

# WESTERHAM WOLFE WEEKEND

12<sup>TH</sup> AND 13<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009



250<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF  
THE BATTLE OF QUEBEC

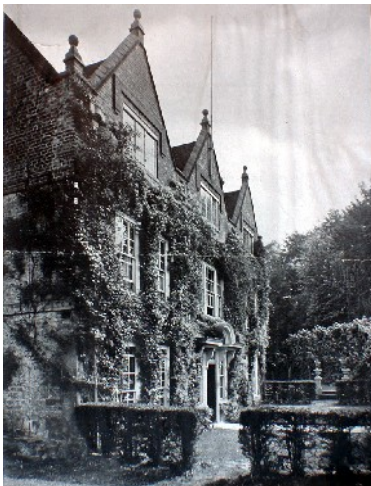


# WESTERHAM WOLFE WEEKEND

## 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wolfe's death at Quebec

*The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Awaits alike th'inevitable hour,  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave  
(From Gray's Elegy in a Country Churchyard)*

Major General James Wolfe commanded the British land forces in the historic victory over the French at Quebec, in September 1759, but sadly perished in the battle. He led his forces in small boats down the St Lawrence River in secret at night, and climbed a steep, narrow path up a 180ft cliff, to be deployed in battle formation at dawn on the Heights of Abraham, in front of the city of Quebec. The French, taken by surprise, made a hasty attack which was repulsed by the British due to their superior discipline and weapon handling. The battle only lasted 15 minutes, and the British went on to capture the city. The French commander, the Marquis de Montcalm, also died of wounds sustained in the battle. The Battle of Quiberon Bay in the Bay of Biscay, which took place two months later, was also relevant to the campaign as a whole. The French fleet was virtually destroyed, making them unable to resupply their forces across the Atlantic.



James Wolfe was born in Westerham, where his parents lived in a house called Spiers, now known as Quebec House. A close friend was George Warde, whose family lived, and still lives, at Squerryes Court. Wolfe received his first commission, at the age of 14, while visiting his friend at Squerryes, and a cenotaph stands in the grounds to mark the spot where it is thought to have been delivered to him. He was a brilliant soldier, and saw active service in a variety of theatres, including Dettingen in Bavaria (1743) during the War of the Spanish Succession, Culloden in

Scotland (1746) at which the Jacobite Rebellion was finally put down, and Louisbourg in North America (1758). To commemorate the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory at Quebec, Wolfe's death, and his connections with Westerham and the Warde family, a celebration was held on the weekend of 12/13<sup>th</sup> September 2009, the 13<sup>th</sup> being the actual date of the battle.

The idea for a Westerham Wolfe Weekend arose from discussions between John Rawlinson, Custodian of Quebec House, and Anthea Warde of Squerryes, who wished especially to involve the whole community of Westerham. The concept was supported by the Parish Council, which



provided the initial funding. The celebration was centred on Quebec House and Squerryes. Quebec House is a National Trust property, devoted to Wolfe memorabilia. Squerryes Court is a fine Carolean house on the outskirts of Westerham, with a long sloping lawn, leading to a sizeable lake; behind the

house are well laid out formal gardens. It is a very beautiful place. John and Anthea Warde, the current owners, generously allowed it to be used for the occasion.

John Rawlinson arranged a special exhibition at Quebec House, including an original of the Benjamin West painting of the death of Wolfe, borrowed from the collection at Ickworth, a National Trust property in Suffolk, formerly the home of the Hervey family (Marquesses of Bristol). Joshua Reynolds said that West's painting "would become one of the most successful, and occasion a revolution in art". Its popularity helped to immortalise Wolfe's memory. The 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is the first time that the 8ft x 6ft canvas has been displayed in Westerham.







During the weekend's celebrations re-enactors from the Mannered Mob, in period costume, demonstrated to visitors at Quebec House what domestic life for General Wolfe's family would have been like. A guard representing the different regiments of both Armies patrolled the grounds, whilst visitors were allowed to handle and learn more about the equipment and weapons

which soldiers used at the time of the Quebec campaign.

Jill Tookey, founder and artistic director of the National Youth Ballet of Great Britain, lives in Westerham, and had arranged for a special ballet, entitled "Soldiers Three", to be presented by the NYB's "Company of Players" in the manner of 18<sup>th</sup> Century theatre.



The ballet was commissioned by the Westerham Wolfe Weekend and the National Trust as a "piece d'occasion" for the event. The ballet, choreographed by Anna Meadmore, was set to mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century music by William Boyce and

John Marsh, and Songs of the Redcoats. The ballet depicted scenes from the childhood and youth of James Wolfe and his brother Edward, and George Warde, their childhood friend. On the Saturday evening a reception was held in the garden at Squerryes, with wine brought from the Montcalm vineyards in the South of France, followed by a formal dinner in a marquee, at which the beautifully costumed ballet was performed against a stunning set designed by Ashton Taylor-Smith. It was a magical experience. The Lord Lieutenant of Kent and the Deputy High Commissioner of Canada attended the dinner. The Lord Lieutenant made a speech in which he described General Wolfe's career, his qualities and his association with Westerham.

An exhibition was staged at Squerries Court by David Boston, a retired professional museum curator, and formerly honorary curator of Quebec House, also resident in Westerham. It featured the Wolfe memorabilia bequeathed to George Warde by James's mother, Henrietta, as well as her own celebrated cookery book. For the first time there was an opportunity to see the large volume of James Wolfe's original letters, with selected transcripts, alongside facsimiles of the secret instructions for the Quebec Expedition from

George II, preserved in the Kent County Archives. Besides the paintings from the Wolfe Room at Squerries, including Benjamin West originals, the 1300 visitors examined the facsimile of James Cook's great chart of the St Lawrence River, underlining the part played by the Royal Navy, and admired the gleaming display of silver, normally only seen at the Wolfe Society's annual dinner (which dates back to 1760/1761 in origin).



**Young Wolfe examining plans for the Battle of Blenheim.**



School, the primary school in Westerham, on the theme of James Wolfe and Native American culture, resulting from their special arts week.

As a framework for the events which took place in front of the house, a Fair consisting of some 40 stalls was established down the sides of the lawn. The Fair included a hog roast, entertainment for the children, traders, charity, food and drink stalls and an art exhibition by Churchill

An arena was thus formed by the stalls and tents down each side of the lawn, and the lake at the end, for spectators in front of the house.





Another group of re-enactors, known as New France Old England, dressed in appropriate uniforms correct in every detail, gave demonstrations of weapons, equipment and tactics of the period.



On the Saturday, they re-enacted the battle of Montmorency Falls, which took place about three weeks before the action at Quebec, and at which the French were the victors.



On Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September, 250 years to the day, they re-enacted the historic battle on The Heights of Abraham at which Wolfe died.



The Portsmouth Model Boat Display Team staged a re-enactment of the Battle of Quiberon Bay on Squerryes lake.

Fully rigged remote-controlled scale models up to 8 ft in length moved around and fired their cannon, to devastating effect







The National Youth Ballet's Junior Associate Dancers, aged under 12 years, gave a display "Ship Ahoy", and pupils from Churchill School participated in a fit to dance workshop, featuring Native American movements taught by NYB Outreach teachers, and were then joined by members of the general public. The local Sea Cadets' band gave performances, and live music was provided by the Edenbridge Town Band and a group from Surrey called The Beamers.



The re-enactors had set up camp in a field nearby, with tents from the period, and cooked over open fires in 18<sup>th</sup> century pots. The public was free to roam around the camp, and re-enactors were on hand to describe such things as camp routine in those days, the sort of food which would have been eaten and how it was cooked. British and French soldiers could also be seen practising drill and

cleaning their weapons, while First Nation warriors were completing their war paint. The camp provided a memorable sight, particularly in the early morning with wood smoke rising from the cooking fires. During the Saturday evening the re-enactors were around the town, with their wives also in period dress, which generated a great deal of interest and incidentally advertised the event to anyone who did not already know about it.



On the Sunday morning a memorial service took place in St Mary's Church. 18<sup>th</sup> Century liturgy was used, and in addition to the regular church choir,



psalms and anthems from the period were sung by the Thomas Clark Quire, a Kentish "West Gallery" group, wearing 18<sup>th</sup> century costume. The names of the Regiments which took part in the battle, both French and English, were read out by re-enactors in the appropriate uniforms. Wolfe's fiancée, Miss Katharine Lowther, had given him a copy of Gray's *Elegy in a*

*Country Churchyard* shortly before the campaign, and he is recorded as saying that he would have preferred to have been the author than to be the victor in the coming battle. Extracts from the poem were read at the service.



After the service wreaths were laid at Wolfe's statue on the Green, in memory of those who fell in the battle on both sides. The Vice Lord Lieutenant of Kent, the High Sheriff of Kent and the Deputy High Commissioner of Canada attended the service.

Having defined the concept of the event, Anthea Warde and John Rawlinson gathered volunteers from the community to put it into effect. Anthea herself and Pam White, the administrator at Squerryes, made all the arrangements at Squerryes; Jill Tookey arranged the ballet; David Boston put together the exhibition inside Squerryes; Paul McVeagh the Vicar designed and conducted the service; John Edwards organised the Fair and arranged the model boat event; Mark Mountjoy and Ashton Taylor-Smith set up the dinner; Catharine Boston, who is a governor of Churchill School, was behind its exhibition; Jacs Taylor-Smith promoted the event in Westerham; Stuart Merrylees did all the signposting; Richard Woolnough was the PA announcer. John Rawlinson, apart from chairing the committee and setting up the Quebec House exhibition, also arranged the participation of both groups of re-enactors. Shops in Westerham devised special window displays, and the Library also gave support.

The event was primarily intended to commemorate a very important historical occasion, particularly for the people of Westerham, but it had been agreed that any surplus funds would be donated to the charity Help for Heroes. Despite there being no entrance fee to Squerryes or Quebec House, a surplus was achieved, and in addition there were collections for the charity. The total sum raised was £5700.



The Weekend was sandwiched between two other events, which although not part of it, also commemorated the anniversary. On the Thursday the Royal Society of Medicine, in conjunction with the Royal College of Surgeons and the Society of Apothecaries, held a conference at Squerryes to explore and contrast the state of battlefield medicine in 1759 and 2009. It included a demonstration by re-enactors of the effect of musket balls penetrating water melons representing human flesh. They chose this date to commemorate the anniversary.



On the following Monday, the Wolfe Society held its annual dinner to honour the pious and immortal memory of James Wolfe. This is normally held in Westerham, but in this special anniversary year it was held in the Grand Hall of Chelsea Hospital, and the principal guest and speaker was the Duke of York.



The feedback from the event has been universally favourable, with some charming letters and emails. A retired history teacher wrote to say that she thought “it was quite wonderful: a glorious mix of fun, theatre, spectacle, sound history and good eating and drinking. And the setting was so beautiful.” A member of the Youth Ballet emailed to say “It was really exciting to be part of a new ballet and in the first cast to perform it. When we danced at Squerryes Court it all made perfect sense. It was a very special experience to perform at the dinner, knowing that everyone there knew the story, and that some of the guests were direct descendants of the people we were playing”.



An 8 year old said that he thought Quebec House was wonderful! He loved it and learned a lot. A representative of the Royal Sussex Regiment (descended from the 35<sup>th</sup> of Foot) emailed to say “I went to the service at St Mary's, laid a wreath and then came on to see the display in Quebec House. Excellent, including the chance to see the picture of Wolfe's death which you borrowed from Ickworth. Then went on in the afternoon to Squerryes for the battle re-enactments: altogether one of the best days in my life”.

Over the whole weekend, there were about 3,500 visitors to Squerryes and over 1,000 to Quebec House. A total of 120 re-enactors, 19 ballet dancers and 3 film crews participated. Overall, the general feeling was that justice was done to General Wolfe, to the victory at Quebec, and to the memory of those involved, on both sides.

The victory at Quebec was a significant milestone in the land battle against the French in North America, as was the naval Battle of Quiberon Bay. These two victories, on land and sea, were turning points in the Seven Years' War, and in establishing Britain's dominance in North America. They were followed by the Treaty of Paris (1763), which largely determined the future of the continent.