

# SOCIETY OUTING

## QUEBEC HOUSE

LORRAINE SENCICLE

Not far from Chartwell is Quebec House, the childhood home of Sir General James Wolfe (1727-1759) and now owned by the National Trust. I was particularly interested in this part of our trip for my interest in General James Wolfe stemmed from when I was preparing the case against a proposed development on Western Heights back in the late 1980's, early 1990's. The main thrust of my argument was about the historic fortifications and I drew parallels with those in Quebec, Canada. The latter are located within a World Heritage Site, a designation given in 1985. In English history, James Wolfe is synonymous with Quebec and I had every reason to believe that the General was in Dover prior to the Quebec campaign - the trip to Westerham confirmed this.

General Wolfe was born at the vicarage in Westerham, Kent, the elder of two sons of Lieutenant-General Edward Wolfe (1685-1759) and his wife, Henrietta (d.1764). The family moved along the road in 1726 to what was then called the Spiers but was renamed Quebec House following the famous battle. The redbrick edifice, which



*James Wolfe*  
Courtesy of the National Trust

Edward Wolfe rented until 1738, was originally built between 1530 and 1550. The first building was an L-shaped timber framed house but it was altered in the 1630's to a 'double pile' house, popular at that time. In the 18th century the front wall of the house was replaced with a parapet façade but by the 1880s the house was divided in two. One part became Quebec House West and was used as a school.

The National Trust has recreated Quebec House in the Georgian style, so that the rooms display furniture and artefacts that belonged to the Wolfe family. One room held particular fascination for both Alan, my husband, and myself, as it was a depository of papers, pictures and maps appertaining to the events that led up to the historic Battle of Quebec.

In a separate room was a detailed exhibition and film of the General's military career, with particular reference to the Battle of Quebec. It was here that another member of the Dover Society, John Morgan, pointed out the confirmation that I was desperately seeking on General Wolfe's connection with Dover. Without doubt, this was the

highlight of my visit. I was, however, saddened to read what one visitor had written that a visit was *'not really worth the trouble ... I would have thought the NT should be looking to get shot of it.'*

Even though at other times there are participation demonstrations on 18th century cooking, quilting, being an 18th century soldier etc., these were not available on the day we visited. Nonetheless, there was much to see and enjoy. Unlike Chartwell, where there was a *'no photographs and no touching policy,'* at Quebec House there were a number of well informed volunteers around who encouraged hands-on with many of the artefacts. The thought of climbing the Heights of Abraham at Quebec, carrying one of the guns that I was encouraged to handle and then trying to aim straight and fire, was a feat that I will not forget in a hurry!

For those not so interested in the minute of details to do with Wolfe and Quebec or the different aspects of a Jacobean households there is a pretty garden that is a recreation of what it would have



*Quebec House*

been like in the days of the Wolfe's residency. It is well stocked with cooking ingredients and flowers and not only was it delightful but tranquil after the tourist infested Chartwell gardens! Although we did not have time, being so caught up elsewhere, to enjoy the home-made cakes from the tearoom, other Society members did and gave favourable reports.

As for General Wolfe's connection with Dover! Around 1753-1754, he was stationed at Dover Castle when discussions were taking place to convert it from a medieval stronghold to an 18th century artillery fortress. Following Wolfe's stay there extensive alterations took place including:

- The defence of the landward approaches from the north and east;
- Lowering the towers between Fitzwilliam Gate and Avranches Tower to give guns a field of fire;
- The building of a number of batteries in front of the Motes Bulwark. All of which can still be seen today.



*Handling a rifle used in the Battle of Quebec*