

AAAAAND I WAS OFF AGAIN, FOR A SECOND YEAR, ON THE CIRCUIT HOLIDAY!
NORFOLK

My first year, Eastbourne, and now Norfolk. We were on tenterhooks for a while this year, as we were uncertain whether we would get enough people to allow the 2023 Circuit Holiday to go ahead, but YAY – there were, and it did!

I was quite excited about the destination. We were to stay at the Dragonfly Hotel, Kings Lynn, a small hotel just outside the main town. Although I'd visited Norfolk many years before, I'd never been to Kings Lynn, or indeed two of the other places we were to visit – Sandringham and Ely.

So, on **Monday morning 12th June**, the coach, driven by our everlastingly-patient, kind and ever-entertaining Gordon McCallum, left Chinnor, with our intrepid and brilliantly-organised leaders Jane and Pete Honeyball. On their way to Aylesbury, they picked up fellow travellers from Thame and Haddenham, and the last nine of us joined the coach at Buckingham Street, including Rev Richard Atkinson, who'd been brave (or foolhardy) enough to come along on his second trip.

We had plenty of time to get to the hotel, as we couldn't register until 3pm, so our first stop, for coffee and to stretch our legs, (since many had already been travelling for nearly 2 hours), was at Dobbies Garden Centre in Bletchley. Then we were off through the lovely countryside, stopping for lunch just outside Peterborough.

The next stretch of our journey ran alongside the River Nene, at least until we neared Wisbech, passing advertising for interesting opportunities along the way, such as 'Glamping with Llamas' – perhaps next year??

We reached the Dragonfly Hotel about 3.30pm, and our luggage was taken to our rooms for us to unpack and to make a welcome cup of tea and freshen ourselves before dinner. The staff were welcoming and helpful, the hotel bright and cheerful, and all 25 of us had rooms on the ground floor, which was great, as many of the party used walking sticks and aids.

Dinner each evening was self-service with a few choices for each course, and care was taken to provide alternative food for those with specific needs. Evenings were spent in the lounge or outside on the terrace, with a drink or coffee, and time to relax and chat with our fellow travellers.

Every morning we met up after breakfast for a short time of worship, if we wished, led by Richard, and with Pete enthusiastically accompanying our hymns on his guitar. We met on the terrace on the first morning, but after that we met up in the coach, just before we left for the day, which worked out extremely well.



I was very excited about **Tuesday**, as it was our trip to nearby Sandringham House and Gardens. When we arrived, we all went our own ways, some of us beginning by enjoying coffee in one of the restaurants and cafes. We had a really enjoyable walk around part of the 60 acres of gardens before our pre-booked time to visit the House.



The day was hot and sunny, but there were two beautiful ornamental lakes fed by natural springs, with numerous shady trees to relieve the heat.

Sandringham House was built in 1870 by The Prince and Princess of Wales, who later became King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra. The main ground floor rooms, regularly used by the Royal Family, are open to the public, and the decor and contents apparently remain very much as they were in Edwardian times. The guides in each room were very knowledgeable, and full of anecdotes about the Royal Family. One huge vase on a windowsill was pointed out to me as having being brought there recently by King Charles from Highgrove House, as he thought it would look good there!



We were thrilled to discover that an exhibition of King Charles' watercolour paintings was being held at Sandringham House – well worth seeing. He appears to be a talented artist.

On our way back to the coach park and an icecream, we visited St Mary Magdalene Church, where the Royal Family regularly worships when staying at Sandringham. There has been a church on this wooded spot since the 14th century, but the present building dates to the Tudor period, though it was restored twice in the 19th century. By far the oldest object in the church is a 9th-century Greek font, and there is a second font made of Florentine marble.

So, after a most enjoyable day, we wended our weary way back to the hotel, in time to get ready for dinner and, for those performing, to practise their 'turn' for our in-house entertainment that evening. What a wonderful variety of sketches, readings, poems, songs and dance.

Wednesday was planned for our trip to the seaside, starting with Sheringham in the morning.



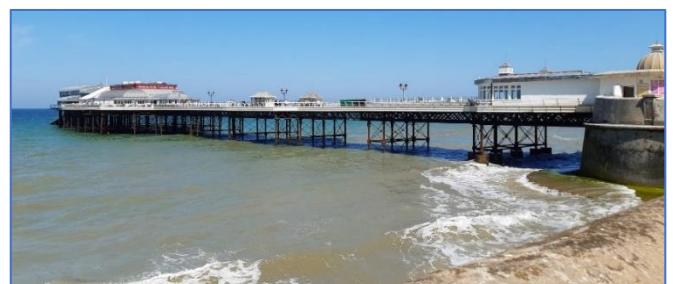
Sheringham Clocktower

I first went to Sheringham when my boys were very young, and have really good memories of this relatively unspoilt traditional seaside town, with its sandy beaches at low tide, thriving market and the North Norfolk Railway - Poppy Line - a 5¼ mile heritage steam railway running between Sheringham and Holt.

We had a leisurely wander along the promenade, (after our coffee, of course), enjoying the sea air and the sight of the colourful beach huts.



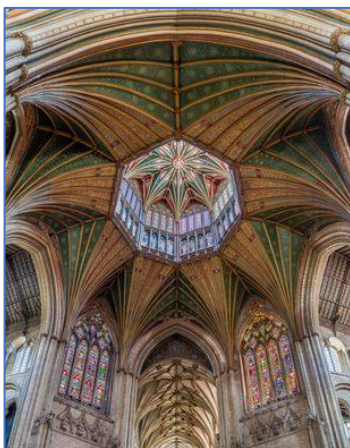
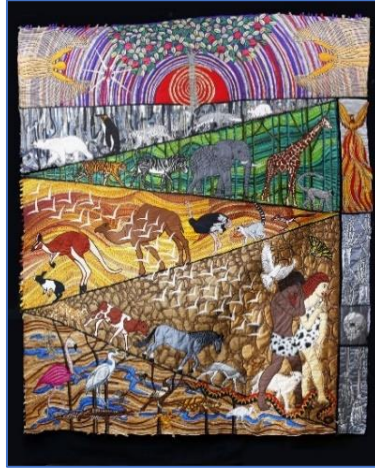
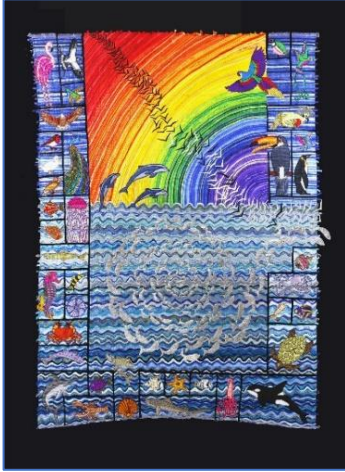
Then, off along the coast to Cromer in time for lunch (mine was a HUGE plate of chips and coleslaw – delicious!) and a stroll along the pier to visit Cromer RNLI Lifeboat Station.



On **Thursday**, the last day of our holiday, we were off to the City of Ely, and the coach dropped us right outside the famous Ely Cathedral. The day was very hot indeed, but so cool and calming inside the cathedral.



A number of the party visited the 'Threads through Creation' exhibition of twelve enormous, embroidered silk panels that explore the story of Creation.



Lantern in Octagon Tower

With its unique 14th century octagonal lantern tower, Ely Cathedral is counted among the wonders of the medieval world. Much of the Cathedral is over 900 years old. The nave ceiling tells the story of the ancestry of Jesus, beginning with Adam and continuing through Abraham, David and Mary. The Octagon, with its enormous internal open space and very unusual wooden 'lantern' above it, came about after a disaster. On the night of the February 12, 1322 - possibly as a result of digging foundations for the nearby Lady Chapel - the central crossing tower collapsed.



Nave Ceiling



Cromwell's House

Others of our party went to visit Cromwell's House, which was the family home of Oliver Cromwell. The kitchen dates from around 1215, other parts being built later. The house then became the vicarage of St Mary's Church until 1986.

A few of us walked along the river (Great Ouse) and sat under a tree in the shade, watching a group of young schoolchildren learning how to use canoes – very relaxing!



In the afternoon, those who preferred to return to the hotel were dropped off, and the rest of us were then taken into the port and market town of Kings Lynn. We walked down to the river side, hoping to catch the ferry across to West Lynn and back, but sadly it wasn't running. But we imagined that we could see, in the far distance, the mouth of the Great Ouse River as it flowed into the Wash in the North Sea.



We explored some of the lovely old buildings nearby, including the Guild Hall, rebuilt between 1422 and 1428 after a fire destroyed the original building, and where we saw a wedding party arriving.



Kings Lynn Minster

We also visited Kings Lynn Minster, founded by the first Bishop of Norwich, Herbert de Losinga, in 1101, as the Church of St Margaret of Antioch, St Mary Magdalene and all the Virgin Saints. In 2011, the Bishop of Norwich designated the church a Minster Church, but locals still call it St. Margaret's.



Guild Hall in the background

One of King's Lynn's most treasured historic buildings is the iconic 17th-century Custom House, overlooking the site of the town's medieval harbour. Outside the Custom House on Purfleet Quay stands a statue of Captain George Vancouver, the Norfolk sea captain and explorer, who 'discovered' the city of Vancouver, Canada in 1792.



Custom House and Captain George Vancouver

But although we'd had a wonderful day, the heat finally got to us, and we were pleased to be driven back to the hotel for our final dinner and bed!

Dragonfly Hotel



Up in the morning on **FRIDAY**, for our cases and bags to be loaded onto the coach. Then, after breakfast and our final time of worship, Gordon started us on the journey home, all feeling relaxed and happy, and full of the lovely memories of places visited, and our Circuit friends, old and new!

Our thanks, as ever, to Jane and Pete for organising and leading the holiday; to Richard for keeping a fatherly eye on us all, and of course to Gordon for giving us a safe, comfortable and entertaining trip!

Hopefully..... 🎵 'We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when

See you on the next Circuit Holiday? Do take the plunge!



Jennie Torpey
July 2023

