

### U3A – Travel Club visit to Norwich and Thursford Spectacular - 17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> November 2019

Richard our smiling driver with his dark blue coach from Jones of North Wales turned up promptly at 8.30am and this was a sign of things to come as we made excellent progress east in the quiet Sunday traffic. We soon took the ever cheerful Richard and his obliging manner to our hearts. We were like kids with our goody bags and soon many people were deeply engrossed in puzzle books with their new pens. Others observed the remaining floodwaters of the River Severn. We arrived in the city of Ely, north east of Cambridge by lunchtime. Not quite enough time to do the cathedral and its lovely stone surroundings, Oliver Cromwell's House, The Stained Glass Museum, plus the open market and shops, but we tried; many eating lunch on the hoof. Shame the market didn't have Fenland Celery, but hooray I found some in Waitrose. Nothing tastes like this Heritage British product grown in the peaty fens. We arrived at the 3\* Brook Hotel (Best Western) north west of Norwich to a very welcome hot drink and time to relax before a good carvery dinner. Porterage and service with a smile added to our enjoyment. The only complaint I ever heard was about anorexic toilet paper.

Monday morning saw us in Norwich city for the cathedrals, castle museum and art gallery, shops and market. Many of us enjoyed the Gainsborough, Turner and Cotman paintings in the Colman Art Gallery and there was a huge natural history section in the museum. 12 noon and we were off to our highlight, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Thursford Christmas Spectacular; three hours of superb entertainment by highly professional artistes followed. It was hard to choose a favourite, but many were truly impressed with the collapsing toy soldiers (female dancers), who later morphed into superb Irish dancers in purple outfits. They were so slim too. The Thursford Choir was very talented and so was the ventriloquist, not to mention the acrobats from *Cirque du Soleil*. None of us remembered being quite so clever as that man with a hula hoop either. We came out full of joy and memories to join the 30 coaches and 1400 folks going home from matinee.

Tuesday was going home day, but we managed two hours in the lovely city of Peterborough, south west of Norwich, having travelled through the frosty landscape of pretty Thetford Forest and Heath and then on raised roads above the flooded fens with big parties of swans a swimming. Peterborough cathedral was stunning, a rich golden colour due to the use of Barnack stone, a local limestone from a quarry near Stamford (reminding us of our recent trip to Barnsdale). At one time the cathedral housed some of the relics of "our own" St Oswald. We had to choose between the museum, art gallery, shops and beautiful cathedral grounds. Despite our busy itinerary we still made good progress north west home before Birmingham traffic became unbearable. It was great to be back in Oswestry for 5pm having enjoyed cold, crisp weather with blue skies and sunshine.

I can only say "How soon can we go back?" Can we please have a whole day in lovely Peterborough and a ride on the Nene Valley Railway with Thomas the Tank Engine and a visit to John Clare Cottage? Many thanks to Jim for yet another great trip.

Ruth Dawes.