

DIDN'T WE HAVE A LUVVERLY TIME, THE DAY WE WENT TO EASTBOURNE!!!

Yes, at long last off I was off on the Circuit Holiday 2022, postponed (a number of times!) from May 2020 due to the pandemic. Jane and Pete Honeyball had been run ragged the past two years, attempting to arrange and rearrange it over and over!

I'd avoided the suggestion of going along for many years, as I'd wondered if it might be a bit restrictive in terms of expectations to attend worship sessions or to stay with other group members all the time (a bit selfish, I know!)

But - Eastbourne! That was the initial draw for me, as, many, many years ago, I used to go there for a few days every year with my Mum, who lived in Brighton. We'd walk along the seafront; go to as many theatre performances as we could fit in; and sit outside at the famous Bandstand, blissfully listening to military bands (sometimes even with bagpipes!) in the sunshine in the afternoons. Extremely happy memories.

The coach wasn't as full as hoped for, since a number of regular 'Circuit Holidaymakers' had to drop out for many reasons, but it gave us a chance to spread over several seats. To my shame, I should confess to having the rear 25 seats all to myself, since most preferred to sit in the front half of the coach!

We started our journey at Aylesbury Methodist Church on Monday 6th June, and then picked up our fellow travellers from Haddenham, Thame and Chinnor, and continued to Eastbourne, with a lunchtime stop at services on the way.

Our coach driver, Gordon McCallum, was excellent, and has been with the Circuit Holiday for many years, vetting hotels, arranging routes, and helping Jane and Pete to make the holidays as enjoyable and stress-free as possible. Hailing originally from New Zealand, Gordon often had tales to tell from 'back home', and constant titbits of useful and interesting information about our destinations, places en route, and snippets from the current day's news!

We stayed at the Cumberland Hotel, right on the seafront. In fact, my room was on the 4th (top) floor, and I could just see the sea while sitting in bed! It overlooked my beloved Bandstand, but sadly, it hadn't been in use the past two years, although hopefully plans to refurbish it are underway.



We were offered tea, coffee and biscuits while our luggage was placed outside our rooms, and then we

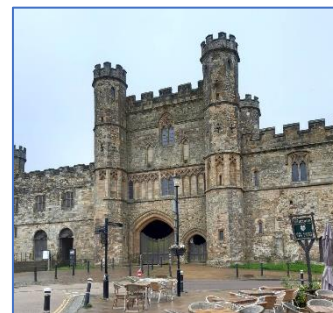
were free to settle in, and to have a look at the sea or a walk into town before dinner at 6pm. The food was delicious and varied all week, although I

ordered their creamy chocolate icecream every evening for pudding! We chose where we sat that first evening, and then remained at those tables for the rest of the week.

After dinner we went our own ways: out for a walk, the theatre, a drink from the bar, socialising with our fellow travellers, or an early night with the TV and a good book. There was also some in-house entertainment at the hotel, which a few of us tried one evening; we had a singer/comedian – and also a game of Bingo, which we didn't win!

Each morning after breakfast we met together, if we wished, for a short time of worship, led by Richard, with prayers, a reading, and a hymn played by Pete, before our excursion of the day.

On the Tuesday, we had a trip to Battle and Tenterden, but some major roadworks on the way meant that we had to cut short our time in Battle, so only a managed a look at the outside of Battle Abbey and a wander round the town, and had no time to explore Tenterden, since we had tickets for a steam train ride on the Kent & East Sussex Railway and couldn't be late for this. The train ride to Bodiam and back was most enjoyable, and it was fascinating to see the huge number of volunteers, not only at the little stations, but maintaining the track and doing all kinds of jobs: firemen, cleaners, guards, signalmen and crossing keepers. Behind



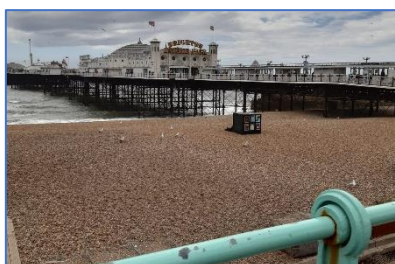
the scenes, they are restoring and maintaining the locomotives, coaches, signalling, and stations. A real community project! So, although we'd missed some of our plans for the trip, the scenery along the way was



lovely, and we all enjoyed our day. In one traffic jam I took the photo of the two little white dogs in a window, showing a sign 'CCTV in operation'.

On Wednesday, we travelled along the coast to Worthing and Brighton. It was a very breezy day, with showers, but that's the British seaside, and none of us got blown into the sea, so – success!! We mainly spent time looking round the shops in Worthing, as the seafront was a bit too windy to stay on for long. Some of us bought our lunch to eat later, and I found a wonderful little takeaway café selling delicious vegan sandwiches, so I was delighted. Food features high on my list of happy things!

On, then, to Brighton, my home town, which I seldom have the chance to visit, so I was very happy to walk along the Palace Pier and all around the Lanes, looking at the many little exclusive shops and reliving childhood memories of the area. I was tempted to have a ride on the 135-year-old Volks' Electric railway, the oldest electric railway in the world still operating, but decided to walk over to see the Royal Pavilion instead and take a photo.



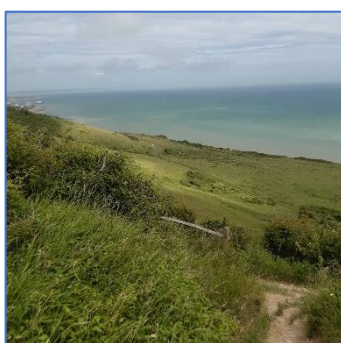
I'd struggled to find any postcards to buy in Worthing, and those I managed to find in one of the little kiosks under the old Victorian arches on Brighton seafront had seen better days, but after all, it was early in the season, and I was just happy to find a few to send.

After dinner on Wednesday, we had our own evening of entertainment, with several of the group making a short presentation: games, recitations, dancing, poems, and a sing-song with Pete and Jane leading the music and singing. For those thinking about joining a future holiday, this is completely voluntary – no pressure to perform – but really enjoyable!!

On the last full day of our holiday, Thursday, we were off through the beautiful Cuckmere Valley to Alfriston, named one of England's 27 most beautiful villages. It certainly lived up to its name, with its winding medieval High Street, attractive old houses and half-timbered inns, leading to Tye village green and St Andrew's Church known as the 'Cathedral of the Downs'. We all had a gentle saunter around the village, stopping for tea and coffee at the welcoming tearooms and inn.



Then we were whisked off to Lewes, the county town of East Sussex, overlooked by the Norman-built ruins of Lewes Castle. Apparently, the name Lewes comes from the Old English 'hlaews' ('hills' or 'mounds') as Lewes is built into the slopes either side of the Ouse Valley. There were lots of good shops and cafés either side of the bridge crossing the River Ouse, and a pleasant place to have our lunch before we began the picturesque trip back through the South Downs, via the famous Beachy Head, where we stopped briefly. It was blowing a gale, so I didn't venture too far; a few of us sat and enjoyed the view – some even had an icecream!



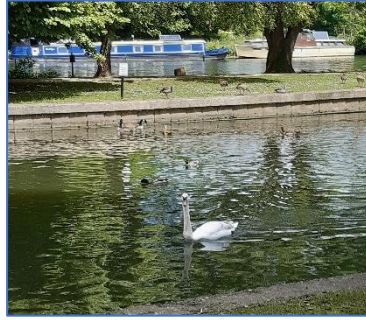
And then, sadly, it was our last breakfast, our last devotional, suitcases to pack, my last trek up and down the 89 stairs to the 4th floor, a last quick walk along the seafront, and an obligatory group photograph to 'validate' the Circuit Holiday of 2022!



Happily for me, our route took us back along to the outskirts of Brighton, so I was able to see snatches of where I used to live, and to have a last glimpse the famous pylons on the A23: the 'gateway' to Brighton. It was always a competition between me and my daughter as to who would catch a glimpse of the pylons first as we neared the city. In fact, I took a video of them as our coach arrived and left and sent them to her with our historic, but grammatically incorrect caption: "I seen 'em first!"



BUT it didn't end there! Gordon, our coach driver, arranged for us to travel home with a stop at Windsor! What a welcome idea that was, as I hate a holiday to end, and this kept it going that little bit longer. We ventured in different directions when we arrived: some down to the river to eat their lunch, some to cafes and shops, and some to see if the Queen was in residence at Windsor Castle (she was, but none of us were invited in for tea!)



So, that was the end, (but a very happy end), to my first, and hopefully not last, Circuit Holiday.

My thanks to Jane and Pete Honeyball, for all their hard work organising the trip and providing music for our morning devotionals and evening entertainment; to Richard Atkinson for being brave enough to join us this year (did he have a choice?) and for keeping a 'paternal' eye on us all; to Gordon McCallum for his expertise in both driving us so comfortably and safely and entertaining us during our drives and at mealtimes.

And thanks to all my fellow 'Circuit Holidaymakers', most of whom I'd never met before in person, and now have, and am looking forward to meeting again!

There are plans afoot to run a Circuit Holiday in 2023, to Dorset, so watch this space! If you've had any qualms or uncertainties about joining one in the past, do take the plunge! It's a perfect way to have a holiday, whether you're on your own or not, and whether you wish to go on the outings or prefer to stay nearby to explore or relax! And it's a perfect way to meet others in our Circuit.

HOPE TO SEE YOU NEXT YEAR!

*Jennie Torpey
June 2022*