

Isle of Man Holiday

On Tuesday April 19th as dawn broke over Central Hall, we started the 12-hour journey to the Isle of Man, the small Crown Dependency, with a population of 84,000 nestling in the North Irish Sea. It is a railway enthusiast's paradise as by the late 19 century the island was criss-crossed by network of electric and steam trains though now reduced to those connecting the major towns.

On Wednesday we took the Manx Electric Railway the 17 miles north from Douglas to Ramsey, a scenic journey of 75 minutes with the rolling countryside, villages, and glens on one side, and cliffs and coastal hamlets on the other, with 14 request stops like Fairy Cottage and Belle View. Travelling in an open carriage on a sunny but cold spring day made us appreciate the coffee John provided on arrival. In Ramsay The Grove Museum told the story Life on the island in Victorian times.



Thursday was a rest day in Douglas. Time to enjoy the crescent of houses built by the Victorians to encourage tourism that later played an important role in both world wars as housing for internees. A walk along the promenade, a ride on the horse drawn tram or a tour of the town.

The Manx Museum was a particular delight. It has a wonderful collection of memorabilia depicting everyday life on the Island and a video explaining how 400 years of Vikings rule laid the foundation of the current parliamentary system, the Tynwald. In 1346 the English Crown took possession of the island leaving the Tynwald responsible local government and financial affairs subject to the approval of the Lord of Man.



On Friday we travelled on the steam train that took us across the Island to Port Erin with its railway museum and time to sit and relax on the cliffs enjoying the view.



Les's attempts to take us on the route of the famous Isle of Man TT races were thwarted by preparatory work for this year's races. Instead a surprise visit to the Isle of Man Motor Museum with its amazing collection of over 500 vehicles donated from across the world. From the unique Peel 50, built on the island, to the car used to take the Queen and Prince Phillip around Australia, to a unique bus built for kindergarten children.



Clouds greeted us on Saturday morning as we travelled on the Snaefell Railway 2000 feet up to the mountain top to hopefully witness its panoramic views. The mist lifted slightly on the way down and we could see the lake and mining ruins in the valley.



After lunch it was time to investigate the Laxey wheel. The Isle of Man had rich reserves of lead, silver, copper, and zinc making the Laxey area very rich in the 1800 hundreds. However there were major problems with flooding in the Laxey mine. With no coal reserves on the island for a steam powered pump an alternative had to be found. The solution, the world's largest working waterwheel, 72 feet 6 inches diameter and 6 feet wide constructed in 1854. Ore from the mines in the valley was processed in Laxey and transported down to the bustling port below for shipment abroad.

Serious mining ceased in the early 19 hundreds leaving Laxey a quiet seaside resort. Jean and Stuart managed the 95 hazardous steps to the top of the wheel. On returning to Ramsey it was a sunny evening. Time for a quiet stroll along the promenade and an early night in readiness for the journey home.

