

## Our British Invasion

# Ayr-Paris Band tour of England and Wales

By Irene Schmidt-Adeney

On Sunday, July 22, 40 members of the Ayr-Paris Band together with a group of 32 "supporters" landed safely at London Gatwick airport straight into a heat wave, similar to home, that was also gripping England. We headed for Stonehenge and a chance to visit the mysterious stone formation – and just a stone's throw north of Torquay, the first stop.

### Torquay

Torquay is a town on the southwest coast of England in Devonshire, known as "the English Riviera". It's a beautiful stretch of coastline in the south of England. We were greeted by blue skies, ocean breezes, sandy beaches, palm trees, and this first stop offered a chance to unwind and switch our clocks to Greenwich Time.

Torquay is a part of the Torbay region and includes several small municipalities such as Brixham and Paignton, which we would visit during our stay. In addition to its beautiful coastline, Torquay is known as the former home of mystery writer Agatha Christie and the setting for Fawlty Towers, a popular 1970s television show starring Monty Python alumnae John Cleese.

The first of seven band engagements was at the Paignton Festival, but more of a carnival to the Canadians. Despite the heat and competition with music from the Wild Mouse ride, it was a good chance to set aside performance jitters and make sure we had all the proper equipment for the remainder of our tour.

At the festival, we were greeted by Chair of Torbay Council Ian Doggett and Councillor Cindy Stocks. They were both official looking, he in his chain of office and she in her elaborate fascinator. The band was warmly welcomed and presented with a plaque featuring the Torbay Coat of Arms. Derrick Ostner, North Dumfries Councillor and member of the Ayr-Paris Band, accepted the plaque.

Tuesday, July 24 was a free day and most of the group travelled to Brixham, about 20 minutes away. Brixham is the home of a full-scale replica of The Golden Hind, a galleon captained by Sir Francis Drake. The Golden Hind circumvented the globe between

1577 and 1580, during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.

It seemed like pretty cramped quarters for 30 or so tourists visiting the ship at any one time – imagine how a crew of 80 would live and work in the same space? The Golden Hind was used by Drake for "privateering" in the name of the Queen. It is estimated that he captured 26 tons of silver, ½-ton of gold, jewels, valued at almost \$800-million Canadian. The Queen received a one-third share of the booty, Drake got one-third and the rest was split between the crew.

Some group members took a side trip to Greenway, the summer home of Agatha Christie, who used the home as inspiration for some of her novels. The Georgian mansion remains just the way Christie left it after she passed away in 1978. It was left to the National Trust in 2000 by her daughter Rosalind. During WWII, the U.S. Coast Guard took over the mansion and used the grounds for training exercises.

Three band members solved the mystery of how to find their way back to Torquay from Greenway after becoming disoriented returning to the train. Two members found the train after a diversion that included a cow pasture and the other band member solved the mystery by walking along the beach, a journey of about 20 kilometres.

During the time in Devon, many band members enjoyed afternoon tea, complete with authentic Devon clotted cream.

### Cardiff, Wales

On Wednesday, July 25th, the group left Torquay for Cardiff, Wales, with a stop at the Cathedral City of Exeter. This would be the first visit to many churches and cathedrals throughout the tour.

The cathedral was completed around 1400 and existed since 1050, before William the Conqueror arrived in England in 1066. It survived Henry VIII's Dissolution of the Monasteries and evolved from a Roman Catholic cathedral into an Anglican one.

Inside the cathedral, the Canadian group was interested in the memorial for John Graves Simcoe, an Exeter native. He's not buried there though. Apparently, he got sick and died on a voyage to India, and his



**WH'AYR IN THE WORLD AT STONEHENGE** – from left, Peter Heuss, Dianne Delisle, Greg Stroh, Ruth Ireland, Irene Schmidt-Adeney, Jim Linington, and Geoff Adeney.

body was returned for burial at Welford Chapel on the family estate near Torquay.

The next two nights were spent in Cardiff, that is both pedestrian-friendly and people-friendly. Near our hotel, which was right across the street from Cardiff Castle, was Queen Street which has been turned into a pedestrian area. What a leading example this is for city planning. It's a vibrant shopping centre and best of all – it has a Tim Hortons.

Around the corner from the hotel was the microbrewery Zero Degrees, the perfect spot for the band's happy hour and dinner.

Our final evening in Cardiff would be the best band exchange of the trip.

The group travelled outside the city centre to Onllwyn, a village of about 2,000 people. Our joint performance was with Côr Meibion Onllwyn (Onllwyn Men's Choir). We were warmly greeted with a pre-performance luncheon and short rehearsal. Soon, local townspeople and our group filled the local hall. Nothing prepared us for what we would hear during the concert.

The choir performed first and I'm sure there wasn't a



**PAIGNTON FESTIVAL** – Chair of Torbay Council Ian Doggett (centre) and Councillor Cindy Stocks presented greetings and plaque to Derrick Ostner (right), a North Dumfries Councillor and member of the Ayr-Paris Band. Far right is band director Merry Schmidt.

dry eye in the hall that echoed with their amazing voices singing the Elvis rendition of Battle Hymn of the Republic-Dixie. The band joined the choir for Land of My Fathers and if that didn't bring enough tears, the final joint number was You'll Never Walk Alone.

More hospitality and spon-

taneous singing by the choir followed the performance. There were promises to host the choir if they come to Canada before we left the hall late in the evening.

More photos of the Ayr-Paris Band tour on page 15.

Story to continue in next week's Ayr News.

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We headed north to Liverpool, the farthest point in the tour, stopping at Shrewsbury along on the way.

Shrewsbury is a very old town with fine examples of Roman and Tudor architecture, buildings almost touching each other across the narrow and windy streets. As with most English towns, there was lots of cobblestone, an old town square and another old cathedral – but some of us



Making the best of a long walk to the hotel in Liverpool – The group hauls their luggage due to a lack of bus parking along the narrow streets. In front, from left, Jim Black, Marg Read, Sandi Sherk. Behind, from left, Alan Murray, Richelle Kocher, Richard Read, Heather McQuillin, Sharon Cutler, and June Smith.



Cheering on the Around the World Yacht Race finish at Liverpool – from left, Deb Berry, Paul Ellingham, Ruth Ireland, Janette Kruegel, Dawna Ward, Cindy Rossignoli, Gabriella Ellingham, Derrick Ostner, Irene Schmidt-Adeney, Geoff Adeney, and Heidi Ostner.

never found, unsuccessful at trying to navigate the windy streets and despite having a map. More sunshine and intense heat greeted us and some members eschewed the siteseeing in favour of a cold drink near the bus drop-off spot.

Upon arrival in Liverpool, the weather had turned windy and damp. We were told that our hotel had no drop-off area and this resulted in a forced walk from a parking lot at the harbour (a UNESCO site), hauling luggage, to the hotel, about 20 minutes away. It seemed a lot longer for those who didn't pack lightly and it didn't help that our guide to the hotel, while being a friendly young man – didn't know the shortest route.

For the next few days, it was everything Beatles – walking tour, museum, statues, haunts. We learned that Paul McCartney performed at the Cavern the night before our arrival as a promotion for his new album. And for the first time, our itinerary went sideways.

Our Beatles walking tour guide was no competition for the end of an Around The World Yacht Race that was finishing at the Liverpool harbour with our group right in the middle of the action – cheering crowds, the BBC, areas blocked off, military presence, a cannon, wind and rain that had blown in overnight.

Meanwhile, Steve, our amazing bus driver, had scouted around the area and discovered that he could bring



Larger than life statue of the Beatles harbour in Liverpool – The group enjoyed a Beatles walking tour despite the threat of rain.

the bus right across the road from the hotel.

We travelled to Preston, a city north of Liverpool for our second joint concert with the local band. It was a far different reception and atmosphere than Onllwyn. Thank you to our group for providing an audience and filling in the Preston Minster. Some members of the band played jointly with their Preston band counterparts and enjoyed conversation during the break. Once again, the concert had competition,

this time from a rock bar that was across the road from the church. Hanging in the Preston Minster was a flag of the North Lancashire Royal Regiment marking its participation in the battle of the Plains of Abraham in Quebec in 1759.

The wind and rain continued into Sunday and meant that our concert at the Wallasey Summer Band Festival was cancelled. More time for attending church, shopping, or relaxing at the hotel.



Band exchange with the Preston Concert Band at the Preston Minster, north of Liverpool.

## Northampton

Already, it was the second week of the tour with the sun trying to come out as we departed Liverpool for Northampton and another trip highlight – a performance at the Althorp Estate, Princess Diana's childhood home and burial place. We were able to arrange for a one-hour performance in exchange for free admission to the estate. It was a terrific concert, in the stable courtyard. The stables were beautiful brick buildings surrounding a large courtyard that once housed 100 horses. Today, they are converted into offices, a café, a museum, and storage.

Lord Charles Spencer gave permission for the band to perform. We found out after the concert that this was a big deal because a concert band had never performed at the estate. A crotchety estate employee told us that Caroline Sadler, the estate event planner, took a chance letting us perform because he was against it. Caroline was thrilled with our performance, invited us to return anytime and asked for our picture to include with their newsletter.

Following the concert, we spent the afternoon learning about the history of the Spencer family while touring the beautiful grounds that include Princess Diana's resting place, and the house.

The Spencers go back to the 1400s. In addition to Princess Diana, other noted relations include Clarissa Spencer-Churchill, wife of Prime Minister Anthony Eden; Winston (Spencer) Churchill; and Charles Spencer's current wife Canadian Karen Villeneuve.

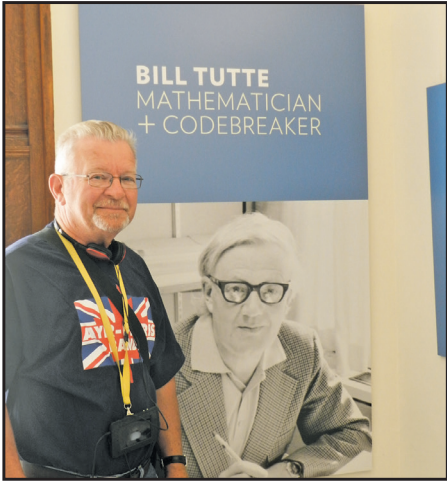
It was a nice break between the fast pace of Liverpool and what would be the final action-packed days of the tour.

Our tour guide Clare has been in the business for over 20 years and remarked that our route was not your typical tourist route. She had never been to Torquay or to Bletchley Park, our next stop.



**ALTHORP ESTATE, NORTHAMPTON** – back row, from left David Romagnoli, Paul Ellingham, George Schmidt, Dieter Morrell, Jim Linington, Peter Heuss, Mike Schmidt, Randy Dodd, Todd Sweezey, Ray Sweezey, George Holmes, Bill Laight, Jamie Rossignoli, and Roseanna Rigo. Middle row, from left, Matt Greenberg, Steve Brunton, Geoff Adeney, Deb Berry, Gabriella Ellingham, Richelle Kocher, Heidi Ostner, Derrick Ostner, Merry Schmidt, Sandi Sherk, Lillian Emberson, James Brown, John Sippel, and Dan Kocher. Front row, from left, Greg Stroh, Irene Schmidt-Adeney, Rebecca Murray, Debbie Collins, Dianne Delisle, Ann Brunton, Ruth Ireland, Heather McQuillin, Janet Schmidt, Ginger Pullen, Dawna Ward, and Janette Kruegel.





Geoff Adeney of Ayr with Tutte exhibit at Bletchley Park.



Bletchley Park estate mansion, at left is Dawna Ward of Ayr.

We spent a few hours visiting Bletchley Park, the WWII codebreaking (and spy) centre, famous for breaking the code to the German Enigma machine. The Germans used the Enigma machine to encrypt messages.

Visiting Bletchley provided

a perspective on the scale of the codebreaking effort and the secrecy that was maintained by the former operatives for at least 30 years. The codebreakers included mathematicians, psychologists – and musicians. It made members of the Ayr-Paris Band feel very smart

to know musicians could find patterns that other people might miss.

The Imitation Game, a movie released in 2014, is loosely based on Alan Turing's work to break the Enigma code.

Some people might dismiss the movie as “tripe”, but I bet

they like the dollars generated by tourists like us who wouldn't have been interested prior to the movie.

Sir Ian Fleming was also at Bletchley Park during WWII. He was a spy and later inspired the James Bond series.



Enigma machine at Bletchley Park.

## London

The next day it was off to London, via Blenheim Palace.

Blenheim Palace is the largest non-royal residence in England to be called a “palace”, a name reserved for Royal residences. It's a UNESCO heritage site, former home of the Marlborough family, connected to the Althorp Spencers, and birthplace of Winston Churchill. There are lots of juicy stories connected to the Marlboroughs and most include connections to the Royal family.

The crowds at Blenheim Palace would prepare the group for what we would encounter in London.

But first, there was one more brewery tour, this time at Fuller's Brewery, a family-run business on a site that has housed a brewery since the 1600s. Annually, they produce almost 350,000 barrels of beer, including London Pride. Some members of the group enjoyed a full tour of the facility, and other members enjoyed a leisurely visit to the Fuller's pub.

Welcome to London traffic – a 15-minute trip to the hotel took well over an hour. The good news was that our hotel, the Copthorne Tara was right in a good location, near Kensington Palace, Hyde Park, walking distance to the Royal Albert Hall, and a five minute walk to The Tube, the London subway.

London is a crowded and culturally diverse city. I'm sure the group has a new appreciation for the many cultures who call London home.

We had the evening free to scout out the area.

Thursday morning was a three-hour city bus tour, followed by the final concert at the Victoria Embankment Gardens for a large lunch-hour crowd.

Thanks to our bus driver for navigating our Size 12 bus through the Size 6 entrance to the gardens.

And then there was the rite of passage for our fearless director Merry Schmidt. Merry has been conducting the Ayr-Paris Band for almost 20 years, raising the musical bar line and also the reputation of band in the local musical community. But, one thing was missing from her repertoire – the band had never played a joke on Merry. This wasn't news to Merry, because previously, she was in on these practical jokes when they were played on other conductors.

Smuggled onto the trip was the score for “Baby, It's Cold Outside” and four “Canada” toques. Waiting for the opportunity to play a joke, the final chance was the concert at the Victoria Embankment Gardens in downtown London in front of over a hundred lunch-goers.

The final number of the final concert was supposed to be God Save the Queen. This was band's cue to substitute in “Baby, It's Cold Outside.”

Merry's baton went up for the Queen drum roll, but the band went into the new number. Merry tried to control her frustration, furiously stopping the band, trying to save us from ourselves.

Again the drum roll for the Queen. The Baby score and a toque had been handed to her, but in her confusion, she threw it aside. This time, a band member shouted “KEEP GOING, KEEP GOING” and “Baby, It's Cold Outside” took over.



Buckingham Palace – Cindy Rossignoli at left in hat and sunglasses, a member of the group.



Band member Jim Linington at Blenheim Palace.

Merry knew that she had been duped. She opened the score, pulled on the toque and finished the number. By this time, the audience was in on the joke and applauded Merry's recovery.

Special guests at the concert were members of the Brunton family, formerly of Etonia and Paris, Ginny (Waldeck) Brunton and Phillip Brunton and their families. Members of the Brunton family in the band travelled to Letchworth where they stayed overnight to visit with Jeff and Ginny Brunton, Phillip and Julie, and their children.

After all that excitement, the group scattered to enjoy various London attractions, West End Shows, and a concert at the Royal Albert Hall.

Friday was the last full day of the tour and was free to enjoy London. Several people visited Buckingham Palace to see the magnificent State Rooms that overlook the famous courtyard that we often catch a glimpse of when a carriage disappears through the main gates, and the gardens. Last year, 413,000 visitors paid an average of \$40 CDN a ticket, a tidy sum of about \$16.52-million that helps the Queen keep her palaces running.

A farewell dinner was held at Brown's restaurant, a former court house in Covent Garden, near Leicester Square. During dinner, we thanked our tour guide Clare, and several presentations were made to the trip organizers. An original limerick was presented by Danny Young, another original poem by Tori Reibling, and a final poem was presented by George Schmidt:

We set the wheels in motion, to plan a fun-filled trip,  
with points of interest packed tightly, in, to a very well-run ship.  
the planning stage well over, in fact that's far behind,  
from houses, pets and politics, who cares if Trump's lost his mind?

Irene and Derrick held the reins, myself, well, close behind,  
we steered the course for British turf, we'd not seen for sometime.  
amazing was our driver, the guide, beyond compare,  
you've shown us sites, caught all the glitz, though Steve has left, thanks Clare.

From children to Deb's clothing, some things were left behind,  
but food, the sites, then sleepy bus rides, left time when we'd unwind.  
the churches that we played in, many kindly words to share,  
our interactions special, so much in common there.

With friendship ever present, as laughter stood supreme,  
just what should we three contemplate, “the next trip”, but a dream.  
remember as you lay your heads, drift off to one last sleep,  
that it's not always where you're going in life – but the company you keep.

– George Schmidt, August 3, 2018.



Westminster Cathedral, London – Band members in distinctive red shirts.