

MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS

Marilyn & Jim Palmer Just Back from Wales, York, and London

For Ten Years They Have Been Using Menlo Commons as Home Base for Their Travels

TGN: Describe your recent trip.

Jim: We flew Air Canada to London, stayed a night at the Heathrow airport's Sofitel Hotel, then flew to Manchester, England, where we spent three nights at the Midland Hotel (more than 100 years old) and discovering what there was to see. That included the museum of science and industry featuring the development of steam engines, airplane and auto transportation, and industrial equipment. Another was the Ryland Library of thousands of medieval manuscripts and featuring an excerpt from Biblical script dating back to 50 years before the Dead Sea Scrolls were written. We were getting ready for our land tour with Alumni Holidays International (AHI) which featured five days in Wales and five days in Yorkshire. In Manchester we located a couple of restaurants by online research - a top rated Italian restaurant, the San Carlo, and an interesting Cuban restaurant with Latino music and Spanish style food. We like to sample wines on our trips. At the San Carlo we had a good (and expensive) Chianti Classico Reserva, and at the Cuban place we had an average Tempranillo. I enjoyed a paella dish, and Marilyn had a chimichanga.

Marilyn: We have traveled with AHI many times (I believe this was our eighth trip with them). It caters to alumni of colleges and special groups who want to take group land trips. We locate in a hotel and take bus trips out and back. It is convenient because you just stay in one place and don't have to pack and unpack. They have lectures at the hotel and meals there and at places we visit. This trip featured two central locations so we moved after day five to Harrogate, which is town south of the city of York. Then the AHI ended and we spent four more nights on our own in London, which we reached by train.

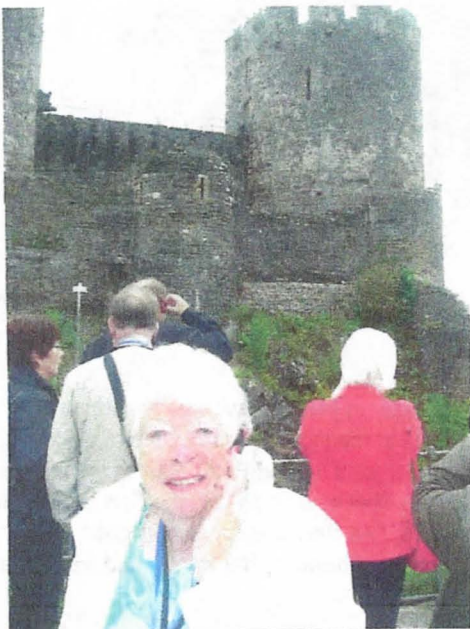
TGN: Tell us about Wales.

Jim: We joined the AHI group of about 25 at the Manchester airport, and bussed to a modern hotel (the Quay Inn) just outside the small city of Conwy in Northern Wales. Wales is a separate country on the western side of England. It is a part of the U.K. and closely related to the British monarchy (the present Prince Charles being the "Prince of Wales"). They also have their own language (Welsh) which is too difficult to describe. It has its roots in Celtic and is still taught and spoken in certain areas there. I think we learned one word ("good

morning") which was "borida". We were told it sounded like "Florida." That night we were entertained by a younger Welsh lady who played music on the Celtic harp. The next day we visited the medieval Conwy Castle, which had been used to guard the entrance to the harbor on the Atlantic Ocean. It was more than 900 years old and still retained its walls, towers, moat, and places for bows and arrows to shoot through to stop the approaching enemy. King Edward I lived there, but ran out of money before he could finish the castle. That afternoon we visited the beautiful Bodnant Gardens plateauing down from the hill to the river. The large mansion there is still occupied by an elderly lady, a descendant of the original owner. She donated the gardens and land to the English National Trust, reserving the right to live there.

Marilyn: The next day we toured the Penrhyn Castle which was fully furnished with old paintings, carpets, furnishings and tapestries. It was here that Prince Charles received his investiture as the Prince of Wales. We walked on the high platform facing a plaza where the investiture took place. From there we visited Beaumaris in Anglesea - an island just off the coast, and the Moelfre Life station for rescue operations for capsized boats that ran into the rocks. The lifeguards described rescuing sailors.

Jim: The following day we visited Snowdonia National Park and took the narrow gauge railway ride through the beautiful mountainous Welsh Highlands. Afterwards we visited a medieval war museum at the Caernarfon Castle. After lunch at the Celtic Royal Hotel we toured the slate quarries, now closed. There was a demonstration showing splitting slate pieces into thinner ones by chiseling across the top of a thicker rectangular piece of slate. We purchased a coaster of slate with the Red Dragon symbol of Wales on it. (The Welsh flag uses the Red Dragon symbol.) That night we had a dinner party of six at a Conwy restaurant, celebrating Marilyn and my 56th wedding anniversary. I enjoyed a Primitivo fine wine from Italy, with rack of lamb.



Marilyn: The next day was our final full day in Wales. We had lunch at the Hayloft, a nice restaurant at the Bodnant Furnace Farm out of Conwy. The establishment featured a wine tasting, and a tour of their modern market with a butcher shop and produce. Then we went to Betws-y-Coed, a quaint village in the Snowdonia area. On the way our bus stopped at a small place with the longest name in Wales - "Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch" which means "Mary's Church in the white hazel pool, near the fierce whirlpool, with the Church of Tysilio by the Red Cave". Back at our hotel we had an evening lecture on local Welsh traditions and heard the Welsh national anthem being played and sang. We then packed for the next morning's trip to Yorkshire.

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The Palmers - Just Back from Wales, York, and London

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TGN: Tell us about Yorkshire.

Jim: We departed Wales and after an hour arrived in Chester, England, where they still have ruins of a Roman coliseum. Also that day Prince Charles and Camilla were there for the opening days of the horse races. We walked the village streets and stopped for fish and chips with draft beer for lunch. We checked the stores of this town and then boarded the bus for a 2 ½ hour trip through the rolling sheeplands to Harrogate in southern Yorkshire, in the northeast part of England. Our hotel there was the Old Swan. As everyday, our breakfasts were included. The next morning we also had a lecture on the history and traditions of Harrogate and Yorkshire. Then we had a long bus trip through the Yorkshire dales (rural, with rolling green hills, valleys, small villages, lots of sheep farming and some cows too). We continued to experience great weather - on our entire 18 day trip there was no rain during the day and only a bit in the wee hours on a couple mornings, while we slept. We had moderate temperatures too. The roads were windy and narrow, scarcely wide enough for our bus even though the traffic was 2-way. From the bus we could see many yellow bicycles standing along the fences, in front of buildings, hanging on walls - symbols of the Tour de France which was held recently in Yorkshire. We stopped at the Wensleydale Creamery to taste their fresh and tasty cheese products, located in Hawes. We had some ice cream - English ice cream is usually very good if you get it at an ice cream store.



Marilyn: The next day we were off to Castle Howard, south of York, where we had a good tour of the restored and furnished castle, and saw the beautiful fountains and gardens (including a vegetable garden). Then the following day we had a lecture on contemporary Great Britain, and a tour of the city of York, visiting the ancient York "minster" - a huge gothic cathedral in the center of town, which was a highlight of the tour. Outside the minster is a statue of Constantine, who was proclaimed the Emperor of Rome there in AD 306 and who then converted the old Roman Empire to Christianity. Vestiges of the Roman presence were around the city in walls and remaining parts of buildings. We toured underneath the main cathedral to see a very thorough display of the history of the minster and York. On our final day, we had another full day visiting York.

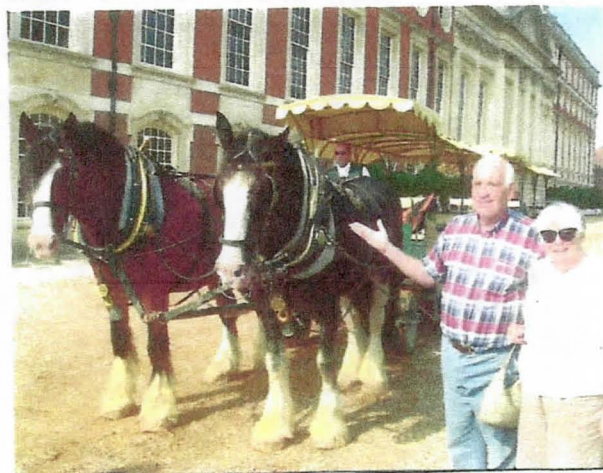
TGN: Where did you go next?

Jim: We caught the train to London, checked into our hotel there

at the Mayflower in the western part of London, located by the underground station called Earl's Circle. The next day we were off by train to Cambridge University. A guide described that there were 31 colleges, which were merely housing units, making up the University. We visited King's College, Queen's College, Trinity College, and St. John's College. The main difference from Oxford is that Cambridge is just a small town around the University, while Oxford is part of a large city. We finished the tour by boating (or "punting") down the River Cam which runs through the campus, with a guide describing what we were seeing.



Marilyn: The next day we toured Hampton Court Palace which we reached by the underground (and overground) rail. This was the palace of King Henry VIII, restored for public tour through furnished rooms demonstrating royal elegance. At the end we toured the gardens on a horse-drawn carriage.



Jim: On our final full day in London, we saw a matinee of "Shakespeare in Love" at the Noel Coward Theatre, followed by a delicious seafood dinner with a good Pinot Noir at the restaurant across the alleyway - J. Sheekey. This was the best food we had in London. The next day we flew home - always good to go on a trip, but also great to return home to our family and friends, and to Menlo Commons!