

The Spring Issue

2023

MARKET DRAYTON



MAGAZINE



“University of the Third Age”

Cover Photograph – A simple reminder, as though you need it, that Market Drayton u3a celebrates its 25th anniversary this year.

‘Every age has a kind of universal genius, which inclines those who live in it to some particular studies.’

An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, 1668

National u3a Electronic Magazine

In order to receive issues of the national u3a newsletter simply register your details online at: <https://www.u3a.org.uk/newsletter>

Market Drayton u3a Committee Members 2022-23

Alan Cartwright	Chair and Magazine Editor
Phillip Glover	Secretary
Andy Shearer	Treasurer
Judy Cowdale	Membership Secretary
Colin Barthorpe	Programme Secretary
Pam Shryane	Committee Member
Sue Walker	Committee Member
Jacqui Wright	Committee Member

Other roles

Jill Glover	Website Administrator
Candice Danleigh	u3a National Office Contact

Newsletter from the Committee

We trust you are keeping well and going on OK.

A major event for the Country this spring will, of course, be the first Royal Coronation in seventy years. Outside that though we have our own celebrations to look forward to as Market Drayton u3a has its 25th anniversary later this year. We are currently arranging a special social event at the Festival Drayton Centre on Thursday 20th July to help us mark the occasion with the comedian and magician Paul Ray, who entertained us so well a few years ago, coming along to join us. We had a great turnout for our 20th anniversary event but are hoping to do even better this time

There will be a coach trip to Salford Quays on Monday 4th September, our destination being the location of Media City UK, the Lowry and the Imperial War Museum North as well as a great place for shopping and dining.

Booking forms for both the above events appear later in the magazine.

In September 2022, following our AGM, Andrew Shearer generously agreed to become our new Treasurer and Sue Walker was not far behind in becoming a committee member.

One other person we have been very happy to welcome into the fold is Candice Danleigh who has become our new representative as regards the Shropshire u3a Network. Candice takes over the role previously performed by Beryl Edwards, who has represented us for a good number of years. The Network is made up of representatives of the various u3a's in Shropshire who come together to share information about their groups' experiences and organize joint events.

We are currently looking for two members prepared to take on the separate tasks of arranging the speakers for our monthly meetings at the Festival Drayton Centre and editing The Magazine when the current Programme Secretary and Magazine Editor step down at this year's AGM in September. The positions have their separate challenges and rewards but do need injections of fresh ideas from time to time.

There have been quite a few developments as regards our special interest groups.

Sadly Arthur Barnett had to step down from running the Country Dancing group recently, as he relates later on in this edition of the magazine. Thankfully Vivian McVittie has become the group's new convenor ensuring its continuation.

Not content with simply being the new convenor of the Country Dancing group Vivienne, or Viv, has also started a Drawing/Art group for 'People who think they can't draw.' You can contact Viv on 07484 606121 or via viv.mcvittie@me.com.

It was also something of a sad day for us when Don Prior had to stop running the Music Appreciation group last summer as it dates back to practically the foundation of Market Drayton u3a but fortunately Harry Hitchen has now got it going again. Harry can be contacted on 01630 652946 or 07967 450921.

There have also been changes of convenor in relation to both our history groups, with Kath Irving having become the convenor of Local History and Carolyn Smalley the convenor of British History.

You can contact Kath online through kath_ Irving@hotmail.com and Carolyn via 07762 689477 or smalleyc@btinternet.com.

A new group just getting underway is 'Mediumship – How does it Work' which our Membership Secretary, Judy Cowdale, has started at the Beacon Community Centre. You can obtain further details about this group by getting in touch with Judy via 07961 817990 or judycowdale@btinternet.com.

Our thanks go to everyone involved.

There is one final piece of extremely good news we really must give you and that is that Market Drayton u3a now has its own Facebook page, set up by Jill and Phil Glover, for which, our sincere thanks. The page makes it easier for members to share information and keep in touch with each other.

Take care and stay safe

Alan Cartwright, Chair of Market Drayton u3a



Have we mentioned it's our 25th anniversary?

MARKET DRAYTON u3a

NOTIFICATION OF AGM

2.0pm Thursday 21st September 2023 at

THE FESTIVAL DRAYTON CENTRE

Annual Subscription £12.00 (by cheque please)

**Election of Committee Members
and
Sign up for Special Interest Groups**

NOMINATION FORM FOR EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE POSITION

Nominee	Position	Proposer	Secunder

Please return the completed form to:

Mr. Alan Cartwright, Pine Trees, Buntingsdale Road, Market Drayton, TF9 1LT

WE ARE 25 YEARS OLD!!!



**COME AND CELEBRATE OUR SILVER ANNIVERSARY WITH US AT THE
FESTIVAL DRAYTON CENTRE ON THURSDAY 20th JULY 2023 AT
2.00pm**

SANDWICHES, SCONES, CAKE, TEA, COFFEE, A GLASS OF FIZZ

AND ENTERTAINMENT!

COST £12.00

SILVER ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

I wish to book:place(s) I enclose: £.....

Name:.....Tel No:

Names of people attending:

.....

.....

.....

Booking form and cheque (Market Drayton u3a) by **19th June 2023** to:

Andrew Shearer, 21 Riverside Drive, Tern Hill, Market Drayton, TF9 3QQ.
Tel: 07894 988879 or Email andy@shearer1.com

Please advise us of any special dietary requirements when booking

SINGING FOR FUN, CHRISTMAS 2022 – SARAH PITT

Just before Christmas our Singing group thoroughly enjoyed singing to and with the Market Drayton Age UK group which meets in the Festival Centre. After chatting with Mary who organises the group the decision was made to print sufficient copies of the song sheets for us and for the audience. This worked really well, generating a real sense of community involvement which was thoroughly enjoyable.

We transported an electric key board belonging to one of the singers which was valiantly played by Gill our pianist. Not an easy task. The idea was very successful, everyone sang lustily, we and they hardly needed the words but somehow it is reassuring to have them. One of the ladies, over 100 years old, sang every song. There was a lovely atmosphere, very companionable, relaxed and Christmassy.

We shall certainly hope to do some more entertaining such as this. Incidentally Market Drayton Mowers deserve a thank you as they allowed us to park in their driveway avoiding the real worry of finding parking places. This was so convenient.

A LIFE OF COUNTRY DANCING – ARTHUR BARNETT

My teaching career began in September 1957 at St Laurence C of E school at Cowley in Middlesex. On Thursday afternoons it was country dancing for my class and the class next door. A young lady teacher actually led the dancing, whilst I made sure the boys behaved and played the right records for the dances. These were the old 78 records. I soon became familiar with many of the dances and eventually called many of the easier ones.

In September 1961 I began teaching at St Mary's Primary School at Thorpe, near Egham in Surrey. I was put in charge of Country Dancing and realised I needed more music. I joined the English Folk Dance and Song Society and obtained music and dance books from there. By now we were using the small 45 records with two dances on each side. Our school paired up with a school where they did maypole dancing. With the help of my uncle we made a maypole and for the summer fete we put on a display which was very well received. I began to collect more and more records of country dancing and my enjoyment grew.

In April 1967 I took up my first head master appointment at Preston Bissett C of E Primary School in Buckinghamshire. Here we restarted a May Day festival with a tour round the village displaying the May Day Garland and a display of country dancing back at the school. Unfortunately the future of this little school was closure and so in July 1967 I was appointed Head of Hodnet Country Primary School where we held an annual May Day Festival with a mummies' play, infant singing games, country dancing and of course maypole dancing. For several years we took a country dance team to perform at the Shrewsbury Show. (Continues on Page 9)

CULTURAL VISITS CULTURAL VISITS CULTURAL VISITS

SALFORD QUAYS – MONDAY 4th SEPTEMBER 2023



Media City UK

The Lowry

Imperial War Museum North

**Our Coach leaves Towers Lawn at 9am, arriving back at approx 4.30pm
The cost of coach travel is £16.00**

There are no entrance charges for admission to the galleries at the Lowry or the Imperial War Museum at present.

BOOKING FORM

I wish to book places for Salford Quays. I enclose a cheque for £

Name:

Address.....

Tel: Mobile:

Names of people travelling:

.....
.....

Booking form and cheque (Market Drayton u3a) by 31st July to:

Mrs. Sue Walker, 3 The Paddock, Kiln Bank Road, Market Drayton, TF9 1RB. Tel: 07815 730726 Email sumegan47@gmail.com

Non-members of u3a attend at their own risk at the additional cost of £1 and preference is given to members.



A maypole but you probably knew that.....

By now country dancing was shared with sword dancing and maypole dancing.

In August 1995 I retired from teaching and packed away all my country dance records and books, which I feared would never be used again. We went on holidays abroad and at home and country dancing was almost forgotten. Then, however, in October 2002, Meriel Blower asked me if I would teach country dancing to a group of about twelve ladies, just for the winter months, once a fortnight. This became very popular and more and more people joined us. Some people from Whitchurch asked if they could also join us, which boosted members, and then they asked if I would go to Whitchurch on Fridays when there was no dancing in Drayton. This meant we were country dancing every week and numbers grew to nearly 30. Whitchurch used the Civic Centre for several years and when that was being re-furbished, we danced at the Raven Hotel at Prees Heath. Once the Civic Centre was re-opened we danced mainly in the Edward German Room. With up to twenty eight dancers it was a little on the tight size.

In 2012 Beryl Edwards asked me if I could help a group of young people called the Tern Valley Tinkers who loved playing country dance music but did not know how to fit dances to the tunes. I joined them and for the past ten years I've called dances for this brilliant little band in and outside Shropshire.

Country dancing was the main part of my life and I kept updating my dances as technology progressed. The greatest advance was the introduction of MP3 music which enabled me to store hundreds of tunes on one little chip. Suddenly the Corona virus took over and reluctantly we finished our Country Dance group on Friday 13th March 2020. Unfortunately this led to the Whitchurch group closing down. Not to be beaten I started Zoom sessions which meant couples could carry on country dancing in their own homes and some danced on their own. Over one hundred sessions have now taken place. We started fortnightly live sessions again on 24th September 2021 (with fortnightly Zoom sessions) but had to close again on 5th November 2021.

We started live sessions again at the Scout HQ once a fortnight on 17th June 2022. Things were going very well until 9th November 2022 when I was rushed off to New Cross Hospital in Wolverhampton having lost a great deal of blood. I have recovered but I have lost a great deal of weight and realised that my body can no longer stand the strain of calling. It was with great sadness that I had to give up my country dance sessions and calling for the Tern Valley Tinkers. During the last twenty years I have had the pleasure of teaching country dancing to some of the most friendly, generous and kindest people I have ever met. From the bottom of my heart I thank them so much for their loyalty and friendship.

I must, of course, thank my lovely wife Lily who has supported my country dancing for all these years. She was the one who spent Saturday nights on her own whilst I was enjoying a ceilidh with the band. I am indeed a lucky man to have such an understanding wife who has encouraged and shared my years of country dancing.

Yes, a lifetime of country dancing, lucky me!

I would like to thank everyone for their support, friendship and kindness over the past twenty glorious years.

Editor's Note - We've occasionally begun or ended our magazine articles with a few comments but in this instance we thought it might be more appropriate if they came from somewhere else :

'Arthur has made an outstanding contribution in promoting country dancing in north Shropshire, teaching generations of pupils at Hodnet Primary School, leading the Market Drayton and Whitchurch u3a country dance groups, and calling with the popular ceilidh band The Tern Valley Tinkers. We first met Arthur in 2011 when we established the band and since then he has been our caller, passing on his expert knowledge of country and maypole dancing. Band members have developed a close friendship with both Arthur and Lily and have lots of happy memories from all the ceilidhs we have played.'

James and Gareth Bowen, The Tern Valley Tinkers.



STRAIGHT FROM THE CENTRE

Highlights from our recent monthly talks at the Festival Drayton Centre.

Transylvania, A Simple Life – Mark Brimble, 20th October 2022



This was a very late change to our scheduled talk after the planned speaker had tested positive for Covid just hours beforehand.

Mark and his wife visited the central Romanian region of Transylvania in 2019, Mark being quick to mention the restorative merits of the region's 'Cowie' brandy. A number of historians have contended that the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin may have been inspired by events in Transylvania with the children the piper supposedly lured away from Hamelin in Lower Saxony, Germany, having migrated to the region to escape an economic crisis.

Anyway let's have a few facts. Transylvania is bordered by the Carpathian Mountains to the south and east and the Apuseni Mountains to the west. A part of the Dacian Kingdom from 168BC to 106AD, it has had a line of different rulers throughout its long history, including the Romans, 106AD to 271AD, with the two most recent being Hungary and Romania.

A census in 2011 revealed that Transylvania had 6,789,250 inhabitants with Romanians (70.62%) and Hungarians (17.92%) making up the two largest ethnic groups. A substantial number of people continue to believe in the countless myths, superstitions and legends that abound in the area. The range of ethnic groups, has had profound effects in the varied architectural styles of the buildings in the region, with Mark making particular reference to the fortified churches in its German towns.

Subject to regular earthquakes with a number of natural springs Transylvania has an array of spa towns, thermal resorts and sulphur caves. It is rich in minerals including iron, lead, manganese, gold copper, natural gas and salt as well as sulphur and has large iron, steel, chemical and textile industries. Agriculture, another key industry, is carried out using traditional rural methods, a way of life currently threatened by illegal logging and increasing mechanisation. Transylvania has a special type of chicken called the Transylvania Naked Neck which has no feathers on its neck or vent. Shepherds sleep in wooden structures, 'coffins,' for protection against bears and lynxes. The knowledge of

those coffins may have helped to fire Bram Stoker's imagination if he came across it during his vast amount of research when writing Dracula. He never visited the area.

Containing one of the last true wildernesses Transylvania's flora attracted the attention of King Charles III when Prince of Wales, leading to him acquiring an estate there and attempting to grow some of the native plants at Highgrove.

The transport system is fairly slow, with trains being restricted to a maximum speed of 40 miles per hour and, although motor vehicles aren't unknown, most journeys are still made by horse and cart.



Watches, A Celebrated History and Uncertain Future – Mark Brimble,
17th November 2022

Having had a great talk from Mark in October it was good to welcome his return a month later for a further presentation even if this one had been planned for some months. Mark began by revealing he had become concerned about the future of traditional watches after talking to a member of the younger generation about them and being informed the boy didn't feel he needed one as the smart watch he had gave him all the information he needed.



However, watches are still a part of everyday life for most of us and have been for some time, their development going back to the 16th century when they evolved from the spring powered clocks introduced two hundred years earlier. Time keeping itself is, of course,

much older, going back approximately 30,000 years. Mark outlined the various measurement methods that have been used over the centuries: the phases of the moon; Egyptian sun dials; and the introduction of water clocks in Iran and other parts of the world. The first mechanical clocks in Europe appeared around 1300.

The earliest watches were somewhere between the size of a clock and the modern watch and extremely inaccurate. Their accuracy improved with the addition of a balance spring to the balance wheel about 1657 which reduced errors from possibly several hours to perhaps ten minutes per day. The step led to the addition of a minute hand in 1680 and ushered in a period of innovation. A change in the 1960's was the move to quartz watches, which keep time with a vibrating quartz crystal.

The first wrist watches were produced in the 16th century with the Earl of Dudley presenting one to Queen Elizabeth I as a gift in 1572. Until the end of the 19th century they were, however, unpopular with men, who disliked jewellery and generally preferred pocket watches, but that began to change as the military recognised the importance of accurate time keeping when organising manoeuvres.

During the last century watches have been specially designed for use during deep sea diving explorations, think of Jacques Cousteau, and space travel, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin having been equipped with moon watches when on board Apollo 13. Non-magnetic watches have also been developed for IT workers. The need for the watch has now outgrown its original time recording purposes so they are worn for a range of other reasons including as style or fashion items or as links to the film and television industries.

Radio Shropshire – Paul Shuttleworth, 19th January 2023



This informative and entertaining talk probably came at just the right time given some of the rumours that had been circulating about the demise of the BBC's local radio stations.

Early in the afternoon, just after getting going, Paul said that we had got to be the youngest u3a audience he'd ever talked to, based on information he'd received from someone on the front row of the auditorium. Unfortunately that assertion came when Paul was talking about the ways in which journalists could mislead people with skewed reporting based on biased source material and asking which sections of the media we trusted the most, television, newspapers, the Internet or radio. The majority vote was, of course, for radio which was apparently down to the way in which it establishes a personalised, one to one relationship with the listener.

In recent years, however, as most people are aware, radio along with television has been struggling to keep up with online forms of information and entertainment. (There has also been a growing move away from the use of radio and television sets towards reliance on the facilities on mobile phones.) The BBC has not been slow to react to these moves with an early step, back in 2005, being the reallocation of 15% of its annual terrestrial budget to iplayer. At present there is a suggestion that in future local radio stations could be live on weekend mornings with the afternoon output provided on a regional basis, given that politicians rarely give interviews after mid-day. (I always thought they were confined to the hours of darkness – Editor.)

Despite the possibility of this change Paul was in something of a spritely mood as he led us through a world of shock jocks and celebrity insularity and talked about the mixed views that exist regarding the ‘licence fee.’ In part, at least, this was down to the fact that he’d celebrated a milestone birthday the day before and was wearing the brand new pair of trainers he’d received, which were displayed to us at almost every opportunity. Having made his way into radio the DJ route he finds it difficult to put a name on the type of show he runs on Radio Shropshire from 10am to 2pm on Saturdays but describes it as a way of providing companionship and cosiness for his listeners.

Following his talk Paul dealt with a few of our concerns during a lively question and answer session. A particular concern related to the cost of having a BBC reporter stand outside the door to No. 10 Downing Street whenever Government developments are taking place. Paul’s simple answer was that there wasn’t any as the BBC news staff in London are based in Millbank House right across the road from No 10 and there was no need for a cameraman or any expensive equipment given that journalists are able to film themselves using their mobile phones.

This was a very enjoyable talk but we really must hurry on before our young and extremely talented Website Administrator, Jill Glover, realizes she has just been referred to as ‘biased source material.’

Chester Uncovered – Stephen Shakeshaft, 16th February 2023

As a registered Chester tour guide Stephen was well placed to take us on a virtual tour of the city, touching on not only the familiar landmarks but also the odd nooks and crannies people tend to pass by. As evidence of this one of the earlier slides in his presentation was of a ‘Sedan Porch’ adjoining a building where the occupants of sedan chairs used to dismount and make their entrances.

Born in Stanley Place, where ‘Sedan House’ is located, Stephen betrayed his feelings a little after moving on to tell us that Chester’s town hall has been standing empty for a number of years, although its rooms are occasionally hired out and it is licensed for weddings. Its tower has clock faces on three sides, the exception being the one facing west towards Wales.

Moving on our guide strongly suggested the refractory in the cathedral, a former abbey, as a place for refreshments given that monks would have eaten there a thousand years ago.

Having negotiated Abbey Square, which has featured in Agatha Christie films, and Abbey Street where there is a plaque commemorating a bequest by a real life Norah Batty (one hopefully without the wrinkled stockings), we were led up onto the city’s walls through the Kale Yard Gate. Having been begun by the Romans when they founded Deva Victrix in

60-70 CE the walls were extended to the west and south after the Norman Conquest and were basically complete by the middle of the 12th century. They provide a continuous walkway of 2.95 kilometres.

Not all that far away from the steps leading up from the Kale Yard Gate - the monks grew vegetables on the far side of the walls – is the King Charles tower where Charles I is alleged to have watched his royalist forces lose the battle of Rowton Moor during the English Civil War in 1645.



The King Charles Tower

Descending to street level again we visited the Garden of Remembrance in the Cathedral's precincts with its links to the former Cheshire Regiment (now a part of the Mercian Regiment). From there our route gave us views of the late 20th century Addleshaw Bell Tower, the first free standing bell tower constructed in Britain since the 15th century, and the Eastgate clock tower designed by John Douglas and unveiled in 1899. The building adjacent to the clock tower dates back to the Tudor period but has a Victorian frontage.

Reminders of the Romans are never a long way away in Chester and even if you don't hear today's stand-in centurions crying out 'Dexter, Sinister' on their guided walks around the city, traces can easily be found in the amphitheatre, which used to be twice its present size, and the Roman Gardens.



The Bear and Billet, Chester

With a lot more to take in – this included the 'Wishing Steps' on the south - east corner of the walls, the weir built across the River Dee that helped to power the abbey's corn mills, the racecourse or 'Roodee' based on the site of a former Roman harbour and of course the upper storey shops, the Rows, see above - it was probably fitting that one of our final stops was at the 17th century Bear and Billet in Lower Bridge Street. (It would have been even better if this hadn't been a virtual tour and we could have gone in, I'm feeling quite worn out! – Editor.) Years ago Paul McCartney brought John Lennon to the pub to see

where the latter's grandmother, Annie Jane Millward, had been born. A nearby cottage named 'Nowhere' subsequently provided the inspiration for the Beatles song 'Nowhere Man.'

This was an extremely interesting talk about a city that the Romans at one point considered making the capital of Britannia and which may have been a major port if the nearest section of the River Dee hadn't silted up.

AIMING TO PLEASE – CAROLE BUCKENHAM

A few years ago Carole Buckenham went on her iPad to search for information about an interesting looking house in Stafford Street, Market Drayton which was just around the corner from where she lived. She came across a reference to a lady who had spent the final part of her life at the house and who is buried in Market Drayton cemetery. Carole found her story so fascinating that she has produced the following article based on information on the website, history Ireland.com.

Cecilia Maria Eleanor Betham, 1843-1913

For a number of years in the 1860s, Cecilia Betham dominated the Irish and British archery worlds but her sporting achievements appear to have disappeared into oblivion. Possibly this was because archery was a minority sport confined mainly to landed gentry and other members of the Victorian elite and during the 1870s the sport was largely abandoned for other sports.

The Bethams originally moved to Ireland to take up residence in the house of Cecilia Betham's grandfather at Rockford, Blackrock, Co. Dublin and it was here that she developed her interest in archery. Her father and other family members were keen members of one of Ireland's oldest clubs, the County of Dublin Archers.

The club's uniform for ladies consisted of a white petticoat, green jacket and a turned-up straw hat decorated with ostrich feathers. The men, however, sported Lincoln green velvet caps and uniforms. Prizes at the weekly competitions were attractive, a silver arrow for ladies and a silver tassel for the men. At the annual competition there was a silver bracer for the ladies and an attractive silver trophy, the Norton Challenge Cup, for the men.

Cecilia first came to national attention when she was runner up in the Irish Women's Championships at the Carlisle archery ground in Bray in August 1863. Her greatest success in England in 1864 was her victory at the Grand National archery competition, the UK's Championship archery contest, held at Alexandra Park in London, in early July. Her winning score was the highest ever recorded at that time. London society commented during successes in England in 1864 that "the shamrock has come to England and has been everywhere victorious."

The following years saw Cecilia recording a remarkable run of national and important regional victories. She won additional UK national championships in Clifton, Bristol, in July 1865, at Crow Point in Norwich, July 1866 and Hereford racecourse in July 1868. She was runner-up at Preston near Brighton, July 1867. She was fourth out of 59 at Aston Park, Birmingham in 1869 and she also won the Scottish National title in 1865, 1866 and 1867. Her Irish provincial victories included the Leinster Championships in 1863, 1866 and 1867;

the Ulster Championships in 1866 and 1867 and the Munster Championships in 1867 and 1868.

Although she continued to compete into the early 1870s her best days were behind her. Ireland's first lawn tennis club, Monkstown, was started by members of the County of Dublin Archers in 1877.

Cecilia died at the age of 70, leaving effects to the value of just over £8,000 after twice being widowed. Sadly, no contemporary newspaper reported her passing or that she had been such a notable champion in her younger days.



Cecilia's gravestone in Market Drayton Cemetery

Where would we be without those (alleged) reports from Qantas Airline engineers

Pilot: Aircraft handles funny.
Engineer: Aircraft warned to straighten up, fly right, and be serious.

Pilot: Target radar hums.
Engineer: Reprogrammed target radar with lyrics.

Pilot: Mouse in cockpit.
Engineer: Cat installed.

Pilot: Noise coming from under instrument panel. Sounds like a midget pounding on something with a hammer.
Engineer: Took hammer away from midget.

Pilot: Dead bugs on windshield
Engineer: Live bugs on back-order

Pilot: Suspected crack in windshield
Engineer: Suspect you're right



DRIVING THE NORTH COAST 500 – COLIN AND SANDRA BARTHORPE

Colin and Sandra Barthorpe spent half of last September driving the North Coast /NC500, a 500 mile loop around the top section of Scotland. Here they give us an account of their trip, which followed overnight stops in Moffat and Pitlochry.

On Day One of our 15 day programme we travelled from Pitlochry to Dornoch on the Scottish East Coast. We spent the day visiting Aviemore and The Black Isle. There was plenty to see and do, including a visit to Chanonry Point where Dolphins are frequently seen but unfortunately not whilst we were there.

Our first stop was at the Dornoch Castle Hotel, for two nights, in the centre of the village. This was an interesting hotel in an old castle, over 3 storeys high with no lift. We were on the 3rd floor which was our first lesson. Several of the hotels didn't have lifts so it's a good idea to ask for a ground floor room.

We didn't eat in that hotel but found a lovely Italian Restaurant called Luigi's, just a 5 minute walk away. There are a couple of nice beaches, at Dornoch and nearby Embo. On our free day we ventured inland to Straffpepper, Rogie Falls and Dingwall (50 miles). Another option is to visit the Glenmorangie Distillery at Tain, but you will need to pre-book.



Brora – Photo Credit Sandra Barthorpe

Our second stop was at The Garvault Hotel near Kinbrace for three nights. En-route we visited Dunrobin Castle, Brora and Helmsdale. The hotel was very interesting, being situated in the middle of the Flow Country, a vast expanse of moorland and bog, and 10 miles from the nearest civilisation! The hotel itself reminded us of our grandparent's house, no mains electric and no TV! No hairdryer or kettle either. Guests all ate the same meal

and at the same time, and on the final evening we ate with the hosts and staff. Meals here were, not surprisingly, part of the package. An interesting place that we liked but it's probably not one to everyone's taste.

The travel company we had arranged the trip with, McKinley Kidd, had booked us a taxi from Thurso for a day around the far north-east including Dunnett Head, John O'Groats, Duncansby Stacks and Wick ostensibly giving us most of the day off driving. The second day of our stay in Thurso was spent quietly, with a morning visit to Forsinard Nature Reserve, 30 minutes away, and a book in the afternoon in front of a log fire! Another benefit of staying in Thurso was that a member of staff at the hotel was an expert in local whisky!!

Our next move was a 40 mile drive to Tongue via Bettyhill. The accommodation there was at the Tongue Hotel, two nights, another hotel without a lift. Our room was excellent and the food was very good. On our free day we again ventured inland on an 80 mile round trip to Lairg, with a stop at the remote Crask Hotel for lunch.

Next, we moved on to The Edrichillies Hotel, south of Scourie, two nights. Our journey took us to Durness where there was quite a lot to see. The Smoo Caves were popular and we visited the John Lennon Memorial and two stunning beaches. The hotel was really the start of the journey down the north-west coast and was probably the best we stayed in. It is located on the coast around a rocky inlet with stunning views from the garden and bedroom. The food was first class but needs pre-booking. A free day took us on a 90 mile round trip through Drumbeg, Clachtoll and Lochinver with superb scenery.

Our next stay was in Ullapool at The Westlea Guesthouse, two nights, an upmarket B&B. Ullapool had a few more eating options so there were no problems in finding somewhere to go. One place to try was the Sea Shack, which is exactly what it says, a shack selling some interesting sea food. Whilst in Ullapool McKinley Kidd had booked us on a 2 hour Wildlife Cruise round Loch Broom and The Summer Islands. It didn't disappoint with sightings of seals, a White Tailed Eagle and 50-100 Dolphins playing with the boat.

Our final stay was at the Tigh Eilean Hotel, Sheildaig, three nights, another wonderful location situated right on the front of a rocky inlet. This was the only hotel in Sheildaig, which is a very small place, so it is advisable to pre-book meals there, which were all very good. On the way we made a wonderful 100 mile detour through Gairloch, and Kinlochewe. We had 2 free days in Sheldaig. On the first we did another 90 mile round trip through picturesque Plockton, Kyle of Lochalsh, over the Skye Bridge to Skye.

Our final day on the NC500 was another drive onto the Applecross Peninsular. Unfortunately the weather was unkind so we drove the Coast Road both ways rather than go over the Bealach na Ba, the highest road pass in the UK. The road is very challenging but rewarding with superb views.

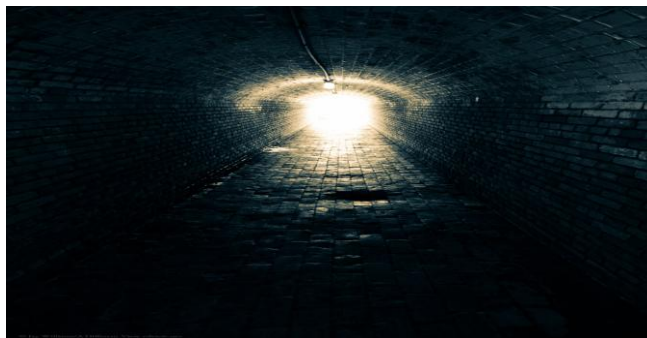


Plockton

Our journey home started with a 170 mile drive via Fort William and Glencoe to Loch Lomond where we stayed at The Loch Lomond Arms in Luss, before the final 290 mile drive home. A wonderful experience! Altogether we drove 1800 miles, 800 of which were on the NC500. Approximately 700 were on single track roads, some of which were quite challenging. A few final thoughts on the tour:

- Fuel stations are scarce so fill up where you can. Payment is card only.
- Meals are not cheap. We spent over £1,000 on food.
- You can save £'s by booking everything yourself but McKinley Kidd were good.
- The NE coast is beautiful but the West coast scenery is even better.

Your editor glimpses a faint light at the end of the tunnel



Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to this edition of The Magazine and all its predecessors that have appeared whilst I have been in the hot seat as editor. As previously announced I will be stepping down from the post at this September's AGM but in the mean-time you still have time to get your contributions to me via pandacartwright@gmail.com or by contacting me on 01630 296126.