill Gardner, the Mayor of Deal, Mike Ebbs, DDC Head of Forward Planning and Adam Wilkinson, DDC Head of Environment and Regeneration.

If this evening is to work well we need questions from members of the Deal Society ahead of time. The questions can be about anything that you believe affects the people of this town. To help you think about it here are some of the areas that we could cover:

The over 65 year olds will double in the next twenty years; what effect will that have on services?

1,600 new homes will be built; where and with what effect?

What happens if the tides rise and the town floods?

How will new jobs be created?

How will development impact on the conservation areas?

What improvements need to be made to sustain new houses and jobs?

I am sure you can think of many more. Would you let me have your questions by 27 April at the latest. You can send them to my email address on the Deal Society web site or drop them into Greencades at 142 High Street. Thank you.

Articles for future News Updates

I am always looking for material! At this month's Coffee Morning, a chat with Deryck Murray led to our discussing the many remarkable people who have lived, and live, in Deal and Walmer and have made significant contributions to where we live. The Maritime Museum is anxious to compile a collection of "potted biographies" of these benefactors and I suggested that they should be published in our News Update as well. Contributions would be welcome from budding biographers.

SOCIAL PROGRAMME REVIEWS

17 December 2008: Christmas Drinks Party

What to say? 84 members and their guests gathered in the Town Hall, where Christopher Ball started off the evening with pianomusic, Eileen Prosser and her merry band of helpers served delicious nibbles and the wine, supplied by the Strand Wine Company, was none other than the house wine served at Buckingham Palace. My thanks to those members who helped to make this successful evening run so smoothly, particularly to the devoted assistant barmen, and to Mike Osborne and John Howland at the Town Hall.

14 March: Coffee Morning

36 members enjoyed coffee or tea (stylishly provided by Mike Osborne, mentioned above), Veronica Goodban's coffee and walnut traybake, Ann Huntley's chocolate brownies and Robin Green's generous supply of biscuits, not to mention a lot of chat. Mike then did the washing up. Thanks to you all – it was a thoroughly enjoyable morning.

TALKS PROGRAMME REVIEWS

4 November 2008: Air Commodore Bill Croydon "Flying Start"

Tim Lloyd writes:

Air Commodore Bill Croydon gave us a fascinating lecture on the birth of flying in England, which all began at Sheppey, when a gathering of enthusiasts realized the potential of powered flight and formed the Aero Club there. This came about in spite of the officials in Whitehall who felt that flying could only be of value for target spotting from balloons. The Club saw the visit of the Wright Brothers, who had successfully flown a number of flights in America, and who inspired Shorts to open the first ever aeroplane factory in the world

at Sheppey.

The early flyers are now legendary names whose dedication and persistence brought about the production of the first aircraft. It was flown by Moore-Brabazon over the weekend of 29 April - 2 May 1909: he made three sustained flights, making 500 yards on his third attempt. He subsequently obtained the first pilot's licence in this country. The airfield used was a strip at Leysdown, which soon proved too soggy and the entire complex moved to Eastchurch, where Sir Francis McLean sold three acres to Shorts for £25 as a site for their factory. By 1910 eighteen sheds had been erected at Eastchurch and in December that year Tom Sopwith won £4,000 by flying the longest distance from there to Thirlemouth, in Belgium, a distance of 177.5 miles.

Later that year McLean offered to loan aeroplanes to the Royal Navy to train officers in this new art. After initial reluctance and with pressure from Winston Churchill, then First Sea Lord, six-week training courses were established at Eastchurch and the Royal Naval Air Service was created. The outbreak of war saw a squadron formed and given the mission of bombing the Germans to prevent them establishing in Belgium and basing Zeppelins there. Eastchurch remained an important training base throughout both World Wars until 1947 when it was handed over to the Home Office; it now houses three prisons.

Bill Croydon's lecture gave a vivid picture of the enthusiasm, courage and spirit that existed at Sheppey in these early days of aviation and added interest by showing a comprehensive series of photographs of the characters involved and the buildings where they housed and produced their fragile machines.

3 February: Dr Vivienne Nathanson "More than just a Doctor"

Due to the appalling weather conditions affecting routes to and from London, this talk had to be cancelled. We hope that Dr Nathanson will be a speaker next year.

3 March: Clive Farrell "Butterfly World - the long path to realise my dream"

Andrew Oxford writes:

The Society met on a rough winter's night to be greeted by images of warm sun and jewelled insects. It soon became clear, however, that far greater visions would be laid out before us. Clive's passion for butterflies was apparent as he illustrated both tropical, native and Kentish species. From the minute Little Blue, still extant on Kingsdown Cliffs, to the splendour of the Silver Washed Fritillary from the Dorset woods – all were captured in images of outstanding quality.

With his audience entranced, Clive made his move. The world of entomology, oft caricatured as fusty old men chasing around with bat-wing nets, has undergone a revolution. Ideas of biodiversity, habitat creation and engaging the public are all key aspects of the modern conservation movement. This is being brought to reality in his plans which formed the centrepiece of this talk.

Clive has great experience of rearing and maintaining tropical butterflies in artificial environments, having created the lepidopterist's equivalent of the Eden Project both here and in the USA. He explained that the challenge of a world class butterfly centre is already under way at a prime site near St Albans. The really exciting angle is to involve landscape designers, gardeners and artists in a multi-talented approach to creating a Butterfly World on London's doorstep.

There is clearly much left to do both in the physical structures and in the funding which has to be in a commercial framework.

We should soon be able to enjoy the magic of the insects at close quarters, and the scientific expertise that this centre will nurture will be invaluable in the campaign to protect our Aurelian legacy.

POSTSCRIPT

The outings to Le Touquet (Saturday 16 May) and Faversham (Wednesday 17 June) are oversubscribed at this stage. We may be able to hire a larger coach and some members may cancel their provisional bookings. If you do not receive a booking confirmation and request for payment, it means that your name is on the reserve list.