

KYRLE Probus Club's annual holiday was this year spent in Cheshire. Organised by Robin Nichol, the club's social events coordinator, it was quite outstanding for the variety of places visited by the 30 strong group.



One could not imagine that a small, mainly rural county, would have so much to offer the visitor and Robin managed to uncover an amazing number of varied, historic places to pack into the five-day break.

It began with a visit to Shugborough Hall, near Stafford, en route to the club's hotel base at Alvaston Hall near Nantwich. Shugborough, a magnificent Georgian mansion, abounds with classical art and architecture, such as the beautiful plasterwork on the ceilings of the dining room and library, the French furniture and a priceless collection of porcelain.

It was also the home of Patrick Lichfield, the fifth Earl of Lichfield and renowned society and Royal photographer. During a conducted tour of the Hall, the Probus group were shown the apartment rooms, that Patrick Lichfield lived in up until his death in 2005, including a collection of his photographs and photographic equipment in a studio setting.

The following morning took up a visit to the Lion Salt Works Museum near Northwich, which had opened in June of this year after a £10 million restoration project. This open pan salt-making site has been restored and transformed into a heritage attraction and visitor centre. In exploring the site and restored buildings, the group discovered how the salt works operated and the impact of salt on the community and its people.

In complete contrast, the group then travelled to Arley Hall, one of the most interesting stately homes in the North West. After lunch, the group were free to tour the fine Grade 11 listed Jacobean house and wander in the beautifully laid-out gardens in which the house is set. The

double herbaceous border was a particular attraction, as was the avenue of giant ilex, shaped in columns.

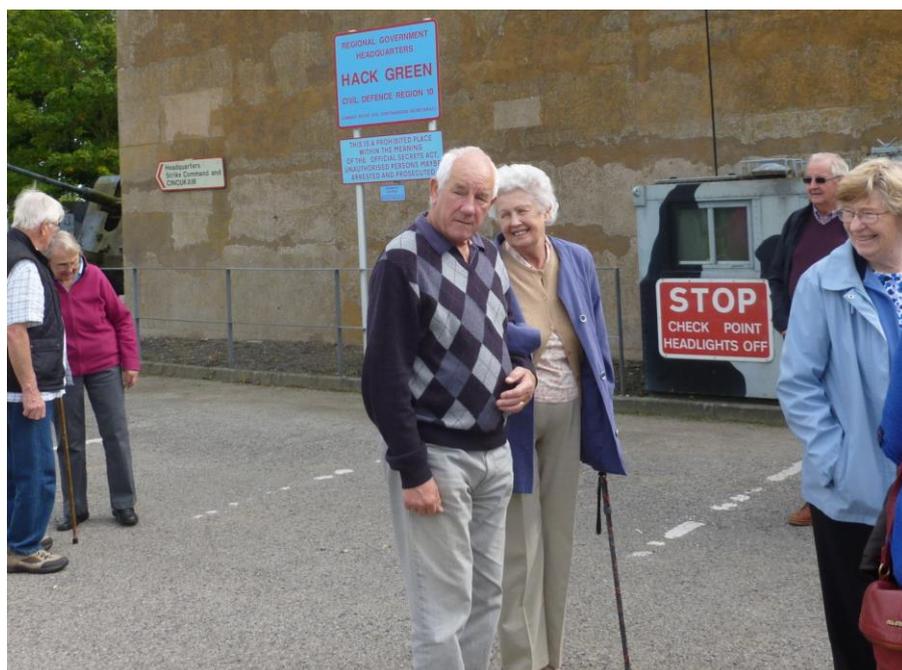
The point of interest changed again the following day with a visit to the Paradise Mill and Silk Museum at Macclesfield. Paradise Mill was home to Macclesfield's last working handloom, until its closure in 1981. It still houses over 20 original fully working Jacquard looms, which are still capable of producing the intricate and delicate woven pattern work that made the loom and Macclesfield famous throughout Britain.

From the delicate to the gigantic and a visit to the awe-inspiring radio telescope at Jodrell Bank. Known also as the Lovell Telescope after its inventor Sir Bernard Lovell, it was the largest telescope in the world when it was completed in 1957, with a diameter of 250ft (76 metres). It is now the third largest moveable radio telescope in the world. The Probus group had a close-up view of it and were also lucky enough to see it move on its double track rails, to scan a different part of the universe.

An engineering feat of a different kind, but of an equally massive scale, was the Anderton Boat Lift, which was another world first. Built by Edwin Clark in 1875, it lifted cargo boats 50ft from the River Weaver to the Trent and Mersey Canal. It was a vital link in transporting, the salt, clay, coal and pottery, produced in the area. Two huge water tanks or 'caissons' each with watertight doors, carried the boats up and down by means of a hydraulic system.

The Probus group enjoyed a boat trip along the River Weaver Navigation before entering their caisson and being lifted up to the canal and back to the visitor centre. In the afternoon, while half the group visited the national Waterways Museum at Ellesmere Port, the other half explored the historic city of Chester.

The final day brought another surprise with a visit to the Hack Green Secret Nuclear Bunker. Hidden on the outskirts of a sleepy Cheshire town, this huge underground complex had remained secret for 50 years. It would have been the centre of regional government had nuclear war broken out, and was a fascinating, if rather spooky place to explore.





This Probus holiday could certainly have been given the soubriquet 'And now for something Different.'