



u3a Holiday in Northumbria



On Sunday, 12th June, bright and early, 30 u3a members set off at 9am sharp on a coach trip to Northumbria for 5 days. Margaret Hinde and Lynda Harris had organised the trip through Simply Groups travel agent. We had a driver, Ron, who also acted as courier and drove us to all the places visited in this interesting and beautiful county of Northumbria.

After a brief stop at Tebay service station we went on to visit the Bowes museum for a conducted tour around the French style chateau / museum with its wonderful collections of furniture, ceramics, art and many other works which had been collected by a fascinating couple, John and Josephine Bowes in the 19th century, well worth the visit. We then continued to our base, the White Swan Hotel, Alnwick, famous for its original oak panelling, stained glass windows, and revolving entrance salvaged from the RMS Olympic, sister ship to the ill-fated Titanic.



The morning of Day 2 was devoted to exploring Alnwick and its main attractions of formal gardens, castle and renowned, amazing Barterbooks bookshop housed in the former railway station. Some

chose to visit the castle and gardens and others fitted in an exploration of Alnwick and the bookshop. The afternoon was devoted to another garden, Howick Hall and Arboretum, which we all agreed provided a pleasant contrast to the Alnwick garden's formality, with its less structured planting schemes and 'wilding', fitting in with current approaches to gardening.



Day 3 was a fine day and just right for a visit to Lindisfarne, Holy Island, so we could see the scenic coastal views and the castle in the best possible weather conditions. Some chose to visit the castle, others to walk and take in the views and enjoy the fresh air and atmosphere. Those interested, visited the small, enchanting, walled garden in the shadow of the castle designed and built by Gertrude Jekyll in 1911.

In the afternoon of day 3 we went on to Bamborough where there was a choice of a conducted tour of the castle or a Farne Island Cruise. Thankfully the weather was kind and the sea calm and the cruise took us from Seahouses out to the islands where we saw (and smelt!) thousands of seabirds some nesting and many flying and swimming on the hunt for their next meal.



In beautiful weather on Day 4 we made a morning visit to the picturesque, peaceful harbour town of Amble. Many chose to walk out along the estuary where fish was available fresh off the boat and interesting 'pods', small stalls, were selling a variety of goods and refreshments. The sea views along the coastline were spectacular in the blue sky and sunshine.

The afternoon visit was to Cragside House, Gardens and Estate, the creation of Lord Armstrong, a Victorian inventor and industrialist. On our tour of the house we saw many interesting features including lights and lamps originally lit by hydroelectricity, a passenger lift, fire alarm panels, telephones and a Turkish bath suite and many home comforts built before their time. The gardens were challenging to explore because of the steep paths to be negotiated but very picturesque nevertheless.



We had an early start on our last day to fit in more exciting visits on the journey home. We stopped at the Angel of the North, the iconic feature of public art in Gateshead.

The afternoon featured a visit to Newby Hall and Gardens, near Ripon, where our guide's most entertaining stories brought the history of the house and its occupants to life. If you were quick you could also fit in a tour of the award gardens, a river tour, a miniature train ride and visit the teddy bear museum, home of a selection of Giles Brandreth's collection of bears!

Then it was homeward bound with our trusty driver, Ron, who delivered us back to Knutsford bus station after a week of most enjoyable whistle stop adventures.

Richard and Eileen Martindale

