

## Tour of Old Portsmouth

On April 17<sup>th</sup> a small group of members travelled to Portsmouth for a walk of the old town led by committee member and maritime historian, Brian Lavery. In a departure from our usual mode of travel by coach, most of us went by train. Disruption on the line meant we arrived at Portsmouth Harbour over an hour behind schedule, requiring a swift change of plan and cancellation of our pub lunch booking. Fortunately Sarah Lavery had preceded us by car, and, thanks to her forethought and generosity, sandwiches were waiting for us when we arrived at Portsmouth's Prêt à Manger. The day was saved and we had time to complete the afternoon's tour as planned.

And what a marvellous tour it was, greatly enhanced by Brian's comprehensive knowledge of Portsmouth Old Town - its history, buildings, characters and literary references. We trod in the steps of Fanny Price of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*. We stood by the Common Hard, where the Baltic Fleet set off for the Crimean War. We passed Buckingham House, where the Duke of Buckingham was murdered in 1628. We walked Nelson's last walk, taking in the George Inn where he ate his last on-shore breakfast and the beach where he boarded the barge to convey him to HMS Victory. We even climbed the winding stone steps of the Round Tower (well most of us did), where families waved goodbye to sailors off on deployment. The walk ended at Portsmouth Point with a cup of tea and a panoramic view of the harbour at the Still and West pub. It's not every day you can watch several ferries and a Royal Navy minehunter sail by as you drink your tea.

Portsmouth is an integral part of our maritime story, past and present. But, as we discovered, there is much more to the town than its Historic Dockyard and the ferry to the Isle of Wight, significant though these are. The Old Town walk was a great day out. Travelling by train instead of coach was a mixed experience, but still worth considering for future trips of small groups to accessible places. One bonus was the opportunity to chat to other members - and not just because we bonded over the chaos on the rails. Several of us plan to go back under our own steam and do the walk again. Very many thanks to Brian and Sarah for organising a memorable trip.