

A 40-minute coach ride through lovely Kent countryside brought us to the vineyard which was named after the nearby church. 129

In 1979 German vintners brought some of their vines and helped plant the sheltered south-facing, gently sloping, cow pasture with rows of vines. They showed our hosts how to cultivate and care for the fruits which eventually produced a variety of wines.

Questions were a-plenty and all were patiently answered. Q: "Why are rose bushes growing at the ends of the rows?" A: "Because they act as disease detectors".

From the field we moved into the cool winery, full of strange receptacles, pipes and gauges. Whereas the field-work is very labour intensive, the winemaking is less so, but it is a most precise science.

After following the grapethrough its journey from crusher to bottle, we adjourned to a table under a shady tree where we sampled several very palatable and distinctive wines. These are great achievements, in spite of the lack of government interest and the imposition of VAT and excise duty. Quite the reverse of their EEC counterparts!

There was much musical clinking as we left the winery shop and strolled back to our coach.

I haven't mentioned the spirit? Nor, have I? Well, the spirit we did not see. We were told he was a 29-year old Elizabethan gentleman and is to be seen occasionally in the 400-year old house and outbuildings, and answers to the name of 'Henry'!

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## *The Historic Dockyard*

at CHATHAM \_\_\_\_\_ PETER BURVILLE

On a sunny day in June thirty-seven members of the Society set off on the leisurely trip to Chatham for a quite fascinating day exploring the historic dockyard. On our way it was a pleasure to see the delightful blue flowers of the flax in the fields we passed: such a pleasant contrast to the aggressive yellow of the rape so evident earlier in the year.

Arriving at Chatham we turned into the car park and saw a vast deserted area with no obvious pattern in its layout. At the reception area we were briefed by a "host", then left to our own devices; for some it was talk-talk whilst for others it was walk-walk. We chose an anti-clockwise tour starting at the Wooden Walls Gallery. These adapted sheds provide a wonderful setting for entertaining and instructive exhibits, telling the story of an 18th century apprentice at the yard. Lots of information and statistics were given by the audio-visual system as we progressed round the various sections. With the Rio Environment meeting still fresh in our minds, it was thought-provoking to hear that Chatham ship-building had required some seventy-five acres of 80-year old oak trees for

130 each ship. Men of twenty-six trades turned the timber into war-machines, that look so attractive to twentieth century eyes, perhaps also to our ancestors. A 64-gun craft required a crew of 650 men. Doubtless those press-ganged into service would not have seen much beauty in the wooden walls. One of the well-illustrated trades was that of the caulker who plugged the gaps between planks and timbers with oakum and sealed it with pitch to make the craft waterproof. Was it in Dickens that I read of prisoners picking old rope to make the oakum or was it part of the Old Dover Gaol rehabilitation programme?

Leaving the gallery we passed by the dry docks where the 100+ year old sloop *Gannet* is being restored. In the Store House complex the displays of household goods, covering a range of decades, held nostalgia for people of a certain age – at least so I was told! It was a pleasure to be able to look round the docks and buildings without being jostled by hordes of people.

By good fortune we found ourselves at the Ropery when an example of rope-making was being given in the 1128 feet long rope-walk shed. Seeing the wheeled trolley, with its cone for weaving the rope, rattle down the length of the shed, twisting three ropes into a larger one, was hardly my idea of a walk. As the machinery dated from 1811 it is obviously some time since the ropes were "walked" hereabouts. The process was most impressive.

The dockyard is well supplied with watering holes. At the Historical Society Museum, located in the Lead and Paint Mill, we were offered tea and cakes at competitive prices. Whilst sipping our tea, members of the voluntary society were only too keen to tell us tales about the yard when it employed 23,000 and more people. Also we heard of their efforts to rescue items for the museum and of the 100 yard long bonfire of dockyard material which burnt for two years – doubtless some interesting objects were sent to the big archive in the sky.

After the refreshments we had a look around the museum and made a brief visit to the cellar to see the, disappointingly, recent-written, archives. Then we set off on our way back to the Visitor Centre but there was still lots to see. At the Sail and Colour Loft we admired the products of skilled craftsmen but were surprised to be offered a Union Jack when we requested the English flag! In the Ordnance Gallery we were impressed by the cannons, which we were reliably informed, were technically, guns. Why is it that yester-year's machines of war look so attractive whilst today's weapons look so frightening? However, we also found the eighteenth century Timber Seasoning Houses charming.

After more refreshments, at the very passable Wheelwrights Restaurant, we all clambered into the coach to be greeted and counted by Merrill. We were reminded about half-price revisits on production of our passes, and perhaps some of us will revisit the dockyard, for there is certainly a lot to be seen.

May I echo the thanks that were given to Merrill and all those involved in organising the trip. During the quieter moments of the return journey, people doubtless reflected on what they had seen at the dockyard: the wooden walls have now gone, as have most of the steel walls; even the chalk walls to which we were heading have been slighted. Δ