

EXCURSIONS IN 2017

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Heysham 2 Nuclear Power Station, 26 April 2017

On a crisp Wednesday morning, twenty members embarked on a guided tour of Heysham 2 nuclear power station, the largest attendance at any of our half-day outings. The two Advanced Gas-Cooled Reactors lie adjacent on the edge of Half Moon Bay and form a landmark that dominates the skyline of Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham.

The site is managed by EDF Energy and we reported to the Visitor Centre for security checks and an induction which included a tour of the interactive exhibition areas with their touch-screen computers and information panels explaining how electricity is generated, information on site safety, the monitoring and control of radiation and the treatment of nuclear waste. We then split into two groups and were given a guided tour of the reactor viewing-gallery, the turbine hall and the cooling-water intake.

This was an opportunity to see at first hand a building and an operation that affect all our lives as local residents. The buildings externally seemed to be much smaller when viewed close up considering their significance on the landscape. Internally, however, Heysham 2 is like a vast medieval cathedral. The most noticeable thing is how few people can be seen working in the control room. The guides explained that the power station is monitored and controlled by a core of up to five highly skilled personnel at any one time working on a shift basis, 24-hours a day throughout the year.

The statistics are impressive. On 1 August 2016, Heysham 2 broke the world record for the longest continuous period of operation of a nuclear power station without a shutdown. The lifespans of both facilities have been extended, with Heysham 1 now due to shut down in 2024 and Heysham 2 in 2030. The two reactors together are the largest in Britain providing a combined output of 2,375MW of electricity to the national grid and supplying energy for approximately four million homes. Over 1,500 people are employed at the power stations with an annual wage bill of £80m, with much of that money being spent in the local economy.

The tour finished back at the Visitor Centre with refreshments and the guides and supervisors answered questions raised by members. It was a splendid half-day outing and a privilege to have an exclusive tour: we are most grateful to EDF Energy.

Barrow-in-Furness and Outlying Venues, 10 June 2017

This was our first full-day excursion of the year with four venues. It was attended by 16 members and one visitor.

Our first stop was at the medieval Parish Church of St Cuthbert in Aldingham, on the shore of Morecambe Bay between Ulverston and Barrow. Our guide was the local historian, Robert Wheatley MBE, who gave a fascinating talk about the history and development of the Church. It was founded in the mid-twelfth century with only the chancel arch now remaining from this period. The south aisle was added between 1150 and 1190 with four round-headed Romanesque arches inserted, supported by three piers, two circular and one octagonal set alternately. The extended chancel dates from c.1300 replacing the original one: the tower was added in c.1350. The north aisle was built in 1845–6 to a design by the Lancaster architect, Edmund Sharpe.

Notable features include the twelfth-century font bowl decorated with twenty scallops; box pews; a late seventeenth-century communion rail; a squint in the south wall at the junction with the chancel, and on the right-hand side of the altar there is a small rectangular hole discovered in 1932. This is thought to be a leper hole used in pre-Reformation times when the priest would pass the communion bread to the lepers through the hole on a long-handled wooden shovel: the priest consumed the wine on their behalf! Also in the chancel

on the north wall is a stained glass window by Shrigley & Hunt of Lancaster depicting St Cuthbert, which was installed in 1905.

This extraordinary church has a very peaceful aura in a beautiful setting. We are most grateful to Robert Wheatley for sharing with us his detailed knowledge and enthusiasm for the church.

Our next stop was a self-guided tour of Furness Abbey – or at least that was the intention, until the heavens opened making it impossible to walk around the Abbey ruins. Fortunately, we had arranged for Gill Jepson from the Furness Abbey Fellowship to give a talk on the history of the Abbey and to explain the artefacts on display in the Museum attached to the Visitor Centre. Gill provided a fascinating account of the hoard of treasures discovered when the grave of a medieval abbot was recently uncovered following an investigation into structural cracking that had started to occur. Among the findings was the first crozier to be discovered in England for fifty years with the bones of the abbot – believed to be ‘a well-fed, little-exercised man between 40 and 50 years of age suffering from arthritis and diabetes’. Also discovered was a gemstone ring in fine condition. Later, we were able to view these findings in the Museum together with a collection of rare and remarkable stone effigies and carved stonework from the abbey ruins. Our thanks go to Gill Jepson for her very interesting and informative talk.

We then proceeded to have our lunch break in the Dock Museum in Barrow, followed by a self-guided tour of the well-laid-out displays there. The Dock Museum has been built over a former dry dock with sandstone sloping walls on a huge scale. The exhibits ranged from the history of Furness from the end of the Ice Age to the present day including: the impact of the Vikings; the growth of the town in the Victorian period; and a Second World War gallery. Shipbuilding remains a major industry and employer in Barrow and there are magnificent models of ships on display including submarines, airships, warships and liners that were built there. As we left the town we saw HMS Audacious, the fourth of seven Astute-class, nuclear-powered submarines that was launched on 28 April 2017. It was berthed in Devonshire Dock to begin its testing and commissioning programme ahead of leaving for sea trials in 2018.

Our final venue was the fourteenth-century pele tower known as Dalton Castle in Dalton-in-Furness. Initially we were expecting a self-guided tour but to our delight, the National Trust had arranged for the Friends of Dalton Castle to give us a guided tour. This small, plain building measures only 13.4m x 8.9m on plan and is 12.0m high. It was formerly the manorial courthouse of Furness Abbey where the Abbot administered justice. Originally the building contained rooms in which the business of the lordship was transacted, with a gaol, guardrooms and stores, over three floors. In 1856 the medieval layout was modified when the two upper floors were converted into a single room, now used for local events. The lower room contains a small museum of local history. The architects for the alterations were Sharpe and Paley of Lancaster. We are most grateful to the Friends of Dalton Castle for providing a guided tour and sharing their expertise and knowledge with us.

Skipton Castle and Bolton Priory, 9 September 2017

Our second full-day excursion of the year was attended by 22 members and one visitor. We arrived at Skipton Castle mid-morning after a splendid coach drive across North Yorkshire, hugging the southern border of the Yorkshire Dales National Park with magnificent scenic views and passing through picturesque villages on the way.

We were met by our guide, Peter Bailey, who explained the history of the Castle before beginning the tour. We learned that the first Castle was built in 1090 by a Norman Baron, Robert de Romille, as a timber-and-earthwork motte and bailey defensive structure. After the de Romille family died out, Edward II granted the Castle to Robert de Clifford in 1310, subsequently ennobled as Lord Clifford, who rebuilt the Castle in stone between 1310 and 1314 to withstand Scottish border incursions and it remained within the Clifford family until 1676. In 1642 the Castle – the only Royalist stronghold in the north of England – was besieged by Cromwell’s Parliamentary army for three years. The Castle was severely damaged after its surrender in

December 1645 and was allowed to be partially rebuilt by Lady Anne Clifford provided that the walls were thinner, windows were added and the roof was weakened so it could not bear the load of live-firing cannons. A yew tree was planted in the inner Conduit Court in 1659, where it still remains.

Today, the Castle has only two of the original six massive defensive drum towers. These are the oldest surviving part of the Castle and were formerly the watchtower and the muniment store. The first floor comprises the original medieval kitchen, a garderobe (privy), the banqueting hall, the withdrawing room, the Lord's dayroom, and the Lord's bedchamber. On the ground floor is the 'new' kitchen (1680) with a charcoal stove and Victorian cast-iron range, the north fighting room, and the wine and beer cellars. Finally there is the dungeon below the entrance where the drawbridge and portcullis would have been. Next to the Castle are the substantial roofed remains of a twelfth-century chapel. To the right-hand side of the Castle is the sixteenth-century Tudor Long Gallery which is the private residence of the present owners of the Castle, the Fattorini family, who purchased it in 1956. Skipton Castle is one of the most complete and well preserved medieval castles in England. The knowledge, enthusiasm and infectious good humour of Peter Bailey made this a very memorable visit and we are most grateful to the Castle administration and to Peter for a grand day out.

After lunch in Skipton and a walk around the town market, we departed to our last venue, the twelfth-century Bolton Priory, just five miles from Skipton. It is adjacent to the River Wharfe and laid out in extensive grounds and woodland. Our guide, Paul Middleton, a church warden, has extensively studied the history of the Priory. Paul's expertise became very clear on his tour of the exterior of the church and the remains of the buildings including the polygonal chapter house. Internally, the church is in two parts. The nave and west tower are both roofed and have served as a parish church since the Dissolution in 1539. Separated by a wall, the former crossing, transepts, choir and chancel are all in a ruinous condition. Converting the nave into a Parish Church was an insightful decision by Prior Moone to save some of the building from destruction by Henry VIII's henchmen. It is easy to see what would have become of the nave by having this side-by-side comparison of the two parts. Augustus Pugin was employed in 1853 to design the magnificent stained-glass windows in the nave and in 1867, George Street, a distinguished architect, was appointed to refurbish the Church which included forming a new Sanctuary. In 1877 the east wall was rebuilt to replace the old wall of 1539 and was decorated in 1880 in an extraordinary scheme depicting plants and symbols representing the profound teachings and redemptive suffering of Christ. The overall effect is stunning and it is unsurprising to learn that over one hundred regular worshippers attend services from the surrounding villages. We were very pleased to learn the history and development of the Parish Church and Priory and we extend our warmest thanks to Paul for his excellent tour.