

ISLE OF WIGHT HOLIDAY

The sun shone as thirty members set out for the Isle of Wight with Les, our driver, and his wife Linda, who came along for the ride, (or should that be Ryde!!!!) Our first comfort break at South Mimms wasn't much comfort because ***"THE CONVENIENCES ARE CLOSED DUE TO A POLICE INVESTIGATION"***

We never find out what it was, but for the purposes of this write up we should make it murder at the very least. We reached Portsmouth on time, only to find out that the ferries were all delayed by an hour. However we managed to get on a late-running earlier boat and undaunted we arrived at Sandown's comfortable Trouville Hotel.

The Trouville Hotel is situated on the Esplanade and many of the rooms had sea views across the beach and the bay. The pier was very close - pretty lights at night (but full of amusement arcade and fun fayre when on the pier itself).



Sandown is a bit run down. Strolling along Sandown's promenade with horses bathing in the sea is marred by the derelict state of former hotels, and the Town had many empty shops. We were even asked in the hotel to pay by card as much as possible, because there are no banks left in the town where businesses can take their cash. Sounds a bit familiar?

There were no complaints about the standard of the rooms or the food. There was entertainment every night, and a games room including Table Tennis which some of us put to good use. There was no pool in the hotel but the gigantic pool called the English Channel was just outside the front door with a beautiful beach just right for swimming and quite warm enough too, although only three of us actually tried it.

Our first trip was to Osborne House where Queen Victoria and Prince Albert's created a family home which was their retreat from Court life, until Albert's death in 1861. The Queen's interest in India is reflected in a collection of paintings and memorabilia and the stroll through an avenue of trees imported from far and wide to the beach was a memorable experience. On the way back we stopped at the Lilliput Toy museum, a dear little exhibition of all sorts of toys of mainly Victorian era. The next day was the free day. The Island's floodplains provided a rich hunting ground for legions of dinosaurs whose remains are preserved in Sandown's Dinosaur Museum and we learned that there are more fossils found on the Isle of Wight than the Jurassic Coast.



Most of our party took the chance to do an extracurricular boat trip to Portsmouth Harbour with an opportunity to view both sides of the Solent.

Osborne House could be seen from a different angle, and the concrete islands built to defend Portsmouth Harbour from the French. In the harbour was the new Queen Elizabeth Aircraft Carrier, HMS Victory and Warrior, and several modern frigates. Also, relics from the Napoleonic War and Rat Island where they buried the dead from the prison hulks. Les and Linda joined us on this trip for a true 'busman's holiday.'



The next day the outing was to Monkey Haven, a new attraction on the island. It is actually a rescue centre for animals who could not live in the wild, mainly because they had spent much of their lives being kept as pets, neglected, or no longer wanted by zoos. The name Monkey Haven is a bit of a misnomer as there were reptiles, Birds of Prey, and Meerkats and the visit included talks from the very knowledgeable staff.

In the café area was a baby blue tit who decided to attach himself to people. It had been hand reared by some of the staff and had just been released back into the wild, but obviously not too successfully.



The afternoon we went to the beautiful Model Village at Godshell, a model of the Village as it was in the 1930's including the model village within the model village. It was unusual not only in the contents of each display but in the background details.

No trip to the I O W would be complete without seeing The Needles so on the last day started with a trip to Alum Bay to a waiting boat for a choppy half hour at sea to have a closer look at the Needles and the lighthouse at the end. The geology was fascinating. The glorious, coloured sands, twenty-one different hues in vertical stripes down the cliff, stopping abruptly when the white chalk takes over and breaks up into the sea stacks of the needles.



Lunch was at the Isle of Wight Pearl shop with its stunning views from the clifftop and an opportunity to learn more about how pearls are formed and watch some being jewellery being crafted.

The rain held off for the last trip of the day was to Ventnor Botanical Gardens on the site of an old 18th century T B Hospital and early sun recording system. It has a remarkable microclimate which allows the growth of many species of plants and trees from round the world, but it would have been nice to have had a few more labels to know what they were. A red squirrel was spotted, the Island being one of the last remaining places in the UK where they still exist.

Our original return ferry was cancelled necessitating a scenic journey across the island to Yarmouth, sailing to Lymington and driving through the new forest to get to the M25, a much prettier route.

Thanks to John and Vivienne for another great trip, and also time to thank Les our driver for all the service he has given our u3a over the years .