The Other Jarrow Crusade

**Synopsis**

**Chapter 1: Sir John Jarvis**

Joe Jarvis was born into an Enfield business-owning family, the modest building firm Jarvis’s. He was youngest of eight children and entered the family business at age fifteen. He was something of a business prodigy, with high levels of mathematical and analytical skills. He quickly rose to control the business and managed its exceptional growth. At 31, he was its Chief Executive, a mercurial business figure whose business and commercial interests developed widely.

His reputation and influence outgrew Jarvis’s and he became active in the City and banking. He was a government advisor during the First World War and afterwards. He was, as Sir John Jarvis, created a Baronet in 1922. He later became Guildford MP in 1935.

His character is humble, while as a business leader he is courageous and enlightened. His energetic approach to life sees him involved in a wide range of sports, while his generous attitude, founded in deep-seated Christian faith, sees him become a philanthropist. He moves to the grand surroundings of Hascombe Court in Surrey. There, he develops a wide social and political circle. In 1934, he becomes Surrey’s High Sheriff. At his inauguration, he undertakes to carry out a grand project that will benefit his country. It will be a life-changing promise.

Conditions of poverty in the north of England are brought to his attention, and it is suggested he helps out in some way. He discovers that the most deprived area in England is Jarrow. He travels there incognito and is stunned to discover the scale of the deprivation.

**Chapter 2: Looking Back**

Galvanised by the experience, he launches a major scheme in 1934 to help revitalise the town. In its vanguard is the Surrey Fund, a high-profile cash collection aimed at the immediate relief of the town’s poverty. The Surrey Fund heralds an extensive plan for creating economic regeneration.

Sir John reflected on these measures when he was invited back to the town to mark the tenth anniversary of his schemes. He delivered two speeches in 1944, putting into context his social and economic plans. He talked about the social distress he encountered in a speech to a church congregation. He recounted the economic conditions in a speech a month later in the House of Commons.

**Chapter 3: The Surrey Fund**

It is targeted at household decoration, sports facilities, a new park, and other renewal projects. The Fund raises from the people of Surrey by subscription nearly £40,000, in 1934 money.

Jarrow marks the gesture by taking a stone from Bede’s Saxon monastery, inscribing it with the town’s name and presenting it to Guildford Cathedral where it is still in place.

The sports stadium it created became Monkton Stadium, which produced nationally famous athletes, including Steve Cram.

**Chapter 4: The Wider Scheme**

The project becomes a preoccupation of Sir John. He puts in about £1 million of his personal fortune, buying plant, machinery, and contracts for new works. He travels the world to identify business opportunities for the town.

He buys two Atlantic blue-ribbon liners, the Olympic and Berengaria, creating ship-breaking work and supplying scrap metal for new steelworks. He creates a tubeworks and other industries. His work attracts much publicity, bringing in other investment and jobs, By 1938, Jarrow is no longer identified as a deprived area.

**Chapter 5: Sir John Jarvis and Ellen Wilkinson: brother and sister**

The desperation of Jarrow in 1934 was chronicled by Ellen Wilkinson in her book, ‘The Town That Was Murdered’. She championed Jarrow’s cause in Parliament. She and Sir John were both elected to Parliament in 1935. With sharply contrasting backgrounds, and constituencies, they nevertheless collaborated closely in support of Jarrow.

Sir John remarked that in that single respect, they were brother and sister. It was a wry comment that Jarrow had two MPs.

In 1936 new events led to the Jarrow March. The March, of course, became a symbol of the times, not because of its protest but because of the post-war social dignity it inspired.

**Chapter 6: Guilty Men**

The March and other events developed in response to the political and economic damage that had wrecked hope. The President of the Board of Trade, Walter Runciman, oversaw two industry cartels instrumental in generating that wreckage. A shipbuilding cartel, run by James Lithgow had put 80 per cent of men out of work, and a steel cartel, run by Andrew Duncan stood in the way of their getting any back.

These collusions led directly to the Jarrow March. Attempts by Sir John Jarvis to put together a syndicate of businessmen and banks to save Jarrow were run aground by the Guilty Men.

**Chapter 7: The Fight for the Steelworks**

The development of a major new Bessamer Steelworks was at the core of Sir John Jarvis’s efforts. He invested much of his time, energy, money, and reputation into achieving it. Defeat was something he was unaccustomed to, and it was a bitter and ironic pill that it was his own political contemporaries that undermined him.

His impassioned parliamentary speeches in its support fell on deaf ears. Though the town marched, little changed.

**Chapter 8: Sir John Jarvis’s Legacy**

Sir John left a lasting legacy on the development of the town, but as a rich Surrey businessman who was also a Conservative MP, that legacy has been wretchedly undervalued by the town’s successive political elites.

It is particularly sad because Sir John’s story deserves the recognition of an age that has lost many of the values that so motivated him. He demonstrates to us a level of personal commitment and determination rarely seen in modern times, when good Samaritans seem thin on the road.

**Chapter 9: Conclusion**

Sir John’s ‘Crusade’ in support of Jarrow shared the inspiration of the Jarrow Marchers’ own ‘Crusade’, in drawing attention to the town’s plight and trying to do something about it. Though they took different paths they shared the same direction.