

## **The Houses & History of Northumberland**

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> –Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2013, a holiday booked through Tailored Travel.**

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With Maureen and Irene who organised the trip and Nigel, our coach-driver, we left Cheshunt in bright sunshine for our pleasant journey to Northumberland, stopping for a leisurely lunch in Harrogate where some of us sampled the delights of Betty's Tearooms, before arriving at The Marriott Royal County Hotel for our five-day stay.

Monday morning, rested and refreshed, we were joined by Jan, our excellent Blue Badge Guide, for a walking tour of Durham and its magnificent Cathedral, catching glimpses of the Castle as our tour progressed.

Linking history with all we were seeing, Jan gave us a vivid picture of how Durham had grown and developed across the centuries, including its links with other places we were to visit during the three days she continued to guide and share with us her deep knowledge of Northumberland and its historic buildings.

We explored the interesting Beamish Open Air Museum in the afternoon, illustrating life in the north of England in the early 1800's and 1900's.

On Tuesday, having again enjoyed the amenities of our comfortable hotel, we travelled to Alnwick Gardens. Its inspirational and beautifully designed features, commissioned by The Duchess of Northumberland for public benefit, delighted us, in the bright sunlight of a glorious day with the perfect backdrop of a clear blue sky. The displays of the fountains and water-features and the geometric and flowing designs of the garden beds with their glowing colours and infinite variety of shrubs, plants and trees really were a joy to behold.

The Poison Garden, a point of interest and contrast, designed to inform children of the poisons inherent in certain plants and shrubs, gave us valuable information and a few shocks and surprises!

In the afternoon our visit to The National Trust's Cragside House and Gardens, a wonderfully preserved mansion retaining its original furniture, equipment and ambience brought us another fascinating glimpse of life as it had been both upstairs and downstairs.

Wednesday brought us our visit to Lindisfarne, the inspirational, historic and significant place where Christianity had first been brought to England from Ireland, The ancient church and ruins of the Monastery spoke of the spiritual and influential work of St. Aidan and St. Cuthbert who, with their monks, worked, prayed and studied, producing the beautifully illuminated volume of the Lindisfarne Gospels and other manuscripts, to inform, teach and display the Christian faith. We left the island in time to beat the incoming tide which floods the causeway and creates the separateness of Lindisfarne from the mainland.

In the afternoon some of us visited Farne Island to which St. Cuthbert often went to Retreat in the peace and beautiful isolation, surrounded by the many varieties of sea-birds and the seals which swim round its shores.

The day ended with a fond and grateful farewell to Jan who had been the perfect guide throughout our stay in this beautiful part of the country, where before leaving we were introduced at close quarters (!) to The Angel of the North standing high on the hill, welcoming people to the North of England.

Thursday morning and it was time to leave our good hotel and make the journey back down the A1 to one last place of interest, Belton House, near Grantham, another National Trust property where we enjoyed the opulent house and gardens illuminated in the bright sunlight of another lovely day.

Continuing our journey home, we warmly thanked Maureen and Irene for their very successful organization of our holiday and Nigel, our coach-driver, for his punctuality, good humour and safe delivery of us all to our final destination after a most fascinating and memorable time in Northumberland.

**MW, Broxbourne June 2013**