

FEBRUARY 2, 2009 F.A.H.P. NEWS

England in the mid-20th Century: My first trips to the British Isles were as a travel agent in 1951 and 1952. Air travel was coming on strong, and the various trans-Atlantic carriers were ever anxious to promote their individual airlines. In the off-season (most any time except June, July and August), travel agents were given free trips as a part of this promotion.

In September, 1951, I had been lining up American Quakers who wanted to attend the 1952 Friends World Conference in Oxford, England. I flew to Britain to make on-site arrangements there on British Overseas Airways, then flying “Strato-cruisers”, modified B-29 bombers of World War II vintage. The fuselage had an under-belly attached with a spiral stairway accessing a 17-seat cocktail lounge on the lower level. All passengers traveled first class, as “tourist” class had not been introduced. The regular fare from New York to London was \$350 one-way, or \$630 round-trip (much more than by steamship). Mine was a very comfortable flight, but the 200 m.p.h. air speed and the limited range made stops necessary. Flying out of Idlewild Airport on Long Island (later JFK), we stopped in Boston where they fed us a deLuxe dinner at the airport, and then at Prestwick, s.w. of Glasgow, Scotland, where we had a full breakfast, before flying the final leg to London. Returning, I left from Prestwick, we stopped at Keflavik Airport in Iceland, saw the coast of Greenland, then up the St. Lawrence Valley to Montreal, almost keeping up with the sun, before we turned south to New York.

It had been six years since V-E Day ended World War II in Europe, but Clement Attlee’s Labor Government that had deposed Winston Churchill at the polls in 1945, had done little to bring Britain out of the privations suffered during the war. Meat was very scarce and it was hard to get a good meal in a restaurant. Things were very cheap, however, especially when using American dollars. A well-known chain called Lyons Corner Houses (cafeterias) provided nice selections of salads, sandwiches and desserts for 49 cents. I stayed at a small inn in the northwest of England where dinner, bed (no private bath), and breakfast cost \$1.75. The *Festival of Britain* was being celebrated in that summer of 1951, with a small world’s fair on the south bank of the Thames in London, and “Illuminations” in all towns and cities to celebrate not having wartime black-outs any more. Soft coal smoke was in the air and steam trains ran everywhere. Some of my time was spent in the many London Railway stations, and I had a great 4-hour ride on the former London & Northeastern Rwy. from York to Edinburgh behind a shining Pacific locomotive, visible from the rear of the train as we rounded the many curves along the North Sea coast at 60 m.p.h. I had introductions to a number of British Quakers and rode a 4-wheel double-decker trolley car all over Edinburgh with a front seat on the upper level.

I returned in 1952 when all “my people” were there, flying on Sabena, the Belgian Airline, via Brussels to and from London. Most of the American Quakers, and there were 305 who booked with us, traveled by Tourist Class on one of the trans-Atlantic ships, about \$175 per person one-way, for the crossing that took between 5 and 8 days. Frames’ Travel Service in London handled European arrangements for us, and my main contact there, Peter Honey, was very proud of his bicycle, but he had only a permit, and couldn’t pass the test to get his license.

Most of the Americans spent time in London before the Oxford conference, and many took trips before and after, around the British Isles and on the Continent. I had a temporary office in the Cora Hotel in London and in the Randolph at Oxford (the story of hiding cash in the Grand Piano and above the fireplace was told in the "News" of 6/26/06). Between my '51 and '52 visits, 10 months apart, Churchill had become Prime Minister again, and King George VI had died, beginning the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, now entering its 58th year.

Weather hampered our work-session attendance last Tuesday, when about 8 volunteers took part, and nearly 20 were with us on Thursday. The Events Committee meeting was postponed from last Tuesday, and is now planned for Tuesday, February 3 at 7:00 P.M. in the FAHP office. Work progressed on disassembling the '14 Stanley Model 607, and the '16 Rauch & Lang electric, with Greg Landrey giving us helpful hints on how to preserve parts and catalog what we remove. The oil pump has been rebuilt on Locomotive #402, and modification of the vaporizer in the 1912 Model 87's burner is progressing well, with the superheater needing re-configuration to have everything fit properly. New wiring is nearing completion on the '18 Model 735. Steve Bryce is keeping up a bulletin board in the garage, listing projects that can be undertaken immediately, both new and ongoing.

On Saturday, January 31, Dan Citron and Ruth invited docents and would-be docents to attend a meeting in the house at which time Dan outlined his hopes for house tours in 2009. There were about 12 in attendance and the response was very favorable. Dan also reports that new locks have been installed throughout the property and a burglar alarm system has been added to our buildings. The smoke and fire alarms are also being upgraded. Active volunteers will need to become familiar with how to disarm these systems when coming on the property for work projects, meetings, etc.

For those volunteers who don't find antique auto projects and the like easy to get involved with, or the population of the garage/shop too great for positive accomplishment on some of our work nights, I list a few more things that need to be done before our spring activities begin:

- 1) The wooden sign boards (parking, station signs, portable signs used on "event days") can be removed and painted over, so that a sign painter can re-letter them and bring them up to speed. The big sign located on the bank at the front of the property needs rebuilding if it is to be used again.

- 2) Our large trailer, stored outside, should be checked over, brackets installed for battery and spare tire, and hold-down strips (on hand) attached to the floor (when weather permits).

- 3) The third track needs installation in the shop's basement, so we can accept Jim Sank's Diesel locomotive for use next spring. The materials for this track are on hand.

Our friend Art Hart is undergoing the first installment of his cancer treatment today. Our thoughts are also with Jerry Lucas, whose mother is very ill.

Tom