

# *England, Italy and a Golden Wedding Anniversary*



*Summer, 2015*

*Bob and Molly Hillery*

## *England and Italy , June-July 2015*

**On June 8** we left Mason for a two month visit to England and our nephew's apartment in Ilkley. We have made this trip on a number of occasions and, in general, we follow essentially the same pattern of activities in each visit. The stay in Ilkley this time was no different, but for a few notable exceptions, so we have chosen to include our day-by-day timetable as an appendix and use the bulk of this journal to cover those deviations from the norm.

As readers of our past summer (and, indeed, winter) vacations to Ilkley will know, our routine consists of a handful of items which repeat almost on a routine basis every day. Breakfast is either in the flat or at our local coffee shop, Caffè Nero, where we are as well known as at our local Starbucks in Ohio and where drinks are in preparation as soon as we walk in the door.

The rest of the day will generally include a walk into town for Molly to do her shopping and, for Bob, either a walk (often on the moors) or a bike ride. On a number of occasions I have been joined by our niece Joanne for these walks and—once this summer—by her three sons also. Her oldest son Toby also joined me on one bike ride this time and indicated that he would like to repeat on future visits.

These periods of intense (?) exercise are often followed by an equally intense afternoon nap in preparation for our evening meal. Perhaps half of these will be at home and the rest are at one of the several local restaurants that we are fortunate to have in Ilkley—Italian, French, Mediterranean, Thai, Indian and local fare, all of which are very good.

Trips to surrounding areas for sightseeing and/or shopping seem to be less frequent as we enter our sixth year of staying in Ilkley but we often enjoy a meal either in town or further afield with family and friends and this trip was no exception. Bob's sister and brother-in-law live relatively close as do our friends Keith and Zena and, as mentioned, our niece; each of these are usually available for a few evenings throughout our stay.

So, as we have said so many times, the Ilkley apartment is really a home away from home and our daily activities—and even our Sunday attendance at the local church—mirror those at home in Mason. Consequently, one could read any of a dozen journals of the past several years and get a pretty good picture of this summer's visit.



However, as we said, this two month stay included a number of “non-routine” items that we feel are worthy of a little more in-depth coverage and it is those that we are including in our more normal format (that is, with pictures!) here.

June 21 1965 was our wedding day, so 2015 is the year of our Golden wedding Anniversary. We were unable to set one date on which we could expect all our family and friends to join us for a single celebration, so we have enjoyed a number of smaller, but nevertheless memorable, functions over the course of several months. We started in April with a weekend in Ohio on which both our children and all four grandchildren were with us for a long weekend. This included a stay at Great Wolf Lodge (a nearby water park), a family dinner and a presentation of a wonderful gift from all eight of our guests—a canvas mounted collage of wedding pictures (us and our children) together with beautiful photographs of our grandchildren.



On the actual date of our anniversary, Elizabeth posted one of our wedding pictures on her Facebook page and we received many comments about this extremely thoughtful gift. Needless to say, we agree, and proudly display it in our home.

Shortly after our arrival in England (on June 13) Dorothy and David took us out for a very good dinner at the Blue Lion Inn in a small village in the Yorkshire Dales. Then, on the weekend of our anniversary, while we were in England, we organized a family and friends dinner as the next step in our continuing celebrations. The dinner was at Monkman's restaurant in Ilkley—one of our favorites. Joining us for a super evening were Dorothy and David, Fran and Alan, Robert, Keith and Eileen, Roy, and Keith and Zena. Brother, sisters, cousins and school friends, a great meal and excellent conversation. Nothing better!



Molly's brother Robert, her sister Frances and brother-in-law Alan had arrived in Ilkley the previous day (on which we had a great meal at our favorite Italian restaurant) and stayed with us until Saturday (Fran and Alan) and Sunday (Robert) so we were able to enjoy a mini-reunion over the weekend. Unfortunately, Molly's other brother Richard and his wife Elizabeth were unable to attend but a visit to Sheffield in July allowed all siblings to be together.



On the actual day (Sunday June 21) Molly and I drove to the venue of our wedding reception in Sheffield. The church where we were married is gone unfortunately, but the Whirlowbrook Park Hall still stands and indeed is still used for weddings and receptions. After a family debate as to the actual location (fifty years had caused confusion in some minds between Whirlowbrook Hall and nearby Whirlow Grange), as we entered the park grounds on the outskirts of Sheffield there was no doubt that we were at the right place.



The Victorian home looks as it did 50 years ago and the grounds are as beautiful as ever – albeit somewhat more “established” than in 1965. There are two lily ponds situated



across the main lawn from the house which provided a classic backdrop for bride and groom photographs. In fact, on our wedding day (and I suspect on many others) the photographer stood across the lake to capture the couple and the water, with a tree-filled rock garden as backdrop.



Apparently the house and gardens had had a period of inactivity and lack of attention over a number of years and it was only in the past few years that efforts had been made to restore the gardens and use the house again for weddings. We met a couple who knew a little about the work that had been done in what had become a very overgrown garden and they told us of the recent transformation. It still appeared to be much more dense vegetation than when we were there a half century earlier (or even one time after that when we took our children there) but it was unmistakably the same place. We asked the couple to take a picture of us near the lily pond in a fifty year on (and color) photograph of the classic shot taken of all newlyweds at the time. It was lovely to stroll through the area once more on a beautiful summer afternoon – at precisely the time we had been there in our wedding outfits.

On our visit this year we had to settle for two photographs with cameraman (a friendly visitor) and couple on the same side of the water – but we felt we had re-captured the moment rather well. In fact – without the benefit of the old black and white pictures from 1965 – we could easily think that the scene and ourselves hadn't changed at all!

*June 21,  
2015*







***June 21, 1965***

The celebratory weekend finished with dinner on Sunday evening with our niece Joanne at the Clocktower restaurant in Rudding Park near Harrogate. It was a very pleasant meal with my late brother's daughter and her husband Robert and another chance to reminisce and extend the festivities. But there was one more treat: our nephew Mark had booked us into a suite at the Rudding Park Hotel ("The best UK hotel outside London") so we didn't have to drive back to Ilkley that night. Quite a contrast to our honeymoon spent in a two person tent!





We had one more celebration to come. Two weeks after our anniversary date (July 8), we spent three days in Northumberland with our friends Keith and Zena. Keith (my grammar school best friend from the fifties) and Zena celebrated their Golden Wedding at the beginning of June so we decided to spend a few days together to cap off a wonderful series of family activities.

Our first stop, on the way to our resort hotel, was at the outdoor museum of Beamish. Beamish is a reconstruction of a Victorian coal mining town and, although the main town is said to be set in 1913, there are a number of older buildings and settings. All the buildings have been re-located here from their original sites around the area and they are all staffed by people in period clothing. Many that we talked to were really into their “role” and provided not only some good historical data but also were very entertaining and amusing at times.



We took a tram from the entrance area to the main street of the town (about a one mile ride) and spent most of our time in the several shops and commercial buildings established there. We visited the Cooperative store, the bank, a couple of confectionery and





clothing stores as well as spending a very entertaining 20 minutes listening to the local dentist and having him explain the tools of his trade circa 1900. There were also stables and coach houses and trams, buses and commercial vehicles of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were continually passing through the town.

One somewhat alarming aspect was that many of the items in homes and stores were ones that we recognized from our childhood – although since the four of us were cele-



brating our 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversaries it is perhaps not too surprising that we had experienced some of the “artifacts” first hand.

Our final stop was at the houses and chapel near the colliery. Here we saw the miners’ cottages which were quite rudimentary to our minds but which were apparently relatively luxurious for the times. Each had a well-tended vegetable garden and there were pens for pigs and other animal housing. Each family worked specific crops or owned animals and the products were shared amongst all the families, as well as with the many single men that were recruited to work in the mine and who lodged in these same small homes.



*Keith in school, writing on slate!*



About 5pm we left the museum and completed our journey to the Macdonald Linden Hotel and Country Club where we were booked in for the next three nights. We had a very good dinner and finished the evening and a very interesting day with a nightcap in the lounge.

On the next day 9 (Thursday July 9) we drove to the nearby town of Alnwick (pronounced “Annick”). Our destination here was the Barter Bookshop which is said to be one of the largest secondhand bookshops in Britain. The library is housed in the town’s railway station (which closed in 1968) and is now a huge facility. There are dozens of shelves crammed with books of every kind, as well as a coffee shop and café and it is common for visitors to







simply go in for a coffee and sit reading at one of the several groupings of chairs and tables set up throughout. The shop was started by a couple less than twenty years ago and has grown not only in size but in fame and is now as much a tourist attraction as it is a bookshop. Needless to say, with Molly and Zena being avid readers, Barters' gained some more trade today.

While in the town we also stopped for a short time at the small but interesting open air market where there was only one fruit and vegetable stall but several stalls selling handmade products. Again, the Alnwick economy was helped by our presence!

## *Alnwick*



In the afternoon we drove a few miles to visit Cragside Estate. This is a large Victorian home in a very large estate (there is a six mile drive – which we took – around its perimeter) and

its major claim to fame is that it was the first home in Britain to have electricity generated on site from its own water supply,







A relatively small (10 rooms) house had been built by William (later Lord) Armstrong in 1860 as a retreat from his main residence in the Newcastle suburbs, some thirty miles away. It was built on barren, stony ground (hence Craggside) on a steep



hillside with little or no vegetation or trees in sight. However, after about twenty years and with increased prosperity and industrial wealth, Lord Armstrong decided he needed something a little larger to entertain his friends and clients from around the world, so he



In 1868, a hydraulic engine was installed, with water being used to power labor-saving machines such as laundry equipment, a rotisserie and a hydraulic lift. In 1870, water from one of the estate's lakes was used to drive a Siemens dynamo in what was the world's first hydroelectric power station. The resultant electricity was used to power an arc lamp installed in the Gallery in 1878. The arc lamp was replaced in 1880 by Joseph Swan's incandescent lamps in what Swan considered 'the first proper installation' of electric lighting.

The generators, which also provided power for the farm buildings on the estate, were constantly extended and improved to match the increasing electrical demand in the house. The use of electricity in many of the houses gadgets and internal systems has also led it to be described by some as a smart home as it was the first private residence to use incandescent lighting, a dish washer, a vacuum cleaner and a washing machine. One of Armstrong's stated aims of both using and funding these new automation technologies was to "emancipate the world from household drudgery".

built the new house around the old one and ultimately ended up with a 100 room mansion. Amongst his house guests were the Prince and Princess of Wales (later King Edward VIII), for whom he had built additional bedrooms and en suite facilities.

Lord Armstrong was by now (1860) a very successful industrial engineer (he had started life as a solicitor) and had major ship building, crane building and armaments factories in Gateshead and Newcastle. However, he was fascinated by water and its power and set out to use that resource in his much expanded home. His was one of the first homes to have running hot and cold water, flush toilets and central heating – and this in a very



remote part of northern England. He achieved this through the use of a hydraulic pump engine, powered by the gravitational water flow from a huge man-made lake built on site that took clean spring water to a tank on the roof of the house (300 feet above the spring).

Not satisfied with this sophistication, he later used the same water power to generate electricity to provide lighting and other amenities in the home. Hence he had the first hydro-electric powered lighting in any home in Britain. Again, this wasn't sufficient as



the arc lighting (dim and erratic) of the time was soon replaced by the incandescent bulbs invented by his friend and Gateshead neighbor, Joseph Swan. Swan had come up with the carbon filament lightbulb at the same time as Edison did the same in America and, in fact, the two joined forces as the Edison-Swan Company.

So, in this remote hilly area of northeast England was a huge home with electric lighting and, largely thanks to the efforts of his wife, now set in a beautiful wooded area with lakes and formal gardens. It is said that 5 million trees were planted within the estate with native and other species from around the world. Lord Armstrong had enormous wealth and partnered with many other wealthy industrialists to form companies that existed well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He also gave much of his personal assets to philanthropic works in a number of areas; again, some still exist today.

He died at the age of 90 in 1900 and, with no children from his long marriage, the estate and title passed to his great nephew and thence to two additional Lord Armstrongs. Their stewardship was not as steadfast as his, however, and in the 1970s Craggside passed into the hands of the National Trust who manage it today.

One final 21<sup>st</sup> century addition to the estate now provides electricity to the house and would presumably have earned the praise of William Armstrong. An Archimedes Screw is now being used to generate electricity via water flow from the same lake that had been put in place by Armstrong in the mid-1800s so that, almost two hundred years on, Craggside is using hydro-electric power once again.

After 4 hours on the estate, which included a tour of the inside of the home with its advanced concepts and its obvious wealth and works of art, we returned to our hotel. Tonight we ate in the pub on the grounds, rather than the main restaurant, and had a good meal in less-opulent but nevertheless pleasant surroundings.





On Friday (July 10) we spent most of the rest of the day in the nearby town of Alnwick. We made one stop on the way at an 11<sup>th</sup> century church where we spent an interesting 20 minutes inside and outside the beautiful building.



Once in Alnwick we purchased tickets for visits to the castle and to the gardens. The castle of course is ancient and is the ancestral home of the Dukes of Northumberland but the adjoining gardens are a relatively modern feature and major attraction of the town. They are owned and operated by the Northumberland estate and it is clear that a significant amount of money has been – and continues to be – put into these beautiful grounds.

The central attraction is a very big water feature that includes many terraces in a perhaps fifty feet waterfall and also includes a number of fountains and sprays that cycle through a pattern. It is a huge man-made structure but fits well into the natural hillside which contains a magnificent hedge, pathways and additional water features and gardens. Above the falls is a walled garden in which there are dozens of species of flowers, vegetables and other flora, all of which surround yet another central pond from which flow four streams.

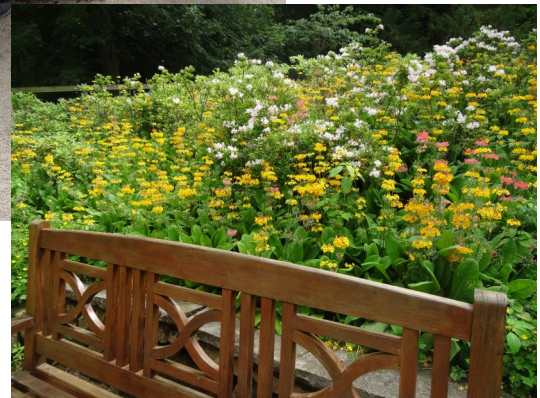


***Alnwick  
Gardens  
huge water  
feature***





We returned from the walled garden via a winding pathway through a cherry orchard and several wild



flower gardens. It was a lovely walk on a warm and sunny day. Then we spent about 30 minutes on a guided tour of the Poison Garden. This is a small area but contains about one hundred species of plants that are poisonous in one aspect or another but are in many cases often found in English gardens or in the countryside. The guide made the tour very interesting and amusing – and, I suppose, a little unnerving as many of the plants were very familiar to most of us.



After a cup of tea in overlooking the main waterfall, we walked through a beautiful rose garden and then proceeded to the castle. By this time it was after 3pm so we were advised to go directly to the state rooms as they would be closed at 4:30 and, in fact, we spent the rest of our time in the castle in those rooms.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Duke of Northumberland and his family live in the castle at least part of the year and many of the rooms we visited were their living quarters containing magnificent works of art, statuary and beautiful furnishings – as well as the occasional modern photograph of a family member or grouping. These rooms and in fact the whole of the castle that we saw were extremely well maintained and we were told that much had undergone major restoration over the past ten years. We have visited a number of stately homes and palaces throughout Europe (including those of St Petersburg just last year) and, although Alnwick is on a much smaller scale, we felt that it compared favorably with its more well-known and famous counterparts.



How much of this is a direct result of the money that has been generated from the use of the castle by the television and movie industry is difficult to say but





the impact of setting two Harry Potter films here must have been significant, not only in direct revenues but in the increased tourism resulting. I was pleased that this aspect of the castle has not been overtly exploited and certainly did not detract from the inherent attractiveness of the castle and gardens.

A more recent claim to fame for the estate has been in the filming here of an episode of the very popular British TV series “Downton Abbey”. This is a series about aristocratic life in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and apparently Alnwick castle provides a perfect setting for many of the indoor scenes. We learned that a second episode will be filmed here – starting tomorrow!

The Percy family (the lineage granted the Northumberland title) has been a major family in British life since Elizabethan times and has generated a great deal of wealth in a number of industries and seems to be doing things right to maintain that lifestyle. However, the fate of so many aristocratic families of Britain has forced many to not only open their homes to the public (as at Alnwick) but eventually to sell off large parts of the family’s assets to pay for upkeep and taxes (“Death Duties”). It is to be hoped that the entrepreneurial ideas of the Percy family will avoid a similar fate for the magnificent castle.

We returned to the hotel about 5:30 and re-convened for dinner at 7pm. Once again we had a good meal and excellent company. We also got our “official” joint anniversary photograph.



On Saturday we checked out for the journey home. Rather than follow the same route back, we decided to head west towards Carlisle and then south to Kirkby Lonsdale and home. We followed some very scenic areas through the Borders, stopped a couple of



times for a snack (one of which was “the center of Britain”, being equidistant from east and west coasts and the northern-most tip and south coast of the islands) and arrived



*The Centre of Britain*

back in Ilkley around 5pm. It was another warm day and it was a beautiful drive and a perfect ending to a very pleasant four days with good friends. We said farewell in Ilkley with a promise to get together for dinner one more time before we leave for America.

We had two additional celebratory events that deserve mention; I suppose we could call them anniversary gifts to ourselves. The first (actually on Saturday June 27, before our Northumberland trip, was dinner at the Box Tree restaurant in Ilkley. This is a long established dining establishment which has been reported as “over-priced” but since our first visit last year we have enjoyed excellent meals with excellent service on a couple of occasions. This three hour “menu gourmand” was no exception.

The other gift for us was an eight day visit to one of our favorite countries in the world, Italy, and two of our favorite cities—Venice and Florence. This was from July 15 to July 23 and will be covered in detail below.

However, One other “traditional” events of our summer visits to England is a sibling reunion with Molly’s sister and two brothers. This year was no exception, although due to Richard’s health (he is a long-suffering MS patient) this year’s get-together was held in Sheffield and was only for a couple of days. In fact, during the time of the reunion, Richard was moved into extended care facilities where we are happy to say he is not only getting the care that he needs but seems to be enjoying his stay. Obviously it is difficult for both Richard and Elizabeth not being in their home together but the physical strain on Elizabeth has been lifted. We continue to keep both in our thoughts.



# Italy

## July 15-23, 2015



### Venice

### Florence

