

REMINISCENCES

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BY SIR CLIFFORD JARRETT

written in December 1989

Not many people were bombed out in World War I, but we were. My father had a photographic business in Dover and when he was called up for the Army early in 1917, my mother managed to carry on the business with the help of the girl who had been my father's assistant. All this suddenly came to an end in the autumn of 1917, however, when one of the German bombers, which used to make hit-and-run raids on Dover, dropped a bomb in our back garden, which wrecked the studio and made the house uninhabitable. With nowhere else to go, my mother moved up to Canterbury to live with her mother and she took my sister with her. I went to live with my father's parents in the "Jolly Sailor" public house, which my grandfather kept.

As a result of the move to Canterbury, I lost a month's schooling because at first the local education authority refused to give me a place because my mother was not a rate payer. Such callous meanness would have been unthinkable in World War II. However, I was eventually admitted to a local elementary school - Payne Smith School - which no longer exists.

I was at this school, which I did not really enjoy, for about a year. Early in 1919 my father was demobilised and his premises were repaired, so we were able to resume our old life in Dover. I transferred to St. Mary's school there (it, too, has long been demolished). It served a rather rough part of the town, so life there was rather rugged; but it had a superb Deputy Head and the teaching was good, so much so that in 1920 I was able to win a scholarship to the County School - now the Grammar School. There I spent eight happy years and was lucky in being taught by two especially

inspiring teachers. I joined the school cadet corps, of which I eventually became Company Quartermaster Sergeant. I also became Captain of my House. In the Higher Schools Certificate exam. in 1927, I did well enough to win a State University Scholarship. This led me to develop an ambition to go to Cambridge and late that same year I went there to sit the scholarship exam for a group of 5 colleges. I was fortunate enough to win an Open Scholarship to Sidney Sussex.

I wanted to read Modern Languages, but my school only offered French, so I spent the year while I was waiting to go up, teaching myself German. At great sacrifice to themselves, my parents sent me to stay for three months with a German family in Bad Harzburg. As a result, as my tutor in German at Cambridge said, I acquired an idiomatic style of German, but with a limited vocabulary.

I went up to Sidney in October, 1928. I was a bit lonely at first, but soon made friends with a group of young men, in other colleges, from Alleyn's School, Dulwich. I got a double first in the Modern Languages Tripos when I graduated in 1931. This was the very bottom of the great depression and there were practically no jobs going and I saw that I should either have to go teaching, which had no great appeal, or try for the administrative class of the Civil Service. My college was very good to me and extended my scholarship for a fourth year, so that I could read Part II of the History tripos and thus improve my chances in the Civil Service exam. This I took in 1932 and, to my great surprise, I came out in first place. There were not many vacancies and in the end I opted to



Lady Jarrett at the Memorial Ceremony, 26 April 1998

go into the Home Office, where I was assigned to the Criminal Division, where the work was dealing with petitions from men in prison. I found the Home Office rather stuffy, although my colleagues were friendly people; so when, in 1934, word came round that the Admiralty was looking for a couple of Assistant Principals with two years' experience, I applied and was accepted. It was a decision I never regretted. My first assignment was to the Political Section of the Military Branch, which was a sort of Admiralty Foreign Office and offered a fascinating variety of work.

In 1936 I was appointed Private Secretary to the Parliamentary Secretary. I served two of them, Lord Stanley and Geoffrey Shakespeare. In 1938 I went back to the Military Branch, this time as head of the Political Section. When war broke out we had a number of reinforcements, including

Cyril Radcliffe, an eminent lawyer, who later became a peer. Our main work was the monitoring of breaches of international law by the Germans. We were also concerned with seeing that the Uruguayans behaved properly as neutrals when the Graf Spee took refuge in Montevideo. When A.V. Alexander became First Lord in 1940, I was appointed his Private Secretary and I stayed in that post for four years. It was a hard time. We frequently worked a fifteen-hour day. I was living in the Admiralty building and sleeping in the basement when the building was hit by a German bomb in 1940.

In May 1944 I was promoted, to a branch concerned with locally recruited employees of the Navy's overseas bases, but was soon returned to Military Branch as head of my old section. Around the end of 1945 I was moved again, to head a branch concerned with personnel work on civilian

employees in England. While there I enjoyed, in 1946, a short trip to our naval missions in Ottawa and Washington D.C. which gave me a much needed rest. Later the same year I was promoted to Under Secretary in charge of all civilian personnel work, a post I held for four years. I made an interesting trip to Hong Kong and Singapore and on my return, in 1950, was promoted to Deputy Secretary. I found this was not a very satisfying job but it had its compensations. I wrote the minutes of the meetings of the Board of Admiralty and I had some very good trips abroad. In 1955 I led a small team to South Africa to discuss the future of the Simonstown naval base and the following year I went out again to attend the ceremony for the formal handover of the base to the South African Navy. In 1960 I went to Australia on my own, to negotiate arrangements for the refitting of British submarines based there.

Early in 1961 I succeeded Sir John Lang as Secretary of the Admiralty. Early in this job I had a lot to do in the case of the spy, Vasall, and had to give evidence at an enquiry, conducted by Lord Radcliffe, whom I had known during the war.

In early 1964, Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister, set up the present-day Ministry of Defence, abolishing the separate service departments, whose permanent secretaries were then scattered among other departments. I got the Ministry of Pensions, which was really pretty dull after the Admiralty. We spent much of our time examining two proposals for changing the National Insurance scheme, neither of which came into force. When Harold Wilson lost the General Election in May 1970, the new Minister of Social Security, Sir Keith Joseph, wanted me to stay on, but I declined, as I was due to retire from the Civil Service in July.

After leaving the Civil Service I had another ten years of considerable activity. First, I took over the chairmanship of a committee set up to review the medical services of the armed forces. This worked for two years, producing a report in 1972. I was also a member of a small tribunal set

up to deal with appeals from foreigners expelled from the U.K. on security grounds. I also had three other major appointments; trustee of the Maritime Museum, Chairman of the Tobacco Research Council and Chairman of the Dover Harbour Board. The T.R.C. was set up by the tobacco industry to conduct research aimed, very optimistically, at identifying the constituents of tobacco smoke which caused cancer and then filtering them out. As time went on it became clear there was no hope of achieving these objectives. Tobacco smoke had over 700 constituents and it was impossible to isolate more than a few of them. In the end the industry admitted defeat and the T.R.C. was wound up in 1978.

The Chairmanship of Dover Harbour Board was about the most enjoyable job I have ever had. In this job one could hardly go wrong because traffic was growing continuously. To cope with it the Board went in for a big programme of reclamation from the sea at the Eastern Docks. In my time we reclaimed about 10 acres at a cost of about £1 million per acre. I would have been very happy to have continued in this job until I was senile, but the Ministry of Transport had a policy of not renewing appointments over the age of 70, so my chairmanship came to an end early in 1980. I could not complain. I had had a good run.

Lady Mary Jarrett has kindly deposited the following books with the Society. The books formerly belonged to Sir Clifford.

History of the Castle, Town and Port of
Dover Statham

Dover and the Great War J B Firth

Annals of Dover Bavington Jones

Dover Bavington Jones

Souvenir of Dover

(Photographic View Album of Dover)

Picturesque Dover

(Collection of Photographs)

Should any member wish to borrow any of the above books please contact:

Jeremy Cope, 53 Park Avenue, Dover
01304 211348