



# The Deal Society

## The Origins of The Deal Society

The background to the formation of the Deal Protection Society (as it was then known) lay in a report in the East Kent Mercury of 4 January 1946 of a Town Council meeting at which the "redevelopment of a badly bombed area was foreshadowed". This area was defined as bounded by the sea on the east, the High Street on the west, King Street on the north and South Street on the south. Although a grant from the Exchequer might be obtained, it was understood that "indirectly they would have to pay for the improvements themselves". It was agreed to defer the subject for a few months.

In fact, the Town Council became embroiled in a financial scandal and the question of redevelopment did not come up again until April 1947. As the proposals took more definite shape, opposition began to be aired. Captain Barrett, owner of Carter House in South Street, and others were among the protesters, but it was a letter in The Times of 29 May that drew national attention to the Deal proposals. This read:

*Sir,*

*We feel sure that many of your readers will be distressed to learn that the Deal Borough Council has recently decided, by 18 votes to 2, to adopt a redevelopment scheme which will involve the destruction of a large part of this very lovely old town.*

*The excuse for this lamentable proposal is that a comparatively small amount of damage was done by enemy action. In the view of the local authority this justifies the demolition of a much larger area which has either escaped unscathed or has been fully repaired by the War Damage Commission. To invoke the assistance of the Town Planning Act 1944 for such a purpose seems to us to put it to a use for which it was never intended.*

*There is hardly a house in the threatened area which is later than the Nelson period, and the layout of the town, with its picturesque seafront, was admirably planned to give the inhabitants as much protection as possible against the prevailing winds. The fact that Deal has, so far, preserved most of its original character makes it unique among the watering places within easy reach of London. We cannot help feeling that, in planning to destroy its own assets, the local authority is embarking on a scheme which will cause great distress to many residents and regular visitors, besides injuring the interests of those who cater for them.*

*Yours etc,*

*Patrick Abercrombie, James Bateman, Noel Coward, Douglas Goldring, Nathaniel Gubbins, John Ireland, J M Knowles, Charles Vyse.*

This brought a response from "our correspondent" in The Times of 30 May:

*The future of that part of the borough of Deal referred to in the letter to The Times today (29 May) as scheduled for redevelopment is far from definite, as no plans for this redevelopment have yet been approved. The war-damaged properties have been brought under interim development control conditional on the preparation of a redevelopment scheme. The affected area is about eight acres, with a frontage to the sea of about 450 yards and a depth of 70 to 80 yards, and much of it had previously been under consideration by the Council as a slum clearance area.*

*A survey resulted in the following recommendations regarding buildings of architectural or historic interest: "that none was of such interest that retention should take priority over redevelopment; that only four were of some interest but not sufficient to warrant retention, and a further twenty-six buildings were of interest but not to the extent that they should be officially listed". The Town Council recently amended their proposed scheme to exclude buildings considered as worthy of retention.*

*Alderman E J Dobson, chairman of the Town Planning Committee of the Council, stated that it was an opportunity to wipe out a lot of old property of low rateable value and substitute something modern and hygienic to the benefit of the town.*

*Until the Council took energetic steps the area was rat infested and much should have been cleared away years ago. Alderman G W Daughtrey, chairman of the Housing Committee, said that the people who were advocating the retention of the houses with Queen Anne fronts made no mention of Aunt Sally in the back.*

A further letter appeared in The Times of 9 June:

*Sir,*

*Your correspondent mentions that a survey of the threatened area of Deal showed few buildings of architectural interest and worthy of preservation. Yet the whole of this part of the town is Georgian and each house, although it be small, is of charming design and built in fine material. The repetition of small buildings (the street) is the piece of architecture to be preserved. This must surely apply to all our old towns and villages.*

*The threatened seafront is a line of houses, hotels, cafés and shops, 95 % of which are occupied and in good condition. The one hotel not in use has suffered more from the ravages of weather than from enemy action. A good stretch of these buildings backs on to open ground.*

*This is not a slum area as is suggested. Most of the property has recently been repaired at great expense to the country under the War Damage Act. Surely it is a folly to contemplate pulling down so many fine little houses that have been newly repaired when, with normal maintenance, they will still be pleasant dwellings in 100 years from now?*

*Yours etc,*

*James M Knowles*

*9 St. Leonard's Terrace, London SW3.*

The Mercury quoted the statement of 30 May, and on 13 June its editorial commented that:

*Deal Council's redevelopment proposals have definitely entered the sphere of high controversy, and quite rightly. In due course every opinion will have an opportunity of being ventilated at a public meeting.*

In the same issue, a letter from "some of the younger generation" referred to those who opposed the scheme, saying:

*Would they care to live in these small closely packed houses? Would they care to live day after day, year after year, in a house without a bathroom, no hot water, no electricity and only one lavatory which is outside?*

Two Middle Street residents' meetings were held; at the second, attended by 40 to 50 people, it was made clear that "they were looked upon and treated as slums and slum people and they resented this attitude". They went on to air their grievances, including the fact that cars could not pass without mounting the pavement (nor can they 50 years later), there were no back gardens in which children could play and (another complaint sometimes valid today) that roads were not properly repaired after cables etc were laid. At the Town Council meeting in July the Borough Surveyor said that he could not hope to produce plans for several months. In August, no doubt alarmed at the concern expressed at the possible demolition of such property, the Town Clerk admitted that no actual recommendations had been put to the Council; the matter had simply been aired in the local and national press. It was in fact in August 1947 that Country Life carried an article by Christopher Hussey entitled "The Threat to Deal, Kent". In it Mr Hussey wrote:

*To alter Deal's character fundamentally would not only be unnecessarily drastic but also be an unwarranted destruction of something historic, picturesque and well nigh unique.*

And he concluded:

*If a modern seaside resort is required, it would be preferable, on purely architectural grounds, to demolish Victoria Town and build it there than to destroy one of the most picturesque and historic of the old coast towns of Britain.*

In spite of the Town Clerk's statement that no actual recommendation had been made, some outline plan must have been known for, in October, Sir Ernest Charles, a High Court judge living in Bruce House, Beach Street, wrote to the Mercury to criticize "the altogether outrageous terms of the proposed town planning scheme".

He continued:

*I understand that part of the proposal embodies the destruction of the houses on the front from South Street to Brewer Street. As to that part of the scheme which affects Middle Street, let those houses which are not suitable for habitation be pulled down by all means, but to shut one's eyes to that which is good and blindly to sweep away everything both good and bad is surely the negation of good planning. This scheme has nothing to recommend it. It is not town planning at all; it is town destruction.*

In January 1948 Mr W J Torr, son of a former Recorder of Deal, addressed the Deal Trades Council on the subject. He made the point that:

*It was an ignorant and foolish way to draw lines on a map and say "all inside this will come down and outside all remain standing". The houses could and should be reconditioned. It was our duty to hand on the heritage for generations to come.*

The opposition was gathering strength and, in a letter to the Mercury of 16 January, Mr R Radcliffe wrote from Guildford House Hotel:

*It has been suggested by a group of ratepayers that a Deal Protection Society should now be formed with the object of preserving the traditional features of the town, the charm of which so many residents and regular visitors appreciate. Will those interested in the project please communicate with me. If sufficient support is forthcoming, a meeting will be called at which the Society can be inaugurated and a committee and officers elected.*

This brought a response giving a different view. The following letter appeared on 30 January:

*Regarding the letter appearing over the name of Mr Radcliffe inviting Deal residents to help form a Deal Protection Society, surely this cannot be serious when he suggests such a society to prevent the redevelopment of Deal.*

*I wonder if our friend realises that the Deal Council's real effort to redevelop parts of Beach Street and Middle Street brings a glimmer of hope to our community who are forced by circumstances to live in the rotting, damp pig-holes, slums of the worst type, I venture to say, that I have ever seen. Does our friend wish to fight to preserve the character of the places I mention which form the major part of the welcome redevelopment plan proposed by our Deal Council?*

*May I invite Mr Radcliffe to think again before he sets out on this project to sabotage the redevelopment of Deal. I, with many of my friends who live in these slums, will fight any organised body which attempts to block this well overdue plan.*

*It must be remembered that, when our Council is in a position to clear these away, we shall help them with pick and shovel voluntarily and give every spare moment of our leisure time to help them.*

*We hope that, when we know the plan, it will be bold and earnest. We shall not tolerate misery and filth for the preservation of "traditional charm".*

The letter was signed John G Roberts on behalf of the Middle Street and adjacent streets Residents' Association.

In the meantime - and unfortunately no date was given in the minutes - the inaugural meeting of the Deal Protection Society was held at Guildford House Hotel attended by eleven residents. Canon Daniels, who could not be present, had agreed to act as Chairman. Sir Ernest Charles was invited to become President and Sir Gerald Wollaston, Garter King-at-Arms, Vice-President. An Executive Committee was elected and a public meeting called. On 2 February the monthly meeting of the Town Council was reported under the heading "Prosperity for Posterity". The Council wished to act without delay; the Town Planning Act 1944, under which it was estimated that a 90% grant could be obtained, would shortly be repealed. Even within the Council, however, there was opposition. Alderman C U R Cavell said:

*Surely they did not want at one fell swoop to do away with the buildings of antiquity that had always been admitted to be one of the town's main charms?*

He felt that there was not a single person in that Council Chamber who would honestly say that the plan would be for the improvement of the town. (Echoing Sir Ernest) he did not call it planning, he called it ruthless destruction.

The plan, which had now been drawn up, was to be on view for the public to see. Other views expressed by members of the Town Council was regret that the scheme did not extend to Alfred Square, that it was necessary to recoup revenue lost by war damage which could be made up by rebuilt houses, and that the scheme should include the widening of Middle Street and Oak Street "to an adequate width for modern traffic".

The Deal Protection Society, having advertised a public meeting, held it in the Town Hall on 12 March. Reporting it, the Mercury stated that the Society "most vigorously criticised the proposal before a large audience". Meanwhile the Borough Surveyor, addressing the Deal, Walmer and District Chamber of Trade, commented, "we cannot have too much publicity for this scheme which, it is emphasised, is not the last word and may be amenable to public opinion". A grain of hope for the Society.

In April the Mercury carried a letter signed simply "A visitor" which started:

*Have residents seen these plans? Do they realise that practically the whole of the unique seafront is to be pulled down to be replaced by three-storey flats?*

Dr Hall, in practice in the town and "sea surgeon" to the lifeboat, likened the scheme to a mule, "no pride of ancestry and no hope of posterity". On the other hand the Deal Labour Party appealed for support for the plan. On 30 April the Mercury carried a letter from New York. The writer, explaining that she received copies regularly from a friend in Walmer, went on:

*Deal has a charm and simplicity of its own. The seafront with the varied types of architecture is most appealing. Living in flats is not good for family life. Witness the divorce rate past and present in the USA, the land of flat dwellers. The Council, I fear, is trying to make dear little Deal a sort of inferior London-by-the-Sea. Also wouldn't it be smart to wait until the town finances are in a condition to bear the burden easily and not to burden the already over-burdened ratepayers?*

Certainly the question of finance was a thorny one; Deal's 22 shilling rate was the highest in Kent.

In May it was reported that Captain Barrett, owner of Carter House (due to be demolished in the plan), had in six days collected 1,770 signatures to a petition protesting against the demolition.

In July a three-day official inquiry was held in the Town Hall to consider an application made by Deal Council for an Order under Section 1 of the Town & Country Planning Act 1944, declaring land to be land subject to compulsory purchase, the approximate area lying between South Street to the south, Brewer Street to the north, Beach Street to the east and a line conforming to the rear of High Street properties to the west.

Statistics were given of houses destroyed or damaged in the war, the pre-war valuation and post-war loss. The Council's case was that a very large number of houses were unfit for human habitation. There was insufficient air space, a large number had no bathrooms and in a number of cases no secondary means of access. The present layout of many of the buildings was totally unsuitable for modern living. Middle Street, Beach Street, Oak Street and South Street needed widening. The Town Clerk stated that the Deal Protection Society represented a very small proportion of private owners, architects and others who were particularly attracted by the charm and beauty of the area; Deal Corporation represented the population of 24,000. The Council did not agree that the majority of houses could be made into excellent small dwellings.

The Borough Surveyor referred to poor conditions, and the Borough Engineer did not consider Coach Yard, Custom House Lane, Chapel, Oak and Brewer Streets to be fit for vehicular traffic. At the end of South Street, Beach Hotel (which stood on the open space next to the Port Arms and in front of the King's Head) would have to be demolished and the inclusion of properties opposite the Royal Hotel would not only provide scope for proper redevelopment, but would allow for a road improvement which would relieve the High Street of bus traffic and provide proper access to existing residential dwellings.

The East Kent Joint Planning Committee gave the proposals their approval and support. The Borough Treasurer expected a grant of 90% from Government for 5 to 6 years and 50% thereafter for 60 years. Compensation for owners would be in accordance with the Town Planning Acts. Deal & District Trades Council supported the plan, considering "the Council's was a sound practical scheme worthy of the fullest support".

The Deal Protection Society had legal representation (without fee) and the lawyer concerned was adept at querying assumptions and eliciting pertinent facts. A statement was read for Sir Ernest Charles, who was ill. He submitted it as a Freeman of Deal, President of the Deal Protection Society and a ratepayer owning property in Beach Street and Middle Street. Extracts from his statement were that:

*The plans show that it is intended to cut through the façade (seafront buildings) and open the Middle Street area by gaps to the sea with sunken lawns and flats facing east. No one in their senses wants to sit on sunken lawns open to the east winds. The threatened houses are substantial, well occupied and at present the whole façade forms a windbreak to everything behind. These houses are not within a war-damaged area. Two properties are quite deliberately being allowed to deteriorate as a result of the refusal of the Council to allow them to be repaired and reoccupied.*

The Medical Officer of Health has never, I believe, reported that the incidence of sickness is higher in Middle Street than in other parts of the borough. If he has done so, the Council has taken no action and has never treated it as a slum area.

Sir Ernest went on to list the financial commitments already in hand and to stress the need for new drainage before any rebuilding. He continued:

*The borough is not in a financial position to undertake further borrowing, particularly to undertake this grandiose and damaging scheme. If further borrowing is allowed, either the borough will be bankrupt and unable to meet its loan charges or the charges will only be met by increasing the rates even up to 40 shillings in the pound.*

Also, on behalf of the Society, Mr R Hardy Syms FRICS, LRIBA, MPTO, FSI of Westminster made the point that the redevelopment area had remained, with very few exceptions, very early Georgian, Regency and early Victorian. The main feature was the line of buildings fronting to the sea. That group, viewed from the sea, presented a remarkable landfall and formed an undoubtedly English composition; to break into that windswept but stalwart line of buildings would be the worst kind of vandalism imaginable for it could never be consistently recreated or reproduced. Many Middle Street properties had a valuable and long life before them - with an improved drainage system, but hardly before, it would be possible to install additional and improved sanitary conditions and baths. Deal had been evolved and laid out in the face of two very trying winds and it would be a disservice to interfere with it by breaching the protective continuity of the Beach Street windbreak. Referring to road widening, it was contrary to good planning technique to encourage traffic into the heart of a town by improving facilities for it. The cleared area and its immediate surroundings behind the High Street and Beach Street would be better left as an open space or municipal car park. It was very unlikely that the Council would get the full 90% grant; other towns had received only 40%. Carter House was associated with a great literary personality and in no way did it qualify for inclusion in a Declaratory Order.

Others who spoke on behalf of the Society included the Chairman (Canon Daniels), V J Torr, James Knowles, painter, architect and town planning consultant C J Fawcett Martindale FRIBA and Anthony Swaine LRIBA.

The result of the Inquiry was published in the Mercury of 5 November when it was reported that a letter had been received from the Minister of Town & Country Planning in which he said he would not be justified in making a Declaratory Order for the whole of the proposed redevelopment area. He proposed to make an Order with modifications designed to limit the land affected more closely to the area of extensive war damage. The Minister also stated that the making of an Order did not imply approval of the redevelopment plan submitted. The question of grant would fall to be determined in the light of the conditions set out in Section 95 of the 1947 Act and a grant would not be payable in any circumstances until the Council's proposals for the redevelopment of the land had been approved by the Minister under that Section.

As a result of the Inquiry, two Orders were made: the Borough of Deal Declaration Order 1949 (South Street to Market Street, Beach Street to rear of High Street) and the Borough of Deal (Middle Street Development Plan) Compulsory Purchase Order under the Town and Country Planning Act 1948. These enabled the Council to buy up some properties. Beach Hotel was demolished and some property in Beach Street on the site of which the Quarterdeck was built. The Council also started to buy up properties in the area, now the car park, but the last property was not acquired until after the reorganisation of local government, when Dover District Council took over in 1974.

On 1 June 1949, 44 buildings in Deal and Walmer were listed Grade II by the Secretary of State for the Environment as being of special architectural interest. Among them were Carter House, Queen Anne House, numbers 11, 12, 14 and 16 Middle Street and 29, 59 and 85 (The Golden Hind) Beach Street. This effectively stopped wholesale demolition of properties within the Declaration Order. Subsequently more buildings were listed and it is still possible to apply for listing where it is deemed appropriate. Walnut Tree House in Southwall Road and Woodbine Cottage in Victoria Road are two more recent listings.

Deal Council had not given up hope of a large-scale redevelopment. In 1964, in conjunction with the County Council, Professor J R Allen FRIBA was invited to prepare a new plan for Deal. His aims were set out in a brochure issued in March 1964 to accompany an exhibition of models, drawings, diagrams and photographs of his plan. In the forward to the brochure, the Mayor wrote:

*The plan has been prepared at a time when great changes are taking place throughout the country and these changes will affect Deal. Entirely new towns are being built and many others are being expanded and central areas renovated. Deal cannot miss any opportunity for its important position in the county.*

This time, it was the staff Estates Correspondent of The Times who brought the plan to national attention. On 17 March 1964, under the heading "Civic Centre proposed for Deal", he wrote:

*New civic buildings and the closure of some central streets to wheeled traffic are among proposals in the plan announced yesterday for redevelopment of the central area of Deal, Kent. The scheme, drawn up by Professor J R Allen, Professor of Town & Country Planning at King's College, University of Durham, and commissioned by Deal Borough Council and Kent County Council, has been accepted in principle by Deal Corporation and is now before the County Council.*

It concerns a large area between the shore and the railway line, with the present High Street forming a spine. A new inner circular road would provide a continuous flow of traffic around the central area. A new and enlarged bus station and enlarged car park accessible from it are proposed. The area of the war-damaged Middle Street is suggested as suitable for new civic buildings. These are now scattered around the town and it is suggested that they might be combined here into an impressive group. This could also include a new entertainment pavilion, a library and new shops linked by a pedestrian precinct with the High Street and seafront. Just to the north of the central area is suggested for a tall block of flats and, with an eye on congestion problems in London and in particular of possible effects of a Channel tunnel, an area has been allotted for office development. This is just one of over two acres capable of being increased to three-and-a-half, to the west of West Street and south of St George's Road.

The original Deal Protection Society seems to have been disbanded, and on 3 April a new Society was formed at a meeting held at the Corner Parlour under the chairmanship of Alderman Aldridge.

On 25 April the following letter appeared in The Times:

*Sir,*

*On 29 May 1947 you saved the town of Deal from the planners by publishing a letter of protest signed by several writers and other distinguished people.*

*The planners have gathered their forces again for a new onslaught of redevelopment. The aim of this includes the construction of large car parks and involves the semi-destruction of Deal in five stages. In stage 1 a fine Queen Anne House will be the first casualty, along with a group of cottages adjacent to it.*

*Further intended destruction spreading along the seafront includes a significant part of Deal which, from the sea and pier, provides one of the most enchanting views in all England of a stretch of fascinating period houses and little shops. These are lovely for their individual shapes and their Kentish roofs form a magic irregular skyline.*

*These will go and in their place will arise a monstrous, incongruous collection of public buildings in the modern mode, including on the seafront a post office, a county clinic and the Borough Council offices in a skyscraper, whose occupants will, presumably in the planner's view, thrive in one of the coldest and draughtiest corners of the winter scene.*

*Progress and development must come, but we believe that this lamentable scheme of destruction and reconstruction is so unnecessary in extent and so damaging to the character and purpose of this small, thriving seaside town that every effort should be made to halt or modify this plan. For this we ask your help.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Peter Boulden, Nathaniel Gubbins, Norman Hepple, Simon Raven, Ninette de Valois, Charles Vyse.*

A reply appeared in The Times of 2 May:

*Sir,*

*I am sorry that my friend Dr Peter Boulden and the other signatories to the letter which you published on 25 April should so distort the facts as to say that the aim of the planners is to involve the semi-destruction of Deal in five stages.*

*Nothing could be further from the truth. The facts are that, following the 1948 Inquiry, a Declaratory Order was made by the Minister that a small area of approximately five acres comprising the shelled and bombed-out portion of the town (which is 2,917 acres in extent) should be subject to a compulsory purchase for the purpose of dealing with war damage. The seafront of this area is behind the pier. It is the only sea frontage affected in the proposals and comprises less than 200 yards in length of a built-up sea frontage of over two miles.*

*The Kent County Council, as the Planning Authority, and the Deal Borough Council jointly commissioned one of the foremost town planners in the country, Professor J R Allen FRIBA and a past President of the Town Planning Institute to advise them on the layout of this area. Professor Allen's advice was that the only economic proposition was a mixture of commercial and civic development. The scheme has been accepted by the Deal Borough Council in principle only as a basis of discussion with all interested parties. The architectural treatment of the buildings to be erected has not yet even been considered. Everything will be done to ensure that any buildings erected will blend architecturally with the existing façade of mixed development which gives Deal seafront that unique charm, as anybody who has looked at it from the sea and pier will know. In Professor Allen's words: "in considering the future development pattern of the old town one must be sensitively aware of the appearance of the existing architectural line and the other relevant circumstances which discourage change". This the Deal Borough Council has very much at heart.*

*Yours faithfully,*

*Charles Steed, Leader, Conservative Group, Deal Borough Council.*

On 5 May the Society organised an open forum at the Astor Hall at which it was resolved to demand the complete rejection of the Allen Plan. Although Councillor Steed was sure that the Council was in favour of the plan, opposition to it from the public and the Society was having an effect.

In October the Architects' Journal carried an article entitled "Planning a New Deal" with drawings. In December the plan was still being debated by the Council. In the Mercury the Chairman of the Town Planning & Redevelopment Committee was reported as saying:

*I don't like the Allen Plan and I have never liked it. It would be far more honest to throw it out in its entirety.*

And thrown out it eventually was, although echoes resounded for some time. In November 1965 the Society organised a special meeting at the Astor. From the note recording this it would seem that the Society intended putting forward its own draft plan for the town centre, but unfortunately few records remain for this period. It was this year that the Council for British Archaeology considered the position of seven towns in Kent (including Deal) which had centres requiring "particularly careful treatment in any planning or redevelopment proposals".

By 1966 home improvement grants were available and the Society was urging householders to apply where necessary. In June that year the Society held an exhibition in the Quarterdeck which consisted of 179 photographs of Deal, 13 of Mongeham and 12 of Walmer, most of them taken by John Vyse. Of the buildings portrayed, 31 were listed Grade II and 54 Grade III. In the forward to the catalogue it was stated that the purpose of the exhibition was "to direct attention to the many small buildings or groups of buildings of exceptional interest in Deal".

At the Annual General Meeting of the Society in 1967 it was agreed to change the name of the Society to The Deal Society - the "protection" element had achieved its purpose.

On 23 October 1968, the London Gazette carried the announcement that the Middle Street area of Deal would be designated a Conservation Area under the Civic Amenities Act of 1967. This was, in fact, the first Conservation Area in Kent. Subsequently other areas of Deal were also designated and maps showing these can be seen in Deal Library on application to the reference section.

1971 saw the publication by Kent County Council of "Deal - Middle Street Conservation Area: an Architectural Appraisal". Acknowledgement was made that "most of the photographs used in the book have very kindly been made available by the Deal Society. We are grateful for their co-operation and assistance". A further tribute was paid in the conclusion: "the advice of the Deal Society will be sought by owners and by the local planning authority in appropriate cases". A copy of this booklet can also be seen at the Library.

It was obvious that by now that the Society was not only recognised, but was appreciated. For its part, the Society had set the pattern for future action. All planning applications were monitored, the perennial problems of noise, litter and dog fouling were addressed and a special effort was made to introduce trees into the landscape. A tree fund was established and gifts of trees were made on occasions.

The first magazine appeared in 1971 and by 1972 the Society had added an annual dinner and a footpath walk to its programme. It continued, in co-operation with the History Society, to mount occasional exhibitions and with that the Society also inaugurated a series of lectures during the autumn and winter months.

In 1972 the link road proposed in the Allen Plan was again the subject of discussion. The County and Borough authorities were in favour and indeed the Borough Council had bought up properties in anticipation of the proposed route of the northern section. These included the Black Bull (now Peppers) and the Georgian house, formerly St Andrew's Rectory, which occupied the site from the Methodist School to the High Street in Union Road. The Society had been opposed to the road from the start, but it was to be several years before the scheme was finally dropped. An editorial in the Mercury of 16 May 1978 stated that "generally people are in favour of keeping heavy traffic out of Deal town centre" and wished to retain "Deal's character". In 1975 the Society brought out a booklet to celebrate European Architecture Heritage Year. This was quickly sold out and reprinted.

Major planning applications considered by the Society during the seventies included the demolition of the former Congregational Church and the building of shops with flats over, or sheltered housing, on the site and the redevelopment of Denne's building yard in Queen Street and of St Ethelburga's Convent in West Street. The results seen today are the Landmark Centre, the block of sheltered flats in Queen Street and the Gateway supermarket and car park. The grounds of two former schools were developed for housing and the schools themselves were to be converted into flats: Leelands in Walmer and Tormore in Upper Deal.

The most important public inquiry held in Deal was that into what was to be done with the former Queen's Hotel which stood at the corner of Prince of Wales Terrace and Deal Castle Road. The Queen's (with 62 bedrooms, 36 with private bath and good public rooms) had been the subject of concern when it closed in 1977. By 1980 permission to demolish was sought, but in that year, thanks to the combined efforts of the Society, the Victorian Society, Save Britain's Heritage, the Ancient Monument Society and the Civic Trust, the building was listed Grade II.

In April 1981 the Planning Committee was to consider two planning applications: one to demolish and one to convert the building into sheltered housing. A few days before the meeting, the hotel was so severely damaged by an unexplained fire that experts at the later Inquiry were of the opinion that the cost of rebuilding and conversion would be too high. The Society was represented and presented evidence to the Inquiry and was helped by a lawyer representing the Civic Trust (who gave his services), but to no avail. The Secretary of State for the Environment gave permission to demolish and the building was razed in 1982. The block of flats eventually built on the site was criticised by the Society at the planning stage, but obviously the Council was keen to see something on the site.

It is not always appreciated that in spite of the Society's aim to encourage high standards of architecture, there is little that can actually be done other than to draw the Council's attention to poor plans and over-development. The Council's responsibility is with land use, not the details of what may be built on it.

Two buildings which the Society successfully fought to save were the Timeball Tower and the Astor Theatre. In each case the Society organised meetings from which action was taken. The Society also presented evidence to support the retention of the casualty unit at Deal Hospital and more recently added its voice to the protests at proposed cuts at Buckland Hospital, Dover.

The appointment in 1987 of a Conservation Officer to the Dover District Council was welcomed by the Society and his advice and support is much appreciated. The new IMPACT Team now looking at Deal has invited the Society - among others - to put forward suggestions for improving the town. What has been and still is difficult to get "authority" to realise is that residents and visitors will benefit more from the regular provision of basic needs such as safe pavements, covered litter bins along the seafront, beach cleaning, etc, than from cosmetic exercises such as dreary planters not properly looked after.

It is difficult for outsiders to appreciate Deal's special appeal which was expressed in an article in one of the Society's magazines by Chris Tophill. He wrote:

*It is one of Deal's strengths (as well as one of its weaknesses) that one doesn't visit it unless one intends to. It is not, unlike most other towns in the area, on the way to anywhere. It has this geographical integrity which gives it identity and an especial quality - its own palpable essence.*

This feeling was echoed by Kit Smith when he was leader of the Dover District Council. He said, "Deal is a special place". The Society recognises this and is anxious to keep it so.

**By Gertrude Nunns, a past Vice-President of the Society. First published November 2002**