

2017, October, Beamish Residential

3-6th October 2017

At 7.30am, on a grey October morning, our party of 47 members met at the Bell for the long drive north. After 2 hours and right on schedule we pulled into our halfway stop at Denby village and pottery. In small groups, after pressing out ceramic frogs during our workshop, we were shown round the factory where the well known Denby ware is manufactured. After lunch there was the opportunity to purchase Denby's wares. Having found space on the coach for 2 enormous garden pots (which were a bargain) we resumed our journey to the North.

On arrival at our hotel we found a spectacular and historic building which traces its roots back to the time of William the Conqueror. It was built as a fortified farmhouse and its owner was Lord of the Manor who dispensed justice and extracted tithes from all of the nearby towns and hamlets. The current building was started in the 17th century. Subsequently the owners have added architectural glimpses of the Elizabethan, Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods. After 700 years as a family home the Durham Coal Board used it as their headquarters and ran educational courses and school retreats. Most recently the newly established Beamish museum used it as a store for the collection of artefacts ready for when the reconstructed buildings were complete. The building's most famous resident was Bobby Shaftoe, MP who 'went to sea with silver buckles on his knee', deserting his lady love. The rooms reflected the grandeur of its past.

Our evening meal was taken in the stables restaurant. The meals were excellent even if the portions were more than many of us could manage.

On Wednesday we drove the 200 metres to the Beamish Museum. This must be the biggest of all of the open air buildings museums in the UK. It has period transport such as trains, trams, buses, cars and in particular a working 'Puffing Billy', one of the earliest steam engines with 2 vertical cylinders. The buildings have been collected from all over the north east and then rebuilt to form communities from different periods of the past. The main exhibit is the 1900's town. The detail in the buildings is amazing. For example the bank, apart from the mahogany and brass counter and manager's office is complete with vaults in the basement. Victoria spent much time in the 1900's dentist clinic comparing the equipment with that of the modern clinic. The various buildings and displays were manned by volunteers in costume who were very keen to share their knowledge of the various buildings. The site is so extensive that it almost impossible to see everything. They are now in the process of building a 1950's town using £11m from the National Lottery.

On our return to the hotel many of us spent time in their micro brewery and then tasting samples of their product.

The longer drive on Thursday took us beyond Newcastle to Alnwick Castle and Gardens. One fascinating exhibit was 3 picture frames set up facing the hills and woodland beyond the castle. In fact these are framing the picturesque parkland designed by Capability Brown. The gardens, although not at their best at this time of year, were stunning with the elaborate fountains performing regularly. The return journey was broken near Gateshead for a visit to the Angel of the North. Here we drank a toast to Maggie to celebrate her big birthday.

On Friday we left early and drove to the Royal Armouries in Leeds. This museum is now the repository for much of the weaponry from the Tower of London. It is now, arguably, one of the best museums in the country. The shabby docks in the city have been renovated and the area is now a very desirable residential area with restaurants, shops and flats. Those members who did not fancy the Armouries explored the waterways and shops.

The coach arrived back at the Bell within minutes of the scheduled time thanks to Bradley our excellent Masons coach driver.



