

# A GRAND DAY OUT

----- JEAN PEARCE

On Saturday 1st June members of the Dover Society set off on a pleasant warm day for Chatham Dockyard.

The coach, its passengers chatting in anticipation of an interesting time, deposited us just in time for morning coffee at the Wheelwrights Restaurant. We browsed over maps and brochures – eighty acres to walk over and so many things to see. Where do we begin! Having newly arrived we decided to follow in the footsteps of William Crockwell.

On the 4th of November in 1758 William, then fifteen years of age, presented himself at the gates of Chatham Dockyard to begin his apprenticeship. We followed him around the Wooden Walls Gallery and learned of his many skills, from the choice of timber to the rigging of the sails that were needed to produce a ship of the line. William's diary, realistically brought to life by the exhibits, talking heads, smells and lighting, told us of the long hours, great skill and hard work he experienced.

Where to now? The story of the RNLI was housed nearby. Real lifeboats that had been used throughout the years were on display. All were there, from the self-righting craft of today back to the open rowing boats of many years ago. The horse pulling a boat onto the shingle was so realistic that we almost offered it our lunch-time apple!

Lunch outdoors and a time to refresh ourselves, after which we strolled beside the Medway which brought us to the large

Georgian church. It now has a rather sad air, like a well brought-up lady left waiting at a Regency ball and not knowing quite what she should do.

The Commissioner's house has a much more inviting air when viewed from the front. The walled garden at the rear is being restored and interested the many visitors walking around. It is a peaceful place, full of plants, birds and insects and an ice-house.

Next came something more serious – the Ordnance Gallery which contained guns of various types and ages used on ships; some captured from other countries and many with splendid decorations on their barrels. Several cases held models of guns and mortars.

The exhibition, with its stories of artifacts recovered from the warship *Invincible*, which was wrecked in 1758, made the people who had sailed on her very real to us. The life histories of various other craft built at the yard made interesting stories, too.

Time for a cuppa and a short break. But, woe! We have run out of time! We left by way of the shop (which is usual) noticing a good selection of books for young and not so young naval enthusiasts.

On our journey home we thought of Drake, Henry VIII, Pepys, Nelson and especially our friend William Crockwell.

## BINDERS for the Newsletter

More than eight months ago members were offered the opportunity of ordering a further Binder to preserve their *Newsletters*. Since then only four members have made a reservation. We cannot order less than 100 items and by now the binders held, especially those who have been members for a long time must have binders that are full or overflowing. If and when we receive sufficient requests we will order from the suppliers. Cost will be only marginally above the original one, round about £3.00 - £3.20. Drop a note in to Budge Adams at 24 Castle Avenue or phine 208008.