

Hank and Claire's Excellent Adventure: England 2015

Day 1: Traveled by car, ferry, foot, and Seattle Lite Rail with small roller bags and backpacks. Flew to Heathrow via Iceland. Hire car took us (with our soaked luggage) to our home base in NE London, London where my son and daughter-in-law live with our 4- yr old granddaughter. Family time and a walk to dinner at upscale fusion noodle house. Managed to stay awake until reasonable bedtime. Here's a map of England with our two trip routes highlighted:



The first was from London by train to Oxford, rental car from there to Cotswolds, Ironbridge, Conwy, Chester, Hadrian's Wall, Durham, York, and Cambridge, then train back to London. The second was from London by transit to Bath with a side trip to Wells.

Day 2: Wellington Arch, Hyde Park, Cecil Sharp House, Westminster Abbey

London double-decker transit bus to Piccadilly Circle area. A fantastic, though drizzly view of London's diverse architecture – years and years layered on this huge city. So much fun to see it through Hank's structural engineer's eyes!

Breakfast in upper crust Richeau Restaurant...right where the bus dropped us, and we were hungry. Full English breakfast for us both: Cumberland sausage, grilled tomato and mushrooms, eggs, toast and tea. Coffee for the man.

Walked through Green Park, past a jogging troop of Queen's Guards in camo, to Wellington Arch, purchased English Heritage passes and explored the history of Waterloo and the great general on the way up to the top. Views off to Big Ben and other iconic landmarks.

Walked through Hyde Park, a serendipitous encounter with mounted Queen's Guards fully uniformed and on their way to the Changing of the Guard at the Palace. Found the public loos just in time to discover that we should have exchanged a few dollars for pounds because we needed 20p to pee. A kind lady thought I needed a tutorial on the turnstile operation. When I explained the monetary crisis (hopping from foot to foot) she dug into her pocket and gave me the entry fee. And another 20p for Hank—the kindness of strangers ...

From the north tip of Hyde Park it was only about 15 blocks to the English Folk Song and Dance Society at Cecil Sharp House, opened as a memorial upon his death in 1924. We sang "To My Old

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"Brown Earth" on the stage where countless folk gatherings have occurred over the decades. Sang to an empty room but then an orchestra showed up – the hall is rented out for all sorts of community events.

An hour or so in the excellent library there and then back toward the tube station. Past a street market and funky architecture and noticed "Best Independent Fish & Chips 2014" at Poppie's, so had our lunch there. Have to say, fish and chips in Poulsbo are more flavorful and way less greasy. When we got home our Brit neighbors opined that this may well be the case as regards all UK classic fish and chips. There's a reason they wrapped it in newspaper! But Poppie's DID get our attention with the authentic Crapper toilets in the loo!

We rode the tube just a few stops to Westminster Abbey and the Halls of Parliament, getting there late afternoon, with the sun streaming through the scudding clouds...classic beauty. Into the interior rich with history from the founding of a Benedictine settlement in 960, to Edward the Confessor's Abbey dedicated in 1065 to 1245 when Henry III commenced building the current structure.

It was our first taste of the British passion for wall-mounted memorials, hewn in stone and inscribed with all manner of Latin and English poetry and dedications. It would take days to do justice, and the docents know this, so they point visitors to the most famous – and of course, there are gazillions of those! We opted to wander on our own without benefit of the audio guides. Made for delightful discoveries and the trade-off of missing "something" was acceptable to both of us.

Hank suggested we each light a candle when we came upon the chance to do so. Quiet reflection and thinking of our loved ones gone and the families we have blended together...so much gratitude. We lit candles several times during our travels. Recognizing the inadequacy of our short visit, we often purchased color brochures to study at home.

After taking in some of the splendor of this awesome space, we enjoyed the sunshine in the statue garden (Mandela, Gandhi, and more), on our way to the tube and train taking us back to NE London. Excellent home cooking for dinner and early lights out.

Day 3: St Augustine's park and tower, a walk around the neighborhood, Sutton House

Lazy morning with our granddaughter to ourselves, then time at a playground on the remains of St. Augustine's church, lunch in fine gastro pub Oslo, chance discovery of Rafe Sadler's 1545 house, Sutton House. Grandpa Hank and Oba soaked up the history that so closely touched Thomas Cromwell's main protégé (figures in Wolf Hall), then playtime for the young set in the reclaimed Breaker's Yard out back...huge tires for clambering in, and old caravans to explore. Called in Indian food for dinner all together at home.

Day 4: Tower of London and Tower Bridge, Southwark Cathedral, the Golden Hinde, Shakespeare's Globe, Opera in a Tunnel, Millennium Bridge, St. Paul's, Sky Garden

An early start—taking the overground from Lincoln Fields and then the tube to Tower Hill—allowed us 4 heavenly hours at the Tower of London, soaking up the stories and totally captivated by the

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Beefeater Tour. Our Beefeater was very funny and played off the crowd at times, but never in a mean way. His script was rich and full of detail—never dumbed down. Fantastic.

Over and over again, I was struck with the genuine hospitality and LACK of hype at tourist sites we visited.

Lunch in an armory building at the Tower, where we chanced to sit next to 4 people from Kingston, WA, 15 minutes up the road from us.

Walked slowly over Tower Bridge to take in some of the Thames Walk. This large promenade along the Thames opens up wonderful views of Parliament, the Tower and all sorts of new architecture on the north bank across the river. We ambled past buskers and enjoyed seeing kayakers on the river, braving all the big ships that cruise on it as well.

Didn't know what we'd find, and within a few blocks we bumped (literally) into Southwark Cathedral. The oldest Gothic church in London, it attracted the likes of Gower, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson, Harvard, and Dickens.

As my father graduated from Harvard, I was intrigued that John Harvard, its founder, was baptized here in 1607. Has his own stained glass window and chapel. Also a niche statue and memorial to that playwright, Shakespeare, whose Globe Theater is just down the block.

It got to be a little exhausting, just sensing all the lives that had brushed these same stones, everywhere we went. Hard sometimes to keep taking it all in...

Leaving the cathedral, we entered a short pedestrian tunnel and encountered a coloratura soprano making good use of the acoustics. Accompanied by a techno-orchestra and small amp, we heard her sing two arias—the second was Puccini's "O Mio Babbino Caro" which some people will recognize as the theme song from "Room with a View." Moved to tears, as were many others. We couldn't leave until she finished, and made sure to add some bills to her tip can on the way.

Just past the tunnel there was the Golden Hinde, Sir Walter Raleigh's ship, moored as an attraction. A little further and we passed the Globe Theater, the modern version of the original where so much history was made and performed a few hundred yards away. This Globe theater is thriving and performances often sold out.

We had only about an hour left to get across the river and head back to a restaurant on Gracechurch Street called The Folly, where we were meeting the rest of the family for dinner. We set off over the Millennium Bridge, set on at least glimpsing St. Paul's Cathedral which stands about 3 blocks from the other end of this ultra-modern pedestrian walkway. But once we got there, we realized we were looking at the back of the church, so, of course, we HAD to amble around it to the front, take the classic photo on the steps with the spirit of Mary Poppins and the bird lady. It was drizzling by now and getting close to our rendezvous time, but finishing the walk around the perimeter set us in the right direction, so we took in as much as we could and sadly, said farewell without going inside Christopher Wren's masterpiece.

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Dinner at another marvelous gastro pub and then we walked to the building known as the walkie-talkie and paid to ride up to the Sky Garden far above the city streets. Incredible views and the drizzle lifted to show them off. An hour of enjoying the sights and the spiffy people up there, and we caught a double-decker back to NE London. Pleasantly wasted and needing a good night's sleep to get us ready for our driving adventure!

Day 5: Paddington, Oxford, Blockley

Early breakfast and then set off on foot to London Fields overground station transferring at London Liverpool Street to the tube. Saw our "most remarkable person" sitting across from us, tattooed, mascaraed, widow-peaked, high or low on something and glaring straight at us. Her partner wasn't quite as colorful but equally unhinged. Glad it was daytime!

Ate some decidedly delicious meat pasties in Paddington Station and stalked the digital departure signage until our platform was announced. The whole question of this train trip had been in debate since two weeks before we arrived, when the rail service announced "scheduled industrial action" – strike—for this weekend. After a lot of mildly panicked online research and attempts at Plan B's, we learned the night before that most likely our specific train would run on schedule. And it did, whew!!

Some delay in being picked up by the car rental company as promised, but eventually David the Driver collected us in the rain and so much liked our story and our attitudes that he offered (he said for only the second time in his career) to let us park our rental car in his flat's visitor spot, so we could maximize our walking-about time in Oxford central, which was only about 10 blocks from his place. We accepted with delight, handed him a free download card for "Home at Last" (something we did about 10 times to kind and/or interesting folks we met), and took possession of our diesel-fueled, automatic, black Renault Capture, Claire driving for the first shift. Our London day trips had done a lot to orient us to the realities of driving in England, and we made it to David's parking lot with no incident, even in the rain.

David had encouraged us to walk to a University Museum and get out of the rain, but we took a wrong turn and landed right where we wanted to be, in the middle of the Inspector Morse Oxford...Trinity and Balliol Colleges and a dozen more. Even though we are fans of Morse, we had not intended nor prepared properly to visit his sites, but Trinity College was open and inexpensive, so we explored the grounds and got a taste of all that tradition. Marvelous. Trinity College Chapel was closed for some major renovation, but we read that it had been founded by monks from Durham, one of our destinations later on this trip.

Wandering the streets of Oxford, admiring the architecture, we found ourselves nearing the Radcliffe Camera, now a reading room for the Bodleian Library. Room under the streets for 600,000 books. St. Mary's Church tower beckoned and we climbed it on very narrow circular stone stairs (of course) but were surprised to find that the space for walking around the tower at the top was also very narrow. Squeezing past strangers in the space that was about 20" wide did not discomfit us too much, but I imagine it was quiet torture for some. And there was a fairly steady stream of people making their way around to see all of the spectacular views.

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We took turns being gargoyles for the camera. Late afternoon we headed back to David's, and began the road trip that was both intensely white-knuckle and marvelously liberating. It's true that we didn't see much of anything except the road ahead while in the car driving. It took the GPS (we named her "Nancy"), one of us with an open atlas, and the driver's intuition and attention on high gear to navigate the 400+ miles we covered in 5 days. But we were so very aware that we could not possibly go and do what we wanted without leaving the tours and public transit behind.

About an hour and 15 minutes for our first foray into real traffic, and the biggest lessons learned had to do with roundabouts, which crop up nearly every couple of miles. England has been populated for so many years, and here are SO many intersections, many with 5 or 6 roads coming together, that roundabouts are truly the only obvious way to manage. But unfamiliar drivers face the same rather mind-boggling set of challenges at every one: how many exits will there be this time? Which one do I need to take? Will it be well-marked? And for the larger roundabouts, do I need to stay in the left-hand lane and hug the outside, or move to the inside lane and hug the hub? Someone had assured us that if we missed the exit we wanted, we could just keep going around, but in many cases, that wasn't an option because of the double lane business. Add to the mix the fact that you're approaching everything opposite to what you are programmed for, and it's often raining a bit, and you really don't want to ruin the action-packed vacation by totaling a rental car, and you'll get the idea. Exciting is the word!

The countryside was miraculous, however, as it slowly rolled and flowed about us, and nary a billboard to mar the view—when we could look to right or left. We arrived in Blockley to a hearty welcome from Mandy and Rupert, the owners and refurbishers of a mill that had been repeatedly flooded and left for dead by the locals. Mandy and Rupert took over 7 years ago and thanks to his civil engineering and landscaping acumen, it is almost completely functional again and free from the threat of floods. They showed us to our upstairs room –“Mind your head on the stairs!” – and then pointed us to the village pub just two blocks away, run by David and Freya Shakespeare. Really.

This is another pub that has taken on the challenge of changing the stereotype about British restaurant food and Freya is a chef extraordinaire. Both she and Mr. Shakespeare (in their late 60's), had decided to retire and then took on running a pub instead. The locals obviously appreciated their efforts as the place was packed. At the bar there was a plaque stating that the “Grumpy Old Men Club” met here. Turned out Mr. Shakespeare spent a year in Bellevue, WA. I'm wishing I had taken better notes on the food we ate at each meal, as we often had gourmet quality fare and it might interest a few folks to hear about it. All I recall about this meal was that we were very hungry at first, and then very satisfied. Ingredients were farm-fresh and the recipes were complex enough to be interesting but simple enough to be easy to digest.

No one tips, which we thought was wonderful, though the wait service in many places we visited showed the downside of this. Young staff rarely exhibited an understanding of customer service as we have come to know it. Sometimes very slow service just to get things like water, and sometimes they were not able to answer questions about their own menu items.

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We walked in the dark down the hill to the Inn. Rupert was at his computer in his home office, the parlor looked inviting but we'd used up all our energy reserves and climbed the steep stairs (carefully) to our beautiful Heron Room, named for the 3 panel screen against one wall.

Day 6: Broadway Tower, Chipping Camden, Upper and Lower Slaughter, Blockley

A lovely night under the duvet with the burbling mill stream outside our window. We asked for breakfast at 8 so we could get a good start on the day, and Rupert ferried hot dishes from the kitchen down the hall to the solarium where several small tables were set up and the soft rain was drizzling on the sunroof. Our scrumptious full English breakfast: rack of toast, assorted fresh breads and sweet rolls, yogurt and fresh fruit, cereal (we passed on that), Cumberland sausage, bacon, grilled tomato, grilled mushrooms, one egg sunny side up, and lots of tea with milk. Yikes! What surprised us more, I think, is that we ate it all and burned it off before tea time.

Rupert set out maps of the Cotswolds around Blockley and made some suggestions, most of which we followed. First off the Broadway Tower, a folly designed by Capability Brown and built by James Wyatt for George William 6th Earl of Coventry, finished in 1798. Built to look like a Saxon castle, it commands views of the surrounding countryside for miles, when it's a clear day. Didn't happen to be clear. We even had to return to the entry point to ask just exactly what direction we should take at the end of the trail...we could see absolutely nothing in the fog until we launched out over an unmarked field. Then it loomed up out of the mist...way cool.

On your way up to the top of the tower, you can read and hear about its history, including the era in which William Morris was buddies with the owner and spent a lot of time there. That's William Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement, an early Socialist, novelist, and amazing artisan of fabrics, and other things. From the top we were supposed to be able to see Stratford-on-Avon about 15 miles to the northeast. We could see about 10 feet past the castle crenellations. But it was wonderfully atmospheric...

On to the market town of Chipping Camden with its Market Hall dating to 1627. Built as a roofed stone structure to protect produce sellers, its bumpy massive stone floor has been worn down over the centuries. Just outside the Hall is a memorial to locals who died in WWI and WWII, something we saw again and again. The memory of these conflicts and how many gave their lives is never far from the awareness of the British public. We looked for the name "Payne" and found it several times at different sites around the country. The weather was beginning to lighten up a little so we ambled up the main street, found public loos (free this time!), and then took back streets to the main square to enjoy a bit of the residential architecture and gardens in bloom. Passed several thatched roofs, though overall we did not see many. Mandy and Rupert noted that the most-photographed street in England is Abington Street in Bibury. The Cotswolds is actually more known in Europe for the honey-colored stone than the thatch. Bibury was too far out of our path to visit, but we saw a great deal of visually satisfying stone, ivy, slate roof, etc.

We caught an intriguing glimpse of some ruins and a large expanse of open field with a cemetery, and went to investigate. Discovered a small museum of Chipping Camden's history, which we chose

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to skip in favor of wandering about outside. Behind the museum were the ruins of Old Campden House, built by Sir Baptist Hicks in 1612. Only two ornately-roofed banqueting "houses" remain standing and are open only a few times a year. But they make an incredible sight away beyond the cemetery. And just next to the cemetery is St. James Church, the approach to which is along a narrow path lined with 12 lime trees, planted several centuries ago. Each one is over 20 feet tall.

In 1170 Henry II visited and confirmed the town's charter. Most likely a small Norman church sat here then. It has expanded in the centuries since, and holds monuments to various successful wool merchants, the Costwolds' most famous commodity. St. James is known as a "wool church." Two brass grave markers in the floor of the chancel date from 1401 and are protected from the inquisitive by a heavy rug, but we gingerly lifted the corner to have a peek at William Grevel, noted wool merchant and citizen, and his wife Marion.

When we had poked to our hearts' content, we walked past the almshouses circa 1620 and went back to the market square for a proper late afternoon high tea in a tea shop: lemon cake, crumpets, clotted cream and jams. Once re-fortified, we headed south about 20 minutes to Lower and Upper Slaughter, whose names are reputedly related to sloe gin, not butchery. There was a country fair in full swing in lower Slaughter and parking looked dicey so we kept on to Upper Slaughter, passing up the sheep petting and who knows what other delights. In Upper Slaughter, we found very little for the roving tourist, and were starting to despair of finding a public loo, when we chanced upon a rather classy hotel, the Lord's Country Club, and nipped in to inquire whether we might use their facilities. Happily, they obliged.

I glanced at the guest book as we were leaving, and saw this charming comment from a Japanese guest whose hometown of Meguro-ku, Tokyo was where I went to school when I was 12 years old: "dreaming hotel! I never forgot this memory of the hotell." The Prince and Princess Akishino of Japan also visited here for lunch a year ago. Swank, indeed!

On our way back to Blockley on some of the narrowest roads in the world, me whooping and keening at every close encounter with the verge, as Hank got used to the no-shoulder, very-little-road, no-idea-whether-cars-are-coming-at-us-around-the-next-bend driving scenario. We took turns with this exciting activity over the 5 days on the road and I have to say I think Hank did a much better job of placing his fate in my hands. Or maybe I was just the better driver so he didn't have as much to whoop about. Just sayin'...

We were still digesting high tea when we got back to Snugborough Mill, so we took a long and lovely walk in the clear early evening light, up into the hills a bit above the village, and then wandered home through back streets. Wood pigeons cooing from the trees and starlings settling to roost for the night. Met a trio of walkers up in the hills, two locals and their visitor. Chatted about Blockley's history. We passed a local bulletin board on which was posted the testimonial of 91-year old Mr. Smith, who began his plea:

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"I came into this world in the rough and ready year of 1923. I am from Barnsley, and I can tell you that my childhood, like so many others from that era, was not an episode of Downton Abbey. It was a barbarous time. It was a bleak time. It was an uncivilized time because public healthcare didn't exist."

Mr. Smith wrote eloquently of the hardships he and many other faced, and ended with an exhortation to Mr. Cameron to "keep your mitts off my NHS." (National Health Service)

We ended the day back in Shakespeare's pub with another delicious gastropub meal, and another chat with the owners. Tired and foot-sore, but very happy, we climbed under the duvet for another great sleep.

Day 7: Ironbridge, Chester, Conwy, Chester

We pretended to have found fault with the breakfast and then sang the chorus of "Proper Cup of Coffee" for our hosts, and learned that Mandy was one of the administrators for the local country opera company for 16 years. This was in fact her last week on the job....finally retiring to run the B&B. They had taken on and successfully presented such mammoth projects as Wagner's Ring Cycle, with a staff of 2 ½ people! Check it out: <http://www.lfo.org.uk/>

As it was a lovely morning we walked about the grounds of the mill, checking out the millpond, the iron bridge across the mill stream, and all the engineering feats that Rupert had supervised or accomplished himself. Final photos together at the front door, and we were off to Ironbridge.

We passed a lot more farmland and rolling hills moving out of the Cotswolds, and then worked our way down into the ravine in which the very first iron bridge spans the River Severn. A Quaker, Abraham Darby I, devised the technique in 1709 of smelting iron with coke which initiated the Industrial Revolution. More about all this at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/371>

We strolled over the bridge and checked it out from all angles, up and down, and then spent some time getting smarter in the museum, a small but info-packed two-story structure that was the active toll house for several centuries.

Lunch at an outdoor café just across from the bridge, at least until the clouds dumped a sudden shower and we scrambled to the only remaining indoor table to finish up, a bit soggy but glad that we'd gotten our time on the bridge before it started to pour. Pretty much cleared up by the time we headed back up the gorge to the main roads and set out for Chester, more than 2 hours away. We intended to check in to our Holiday Inn in Chester and take off right away for the medieval castle in Conwy, North Wales. Took a few moments upon our arrival to absorb the fact that this was a hotel on a racecourse (I had known that), but that the racecourse is the oldest on in the UK and was originally a Roman harbor we hadn't realized.

With a nod to the origins of Chester, we were on our way by 4pm, hoping to get to Conwy, an hour away, in time to explore inside the castle. No such luck, so when we realized we were too late for that, we found a crepe café and chatted with the young lad who made our dinner. Heard the woes of his working life having to deal with TWO managers, one of whom came in to say they were closed for

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the night and the other a few minutes later announced they were still open! He said he couldn't keep them straight. When we finished there, we fortified ourselves with ice cream cones and headed down to the quay. Posed Hank next to the "smallest house in Great Britain." We set out to walk atop the walls of the town of Conwy, all part of the fortifications built by Edward I starting in 1292 to protect himself and his reign from the locals. Hugging the coastline in order to re-provision safely by sea. Walking all the way round on the city walls was an adventure itself and took over an hour. Lots of crows and rabbits, and views into townspeople's back gardens, and the occasional peek into a church or other public space. We felt the breeze, smelled the salt of the Irish Sea, heard the sounds of night falling, and saw incredible views of the castle and the surrounding lands.

I had hoped to sit in a Welsh pub and hear Welsh language burbling all around us, but the locals disabused us of that notion. Said we'd have to head into the remote countryside to get any of that—"around here, most everyone speaks English"—so we sat in a pub on the quay and Hank had a pint while I had some soda and crisps. Then back to the car and Chester for a "real" hotel experience – cookie-cutter room, but spacious and comfortable.

Day 8: Chester, Hadrian's Wall (Birdoswald and Chesters Fort), the town of Wall, Durham

It was in the breakfast nook at the Chester Racecourse Holiday Inn that we learned the real secret of full English breakfast...Heinz baked beans right out of the can. Really. This was missing from our more high-class morning meals so far, and we made up for lost time. At least I did. There was something altogether yummy about that brown sugar molasses flavor on my eggs, sausage, bacon, tomatoes, and mushrooms!

We hoofed it into city center in a slow steady shower and followed directions for the Roman amphitheater, but got side-tracked on some more city wall walking and came upon the Roman Gardens first. Archeological finds from elsewhere in town have been arranged in an open garden space right alongside the section of the city wall that was blasted through back in 1642 or so. King Charles I took refuge in St. John the Baptist Church (which was the local cathedral back then) and the Parliamentarians tried very hard to get to him. He's the King who later lost his head to those who no longer wanted a monarchy. His son, Charles II got it back a few years later. Just think of all the drama and pageantry (and the purses) we'd have missed over the last few centuries if he hadn't sat down again on the throne.

Learned all about hypocausts (heated flooring) in Roman baths, which was great preparation for our later trip to the bathing complex in Bath itself. Across a street or two and we were in the Roman amphitheater which also lies just outside the city walls. A mural has been drawn on one side to bring the place to life—very effectively we thought. I stood on the tethering stone and tried to look intimidating—as the ankle-shackled day's entertainment was supposed to look.

Much excavation remains in-progress around Chester which was a significant Roman enclave in its day. Thanks to our British neighbors Simon and Deborah, we knew it would be an important stop. The next place we wandered into turned out to be the church where Charles I hid out and where some

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seminal events happened years earlier. A pagan site, a Celtic Christian site (550AD), an ancient Christian (non-Celtic) site (689AD), etc.

Of critical historical significance for England is that King Edgar the Peaceful was crowned in 973 the first king of ALL England. The actual crowning was in Bath. He was then transported to his palace in Chester, rowed on the River Dee from there to the Minster Church of St, John the Baptist by the 6 next most powerful kings in a display of submission. In the city center, they swore fealty at the Saxon Cross, the ruins of which still stand. This event is considered the defining moment for the country from then on known as England. And we just stumbled upon it on our walk in the rain!

The church was eventually superseded by a grander cathedral built a few blocks away, but we preferred the old and historically rich St. John's. At either end of the main buildings there are fascinating remains of towers, one of which came crashing down on Good Friday 1881. Oops.

In amongst the tower ruins at the other end of the church is a wall containing the remains of a medieval coffin high up above an arch. Inscribed on the inside and visible are the words "Dust to Dust."

The rain was letting up as we ambled over to enjoy some of the architecture in town and walked past the Saxon Cross. Warmed ourselves inside and out at a chain restaurant called "Pret a Manger" with delicious veggie-stuffed wraps and hot soup. Making our way with a sub-standard map back to the hotel car park, we passed more industrial areas of town and the bus station. Always good to remember that locals are going about their normal days while we are soaking up the ambiance of the ages right under their noses.

We had our most repetitive roundabout experience getting out of Chester, tracing nearly all the spokes of the hub before we landed on the correct highway heading north.

There were some blessed stretches of highway on this afternoon that had no roundabouts for as much as 20 miles! Pure bliss....I was at the wheel and when the sun came out, I know my right foot got very heavy on that gas pedal. Miles and miles of agricultural land, small villages, and the occasional industrial town whizzed past. We went past exits to the Lake District but were eager to explore Hadrian's Wall before dark, so we kept on going. We were also acutely aware that our own corner of the world contains spectacular scenery. The Lake District is wonderful, no doubt, but we had decided to focus on history and architecture. So onward to the north of England!

After more than 3 hours driving, we saw road signs for Birdoswald, one of the most significant of the garrisons situated next to the wall. You can see the wall itself from time to time off a ways, but it's also hard to know whether what you are looking at is Hadrian's Wall, or the farmers' walls, constructed of the abandoned Roman garrisons. It's all the same stone...

At Birdoswald we got the clear sense (with the help of terrific graphics and commentary) of the fact that each garrison on the wall was a large village, fortified and guarded by soldiers 24/7. Entrance gates and the layout of buildings remain in stubble form, but the sketches show the height and

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breadth of the communities that were thriving here right up until the Romans left in the mid 400's. And then the locals swept in, commandeered the building materials, and hostilities with the Scots just over the former barrier vigorously recommenced.

The gift shop clerk advised us on several things. 1) the delicious elderflower wine available only from English Heritage, which we bought and drank with pleasure, 2) the best place to take another look at the garrisons (Chesters Fort) and 3) a trivia point along the way – the sycamore growing in the wall itself that appeared in the Kevin Costner Robin Hood movie. We kept a sharp lookout for this most important landmark and found it! As there was no traffic just then, we stopped and took a couple of photos. Grade C movie, but grade A tree and photos.

Chesters Fort combined a museum of Roman artifacts (some with captivating inscriptions), an extensive garrison complex, and a bit apart from the main buildings, luxurious Roman baths nestled by the River Tyne. Just across the river lie large blocks of stone that anchored a bridge here in Roman times.

They were shutting for the night when we drove off from Chesters Fort, armed with the recommendation of a roadhouse called "The Hadrian Freehouse" in the nearby village of "Wall." Seriously. Dinner was a little delayed when the young server brought out a large platter of ham that we had not ordered. Her response when we so indicated was the altogether charming "Are you sure you didn't order this and change your mind?" She stood undecided for way longer than a tip-hopeful server might have, but eventually the kitchen got it right and we had beef brisket cottage pie to share that came with "mash peas." Hmmm, not sure we'll order mash peas again, but the rest was delicious.

At the end of this action-packed day, we expected to settle into our Airbnb accommodations for 2 nights so that we could explore the area around Durham. Billed as an 18th century manor house, it proved difficult to locate in the dark with no internet or phone service. In exasperation, we pulled into the only public building we could find—the Chiltern Bowling League—and roused a couple of men drinking at the bar with the bartender. They were at first amused and then helpful. They didn't know our hosts personally but identified them as, 'Oh, those people that took the old manor house.'

With their clear directions, we found the manor by 9:30pm. A small sign directed us to park and use the back entrance. Not the warmest of welcomes, especially as there were no lights to guide us. And in fact, no one there when we entered to a foyer and large family room. A car screeched out front and the hostess swept in, showing us immediately to our upstairs room. She explained the rules of engagement for our shared bathroom (they call it "Jack and Jill"). Two construction workers would be using it as well, so both parties needed to remember to unlock the opposing door when done. Both our room and the bath were high-ceilinged, starkly furnished, and rather intimidating. But that was okay—we were really tired by then. Our hostess said she and her husband live in another part of the manor and that if we needed anything, we would have to text them. And she left. I realized we hadn't been given a room key, and I picked up the latch to secure our door. It cracked off its base. A little wary, I turned the door handle and it fell out of the door. Time to text our hostess...the man of the

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manor appeared with screwdriver and assured Hank that the door handle was "just that way." He began to putter with the latch as he mentioned that there are no keys for the doors and that they'd never had any problems or complaints.

I had reached the conclusion by then that I wasn't comfortable with this arrangement, given that we had planned on leaving our luggage the next day. When I stated this, he went and got his wife. She appeared offended that we would question the integrity of their security. Though Airbnb does screen the person who makes a reservation, it does not screen anyone else, so her assertion, while lovely, is relatively meaningless. She finally blurted out that she had been in hospital all day, gotten some bad news, and didn't care what we did. I expressed regret for her bad day but said we were leaving.

Turned out that the Chiltern Country Club and Inn was just down the lane. We booked a room, and were on the phone with Airbnb a minimal amount of time. They were absolutely first-rate in their handling of the situation, refunding our money and even (over my protests) covering the cost of our new room. In fact, their main concern was whether we were now in a safe place. Had I been a single woman using Airbnb in any number of countries in the world, I would have felt VERY grateful for their concern. I have found, however, that because we "cancelled" our stay, I am prevented from leaving a review indicating WHY. Which means, I guess, that this might have happened to others who wanted to post an alert about the lack of security, but couldn't. Of course, there are probably plenty of folks who wouldn't have cared. They certainly had lots of good reviews on the Airbnb site.

So our day ended unexpectedly in a truly country inn sort of accommodation, with the local Rotary Club engaged in its monthly meeting and eating event in the large dining room.

Day 9: Durham, York

Breakfast in the dining room was nearly full English—minus the baked beans. That was okay. As we drove into Durham, just a few minutes away from Chiltern, we took Rick Steve's advice and headed for the large mall close to city center, since parking in their garage was much easier than on the street. It was disorienting to walk through retail spaces that we had been assiduously avoiding. Hank strolled past the prefect travel hat, but couldn't bring himself to wait in line and pay for it. We found it again on the way back to the car and he wore it from then on.

Durham is a hill city, with the castle and cathedral perched on the highest point overlooking a bend in the River Wear. Narrow pathways squiggled off the main roads, winding down to the water or up to the hilltop. We walked slowly in an uphill direction, sure we'd reach something interesting in a few moments, and enjoying the buskers (a young and enthusiastic lot) on the way.

We reached the tourist information center just in time to purchase and join the next tour of the castle, the only way to see inside it. The castle was built on the orders of William the Conqueror, beginning in 1072, for the purpose of defense against the Scots and his own (reluctant) subjects. His offensive became known as "the Harrying of the North." The castle is now a dormitory for students attending Durham University, so there was much of it off-limits and no photos were allowed. We saw quite a few artifacts, some dating as far back as the 8th century. On one end of the castle was a 3-story

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staircase that visibly sloped to the west, in spite of the addition of supporting columns in recent centuries. The original builders had not reckoned on the weight of stone involved in the open-plan stair construction.

William also created what he called a Prince-Bishop position, combining both secular and religious powers in one man, an effective means of controlling the situation in the "unruly" north and the only place in England with such an office. As was the case with every structure we visited, changes to both exterior and interior have occurred over the centuries. Recognizing the basic design elements of each architectural era proved both challenging and rewarding.

On our way to the cathedral across a green space, we noticed a plaque on a large stone building that read: Bishop Cosin's Almshouses, 1666 replacing Bishop Langley's Song and Grammar Schools 1414.

Durham Cathedral, one of our gotta-get-there sites, is the grandest example of a Norman religious edifice in Great Britain. An Anglo-Saxon church sat on this ground to house the bones of St. Cuthbert for about a century. His bones were transferred in 1104 to the newly built cathedral. And The Venerable Bede (d.735, author of the first history of England) is also entombed here. Oh, and this is where segments of Harry Potter were filmed—we were told especially the corridor outside the Chapter House.

But before we poked around inside and climbed the tower (325 steps), we needed to stoke the fires within, and ate in the restaurant tucked into the vaulted undercroft. And ogled the fund-raising genius of a lego version of the cathedral. For a pound you can buy one lego and place it (under supervision) to contribute to the project. Complete with little construction characters perched here and there.

We paid a few pounds to climb the tower, left our bags with the docents, and set up the very narrow stone (of course) circular stairs to the sky. One other person huffed and puffed up with us, but headed back down rather soon. We enjoyed the views and all the masonry marvels all alone up there and then a father-daughter duo appeared through the small doorway onto the roof of the tower. I offered to take their photo if they'd take ours. They answered in English and said they had just hiked 5 days in the scenic Lake District. Asked where we were from, we always answered "Seattle." These folks countered with "We're from Port Townsend." So we fessed up that we're actually from Poulsbo (even closer to Port Townsend). The man is attorney for the port up there. There went another free download card!

We headed back to the car, slipping in to have a proper English high tea just as the tea shoppe was closing inside the shopping mall, and Hank nabbed his new travel hat. We pulled out of the parking lot about 5pm. Traffic was as white-knuckle as always, and we took a circuitous route out of town thanks to roundabout woes, which we repeated on the approach to our hotel outside York, but arrived about 7:30pm. Greeted by a smiling receptionist and a mini-pub in the lobby. Went next door to the local carvery for a full-on dinner with 4 kinds of meat, all sorts of sides and the genuine article Yorkshire Pudding. Hank allowed as how it was really just a vehicle for the gravy—he was right, but I still loved

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it. And the chatter around us was thick with Yorkshire accents. This was clearly a popular gathering spot for locals, so we stayed as quiet as possible and just listened. It was great.

Day 10: York, Cambridge

This is where you get a break, dear reader, because on Day 10 I woke up unable to focus my eyes and nauseous, so we skipped the city of York. I was able to travel by noon which gave us just enough time to reach Cambridge before the rental car company closed. Hank had to drive my portion as well as his own—no way was he letting me behind the wheel—but I did keep my camera poised to capture signs of places we weren't going to go. We passed Grantham (Downton Abbey's lord was a Grantham) and Robin Hood Airport right near Nottingham and Sherwood Forest. Looking off to the distance, it MIGHT have been what we saw! Lunch was sub-par, at a service area we reached with some degree of urgency as I had been drinking fluids all morning and was near to bursting. Hank, my driving hero!

Just a block or two away from the car place, after driving for over 3 hours (the second day in a row), Hank sped up to avoid a cyclist and we saw the flash of a traffic camera behind us. Still haven't gotten the ticket charge, so maybe they took pity on the "foreigners." We got a taxi from the rental place to our night's accommodation in Christ's College, the home base for Charles Darwin as an undergrad from 1828-1831. We looked in to the grand dining hall on our way past the porter's lodge and saw the room packed with academic luminaries getting ready to sit for dinner—part of a conference that week. Some colleges supplement income by renting facilities and rooms when the students are on break. Our room was in what they call the second court, in a "new" building...circa 1830.

Out to stretch our legs, we went across the market place and strolled past King's College, a very grand spot in Cambridge which we visited at length the next morning. Then through narrow streets, In a small side alleyway, we chanced upon St. Benet's Church and went in just as Evening Prayer was beginning. The only attendees were the Franciscan vicar and the sexton and one other passerby. We couldn't easily follow in the prayer book, so we mostly shared in the quiet reverence and healing energy present here. Following the service, we spoke with the vicar, Reverend Anne Matthews. Back in the 70's she spent a year in Minnesota as an exchange student with American Friends' Service Committee (Quakers). Now she is an Anglican Franciscan carrying on the tradition of morning and evening prayers recited every day in this church for centuries. We were led around the small but memorable space and saw the bell pulls, the original Saxon foundation stones, the Norman arches and columns from 1020, and delicate stained glass windows. This is, in fact, the oldest church in the city and county.

Leaving St. Benet's, we passed an elaborate building called The Corn Exchange, currently a venue for the likes of singer/songwriter Richard Thompson.

By this time, we were both ready for a meal, so we headed to an avenue reputed to have a good selection of restaurants. Walked by Wagamama which we'd heard of but never visited, so we

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indulged and it was so worth it that we went back for lunch the next day. Wonderfully fresh and inventive combinations of Asian-inspired dishes. One of the few places we were asked to tip. We did.

Back at Christ's College, we found the staircase to Darwin's room (now occupied by another student), and wandered through the grounds as the day drew to a close. Two memorials to Darwin drew our interest; one a garden containing plants he encountered on the Beagle voyage just after his graduation here. He sits as a young man on the edge of a bench in this garden. A little stroll takes you to a portico with a bust of the elderly Darwin and informative graphics and text about his life. Another garden containing the mulberry tree that John Milton planted here was open at only select times, and we missed seeing it.

For those who are not into all things British, it bears noting that Cambridge University (like Oxford University) is a collection of colleges, each one founded by different benefactors over a span of many centuries. Christ's College, for example, was founded by the richest woman in English Medieval history, Lady Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII and grandmother of Henry VIII. A few blocks across city center is Trinity College, founded by Henry VIII, who also had a hand in finishing up King's College, which took 90 years and four kings to complete. There are at least 12 major colleges that make up Cambridge University. It began with rebels from Oxford who set up shop in Cambridge in 1209. So Oxford has more tradition under its belt and Cambridge is considered the "upstart, progressive" university.

We ended the day in our "college rooms" tasting the elderflower wine from Hadrian's Wall. Lovely.

Day 11: Cambridge, London

Breakfast was in the upper hall dining room. Listened to all sorts of languages at long trestle tables, most surprised by the large contingent of folks speaking Finnish. We chatted with a couple who enlightened us. Turns out that a young friend of theirs was graduating as the first Finn to earn a doctorate from Cambridge and 60 of her fellow Finns had arrived for this auspicious event. Then we learned that our new Finnish friends were involved with the annual Sibelius Competitions in Helsinki. The man was actually the vice-chair and this year they were looking at several hundred contestants. We had a silly moment when we offered them a free download card and the wife thought she heard us say "Rap" not "Folk." She shook her head and seemed offended and he tried to give it back. We persisted a little and when they realized we were simple folksingers, they relented and accepted the gift.

On the other side was a Frenchwoman at the college for a seminar in Private International Law, in her case focusing on the legal rights and realities of children caught in custodial or other situations when the parents are in two different countries. A very different field from international corporate or business law. She practiced in all the EU countries.

We set out to explore the architecture of Cambridge and settled upon a closer look at King's College. The normal chapel entrance was closed due to filming (a not-infrequent occurrence at popular sites around the country). This was for an episode of Grantchester, the BBC production. But we were able

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to access it by a side door and marvel at the largest fan vaulted ceiling in the world. This is the college that took the efforts of 4 kings and 90 years to complete so there's a lot to see and understand. A veritable museum has been established along one side of the main aisle, in the area that would have originally been private worship chapels and memorial vaults. Excellent graphics and text to explain the historical significance and structural beauty of the place. We took in as much as we could including Anne Bolyn's initials carved to accompany Henry VIII's on a magnificent wooden "screen" that leads into the quire—her initials certainly date his contribution!

One bit of trivia we learned from a docent about a special area of the quire section. For centuries most congregants stood throughout hours-long church services, but the back row of the quire on each side of the aisle was equipped with an extra ledge about 3' tall. On this ledge an aged and deserving (and no doubt rich) gentleman could perch his bottom for some relief to his legs and still appear to be standing. You can see the slightly concave depressions made from years of wearing away the wood.

Several hours were still ours before we had to hop a train back to London, so we kept on wandering, passing Cambridge University Press unobtrusively sited on a corner with a slew of bikes in racks out front. Buskers were performing every few blocks, mostly college-age kids. Down a side street from the University Press we came upon a spectacular Norman Round Church. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, 1130, was built to emulate its counterpart in Jerusalem. Just a little more recent than St. Benet's, it is one of only 4 round churches in England. The stone faces and their placement among the successive arches is stunning. I snapped photos of two of the explanatory posters before someone told me it was forbidden. Oops...

Back to Wagamama for another scrumptious meal and then I twisted Hank's arm to go punting on the River Cam, a truly tourist-y thing to do. But the most fun happened while I was in the loo down by the punting docks. I heard a lot of squealing and heavily accented, "Oh, no, there's a queue! I can't hold it!" I opened my stall door to find 10 or so 20-something lady pirates wielding fierce-looking swords and squirming about. I quipped, "You're pirates! You shouldn't HAVE to wait!" They hooted at that, one thing led to another and we ended up taking a selfie in the loo all together. Peak moment. Met them later as we were walking to the train station and the whoops and hugs started up again. Delightful pirates.

Punting afforded us a view of the River Cam and the back end (very grand) of several famous colleges, including King's College, Trinity, and St. John's (the latter two fierce rivals), as well as several impressive if small, bridges. The punting itself, especially on a Saturday, was pretty much like playing bumper cars, and sometimes a pole would get stuck in the mud, literally. Nothing to do but wait for a passing punt to effect a rescue. Our punter was a pro and kept us at a safe distance from amateurs, but it was lively.

Picking up our luggage from the porter's lodge back at Christ's College, we hoofed it quite a few more blocks than we had imagined to the train station, with plenty of time to board. We had picked up some gourmet pork pies at the farmer's market and enjoyed these on the train—very swank accommodations with drop-down tables and cushy seats. Thoroughly relaxing way to travel. Had to

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transfer to the overground and walk from London Fields station back to home-base and our welcoming young family. Fun with them all before a bath and story time.

Day 12: London

Lazy morning and a bus ride all together to Dashoom, an Indian-inspired global dining experience. Snuck in just under the rope for the breakfast menu which were various egg wraps with all sorts of yummy fillings. Very chic and very tasty, Then Mom and Dad headed off for a day alone while we took the little one and boarded a bus for Victoria Park, via a canal walk. Passed one canal boat with a Peter Pan flair, "Second Star on the Right." Victoria Park was a young person's heaven. Might give ulcers to American city playground planners who are so restrained by our litigious approach to design these days. There were mostly wooden and rope structures, and so many different ways to challenge and improve balance and speed, with all sorts of potential for falling or getting caught up in ropes. We loved watching our granddaughter navigate every one of them.

We had a quintessentially British experience there as well...someone pointed out that a puppet show was just starting a few yards from the playground, so we went to see it. I had asked if it would be Punch and Judy which I find offensive for many reasons, and the man had said, "Oh, no, it won't be Punch and Judy." So we settled our young person in a group of enthusiastic kids and got all ready to be enthralled. And, of course, here came Punch and Judy and the baby and all the whacking which seems to be the only plot line.

We watched for a few minutes until it was clear that this was not funny, even though there were quite a few kids hollering and whooping all around her. In my opinion, she had more sense than to find it funny. If it's an acquired taste, I'd just as soon she not acquire it, and she was more than ready to come with me when I asked her if she wanted to play some more.

We ended the day with an emergency run to a nearby café as we discovered all the public loos were closed. But this meant we also got to have ice cream cones from the vendor truck just outside the park, so that was cool. We found the right bus pickup spot and headed back to NE London, with a stop at Perfect Chicken to get take-out dinner. Some quiet time before dinner and a bath and songs and stories afterward. Mom and Dad got back just in time to kiss her goodnight.

Day 13: London, Bath

Early breakfast and off to London Fields (getting to be very familiar) and tube to our train out of Paddington on tickets we bought online the night before. Glorious day for traveling—sunny and warm. Arriving in Bath early afternoon, we walked on Henry Street and other side streets to the Abbey and beyond, getting a feel for the very special atmosphere of this mostly Georgian-era city. Beau Nash, a true dandy of his time, single-handedly created and enforced England's first "manners" as he and others in the 18th century developed Bath into the Las Vegas of its time. But the history, of course, reaches back to Roman times. Once we'd gotten our bearings, we walked back to the bus station close to the train station and boarded the next local for Wells, a 30-minute ride to the southwest. With all the places we visited and the dates on which we were traveling, the ONLY opportunity to hear

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Evensong in a major cathedral (which was one of my gotta-do's), was this Monday evening, Sept 7 at 5pm in Wells. So to Wells we were going!

We chatted with folks on the bus, including two drifters and a dog...the young man called himself "a gypsy" --we took to mean maybe getting a handout from home but wandering on his own. His companion was vaping at the back of the bus, and Hank asked whether that wasn't considered smoking and therefore banned on the bus. The answer, "It should be banned" came with a shrug. The dog was very well behaved.

The scenery was again mostly agricultural and we were now entering the southern edge of the Cotswolds so the rolling hills dominated the horizon. Every once in a while up popped a folly or a small castle, or chapel-like structure nestled among villages and fields. It doesn't matter that we'd seen all this in movies and read about it for years, it was magical and mystical and utterly mundane all at the same time. Something inexplicable about breathing the air and hearing the sounds and listening to the voices to make it REAL for yourself. Nothing else manages to do that.

One of the locals, a lady in a flame red woolen coat, told us to get off a few stops before the cathedral and walk down the hill. She was so right...we went along cobbled streets and passed a few students wearing polo shirts with "Wells Cathedral School" logo. One of only 5 musical schools established for school-age children in the UK. Turned a corner to the left and bam! – there was the cathedral gloriously showered in mid-afternoon sun. Breath-taking.

Wells is touted as the smallest city in England. How it rates this cathedral is a long story of power and its consolidation. We wanted to learn about it but were really hungry and it wasn't easy finding a place to eat at 3pm...but we landed at Pickwick's and they graciously (because they weren't really open) fixed us paninis that will from now on rate as the panini gold standard with us. We wolfed them down and took their last two scones for later, and walked a few blocks to visit the Bishop's Palace before going inside the cathedral. We checked with a docent whether it would be better to go climb the cathedral tower or tour the palace in the short time we had. He noted that ever since a woman fell 30 feet and was trapped between walls in the bell tower in 2014, they had cancelled all tower tours. She was airlifted with injuries in a rescue complicated by the turrets and tight spaces. So we went to the palace...

Sixty Bishops have lived here since 1206, holding office as Bishop of Bath and Wells...an interesting bit of news since we were going to explore Bath the next day. There have been people here since long before the palace and cathedral were built, drawn by the free-flowing irrigation from the wells. However, it was the Palace (1206) and the cathedral built just before it that increased the political importance of the area.

The palace is simply grand outside, with its moat and walls you can walk, and the ancient well springs that gave this area its name. Henry VIII wanted the lead in the roof over the grand hall and so there are majestic ruins of that edifice, with grass growing lush where the Bishops' dinner guests banqueted. And trees of over 400 years' majesty dot the greens: walnut, yew, and ginkgo.

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The water works that were constructed to channel the spring water so that flooding abated are still in operation and a community garden takes advantage of the runoff just outside the palace. Inside are historic vestments in display cases and the Bishop's Chair, as well as a gallery of paintings of the most important Bishops to hold court here. Even the restrooms were impressive with their vaulted columns.

We walked through a connecting archway, in which beggars historically asked for alms of the high and mighty passing between the two structures of power. The interior of Wells Cathedral is every bit as impressive to the eye as the outside. We had only 15 minutes to take in what we could, and were most struck with the amazing swooping arches of the central aisle, and the inviting lightness of the interior. Getting in line with about 30 others who wanted to experience Evensong in this amazing space, we could hear the choir warming up. Tonight it was to be a Boy's Choir together with a Vicars' Choir. We were ushered into the quire and admonished to turn off all devices and take no photos or videos. We sat on cushioned wooden seats, several hundred years old (the seats, not the cushions).

The service was both musical and textual with two readings by churchmen whose official titles we did not learn. We were seated side-on to ½ the choir, one line of boys and one of vicars behind them. The other ½ was across the aisle and the director stood in the aisle facing us, which was wonderful as he was animated and very engaged with his choristers. His attitude was one of firm benevolence, gently admonishing one youngster who apparently got out of line for a moment. It was a joy to watch him direct. They sang a setting by Tompkins of Psalm 37, provided all the choral responses to the readings, and then sang Parsons' Ave Maria. I don't see them on youtube, but you can hear the Choir of King's College sing it, and you may understand why this was worth the effort to experience. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2WrDvl847g>

One need not belong to a religion to feel a connection to some universal truth that rises in and through this music in this space. Exquisite, healing sounds.

We engaged in a little scurrying to be sure we caught the last bus back to Bath, where we found clotted cream in one store and strawberry jam in another, to slather on our scones later. We set off in the dark up the long hill above Bath to our B&B, a walk pretty much uphill all the way for about 20 minutes. Arrived at Astor House to find a welcome envelop on the door. Our key stashed inside—interesting security setup. I guess it's a really safe neighborhood.

No one was there to greet us, but lights on everywhere and the breakfast room already prepped for the morning. Our spacious room was on the second floor, with even a trouser press among the amenities. The Victorian house with its colorful wallpapers and carpeting has been furnished in a rather stark but totally effective black on white/cream theme. Cozy and minimalist at the same time. Well done. Seated on the massive king-size bed and nibbling scones with clotted cream and jam, sipping tea from our courtesy teapot, we were completely content and ready to crash for another night.

Day 14: Bath

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The breakfast room had tables for seven groups. We were down early and took the table for two in front of the fireplace. Several other guests came in while we ate, everyone pretty quiet. Full English breakfast for me (no baked beans on the menu), and Hank had two poached eggs with all the trimmings. Wonderful tea and a rack of toast, plus jams and marmalade. This was Hank's morning to take a breather, so we spent a couple of hours resting upstairs. Headed out just before noon and picked up the bus for the ride down the hill. Took so long to come that we could easily have walked it, but we wanted the change of pace. We got off at city center right by the Abbey and the Roman Baths, and bought a couple of day passes for the hop on-hop off double-decker city tour bus. For a very modest fee you can get on or off at 15+ locations in and around Bath and listen to an audio guide while you're riding. We figured it might come in handy later in the afternoon when we were less eager to walk as much, and it did.

However, our first destination that day was the Roman Baths. To the casual observer walking outside the entrance, it appears to consist of one large rectangular pool that sits 18 feet below street level, with statuary high above the water. In reality, this visible pool is perhaps 1/5 of the total excavated ruins, all of which lie below the Georgian buildings in the center of Bath. When they were being constructed, the geniuses of city planning raised the level of the streets 18 feet above the Roman foundations. The result was to eliminate the effects of repeated flooding of the River Avon. It also buried the first floor of Sally Lunn's house, the oldest house in town and the site of the famous Sally Lunn Buns, a Bath tradition.

Now the excavations, which are ongoing, are in large part open to the public and the on-site museum they incorporate is one of the most fascinating experiences of this trip. Room after room with audio guides that supplemented the exhibits or occasionally provided commentary by American author Bill Bryson, one of Bath's most ardent fans. Finds continue to be unearthed, most recently a stash of over 30,000 coins, many from Roman times.

There was much more to take in than we had capacity for in just one visit and our stomachs were grumbling, so after 2 ½ hrs. we walked through the famous Pump Room, where the spa water of Bath bubbles up into a fountain and is available to drink, but there was a long wait for a table, so we settled for the Roman Kitchen restaurant across the square. Had delicious gourmet sandwiches and soups. The busking just outside in the square kept competing with the restaurant's sound track and we were delighted that we got outside in time to hear two pieces sung by a soprano with enviable vocal versatility. Her name is Miranda Gilroy and in talking with her when her set was done we learned that she's been busking here daily for 26 years. I don't see any website or info for her online...we gave her a generous tip and captured two short videos, the second one a few bars of "Nessun Dorma." More grateful tears on our part for the talents and devotion of people who make music-making their vocation, as she does.

When her set was finished, we hopped on the bus and rode through stops 1-9, learning more about the history and architecture of Bath. We got off near the Assembly Rooms, where Beau Nash worked his social engineering marvels and Jane Austin attended events during the 5 years she lived in Bath, from 1801-1806. It was close to closing time, but fun to get a glimpse of the ornate Georgian ceilings.

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From there we walked to the nearby Circus and Royal Crescent, both elaborate Georgian condominiums in essence. The Circus is three banks of buildings enclosing a green space containing 5 huge plane trees (what we call maple). We estimated they must be easily 300-400 years old. It was softly warm and breezy and the sun was shining...perfect day for people to be out and about. As we walked into Victoria Park just south of the Royal Crescent, we saw families and couples picnicking and relaxing on the grass near the Victorian band shell. Sitting on the bench waiting for the bus at stop #15 enjoying the fine weather, it was hard to imagine being anywhere else on the planet.

Getting off the bus we noticed a statue close to the Abbey, a rather Victorian looking angelic lady pouring water from an urn. The inscription read "Water is Best" and under that the notation that this fountain was part of the Bath Temperance Movement in 1861. A push-button activates drinking water but mostly it misses the mark and makes a mess. Kind of like temperance...

There was now another busker in front of the Abbey. His playing drew us in and held us for his whole set. Ben Powell plays all original instrumentals in a DADGAD tuning on a Lowden guitar. Mesmerizing. A little like hearing Michael Hedges or Pierre BenSusan but not mimicking either of them. <http://www.benpowellguitar.com/> My mother would have made him get his hair out of his face, but we didn't care...the music was brilliant.

When this town was in the epicenter of fashionable living, back in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, fancy people (including Jane Austen by her own account) sauntered up into the hills surrounding Bath to stroll on country lanes, enjoy the meadows and the views and "take the air" away from the bustling city crowds. We figured on doing the same thing and catching the sunset while we were at it.

We set out for an evening stroll over Pulteney Bridge, likened to the Ponte Vecchio by Queen Victoria on her one and only visit to Bath. It is considerably shorter and less dramatic, but it does have shops along the sides.

Past the bridge we walked out of the main city via Great Pulteney Street, making a short stop at the public loos in Sydney Garden. (If I had all the time and money in the world, I would take a trip around England photographing and documenting public loos with their often-inventive solutions to the problem of hand-washing/drying, as well as the whole pay-for-pee situation.) The Sydney Garden loos cost 20p and access was on a 15-minute basis. A digital display ticked down before my eyes. We didn't find out what might happen as I gamed the system, holding the door open for Hank since we had no more coins. We were gone before the 15 minutes was up. I was a little curious to see whether alarm bells might go off or whether we'd be locked in, but we decided not to push our luck.

Just past the elegant Sydney Gardens we connected with the canal excavated around 1800 by some of those entrepreneurial gentlemen of Bath. The River Avon flowing through town was unpredictable and, therefore an unreliable transport system for goods to and from Bristol on one end and London on the other. So they established a canal company and built the necessary number of manually-operated locks, more than a dozen, to accommodate the rise from the river. They also needed to build a few bridges and the outcry from the local aristocrats—complaining of this industrial activity so close to

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their Eden—was enough to force the developers to create visually charming iron bridges spanning the canal here and there.

One piece of trivia we picked up about Avon, which turns out to be the Celtic word for "river." So when the Romans asked the Celts "What's this called?" and pointed to a river, the answer was uniformly "avon." As a result there are several rivers in England labeled the River Avon. The one that flows here in Bath is not the same as the one at Stratford-Upon-Avon.

We followed the canal path past a raft of colorful canal boats complete with resident cats, then came upon one of the locks. Boat pilots manipulate the levers and sluices and have to haul on the lock "arms" manually to pass through.

Up a flight of stairs into the hills and we were at Bathwick Fields, one of the best viewpoints above the city for centuries. A group of joggers nudged past us and headed further uphill, but we turned to see that the sun was just about to set and it was going down directly above the top of Bath Abbey tower. Lugging a "real" camera would have been difficult, but this was one moment when I would have been happy to have one.

Rather tall grass and the threat of chiggers or worse kept us from lolling about in the greenery, so we observed and enjoyed the fleeting moment and then began the stroll back to town, passing two kids flying their new drone. Along one of the residential streets we passed a parked jeep of vintage age, emblazoned with the logo "Oxford and England Far Eastern Expedition." Totally intriguing, there were two extra petrol cans lashed to the front and a list of ports-of-call including Afghanistan, Burma, and Greece.

Arriving in the dark and getting hungry we saw Garfunkel's (a noble British restaurant tradition, we learned) just in front of us as we walked toward the city center. It seemed appropriate to eat something traditional on our last night on our own. A cottage pie and a steak and ale pie served with mange tout, a sort of snow pea. Hearty and delicious. Our feet begged for a taxi back to our B&B, and we had a very short, but ridiculously dangerous drive up the hill with a man who clearly was not having a good day—the only nasty behavior we encountered this whole trip. He spit us out at the front door and we were glad to be in one piece. The only moment of civility was his look of surprise and thanks when Hank tipped him far more than he deserved.

Day 15: Bath, London

A final breakfast of modest proportions at our B&B and then we walked down the hill, intent on exploring Bath Abbey and climbing its tower before our early afternoon train/tube/overground trip back to London. Passed a new Nepalese restaurant named Yak Yeti Yak. Groan.

Entering Bath Abbey, we noticed at once the fan vaulted ceiling...turns out it was built by the very men who erected the one in Kings' College Chapel, Cambridge. Our timing was perfect, as a tower tour had just formed for the 10am slot and they had space for 2 more people. The close quarters in the bell tower limited the group to 8. We hung our backpacks at the bottom of the stairs on one corner

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of the tower and followed our guide Phillipa up the circular stairs. The ascent was very steep. A rope hung straight down hugging the hub of the stairs and afforded the illusion of a life line if you slipped. About ½ way up we went out on the roof and walked to the bell tower itself, letting ourselves in to the center of action for bell ringing by a very small and low door.

At this point Phillipa divulged that she is a bell ringer at another cathedral, and began educating us about the history of bell ringing itself and of these bells in particular. The ropes employed for ringing Bath Abbey's 10 bells are raised to the ceiling when not in use. In addition to these ropes, there is a manual method for a single person to ring each bell in quick succession. She demonstrated the scale. C to C with an added D and E at the top. Chimes for the ¼ hour are rung now by a digital mechanism, but in the past were manipulated using machinery that still stands in the bell room.

And most informative of all was her explanation of change-ringing and the definition of peals. On special occasions, such as royal weddings and funerals, 10 people will stand each with their rope and follow ancient patterns to "change" the order in which bells are rung. These events can last up to 5 hours and include thousands of changes. If they are successful in completing the entire pattern with no mistakes, a plaque is mounted on the wall in this chamber to commemorate the feat. There were not many plaques.

From the bell-ringing chamber we stooped over and crept along planking to reach the back of the clock face. The mechanism is in continual motion and rarely needs correction. For many centuries it was situated higher on the tower, but was moved when the tower began to tilt sideways from the weight of it.

She pointed out the keystone for the fan vaulting which we were at that point standing directly above. We got to peep through a round hole in the stone flooring up here and imagine how the bell ringers used this vantage point to figure out the proper time for ringing bells on special occasions. It was a very long way down to the floor of the chancel from up there but the only way for them to follow the proceedings below.

Up to the actual bells next. At this point an elderly lady in our group confessed that she suffered from vertigo and would prefer to wait for us in the bell-ringing chamber. Phillipa assured her that was fine except that the ¼ hour would be ringing any minute and it was pretty loud from there. The 85-year-old woman must have been more anxious about the noise than the height because she decided to come along with us. We kept an eye out for her from then on.

The bells were a confusion of wood, rope, and metal, hard to make sense of until Phillipa explained their operation and pointed out all sorts of interesting trivia. The tenor bell, the largest, which was first cast in 1700 but recast twice in the 19th century, has an inscription reproduced from the original casting:

All you of Bathe that hear me sound
Thank Lady Hopton's hundred pounds

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The story is that Lady Hopton actually contributed only 20 pounds to the bell's 1700 creation, and forced her family to provide the rest.

It was a glorious day to be on the top of any tower, but especially dramatic to see so many honey-colored Bath stone buildings on every side. A final look around at the flying buttresses—the only church we visited that had them—and we headed down to collect our packs and walk about inside the Abbey. The walls are covered with memorials. There are 641 wall tablets (second only in number to Westminster Abbey) and 847 grave slabs. It was a little heady and impossible to appreciate even a fraction of the stonework and inscriptions at every turn. Then we learned that there are 3800 bodies buried under the Abbey floor as well. Last one was in 1845, finally outlawed as a danger to public health.

While we were atop the tower at Bath Abbey, Phillipa mentioned that the flag had been changed from the Union Jack to the flag of St. George, the specifically English flag. This was in commemoration of the fact that today, Sept 9, 2015 at about 5:30 pm, Queen Elizabeth would become the longest reigning English monarch. We asked if there would be celebrations in London, and Phillipa answered that first of all, the Queen was in Balmoral, her estate in Scotland, and secondly that she did not want a fuss as it wasn't really a competition. Then Phillipa said, "Perhaps she'll have some extra jam on her crumpets."

Speaking of food, lunchtime was approaching and we were hoping to eat a famous Sally Lunn Bun at her house, the oldest house in Bath. They say that in the basement there is a door which was obviously the original front door. This was before the Georgians lifted the city streets 18 feet. So you actually enter her house, now a tea shoppe, on what was the second floor. We found it down a side street from the Abbey and entered hallway and front room that were almost Hobbit-like. But before we'd even looked at the menu, an unhappy toddler sitting at the next table started what promised to be a lulu of a howl—we exited stage left. Went round the corner and saw a grotto promising Bath Buns so that seemed a pretty good second. In fact, they were current-studded, sugar-sprinkled sweet rolls warm and drizzled with butter. Made a perfect dessert after sandwiches and soup.

Then it was off to the train station and the trip by stylish rail car, to the tube transfer, to London Field by overground train, and the walk back to homebase. A moment of delight on the train when Hank noticed a woman using her digital device that was bordered in bright yellow plastic. He turned to me and said, "Check it out. The Brits use Etch-a-Sketch." I snapped a photo to prove it. We were also delighted to see that our train had originated in Penzance, of Gilbert and Sullivan fame and went through Truro, one of the locations Basil drops into conversation on Fawlty Towers. There are so many potential theme-based trips one could take in this country!

Paddington Station, like many other locations, has memorials to those who fought and died in the wars of the early 20th century. We passed a large bronze soldier reading a letter from home. Originally unveiled in 1922 to honor the dead of WWI, the names of 2,524 men and women are inscribed on a roll of honor in a casket underneath the statue. A later update took into account those

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who died in WWII as well. The inscription reads "3312 men and women of the Great Western Railway gave their lives for King and country."

Just a little further on we came upon a black and white poster display of photos and text illustrating the origins of the underground in London. 1864 saw the world's first underground right here...the photos make it clear that no OSHA was on duty!

At London Liverpool Street Station we had a few minutes to take a close look at two statues, one inside and one outside, both of them dedicated to the memory of "Kinder Transport," the British-led rescue of over 10,000 mainly Jewish children fleeing Nazi persecution in 1938 and 1939. Resonates with what's going on in the migrant/refugee crisis in Europe.

We got home to our young family in time to see a bit about the Queen's special day on the telly. I had hoped to get a shot of Hank reading the paper with the Queen on the screen, but she didn't appear. Instead, there was a photo, for some reason, of the Beatles, so I got a shot of Hank relaxing with the Fab Four. We spent the evening sharing the week's highlights all around and planning for the morning.

Day 16: London, Iceland, Seattle

We said our goodbyes to our son as he went off to work and just a while later our daughter-in-law and granddaughter walked us down and waved us off in the hire car that took us to Gatwick Airport. The driver was an immigrant from Bulgaria, had been in London over a decade and was raising two children with his lawyer wife. He conversationally shared his opinions about the former Communist state, the current experiment with capitalism, and the nostalgia of some of his friends back home for the old system that was in many ways not so hard, at least not as they recall it. He also pointed out sights along the way which took us through a rural corner southeast of the city.

Another meal at Wagamama, this time in the airport, and we were off to Seattle, via Iceland. A quiet taxi ride to the ferry dock and we slid right onto the Bainbridge Island ferry. Great timing! My brother and sister-in-law picked us up right where they'd left us off 16 days before, but you would have to say that we were not the same people we'd been.

So thanks for reading this all the way through, if you did, and hope it was a little bit entertaining.