

jetties and refineries of Shell, B.P. and Texaco. We all knew which side of the river we preferred.

The first stop was at St. James's Church, built of ragstone in the 13th century, but sadly, now cared for by The Churches Conservation Trust. Inside we saw richly-carved woodwork and the vestry wall covered with cockle shells. We gathered in the churchyard near the porch, around a group of gravestones of thirteen children who had died from the lethal marsh fever. It is this scenario that is brought gruesomely to life in the opening scenes of "Great Expectations", when the escaped convict frightens Pip in the grave yard.

A few minutes walk away is the ruined 14th century Cooling Castle, still with part of its moat filled with water, where we were told of its little known history, before continuing along the narrow lanes to the ancient village of Cobham.

In the famous Cobham Church is the largest and finest collection of brass rubbings in the country. Behind the church we came upon a square of flint stone cottages, fully occupied sheltered accommodation, around a grassy quadrangle. It was now time to return our guide to Rochester and thence homeward to Dover.

Although we had gone with "Great Expectations", the complete day far exceeded these. I am sure some of us will return in June to savour more of the Dickensian delights during the Dickens Festival. This will include processions, music, street entertainers and the Finale, based on Dickens' Dream. There are to be four other festivals; in May, July, August and December.

Once again, we have to thank Joan Liggett for her hard work in arranging such a successful and interesting day in and around the city of Rochester.

Curious Happenings on the Goodwins

The Society's visit to the Goodwin Sands on 14 June

PAT PENNINGTON

Extending about 10 miles north to south with an average breadth of two miles, the Goodwin Sands are both a danger and a safeguard to vessels. They protect the deep water channel known as the Downs from the prevailing winds but also act as a notorious "swallower of ships" since they turn to quicksand as the tide advances, sucking down any ship in a few days.

Legends abound as to their origin. The most romantic maintains they were part of the fertile island of Lomea owned by the Saxon Earl Godwin (father of the more famous Harold), and drowned in a cataclysmic storm like the lost continent of Atlantis, after he had neglected the sea defences in order to build Tenterden church tower. However, borings show they are nothing more than 80 feet of sand on a bedrock of chalk. This lack of a firm

foundation has doomed several attempts to build lighthouses, notably by the eighteenth century engineer John Smeaton, who constructed canals, roads and the Eddystone Lighthouse with rather more success.

A psychologist would have found much material to ponder during the chartered trip to the Goodwins on the evening of 14 June. Thirty members of the Dover Society were among the 300 visitors who launched into an extraordinary variety of activities on disembarking from the bowels of the hovercraft *Princess Margaret*. The weather was far from clement, being sunless and chilly, but undeterred the trippers sprang into action. Some built sand castles, picnicked shivering behind windbreaks, played with balls and frisbees, posed for photographs, made comfortable nests on portable chairs and generally tried to

58 make homely the one place that defies all such attempts. Members of the National Autocycle Club put-putted around on a weird collection of motorised tandems and ancient mopeds, polluting the sea air with a strong smell of two-stroke fuel. Most people remained clustered around the looming hovercraft like chicks around a mother hen, a little nervous to stray too far from the safe haven. It was little wonder the seals remained close at hand; they were obviously mesmerized by such peculiar visitors.

There were virtually no views that evening. Richborough Power Station could just be discerned through the mist and this gave a disorientating quality to the whole occasion. One felt suspended in time and space, cocooned in the dull roar of the slaty sea. We wandered away from the firm banks where the hovercraft was safely planted to the Downs side of the sands. Here water and sand merge gradually as countless streams drain from one pool to another in convolutions back to the Channel. From this distance the people looked

like tiny Lowry stick figures bent forward against the wind. When we stood for a few seconds in some places the sand turned liquid and our feet were quickly sucked down, a chilling reminder of what is under this treacherous ocean graveyard whose power can never be underestimated. Our own Miss Kay, who had never before visited the sands, recounted that in 1857 her grandfather, a ship's carpenter, was too much under the weather to go to work one morning and stayed in bed. That day his ship, the "Lady Violet", went down on the Goodwins. Had he been fit for work that day she, and over 100 of her family, would never have been born!

The atmosphere and fascination of this frightening physical feature will always remain. As I see the sands almost every day as a distant thin brown streak fringed with white water, I was delighted to have been given the chance to actually set foot on them. Our thanks must be given to Joan Liggett for her customary efficient organisation of this memorable trip.

Greenwich – Where Time Begins

AUDREY KIRK

*'On Thames bank in silent thought we stood
Where Greenwich smiles upon the silver ffood'*

So said Samuel Johnson who lived in Greenwich in 1737.

258 years later I stood at Greenwich on a sunny day in July to soak up those same sensations. Our thirty strong band of Dover Society members and friends, on an outing well-planned by Joan Liggett, were there to explore and discover the wonderment of Greenwich and to remember our great Naval history and the fine men who trained there before setting out to circumnavigate the globe.

The 1700s was the era for discovery since John Flamsteed – the first Astronomer Royal had established Longitude 0°. This is the imaginary line joining the north and south

poles through the dead centre of a specialised telescope installed at the Observatory in 1851. The 28 inch refracting telescope in the spectacular onion dome is the largest in Britain and the Meridian runs through the courtyard. Although John Flamsteed spent his whole life working on this there is still controversy surrounding the exact line. Many wonderful timepieces were developed once the Meridian was established and exhibited here.

From the hilltop observatory, downhill, thank goodness, to the riverside wharf and that splendid ship the *Cutty Sark*. Readers might know that one Captain Willis had a nephew living in The Grange at