

Chas 2019 Trip the North East

This year's trip from Sunday 7th July to Tuesday 9th July took us to the North East and Tyneside. Our early start for 47 members and friends had a slight hiccup when it was necessary to replace the coach before we left Chorley. After a brief break at Hartshead Moor we continued on to our first visit. It had originally been intended that this should have been the Transporter Bridge at Middlesbrough, but this had been closed for essential maintenance.

Our first visit then was at Mount Grace Priory, House and Gardens, which is beautifully situated at the north-western edge of the North York Moors. It is the best-preserved Carthusian Priory in England. The second photo shows the right-angled passage by which food entered each cell. The size of each cell, as could be seen from a reconstruction, was fairly large when compared to normal domestic accommodation. The adjacent herb, flower and vegetable garden was particularly colourful.



From Mount Grace we headed north, over the Tees, to Hartlepool and its historic quay, which is the home of the National Museum of the Royal Navy and of HMS Trincomalee, which is Europe's oldest floating warship. As we approached the quayside, we had our first sight of the Trincomalee as its mast towered above the recreated seaport. Around the dock were different premises illustrating various nautical related trades including chandlers and gun and sword makers as well as nautical tailors. Whilst were there we also saw exhibitions of ropemaking, gun and cannon loading and firing. The highlight was undoubtedly the tour round the HMS Trincomalee led by local guides. They brought to life the daily round of work and existence on a nineteenth century naval sailing ship. It seemed to be claustrophobic even after a short time. The low height of each deck was a telling factor.



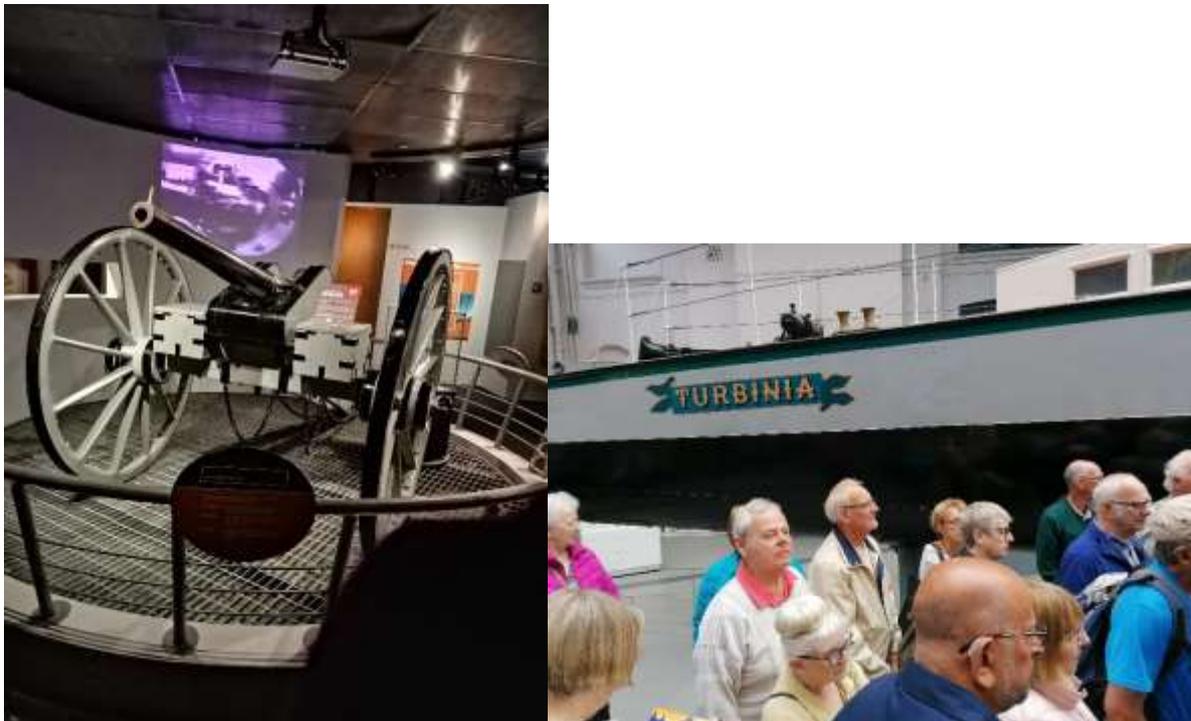
From Hartlepool we continued north over the River Wear and past Sunderland (and Nissan) to Newcastle, where we were booked to stay for two nights at Jury's Inn, close to the City Centre and riverside. We were staying off the Scotswood Road which features in the Geordie anthem "The Blaydon Races." The accommodation and food was good, and some of us even had views from the 5th 6th and 7th floors of the Tyne Bridges and the Sage. The Tyne was sufficiently close to encourage some to take an evening stroll after dinner.



The following morning we started with a very short journey on the coach to the Discovery Museum which is housed in the very fine former Co-operative Wholesale Society warehouse. As soon as we entered the museum we were faced with the SS Turbinia, which with its turbine-powered steam engine, designed by Charles Parsons, gave it a top speed of in excess of 34 knots. That apart it was surely the most sleek and elegant ship of the post sail age.

We split into groups for our guided tour which took in both the co-operative history of the building and the industrial history of Newcastle and the Tyne.

We could not help but be impressed with the huge importance of William Armstrong and his company and the range of their manufacturing, starting with the No.1 gun below.



One of the most fascinating exhibits, too large to photograph, was the model of the River Tyne, made by the Tyne Improvement Commission in 1929. It showed all the industry, particularly on the banks of the river, on the eve of the Great Depression.

From the Discovery Museum, after a drink and a bite to eat, our coach took us across the city, and out through Byker, to Wallsend and the Roman fort of Segedunum at the eastern end of Hadrian's wall. Here again we had well-informed and enthusiastic guides to bring history to life. Segedunum was in many ways a typical fort, but it was amazing to hear that it was largely only discovered after the demolition of streets of terraced housing. We had the added bonuses of seeing the remains of an eighteenth century colliery and the Swan Hunters dock where the SS Mauretania was built. (The Mauretania was once the fastest transatlantic liner and we had seen an amazing scale model of the ship at the Discovery Museum).



Hadrian's Wall was of course well known to all, but our final visit of the day was to the relatively unknown Victoria Tunnel in the Ouseburn Valley. The Tunnel was a nineteenth century wagonway built to link the Spital Tongues Colliery and a coal staithe on the Tyne. It only operated for 18 years but had a second life as a Second World War air raid shelter. All this was brought to life by excellent guides as we walked along a section of the tunnel. We were not surprised to learn that the Victoria Tunnel is rated by Trip Advisor as the first of 131 things to do in Newcastle.

Day 2 had been a busy day, so we were relieved to make a slower start on the final day. We were due to board a boat for a trip down the Tyne. Sadly, it was raining so only a handful walked to the Quay just beyond the Millenium Bridge. The rest of us were delivered by coach to Sandgate ("As I went through Sandgate" in the Keel Row). Our trip took us up river at first and the Millenium Bridge was raised specially for us. Then we headed downriver to the mouth of the Tyne. Our commentator described in detail the history of the firms that had once lined the banks of the river, as well as other historic sites including Tynemouth Castle and Priory and the memorial to Admiral Lord Collingwood. The trip took three hours and the rain meant that most time was spent inside the boat, where the commentary was picked up, the views seen and bacon stottie cakes consumed.





The journey home was uneventful. A great time was had by all and we came home with many enjoyable memories. The River Tyne has inspired many songs and readers might enjoy versions of "The Waters of Tyne" and "The Big River" on You Tube, the latter song by Sting and Jimmy Nail.