

November 2002

Cheryll and I just returned from England (and a few hours in Wales). We spent six nights in London. We saw eight West End shows including Chicago, Grease, Art, Life x 3, Stones in His Pockets, the Complete Works of William Shakespeare (abridged), Taboo, and Blood Brothers. We visited Windsor Castle and several museums. One day we took a boat down the river to Greenwich and toured the Royal Observatory.

Sandwiched in the middle of this was a three-day trip to Southwest England and just across the Welsh border. We took the tube (subway) to Heathrow Airport and rented a car. Getting used to driving a manual transmission car from the right side on the left side took some time, and the driving and navigating the narrow hedgerows was pretty stressful but without incident for 500 miles.

You may recall that our Great Grandfather, Henry Charles Williams immigrated to the US around 1880. He left some notes describing his homeland that were recorded by cousin Linda Moore in her genealogical work. He went to work in the coal and iron ore mines of Western England at the age of nine. His notes describe the area of the mines near Cinderford, England.

It was a three-hour drive to our first stop in the town of Little Dean five miles east of the Welsh border. Little Dean has around 50 houses and isn't on most maps. We asked a man in the store, but he only knew one person named Williams. He gave us directions to the graveyard, but we couldn't find any headstones labeled Williams. A man came to replace the flowers on a grave. He had a cloth covering the hole in his throat. I correctly surmised that he was a veteran of the coalmines. He kindly directed us to the vicar for birth and death records, and a mine where there were tours. The vicar wasn't around, so we headed up the hill into Cinderford.

We had lunch in a 160-year-old pub and started asking the locals for directions to the mines described in Henry's notes. One mine has been recently covered by a new upscale residential subdivision, but we were unable to determine how anyone living in this rural, hilly area could afford an upscale lifestyle. Henry's notes indicated that he worked at the Crabtree Hill "colliery" (coal mine). An older gentleman in the pub was able to direct us to an abandoned coalmine on Crabtree Hill. Crabtree Hill is now in a park called the Little Dean Forest. Its gently rolling hills are covered by a mixed forest and crisscrossed by hiking and mountain bike trails. He was able to give us directions for a three-mile walk to the abandoned mine on Crabtree Hill. We followed his directions, and sure enough, there was the mine. There's not much left today, a couple of fenced off pits, some foundations and a chimney. The railroad tracks are now a bike trail. Cool!

We spent the next two days exploring towns along the coast before heading to Stonehenge and then back into London. A fine trip.

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