

Beautiful Beverley

A visit to this Yorkshire jewel on May 20th

We set off bright and early at 8 30, prepared for the changeable May weather with short sleeves and raincoats. It is a short journey and we made good time, arriving at 10. Now, Beverley Market is well known, so most of us headed off there (after a coffee of course,) only to discover a few sad stalls of plants and some second hand jigsaws. Was it the weather? It appears the market is now only big on Saturdays. One shopping opportunity gone. However, the beauty of the UK is that, if you just look around, you will find plenty to entertain and intrigue you. Beverley did not disappoint!

Beverley was established in the 7th century by John of Beverley, who founded a church there. Originally called Inderawuda, the town was part of Anglo-Saxon Northumbria, then Viking, then English. John became a saint in 1037 so Beverley became a place of pilgrimage, also building its trading connections till it became a large and wealthy settlement. It is believed to have inspired the naming of Beverly in Massachusetts and thus indirectly Beverly Hills!! Who knew?

Dominating the town's skyline is the Minster, with its soaring walls, tower and intricate carvings. The aforementioned John founded a monastery there and King Athelstan gave the church the right to offer sanctuary in 938, a valuable refuge for people in these lawless times. After a fire in 1188, extensive building work began. It is a Gothic masterpiece and larger than one third of all English cathedrals. The powerful Percy family has a tomb there and the interior decoration is unbelievably intricate. Around the inner walls are medieval carvings of musicians, believed to be the largest such collection in the world. Each is a work of art in itself, unbelievably lifelike. The magnificent organ still has some of its original piping, and the east window contains the remnants of medieval stained glass blown out by a huge storm. It was a fascinating, atmospheric place.

Still more history awaited us in St Mary's Parish Church. Founded in 1120 or thereabouts, it has evolved over its 900 years of history to be nationally recognised for its amazing architecture. In the chancel there is the Ceiling of Kings, including an image of George VI. The 14th century stone vaulting of one chapel was revolutionary for its time and the carving of The Pilgrim Hare is believed to have inspired Alice's White Rabbit. It is amazing how often past and present intertwine seamlessly as shown by the carvings of the creatures of Narnia, now decorating the renovated exterior of the church.

Here endeth the history lesson, as there was so much else to do. Beverley boasted a very fine collection of shops, from well-known brands to quirky boutiques including a lovely shop selling scented soaps, some made to resemble tulips. The aromas were amazing and one has to have a souvenir, hasn't one? There was a stately bandstand in the square, sadly lacking musicians today. We had food, fashion and tempting little side arcades to enjoy, and we found we needed all of the five hours we had!

It was an equally good journey back and remarkably, there was none of the promised rain! Typical, as I had lugged a coat and umbrella around all day. But I am not complaining, as I enjoyed every minute of my visit to this Jewel of the North. Thank you to Jane, Stewart, Brian and Chris for another great day out. Next stop Scarborough. Barbara Pearce

