

Blog #87 - UK Beginnings

Tuesday, 11 February 2020

Further to my 'Thank You' note written and sent at the end of November last year, I've received many requests for me to relate some of the highlights and details of my needlework trip to the UK. But - so many wonderful sights and experiences, where does one begin?! I guess at the beginning

Midday, Tuesday the 12th of September, I flew from Napier to Auckland and that evening boarded an Emirates seventeen hour flight to Dubai, stopping over at the airport for several hours before flying another six and a half hours to Manchester, arriving there early evening to be met and taken by private car (organised by Lady Anne's) to our York hotel - Middletons. About an hours drive.

Unpacked my bags and tumbled into bed.

Despite the long hours of travelling I managed to sleep and so I was not too tired and so up reasonably early the next day (Saturday) to begin my exploration of the city of York.

As mentioned in my last blog (Blog #86), apart from visiting London for a few days in 1997, I'd never been to the UK - the birthplace of all my grandparents - and this area of the UK and a bit further north was where my paternal side of the family were born and worked as coalminers, carters, boat builders and bootmakers - the latter two having their own businesses - and so I guess being in business is in the blood!

As per the feeling I experienced in London all those years ago in 1997, I again felt very much at home / as though I belonged / I had been there before. How I would LOVE to live there! The excitement inside me was indescribable. I found so many interesting and fascinating things. I explored endless nooks and crannies and read the explanatory descriptions of an object or the room of a house or building and soaked up the history.

The weather all the days prior to the commencement of the Lady Anne's Needlework Tour were lovely as can be seen in the images above.

Middletons wasn't situated in the city centre but about a ten minute walk away over one of the bridges. My first memorable sight in the city was the crooked and sagging buildings. Oh - so quaint!

And unbelievably, the first shop spied was 'Duttons For Buttons'. The outside of the building was obscured by scaffolding so that some restoration (not rebuilding) could be carried out. Inside, the floor dipped and rose and fell in all directions and the stairs were so steep and narrow and the exposed beams of the roof and walls were so crooked and uneven. As for the shop itself, it was SO small that had I stood in the centre of the room and spread my arms out, each arm would have almost reached the many cabinets containing drawers and drawers of gorgeous buttons or shelves and shelves of brightly coloured wools. The back wall of the shop contained shelves and shelves of cards wrapped with beautiful delicate pastel coloured laces of all different widths. Upstairs there were craft books and cross stitch kits.

Of course, I had to read the history of the business and here is a little of it -

The parent company was founded as a firm of trimming merchants in Leeds in 1906 by the present owner's grandfather. Having always been fascinated by the splendour and variety of buttons, the son of the founder, decided to diversify and saw the opportunity for a specialist haberdashery shop and subsequently opened the first 'Duttons for Buttons' in Harrogate in 1956. On his death in 1968 his daughter, Drusilla (the present owner), took over the running of the business and expanded it to include other shops. This unique shop shown above is located in a medieval building built in 1422. Fired with the same enthusiasm Drusilla now travels the world in search of unusual and exotic buttons. 'Duttons' claims to have the largest stock of buttons in Great Britain and possibly in Europe, with more than 12,000 different designs. The stocks include the latest fashion buttons together with buttons in glass (some hand-made Venetian), mother-of-pearl, diamante, crystal, metal, silk, enamels, early and modern plastics, rare woods and horn. There is even a selection of officer's glove buttons dating from the Boer War.



Middletons - originally a hospital in the late 1800's



Sitting on the brick fence
surrounding a fish pond outside Middletons' reception area



Just a little further up the road was a pub (pictured to the right) - The Three Tuns. On a placard attached to an outside wall, was the following piece of history -

Over three hundred years old, 'The Three Tuns' has stood the test of time.

First licenced in 1782 it was named after the three 'tun' barrels which were housed at the rear of the pub. Each 'tun' held 216 gallons of beer.

In a recent renovation, builders discovered a stunning cache of gold coins hidden in one of the original old beams, the newest of which dated from the time of King Charles I.



Down the road from 'Duttons', is another pub housed in an old building, next to an extremely sagging building built in 1606 ... The Golden Fleece.

Supposedly this pub is haunted by five ghosts :

Lady Alice Peckett - said to be found roaming the endless corridors and staircases

Geoff Monroe - located on the third floor

One Eyed Jack - mostly sighted in the bottom bar, dressed in a red coat

Grumpy Old Man - again sighted in the bottom bar, this time crouched in a small alcove

Small Child - immediately behind the entrance to the pub is where the youngest of the ghosts has been most commonly sighted.



I did not go inside to find them!

A couple of doors from the sagging building was the entrance to an alley above which a sign read, "Lady Peckett's Yard".

I wandered down the alley beside the shop building to find an open area behind. It reminded me of what I imagined the rag merchant's place in Catherine Cookson's book, 'The Rag Nymph', would be like. Several days later when visiting the Merchant Adventurers' Hall (a medieval guildhall - home to York's entrepreneurs for 660 years) there was a placard acknowledging and relating the history of Lady Peckett and Lady Peckett's Yard - and, yes, she had been a rag merchant!



A couple of doors along was a hat shop - and this I **had** to visit! LOVED IT!



Pictured to the left is the shop's brochure claiming to stock the largest collection of hats in the North of England.

At the entrance to the shop were various tweed, wool and felt caps and hats associated with and worn by those of Scottish heritage, but went to the back of the shop and drooled over the fabulous hats and fascinators that one would see being worn



by the gentry and patrons and guests when they attended a royal garden party or the races at Ascot, etc.

Of course - I had to try one or two on when prompted to do so by the sales assistant. Dream - it doesn't hurt to dream, but does one good to dream.

However, no chance that I will ever get to wear one to a royal occasion.

The hat shop was almost opposite the famous street known as "The Shambles" but as it was nearing lunchtime and the street was crowded with tourists such as myself, bypassed this to the next street to look for a place for some lunch and found a little café that appealed as in the front window was a poster that read ...

CHLOE'S OF YORK
KNIT & STITCH
EVERY WEDNESDAY
10-12
£3 attendance,
includes hot drink and teashop treat
and
ENJOY A
20% DISCOUNT ON LUNCH
THIS DAY

And on display in the front window was a knitted afternoon tea set plus lots of other teapots covered with knitted tea cosy's. Really quite cute.

After this visit went to this particular café on several occasions for lunch or afternoon tea.

From the café wandered to the Information Centre to collect the 'on & off' bus tickets and other tourist tickets that had been purchased on-line before leaving home, but on the way was distracted by a fabulous shop containing the most gorgeous shoes, boots & handbags made from snakeskin and displaying the most fabulous elegant clothes - all made in Italy. A weeks later when I was back in York with Melissa, I bought a couple of pairs of shoes and a couple of shoulder wraps!



After collecting the tickets at the Information Centre caught the local bus and travelled from the city to Castle Howard - my first experience of visiting a castle.



I don't quite know what I expected, but I was a little disappointed. According to lots of brochures and 'where to go' and 'what to see' tourist sites it is touted as being one of Britain's top ten buildings you must visit in your lifetime. Hmmm.....

To me it could have done with a good spring clean!

Some of the sculptures and cabinets of china were amazing though. Plus too, the architecture.

I won't continue on any more in this blog about my trip. Instead I will relate it over several more blogs as hearing of another's overseas travel experiences can often not be enjoyed by everyone.

In blog #84 written last July, I mentioned that I had finished stitching some more of the alphabet letters - C, K & N.



At that time they were only stitched and had not been finished as ornamentals. Before leaving for the UK I finished these pieces as ornamentals plus also stitched and finished the letter 'A'.

A = Affection : C = Contentment : K = Kindness : N = Noteworthy

But, of course, you can choose your own word or choice of name.

To date however, these pieces have not yet been photographed, nor the instructions written or printed, but they should be very soon.

As always when flying I begin a new needlework project and as I took off for Dubai, I began stitching the letter 'D'.

That's all for this blog.

Bye for now.

