

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 - 14TH 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-

perb detailed decoration and past history in such a short article, but as we passed through the various rooms our guide brought humour into his tales with snippets of information. In the House of Commons there is a carpet with a red stripe around it. In days gone by when members were debating they would cross the floor and strike the offending fellow. That was not acceptable behaviour so a width of 2 sword lengths plus 1 inch was introduced



so members were kept apart. In modern times the carpet with the red strip is the barrier not to cross the floor, hence the saying 'toe the line'.

Behind the speakers chair is a very large green felt bag. Before technology arrived, constituencies who wished to have a question raised in the house by their M.P. would have it delivered to the House. It would be then placed in this bag to be read out by the nominated person, this method has long gone, but the saying 'in the bag' came from this procedure. In the Royal Gallery our guide stopped to tell us about two very important paintings. The Battle of Trafalgar and The Death of Nelson. Speaking of the latter he described the role of women on board, who lived with various crew members. In the course of time they would become pregnant and with no private quarters of their own, the main deck was their delivery room. The other women would use blankets to make a shield tied to the guns on deck. The baby would be born and another well-known saying came about 'he's a son of a gun'

The Great Hall now called, Westminster Hall has a quiet emptiness compared with its previous use for coronation banquets, the last being George IV. It is now used for great parliamentary and royal ceremonies, the last one being the Lying in State of Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother. Here history must stand still until our next visit. Our tour ended and we were out into the hustle and bustle of London life. Members took off to their various venues or to stroll and soak up the wonderful weather along the embankment. A short walk over Waterloo Bridge took us to Somerset House to see The Gilbert Collection, a fabulous Exhibition of great craftsmanship in English silver, mosaics, gold boxes, portrait miniatures, art enamel and furniture. The collection was formed over four decades by Sir Arthur Gilbert, a Londoner who moved

to California in 1949 and made this extraordinary gift to the nation in 1996. He wished to give it to the country of his birth. With the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund this preeminent collection is beauti-

world famous art collection of the Courtauld Institute Gallery, the Gilbert Collection and the Hermitage Rooms. There is an ongoing programme of exhibitions, workshops and seminars on changing



fully housed in over 17 galleries and is a perfect setting for the Nation's treasures. I do recommend you visit when possible.

Somerset House, built in 1547 and rebuilt in 1775 by Sir William Chambers for George III. The building is now fully open to the public for art and cultural exhibitions, after extensive renovations. This magnificent building is the inspirational setting for the

themes. The Courtyard and Edmond J Safra Dancing Fountain Court are at the centre of Somerset House and provide a venue for open-air events.

Our time was now over and the coach departed at 4.45 pm. A steady drive brought us home to Dover by 6.45 pm and our farewells were said. Our thanks to Joan for another splendid day out.