

### Southern England in February

After work on Thursday Mel & I set off along the A303. It was bitterly cold, and snow was forecast for the South West. We reached Winchester before stopping to cook our dinner of chicken curry. It soon warmed us up, especially Mel who felt really cold after hanging around for buses in Taunton in the afternoon (and didn't let me forget it!).

The services I had pulled into were busy and noisy, so we continued onwards and found a quiet layby on the A 272 near to Hinton Ampner where we settled down for the night.



I was woken in the morning by a refuse truck emptying the bins, and peeping through the blinds we were dazzled by the white and sparkling snow. After porridge, we were off heading along the A272 to Midhurst where we stopped for a wander to look round the town.



Continuing along the clear roads we made our way to Petworth, which was closed for the winter, continuing on we went to Wakehurst Place, which is the seed storage for Kew Gardens. We had a wander around the grounds which were under a blanket of snow, and part of the house. Most of it was used as classrooms, but we were able to view a magnificent fireplace in one of the rooms and the remains of the chapel which is also used as a classroom.



The gardens are part of the famous 'Royal Botanic Gardens' of Kew. A seed bank is constructed here, which will help to ensure the survival of plant species.



I chose a Caravan club CL for the night at Lamberhurst Down on a farm. It was beautifully quiet, and the snow sparkled. We filled up with water while the tap was thawed, and plugged into electric, and got my heaters going, and our Duck & Orange pie went into the Romoska with some roast potatoes.. Next morning we were surrounded by rabbit & bird footprints, and it was warm enough in the sunshine to have the van door open..



Having time to spare, we went to Tunbridge Wells to have a look round. There were lots of independant traders, which made the high street interesting.

Deciding it was time to move on I drove to our accommodation for the night, which was the Travelodge at the Medway Services on the M2. We were too early to check in by 1 hour, so we sat outside in the van and ate home made pate sandwiches while we were waiting. Once we had checked in I enjoyed a bath; it wasn't very deep but was nice and hot. Later on we walked into a nearby village to get fish & chips for our dinner, which we took back to the Travelodge. Soon it was time to go to St Michaels Church Hall at Rainham, where Jeane & Mick were hosting a party to celebrate their 25th Wedding Anniversary. It was Country & Western themed, and the singer was quite good. Jeane & Mick had laid on a huge buffet with loads of salads meats and prawns, - I regretted our fish & chips!



We spent a quiet night at the lodge, and woke to a light covering of fresh snow. After a breakfast of Cornflakes, orange juice, croissants, jam, and muffins we drove to St Michaels Church where Jeane & Mick renewed their wedding vows. It was a short but moving service. Jeane & Mick were surprised by a guard of honour with the MCC Country and Western group's flags and the presentation of a certificate from the church. Soon we were on our way to a very nice 3 course lunch at a Golf and Country Club.

After lunch we made our way back to the CL we had stayed at on our way. It was nearly dark when we arrived, no one disturbed us so I had to go & find Tracy in the morning to pay for our stay.

Next morning we made our way Southwards to Brighton, staying overnight at Sheepcote Valley Caravan club site, a favourite of mine, which is usually full to bursting in the summer.

Once pitched up we got the bus into town, where we explored the Regents Palace.





For 200 years, John Nash's extraordinary oriental fantasy, the Royal Pavilion, has been linked with the identity of Brighton. It has provoked controversy, inspired fervent adulation and, throughout its colourful history, become one of the most instantly identifiable architectural images in the world.



It takes its unique character from George IV, and its magnificent interior is a reflection of his personality and Regency reign. It was conceived as a monument to style, finesse, technological excellence and above all pleasure.



Having taken our fill of the Royal palace, we headed for the "Lanes". A network of narrow streets hosting antique shops, bistro's art shops etc. where we headed for a warming cup of coffee.



After a quiet night, we headed west. I tried parking in Chichester, but couldn't find anywhere to park so carried on. Mel wanted to take me out to dinner that night as it was Valentines day. I wanted a pub/restaurant with lots of parking where we could get permission to stay overnight. The only place I knew of was "Fishers Pond" at Colden Common. We called in at lunch time and made our request, and, permission granted and a table booked, went into Winchester for the remainder of the day, using the very efficient park and ride service.

Situated at the top of the High Street just to the left of The Westgate, The Great Hall and Sally Port are the only surviving parts of Winchester Castle.

The Great Hall was one of the largest and finest in England, and is certainly the finest of that period to have survived today. Its many features include stained-glass windows, a judges' gallery and wrought steel gates that were installed in 1983 to commemorate the wedding of the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer.

Winchester was once the centre of England and was ruled from the castle

It is also the home to the legendary round table of King Arthur



Having exhausted the shops of Winchester, we made our way back to the van, and drove to "The Fishers Pond" and parked at the back of the car park under a tree. We just had time to wash and change before going in for dinner.



Dinner was a splendid romantic candle-lit treat. Before we had time to enjoy a sherry in front of the log fire, we were shown to our table next to the window, which overlooks the lake. We started with a sharing platter of Baked Cornish Brie, Chicken liver & Pork pate; garlic mushrooms, Italian Cheese Crumbed Chicken breasts, Onion Rings and toasted Chiabata bread. It was delicious, and the baked Brie was heavenly. For main course Mel was predictable with steak, while I had sole and smoked salmon roulade served on a bed of wilted spinach and Samphire (which I love).



Our dessert was Apple pie with vanilla ice cream. We then got to sit by the fire with a Drambuie. It was a lovely evening.

Next day we were off again, and decided to try and visit Broadlands at Romsey. Unfortunately it was closed until June, so we continued onwards to Bucklers Hard. Both Mel and I had visited Beaulieu in the past, but he had never been to Bucklers Hard.



The Maritime Museum and Buckler's Hard Story give an insight into the history of this 18th century shipbuilding village focusing on its vessels including those built for Nelson's Navy. It is hard to imagine large wooden ships being built here, given the narrowness of the estuary.



Moving on we headed for my Brothers' house in Hamworthy, where once parked we caught the bus into Poole in order to give Terry & Jackie time to get home from work. It was very chilly, but the quay side was still fairly busy.

Returning to Terry & Jackie's house for 5.30 we had a warm greeting and a hot cup of tea. We were quickly introduced to Anya Valentine, their new kitten, which was their Valentines' present to each other. She is beautiful, and already settling into her new home. After a delicious chinese takeaway we settled down to chat, catch up on news and taste Jackie's home brew - Damson Brandy; Gooseberry Gin & Sloe Gin (which was better than my own). We stayed in the van outside their house, and did not hear when they left for work - it must be a quiet motorbike!



It was a bright and sunny morning as we made our way to Studland Bay for a walk on the beach, with clear views of Old Harry Rocks. It was half term and the National Trust had organised a Pirates Treasure Trail for the young ones. It was fun watching them. On the way there we stopped for a bacon sandwich in a layby overlooking Poole Harbour, which afforded the best view for miles.



It was a lovely calm day with hardly a ripple on the water, and we walked for ages along the beach.

Leaving the beach behind we went to Corfe Castle, a place neither of us had been to before.



Again the National Trust had laid on extra things for the children. They had a dressing up tent, and paraded around as soldiers, and there was a zip wire for their teddies, who received a bravery certificate for taking part.



The views across the village were superb. The castle is bigger than we first thought, and it was easy to see where walls had slipped down the hill.

The snow drops were out in force. What a shame people pick them and then drop them.



Corfe Castle is a fortification built by William the Conqueror, it dates back to the 11th century and commands a gap in the Purbeck Hills. The first phase was one of the earliest castles in England to be built using stone when the majority were built with earth and timber. Corfe Castle underwent major structural changes in the 12th and 13th centuries. In 1572, Corfe Castle left the Crown's control when Elizabeth I sold it to Sir Christopher Hatton. After two sieges in the English Civil War, Corfe Castle was demolished on Parliament's orders

<p>Leaving Corfe we visited Wareham, a town I knew well. Mel thought he knew it, but wasn't sure.</p>		<p>The caravan club site at Wareham was shut, even though the book said it was open all year. Wareham Forest site was full - in February! So I found a CL at Martinstown. A bit wet and boggy, but quiet.</p>
<p>I got us off our pitch with the use of many grip mats used in relays, and did less damage than I did getting on it! Continuing our journey we visited Dorchester. Mel had explored it before, but I hadn't. On Mum's recommendation we had a coffee &amp; cake in "the Horse with the Red Umbrella", and very nice it was too!</p>		
<p>We then made our way homeward via Lyme Regis where I couldn't get parked, so we have left that for another day.</p>		