

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

Kingsdown who in recent years returned memorabilia to his ship.

Nearby is the Victorian foot tunnel under the Thames, connecting Greenwich to the Isle of Dogs. Built in 1902 it has a domed entrance at each end housing a wide stone spiral stairway and a hexagonal shaped lift in the centre of each dome. Well worth exploring if one's energy permits! Some walked through the tunnel and took a trip on the Docklands Light Railway to Canary Wharf.

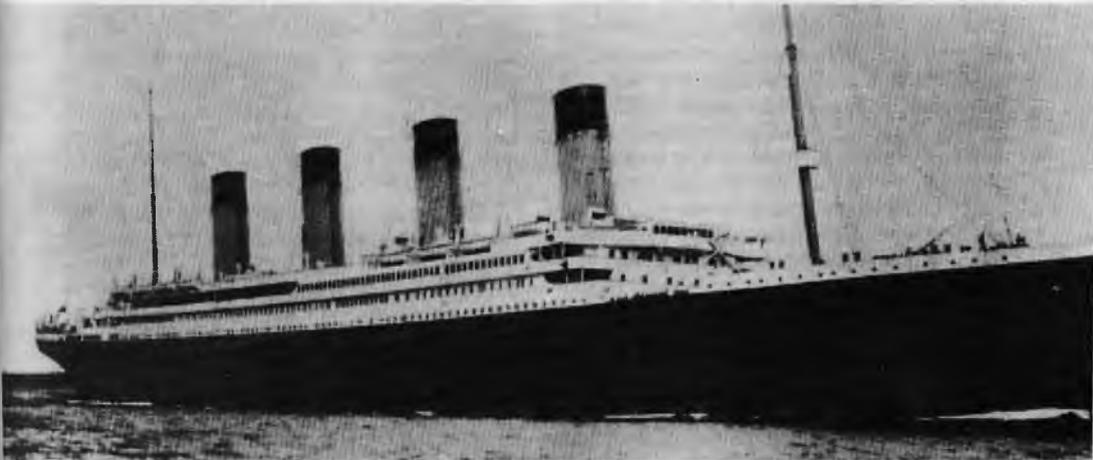
With the river behind me I headed for the Maritime Museum which tells the story of important figures in history, such as Lord Nelson and Captain Cook. The museum, housed in the old Greenwich hospital since 1934, at present mounts the *Titanic* Exhibition, bringing home the (greatest?) marine tragedy of modern times. The President of the White Star Line was on board but escaped in a lifeboat. He was pilloried for the rest of his life. Plans were set in motion to find the wreck weeks after the sinking in 1912. It lies two and a half miles deep. Now technology has turned the obsession into reality and the recovery of many objects, such as the first silver plated tray in perfect condition, goes to making this a worthwhile exhibition. My personal feelings are to let the wreck and its occupants rest in peace where it still lies.

Set between the Naval College and the Hospital is the Queens' House. A Royal

Palace by the Thames, built for the pleasure-loving wife of King James I in 1616, but she died in 1619 when only the ground floor was complete. By 1625 King Charles I had married a French princess Henrietta Maria and it was completed for her by Inigo Jones when Charles succeeded to the throne. The 'Tulip Stairs' off the Great Hall have a finely crafted wrought iron balustrade. These are the first cantilevered stairs built in Britain, designed by Inigo Jones in the early 1630s. The original wall and ceiling panels in the many chambers and anterooms have all been lost but the wall hangings and the coverings are all woven to original 17th century patterns and colours giving a very pleasing and authentic effect.

Danish pastries in 'The Tea Rooms' before a quick dash though the old village to The Fan Museum at 12 Croams Hill. Folding fans were a novelty in Europe in the 16th and 17th centuries, made of Mother-o'-Pearl, Ivory, Tortoiseshell and Ebony and often studded with diamonds, emeralds and pearls in the handles. The earliest fan was on painted cad but by Queen Mary's era in the 1920s beautiful handwork such as fine lace and pulled thread-work was used. Some have miniature boxes or watches at the base of the handle.

Back to Mr Roberts' coach at one minute to five – tired, happy and proud to be British, we were brought safely home.



THE GREAT 'TITANIC'