

Taunton U3A on the Loose in Yorkshire – from Dorothy Davis

In the early hours of 19th September disparate groups of U3A members staggered bleary-eyed on to a Berry's coach to start a five-day holiday together. By lunchtime we had reached our first cultural objective, Lyme Hall in Cheshire, popular with film producers and boasting wonderfully ostentatious fireplaces, tapestries, Grinling Gibbons carvings and a connection with Mary, Queen of Scots. My favourite item was a very early printed missal which had much to reveal about early marriage vows.

We arrived in steady drizzle at the Harrogate Holiday Inn, a cool, steel and glass high-rise and were grateful for our driver, Glynn's steady hand and Jack's organisation.

Next morning with the weather improved it was off to Whitby, famous for its abbey, Captain Cook, jet and a picture-book harbour. With only the morning to spare, the party explored on foot, by bus or boat and, over the inevitable fish 'n chip lunch, agreed it was a delightful, lively town, to be visited again. The packed programme next took us on the Yorkshire Moors Railway to see the impressive scenery from a different angle. That night at the hotel we had larger tables and started to get to know different members of the party.

Wednesday was the highlight of the tour – the visit to York. Some of us made straight for the novel experience of the Yorvic Centre where the smells, sights and sounds of Viking village and market are faithfully reproduced. York's 2,000 year old history is everywhere present; in the timber-framed Merchant Adventurers' House, in the Treasurer's House and particularly in the Minster. Once more we needed another day.

Our first stop on Thursday was the delightfully modest Nunnington Hall, a stately home on a human scale, surrounded by gardens, orchards and meadows and Peter Rabbit and a scarecrow, Mr McGregor in the organic vegetable garden. Castle Howard couldn't have been a greater contrast, with John Vanbrugh's extraordinary dome dominating the sky-line. I found the vast collection of classical antiquities, brought back from Europe by successive Earls of Carlisle, overwhelming and escaped thankfully into the serenity of rose gardens and fountains.

On our final day we squeezed in a quick visit to the Yorkshire Sculpture Park, a lovely tranquil setting where Henry Moore's and Barbara Hepworth's works as well as fascinating contemporary sculptures can be seen at their best. Then it was on to Chatsworth House, another imposing pile, built to impress, its outside rather marred by scaffolding. In the house the usual painted ceilings, tapestries, classical and traditional furniture and works of art mingled with the modern – good to know that the Dukes of Devonshire are still patrons of the arts. In the gardens we waited patiently for the famous fountains to come to life; because of the dry weather their hours were restricted.

Back on the coach, now our home-from-home, we listened to Jack's jokes and dozed away our tiredness on the long return journey, thankful for the safe hands of our wide-awake driver. We had had a very enjoyable time – thank you for arranging it, Jack.