

England

December 2023 to January 2024



Bob and Molly Hillery

England, December-January 2023-2024

Sunday December 17/Monday December 18

We left home about 2pm and drove to the airport. Here we dropped off our rental car, checked in and spent about an hour in the Sky Club before our 5pm flight to Atlanta. This left on time, arrived in Atlanta a few minutes early, so we had over two hours in the SkyClub.



Sunset flying to Atlanta



Delta Business Class "Suites"

The flight from Atlanta left a little late as we needed extra gas (Molly blamed my suitcase) and we had a rough patch as we were eating dinner. Other than that, the ride was uneventful, and we arrived at Heathrow about 20 minutes late (11:30 am local time).

Border security and baggage claim moved well, so we were getting our rental car about an hour after landing. We were soon on the motorway and heading for Wells. We had one coffee stop and arrived at the Swan Hotel at 3:45pm - and it was fully dark!! The room is in an annex to the main building but is very spacious and well appointed.

We ate in the hotel dining room tonight and had a pleasant meal. It wasn't the "high end" restaurant that featured in the ads (more like an upscale pub), but it was a good meal with good service. It was about 9pm when we returned to the room.

Tuesday December 19

We were up at 8am and went to the hotel restaurant for a Continental breakfast. We then took a walk (in the rain!) to mail Christmas cards and walk around the town for some good views of the cathedral and the Bishop's Palace. It wasn't conducive to spending more time walking, but we were reminded just how attractive a town Wells is.



Our Hotel and Wells Cathedral

Later in the morning, we got ready for the wedding and ordered an Uber to take us to the venue. Unfortunately, I received a message stating that there were no cars available, so we ordered a taxi and were at the Elmhay Park venue by 1pm. We were wondering where to go when Josh (the groom) approached and asked if we were Molly and Bob (we had never met him) so we made introductions and soon were directed inside.

The ceremony was to be held in a tent erected near the main building, and we found our seats on the second row of the bride's side of the enclosure. One by one we met Dorothy and David, Amanda and Ellis (Isobel stayed home so as not to miss school!), Sam (Georgina's mother), and Jessica (Georgina's younger sister). And many others.....



A little after 2pm (the bride was fashionably late) Georgina was escorted down the aisle by her dad, Nigel. The relatively short ceremony conducted by the Somerset registrar was very similar to that at our own wedding almost 60 years earlier – with the exception of the word “Holy” since this was a civil ceremony only. The signing of the official papers seemed to take as long as the ceremony itself but we were soon welcoming the new couple and headed indoors for the first of many glasses with which to toast.

The weather earlier in the day had been atrocious as mentioned above but there was a break in the rain (even a little sunshine) for the official picture-taking session outside. Similarly, the weather stayed dry for the confetti throw, staged specifically for another official picture.



The “wedding breakfast” was served at table and was a very nice meal of pate, bangers and mash (unusual but very good!) and cheesecake -all

accompanied by wine. Then it was time for the speeches. Nigel (who had been teased a lot by his family prior to the event) did an excellent job and gave an amusing and heartfelt speech about his daughter and her new husband. Likewise, Josh and his best man



gave very creditable responses.



Following this set of speeches (all remarkably “familiar” in format to our wedding), one of the venue staff took the microphone and said that he would like to offer his congratulations on behalf of the venue.

We thought that we were in for a commercial for the Estate but he – and another “waitress” – suddenly burst into song. The two of them sang perhaps eight songs, wandered through the hall, and got guests involved, and gave an excellent performance. Obviously, they were not staff but had been hired by the bride and groom for the occasion and were, in fact, “The West Enders”, presumably a tip to their day jobs in theater. It was an interesting and enjoyable twist to a lovely event.



The Wedding Breakfast and Reception



Beautiful Flower Girl

A “final” outdoor camera shoot took place when we were all given sparklers to raise as the bride and groom walked up the path to a sparkling glow. Then it was time for the dancing, which presumably went on for quite a while.

Molly and I left about 8:30 (getting a taxi when offered, rather than risking lack of availability later) and both Nigel and Sam came outside to the taxi pickup point to thank us for joining them. They really made us glad that we were able to attend.

Wednesday December 20

We were up at 8am again, had breakfast and checked out, and were on our way to Ilkley by 9:30. The drive was billed as taking 5 hours and the weather as we left Wells certainly would not have slowed us. We stopped twice – once for coffee, another for a nap – which would have added a little over an hour. However, as we circled Manchester it began to rain and there were a series of accidents or slowdowns such that, at one point, the prediction was for a 6pm arrival. It was stop and go all the way to Ilkley, but we eventually arrived at the flat at 5pm – 7 ½ half hours on the road but far better than it might have been.

We rested and then cleaned up for dinner at Piccolino, where we were warmly greeted and given our “usual” table. It was a great way to start our time in Yorkshire.

Thursday December 21

Today we had an extremely lazy day and spent the entire time in the flat after having breakfast at Caffe Nero. It was very windy and rained on and off most of the time – although it was dry when we went for our evening meal at La Casita.

Friday December 22

We had breakfast at Caffe Nero and then drove to Skipton. It was another blustery day with more rain, but we were able to spend about 45 minutes in town without getting wet. The market was pitiful, with only a handful of stalls on what used to be its busiest day. We drove back to the flat via Bingley and then stayed home – and watched the rain once more!



Tonight, we went to Quinta for the first time on this visit. We were warmly greeted by Diogo and Hayley (they are still an item) and had a great meal with time to catch up on happenings at Quinta and at the café in Otley.

Saturday December 23

After breakfast at Caffe Nero we did our first Tesco shop and then were kept home again by the high winds and rain. We went to the 6:30pm Service of Lessons and Carols and had a chat with the vicar and with Joyce. Stephen had had a brain hemorrhage in September and is now in a local nursing home as he needs more physical help than Joyce can provide. She

seemed to be in remarkably good spirits and said that she would like to get together with us during this visit.

We left the church for dinner at the Ilkley Cow.

Sunday December 24

We had breakfast at Caffe Nero on another blustery day, but I managed to get an almost dry walk around town later in the morning. Tonight, we went to dinner at Piccolino and then went straight to the “Midnight Mass” at St Margaret’s.

At Piccolino, we were shown to our table by a young lady wearing a Santa Claus hat and, when we admired it, she showed us her matching red earrings. She looked familiar, we thought she recognized us, but neither of us said anything more at the time. However, as the evening wore on (she was not our waitress) we became more and more convinced that the young lady was Bella, who we had met almost two years ago

ST MARGARET'S
ILKLEY



The Service of Lessons and Carols

Saturday 23 December 2023
6.30 pm



and who had posed with us during a visit in June 2022. Curiosity finally convinced me to ask – and, indeed, this was Bella. She is now in her first year at Lancaster University studying International Business. We got an updated photo together before we left.

Midnight Mass (10pm in the UK, midnight in Bethlehem) was a 75-minute-long service with communion and several familiar carols. The choir sang the Sanctus and the *Angus Dei* and a Motet (anthem) as well as leading the congregation in the Gloria and the hymns. The priest chanted rather than spoke most of the rest of the service. St Margaret is High Church – and proud of it! And we love it.



We arrived home about 11:30 after a lovely evening (two contrasting halves) and were in bed by midnight.

Monday December 25 (Christmas Day)

We were up a little before 9am and, for the first time since our arrival, it wasn't raining as we had breakfast in the flat. That changed, however, and the morning soon settled into its typical regimen of wind and showers.

At noon, Joanne, Robert, Toby, Oliver and William arrived, having walked from their home in Ben Rhydding, apparently without getting wet. They spent two hours with us, chatting and munching on nibbles – as well as sampling my Manhattans!

Shortly after they left, Molly and I drove down the hill for our Christmas dinner at Quinta. The place was packed with two large parties as well as several smaller family groups. It was a very good meal (although the turkey dinner that we had was HUGE) and it was about 3

hours later before we left to spend the rest of the evening at home – watching old comedy shows on TV.

Tuesday December 26 (Boxing Day)

It was after 9am before we were driving down the hill to breakfast at *caffè Nero*. We were essentially alone there when we arrived but by the time we left an hour later, the café was packed, and the streets of Ilkley were beginning to get filled with shoppers.

About 12:15 we left to drive to Ripon for a "traditional" Boxing Day lunch with Dorothy and David. Amanda, Ellis and Isobel were also there, and we were struck by how pretty Isobel is now. She is still very shy and didn't say much but we got the impression that she was listening to everything quite intently.

The meal was typical of the spreads that Dorothy has prepared over the years- pork pies, sausage rolls, ham, chicken, etc, etc with all the appropriate condiments, followed by a selection of three desserts, including the trifle that Molly always enjoys.

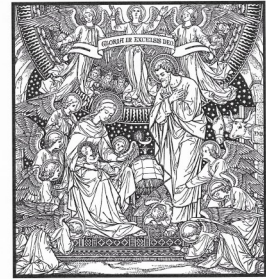
The Harrogate trio left after the meal was finished but Molly and I stayed until about 7pm chatting before starting the drive home. It had become noticeably colder and there was a thin layer of frost on the windshield. The roads were reasonably quiet, and we took the more traveled route via Harrogate, so it was a relatively easy drive home. We couldn't find anything worth watching on TV, so we had an early night.

Wednesday December 27

It was the most dreary day as we went to breakfast – raining quite heavily and still quite dark as we returned home at 10:30. We had nothing more on our agenda until about 6:30 when we left for dinner at Joanne and Robert's house. Robert had prepared a huge spread of roast beef with several vegetables, two kinds of potato and delicious condiments. This was followed by a choice of three or four desserts. Add to that some nice conversation and we had a lovely evening before leaving about 10pm.

Thursday December 28

We drove to Otley for breakfast at *Mondo* where we had a nice chat with Stuart, the owner, who we have known since he was manager at *Caffè Nero* in our earliest days in Ilkley. We then went to Harrogate, had a very wet walk down the main



Bethlehem Midnight Mass

Sunday 24 December 2023
10.00 pm

shopping street, visited Marks and Spencer – and drove home.

At 2pm we left to pick up Linda in Addingham for afternoon tea at the Devonshire Arms. It was a very nice meal and we had a good conversation which continued at her home afterwards. Unfortunately, Linda started to feel sick about 6pm and she immediately knew that the gluten-free meal she had enjoyed had not been entirely gluten-free.

We left her to come round (hopefully) but when Molly called about 8 she was in bed and not feeling good. Clearly, the Devonshire Arms tea was not what it was supposed to be.

We had a very early night.

Friday December 29

Despite our early night, it was 9:30 before we got up and went for breakfast at Caffe Nero. At 11:30, Molly called Linda but there was no answer, so we were hopeful that she had recovered and was able to continue her hectic social life. We did speak with her later and she said that she had cancelled a visit with her sister in Ripon but felt she was getting better.

I took a two-mile walk (without getting wet!) and then we stayed home until we met Toby for dinner at the Ilkley Cow. We had a lovely 2 ½ hours chatting about travel, the NHS, his job and many other topics and felt no generation gap whatsoever. We took a taxi home and Toby suggested that we could meet again for coffee before he returns to London on Monday afternoon. We hope to do that.

Saturday December 30

We had a two-hour breakfast in Caffe Nero on another cool and wet morning – with a forecast for rain throughout the day. We stayed home until it was time for dinner at the Box Tree.



As anticipated, the meal and service were very good – very expensive, but very good! Towards the end of our meal, we started chatting with a couple at the next table and were surprised once again just how small a world it is. He was perhaps five years younger than us, she maybe a little younger – and both had very strong local accents. We discovered that she had attended the same school as the one I had started at when I was five (Eastwood) and he had spent five years at Keighley Boys Grammar School within the eight



that I had been there. We exchanged memories of teachers and experiences and those times in Keighley. The “cap” on our similar background came when they told us that they now live at Cringles Caravan Park – where my parents spent the final years of their lives. Amazing coincidences. They had both spent most of their lives in Keighley, except for a brief period when he left as part of his training in the police force.

Sunday December 31 (New Year’s Eve)

We went to Caffe Nero for breakfast and then went straight to church. It was cold but not raining (for the first time in several days and I entertained the idea of a walk later in the day. However, once in the warmth of the flat after the service, that idea lost a lot of its appeal, and I spent a lazy afternoon indoors. I felt a little better about it when it started to rain.

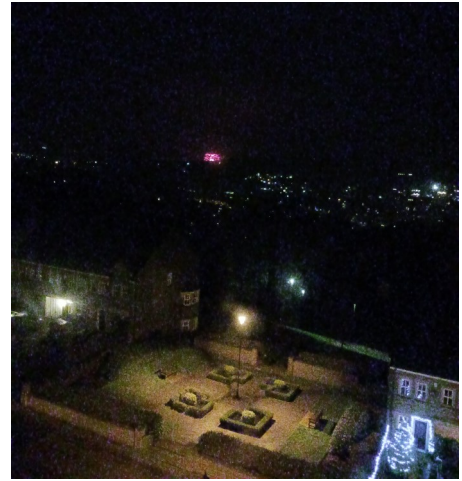
At 7pm we met Linda at Quinta for our New Year’s Eve celebration dinner. The restaurant was full but the crowd was not very



boisterous and we all enjoyed a very good meal. We were joined for a while by two neighbors of Linda from Addingham as they were leaving and had a very pleasant chat with them. It was after 11pm when we left.

Diogo's relationship with Hayley seems to have hit a new low. She was not working and when I asked why was told that she was packing. I assumed that this was for their planned trip to Egypt for the next two weeks but, unfortunately, she was packing for a more permanent move. Where things go from here is anyone's guess.

Molly and I watched the fireworks displays at midnight across the Wharfe Valley (far better than my picture!) and retired about 12:30 on the first day of 2024.



Monday January 1 (New Year's Day)

We picked up Toby at the farm at 10am and went to Caffe Nero for breakfast. It was Toby that had suggested another meeting before he returns to London, and we were happy to oblige. As we were ordering, Joyce Pilling came in the coffee shop, so she sat down with us and chatted for about 20 minutes. She seemed to be in good spirits and was quite comfortable chatting with Toby – and vice versa. After she left, we continued our meeting until almost noon.

We shopped (at one of the very few shops open today) for a gift for Laila and then returned to the flat for lunch. The weather today to this point had been cool but dry, so I decided to start the new year on a positive note and take a walk. I did four miles in all via Panorama Woods and the river – and felt it by the time I got back home!

Tonight, we had another dinner reservation at Piccolino. As usual, it was a two-hour experience and we had a very nice chat with Olivia, a teenage waitress who is a friend of Bella.

Tuesday January 2

We had breakfast at Caffe Nero and then drove to Barnoldswick to visit Cat, Stephen, Jenson and Laila. We had a lovely 1 ½ hour visit, gave Laila her birthday gift (she turned two just before Christmas) and had a very nice chat, catching up on the happenings with this lovely family.

We drove home in the pouring rain and were looking to spend the afternoon indoors before our evening meal. It turned out that that is exactly what we did before going to the Olive Branch (still in the rain!) for a very nice meal.



Wednesday January 3



For what felt like the first time, we had breakfast at Caffe Nero under non-rainy skies. It was still cool and very damp underfoot but there was no actual precipitation. So, I decided to take a walk on the moor for the first time on this trip. I walked up Keighley Road to the Gate and then across the moor top towards the Cow and Calf rocks before cutting across to White Wells and home.



It felt like a very difficult walk (5.6 miles total) and I was very tired when I got back – but I made it.

We stayed home for the rest of the afternoon and went to Pranzo for dinner. This is an Italian restaurant on the square that has recently relocated from Ben Rhydding. It has had some very good reviews, and we thoroughly enjoyed the ambiance, the service and the food. We also met an “old friend” who we had known at La Casita on previous visits.

Thursday January 4

We drove to Otley for breakfast and had another good meal at Mondo. Later, I went for a walk to the Cow and Calf rocks and back – only 3 miles, but very tough! Again, I managed to stay dry. Tonight, we ate at Panache, our favorite Indian restaurant in town.

Friday January 5

We drove to Skipton for breakfast at the Dales Café and then spent time strolling the market (small again) and the shops. We returned home via Bradley and Addingham. I then went for a walk via Ben Rhydding – three miles only.

Tonight, we ate at Galo’s Kitchen and had a very nice meal with excellent (Italian) service.

Saturday January 6

After breakfast at Caffe Nero, I decided on a walk despite the cold weather. I walked via the cemetery and the river and Queens Drive and covered a total of four miles plus – and it felt quite warm once I was properly dressed for the weather.

Tonight, we ate at the Ilkley Cow.

Sunday January 7

We had breakfast at home before church and afterwards went to Caffe Nero for coffee. At 1:15 we left for Ripon where we picked up Dorothy and David for the short drive to Grantley Hall where we enjoyed a delicious (large) afternoon tea in very elegant surroundings. We returned to Ripon and spent another couple of hours chatting before returning home.

Monday January 8

Joanne joined us for coffee at Caffe Nero and we had an hour-long chat. I went for a 5 ¼ mile walk via Panorama Woods, Dalesway and the river and back to the flat. For the first time, I felt that I was striding out and could have done more.

Tonight, we ate at Piccolino. We had a good chat with the host and a longer time talking with the waitress, Olivia, who had immigrated from Poland with her parents less than 10 years ago. She is now in her final year at Ilkley Grammar School and is looking forward to taking a degree in Criminology at Cardiff University.

Tuesday January 9



We had breakfast at Caffe Nero and then



Molly did a little M&S shop. We then had an hour in the flat before meeting Phil and Jenny (Flat 22) to drive to Ripley for lunch at the Boar’s Head. We had a very good two-hour meal in a nice ambiance, before returning to Ilkley. We were invited to Number 22 for tea and Christmas cake, followed by a slightly stronger drink. At 7pm, we left after a very pleasant time with our neighbors. Molly and I shared a small pizza later in the evening.

Wednesday January 10

After breakfast we drove to Pudsey where there is a huge Marks and Spencer store. We loaded a small trolley with goods (clothing of all kinds) and then came back to Ilkley. After a light lunch, I went for a relatively short walk and got a haircut at the Turkish Barbers I have used a couple of times before.

At 6pm we left for Addingham and dinner that Linda had prepared at her home. It was a beef in beer dish with lots of different vegetables and, as usual, was excellent. We spent another two hours with her chatting before driving home after 10pm.

Thursday January 11

At Caffe Nero we were joined by Joyce Pilling and enjoyed a very nice hour or more with her, chatting about our life and hers, as well as snippets on Stephen's illness. We both felt that she was holding up remarkably well, and she is an excellent conversationalist.

Later, I went for a five-mile walk over the top of the Moor in cool and somewhat windy conditions – but mostly dry. Unfortunately, I had a few altercations with dogs or, more precisely, with dog owners. I sense a general loosening of training for dogs, and many are not kept on leashes, so are free to bother other walkers. I should be a sheep so that my farmer could take more aggressive action other than my raised voice!

Tonight, we drove to Baildon and met Keith and Zena at San Angelo, an Italian restaurant that we have enjoyed with them a couple of times in the past. As before, it was a good meal and excellent company and before we knew it the time was close to 10pm.

Friday January 12

After breakfast at Caffe Nero, I drove to Joanne's home to begin a walk with her. First, however, she gave me a tour of the barn conversion and the progress that has been made. The construction is complete, many of the bathroom and kitchen fittings are in place and "all" that is left is painting, finishing and completion of the furnishings. Joanne is convinced that this is weeks away (and, based on previous work, I believe her), so we expect to see the new place inhabited the next time we come to Ilkley.

We walked almost 4 ½ miles on a tough walk-through Burley Woodhead and up onto the Moor before descending near the Cow and Calf rocks and walking back to the farm. It was a nice walk and a lovely time for a chat.

Tonight, we ate at Pranzo and enjoyed another good, leisurely (2 ½ hours) meal.

Saturday January 13

After breakfast, I went to shop for shoes at Mountain Warehouse (success at last!) and then did a three-mile walk before relaxing for the afternoon. Tonight, we ate at the Ilkley Cow with Joanne and Robert and enjoyed a good meal and chat.

Sunday January 14

We decided against going to church in favor of a more leisurely clean up and pack. So, after breakfast at Caffe Nero, we did the chores necessary at the flat and packed our suitcases. I did manage a 3 ½ mile walk in the afternoon and tonight we went for our final dinner at Piccolino – for this trip.

Monday January 15

We got up early to get the bed sheets in the wash before breakfast at Caffe Nero. Following this, I had time for a short walk while Molly finished the chores in the flat. We were both ready to go by 11:30.

It was a beautiful sunny day for the drive to London and the traffic was remarkably light for English motorways. The drive to return the rental car took just short of five hours, including two short rest stops – one for lunch and a second just to stretch the legs. After turning in the car, we took Uber to the Renaissance hotel, checked in, and had dinner in the restaurant at 7:30.

Tuesday January 16

We were up at 5:45 to check out and take a 6:30 taxi to the airport. We were soon checked in at the Virgin Atlantic lounge

and had a coffee and pastry before the flight.

The 9-hour flight to Minneapolis was smooth and seemed to pass rather quickly, with brunch and afternoon tea en route. It was 5F in Minneapolis, here we had about 3 hours layover. This, too, passed quickly and we then had a two-hour flight to Cincinnati. We arrived there at 6:30pm, picked up the rental car and drove to Bravo for dinner. We then dove home and essentially went straight to bed at 9pm local time – after a great four weeks in England.



