

From Havant to Scotland and Back

Avid readers may remember that last year, having sold our yacht, Rosemary and I decided to have a look at our own country. Having 'done' Wales we decided to look at North Yorkshire and Northumberland on our way to attend a parade and service near Fort William. Our first stop was at Newbury to attend a family christening then on to spend the night with son Christopher and family at Bournville. Nothing like using relatives as safe havens.



We went on to visit Lincoln Cathedral before heading for my cousin near Whitby. En route we were driving across the North Yorks moors when a small VW overtook us at speed on a steep downhill stretch. To our horror it left the road, clipped a stone wall, somersaulted and rolled over in a ravine. In trepidation I scrambled down wondering what I should find. Two young men climbed out and said they were OK. We drove on to be passed by three police cars speeding out of Whitby. Anything for a blue light drive.



My cousin showed us around Whitby and its environs including the historic shell of the Abbey on the headland above the harbour.

Just down from the ruins is the 2nd century St Mary's Church, its interior cluttered with box pews and galleries and with an extraordinary 3 tier pulpit (*see inscription at end of article*).



We then visited the magnificent Durham Cathedral with the tomb of St Cuthbert. He, with the other Celtic saints, kept Christianity alive in barbarous times. Later we were to see in the church on Holy Island a modern sculpture depicting the monks carrying his body from there to Durham to be safe from the marauding Vikings. We then drove on to another cousin near Hexham in Northumberland. Here we were shown around the wonderful countryside and taken to a hill fort on Hadrian's Wall well away from the many visitors' centres.



Before leaving Hexham we attended the Eucharist in the beautiful Abbey where the semi circular

communion rail would gladden our Rector's heart if St Faith's were big enough. Driving north we visited a lovely walled garden belonging to the stately home of Wallington and then on to Alnwick which combines two lovely rose gardens with a theme park water feature. Having run out of relatives we made use of the AA B & B Guide and stayed in some delightful private homes but as few provide evening meals we favoured pubs to save going out again in the evening.

We spent a day visiting the Farne Islands by boat from the harbour of Seahouses. We went round all the islands seeing seals on the outer ones and landed on one where we were close to nesting shags, busy puffins bringing in bills full of sand eels and hordes of squabbling razorbills and guillemots.



The next day we went to Holy Island carefully noting when the tide would close the causeway. Rosemary gamely climbed up to Lindisfarne Castle which, from keeping the Scots at bay, was transformed into a stately home by the architect Lutyens. Then on across the border into Scotland visiting the Caithness Glass Factory and the Explorer's garden commemorating the many Scottish botanists who have brought trees and plants back from remote places (sadly few other visitors were seen). We then went to see the Ospreys nesting at Loch Gartnait but even more charming were the red squirrels enjoying the bird feeders put out by the RSPB.

We then checked into the Spean Bridge hotel and had a look around the area where some 64 years ago I had been one of the last to go through the Commando course at Achnacarry. While trespassing to look at the "Castle" I was

intercepted by the Cameron of Locheil himself who could not have been nicer and took us in to see the area now bereft of Nissen huts. The next time we saw him was two days later on TV when he was greeting the Queen at the first visit of a Sovereign to Culloden; the site of the battle in 1746 which ended the Jacobite rebellion with the most atrocious barbarities.



The next day we paraded at the magnificent Commando memorial above Spean Bridge to honour the 29 serving Commandos who had fallen during the past year in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as from natural causes and RTAs. Unlike previous years the sun shone and no one was drenched as happened last year.

It was then time to return via the Lake District but on the way we called at Killearn to find the house we had lived in and where Christopher was born in 1959. One is told never to go back and it was a pity we did. The house has been renamed and another had been built in its garden. Sadly we resumed our journey which entailed negotiating the suburbs of Glasgow and three motorway intersections. We were relieved to spend the night in a pleasant and welcoming B & B in Moffat. Here we met someone whose sister ran 200 head of sheep on the hills. When she had had them sheared the price she was given for the wool was £1. Why don't we turn the central heating down and wear wool?

The next day we indulged in a steamer ride the length of Ullswater before checking into a pleasant pub in the isolated village of Mungrisdale which we used as a base to explore the northern Lakes. Near Windermere we found a most delightful garden entirely maintained by

volunteers from the Lakeland Horticultural Society in the grounds of a Leonard Cheshire Home.



From there we went to the tiny Dove Cottage where Wordsworth wrote many of his best loved poems. We even saw the couch on which he reclined as he remembered the daffodils:

“They flash upon the inward eye which is the bliss of solitude

And then my heart with pleasure fills and dances with the daffodils”

Amongst the many friends he entertained there was Sir Walter Scott who was fed up with porridge three times a day dined out in a hotel.

Then on to Sizergh Castle, *“a beautiful medieval house, extended in Elizabethan time is still lived in by the Strickland family”* to stay at the quaintly named Eagle & Child Inn at Stavely. Next followed an unpleasant day of motorway driving to reach the Hollybush Inn near Weaverham in Cheshire where we met Rosemary’s niece and family of three rascally little boys. Her husband is a marine surveyor having a busy time with people trying to dispose of their yachts by devious means. Next day, as breaks from the M6, we visited Tatton Park, a 19th Century estate set in a deer park and also the Shugborough estate the home of the Lichfield family containing relics of Admiral Anson’s circumnavigation in the 1740s which brought him sufficient prize money to build the house and gardens in which guides dressed in period costume work with traditional skills. Both these rich assets are maintained by the National Trust financed by Cheshire and Staffordshire Councils.

Then back to Christopher’s for a weekend, another christening and then on to Havant. We enjoyed mostly fine weather during the three weeks and nearly 2,000 miles we were away and saw much splendid countryside that we in the South hardly know or have forgotten exists.

Peter Thomas

