

What a load of Bull!

Trip to Birmingham Christmas Market in December

Despite it being December, the weather was very kind to us as we clambered aboard our trusty Sleafordian chariot, with our very own Prince Charming Stewart at the helm for the last time in 2024. This was our chance to see all the stalls, treat ourselves or buy last minute gifts, so we set off in high spirits.

We had a clear run through and arrived in Birmingham in good time, giving us 4 and a half hours to enjoy the decidedly festive atmosphere. First stop had to be The Bullring, which had its own selection of stalls and high-end shops to entice the unwary. This is so named because bulls were baited there in the 16th century and a huge bronze bull stands there to this day. Sadly, the indoor market is closed on a Wednesday now, but that probably helped avoid too severe overdrafts! It was time to hit the Christmas Market.

In 1966, the Birmingham-Frankfurt Partnership Agreement was signed, leading to several joint projects, culminating in the Birmingham-Frankfurt Christmas Market in 2001. This has expanded steadily over the years, starting with 24 stalls and now reaching 60, selling everything from crafts to food to warming beverages. It stretches over several streets and is a feast of the senses, with tempting aromas beckoning you to add a few pounds even before Christmas. There were wonderful cuckoo clocks; Christmas decorations; fudge (not again!) ; pretzels and peanuts, all beautifully presented in glittering stalls, whose roofs sparkled with Christmas lights and featured reindeer and Santa in varied poses. It was wonderful to wander round and just look!

Having refuelled, we wandered up to the Craft Market, at the top end of the market. There were jewellery stalls everywhere, so of course I succumbed. It was based round Birmingham Cathedral so we went in to explore. Built in 1715, this elegant Baroque church boasts some of the most stunning stained glass I have ever seen, designed by Edward Burne-Jones, the famous pre-Raphaelite artist who was also christened there. The vibrant reds, blues and greens drew the eye and the drapery of the figures was so realistic you felt you could reach out and stroke the rich fabrics. The famous Schwarbrick organ was removed for safety in WW11. It was the perfect place to remember the true significance of this time of year, so easily forgotten in the feeding frenzy of shopping.

After a stroll past the remaining stalls and a stunning carousel, we stopped for some Gluhwein near the steps, where an elegant, reclining sculpture of a female figure poured water down the stone terrace from her overturned cup. There was a singer belting out both Christmas songs and artificial snow. People of all ages and ethnicities were singing and dancing together in the flurry of snowflakes. If only such harmony extended beyond the festive season.

And so back to the coach and another excellent run home. The sun had shone for us, we'd all enjoyed our day and were full of the Christmas spirit. Thanks once again to Jane and her band of little helpers, Stewart, Chris and Brian, who sadly did not get to drive the coach yet again. Better luck next year, Brian. May I wish everyone a wonderful Christmas and a happy and healthy New Year and see you on January 8th.

Barbara Pearce

