

UK Trip

Well it's taken a while but here is a little of my trip:

London was my base for the first week and I had a lovely time with my niece who had planned so much so thoughtfully, even though she works full time. Did a Hop on Hop Off bus with her on the Saturday, which she had never done! Then on the Sunday we headed off to Kew Gardens and Kew Palace where King George III grew up and where he had Queen Charlotte spent much time. Then lunch at a gorgeous pub called The Botanicals which she had organised and there was a welcome letter on the table for us. We had planned to go to evensong at St Paul's Cathedral but we had a long lunch! Next few days were spent exploring on my own, did a London in One Day coach tour and a cruise down the Thames as well. Was there, in London, for the Queen's 90th Birthday celebrations, which was special. Then Thursday night my niece had booked seats to hear St Martin in the Fields orchestra in their beautiful church and had dinner in their basement. I was staying in a beautiful hotel at Kensington just off High St with lots of lovely Mews (like units, but not!) lining every street, the tube handy and a lots of shops and even a dentist where I went in my first couple of hours in London!

Was over London, so crowded, busy and full of tourists!!! So happy to join our UK Discovering UK coach and head out of London to beautiful

We spent a little time in Oxford which is a beautiful, fascinating and historic city. Then travelled through the Cotswold and landed in Stratford on Avon, (stayed in a beautiful, historic manor), where they were celebrating the 400th year of Shakespeare's death - it was even bigger celebrations than the Queen's 90th. Went through Shakespeare's family house where he was born and walked through the quaint and most beautiful city.

Next we headed to York where they were celebrating Patron Saint's Day, St George's Day. So many costumes with loads of men decked out with lots of flowers in their hats and performing their historic dances. I walked the wall of this beautiful and majestic city, full of majestic universities and museums and York Minster (Cathedral) but also saw the fascinating Shambles.

Next day we visited Grasmere where they were celebrating both Wordsworth and Beatrice Potter - seems everywhere we went was celebration time, so I felt really privileged. Then headed off through the magnificent Lakes District and on to Edinburgh. So huge travelling days, so in two days went from London to Edinburgh! Travelled on up through snow-capped mountains which were truly magnificent, experiencing snow, hail, sleet, rain and sunshine all in one day. Fittingly we went to Edinburgh Castle where they were celebrating Anzac Day. It was SO windy on top of Edinburgh at the Castle that we had to hang on to our cameras for fear of them being blown out of our hands. It was really freezing - the only time I really felt the cold. Edinburgh is the most historic city in the UK, 4,800 listed properties!! AND it is built on 7 volcanos! We toured the Royal Yacht Britannia which was fascinating and finished that day off with a magnificent Scottish Cabaret. My room looked out over roofs but at Sunset I had the most magnificent sunset and just sat on the window seat taking photos of it as it set over quite a number of hours.

Then on the way to Inverness we enjoyed a misty cruise on Loch Ness, visited Culloden Moor where Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite army was finally crushed in 1746 on the way through to the very northern shore to visit the Queen Mother's Castle of Mey - the only home she ever owned and very tasteful and cosy but very much in the wilds of northern Scotland - away from the maddening crowd alright!

I'll just pause there to tell you we had a really lovely group of 35 people on our coach, who were respectful of each other, arriving back at the coach at the stipulated times and amazingly no smokers! Our tour director was amazing. She quite often sang to us with a beautiful lilting voice, read poetry and history and took us on little side trips which were really quaint & beautiful. Our coach driver was not only an amazing driver but kept the coach spotless and was meticulous with going over the coach each night even cleaning it inside with anti-bacterial solution. Yes, we had 2/3 of the coach who came down with a cough laden cold - from day 1 the man behind and the women in front of me were coughing so it was inevitable for me to get it but due to a regime I was following I only had one day in bed and it was a day I didn't feel I was missing anything and we also had two days in that particular hotel, so it was good timing.

We then did what not many do, travelled to the Orkney Islands - what a fascinating place and on through Wick to Ullapool and Skye. On the way to Skye the temperature dropped from 10 degrees to 5 in just a few seconds! Skye is 50 miles x 35 miles and wherever you are on the Island you are never further than 5 miles from the sea. They only have a population of 10,300.

In Scotland they have over 900 mountains all over 3,000 feet and they call them Munroes and they have lots of challenges with special names. For example every year some run up the 3 highest mounting in the UK - Ben Nevis (Scotland's highest with 44 minutes being the quickest time for up and then back down in 16-18 minutes); then England's highest and on to do the Snowdonia Mountain in Wales - all in 24 hours!!!

Stayed overnight in Glasgow which I found dirty and scary. Then next day sailed over to Londonderry (Derry) in Ireland, where there was a blues/jazz festival on so all sorts of people there! I went to hospital there to check out whether I had another bout of cellulitis (which thankfully, I didn't) which was a pretty scary experience. There until 2am and then had to wait an hour for a taxi as they were so busy with the rush of people leaving different venues from the festival! What an experience. Also couldn't understand any conversation going on there as all spoke their Gaelic dialect! We had a fascinating tour of Derry with a local who gave us the details of the war, Sunday Bloody Sunday, and the unrest that continues to this day. He was extremely informative, giving us a good insight to each 'side' but maintaining an unbiased account of the history. It was most moving at the end when he thanked us profusely for coming to Northern Island as he said seeing tourists visit was really healing. He said it is not a religious or political war but a social war and the only way to rectify it is to educate the children in mixed classes. In a small area Derry was blasted away and they had up to 5 bombs a day, so there was not much left and all had to be re-built. (We are so blessed in Australia.)

We travelled on to Cork, known as the rebel city and then via Mulbeck Moore where Mountbatten (Prince Charles beloved uncle) was murdered - the cove was quite wild that day, even had white horses on the waves! Then on to Drumcliff at the base of Ben Bulbin where we visited the grave of William B Yeats, the poet. His epitaph is taken from the last lines of "[Under Ben Bulbin](#)", one of his final poems.

That night we stayed at a beautiful hotel, Radisson Blu, on the shores of Sligo Bay where I had a really lovely room. Next day we went to one of our Tour Director's little extras: a beautiful, peaceful and reverential site: Tobernalt Holy Well, a place of healing and worship for pilgrims and those exiled because of their faith and not allowed to practice it, so here was set up an open air chapel like I've never seen before. It was very moving and had a remarkable effect on everyone and the coach was very quiet for the next hour or so.

We left Sligo Bay and on to Connemara Causeway, then to Galway for a lunch stop. What a bohemian and fascinating city - filled with musicians and entertainers - one quarter of the

population are students. We then went on to Limerick where Cromwell destroyed nearly all of the city - only one church survived. We stopped in pretty Adare with all its thatched roof cottages; then on to County Kerry and Killarney for a very welcome two nights. We had a jaunty car ride (which is a horse drawn covered wagon) through the 127 acre parkland. It was a truly beautiful little place. We had lunch in an Irish private home and then went to a really old pub where a couple entertained us on harp and a type of guitar along with a bit of storytelling - a lot of fun.

Next via the Ring of Kerry, across rugged mountains to Blarney Castle and yes, I climbed it but no way was I going to kiss the stone! What with so many bugs around and a fear of heights - it was not for me. I thought I was brave just climbing up there. It was interesting to cross the peat bogs and see where they had cut the peat - what a wilderness. We went on to do a tour of Waterford Crystal, then Kilkenny, where we learnt about the ancient Celtic game of Hurling which is still played today and is the fastest sport with a ball (& dangerous), walked the ancient city walls and then drove on to Dublin where we spent a very welcome two nights.

Then off across the Menai Straits on via Conwy which is a walled market town; and re-entered England at Chester, a Roman fortress town with the "Rows", fascinating black and white double decker arcades which lined the streets. We stayed the night at a fascinating ancient, historic hotel - The Queens.

Next through the Welsh marshes to Cardiff. We followed the Welsh border to ancient Ludlow which still showed much of its origins: castle, walls, shops, housing all being really ancient. We visited an opulent castle there, so different from all other castles. Fitted out by an eccentric Marquis and his equally eccentric architect. Here we explored the ancient bunkers which were rather eerie. In 1922 they discovered original walls from Roman Times which are 2,000 years old and a 1,000 year old Norman keep. We then crossed the border back into Wales and stayed in Cardiff for the night.

Left the Roman City of Bath and crossed the Severn Bridge to elegant Georgian city of Bath and of course toured the Baths. Left Bath and on to Glastonbury for the night, continuing on through the Cornish countryside to Saltash where we stayed at the exotic St Mellion International for another welcome two nights. The first day we did a rather wet cruise in the bay and I thought about my grandfather who was chief engineer for all his life and thought about what he had to endure. Crossed a couple of amazing bridges and on to a small fishing village of Plymouth where the Pilgrim father set sail in the Mayflower for America. We visited a picturesque Cornish fishing village where contraband was once landed in the dead of night. It was really fascinating to walk the narrow streets with houses built up into the cliffs and you feel the atmosphere of those days and imagine the goings on. What tickled me was "The Policeman's House" built next to the "Smuggler's House"!! We then headed back to Saltash to our Country Club Resort situated on a golf course for our last celebration dinner together.

Our final day was spent crossing the Salisbury Plain, visiting Stonehenge on the way and back to London - a long day.

My thoughts on the coach trip echoed most others - too long and would never do it again. But what an experience and how much country we covered and so many amazing experience and magnificent scenery.

Back in London I had a nasty experienced which left me feeling very traumatised and giving me many sleepless nights and nightmares when I did sleep - had my credit card go into an ATM and not come back and a guy telling me to quickly put in my pin three times and saying it would come

back. However, it was a set up and there were, on reflection, many men involved and they wiped around \$4,000 out of my account in just three hours. Travelex knocked back my request for reimbursement and so now am pursuing it with an Ombudsman back here. It certainly tainted my trip and has taken up a lot of time. However,

I went on up to Aberdeen the next morning and was looked after royally by a couple with whom I had corresponded regarding my ancestors. They took me on an orientation of Old Aberdeen and then took me to their home for a very welcome home cooked meal.

Next day they took me out to Tarves and Methlick where my great grandfather had ministered in a church there. They had arranged with a local church, which had origins in my ancestry, for me to be there. The people there were so lovely and gave me a book on the history of the church as my great grandfather had been a minister in that same area for 40 years. It was very moving to join with likeminded folks a world away from home and be able to join in with their worship, singing songs I knew, and to hear the beautiful tiny pipe organ played so well. After a beautiful and moving message from the minister, many spoke to me over coffee including Lady Aberdeen from Haddo House - well known in tourism circles, who had my great, great, grandfather on their books as he had a tenanted farm through them. They also gave me a very beautiful and cute bouquet of flowers with card attached saying,

"With good wishes from Methlick Parish Church. Matt 6:28 "Consider the Lilies of the field: said Jesus, knowing that they speak of God's tenderness and care.

These flowers are from the Communion Table of your church and bring thoughts and prayers of those who worship there.

Those flowers were very special and they were still alive a week later, on the day I left Scotland! I really felt the comfort of that especially after all that had happened.

That lady had also organised for me to visit Tarves Historical Society, which is where my grandfather had grown up. I had also corresponded with Moira from the historical society and she had prepared for my visit, done heaps of research and she and her colleague spent hours going through what they had found and then copied two books which had been written about one of my ancestors. It was really lovely to meet these two beautiful women who had been emailing me for a few years.

I found that my great, great uncle had been extremely famous and is still referred to in agricultural circles around the world. Most Aberdeen Shorthorns are from his farm. He was honoured by the American Agricultural Society and exported cattle to America, Canada and Argentine, which I thought was pretty amazing for those days. I have just read both books on him and have been really challenged by his life - devoted to helping others and a stalwalk of the church he donated to the village. An exemplary life, displaying his kindness, gentleness and yet an astute mind and business head but humble and has assisted many not only in business but in life and in their spiritual lives as well. Was world known but yet the Sunday School Superintendent for 60 years. Oh to be more like him!

I really loved Aberdeen, it is a beautiful city, full of history and a live city, yet peaceful. Beautiful majestic buildings with many reminders of centuries gone by. I also visited a 44 acre park there, Duthie Park, which had been donated by Elizabeth Duthie (my great great aunt) to the community. It brought a lump to my throat as I watched dozens of people using the park and seeing that it was well loved - what a lovely gift, certainly one that keeps on giving. The people think so much of it that they have set up a restoration committee who are in the throes

of restoring the park back to the original design (which incidentally had been shown to me by the lady at the Tarves Historical Society).

I then drove back down to Edinburgh where I spent my last 5 days. I drove out to meet another lady, Maureen and her husband Kirk, who was the minister for the Muthill church, which is where the rest of my ancestors had lived and where my great, great, grandfather had been born.

She also had done a lot of research and gave me all that she had done, took me to the grave where some of the family had been buried and took me on a guided tour to see some of the places where the family had been - the original manse, the church where GG grandfather had ministered, and the home where he, his wife and children had lived in their latter life and actually died in that home - which is just 50 metres from Maureen and Kirk's manse! After driving me all around the area Maureen took me back for lunch where she had invited a distant relative also - what a lovely surprise. He is the only relative I met, sadly. We share the same great, great grandparents. We then visited the original manse and as the owner drove up while we were there (he actually knew I was coming that day) and so I was able to go round to the front of the house (the back actually faces the road) and take photos of it - what great timing.

So after a full day with Maureen, she had her husband take me to see their church and he took me on a bit of a walk through the village, which was lovely as it was the first time I'd been able to do that, she organised tea which I had with them and then drove back to Edinburgh. What a lovely experience. Absolutely beautiful country and villages.

So after this long epistle, I will close. Don't know if you will manage to read it all but it was good for me to reflect.