

TRIPS AND VISITS 2012 - 2013

OCTOBER 2012: NEWSTEAD ABBEY

Making full use of free bus passes many members on this outing arrived on the Pronto bus from Nottingham. It was a beautiful sunny morning so some decided to walk from the gates to the Abbey. The walk turned out to be further than was perhaps anticipated but it helped to build appetites ready for our afternoon tea.

The party enjoyed the gardens which are just starting to show their autumnal colours. The walled garden had the last of the summer roses still blooming and wire mesh sculptures stood amongst the shrubs. Peacocks were wandering around the grounds and became very friendly with anyone who looked like they may have food.

A beautifully presented selection of sandwiches, scones and cakes on a two tier cake stand were enjoyed in a private room.

OCTOBER 2012: FLIPSIDE BREWERY

An enjoyable evening was had by all at Flipside Brewery. Maggie the proprietor of Flipside Brewery gave a very interesting talk about how the beer was brewed using traditional methods using their own strain of live yeast. After the talk came the tasting of eight regular beers ranging from an easy drinking bitter to a traditional strong IPA.

Much banter ensued about which beer was best & several of us had to try some more than once just to be sure. The real drinking then started when we helped ourselves from firkins of Sterling Pale and Flipping Best (and it was!!!!). An excellent buffet accompanied the quaffing of the real ale. The brewery will be opening a shop outlet on Gedling High Street next to the Willowbrook Club in early November serving real ales and some associated products.



JANUARY 2013: STOKE POTTERIES

Two mini buses of intrepid Polar explorers, well wrapped up for the snow set off for the Gladstone Pottery Museum. We had a very interesting visit stepping back in time to marvel at the hard life of the children and workers in the factory. They paid a high price for us to eat off such exquisite crockery. We watched demos of turning and modelling then saw a vase being beautifully painted by hand.

The toilet exhibition, "Flushed with Pride" recreated the Victorian slum and ended up with innovative toilets of the future. Many of us remembered the avocado bathroom suite and could only dream of the self-flushing, cleaning & seat lowering model!

Following soup & a sandwich we purchased many bargains at the Ainsley china factory shop and marvelled at the intricacy of the Leeds Creamware. After a sightseeing tour of Stoke (not necessarily planned!!) we visited The Potteries museum to see the famous Staffordshire Hoard, ceramics and Spitfire. I would like to thank the staff for looking after us all so well. We were all impressed and would revisit the museum when parking in the area becomes available.

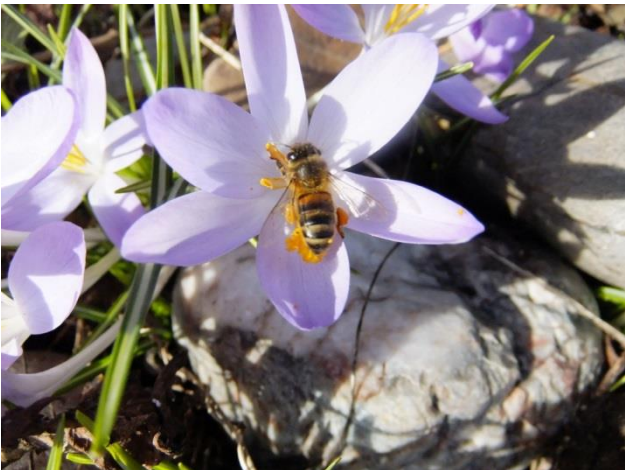


FEBRUARY 2013: SNOWDROPS AT HODSOCK PRIORY

What a fabulous day we had at Hodsock Priory. Of course booking one of the best sunny days of the year helped and eating a bacon butty in the woods sitting around an open bonfire, surrounded by snowdrops, well what can I say "sheer luxury".

The day started well with a welcome cup of tea and cake in a private marquee. We then had time to wander in the sunshine around the garden trail and take in the beauty of the thousands of snowdrops, aconites and cyclamen. How hard have we all tried to grow these plants and failed. Everywhere you looked budding photographers were lying prone on the grass trying to capture the perfect flower and yes if a bee could just land on that particular stem !!!!! Even the bees lived in a bespoke Carr-Stewarton Hive constructed with wicker walls and a copper roof.

George Buchanan who has taken over the management of Hodsock Priory from his father and now lives in the hall gave a talk about the interesting and colourful history of the estate. Many of us were very interested to find out if Henry Mellish Grammar School was named after the Colonel Henry Mellish who sold 90% of the estate to cover his gambling debts. The answer is no it wasn't but it is the same family.



APRIL 2013: LICHFIELD CATHEDRAL AND THE NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM

Lichfield Cathedral

This majestic 1300 year old Cathedral should really be on your 'to do' list. It is a magnificent Cathedral, dedicated in December 700 to St. Chad, the Bishop at this time and St. Mary who are both commemorated here.

Our very knowledgeable guide took us outside to appreciate the architecture, pointing out the remarkable stonework, small carvings that you would not normally notice, and the 113 statues of Kings and Saints. The main doors are the original doors, which are not in use today.

During excavation in 2003 to install a mechanical platform the Lichfield Angel was discovered, in three pieces, and is now displayed in the Nave. We were all asked to observe if the pillars in the Nave were an optical illusion or they did bend outwards. They bend outwards as the original stone roof was so heavy. The roof was eventually replaced with wood and plaster. The huge windows in the Lady Chapel are presently plain glass. However the Herkerode windows dating back from 1530 were originally in Belgium. They were acquired by the church, and are currently being restored at a cost of three million pounds, and will be in place by 2015.

The Cathedral has suffered from many violent clashes, fire, vandalism and theft over its life time but is today a testament of tremendous hard work and dedication by the incumbents. We were then all refreshed by a hot drink in the Cathedral cafe.

A wander around a real farmers market, with many interesting stalls, and a walk up a superb High Street with its many individual shops, it was soon time to board the coach for The National Memorial Arboretum.



The National Memorial Arboretum

Another place to be on your 'to do' list. Our guide only had time to take us to about a quarter of this 150 acre site. He told us of the heroic acts of all our servicemen, and I am sure until you visit a site like this you have no idea how many servicemen were killed in the wars.

The Arboretum is home to over 200 significant memorials, representing military, civil services, local and overseas organisations and charities, no two memorials being the same. The RAF Association with its magnificent Eagle emblem and the Women's Royal Naval Service Wren emblem, were just two of the stunning memorials. Avenues of trees have been planted, all dedicated to individuals. You can also dedicate a tree when you celebrate your 60th wedding anniversary. The remembrance wall leaves you in awe. This has to be the centre piece of the Arboretum. It has a quiet, calming and reverence when standing in the middle.

JUNE 2013: MATLOCK BATH MINING MUSEUM

Having enjoyed drinks and cake on the mini buses we arrived at the Peak District Mining Museum for a guided tour. After seeing all the different rocks and minerals we had a go turning the rag and chain pumps. Before steam was produced, men could produce 1/30 horse power by turning the handle and I'm sure we would have had a similar output!!!

Some of us had a go crawling through tunnels and climbing shafts. It became a bit tricky at one point when the tunnels became so narrow we could hardly get through and going backwards was not an option! A visit to Temple mine gave us an authentic insight into life underground and the tools and equipment needed to extract lead and fluorspar in days gone by.

Outside the mine we spent some time in the sunshine panning for gold. We were hoping to make our fortunes but the fool's gold got the upper hand.

It was lovely wandering around Matlock Bath in the sunshine and some of us braved the cable car to the Heights of Abraham. We rewarded ourselves with large portions of fish & chips followed by double ice creams.



JULY 2013: GAINSBOROUGH & HEMSWELL

On perhaps the hottest day of the year we arrived at Gainsborough Old Hall ready for our coffee and huge portion of freshly baked cake. We were then greeted in the main hall by our Guide, Sue Allen, who is a local author and historian.

Sue explained that Gainsborough Old Hall was not only the home of the Burgh family but also a demonstration of their wealth and importance. By 1596, however, the Burghs had fallen on hard times and the house was sold to the Hickman family. Although a number of "home improvements" have been made over the years it remains a "textbook of medieval architecture."

There is plenty of circumstantial evidence to suggest that the Hickmans allowed the Separatist congregation of local preacher John Smyth to worship in secret in the Old Hall. This was a very dangerous path because the monarch was supreme head of the Church and to oppose the monarch

was regarded as treason. Eventually some of the Separatists in the Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire areas later became "Pilgrim Fathers" and as religious dissenters, sailed across the Atlantic in the ship "Mayflower" in 1620.

We became familiar with the etiquette of the time and had a good look around the kitchen and private rooms. We saw how bread was baked and the bottom of the loaf was covered in ashes. The bottom slice went into the "humble pie" and the "upper crust" went to the gentry.

The bedroom had an "en-suite" which was very forward thinking for the time. Unfortunately with no running water the door had to be kept closed at night because of the smell of ammonia. Unfortunately or should I say fortunately we did not get a sightings of the Grey Lady walking the Ghost Corridor. Dressed in grey and in Tudor style, the grey lady walks the length of the corridor and turns right before the end to disappear through a wall which has since been found to be a covered over doorway.

After a short journey in the mini bus we arrived at the old RAF Hemswell but on the wrong side of the fence for the Antiques centres. Never trust a GPS!!! It was now getting a little on the hot side so we enjoyed lunch in the gardens before exploring room after room of antiques. Quite a few purchases were made of antiques and ice creams.

AUGUST 2013: BLACK COUNTRY LIVING MUSEUM

We took what could only be described as a very scenic route to Dudley and the Black Country museum. We then set about exploring the 26 acre site. Buildings have been relocated from their original sites to form a village portraying life in the period from the 1850s to the 1950s.

There were always people queuing at the famous fish & chips shop and I can confirm it was definitely worth the wait. There were shops selling old fashioned sweets and cakes and even a menswear specialist. It was fun remembering our childhood by skipping in the cobbled streets and learned how to roll a metal ring with a stick.

We were given a maths lesson in St James's school and needless to say some of the pupils were a bit naughty. They were made to stand in the corner then the cane came out!!! We all sat to attention and recited our tables then struggled to chant the alphabet backwards. There were boat trips into Dudley Tunnel, trips down a coal mine, chain making demonstrations, tram rides along the high street, not to mention the real ale pub! All in all a hectic, but fun filled day.



SEPTEMBER 2013: BUCKINGHAM PALACE

We were fortunate enough to visit the State rooms in the Palace whilst an exhibition of clothes worn by the Royal family at the Queen's Coronation was on display.

We were awed by the majestic decorations of the ceilings, walls and chandeliers. Eventually after wandering along for at least an hour, we came upon the spectacular array of dresses and uniforms worn by the principal royal party. The diamond tiara, necklace and earrings worn by the queen were objects of immeasurable beauty.

The "petite" dress worn by the Queen is in self a work of art. It was made in gold taffeta, backed by soft horsehair; it is embroidered in silver and gold threads. It features a Rose for England, Thistle for Scotland, Shamrock for Ireland and Daffodil for Wales. The dress also featured a four leaf clovers for luck. You had to ask where this was on the dress, and it was just where the Queens left hand rested when she was standing. Apparently the Queen requested this, to bring her luck. Sir Norman Hartnell designed and oversaw the making of this dress and all the Ladies in waiting dresses. Ladies in waiting dresses were also made of gold taffeta, and heavily embroidered.

This exhibition, the first time these clothes have been seen since the Coronation, attracts thousands of visitors, many from abroad, and is test amount to a wonderful heritage we in this country are lucky enough to have.

After Buckingham Palace, we were exited through the shop (of course). Sadly the heavens had opened by now, and it was lashing down with rain. We all went off to do various things. Some intrepid members hired Boris's bikes and travelled on the cable car over the Thames at Greenwich. Others hit the shops but a large proportion sampled the local hostelryes!!!

After a very tiring day, we all agreed that Buckingham Palace and the Royal family should be treasured.



OCTOBER 2013: WEDGWOOD

Having set out in the pouring rain we arrived at Wedgwood Visitor Centre in reasonably good conditions. After an essential cup of coffee we were treated to an up close and personal tour of the modern factory. We saw examples of Jasperware such as the famous Portland vase which was selling for around £45,000 so everyone kept their elbows well in!! For those interested in golf we watched the potter at work who made the Accenture Match Play Championship trophy which was won by Ian Poulter in 2011.

The Wedgwood museum chronicles the life of one man, the company he founded and the people whose skills, artistry and ingenuity have for many generations kept Wedgwood at the forefront of taste and fashion. Josiah Wedgwood I, the 'Father of English Potters' was a fascinating individual, scientist, artist, entrepreneur and social reformer and one of the most important figures of his age.

The Wedgwood museum had something for everyone. And we were amazed by the myriad of skills shown. The collection is displayed chronologically from 1730, the birth of Josiah Wedgwood, to today. It houses paintings by famous artists, intriguing documents and an outstanding display of some of the world's finest Wedgwood ceramic pieces.

In the crafts demonstration area we were able to watch the skilled craftsmen at close quarters. The hand painted owls came to life before our eyes. We even had the opportunity to have a go ourselves.

Needless to say there was plenty of opportunity for a retail experience. Many a bargain was to be had in the seconds shop such as a teapot, sugar basin & milk jug for £18. Most of us could only admire, but not afford china displayed in the Boutique shop where the phrase "Bull in a china shop" nervously came to mind.

At the end of the day our observation was tested and the ladies who knew the wooden fire engine built for Wedgwood in 1738 cost £58 13s 6d won a china mug each.



NOVEMBER 2013: BOSWORTH FIELD AND RICHARD III SEARCH FOR A KING EXHIBITIONS

Didn't we have a wonderful time, the day we went to Bosworth – 31 of us in glorious sunshine! A drive through some beautiful villages, down very narrow lanes, so ably navigated by Alan & Melvyn (although finding the car park in the afternoon in Leicester tested his skills somewhat!) Even Brian's satnav failed at one or two hurdles!

We were all so impressed with the Bosworth Battlefield Centre – John our guide was wonderful and brought the story of Richard III very much to life - telling us he lost the battle, his body and his crown, and exactly how it happened. Three armies were involved and it was truly fascinating. I now understand that hopefully in August 2014, when Richard is finally laid to rest that this will be of global

interest. The Heritage Centre was again superbly done with displays that reached out to both children and adults. A treat not to be missed!

In the afternoon we were dropped near the Cathedral and Guildhall in Leicester – and some of us were lucky enough to pick up a guide there who showed us where the remains were found and the extensive plans Leicester have for improving the Cathedral to create a better experience for the thousands of people expected to visit. This also includes the Cathedral site including re-siting the statue of Richard III and hopefully the work will start soon.

NOVEMBER 2013: Downtown Shopping Superstore, Grantham

Downtown is certainly bigger than I thought. If you are looking for anything between a pair of socks to a washing machine to wash them in, this is the place to go. On arrival the cafes were definitely the place of interest but on rushing to the mini bus 3 ½ hours later we realised we had not stopped shopping. Most of us came away with many bargains and the consensus was that we must go again sometime in the New Year.

Sorry I was too busy shopping to take any photos!!

DECEMBER 2013: Haddon Hall and Bakewell Market

Fifty five of us had a wonderful day in the winter sunshine at Haddon Hall and Bakewell Market.

These are some of the comments made about the day.

- Christmas foliage, real smell of Christmas, spices and greenery.
- Time wain flag stones, authentic Old English Country House, wonderful atmosphere.
- The grounds of Haddon Hall were spectacular in the winter sunshine. The Hall with log fires and great decorations, often natural was full of history. Bakewell was festive and bustling. We treated ourselves to Bakewell pudding and custard.
- Authentic surroundings – super. The rooms were not cordoned off and it was nice to be able to touch things.
- Beautiful original panelling, coving like you have never seen before and rooms that would be comfortable for a family.
- Lived in feeling not manufactured and the staff were very friendly.
- And finally – Lovely day, lovely weather, a day to remember.

