

AWAKE u3a Stately Homes Holiday 2025

On Monday 6th July at 8.30 we boarded the Acklam's coach to take us on our annual holiday, this year to the Lake District. Julie was our very friendly driver. On the way to our hotel we visited Kiplin Hall, a red-brick building extended several times over the centuries. It, unusually, and yet like all the other homes we toured this year, was basically owned by the same family throughout. Nestled between Richmond and Northallerton it was filled with numerous treasures gathered over many generations, including part of the wooden block used in the beheading of Charles I.

A drive through the Yorkshire Dales and into the Lake District took us to The Crown Hotel, Wetheral on the edge of Carlisle. Tuesday proved to be a very busy day. By 10.00am we were sailing the length of Ullswater from Glenridding Pier to Pooley Bridge on the 'Raven', an Ullswater 'steamer' commissioned by Thomas Cook in 1889. Beautiful views of the lake and the mountains - very "Swallows and Amazons". Dalemian Mansion is a grade 1 listed building 5 miles from Penrith. Like the other properties we visited in Lakeland, it was built around a pele tower. Pele (or peel) towers were small fortified Norman keeps built along the English/Scottish borders to combat border reivers. Over the centuries, additional buildings have been built around and alongside. Extensive gardens were explored. Founded in 2005, the World's original Marmalade Festival and Awards is an annual event, and the house contains a marmalade museum featuring Paddington Bear.

Hutton-In-The-Forest is another grade 1 listed building north of Penrith built around a pele tower. It contains superb seventeenth century furniture as well as rooms decorated in an Arts & Crafts style with wallpaper by William Morris. Again, extensive gardens were available to view. After dinner, Chris Watson gave out a picture quiz (donated by Mark, our chairman) in which we had to find the titles of 50 films. It proved to be very entertaining, although *The Invisible Man* apparently wasn't there.

Wednesday was a more relaxing day. A morning visit to Levens Hall, south of Kendal. It is a beautifully well-kept property, again built around a pele tower and with numerous generations of the same family living (and still living) in it. Particularly impressive were the trees with amazing topiary, many over 300 years old. It was said to be the finest, oldest and most extensive topiary garden in the world.

After lunch in the cafe or from the on-site bakery, it was on to Kendal for a little retail therapy in this pretty, bustling market town. The quiz in the evening was held in two adjoining rooms. It was well received with some very creditable scores all round. We now know what connects Bernard Cribbins with Beyoncé and gall bladder

operations! We were all packed up and ready to leave at 9.00am. Julie must have been relieved at having to manoeuvre out of the tight hotel entrance for the last time.

On to the Bowes Museum at Barnard Castle, County Durham. Designed in the French style of the First Empire, it has never been lived in as it was always designed as a museum and gallery. Opened in 1892, it was built to house the extensive collection of artefacts gathered by Josephine and John Bowes. Many more than you can hope to properly see in one visit. Temporary exhibitions of Vivienne Westwood's clothing and pages from Norman Cornish's 269 sketchbooks of life in Spennymoor were fascinating. We watched the daily performance by the mechanical Silver Swan at 2.00pm built in 1773 and with over 200 moving parts it was truly spectacular.

Then it was back to the coach for our return journey to Willerby, where the high temperatures of the third heatwave of the summer we had been avoiding up north hit us. Once again we all had a wonderful, memory-packed holiday. Our thanks to our superb driver Julie - hopefully we'll see her again next year - but especially to Chris Watson who has once again excelled all expectations, despite the health issues she has faced.

David Newman