

Rambles in Sussex and Kent 15th–21st May, 2000.

Ivor, with Peter and Mervyn collected me from home about 09.00 o'clock and a very full car with passengers and luggage set off on our peregrinations to Sussex. A brief stop near Oxford for coffee, then the M40, 25 & 23 to look and admire Balcombe railway viaduct. It has 37 semi circular arches spanning the R. Ouse with two pavilions at either end of the open balustraded parapet. It looked resplendent in the brilliant sunshine after its three year long restoration.

A good lunch taken in the Oak, Ardingley, then onto Wakeham Place [N.T. gardens]. These are quite extensive, with lakes, many mature trees and Rhododendrons of every colour. Peter became a fully paid up member of the N.T.

About 5 pm. We left to visit the unusual castellated portal of Clayton railway tunnel.

Leaving here we climbed a hill to see Jack & Jill [windmills].

Time as ever had slipped by, so we motored through Brighton and Newhaven to Eastbourne where we had an evening meal at Wetherspoons, then to our digs for six nights. The Reymar Hotel, Cambridge Road, Eastbourne.

Tuesday. After a good breakfast off we went to the former Greenwich Observatory at Herstmonceau, not quite the pleasure domes of the poem Kubla Khan as these housed telescopes. It seemed the ideal place for old men and little boys to have a good day messing about with the scientific exhibits.

Before long we were looking at a railway station, or was it a church in Battle. It was fortunate I saw a train there or I wouldn't have been certain.

Lunch at the Castle Inn, Bodiam. Pictures taken of an unusual hand operated water pump situated beneath a canopy, this served as a war memorial as it bore the names of the fallen in two world wars. A short walk away was a jewel set in a silvery sea, [the moated Bodiam Castle].

The sound of a locomotive whistle lured us to the restored Bodiam station on the Kent & East Sussex Railway.

To Great Dixter, a house designed or greatly altered by Edward Lutyens.

A hurried journey to Northiam railway station for Peter to board and travel in a first class coach to Bodiam and back

At Tenterden, Peter and Ivor spent their time at the station while Mervyn and I looked in the very large parish church of St. Mildred, we then walked along High Street admiring the many tile hung cottages etc.

To Rye for a brief walk along the pebbled paved streets.

Finally to Bexhill to see and drink tea in the art deco style De la Warr Pavillion where we were told that several million pounds will be spent on its restoration.

Arrived at the Reymar after dark.

Wednesday. Making a 9.30. start, we headed west to the secluded Boxgrove Priory to see the De la Warr chantry chapel which I had seen pictures of. The chapel was situated inside the Priory and was very much smaller than I had imagined it to be. The whole area was a place of calm and peace. Peter was taking advantage of this situation to relieve him self when he was surprised to see a pair of sparkling eyes watching his every action. This young lady who was sitting in a car was obviously contemplating spending her life in a nunnery, but after what she had just seen, quickly changed her mind and drove off.

At Bosham we walked around and visited the church and after the high tide had receded from the roadway we attempted to cross to another part of the village but the seaweed was so dense we had to return and try another route.

A rather uninteresting lunch taken at the Berkeley Arms.

From here we went onto the Amberley Chalk Pits museum which we all enjoyed and wished we could have had longer there.

To Shoreham Beach hoping to see an old railway coach incorporated into a house, but this has been spoiled by a recent extension to the property.

Lewes. Called at the rather large junction railway station, then to a nearby pub where we were served with a very large supper.

Arrived at digs 10.15 p.m.

Thursday. I met Mervyn strolling along the promenade before breakfast and together we walked the length of the grade 2 listed 1872 pier.

Our first call was at the wind swept Beachy Head where only the foolhardy would venture near the precipitous edge. An helicopter hovered below eye level for a few moments near the light house.

To Alfriston. Visited the Clergy house with its lovely garden where a Judas tree was in full bloom.

Mervyn crossed several fields in search of a picture of house and church.

A good lunch at the Stewards Enquiry Inn, Iford, then onto Sheffield Park gardens. These are lovely gardens at anytime, but with such an abundance of Rhododendrons and Azaleas in all their glory we were especially privileged to be there.

Leaving the gardens, we made the short journey to the Blue Bell Rly. station and wandered about the engine shed where there were a good variety of loco's on display.

Our final call was at the very busy but untidy Brighton Rly. station. This station is having millions of pounds spent on restoration, the glass roof which covers about 4 acres has been completed.

Back to Eastbourne for supper at Wetherspoons and digs.

Friday. Our first area to visit was Brightling to see some of the follies which Mad Jack Fuller had had erected. These were spread over an area of two or three square miles. We saw four of them, each one being very different. We also looked in the church of Thomas a Becket and the churchyard where his mausoleum, a 25 feet high pyramid stands.

To Robertsbridge for lunch at the Seven Stars, then onto the famous Scotney N.T. gardens where Peter took an instant dislike to the drum tower in the moat. These gardens were again delightful.

Not being satisfied with one garden we went onto Sissinghurst to these very colourful gardens created by Harold Nicholson and Vita Sackville West in the 1930s. Peter instantly climbed the high towers so that he could see all the gardens from this vantage point without taking a further step.

After a cup of tea and a short journey we arrived at Cranbrook to admire the largest smock windmill in Kent and probably in England.

To Hastings where we walked around the tarred, tall wooden net shops on the Stade, but this visit was cut short due to a rain shower.

Finally supper at the Denbigh, Bexhill, where we received special consideration.

On our arrival in Eastbourne the lights were shining brightly on the pier.

Saturday. Peter & Ivor were all excited over breakfast as they were going to travel on the Romney, Hythe & Dymchurch Railway. It was intended to catch the 11.30am. train from New Romney and we got there just in time. As this train drew into the station Peter refused to board as it was being hauled by a diesel engine. It was quickly decided that we should have to wait for the next. Some confusion ensued with Mervyn and myself getting separated from the other two but eventually all ended well with round trips made by all.

After the excitement of the journey in open carriages, looking at Martello towers and sea defences at Dymchurch was quite tame for Ivor and Peter.

From Hythe we followed as much as possible the line of the Royal Military Canal which had a dual purpose, the passage of sea going boats inland and as a line of defence. It runs along the north of Romney Marsh. We stopped for a cup of tea about half way along the canal where I got into conversation with a bird watcher. He took me on a short walk to hear a nightingale singing and at the same time we heard frogs croaking. All this time a cuckoo was calling lustily.

At the Globe Inn, Rye, we were served with a very good meal.
An abortive search for the Rye and Camber Rly. then a journey to Eastbourne in the dark.

Sunday. Breakfast and the packing of bags. From Eastbourne we headed west to Chantonbury Ring, a hill crowned with trees. Leaving the A283 we followed a larch lined lane to a small car park which was also surrounded by lovely trees. Here we had a cup of coffee enjoying the view of the tree capped hill.

A stop at a cactus nursery at Ashington, then onto Petworth House and Park. Here we had lunch which Ivor kindly treated us to and later Peter bought us tea. Between meals we looked at the big collection of paintings, many by well known names and also the statuary and sculpture. The kitchens were most interesting. It took me a long time working out how a boiler which raised steam worked and its various uses in the kitchens.

At about 5.pm. we collected ourselves together and headed for home via Guildford, M25 & 40 arriving at Leamington at 7.45.pm.

It has been a very full week and we have had quite good weather. The Reymar Hotel proved very satisfactory. I have enjoyed Mervyn, Peter and Ivor's company and special thanks to Ivor for driving us safely for over 900 miles.

Peter Chater May 2000