

TRIP TO BRITAIN 2000



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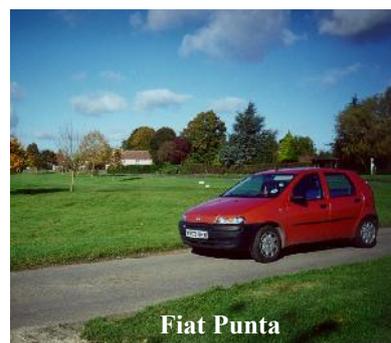
1 GENERAL

The trip this year lasted just over 4 weeks duration and although I have been to Britain several times before, the last visit was a long time ago so it was interesting to go again. As well as re-visiting some places, I also went to many new places. Note that the visit was to *Britain* (i.e., England, Scotland and Wales) and not the *United Kingdom* (which also includes Northern Ireland).

The places visited are shown on the map on the front page. The trip started in London (2 nights). I then spent 15 days touring around England and the north of Wales by rental car. There was not enough time to get up to Scotland. I then returned to London for the remaining 5 days before returning to Hong Kong.

Because normal airfares are quite expensive to Britain, it is more economical to get a package tour and extend the stay. My package was for 2 nights in London flying with Virgin Atlantic Airways. The visit was extended on a 'do-it-yourself' basis. Flying Virgin Atlantic had two advantages: It's packages are cheaper than similar ones with British Airways or Cathay Pacific, and the airline is also a member of Star Alliance so I could credit miles to my Air NZ flying mileage scheme.

The rental car was a Fiat Punta (1100 cc) – small but extremely economical (petrol is expensive, being just slightly cheaper than in HK); it would do about 48 miles per litre! It also had plenty of power; with 90 mph on motorways being no problem, though I didn't do that often. It was also much cheaper to hire than expected (only about £18 per day all inclusive) and was actually cheaper booking it in HK rather than in London. I couldn't help noticing that most cars on the roads in Britain are small now, as people cannot afford to run large cars anymore. Travelling by road was not too difficult even though I only had only a one-page map without much detail. There are three kinds of classified roads – motorways, 'A' roads (which range from almost motorway standard to 'B' road standard) and 'B' roads (which are two way, narrow and often windy are frequently bordered by hedges making it difficult to see if vehicles are approaching). I depended a lot on signposts for directions. The sign posting on 'B' roads was the worst and I got lost a number of times (particularly as most of these roads were not on my map). Occasional wrong turns were made on motorways too especially at 'spaghetti' junctions when I had to make several transfers in quick succession. At high speed with other cars breathing down your neck, there is sometimes little time to decide if a turn is correct, particularly if the place names on the signs are different from those expected or wanted.



Accommodation was at Bed and Breakfasts. More convenient than Youth Hostels as they are everywhere and in *most* cases were not too difficult to find. Costs comparable too to

Youth Hostels. About £15-16 per day (including breakfast) at a Youth Hostel; £20 average for Bed and Breakfasts. Except for two or three places, the accommodation was very nice indeed, with many of them having en-suites. Except for London, all the B & Bs had a full English breakfast – juice, toast with butter and jam, choice of cereal, milk, tea or coffee (or sometimes hot chocolate) and the main course of bacon, eggs, sausages, tomatoes and often mushrooms and baked beans. Returns on everything but the main course. Great! Because of these breakfasts, lunch was sometimes skipped. The London places had only a ‘Continental’ breakfast – as above but without the main course.

The weather was not bad at all. Cool of course, but fine most of the time. There was a severe storm and flooding in the South-East which I missed. While in London at the end of the trip, there was also a very severe storm which didn’t effect London much (though the winds made a mess of my foldable umbrella) though they put all train to the South of London out of action. On returning to Hong Kong, I saw on TV that many places I had been to were having very severe floods, so I left just in time! During the day, most of the time I wore only a sweatshirt (long-sleeved T-shirt) though occasionally, and especially at night, I wore a jacket – the one that Gavin gave to me.

To visit places, I bought a ‘British Heritage’ Pass. This cost £60 and was valid for one month but allowed free access to over 600 properties (except for the Tower of London which is half price). This pass covers all the British Isles in contrast to the English Heritage Pass (which we had in 1990) which is only for England (but now does not include the Tower of London). Even though only one site was visited that was not in England, the pass was worth it. I managed to get £150 of value though were places I would not have bothered going to if I did not have the pass.

2 A bomb scare in London!

The flight from HK at 11:00 p.m. (late!) on Monday, October 9th. Arrived in London about 13 hours later very early in the morning. Immigration again slow. Hundreds of people and few directions to which queue to get into. The company selling the package laid on a bus (free but a £3 tip required!). The journey into London took about 90 minutes. After checking in at the hotel (a 1000-room place of dubious quality), the company provided a free orientation bus tour of London (again free but a ‘tip’ required) which was actually not too bad even though I had been seen many of the places several times. It began with the older ‘City’ of London including St. Paul’s Cathedral and the Tower of London and then the Westminster area including Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament and Buckingham Palace.

After the tour, we were all dropped off in the centre of London. Had something to eat at McDonald’s and visited their loo. London does not seem to have many public loos – at least when you need one – but all McDonald’s





Piccadilly Circus and the statue of Eros

have them! Walked down to Piccadilly Circus and the statue of Eros (Cupid). Then down to New Zealand House. Unfortunately, they no longer allow NZ passport holders onto the roof for security reasons. A pity, as one gets an excellent view of London from the roof. From there down to Trafalgar Square and St Martins-in-Fields Church (of music fame – just missed a lunchtime concert) and the brass rubbing centre in its basement. Then slowly back to the hotel. Checked in at the car rental company ('Budget') which, conveniently, had a branch in the hotel building. Then a walk around in the early evening for

something cheap! to eat. There are many small but good places offering takeaway or eat-in food including things such as fish and chips, salads, kebabs and pita bread. After eating, wandered around and ended up at King's Cross looking for possible Bed and Breakfasts to stay at after returning from the tour around the country.

Good sleep followed by a continental breakfast the next morning. Off then with the first stop being a supermarket to buy food for lunch – French bread roll with things for fillings, including tomatoes of course! Walked to Buckingham Palace to watch the changing of the guard. Although it was not the peak tourist season, there was a very large crowd. Just before the expected 11:30 a.m. start, the Police, for no apparent reason, started forcing hundreds of people to move after they had already found locations they wanted. Needed a lot of shouting on their part and they got little sympathy from the crowd. I even added my voice to those of others!! After a while however, they just seemed to give up and let everybody move back again! Afterwards, I ask a policeman why they had moved people and he said it was because of a bomb scare (possibly IRA) at one of the nearby entrances to the palace. They did not want to tell us the reason in case it caused panic. Turned out to be a false alarm and so the changing of the guard duly took place.



Changing the Guard at Buckingham Palace



Houses of Parliament and Big Ben

After that, made and ate lunch in the nearby St James' Park. Cold wind but nice in the sunshine. Then to the Westminster Abbey area. First visit was to the Cabinet War Rooms – basement rooms where Winston Churchill spent a lot of his time with top military and civilian officials conducting the progress of World War II. Extremely interesting. (This was not included on the pass but I managed to get a cheaper 'Senior Citizen' rate which made me seem old!) From there, a short distance to the Abbey. Also not on the pass and I thought the £5.50 too extravagant. Still managed to get into the front half of it from a rear entrance in a part of the abbey that *was* included on the pass. This was the Chapter House – so called as it is where medieval (= middle ages)

monks used to meet every morning and hear a 'chapter' from the Rule of St Benedict read to them. In the abbey proper, many tombs and graves including those of Queen Elizabeth I, Winston Churchill, Lord Rutherford and Sir Isaac Newton. Then around the back of the abbey through the attached Westminster School (where A A Milne of Pooh Bear fame went to school and where fees are currently about £16 000 p.a.) and to the Houses of Parliament (i.e. two chambers – 'Commons' and 'Lords'). There was a large queue of people waiting to visit the House of Lords gallery. Would have liked to have gone in but would have had to wait for too long.

Leaving Parliament, I walked along the river a while and then back to the hotel via the Covent Garden area. This area used to be run down after the markets left but is now a very lively place with old markets being converted into shops, restaurants, museums and so on. In the evening, sorted out possible routes for driving out of London the next morning; didn't want to be caught on one-way roads. I found out the next morning when collecting the car that the route I had settled on along Oxford Street would have been a disaster as cars are not allowed along parts of it.

3 The cockroach uniforms'

Up at 7 a.m. the next morning to set off for the 15 days around Britain. After breakfast and a visit to a supermarket to pick up food for snacks and lunch, picked up the car and headed for Windsor at about 9:15 a.m. Easy getting out at London but missed the turnoff to Windsor (signs don't always include places that involve another turnoff) and ended up at Beaconsfield. This is the place with a model village that we looked at in 1990. Thought I would go in and have another look. I liked the names of the people that were on some of the buildings. For example, the school: Headmaster - I. Cane Caretaker - B. Tidy; Scratchett and Reckitt – Furniture Removals; I.M.Black – Coal Merchant. The model railway system they have in the village is also very interesting. The town is associated with famous people. It was the home of Edmund Burke, and the 19th Century prime minister Benjamin Disraeli took the title Lord Beaconsfield from this place. Also, John Milton wrote 'Paradise Lost' from nearby.



Well, after that, headed down to Windsor on smaller roads that were often blocked with traffic. On arriving at Windsor, parked where we did 10 years ago alongside the river. Had to back the car for the first time and couldn't do it. Asked another motorist but that didn't help. Eventually, found a tube around the gear stick that had to be lifted up – the first time I had

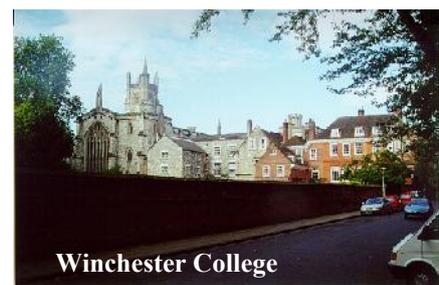


come across that method. On entry to the castle, bags were X-rayed. Guess what they found – the knife I used to cut bread for sandwiches! When they saw tomatoes, bread roll and so on, they actually let it through. The main thing they were looking for,

though, were bombs, what with the IRA, and all that. Saw new places in the castle including the Royal State rooms and the main hall restored after the devastating fire in 1992. Surprisingly, fire sprinklers have not been installed, the reason being that water would cause as much damage as fire. So, they have a very sophisticated fire and smoke detection system. A lady on duty in the hall told me that they are very fire conscious – even when they burn toast during their breaks, panic breaks out! Then along to Eton College, where Prince William was until this year. Lots of boys walking around in black gowns and suits that make them look like giant cockroaches. Close to the college I saw a shop called ‘The Porny Shop’ – no idea what it meant! While at Windsor, the Queen was on her way down for the weekend, but didn’t wait to see her arrive.

From Windsor, down to Winchester, which was once a Roman town then the city of the Saxon king Alfred the Great. Difficult to find parking places in Britain now with many streets being reserved for “Permit Holders Only” which are mainly residents who do not have car-parking spaces. Eventually found a space just round the corner from Winchester Cathedral. Had a look through the cathedral which has the longest nave of any cathedral in Europe. Jane Austen is buried there. She came to Winchester for treatment by a doctor for some illness she had but died 6 weeks later. As women were not usually buried in cathedrals, she must have had some ‘connections’ -- they are not sure why. One 19th Century bishop of Winchester was Bishop Wilberforce, the son of William Wilberforce who is known for his work in outlawing slave trading and then slavery itself. Bishop Wilberforce attacked Darwin’s theory of evolution in a public debate and was generally viewed as the loser. He also initiated the revision of the King James’ version of the Bible resulting in the Revised Standard version. As it was after 5 p.m. at this time, looked for a B & B there instead of trying to get to Portsmouth as originally planned. Eventually found one – old but OK. Back to town for something to eat (mainly fish and chips!) and to get the car.

The next morning, spent some more time looking around the town which is actually very interesting. Saw the house where Jane Austen stayed which is next to Winchester College, the second oldest grammar school in England. Around to a restored water mill and to the old gate at the west of the city. Originally a gate house, then a prison (with graffiti scratched onto walls and floors).



While there, did a brass rubbing of a small brass memorial dating from about 1500 AD. From the visit to the water mill, learned the origin of the expression “showing your metal”. Men who worked on the iron rims of the water wheels would get pieces of iron stuck under their fingernails. When applying for such a job, men had to show their metal to prove they were experienced.

Then, early afternoon, off to Portsmouth, taking less than 30 minutes. Straight to the wharf area as we did 10 years ago, to have a look at HMS Victory, Lord Nelson’s flagship. As it was not the peak season, there was no waiting to get on; I remember that 10 years ago we had



to wait several hours before our group got on. Learned the origin of a 'square' meal – comes from the square board sailors of that time had meals served on! The day was beautiful, warm and fine. Found out later that there had been devastating floods in other parts of SE England. Didn't know anything about them as had not listened to the radio or watched TV.

Off early the next morning. Spent a few minutes looking around the restored old town. Just across the water, yachts were being prepared for the Round-the-World yacht race that was to begin the next day. Then to Dicken's birthplace but only open in the summer season. After leaving Portsmouth, visited the remains of Portchester Castle. Originally Roman. Left to rot by



Portchester Castle

the Saxons, who came after the Romans, as they lived in small houses rather than castles. In Norman times (1066 on), the castle extended mainly as a stopover for royalty who were leaving or returning to the country. Later it became a monastery but suffered the fate when Henry VIII broke with Rome by being destroyed.

From there up to Salisbury. Didn't stop in the town but went straight on up to Stonehenge. Cold, just as it was 10 years ago. Interesting to learn more about it. Actually the site of three circles – the first an earth mound, the next stones and finally another circle of stones. Back towards Salisbury to look at the hill site of Old Saram, a small town that pre-dated Salisbury. Too windy apparently – even the cathedral built there was seriously damaged a few days after completion because of wind. So the town was abandoned and moved down to where present-day Salisbury is. That maybe is why the cathedral spire is the tallest in Europe, so that people could see it more easily. After checking-in at a nearby B & B, walked into town. Went to the cathedral. Had a one-plate cold buffet dinner at the cathedral restaurant. Walked around town for a while;



saw the room over a gate near the cathedral where Handel stayed while there. Returned to the cathedral for an evening performance of 'The Messiah' by Handel. This was put on by amateurs to raise money for a hospice. But pretty good, especially the female voices which would soar and seemed to be coming down from the ceiling.



4 Say 'Cheese'

Leaving Salisbury on a cloudy but fine day, the first stop was Longleat, a large mansion set in huge grounds. The 'lord' who owns the manor has to open it to the public in order to get money to keep it running. Not just the house, but there is a fairground, a train, zoo, flight simulator and other attractions. A 'leat' means a man-made stream which



Longleat

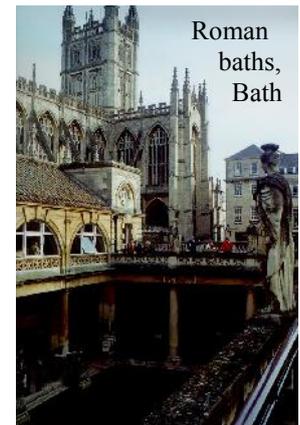
is where the name Long-leat came from. Then off towards Bath stopping off at one or two places on the way. One was a drive through Cheddar Gorge. This is a gorge about 3 miles in length from the village of Cheddar where the kind of cheese processing that is now common originated. I was going to stop in the village but as there were so many cars and tourist buses (it was a Sunday), just drove on up through the gorge. Interesting, but doesn't compare with



Royal Crescent, Bath

gorges in other parts of the world. Without a detailed map with 'B' roads, and with sign posting that wasn't always helpful, I got lost and took some time to get to Bath. Found a B&B close to the large children's park we visited 10 years ago. After checking in, walked into town via the 'Royal Crescent' – the crescent of famous houses built about 200 years ago.

The next morning, back into town for a look through the old Roman baths, built by Roman army engineers nearly 2000 years ago. It is difficult to see the baths in the photograph, but they are much lower than the present-day road level but were at road-level in those days. Must have been a great life being a Roman – provided you were at the top of the pile! Walked back to the B&B to collect the car. Filled up with petrol for the first time. In Britain, one has to fill the tank oneself – no service as in HK. Helps to keep costs down, I suppose.



Roman baths, Bath



White horse, Uffington

Off towards Oxford, viewing two English Heritage sites first. Then to Britain's oldest hillside carving – the large white horse on the hillside at Uffington, the one we saw in 1990. Horses were held in high regard by the ancient Celts and later the Saxons and were the object of cult worship. In fact, there was a group of chanting people on a nearby hill – possible modern Druids. Then on to Oxford. Knew two streets where there were many B&Bs but difficult to find. Driving round and round and eventually ended up in these streets. Got a B&B. Slight grotty but OK; managed/owned by a guy who has done quite a lot of climbing in the Himalayas – many photos on the walls of his dining room. Had dinner in a small, simple Chinese restaurant frequented mainly by university students.

Spent the next morning looking around Oxford on a wonderful, cloudless day. A very interesting place. Did a do-it-yourself tour from a guidebook. I will just mention a few of the highlights. Oxford was the place where three Protestant bishops were burnt at the stake in 1555 by the catholic Queen Mary (first daughter of Henry VIII).



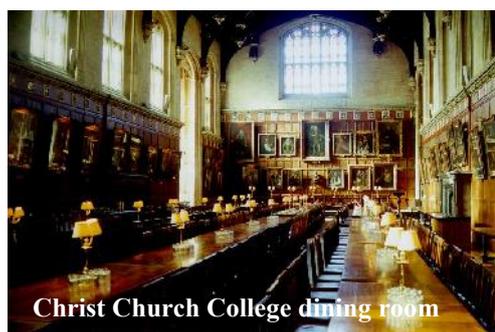
Martyrs' Memorial

There names were Cranmer, Latimer (squares in Christchurch, NZ named after them) and Ridley. Had a walk around the newest college, Christ Church College dating from 1525. Christ's College (NZ) is very similar. There is a large grass quadrangle, a dining room with long tables and a cathedral which is one of the smallest in England. The cathedral



Alice Liddell, 1859

has close associations with the story 'Alice of Wonderland' by Lewis Carroll. The 'Alice' is based on a real girl – an Alice Liddell, whose father was dean of the cathedral in the mid 19th century. One of the stain-glassed windows in the cathedral includes a picture of Alice's sister.



Christ Church College dining room

Left Oxford early afternoon, heading for Stratford-upon-Avon. Instead of going direct, drove through the Cotswolds area, a place with many great little villages with buildings made



Shakespeare's birthplace

of Cotswold's stone. Visited Shakespeare's birthplace and the cottage of his wife Anne Hathaway. Had been through this cottage before though not the birthplace. The Shakespeare family was quite well off, beginning with William's father. The next morning, visited the church where Shakespeare is buried. Interesting, as spaces in churches were normally held for only something like 40 years. But by the time Shakespeare's time was up, he was famous enough to be left there. Then visited other houses associated with Shakespeare's children. One with his daughter Susanna who married a doctor and other with their daughter who was married to an architect. I was intrigued by the technology used in these houses to roast animals. Up the chimney was a fan driven by the rising currents from the fire. The fan was connected by chains to a spit which



Anne Hathaway's cottage

enabled the animal to be turned and roasted automatically.

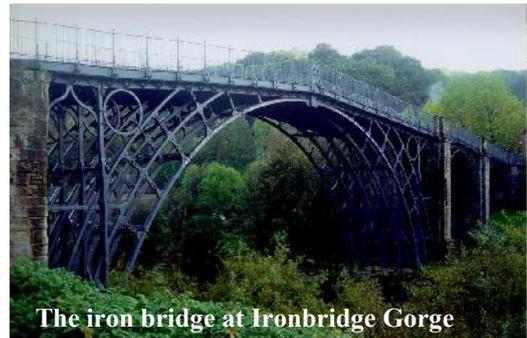
From Stratford, the next stop was Warwick Castle – a place we has passed in 1990 but didn't go in as there was not enough time as it was not on the pass we had then. The castle is a medieval fortress and a stately home and is completely intact. A lot of interest including methods used in those times to torture people. Bought a fridge magnet with the coat of arms



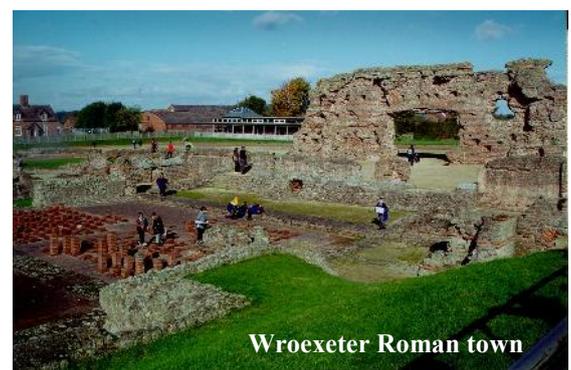
of the Harper family (Nana's ancestors) with a brief description. The shield is white with a single black vertical lion. The name Harper can be traced back to the 12th Century and comes from people who used to play harps. There is a family motto: '*ET SAUVIS ET FORTIS*', meaning "Pleasant and brave".

Could have spent many more hours at Warwick Castle but mid-afternoon and time to head off to

Ironbridge. Motorways most of the way so progress quite fast. Except at Birmingham (Britain's second city). An elevated motorway cuts right across the city. But it was extremely busy and progress was very slow at times. Just before Ironbridge there was a heavy shower, one of the few times it rained. Arrived at about 5 p.m. at what is just a very small village in an extremely attractive gorge setting. The place was one of the most important centres of the Industrial Revolution In 1709, coke rather than the expensive charcoal, was used to smelt iron. The use of iron to make bridges transformed Ironbridge Gorge into one of the world's greatest iron centres. The iron bridge there, built in 1779, was the world's first, and people came from all round to marvel at it. The bridge was quite expensive and became a toll bridge to help pay for it. For example, a pedestrian had to pay a toll of ½ p to cross the bridge. That night, had the first dinner at an English pub. It was great! I had heard that many pubs have good meals. Overnight in a very nice B&B – as it was the off-season, managed to bargain for a lower price! Although I only went to this place to see the bridge, there were many other things that could be seen – living museums dealing with life in Victorian times and, of course, the Industrial Revolution. But not enough time to see everything.



The next morning, had a look around the village (took about 10 minutes!) and a look through the toll bridge office which is now a museum. Then on for what turned out to be another very interesting day. First was a quick look at the ruins of another abbey (one of the many destroyed after Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries/abbeys of the catholic church in 1536 so that he could get there wealth – they owned 1/6 of all land in England and had 4 times the income of the Crown – to pay for his wars).



Then to the ruins of an important old Roman town at Wroxeter. This was very interesting and gave a great insight into life in those times, such as their exercise hall, hot baths, outdoor pool and markets. The street through the town was called Watling Street – a Roman road that ran from London all the way NW to the north of Wales.

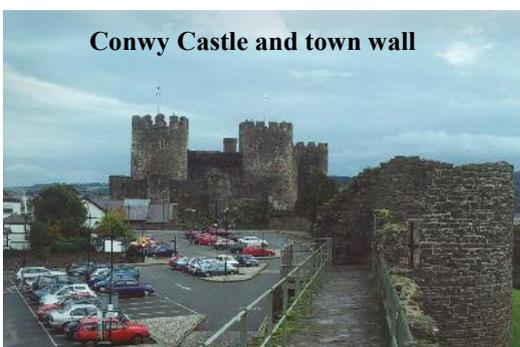
5 The war poet

From Wroxeter, on to Shrewsbury – Charles Darwin’s birthplace – a few miles on. Just drove through the town, visiting a supermarket and sitting in the car to eat lunch. Remember seeing a huge woolly dog sitting in the front seat of a nearby car looking very polite and regal. Then on to the small town of Oswestry. Went there to visit an old Iron Age fort. This was a system of 2 (perhaps 3) large circular mounds used to defend the inhabitants. If you didn’t know it had been a fort, it would have looked just like a series of small hills. While in Oswestry, made an interesting discovery – the kind of thing that often happens. This was that the war poet Wilfred Owen was born and brought up there. {Remember his poem ‘*Dulce et Decorum Est, pro Patria Mori*’ – ‘It is a sweet and pleasant thing to die for your country’ – the ‘old lie’ as he called it -- about soldiers dying from chlorine gas in World War I.) Saw his birthplace, though it is still just a private house. Later, Owen’s family moved to Shrewsbury. His family received the telegram telling of his death while the victory bells were actually ringing!



From Oswestry, headed towards northern Wales. It was getting dark when I was passing through Llangollen, so decided to stay overnight. In 1990, we stayed at a Youth Hostel which was an old mansion in a forest with a very grand staircase. I remember Gavin and I had a large dormitory almost to ourselves. Drove up for a quick look at

the hostel; it is just the same. Heavy rain overnight and drizzly the next morning. Drove the few miles to look at a large aqueduct used to carry a canal over a valley. From there, through the scenic, hilly countryside to the small town on Conwy (pronounced Conway) on the north coast. This is one of the fortified towns built by Edward I about 1300 to defend his conquest of Wales against the stropic Celts and to provide protection for English settlers. Conwy has



the best preserved town walls with 21 towers and a wall still mostly intact. On the quayside is a fisherman’s cottage just over 3 m high which is said to be the smallest house in Britain. Because of this, a quick look through the door was sufficient. Another place visited was Aberconwy House (‘aber’ = mouth, of the river Conwy), a restored

14th Century house which was once the home of a wealthy merchant. Sat on the quayside eating fish and chips for a snack. On the way back to the car, saw a dog which apparently always carries a pipe in its mouth.



Then on to Chester. Passed the Youth Hostel (where Gavin and Leonie found coins under a drink machine) and into town. Booked a B&B at the visitor centre just before closing time at 5 p.m. After checking in, walked back into town, looking at Roman sites, the “Rows” – medieval split-level shops (i.e. footpaths at 2 levels). Visited the cathedral again and sat there listening to the choir singing.

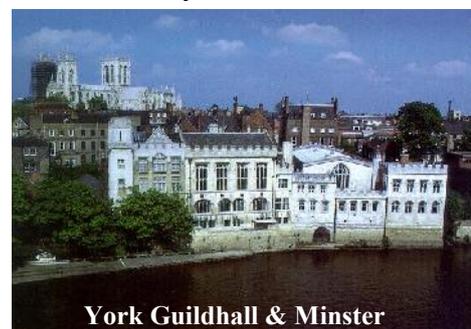
The next day was overcast but fine. Set off for Bury on the motorways, skirting around Manchester. Then down to 828 Bury Road where my Heyworth grandparents lived. We got the wrong place when we were there in 1990! ‘828’ is actually a few places down the road and not the liquor store we thought it was last time. Went in and introduced myself, but the guy in the shop didn’t show much interest!



Then off towards York often off main roads. Passed the Roman road that we saw in 1990 (near the youth hostel at Machinholes). Also passed through a small town and stopped at an open market. Bought a cup of thick, hot home-made broth; as it was so good, went back and bought another. At



York, it was very difficult to find a B&B. Then, just by chance, had parked immediately opposite the visitor centre. They said that everything on their computer was booked out for a radius of 10 miles and suggested that going to one of the more distant villages or else try the Youth Hostel. While on the way to the hostel, found a B&B less than a mile from the centre. This was one of the many not listed in the Visitor Centre computer! In the evening went into town for a ‘ghost walk’. There are several people that give conducted tours with an emphasis on the macabre. A few things he mentioned were interesting but it was largely a dead (!) waste of money. Saw the place where Guy Fawkes lived. Spent most of the next day walking around the old town. Looked through York Minster (a ‘minster’ usually means a church served by monks). Visited the tower on a large mound where several hundred Jews committed suicide in 1190 during anti-Jewish riots. Good views. In the distance is the largest chocolate factory in Europe (now owned by Nestle). Also had a look through the medieval Guildhall restored after bomb damage during World War II. This was incorporated into the restored stain-glass windows. There are many interesting things to see in York that I didn’t see. This included the Jorvik Viking Centre (the name ‘York’ comes from the name Jorvik given to the original settlement the Vikings established) and a great railway museum. Probably need 2 full days in York to do it justice. Late afternoon, headed south. Overnight stop in the old steel centre of Sheffield. It certainly is not a tourist centre!

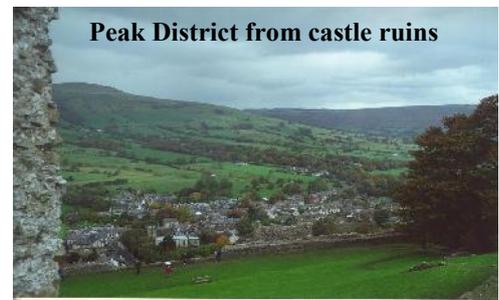


The next day was spent driving through the beautiful Peak District which begins west of Sheffield. Visited an old castle above a beautiful village and also an old stately home called Haddon Hall which was begun nearly 1000



years ago and has been added to and changed a number

of times. In the evening, ended up at the southern end of the Peak District in the town of Matlock, where we had stayed in 1990. At this stage of the trip, the car odometer read 1000 miles.



On the next day, visited a working cotton mill museum close to Matlock; one of the first in the world. Built there because the river could be used to drive a water wheel which operated all the machinery. Very interesting. Then off towards Lincoln. Stopped at Sherwood forest. Walked around it and saw a large old oak tree supposedly connected with the tales of Robin Hood. Bought the classic book called 'Robin Hood' written by an American writer. Have since read it – interesting. Then off to Lincoln. Surprised that after crossing a small bridge on the main highway, had to stop and pay a 20 p toll as the bridge is privately owned. Lincoln town is built on the top of a hill. Several places of interest but spent nearly all the time at the Castle which contains one of the remaining 4 copies of the 'Magna Carta' (i.e. 'Great Charter'), 2 others being in the British Museum and one in Salisbury Cathedral. The Magna Carta was the document signed in 1215 by King John which proclaimed the supremacy of law and put the king under the law. At the time, the king acted arbitrarily and extracted high taxes from his barons as well as troops from them to fight the many wars that

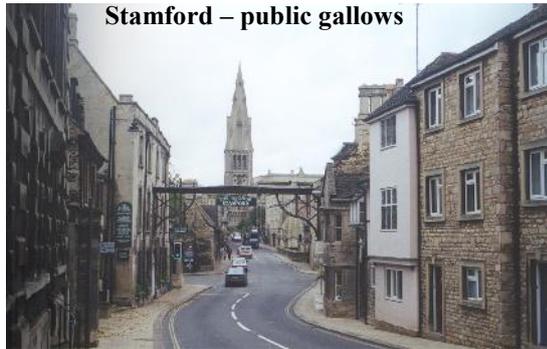


were undertaken, especially the Crusades. The document has been as the basis of the constitutions of many countries. The US Constitution, for example, has quotations that are very similar to parts of the Magna Carta. As well as articles of universal importance, the Magna Carta also included many specific rights that related directly to the times when it was written.

As the rental period for the car was running out, headed south from Lincoln to try to make as much progress towards London as possible. Passed an Air Force base. There was a large car park alongside the main road for people to watch aircraft movements. Would have liked to have spent an hour or so there. Next time perhaps! Eventually got as far as a small village called Bourne. Only saw one B&B and it turned out to be the best of the trip. Had another good pub dinner. Also a good breakfast the next morning – semi-buffet style with plenty to eat.

6 Queen Boudicca strikes

Two more days of the tour around the country. Set off from Bourne and, on the suggestion of the B&B hosts, visited a lovely small town nearby. The town is called Stamford and is where



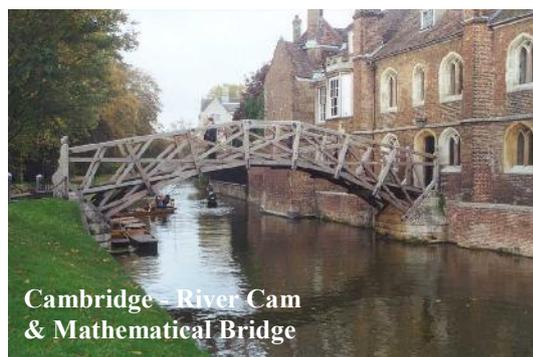
Stamford – public gallows

the famous novel “Middlemarch” by George Eliot (a woman!) is based (I must admit I got halfway through this novel and found it hard going and have not completed it). Many of the buildings in the town were put up by wealthy middle-class merchants of the 18th century. In 1333, a breakaway group of students from Oxford tried to set up a rival university but their attempt was suppressed. Of interest are the public gallows placed across the street outside the main inn. It was put there to deter highwaymen of earlier times such as Dick Turpin (who, when caught, was actually hung at York). It appears that the gallows were never used – they must have had the desired deterrent effect!

From there, gradually down towards Cambridge, the other main university town. I wanted to visit a couple of English Heritage sites on the way but both were closed – open during the summer period only. And so to Cambridge, arriving about 1:30 p.m. Appears to be smaller than Oxford and to me at least, not as interesting. The old colleges are down one street between the street and the River Cam (from which the town gets its name). One of the most famous colleges is King’s College because of its magnificent chapel, begun in 1446 (five years after the college was founded) and was completed in 1515 when Henry VIII was king. Quite expensive to get in



King’s College Chapel, Cambridge

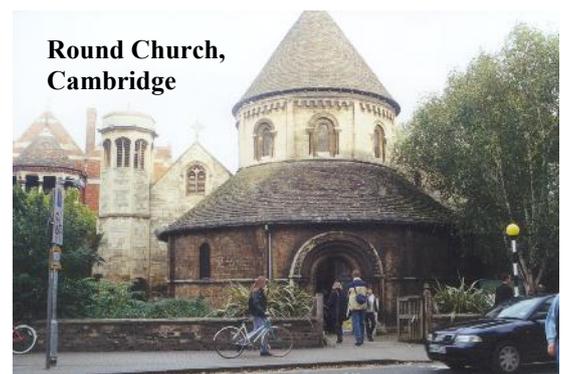


Cambridge – River Cam & Mathematical Bridge

but interesting inside. Each college has something of note. Queens’ College, for example, has its ‘Mathematical Bridge’ originally built without any nuts and bolts. (I am not sure when it was built.) One thing the town is short of is loos! There are actually signs up to this effect! And, of course, I needed one. Eventually found an information office and was directed accordingly. Also interesting is the Round Church, a 12th century church based on one in Jerusalem. I didn’t go punting on the river. A punt costs £8 an hour for up to 6 people, which is all right if you have a group.

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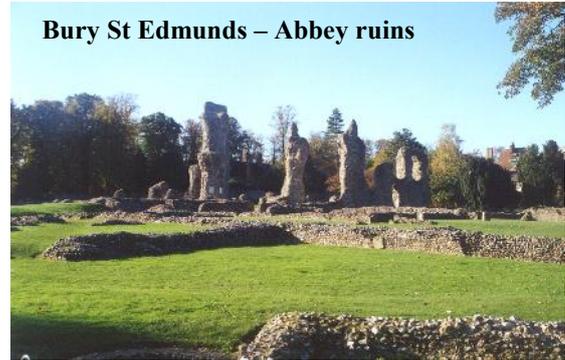
Eventually



Round Church, Cambridge

Getting late in the day, so to save time, decided to head for Bury St Edmunds and stay there overnight. Not a wise move as it was almost impossible to find a B&B (and the Information Centre was already closed). The reason was because there had been an outbreak of swine ‘flu and experts were there from all over the world, and of course, they needed places to stay. Eventually found a place but it was rather late. Went to have a dinner at a nearby pub which had a board outside advertising special cheap meals. Turned out that they were not for that night, so didn’t eat there. Walked towards town and found a huge 24-hour supermarket so bought a half-chicken and other things to eat.

The next day was absolutely glorious. Had a look around the remains of an abbey, once the wealthiest in the country, which was razed by fire in 1347. The name of the town comes from St Edmund, the last Saxon king of East Anglia, who was decapitated by Danish raiders in 870. He was later buried in Bury. In 1014, King Canute (heard of him?) built the abbey in his honour. Next to the ruins is a garden memorial to World War II US airmen who from flew bombers from bases nearby. One of the seats in the park, presented later by former US servicemen, is made of metal from one of the bombers.

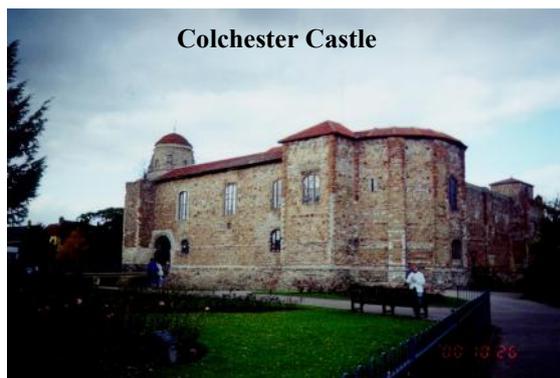


From Bury St Edmunds, down to the small town of Lavenham, often considered the most perfect (?grammar) in England with its black-and-white timber-framed houses. The town was once the centre of the woollen trade in the area (and also a WWII air base area). It has an old Guildhall. Guilds are groups of people (we would perhaps call them unions or co-operatives today) particularly from the trades.



However, here the guilds were religious in nature. In order to get to heaven, medieval priests made people pay! Rich people had no problems. But the poor did, so they grouped into guilds and each contributed a small amount to pay the sums demanded.

From Lavenham to Colchester. This is the oldest recorded town in Britain. It was already a large place when the Romans took it over in AD 43. They built their city there but without a wall. They didn’t feel a wall was needed as they tended to work with the local tribes. Not a smart move! In AD 60, after being cheated by the Romans, Queen Boudicca – wife of the king of a local tribe – rebelled, attacked the town and destroyed it while the Roman governor was away. She then went on and sacked London and one or two other places, killing apparently



70,000 Romans and pro-Roman Britons in the process! When the Romans finally caught up with her, she took poison and killed herself rather than falling into Roman hands. After that, the Romans, a little wiser, built a strong wall round the town. [Queen Boudicca is the same as the person most people know as Queen Boadicea. This latter name is now believed to be a spelling mistake and Boudicca is probably the correct version!] Later, castles were built on the Roman ruins. A tour of the castle includes a visit to the Roman foundations which had been excavated and strengthened in order to build the castles.

There was not enough time to do justice to all the interesting things in Colchester and the castle with its super museum was the only place visited. Left for London at about 3 p.m. The car had to be returned by 6 p.m. (depot closing time). Good road all the way so was able to travel fast. I had a map of inner London so knew how to get to the depot, and the map of the country. But as I had *no* map of outer London, I wasn't sure of how to get in. Turned out to be easy and did it without making any mistakes. Got to a B&B in the King's Cross area (one



found before leaving London) and to the depot – all by 5:30 p.m.! Walked back to the B&B and checked in for only two nights (of the total of five) in case a better place was found. (Looked around but eventually couldn't be bothered shifting so stayed there for the remaining 3 nights). Then to a nearby café for dinner (the one in the picture). From memory, it was probably fish and chips or

lamb kebabs with some salad. This café was run by three young men from Turkey. It provides takeaway and eat-in service. Quite a number like this in the area. That night, it rained quite hard. This resulted in an annoying dripping noise on the window sill so I got up and jammed a towel out the window to absorb the drips! Worked all right.

Most of the rain had gone by the next morning though it was overcast with a brief light drizzle at one point. Only a 'Continental' breakfast – cornflakes, toast and jam and tea. Set off – walking – to spend the day in the City of London. The first place was St Paul's cathedral (the photograph here is not mine but is from a postcard). The present cathedral was designed by Sir Christopher Wren and built after the disastrous fire of 1666 which destroyed a lot of old London. Had to pay to get in, but although I have been inside before, the fee this



time included the crypt under the cathedral which I had never visited. Lord Nelson's tomb is in the crypt immediately under the centre of the dome. Nearby is the tomb of the Duke of Wellington, the victor at the Battle of Waterloo. Also walked up to the 'whispering' gallery. Couldn't hear any people whispering – probably too noisy. Then up to the very top for a view of London.

7 In the clink!

From St Paul's, walked to the Tower of London. On the way, passed the monument to the great fire of 1666. This started in the kitchen of a shop in Pudding Lane (many of the streets in the old City of London have names reflecting foods and trades) and soon spread, destroying many of the wooden buildings and also the London Bridge of that time. Anyway, on arriving at the Tower, made and ate lunch outside first. Entry cost £11 – half price because of the British



Heritage Pass. Bags again examined on entry for evidence of explosives; they used a kind of electronic 'sniffer. They were not interested in the knife in the backpack!

Spent nearly 4 hours looking around,

which was still not enough time but more than for earlier visits.

One or two live demonstrations. One was a simulation of soldiers firing flint guns and reloading. The main central tower, called the

White Tower, is a museum dealing mainly with arms – from horses and knights, to

muskets, suits of armour and so on. But it also has the 'Domesday Book' (pronounced 'doomsday') which has nothing to do with doom. It was a sort of census by William the Conqueror 20 years or so after conquering England. It was a record of the land and other property and other things that the nobles around the country had, largely for tax purposes. Very interesting. Took a long time to actually get to the book because of the very long queue. The crown jewels are housed in the building behind the White Tower (see photograph). Had another look at them.



That night was very wet. This was the tail-end of a severe storm across the south of England which caused a lot of flooding and shut down nearly all rail lines between London and the South. Light rain for most of the next day but heavy rain late in the afternoon. Walked down the South bank of the river Thames, which was once largely warehouses but is now a major tourist area with lots to see. First stop was the Globe theatre where most of Shakespeare's plays were performed, reconstructed on a site close to the original one. They

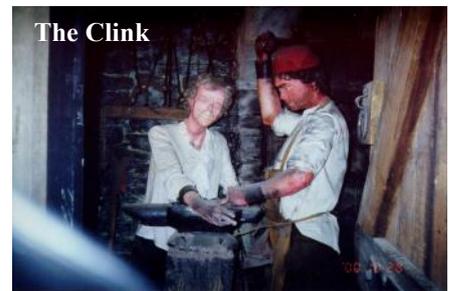


have group tours with guides. Very interesting seeing it and learning how plays were performed in those days. Audiences interacted much more with the actors in those days, especially by the



‘uneducated’ folk who had to stand for a performance and got wet if it rained as the theatre is round with an open centre. They also knew quite a bit about the plays and would let an actor know if his lines were not perfect or if he was not acting well. There is also a super museum attached to the theatre with a number of interactive exhibits.

From the Globe, a short distance to the ‘Clink prison’, the prison that gives its name to all others. This prison was set up about 800 years ago on the south bank of the Thames outside the jurisdiction of the City of London and under the control of the Bishop of Winchester. The prison was part of the Bishop’s palace. I am not sure of the origin of the name – a book I



bought says it comes from the clinking and clanging of chains, but the same book says the area was called the Clink. All sorts of vice went on in the area. In the early days, punishment was not too severe. But when the knights came back from the Crusades, they brought all sorts of terrible forms of torture with them and the jail became a terrible place. Much later it was mainly a debtor’s prison. It finally closed down 200 to 300 years ago. The prison has now gone but close to the original site is a museum showing the kinds of things that went on. Gruesome! The photograph shows one of the displays – a new prisoner being manacled – they actually had to pay to get manacles put on and taken off!

A short distance from there is a reconstruction of the ‘Golden Hinde’ the boat in which Francis Drake sailed around the world. As a school (?) group was on it, it was temporarily closed to the public so never got on board. Walked to a nearby open market where there were lots of ‘natural’ products on display. Bought a loaf of bread then sat on the riverside and



made sandwiches. Then onto HMS Belfast, the WWII cruiser (decommissioned in 1953, I think) which is now a naval museum. Lots more things on display than when I last visited it, including reconstructions of the dental surgery, the operating theatre, the kitchen and the laundry (compete with Chinese cooks and laundrymen). The rain came down heavily so not so pleasant on deck. After leaving the ship, while in the shop, I was asked to do an interview about the shop! (Didn’t buy anything but still answered the questions). Getting late and dark at this stage as I headed towards Tower Bridge where they have an exhibition about the history, construction and operation of the bridge. But because of the time taken for the interview, I arrived about 2 minutes after the time for the last entry.

The next morning the clocks were moved back by 1 hour to standard time which meant that it got dark earlier. Fine day. Bought a one-day travel ticket. Went to Hampton Court which is on the outskirts of London on the banks of the river Thames. Because of all the

flooding, rail track repairs and diversions, had to take a detour involving two different trains and a bus ride connecting them. Took about 2 hours to get there instead of the usual 45 minutes or so! They have a famous maze there. Took only a few minutes to get to the centre but more than 20 minutes to get out again! Spent several hours looking through the palace built by Cardinal Wolsey but taken over by Henry VIII. Further changes and additions were made by later kings and queens. Note from the photograph, that the building is made from brick which started to be used a lot about that time.



From Hampton Court by bus and underground to Tower bridge for the ‘Tower experience’ missed the day before. Arrived just in time. Interesting but I wouldn’t pay to see it if it had not been included on the pass. Of particular interest to me was how the bridge is raised and lowered. On leaving, it was dark, wet and windy. The bridge was actually being raised to allow some luxury yacht through. Took the underground back to the B&B and bought a take-away meal. That night there was a severe storm with typhoon-strength winds over SE England. All trains to the South of London put out of action. However, the next day was largely fine. Bought another day ticket. First stop was the ‘London Dungeon’ (close to the Clink) which was not open at the time due to ‘technical’ reasons. So on the Westminster. Saw the changing of the horse guards and nearby Trafalgar Square. Then to the Buckingham Palace Mews to see the royal coaches and some of the horses used to pull them. About 90% of the horses are put



down when they retire as homes offering the facilities and care they are used to cannot be found. Then back to the London Dungeon – a sort of museum with live actors about the darker side of London. Long queue and took a long time to get in. Very expensive too and just not worth it as far as I was concerned! Takes about 2 hours to get through as you have to proceed in one direction and it can’t all be done at the pace you would like. The Clink, though smaller and less sophisticated, is cheaper and better value for money. Later, back to King’s Cross. Had a Chinese buffet meal in a small restaurant.

The next day was the last. Fine. Had a one-day pass and used it to take bus rides to various parts of London. In the afternoon, back to the B& B to pick up bags and then off to the airport. The underground line to the airport was back to normal. Having got onto the train, there was then an announcement that its destination would be different from the originally scheduled one. Just meant getting off at a station and waiting for the next train. Got to the airport 3 hours before departure but needed to as all passengers for the airline to all destinations join the same queue!

---- THE END ----