

On To Birmingham



Rotary International's 100th Convention—June 21-24, 2009

From the Desk of Roger Hayward

Next year's Birmingham Convention, Rotary International's 100th, promises to be one of the best international conventions in the last 20 years. This is because the "Brits" know how to organize, host and really have fun. Those of us who went to the 1984 convention remember the last time the Rotary Club of Birmingham, along with District 1060 Rotarians, put on a most memorable event. Next year we have yet another opportunity to attend an exceptional convention and visit England and perhaps other parts of Europe next summer.

Birmingham is the U.K.'s second largest city and when you include the surrounding towns the population is equal to many of the larger cities in North America. Birmingham is at the centre of England and hence the area is called The Midlands. It was once known for its heavy industrial base. The city itself, along with towns such as Coventry, was the heart of the British car industry. Famous car manufacturers such as MG, Austin and Woseley were situated here. Many of us remember these gems and some, like me, own one of these vintage cars just for the thrill of the Sunday afternoon drive in the country!



A Perfect Blend of the Old and the New

Since the early 1980s much of the heavy industry has moved away from the area and the city has had to reinvent itself. Light industry and high tech businesses remain. The city has also undergone a "makeover" in that it is now considered a very attractive area to tourists; much rebuilding has been undertaken both in the city proper and in the surrounding areas, boasting excellent cultural events, good sports teams in cricket and soccer and the beautiful green spaces that we have come to expect in England.

Most people will have heard of some of the attractions in the Birmingham area: Stratford and its most famous son,

William Shakespeare; Warwick Castle; and the newly built (1950s) Coventry Cathedral. But there is much more! And I will highlight those attractions both in this newsletter and in one that I will publish in November.

Most of us think of a trip to England as an opportunity to visit London, Stratford, Scotland, and Wales. Birmingham International Airport is an excellent hub to fly to other parts of Europe and Ireland. Book on-line through sites such as "Cheap Airfare Europe" or check out Ryan Air. I know someone who was able to get a \$5.00 flight (plus taxes) to Dublin recently!

Volume 1, Issue 2

Zone 22 and Northern USA
Zones Issue
September 2008



Inside this issue:

NEC—A Wonderful Venue	2
Accommodations	2
Eating Out	2
Optional Functions	3
Local Attractions	3
My English Favourites	4
Coventry Transport Museum	4

Transportation to Birmingham

During the summer months you can get direct flights to Birmingham from some Canadian cities on charter airlines. Scheduled flights to the U.K. will be mostly to London Heathrow or Manchester. In both cases the easiest way to get to Birmingham, if you don't want to rent a car, is by taking a bus from either airport by booking on www.nationalexpress.com to the Birmingham Airport. Allow two hours from arrival time in Heathrow and one hour from Manchester to catch your bus.

From the Birmingham Airport there is a free connecting monorail to the NEC. To get to your hotel, take a taxi from the Birmingham Airport.

Another good connecting airport to Birmingham is Amsterdam Airport Schiphol which has hourly flights to Birmingham.

National Exhibition Centre (NEC)

The NEC is situated about ten miles from the centre of Birmingham and is joined to the Birmingham International Airport by a free monorail system. It is accessible from the M42 motorway (401-type road) and has free parking. It is the largest convention site in the U.K. and well able to handle our requirements. Banquet food in the past has been

excellent and the area for The House of Friendship and display booths will be larger than we have seen at other sites. There are over twenty-one interconnecting halls, with the major ones being on the same level. The NEC is one of Europe's busiest venues, staging over 180 exhibitions each year.

Accommodation

There are three hotels on the NEC property at which delegates can stay and from which they can walk to the NEC. These are the Hilton Birmingham Metropole, the Crowne Plaza Birmingham NEC, and the Express by Holiday Inn Birmingham NEC.

There is also the Holiday Inn at the Birmingham Airport from which delegates can catch the monorail over to the NEC.

All hotels on the RI official hotel list will have transportation service to the NEC. There is a variety of prices available for hotels but many of the less expensive hotels do not have many rooms

and you need to book early. You can book on-line by going to www.rotary.org and clicking on "2009 Birmingham Convention" You do not have to wait for your RI registration number.

For those of you who have an adventurous spirit, you may want to rent a car and stay at a Bed and Breakfast (B&B). These are not difficult to find in these days of internet search capabilities. Look at a map at the south side of Birmingham and pull up some of the names of some of the smaller towns. You will find the B&Bs available to you relatively close to the NEC location.

Eating Out

It has been said, "Who wants to eat when you can drink!" Of course, the Brits are famous for their pubs and, in the old days, warm beer. The warm beer is, for the most part, a thing of the past. Pubs usually have the most reasonably-priced food. You order at the bar and the meal is brought to you. Those of you who don't want a beer might try a shandy (half lemonade and half beer). There is always excellent wine available as well. If you buy a meal at the bar no tipping is needed. Credit cards are used by everyone.

In Birmingham and the surrounding area there are

many excellent restaurants to rival the best in the world. When you pay by credit card most of the time there is no space left on the bill for a tip. You will have to have some cash for the tip, usually in the 10-15% range.

Sunday is the traditional day for many pubs and restaurants to serve the roast beef and Yorkshire pudding lunch. Don't choose the cheapest price since the beef will be tough. As always, you get what you pay for. A ploughman's lunch in a pub consists of fresh bread, cheese and pickles.—an excellent lunch with a beer or a glass of claret.



The Beautiful Location of the NEC

- *Various rates available*
- *Book early*
- *Don't be afraid to go off the beaten track!*



A Pub—One Excellent Choice for a Lovely



Optional Functions

The host Birmingham Convention committee is organizing six special events during the convention. They are:

- **The Lord Mayor's Grand DG Reunion Breakfast**
- **The Foundation 10k Fun Run**
- **Music Fantasia**
- **Warwick Castle Mediaeval Spectacular**
- **Home Hospitality**
- **Night on Birmingham**

In this issue two of these functions are highlighted.

Music Fantasia

This events features the Birmingham Symphony Orchestra which is certainly one of the top ten symphony orchestras in the world. This event will be at the National Indoor Arena in the Birmingham City Centre featuring the famous singer Katherine Jenkins. What a

way to start a convention! The will certainly be something you will not want to miss.



Mediaeval Spectacular at Warwick Castle

This event will occur on the Sunday evening. Most of the upper class of England used to inter-marry to such an extent that the children and heirs to the various earldoms were either mad or nearly so! The result was that these families lost their power. This was not the case with the Earls of Warwick who remained powerful throughout the centuries. The result is that the castle is well-preserved.

Warwick Castle is now owned by Madame Toussaud's, the famous waxworks company, so a lot of money has been spent on updating the castle to receive visitors.

There will be many activities going on during this event, including a mediaeval jousting tournament. Sit back with a pint of ale and enjoy the fun. Also take the opportunity to tour the castle and see the world's largest catapult (siege machine) capable of hurling a 22-ton stone!



Some Local Attractions

There are so many local attractions that are worth visiting in the greater West Midlands area. Some are listed below and two are highlighted in this issue. I will feature others in the next newsletter.

- **Black Country Museum**
- **Coventry Cathedral**
- **Birmingham Cathedral**
- **Coventry Transport Museum**
- **Warwick Castle**
- **Lichfield Cathedral**

Black Country Museum

This is worth at least a half-day visit. Birmingham and the surrounding area was very heavily industrialized from the turn of the 20th century until the early 1960s. During the winter months fog and smog would be so thick on certain days that you could barely see your hand in front of you. The working man of the day had a difficult life and in turn many families had very poor living conditions.

The Black Country Museum takes you back to that era and makes you realize how much progress we have made. You will not be disappointed with the visit.



Coventry Cathedral

Visiting the new Coventry Cathedral built in the 1950s is always a moving experience. It is attached to the original cathedral that was bombed, along with much of the city of Coventry in the early part of the war.

The Brits had broken the German secret code and knew ahead of time that Coventry would be bombed. If an evacuation had been carried out, the Germans would have known the code had been broken.

As you tour the new cathedral and see its various features I think you will see how important our Rotary Foundation is in promoting peace. I always sit in the cathedral for a few quiet minutes and come away re-

freshed and thankful that the horror of war reminds us of how precious the peace we seek is.

When the cathedral was first built, many Brits felt that it was much too modern. At the time I was in my teens and found the experience of being in the building extremely moving. Come and see for yourself.



My Favourites in England

Many of you watch PBS or a version of TVO in Ontario, so you will probably have the same loves as I do, such as "All Creatures Great and Small" based on the stories by James Herriott and "Heartbeat". To me a visit home is never complete without a visit to the Yorkshire Dales, otherwise known as James Herriott Country.

James' real name was Al Whyte and he lived in Thirsk. You can now visit the original Skeldale House and surgery in Thirsk (www.worldofjamesherriott.com). Visit the Thirsk Rotary Club and I am sure there are Rotarians there who had their cats and dogs cared for by Al.

When I go to the Yorkshire Dales I normally stay in guest houses or B&Bs in the southern part, such as Grassington, Bainbridge, Kettlewell (site of the movie "Calendar Girls") and then drive around the area and walk from one place to another, always finding a pub at the end of the walk! The peace away from the hustle and bustle of the world is wonderful!

In another newsletter I will feature "Heartbeat" which is set in Goathland in the North Yorkshire Moors.



A Truly Spectacular View of a Typical Village in the Yorkshire Dales "James Herriott Country"

Another Local Attraction (continued from page 3)

Coventry Transport Museum

Along with Birmingham, Coventry was the heart of the automotive and transport industry. Most of the famous British makes were produced in the West Midlands. The famous Dunlop tires and the Lucas electrical systems were also made here. Those of you who have driven the older British cars will remember Lucas, which was called "Prince of Darkness".

So take a step back into the old world of automotive manufacturing for two or three hours and enjoy these examples of the transport of the past.



*Calcott Cabriolet
1921*

More Local Attractions (continued from page 3)

- Dinner or holiday on a canal boat
- Droitwich Roman Baths
- Worcester Cathedral
- Royal Worcester Pottery
- Shugborough Hall and Farm (Lord Lichfield Estate)
- Stoke-on-Trent (Moorcroft, Doulton, etc.)
- Transport Museum in Wythall
- County Cricket Match of Warwick at Egbaston Club
- Cadbury Original Factory and Bournville
- Birmingham's Antique Jewelry Area
- Dudley Zoo and Castle
- Bourton-on-Water (featured in Dick Francis's books)
- The Cotswold Villages



Bourton-on-the-Water

