

## Visit To St. Peter's, Broadstairs

*Reported by Derek Leach*

On 10 July nineteen members visited St. Peter's Broadstairs to take advantage of a guided walk around this ancient village, which still retains its village atmosphere despite being today a 'suburb' of Broadstairs. These walks date from 1994 when a guided tour of the parish church was arranged. This small beginning led to a tour of the village being organised for Easter 1995 incorporating costumed characters who were met en route. It was run for several weeks with over 1000 visitors before the end of the season. Now there are over 10,000. Over 100 volunteers are involved with up to 40 per morning. The tours are available on Thursday mornings from May to September -free of charge!

Our tour started in the large parish church, founded by Benedictine monks in 1070 and sumptuously refurbished internally in Victorian times. The monks of Minster Abbey used to visit the churches of St John, Margate, St Lawrence, Ramsgate and St Peter's. Their ancient footpath between the churches can still be walked. During the Napoleonic Wars the church tower was used as a signalling post manned by Royal Navy personnel. As a consequence the church is one of only two in the country still entitled to fly the white ensign. In one part of the church is the Children's Corner, refurbished in the 1960s in memory of Annette Mills of 'Muffin the Mule' fame. Annette lived close to the church. This same church corner was the meeting place of the Lovejoy School set up for 24 children in 1694. Edward Heath learned to play the organ here. The churchyard is possibly the longest in the country.

After leaving the church we came across John Wesley on the village green, which was a farmyard until 1970. Before dismissing us with a blessing Wesley told us how



*1850 Village Constable*

he preached in the village in 1788, aged 85. Overlooking the green is a Dutch style farmhouse dating from 1682. The farm was owned by the Mockett family who played a leading part in village life from 1657. Close by lived Walter Sickhart (from 1934 to 48), the father of modern British impressionism and thought by some to be Jack the Ripper!

The village constable, dressed in his 1850 unifom, saw us safely across the road, pointing out the stocks which are still legal after 600 years. Perhaps they should be used for today's litter and lager louts! Passing by the former village school, which Edward Heath attended, we arrived at the (former) workhouse and met the manager and his wife who told us the history of the rather grand building and the living conditions of its former residents. An inmate tried to bother us, but was quickly chased away. The building was converted into Nuckell's Almshouses after the residents were transferred to the new Union Workhouse at Minster in 1834. Walking on we came to The Coves, built in 1769, and heard about its connection with smugglers and the maze of smugglers' tunnels under the village.

Next we were accosted by a lovely French lady, but we were warned that she was probably a French spy! We arrived at the site of the Ranelagh Pleasure Gardens, although only Flint Cottage, the Steward's Cottage and the Assembly Rooms remain. The owner of the gardens told us how popular the gardens were - a copy of the Vauxhall Gardens in London - with the summer visitors. The 2.5 acres opened in 1818 with up to 1600 visitors per day paying 2s 6d entrance. Jugglers, ventriloquists, singers, actors and bands entertained un-

til sunset. Margate soon did something similar and took most of the trade away and the gardens closed in 1852.

We moved on along the ancient monk's track, encountering a 10 century abbess from Minster, before entering a lovely garden where refreshments were gratefully received on a hot day. By some workers' cottages we met a smuggler who had a number



*Smuggler*

of tales to tell and at the Red Lion pub we saw a Victorian doctor and nurses. They told us about the smallpox outbreak of 1867 when the pub became a temporary hospital and the beer cellar became a mortuary. A local girl had become a Nightin-

gale Nurse in the Crimea.

Back at the church the roles of the churchwarden and his staff were explained, including poking anybody who dozed off during the service! In the vestry we met the rat catcher who related some disgusting details about his work, including a nice little earner - rat soup, which was a 'cure all' and cost 1d per pint. Fortunately, we were not asked to buy any!

Lunch in the Red Lion concluded a very

entertaining and interesting morning. I can thoroughly recommend it.

One final thought. If the village of St Peter's can involve 100 volunteers in such a venture, what could and should Dover do with so many more people to call upon and so much heritage to offer. Another project for The Dover Society, I think. Come on somebody, volunteer to get it started. The terms are generous - no pay, but lots of satisfied customers appreciating Dover's past and present glory.

## ***Visit to the Houses of Parliament and Somerset House - 14<sup>TH</sup> August 2003***

*reported by Adeline Reidy*

The Coach left Dover at 8.20 sharp for the journey to London with an arranged visit to The Houses of Parliament, or for the correct title 'The New Palace of Westminster'. The driver was able to make good time and our tour guide was waiting for us. We went in through the 'Royal Entrance' and after the usual security check were placed in two groups of 15.

Our tour guide was a happy chirpy chap called Jeff, who knew all about Dover as he had been stationed there with the Junior Leaders. He married a girl from Dover whose family still live in the town.

The tour commenced, through the Queens Robing room, followed by the Royal Gallery, Princes Chamber, House of Lords, Peers Lobby, Central Lobby, Commons Lobby, House of Commons, St. Stephens Hall, and Westminster Hall.

For more than seven hundred years Westminster has been a cradle of democracy, as Parliament has developed from its early role as the King's Council into a fully rep-

resentative body, which votes on measures and calls the Government to account. The advent of television coverage allows people to see this process in action in the chambers of the two Houses and in their various committees. This wonderful building combines the historic site of the old royal palace with the good planning and fine craftsmanship of the mid nineteenth century. It was built to display the history of the nation, but it now has to cope with the every-increasing demands of a busy Parliament. While it lacks the full number of offices that are needed, the quality of its architecture and sense of history ensures the need to preserve and enhance it. I would urge everyone who has never been, to do so, and marvel at the external and internal wonders created by the architects Barry, Pugin and their successors. Eleven hundred rooms, 3 miles of passageways on an 8 acre site gives you some idea of the size of the building. Justice cannot be done to this magnificent structure with its su-