they even provided small plastic bags as we entered the house, to prevent rain from our umbrellas dripping on the carpets! It is very much a country gentleman's house, three or four storeys high to accommodate the rolling landscape to which it clings, but not over large, with many small passage ways and staircases leading hither and thither to the neat and elegant principal rooms. These are all furnished with mementos of the family kindly donated by Clementine, Churchill's wife, when history turned the family home into a shrine. Even on a dull day, the house is light and airy, thanks to the architect Phillip Tilden whose work of renovation and extension from 1922 to 1924, cost three times as much as the original purchase price but was money well spent. Even on a dull day, the overall impression is one of light, especially in the dining room, part of the 1922 extension, and in Churchill's study at the top of the old house, where exposure of the ancient beams and rafters created a large, double height room worthy of its distinguished occupant. And everywhere, spectacular views across rolling English countryside.

Clemmie, unlike Churchill, was constantly worried about the expense of keeping up the house and gardens and soon after the end of the second world war, wealthy well-wishers combined to buy the house and pass it to The National Trust on condition that the two should be able to live out their days there. Ironically, soon afterwards, Churchill's writings on the war made him a rich man.

Some brave souls ventured into the gardens to see the studio, where a further selection of Churchill's paintings remain on display. Others repaired to the restaurant where a lucky few were in time for the delicious lunchtime selection of hot meals. A content and grateful party made its way back home. Never, as Jeremy Cope said of Joan Liggett, our organiser and leader, in the field of social outings, had so many owed so much to one woman.

To Celebrate Sea Britain 2005

Trip to the Historic Dockyard, Chatham

Reported by Merril Lilley

THE DOVER SOCIETY TRIP to Chatham Dockyard on Saturday, 9th July, was a great success. The coach left Dover at 9.15a.m. and arrived at Chatham at 10.30a.m., where we had an hour and a half to ourselves before starting our guided tour.

The Society had a trip to Chatham in 1996 and there were several changes since that visit. There is always plenty to see at Chatham Dockyard and, while our tour could not include everything, we packed a great deal into our time there.

We started with a visit to the exhibition of 17 lifeboats, a new addition to the site, and then looked at the ship quays, where there are three vessels open to the public. Here can be seen the Cavalier, the last surviving destroyer of the Royal Navy, built in 1944 and decommissioned in 1972. It occupies the dock where Nelson's Victory was built. The Cavalier spent a

RNLB *Susan Ashley* - one of a class four 41ft lifeboats built for slipway launching

H.M.S. Cavalier the last of the WWII Destroyers

lot of its time in the Arctic and on the open bridge the men worked in freezing conditions. Alongside is the submarine, Ocelot, built in Chatham in 1962 and decommissioned in 1991, now in a dry dock. The next dock holds H.M.S. Gannet, the last remaining sloop of Queen Victoria's navy, built in 1878. Its last use was as a training ship.


Paddle Steamer Kingswear Castle

At one o'clock we joined the paddle steamer, Kingswear Castle, for a 40 minute trip on the Medway and the sun came out briefly for the first time that day. On landing our party went on board the Cavalier to the officers' ward room for a brief talk about the vessel.

From here we proceeded to the Ropery, which our guide regarded as the highlight of the visit. He entertained us throughout with bad jokes which kept us amused. He was very enthusiastic and obviously enjoyed his job. A tour of the Ropery needs an hour to see everything from the first spinning of the yarn to the final production of the rope.

Originally all rope was made of hemp. Now man-made fibres are used as well as the natural fibres of manila, sisal and coir. 34 miles of yarn are needed to make one single 3 inch rope. We saw every step of the process. Whereas many changes occurred in the spinning of fibres to yarn, the process of making the yarn to rope has hardly altered since first used at Chatham in 1811. In fact, some of the


The Gannet - last surviving sloop of Victoria's navy

original machines are still in use. The basic principles date back to the Egyptians. At one point our guide 'roped in' two of our party to help him make a piece of rope, with the two helpers turning large wheels at either end of the rack. Three thin strands of fibre twisted into one, three times, and then the three resulting strands into a rope of synthetic hemp, which he then donated to the Society.

Finally, after passing through each stage, explained with the help of scenes set up with figures in period costume, one emerges into the final building at ground level, the Ropewalk, almost a quarter of a mile long. This is a magnificent sight, even more interesting because the rope makers are still using the original method and machines. As one approaches the exit there is on display a piece of the biggest rope ever made, a cable-laid manila, 24 inches thick and made of 3456 threads.


24" thick cable-laid manila


The Commissioner's house

Time was passing quickly and we made a brief visit to the Commissioner's garden, established in the seventeenth century.

His splendid house was built in 1703 and is used now for functions. There was a wedding party there at the time we visited. We had our delicious cream teas in an annexe of the house, originally the servant's quarters, leaving us just enough time to visit the shop on our way back to the coach, which left at five o'clock.

It was a fascinating, though exhausting, day. Many thanks to Joan Liggett for her usual efficient organisation.