Science and Technology Somerset Trip – May 6th – 10th 2024

This was my first residential trip with the Science and Technology group and I thoroughly enjoyed it. The organisation was first class and I felt looked after and comfortable with a great group of people. We stayed at the Centurion Hotel which was ideal for what we needed. The rooms were very comfortable, the food was really good with options, and the hotel was situated on a golf course which was lovely to look over and sit out on.

The week had a packed and varied programme, all of which was really interesting and I for one learned an awful lot about things I had no knowledge of before going on this trip.

Monday – On the way to our hotel we visited the American Museum, near Bath. The only museum of Americana outside of the United States. The gardens and arboretum were stunning, with lovely views, and some rather unbecoming statues of historical Americans. We had an interesting talk on the Salem Witch Trials in a room replicating as it would have been at the time. The museum and gallery were interesting and full of artifacts and memorabilia.

Tuesday (AM) As the number of people allowed to visit Hinkley Point was restricted at the last minute, a group of us visited Bridgewater Town. The highlight of the morning was visiting a shop that was dedicated to the annual Bridgewater Light Carnival, it was interesting to learn how it came about and to see the amount it had grown since I had visited it many years ago when my children were young.
Those visiting Hinkley Point were taken to their visitors centre, a mile or two outside the town. Our escort was one of the Atomic Station guides who took us to their lecture theatre for an illuminating talk on the construction and the workings of the UK's most advanced Nuclear Power Station (designed by the Chinese and French). We then spent time looking at the elaborate models depicting how it will look and operate. There were many details of outstanding engineering but perhaps 'Big Carl' Is the most impressive feature of this huge site. The power station is anticipated to start operating by 2030.

Tuesday (PM) A visit to the English Willow Centre as seen on Countryfile. This was led by a really engaging guide who demonstrated and explained how the willow is grown, harvested and used to create all sorts of things including baskets and fencing. There were examples of how it had been used in the past for prams, hot air balloon baskets and several of us recognised it in the flooring as a blast from our past homes! We also learnt how they supply 80% of the worlds charcoal for drawing. At the end we saw a demonstration of willow coffin making!!

Wednesday (AM) We travelled down to Bishops Lydeard and boarded the steam train to Minehead, which is part of the West Somerset Heritage Railway. The U3A had their own carriage at the front of the train, and it was a real reminder of what a wonderful way it was and is to travel. A coffee and snack along with the smell of the burning coal and steam made for a real treat. The rest of the morning was spent with a gentle walk along the front and lunch, followed by a local ice cream.
Wednesday (PM). The coach took us to Dunster Castle and Watermill. Unfortunately, the information regarding a bus to take us up to the castle was

incorrect and as it is at the top of a very steep hill (known locally as Heart Attack Hill) most members decided to stay in the village and explore. A group of us found the recently refurbished Dunster Museum and Doll Collection, We discovered the story of this beautiful Exmoor village and explored its 10,000 year history. The doll collection housed one of the largest collections outside of the V&A museum, with thousands of dolls spanning different time eras, cultures and manufacturers. The afternoon was rounded off with a delicious cream tea in a local café.

Thursday (AM). Today was a packed day. Starting with a visit to the Yeovil Fleet Air Arm Museum. With four exhibition halls, over 90 aircraft, more than 2 million records and 30 thousand artefacts, the museum is Europe's largest naval aviation museum. There was a wide range of helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, some dating back over 100years. The highlight for me was the first British Concorde and being able to go inside, I was surprised at how small the cockpit was and how compact all the equipment etc was. Not sure I would have wanted to fly in it!
Thursday (PM) After lunch we travelled to Wells Cathedral, the first English cathedral to be built entirely in the new Gothic style. We were split into groups with tour guides, half were looking at the Stain Glass around the cathedral and I was with the other half who had a tour of the stone carvings, our guide was really interesting pointing out how the masons marked their work, the complexity of replacing some of the stonework as needed and how they told stories through some of the carvings. It was a beautiful cathedral with lots of interesting history. After all the concentrating and walking, the afternoon was topped off with yet another ice cream before returning to the hotel.

Friday(AM) On the return journey to Aston Clinton we stopped off for a visit to the Cotswold Farm Park which is home to Adam Henson from the BBC Countryfile programme and Channel 5's Springtime on the Farm. We began with a talk about the history of the farm, advances in modern farming and sustainability. We then had the opportunity to explore the farm seeing many rare breed animals. Of course before heading off home we indulged in a rather lovely lunch from the restaurant.

Then it was back to Aston Clinton, weary, but what a great week it had been, we were lucky with the weather and a great coach driver. So well organised and definitely something I hope to attend next year.

Report by Science and Technology Group member Sue Quirk