

Spring Reunion 2017 and Twenty-Ninth Annual General Meeting Friday 12 May – Sunday 15 May 2017, Newcastle

Sixty members and guests attended the Spring Reunion and AGM in Newcastle, staying in the Gosforth Park Marriott Hotel, located in a northern suburb of the city, close to Newcastle racecourse.

On Friday afternoon a short coach trip took us to the city pier to board a river boat for a trip down the River Tyne. Initially the boat went upstream to pass under the spectacular Millenium foot bridge which was raised in our honour. Downstream the boat passed recent developments, including the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, housed in the converted Baltic flour mill with its resident kittiwakes.



Downstream again there were numerous almost derelict reminders of Newcastle's industrial history, shipbuilding, heavy engineering and coal exports to London and abroad. Coal from mines in the



north east of England was fundamental to the industrial success of Newcastle and its importance gave rise to the saying "taking coals to Newcastle" to denote a useless action. Further downriver a more modern industry provides the enormous foundations for offshore wind turbines before rural countryside replaces the industrial past.



Saturday morning meant an early start to board the coaches for a drive past fragments of Hadrian's Wall to a cold and windy view point overlooking the Kielder Water and Forest Park. The forest, covering 60,000 ha, is the largest planted forest in Europe, and

the Water is a huge reservoir built to supply water to the industrial conurbation of Newcastle. The forest is managed by the Forestry Commission and the General Manager of the north of England district of the Commission, and the Chief Planning Officer met us and provided a detailed overview of past and ongoing development and exploitation of the forest. Management objectives aim to balance conservation, social and economic values. Tourism is an important concern for management both within the forested area and on the reservoir.

A visit was then made to an area being logged and all were impressed by the vast machines that fell, strip and sort the logs according to market demand.



After a sandwich lunch at Kielder Castle we drove eastward through beautiful hill scenery, almost empty apart from a few cars and thousands of sheep, a remarkable landscape for our friends from the densely populated Netherlands.

Reaching Alnwick we visited the impressive castle, founded in the 11th Century, but developed many times since then. It is the home of the Duke of Northumberland of the Percy family who live in part of the castle. The state rooms are magnificent and hold many treasures, paintings and tapestries collected over the centuries and an excellent guide provided information and historical insights.



At the Marriott on Friday and Saturday evenings there were pre-dinner informal receptions enabling members to meet. Dinner on Friday evening was a buffet and



on Saturday evening a more formal dinner was served at table.



Andrew Lewis, Managing Director of the Tees-Valley Combined Authority spoke after dinner on Saturday. He explained the role of the Authority in trying to revitalize the economy and the social and physical infrastructure of the area which covers a number of local government authorities. Many of the possible initiatives need regional approaches but challenges inevitably include financing and building relationships between local authorities, the Combined Authority and central Government.

The Twenty-Ninth Annual General Meeting took place on the morning of Sunday 15 May, followed by a buffet lunch after which the reunion ended.