

ART APPRECIATION

On the 17 May, 16 of us left Grange to visit three galleries in Newcastle. Several of us had never been to the city so we were looking forward to seeing what it had to offer.

Taking junction 44 off the M6 our first comfort break was at Houghton Hall. Not really a stately home but a glorious garden centre with food hall, fruit and veg stall, cafe, and restaurant. Well worth a future visit for browsing.

Once in Newcastle our first stop was the Hatton Gallery, part of the university buildings. Here we looked at an exhibition of art by Scottish Artist, Wilhelmina Barns Graham, who was a prominent member of the post-war St Ives group. The exhibition charted her path from realistic type paintings of Cornish landscape to Abstract Art. Also, at the Hatton we were able to see close up the Merz Barn Wall started by Kurt Schwitters in Elterwater. Schwitters was a refugee who fled Nazi Germany in 1940 and spent the last few years of his life in Ambleside, dying there in 1948. The small barn was in danger of collapse and was “rescued” for the Nation by Newcastle University who arranged for its re-location to the Hatton Gallery in 1965.

Then a leisurely stroll through the city streets (whose pavements are amazingly wide) to reach the Laing Gallery - the main art gallery of the city, founded in 1901. Here we saw a collection called “Northern Spirit” which focuses on work by Northern artists. Amongst the other collections were two beautiful paintings by pre-Raphaelite artists Edward Burne-Jones and William Holman Hunt.

We lunched in the cafe at the Laing whose walls were adorned by 19th century paintings by local artist Ralph Hedley and a super pair of stained-glass panels by Edward Burne-Jones which had been rescued from a local church before its demolition in the 1960s.

Our final destination was the Baltic Art Centre in Gateshead. This involved a slightly longer stroll through the city streets with spectacular buildings and bridges - looking like they were in flight above the buildings. We continued to the River Tyne and crossed its Millennium Bridge.

Two contrasting exhibitions at the Baltic – the first a collection of black and white photos by documentary photographer Chris Killip which featured very moving images of life in the North-East during periods of economic decline in the 1970s and 1980s.

The second exhibition by Hew Locke was called “The Procession” and was exactly that – a colourful procession of people and animals (some almost mythical) reflecting cycles of history and different cultures. The installation was commissioned by the Tate and was originally on display in Tate Britain.

And then all too soon we were boarding the coach and heading back to Grange with a good sighting of The Angel of the North statue as we headed out of the suburbs.

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