

DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS

by Dorothy M. Kurtz

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Hello. Despite the tragedy of September 11, I hope everybody had a good Winter Solstice.

In many ways, a lot can happen in a year. The best evidence of this is what became of London's Millennium Dome. In 2000, when I visited the Dome, it was like a mini World's Fair; then, it closed in 2001, and its fate remained unknown. **Stop Press!** I just learned from BBC news that a USA company, Meridian-Delta, bought the Dome. They plan to turn it into a complex for sports and entertainment events. That's all I know so far.

A lot can happen in a few years as well. The evidence of this is in the changing ownership of Dimensional Press effective in 2002. At that time, Virginia Louise Davis will be selling Dimensional Press to me. (Ms. Davis wants to go back to freelance writing.) So, this issue of DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS and an additional one-shot publication will be the last bits of literature published by Dimensional Press under Louise's ownership. (Wish me luck in my new business venture.)

Meanwhile, this issue will cover a day-trip to Philadelphia, a few day-trips to Suburban Pennsylvania, and the highlight of this issue: my recent trip to England.

In addition to those two guide books to London that I've mentioned in Volume 1, Issue 4 of DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS, I also recommend two other sources: (1) *Let's Go: London*, ISBN 0-312-27043-7, published by St. Martin's Press, Inc.; and (2) *Time Out: London* magazine, found

on news stands in the UK and in certain bookstores in the USA. Similar to its counterpart, *Time Out: New York*, this magazine can keep you up to date on theater, cinema, nightlife, and other events.

AT THE "GHOST" HOUSE OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

Many people in the 18th century kept a very detailed account about their homes. In return, the insurance and fire companies who insured these homes also had copies of those records. Years later, these records helped historians in their efforts to restore or reconstruct those same houses. Nevertheless, nobody could find a detailed account about Ben Franklin's home. So, in the 1970s, builders constructed metal frames that outlined Franklin's house and print shop above some cut-a-way pits showing the foundations of these buildings. Thus, the term "ghost" house (and print shop).

Saturday, October 6, I paid a visit to Franklin Court, 316-318 Market St., Philadelphia (215-597-8974). If William Penn was the architect for the city of Philadelphia, then Franklin was the city's carpenter because he introduced institutions that have been in Philadelphia to this very day. There was a lot more to Franklin Court than those metal-outlined buildings. A nearby underground museum displayed a small portrait gallery of the Franklin family on one side of the room and some 18th-century furniture on the other side, including the "armonica," a glass musical instrument that Franklin invented. Another room showing a mirror and neon lights reflected his interests as a statesman, scientist, printer, postmaster, inventor, and other trades. A nearby cinema presented an interesting biographical film. Finally, in the main museum room, I listened to other people's opinions about Dr. Franklin by dialing a certain telephone number. In other parts of this room, I read passages from his famous publication, *Poor Richard's Almanac*, and I viewed other exhibits about Franklin and his achievements. Situated in the center of the room, electric spotlights showed doll figures presenting three climatic scenes in Franklin's career as a statesman. (Those scenes included England in 1765 while he protested the Stamp Act, France during the American Revolution as he gained the support of the French, and Philadelphia in 1787 during the Constitutional Convention.) In addition, I saw some 18th-century structures nearby: houses from 1786 that Franklin rented out to tenants. One house served as an 18th-century-style print shop and bookbindery, and the other house served as a working post office (with a postal museum upstairs). If nothing else, I learned that Franklin was a Renaissance man (who was born a few centuries after the Renaissance), and he accomplished quite a bit considering that he only had a few years of formal education!

A DAY OF HISTORY AND SHOPPING

Sunday, October 7, I got my share of history by visiting Valley Forge National Historical Park, Rt. 23, Valley Forge, PA (610-834-1550). In the Visitor's Center, I saw

Revolutionary War artifacts, George Washington's tent, and a bookstore that sold books about the American Revolution and life in 18th-century America. A cinema nearby presented a 15-minute film about what Washington and his troops endured in Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78. My favorite section was Washington's Headquarters at Isaac Pott's House (1770). This fieldstone house showed two floors of rooms opened to the public. Although Washington and his officers used the downstairs rooms for their offices, upstairs, I glanced at bedrooms where his officers slept (a bit crowded) and the bedroom that Washington shared with his wife, Martha. At another interesting section of this park (on private property located within the park), I looked inside the Neo-Gothic Washington Memorial Chapel (that serves as an Episcopal church) and the nearby Valley Forge Historical Society Museum containing more items having to do with Washington, the Revolutionary War, and the 18th century.

Even though my visit to Valley Forge was peaceful and historical, my visit to nearby King of Prussia was not as peaceful. It would be more correct to call this town an "edge-city" outside of Philadelphia. Anyhow, after overdosing on history at Valley Forge, I visited the Court and Plaza at King of Prussia (commonly called "The King of Prussia Mall"). Because I'm not an impulse shopper, I don't usually go out of my way to visit a shopping center. Nevertheless, this shopping center has been the third largest shopping mall in North America (after the West Edmonton Mall, Alberta, Canada, and the Mall of America in Minnesota). Unlike the first two largest shopping malls, this mall had no entertainment. On the other hand, this mall contained over 400 retail establishments as well as several restaurants (unless you can call shopping and eating "entertainment"). The variety of shops ranged from upscale to moderate and gave serious competition to Center City Philadelphia's retailers!

LOOKING AT DUST COLLECTORS

Many of you have seen the ads for the Franklin Mint. Some of you may have had the display space and money for many of those collectable items; I didn't! That was why I was glad that there has been a place like the Franklin Mint Museum, Route 1, Franklin Center, PA (610-459-6168), for me to visit.

Saturday, October 27, after I saw a short video about the organization and craftsmen of Franklin Mint at work, I walked through the museum. In different rooms that circled this building, I viewed sculptures, replicas of small-scale automobile models, dolls, items from the House of Fabergé, and a *Star Trek* (ST) room. With an interior that looked similar to a space station, the ST room contained several models of starships, insignias, figurines of ST characters, phasers, a 3-D chess set, and other items. Different videos in the museum demonstrated small-scale car model and doll making. This museum also dedicated special sections to Princess Diana (displaying a gown that she wore) and Jacqueline Kennedy

(displaying a necklace that she wore). In addition, the museum included seasonal displays as well as displays of collector plates, coins, and stamps. Finally, the gallery store sold many of those same items.

A GARDEN FOR ALL SEASONS

Anytime of the year I visited Longwood Gardens, Rt. 1, Kennett Square, PA (610-388-1000), I had a good time. Longwood Gardens showed a different garden theme for each season, and even if the weather was less than perfect, the conservatory alone took up a good portion of my day.

Saturday, November 3, the early morning rain cleared up and the weather became sunny by the time I arrived at Longwood Gardens. At the first place I entered, the Visitor Center, I saw a brief slide show introducing me to the highlights of these gardens. After this, I walked over to the Peirce-du Pont House. Here, via videos and exhibits, I learned more about the history of Longwood Gardens; its founder, Pierre S. du Pont; and the former owners of the land, the Peirce family. (Parts of this house go back to 1730.) On past visits, I toured most of Longwood's 1,050 acres of grounds with its gardens, fountains, meadows, and woodlands; on this recent visit, I spent most of the day at the conservatory. Built in 1921, this vast greenhouse contained enough colorful flowers and tropical plants to keep me occupied for a few hours. This was one of the most pleasant few hours that I've ever spent in my life!

VISITING ENGLAND IN THE MILLENNIUM: THE SEQUEL

I hope the above title satisfied those of you who insisted that the Millennium started in 2001 and not 2000. (I won't get into that debate.)

Monday, December 10, I flew on a British Airways 777 from Philadelphia to London Heathrow.

Tuesday, December 11, after taking the tube (London Underground) into London and checking into my hotel (Tavistock), I took the tube out to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, TW9 3AB (020-8332-5655). Covering 300 acres, I couldn't see all of Kew Gardens in a day. Thank goodness for the Kew Explorer tram that toured most of the grounds and stopped near the main attractions. Along with its gardens, woodlands, museum, and galleries, I visited my favorite four attractions: (1) Evolution House displayed the looks, sounds, and smells of how plants have evolved from 3,500 million years ago to the present. (2) The Victorian-styled Temperate House, Kew's largest glass house, showed citrus plants, the world's largest indoor plant, and other plants from warmer climates. (3) Inside the Palm House, another Victorian glass house, I noticed plants (especially palms) from the rainforest. (4) Finally, in the Princess of Wales Conservatory (opened in 1987), I saw plants from 10 different climate zones and an aquarium in the lower level. The botanical gardens at Kew were the largest that I have ever seen. When I was there, I definitely learned how plants provided us with food, fuel, shelter, and oxygen. In the words of the late Dr. Carl Sagan: "We need the plants more than

they need us."

Wednesday, December 12, I took a National Express Coach (bus) to Cambridge. Once there, I visited King's College Chapel, CB2 1ST (01223-331212). As I entered this chapel, I realized that I walked into a very special place. Looking up, I saw the largest fan-vaulted stone ceiling in the world. Surrounding the walls, I noticed large stained-glass windows. The upper windows depicted Old Testament lessons that foretold events displayed in the lower windows showing New Testament events. Along with relief-styled ornamentation and carvings inside and outside of this chapel, I viewed the famous painting of the *Adoration of the Magi* by Peter Paul Rubens, displayed above the altar. Exhibits in the side chapels explained the chapel's history, building techniques, furnishings, and especially the stained-glass windows. Completed around 1547 (except for the installment of the West Window in 1879), this chapel was one of the most beautiful Gothic fantasies I've ever witnessed.

After lunch, I stopped into the Fitzwilliam Museum, Trumpington St., CB2 1RB (01223-332900). Starting with the Upper Galleries, I looked at European paintings, furniture, and sculpture from the 1200s through the 20th century. Many of the rooms displaying these artworks, however, looked like works of art themselves. The high-domed ceilings showed elaborate carvings, and many of the walls displayed inlay marble. A marble staircase led me down to the Lower Level. Here, I saw ancient art from Egypt, Greece, and Rome. (Even if you are not into fine and applied art, the building alone is worth a visit.)

Thursday, December 13, became the day my friend, Val, and her son, Andrew, drove me to Bath. Once in Bath, I toured the Roman Bath Museum, Stall St. (01225-477785). Via an audio-headset player, I learned about the history of this place as I walked around the complex. Discovered and excavated in 1880, this area displayed the remains of the Roman Bath in addition to sculptures, mosaics, and other Roman items in an underground museum. The temple and statues constructed above the bath were a Victorian interpretation of a Roman temple. Meanwhile, the audio tour also gave some details about the day-to-day life in Roman Britain. Bath itself has been a lovely city containing many honey-colored stone buildings constructed in a Georgian style. At that time (1700s), Bath became a fashionable resort for the social elite.

After stopping at a pub for lunch, Andrew drove me through the countryside in Somerset and Wiltshire Counties. I saw many towns and villages that I would never have had the chance to see otherwise. (Thanks Val and Andrew!) Finally, we stopped at Stonehenge (near Amesbury) at the junction of A303 and A344/A360 (01980-623108). Although I only had a few minutes to see this circle of stones, I came away impressed by knowing I saw a structure that dated back (in some parts) about 5,050 years. (Despite studies and speculations by archaeologists and historians, Stonehenge still remains a mystery that is now a World Heritage

Site.)

Friday, December 14, found me taking the train to Brighton. This resort has been so popular for Londoners to spend a day or weekend by the sea, that it was nicknamed "London by the Sea." Nevertheless, forget about sandy beaches; Brighton's beach contained rocks. My British friends told me that most people just sat on a deck chair and enjoyed the sea breezes, or they visited the amusement pier, Promenade, shops, and museums. Like other British resorts, such as Blackpool and Southend, it used to be a popular destination for a long seaside vacation. (Nowadays, it only attracts daytrippers, weekenders, and those who can't afford a seaside vacation in Southern Europe or overseas.) Unlike Blackpool and Southend that catered to the working class, Brighton attracted a more fashionable social crowd in its heyday. By the late-1700s and early-1800s, sea bathing started to replace going to spa resorts in popularity. One of the most famous visitors to Brighton included the future King George IV. In the late-1700s, he bought a farmhouse and hired Henry Holland to turn it into a Neoclassical-styled villa. Then, between 1815 to 1822, George hired John Nash to enlarge the building and design it into a style similar to Indian architecture. Known as the Royal Pavilion (01273-603005), this place turned out to be the ultimate European version of an Oriental fantasy. Although designed outside in an Indian style, the inside interior displayed a Chinese style. Even if this building has not been exactly authentic in any kind of Asian way, I still felt swept away by what I saw in this seaside retreat for the King. Each room seemed more impressive than the last room as I admired the interiors containing bright pastel colors, gilding, and chinoiserie designs in the furniture, lamps, artworks, and other items. Via guided tour and video, I learned more about the history of Brighton, the Royal Pavilion, and about Brighton's royal connection. Compared to other places on this trip so far, the Royal Pavilion proved unique, and it was worth the trip to this seaside resort.

Saturday, December 15, I stayed in London and spent the day at the Natural History Museum, Cromwell Rd., SW7 5BD (0207942-5000). First off, this building itself looked very interesting. Built in a Victorian-Gothic style, it reminded me of a cathedral devoted to natural science. In place of the usual cathedral gargoyles, I noticed statues of animals (from extinct and non-extinct species) on the outside walls. Life Galleries and Earth Galleries were the two main sections of this museum. After riding an escalator through a globe, I viewed the following exhibit areas in the Earth Galleries: The Power Within, Restless Surface, Earth's Treasures, From the Beginning, Earth Today and Tomorrow, and Visions of Earth. By pictures, text, models, samples, computers, audio presentations, and videos, I learned more about the history and formation of the Earth. Life Galleries showed the usual exhibit areas: animal displays, plant exhibits, and rocks and minerals. I especially liked the museum's presentation of rocks, minerals, and

meteorites. Displayed in old-fashioned wood-and-glass cases, I looked at huge collections of rock, mineral, and meteorite samples. Other areas of this museum covered humankind's place in all of this. Therefore, I definitely experienced an educational day here.

Sunday, December 16, I spent a relaxing day with another friend, Doris. Together, we walked around the neighborhood near my hotel, the Bloomsbury area, and we saw the main reading room of the former British Library. (Now open to the public, the British Museum administers this room.)

Monday, December 17, I checked out of my hotel and took the train to Woking, Surrey. Upon arrival, I checked into the Holiday Inn, and later, I walked to the town center. Woking became ground zero in H. G. Wells's 1898 novel, *War of the Worlds*. (Wells lived in Woking when he wrote the book.) In 1998, the town unveiled a stainless-steel *Martian* in the town square. Anyhow, I came to Woking to see John Inman in a pantomime play (panto) called *Aladdin* at the New Victoria Theatre, the Ambassadors, Peacock Centre, GU21 1GQ (01483-545900). I've seen two pantos starring John Inman before: 1998 at the Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton, West Midlands, where John played Nurse Wanda (governess to Maid Marion's younger brother and sister) in the *Adventures of Robin Hood*; and 1999 at the Cliff's Pavilion, Southend-on-Sea, Essex, where John played Dame Wanda (mother of Jack) in *Jack and the Beanstalk*. (It's a bit hard to explain panto, but I'll try: Starting in the 1800s, many British children spent some part of the Christmas holiday attending a panto. Most pantos have a pantomime Dame or the role of a matronly woman played by a man, and several have a principal boy played by a woman. [How's that for gender confusion?] This is a very active play for the cast and audience because the audience are encouraged to cheer the hero, boo the villain, shout clues to the actors, sing along in some parts of the show, and take part in other ways. There are many naughty jokes with plenty of double-entendres to entertain the adults. [Naughty but not obscene because many of the jokes would go over the heads of small children.] The plots are usually simple: the hero tries to win the hand of the leading lady, but the villain tries to foil the hero's plans. [Of course, the hero wins in the end.] Included are plenty of comedy skits, singing, dancing, and very elaborate or bizarre costumes, especially on the pantomime Dame.) For all three of the pantos that I've seen, at the show's end, John Inman wore a pink-sequined-evening gown and invited a few children on stage to join him in a sing-a-long to "Let's All Sing Like the Birdies Sing." Afterward, he gave the children some chocolates for their efforts. Some of John's costumes and jokes were the same in all three pantos, and some were different. In this particular panto, John played Widow Wanda Twankey (mother to *Aladdin*). That night, he wore a Blue-Willow dress, a Wash-&Spin-laundry dress, and a few other theme dresses along with some equally bizarre headdresses. Because I sat in the front row, I felt the full effects of the lights, sounds, and music. All of the performers showed

a lot of talent with their acting, jokes, singing, dancing, or acrobatics. Overall, I spent a very funny and colorful three hours in this theater. After the show, security let me into the stage door to meet John. After he posed for a few pictures, we had a bit of an articulate conversation. Mr. Inman mentioned that he was feeling OK, and he was recording a radio interview when he heard the news on September 11. He stated: "When I first saw the disaster on the news, I thought that it was a Bruce Willis disaster film." John also told me that he planned to retire from show business. (He is 66 years old.) I thought Mr. Inman was very kind to grant me this interview because he had to return to London that night. (There was no panto show scheduled for the next night, and Woking is not too far from London.) Therefore, we said our good-byes before he headed back to London, and I returned to my hotel.

Tuesday, December 18, I returned to London and checked into the Royal National hotel.

Later, I took some short walks around the city before retiring to my room.

Wednesday, December 19, I flew British Airways back to Philly to conclude another successful overseas trip.

In these last few years, I have received letters from some of you asking me for more details about my past overseas trips. I don't usually have room in my newsletter for talking about these trips, but Louise Davis and I are working on a one-shot publication covering 64 attractions that I've visited on those overseas trips. The zine should be out in a few months. Meanwhile, here's a brief synopsis about my overseas trips.

1976: I was 20, young, naive, and good-looking (or so, I was told). For my first overseas trip, I flew on a charter jet (DC8) called Overseas National Airlines from New York JFK to London Gatwick. By day, I went sightseeing and shopping; by night, I visited a few discos and pubs.

1982: I flew on another charter jet (another DC8) called Global Airlines from JFK to Gatwick. I did some more sightseeing in the city, and I visited Windsor and Canterbury.

1984: Airline deregulation was kicking in, and I could afford to take British Airways (on a 747) from Philadelphia International to London Heathrow. In addition to sightseeing in London, I visited York and Stratford-Upon-Avon.

1985: I flew on TWA (on another 747) from JFK to Charles de Gaulle Airport, Paris. I spent four days sightseeing in the city of lights before I boarded a TGV train for Geneva, Switzerland. Once there, I spent another four days sightseeing in that city. Finally, I flew on Air France (on a small jet) back to Paris, and then, I switched to TWA to fly back to JFK.

1998: I flew on a BA 777 from Philadelphia to London Heathrow. I spent most of my time in London sightseeing. Later, I stayed overnight in Wolverhampton and saw a show.

1999: I took another BA 777 to London. Again, I did more sightseeing in London. Later, I stayed for two nights in Southend-on-Sea to sightsee and catch a show.

2000: I have the details of this trip in

Volume 1, Issue 4, of DOTTY'S DIMENSIONS. I mostly stayed in London and visited Oxford for a day. Later, I spent two nights in Blackpool.

2001: The details on this trip are right above you in the last essay in this issue. I won't say, "forever," but it seems most likely that this will be my last overseas trip for a long time. So, that's why I visited more places in England: London, Cambridge, Bath, Stonehenge, Brighton, and Woking.

In the next issue (my first as the new owner of Dimensional Press), I plan to write about a few weekend trips to New York City, and two science fiction conventions: one in Maryland and another in New York. Have a good 2002!