

More Anglian Antics

For the 30th Barnes Summer Tour we returned to Suffolk (with incursions into Norfolk) and were billeted in the same two pubs as last year. The gargantuan breakfast at the Four Horseshoes was as good as ever. Even the “small English” would pass muster for a full Monty anywhere else (the writer ruefully acknowledges another symptom of ageing in that he found the smaller version more than adequate).

There was no shortage of spectacular Suffolk churches. The roof at Rattlesden has an impressive array of wooden angels, albeit mostly Victorian replacements for the 15th century originals, and hidden high on the wall in the southwest corner is a carving, probably a self-portrait, of a woodworker with his tools. At Bressingham we had great fun cranking up the barrel organ, possibly the only one of its kind in an English church.

As usual the organisation was impeccable (thank you, Mike, Jill and Trisha) and there were some very fine bells during the week, including Stowmarket, Dennington and Eye, but arguably the jewel in the crown was the majestic eight at Redenhall. And for something completely different there was Shipping Forecast on the three at Wyverstone.

The spiral staircase at Wilby is steep with narrow treads ill-suited to modern feet. In contrast the steps of the 45-degree flight across the back of the church at Pulham Saint Mary are wide and well-formed but slightly daunting to those of vertiginous tendencies. However, nothing proved an insurmountable obstacle to Mike and his wheelchair, and credit must be given to Peter who, being the youngest and fittest, did most of the carrying.

The ring of eight at Horham purports to be the oldest in the country and it seems that on Friday afternoon the venerable clapper of the seventh finally decided that enough was enough. The ensuing thunderclap was loud enough to convince most of the band that the tower must be falling or the Day of Judgment nigh at hand; only one (who shall be nameless) had the presence of mind to set his bell. As it became clear that the almighty cataclysm was no more than a mundane mechanical failure, the flailing ropes were brought under control. But that was the end of a quarter of Little Bob.

Car parking at Alburgh is delineated by rough-hewn logs of just the right diameter to snag on a bumper or exhaust pipe. One driver, attempting to avoid this, managed to drop a wheel into a ditch, fortunately not irretrievably. In the event the whole parking exercise turned out to be futile when no-one turned up with the key.

Residents at the Four Horseshoes were awakened on Saturday morning by the sound of heavy machinery, which turned out to be road re-surfacing plant (whatever happened to steamrollers?). By the time we set out for our first tower, they had reached the other end of the lane, where the vehicles were halted while the workmen stood around surveying a pile of rubble which had recently been a gatepost of the White Horse.

Saturday's dinner was taken at the White Horse. In response to some disappointments earlier in the week, Caroline had managed to procure two fresh Cromer crabs to supplement the official starters and for those who had ordered “crab bites” a mouthful of the real thing was sufficient to cast severe doubt upon the provenance of the dish set before them. The occasion was tinged with sadness as we raised a glass to friends no longer with us: Colin Yandle, the originator of the “Barnes Weekend”, and Charles Turnbull.

Dinner ended with the traditional rendering of Flanders and Swann songs, interspersed with some Tom Lehrer and Arthur Sullivan, although the quality may have been suspect as it soon became apparent that most of the non-singers had left the room. We were still singing “the Hippopotamus” as we trekked down the lane to the other place for a final nightcap.

The new Dean of St Edmundsbury, the Very Rev’d Joe Hawes, is well known to many of us, having been a Team Vicar in Barnes and lately Vicar of Fulham, so it was a great privilege to join with members of the Cathedral band in ringing a quarter of Grandsire Cinques to welcome him – and a fitting conclusion to the tour! (We won’t mention the subsequent attempt at Horringer where Stedman did as Stedman does.)

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