

## DORSET 2022

### **Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2022 – Day 1**

This holiday was going to be a third and a first. That is, our third holiday in Dorset, but our first holiday with our son Daniel, his wife Anneka, their son Reuben (age 3) and Anneka's children Levi (age 17), Ella (age 15) and Leila (age 13). We had rented a self-catering house at West Lulworth, a short walk away from the beach itself, Lulworth Cove on the Jurassic Coast.

The cove is known internationally as one of the finest examples of a near-circular bay that has resulted from the differential erosion of softer rock strata behind a harder, resistant outer wall of rock. Around 25 million years ago, the bedrock around Lulworth lifted, twisted and folded, due to tectonic movement of the Earth's crust. The area contains some of the finest folding strata in Europe.

The rocks at Lulworth now lie with the oldest rock, Portland limestone, nearest the sea. These are very hard rocks that formed 145 million years ago in the late Jurassic/early Cretaceous period and make up the coastline holding back the sea.

At the end of the last Ice Age, around 11.5 thousand years ago, a river of glacial meltwater flowed overland to the sea. Together with harsh waves from the sea side, water broke through tiny weaknesses in the hard Portland stone and began eroding the rocks. When the sea reached younger, softer clay rocks behind the Portland stone, erosion was able to take place more quickly.

The narrow entrance to the cove between the resistant Portland limestone pillars causes waves to bend in an arc-shape around the rocks, in a process known as diffraction. Over a great deal of time, this wave pattern has eventually worn away the rocks to leave the wonderful semi-circular cove as it is today. These natural, dynamic processes continue gradually and inevitably to shape the coast further.



**Lulworth Cove** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Now I understood (a bit better) the geological implications of where we were staying, I could relax and concentrate on simply enjoying the whole experience!

To be honest, that's not quite true, because all week I would find myself looking at the various rocks and the incredible rock formations and wishing I could properly understand ... everything. I'm not at all surprised Lulworth Cove was classified as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 2001.

As a victim of its own beauty, the area unfortunately suffers from a huge amount of footfall from its visitors. Many steps and fences have been put in place to limit the surface damage, but each year over 250,000 people walk across the hill that links Lulworth Cove to Durdle Door. Looking back, I wish I'd been one of them.

However, it was a long-awaited family holiday and by the time we arrived at our accommodation, we didn't have to wait any longer, as the others were already there. Since it was late afternoon, we briefly unpacked and had something to eat and drink before our first walk down to the cove. This took about ten minutes, but would have been a bit quicker without an inquisitive little boy, who was clearly excited for us all to be together on holiday. He wasn't the only one.

It was obviously a highly popular place, still thronging with people, both on the beach and wandering around the few different shops, while a number of people could be seen walking along the clifftops. We were drawn to join them, for what was clearly a great vantage point. The pathways were chalky and the sea was very blue, so much so that Aneka (who shall henceforth be named Neeka) said she felt she was somewhere more like the Mediterranean.

We first walked a short distance from the west of Lulworth to Stair Hole, a small cove with natural arches cut into steeply-dipping basal Purbeck and Portland limestones. Here it was easy to understand how the sea erodes the softer rock to make fascinating shapes. In fact, Stair Hole is considered to be one of the best places to understand how erosion shaped, and continues to shape, the coast.



**Stair Hole showing the Lulworth Crumple, left** (photo by Alan Santillo)

What is known as the Lulworth Crumple is very visible at Stair Hole. This is an area of limestone strata showing clearly how originally flat beds of rock have been lifted, tilted and twisted to form some astounding patterns.



**Back to Lulworth**

Leaving the Lulworth Crumple, we walked back towards Lulworth Cove, stopping at a clifftop viewpoint before heading back down to ground level. By then it was early evening and our hopes for an ice cream were dashed. We therefore popped in at a pub, where Reuben had an ice cream dessert and the rest of us had a drink. It was very pleasant sitting in the beer garden, as the air gradually cooled.

Once back at the house, Neeka kindly prepared halloumi and salad wraps for pescatarians Alan, Ella and me, with meat versions for the others. We were still in the throes of settling in, so the rest of the evening passed quickly. Reuben had slept during the day and took a while to settle, but eventually peace reigned...

The house was on three levels, with two bedrooms and a bathroom on the ground floor, a large living room and kitchen/diner on the middle floor and two bedrooms and a bathroom on the top floor. Alan and I were on the ground floor with Ella and Leila, with the others up aloft. It was an arrangement that worked well and although I had trouble getting to sleep in a strange bed in a strange place, I whiled away the hours quite comfortably, looking forward to the week ahead.

### **Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July – Day 2**

Daniel (who shall henceforth be named Dan) and Reuben were already up and having breakfast when Alan and I went upstairs to the living room. The plan for the day was a trip to Portland Bill and Chesil Bank, taking a packed lunch. I was quite excited to be going there again, having first visited in 1987 with our two young children. Since yesterday, Dan had been comparing memories with us about that trip and for an 11-year-old at the time, he was doing remarkably well.

Reuben was also doing remarkably well at letting us all know he was there, so it was quite a feat to leave the house at a reasonably early time for a day's outing. Portland Bill was about an hour's drive away, on a dry day with sunny intervals. When we got out of our cars in the car park, we realised it was also rather windy, but walked undeterred towards the famous tall white and red lighthouse in front of us, on the southernmost point of Dorset.



**Portland Bill lighthouse**

The Isle of Portland is a tied island, 4 miles/6 kilometres long by 1.7 miles/2.7 kilometres wide. The barrier beach of Chesil Bank joins Portland with the mainland, with the A354 road passing down the Portland end of the beach and over the Fleet Lagoon by bridge to the mainland. It's an unusual area, but a clever arrangement between nature and civilisation.

Portland Bill lighthouse stands at 135 feet/41 metres high and was designed by Sir Thomas Matthews. Wakeham Brothers of Plymouth began work on the foundations in October 1903 and it was completed in 1905 at a cost of £13,000. The lamp was first lit on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1906. It underwent a major restoration programme in 1990 and on 18<sup>th</sup> March 1996, all monitoring and control was transferred to the Trinity House Operations and Planning Centre in Harwich.

Portland's coast had been notorious over centuries for the number of shipwrecks caused by the shallow reefs of its coastline, together with the Shambles sandbank and the strong Portland tidal race. From Roman times, before the advent of lighthouses, beacon fires would be lit on Branscombe Hill above Portland Bill in an attempt to warn passing ships of danger.

Two original lighthouses had been constructed in 1716 and rebuilt in 1869, but were decommissioned in 1906 when the current lighthouse was completed. One of them became a bird observatory in 1961, while in 1923, the other one became the home of Marie Stopes, the campaigner for women's rights and a pioneer of family planning. Nowadays it has a new life as a holiday let.

Portland Bill lighthouse now guides sea traffic heading for Portland or Weymouth and also acts as a waymark for vessels navigating the English Channel. It was made a Grade II listed building, together with its boundary walls, in May 1993. The lighthouse is open to the public, with tours run by Trinity House and a visitor centre that's housed in the former lighthouse keeper's quarters.

However, we were happy to take a walk around the outside area, looking at the sea and the maritime flora on the limestone grassland. It was dry and rocky, but a close look revealed a number of wildflowers. I wasn't very good at identifying them, but I did see small scabious and sea thrift. Of more importance in the area, though, are rare mosses, lichens and liverworts. Portland sea lavender grows only at Portland – we needed a tour with a knowledgeable botanist!



**Unidentified maritime flora** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Instead, we left the refreshing briny air blowing in from the sea and returned to the car park to drive to Chesil Bank, or Chesil Beach. We'd been here on our first Dorset visit in 1985, but my only memory is of masses of banked-up pebbles, stretching into the distance, that were exceptionally hard to walk on.

When we arrived at the Ferrybridge car park, the wind had sprung up even more as we walked onto the beach – where the masses of banked-up pebbles, stretching into the distance, were very hard to walk on! However, we ploughed slowly on up the pebbly bank in front of us, with the sea still out of sight the other side.

Aptly named Chesil Bank is one of three major shingle beach structures in Britain, its name of 'Chesil' derived from the Old English 'ceosele' or 'cisele', which means 'gravel' or 'shingle'. It stretches for 18 miles/29 kilometres from West Bay to the Isle of Portland and in some places is up to 50 feet/15 metres high and 660 feet/200 metres wide. The shallow tidal lagoon known as the Fleet lies behind the beach, both part of the Jurassic Coast and a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

I found myself stumbling on upwards behind the others, feeling a bit of strain on leg muscles. On the other hand, Reuben was running gleefully on the pebbles and happily investigating all that was around him – mostly pebbles, it has to be said.



**Reuben and Ella at Chesil Bank, with the Fleet on the right**  
(photo by Alan Santillo)

Unsurprisingly, there have been numerous shipwrecks over the years on Chesil Beach, especially during the age of sail. During this time, a string of coastguards was based along the beach, with lookouts and cottages at significant places, but nowadays the National Coastwatch Institution has taken over. Chesil Beach Watch also has a Facebook page, posting daily photos.

Much of the Chiswell and Fleet villages were destroyed in the Great Storm of 1824 and more recent storms are still causing havoc, albeit by some people's reckless behaviour. On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 in the Chiswell area, huge waves were crashing onto the beach, causing water and débris to run into the streets.

Crowds of around 200 people had gathered to watch the storm, with some of them jumping up on the sea wall. The Portland Bill Coastguard Team were called to give safety advice and ask people to leave the area, but three of the team were injured when they were hit by a freak 30-foot wave. They were thrown against the sea wall, with one volunteer being seriously injured and needing hospital treatment.

Thankfully, none of us were injured as we finally reached the top of the bank and were able to see the sea. Our faces were suddenly blasted with a fierce onshore wind and we decided more or less on the spot not to eat our packed lunch on the beach as planned. Instead, we scrunched and semi-slid our way down the pebbles rather more quickly than when we'd ploughed our way up!

There was a visitor centre not far from the car park with some wooden picnic benches alongside, so we sat down in the madly blowing wind, anchoring down anything that could take flight. It was warm despite the wind and a happy first lunchtime of the holiday, before we went in to investigate the visitor centre.

The Fine Foundation Chesil Beach Centre, to give it its proper name, contained a small gift shop as well as providing various displays on all aspects of Chesil Beach and the Fleet. It was very informative, with some hands-on activities for children (and like-minded adults), so we spent at least half an hour in there.

Since we still had a free afternoon, Neeka suggested we go to the Sand World Sculpture Park in Weymouth. Located in Lodmoor Country Park, there were sand sculptures on view that had been crafted from Weymouth's eminently suitable golden sand. I was sure I'd seen some of these on television in the past, looking incredible for being sculptured only from compacted damp sand.

As we drove through Weymouth, I had a few vague memories of our 1987 visit, including a donkey ride each for 11-year-old Daniel and 6-year-old Rachel along the beach, a walk around the shops looking for souvenirs and Rachel's fascination with Weymouth's Jubilee Clock Tower.

This had been built of wrought- and cast-iron and set on a base of Portland stone, ready to be erected in 1888 for the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Historic England (the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England, to be pedantic) has described the clock as a "florid but characteristic enrichment to the sea-front". Fair enough, but Rachel had loved it and that was good enough for me.

We found the Lodmoor Country Park easily enough, which looked as if it would be an interesting place, perhaps especially for families with children, as it contained several independent attractions. We walked through to where Sand World was located and immediately saw some amazing sculptures. There were some in an outside area, but then we saw there were a whole lot more under cover.

They were all amazing and what was really interesting was seeing one of the sculptors at work. I'm sure she would have answered any questions, but as it was, we all seemed to feel we should leave her to her inspiration.

Some of the sculptures carried underlying messages, although an incredible one depicting the Russian invasion of Ukraine spoke for itself, with thought-provoking imagery. It was named 'A Message of Peace', created over 10 days with 150 tonnes of sand, by Slava Borecki. Although currently living in Poland, Mr Borecki's hometown is 62 miles/100 kilometres from Kyiv and was bombed by Russian forces. He has since opened his Polish home to Ukrainian refugees.



**A Message of Peace**

I also particularly liked a large diorama depicting the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb and other Egyptian items. The detail was positively breathtaking, although I regret to say I failed to note the creator/s.



**Part of the Egyptian diorama** (photo by Alan Santillo)

After being wowed by the exhibits, we wandered into another area, where there was a sand pit, sand tables and various pieces of equipment for those who felt creative to make their own sculptures, such as Neeka! It looked very therapeutic:



**Neeka chilling out with sand** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Over at one of the tables, Ella was very much into creating weirdly fantastic shapes with watery sand. It looked mesmerising, so much so that Leila and Dan were drawn to become creative themselves. Levi seemed to be running around to make sure Reuben wasn't into mischief, while filling out a quiz.



**Sand therapy** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Eventually, Ella was prised away from the sand table and we drove back to West Lulworth for some refreshment, which involved walking down to the cove for flavoured ice cream. There was an interesting visitor centre and shop that we looked around, before returning to the house for food.

I'd like to say we had a relaxing evening, but Reuben was still full of energy and questions... I loved the questions, actually, it showed his very active mind and besides, with four adults and three teenagers, we could take turns! Having a bath settled him and thus the evening once again passed comfortably.

### **Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> July – Day 3**

After sleeping a lot better than the first night, it was a little disappointing to see the sky rather overcast, but it was still dry and our only opportunity to visit the abandoned village of Tyneham, a drive of about 25 minutes away.

Due to its proximity to the Lulworth firing ranges, the Government had decided in World War II to appropriate Tyneham village and much of its surrounding land as a training ground for the allied forces. Just before Christmas in 1943, the villagers had been informed they must temporarily leave their homes for 'the greater good'.

Tyneham is only accessible when the Lulworth Ranges are open to the public, which is usually at weekends when no firing is taking place. The ranges are part of the AFV (Armoured Fighting Vehicles) Gunnery School, which is an important training establishment of the British Army. When there is live firing, red flags are flown and lamps are lit.

I remembered Tyneham from our 1987 visit, when it had evoked an aura of lives interrupted and an unsurprising atmosphere of desolation – this hadn't changed:



**Tyneham deserted village** (photo by Alan Santillo)

The villagers hadn't known it at the time, but they were never to return to their former homes. When they left, they pinned a note on the door of the village church that read: "Please treat the church and houses with care. We have given up our homes, where many of us have lived for generations, to help win the war to keep men free. We will return one day and thank you for treating the village kindly."

Since nearly all the evacuees have now died, it is highly unlikely the Government will release the village, which to me seems very much like a betrayal of trust. How must they have felt in previous years, knowing their old homes had become a tourist destination? It certainly felt odd wandering through the remains of the old houses that must have gradually deteriorated into ruins.

Before their forced evacuation, Tyneham had been a countryside village situated only a couple of miles from the sea, with its own church, school, post office, rectory, several farms and many cottages. The most prominent building was the mansion known as Tyneham House, or simply the Great House.

We found our feet taking us towards St Mary's Church, built of limestone rubble and dating back as far as the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although the south transept had been rebuilt in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. It was somewhat small compared to other parish churches, but it had served the Tyneham villagers quite adequately and the atmosphere inside was peaceful, although exuding a slight sense of sadness.

Immediately after Tyneham was taken over by the military, the church was neglected and some of the fittings were taken away. The organ and the bells were moved to St Michael and All Angels Church at the former civil parish of nearby Steeple. In April 2014, Steeple's civil parish was abolished and was merged with Tyneham to form Steeple with Tyneham. Meanwhile, Tyneham Church's Jacobean pulpit was moved to Lulworth Camp.

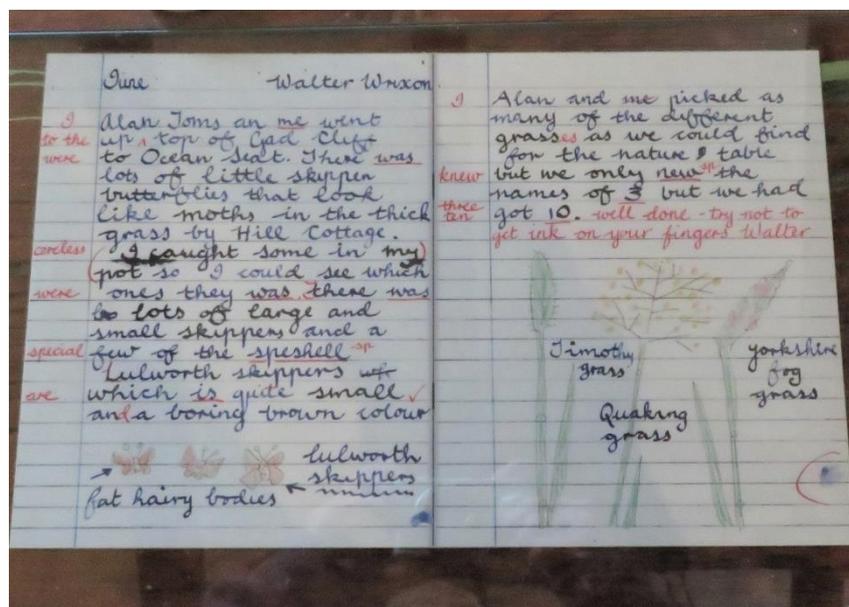
Nowadays, the church contains different displays that in effect record the history of everyday village life, in documents, photos, artefacts and other items. The names of the villagers are recorded on the inside walls, as well as in a bible.



**Tyneham Church** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Life for the villagers had been simple and uncomplicated, because although they had no electricity or running water, they were more or less cocooned from the strife and pressures of the outside world – a situation extremely rare today. It must have been a great shock to leave what had once been a safe haven.

I found the schoolhouse particularly moving, with its exhibits of children's work, books, a blackboard and other schoolroom items. It humanised what had taken place and I felt sorry for the teachers and children, including Walter, who had struggled with his spelling and grammar, but was clearly interested in nature.



**A corrected piece of work in the schoolroom**

The former farm was also very interesting, with a barn, farm implements and many old tools and other artefacts on display. There was also a rather eye-catching 'scrappy wall' that seemed to be made up of mainly used ordnance from World War II, with signs explaining significant military events in the area.



**Part of the 'scrappy wall'**

In December 1943, Tyneham had become part of the 'Dorset Coast Battle Area', used as a training ground for British and American tank crews based at the nearby camps of Bovington and Lulworth. By the following spring, the south coast was a vital location for D-Day preparations. A total of 11-million acres of land, much of it farmland, had become airfields, camps, training grounds and munition dumps.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, an armada of 7,000 boats with 54,000 vehicles and 156,000 troops left the south coast for the beaches of Normandy in German-occupied France. The 34,000 American troops based in Dorset left Weymouth and Portland for one of the five Allied landing sites in Normandy, code-named 'Omaha Beach'. It went badly and 2,500 Americans were killed that day.

In happier news, Ella managed to rescue a butterfly trapped in one of the farm outbuildings, by coaxing it into her cupped hands and releasing it outside, much to the delight of Reuben. It fluttered away quickly, as the wind had become rather strong – so gusty, in fact, that we decided not to go on one of the Lulworth Range walks, but wend our way back to the house instead.

After a relaxing lunchtime, the weather had improved, so we embarked on another excursion to a 1987 visited location, namely the fossil forest at the east of Lulworth Cove. This was another timely visit, as the fossil forest is only accessible when the MOD ranges are open to the public. My abiding memory of that first trip was a tortuous walk across the constantly sliding, unfriendly large pebbles of Lulworth – it was frankly a miracle that I hadn't actually tripped, due to unsuitable footwear!

This time I was sure it would be better, if my trusty trainers had anything to do with it. First of all, though, on our walk down to the cove, we stopped for some home-made ice cream at a different place. We'd be returning here several times in the future, as the ice creams were wonderful, with many fabulous flavours.

After this delight, we began the walk along the beach, almost to the end. I was a bit miffed to discover that my trusty trainers weren't all that much better on the constantly sliding, unfriendly large pebbles, but it was all part of the experience...

The next part of the experience was Dan informing us that we'd have to climb up the cliff a little way on a narrow track, which was something I didn't seem to remember from the first visit. Maybe I'd blocked it out of my memory! As has so often happened, the others in the group went ahead and ascended the cliff like mountain goats, while I clambered slowly and uncertainly upwards in a most ungainly fashion, often using my hands to ensure I didn't lose my balance and make an untimely, dangerous descent back onto the pebbly beach below.



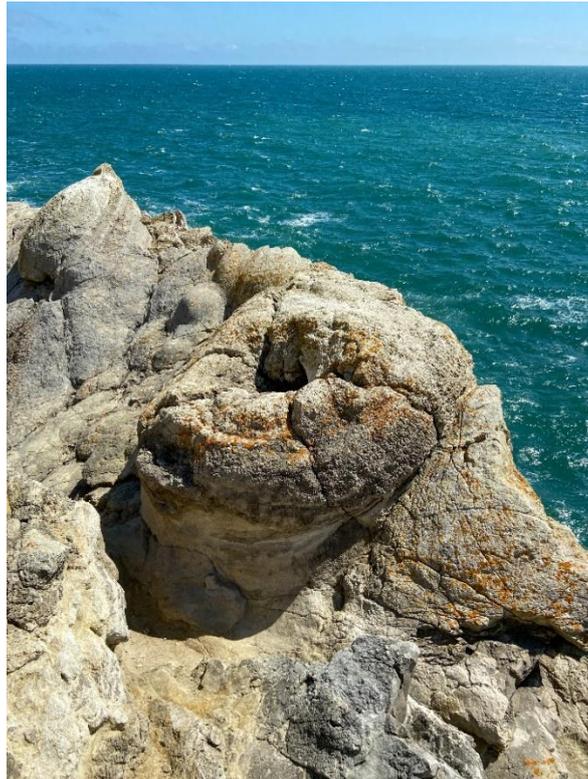
**The narrow track upwards**

However, the ascent was achieved without fatality and we found ourselves on top of an open expanse, with the sea to our right and much vegetation to our left. We were a little unsure which way to go, but managed to arrive at the right place, where there was a series of steep steps down to the fossil forest.

As the Jurassic era had drawn to a close, there'd been a global drop in sea levels, which meant that shallow tropical seas gave way to coastal plains. For a short time around 145 million years ago, a forest was able to grow at the east of Lulworth Cove and since flowering plants had yet to evolve at this point in Earth's history, the forest was dominated by cycads, tree-ferns and conifers.

When the climate became wetter again, a lagoon rose and swamped the forest, which caused the trees to die. Their trunks, roots and stumps were preserved by being encased in a limestone sediment from the deposits of freshwater algae. The unusual rounded shapes this process created are known as 'algal burrs', which are among the strangest fossils found on the Jurassic coast.

As I forced my tired legs down the steep steps, I was nevertheless delighted by the view across the coast. The sea was a deep blue and the wind was still whipping the waves capriciously – and then we were there, sheltered down amongst the ancient landscape on a rocky ledge, while the sun beat down on us.



**Fossilised remains of a tree** (photo by Alan Santillo)

I remembered the bizarre shape of the burrs, or thrombolites, as well as the odd sensation of being in a forest of rocks. There were also ripple marks of the ancient sea floor to see, as well as fossilised algal mats, made prettier with living plants.



**The ancient sea floor**

We were fortunate that the fossil forest was open at all, as it had been closed from 2015 until 2020, due to a large rock fall that had damaged the steps leading down to the site, making it too dangerous. Several organisations had funded repairs, enabling new steps to be installed and an area of unstable rock made safe, with a catch fence in case of future rock falls. A new seating area had also been created.



**Interesting rock strata**

As well as the fossil forest, the rock strata was also fascinating, but after 20 minutes or so of exploration, it was time to make our way back up the steep steps, which seemed even steeper than on the way down. It was still very warm as we made it to the top and deliberated which way to go to arrive back on the beach.



**Where are the steps?** (photo by Alan Santillo)

The chosen route was very overgrown with vegetation and brambles, but we made our way through, without mishap, to the top of some more steps. More steps!

These particular steps, which we'd walked past on our way across the beach to the cliff climb, were widely spaced and towards the bottom they petered out altogether. This necessitated another ungainly clambering situation on my part, but this time using my rear end rather than my hands.

My legs were trembling by the time we reached the beach, but they fortunately managed to carry me back across the constantly sliding, unfriendly large pebbles and onto solid ground, followed by the walk back up the hill to our accommodation.

Dan and Neeka went for an evening walk after we'd eaten and Reuben was asleep, but Alan and I didn't join them. Speaking for myself, I was spent, fatigued, knackered, pooped – but it had been a brilliant, interesting day and I was happy.

### **Monday 25<sup>th</sup> July – Day 4**

This morning we'd decided to seek out different venues, with Alan and me heading to Corfe Castle, while the others had booked a visit to the Tank Museum at Bovington. I'd been hoping for some blue sky for photographic purposes, but the weather gods were not on my side and the sky was decidedly grey and overcast, despite a hopeful forecast. However, it was dry and it was a castle I'd wanted to visit for some time, so we jolly well went and made the best of it!

I could remember being in Corfe village in 1987 and looking up at the castle, but not actually going inside it, so I was intrigued to arrive and see the castle up close. In fact, it felt very close indeed, as we left the car park and took a narrow path that wound straight up the side of the motte, to the level of the gatehouse. Corfe village was also at this level, so our first stop was at the National Trust tea room there, which was only just opening.



**Climbing up the motte** (photo by Alan Santillo)

At the tea room, we sat outside with a tantalising view of the castle in front of us. The blue sky was attempting to break through, but with hardly any success.



**View of the keep area from the outer bailey** (photo by Alan Santillo)

By the time we left the tearoom, showed our National Trust cards and entered through the gatehouse, there were already quite a few people there. Like most fortifications, Corfe Castle's strategic location in the Purbeck Hills meant that it was an important defensive site long before the castle that we know of today started to be built on the orders of William the Conqueror in the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

This importance was demonstrated when the natural motte of the castle mound was one of the first castles of William the Conqueror to be topped with stone walls, rather than the usual practice of erecting wooden palisades. Purbeck limestone was quarried only a few miles away, prized as being easy to shape, but strong enough to resist the effects of weathering.



**Saxon herringbone design** (photo by Alan Santillo)

In the west bailey, a stone hall was built, its current remains the earliest surviving part of the castle, although predated by an even older Saxon hall. It's most likely that local masons were employed, as the herringbone construction style is typically Saxon – and really rather attractive, I thought.

After William died in 1087, his son, King Henry I, took eight or so years to build the stone keep, completed in 1105. Standing at 69 feet/21 metres high on top of its 180 feet/55 metres mound, it was a dominant symbol of Norman power that must have stood out for miles around, especially after being whitewashed in 1244.

King John (reign 1199-1216) had a significant impact on Corfe Castle. His darker side was manifested in building the Butavant tower, to imprison his nephew Arthur, a rival to the throne. John also took Arthur's sister Eleanor prisoner, along with her 24 knights. Eleanor is believed to have lived comfortably, but her knights were thrown into the oubliette of the tower and largely forgotten.



**The Butavant Tower** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Ironically, it was while we were at this tower of misery and woe, wondering why it was so named, that the sun came out briefly, before rapidly disappearing again!

The more positive side of King John was seen in his decidedly luxurious addition to the castle, referred to as the 'gloriette'. This was more or less a pocket palace in the latest architectural style, employing England's finest craftsmen. It was magnificently decorated and even had the comfort of an indoor toilet.

Other more practical defensive work undertaken during his reign included a new thick curtain wall of stone; a big ditch between the castle mound and the outer bailey; towers in the west bailey and improvements to the outer defences.



**The gloriette** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Following John's reign, King Henry III (reign 1216-72) had the stone walls of the west bailey completed and also had the south-west gatehouse built, along with a wall dividing the outer bailey. King Edward I (reign 1272-1307) continued the work of his ancestors, so that by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Corfe Castle had reached its peak – literally, as Edward had increased the height of the keep.

The castle remained a royal fortress until Queen Elizabeth I (reign 1558-1603) sold it to her Lord Chancellor, Sir Christopher Hatton. It was bought by Sir John Bankes in 1635, but the English Civil War broke out in 1642 and a year later, most of Dorset was under Parliamentary control.

While John Bankes was in Oxford with the king, he left his wife Mary and their children at Corfe Castle, relying on his men to 'hold the fort' in the royal cause. A first attempt by Parliamentary forces to infiltrate the castle's garrison failed, but a siege lasted for six weeks, until Lady Mary was relieved by Royalist forces.

By 1645, with Parliamentarians predominating, Corfe Castle was still a Royalist stronghold. One of Lady Mary's officers betrayed her by leading a group of Parliamentarians, who were pretending to be Royalists, into the castle. She was forced to surrender, but was allowed to leave with her garrison. Parliamentarians ordered the defences to be slighted, but the castle was so well constructed that demolition was partial, with only the gatehouse, towers and walls blown up.

After the monarchy was restored in 1660, the Bankes family chose to build a new house at Kingston Lacy on their other Dorset estate, but the castle remained in the family. Their descendant, Ralph Bankes (1902-81), bequeathed the whole of the Bankes estate to the National Trust on his death and although there had been previous archaeological work, further excavations jointly funded by the National Trust and English Heritage were carried out between 1986 and 1997.

Corfe Castle is thought to be the inspiration for Enid Blyton's Kirrin Island and it was used as a location for the 1957 film serial of *Five on a Treasure Island*, as well as the 1971 film *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*.

We'd enjoyed our Corfe Castle visit – we'd investigated towers, peered into nooks and crannies and climbed to the lofty heights, but it was time to leave and hopefully make a return visit one fine day, now we understood more of the history.



**Lofty heights** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Walking back to the car park, the village seemed to be heaving with people, lots of them anxious to find a parking space. It was troublesome even to get out on the road, so it was with some relief that we drove back to the house, via a handy supermarket, for a relaxing lunch. The others returned a little later, as Dan was going to take Alan to see the new *Top Gun* film.

After they'd left, the rest of us had some food and then decided it was time for ice cream number three. We returned to the place of the fabulous flavours and went to sit on our favourite little nearby wall, watching the Lulworth world go by.

Later, when we were all back at the house and Reuben was in bed, Neeka asked if Alan and I would like to join her and Dan for a drink at the pub just a few minutes away down the road. Mobile phones and three sensible sibling teenagers meant it was perfectly safe, so we agreed and went to sit in the pub garden with a drink.

It was very pleasant being able to sit, sip and chat, while the evening progressed and the light gradually faded. After we'd returned to the house, I think Dan went out again to take night-time photos, but it was bedtime for Alan and me!

### **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July – Day 5**

The weather was sunny and bright this morning, so we followed the plan to have some time on the beach at Lulworth. It was so good to be able just to walk down the road a bit and there we were, with not too many hordes of people. After finding our spot, we did some beachy things, like sit on towels and apply sun screen, play with pebbles, people-watch and try out the water for temperature.

The Boat Shed Café was at hand for morning coffee and later on, Neeka and Levi went to hire a paddle board. Alan and I then enjoyed ourselves watching various combinations of people having a go on it...



**Leila paddles while Ella balances**



**Dan goes solo**

The sea was shallow – so shallow, in fact, that one man on a paddle board fell off onto an underwater rock and cut his leg, but fortunately there were no injuries for any of us. At midday, we sampled some of the takeaway food from one of the food outlets just up the road and ate lunch on the beach, with the holiday vibe working well. It wasn't too hot and there weren't too many people, so all was well.

After a while, we were ready for a change and went to see a photo exhibition in a Lulworth shop. It made sense to take the beach items back to the house, but then we had a free afternoon on our hands. Clouds Hill, a cottage that was once Lawrence of Arabia's rural retreat, wasn't far and seemed a good idea.

Unusually, nobody had checked opening times and it was shut when we arrived. Plan B meant a short drive to a wooded area near Brianspuddle (whoever Briant was), where we found Culpepper's Dish car park and went for a woodland walk.

Culpepper's Dish is a natural sink-hole 870 feet/265 metres round, with sides 141 feet/43 metres high. It's believed that in the ground, acidic rainwater dissolved chalk into large sand-pipes and the sink-hole was created by natural materials falling into these sand-pipes. Culpepper's Dish has collapsed in a crater-like shape, now covered by vegetation and apparently viewable from the road.

I must confess that I didn't discern it either from the road or anywhere else, but I wasn't really bothered, as it was lovely simply to walk in the woods. We followed tracks and spotted some huge fir cones. Dan and Reuben played a game of 'hit the fir cone with the branch' and Reuben was really rather good at it.



**A walk in the woods**

After we got back to the house, it seemed a perfect time to walk down the road for another flavoured ice cream, which is exactly what we did. We sat on the nearby low wall again and discussed the different flavours, as you do. Chocolate orange was coming out top, but Reuben stuck to his best-loved mint choc chip 😊

After tea, it was decided to walk to a pub up the road (as opposed to the one down the road), because we were looking for somewhere child-friendly to have a meal on our last evening. The walk was longer than I'd expected, but it was very agreeable to sit outside and enjoy an evening drink. Reuben thought so too, except he didn't sit down much! Unfortunately, though, the pub didn't fit the bill for our last evening meal.

By the time we walked back to the house, Reuben was still raring to go (although to be fair he'd been in his pushchair rather than walking). On the other hand, I found I was raring to go to bed. Once Reuben had finally succumbed to sleep, Dan and Neeka went out again for photographic purposes, making the most of the lovely location and the weather conditions for night-sky photography. It was hard to believe the next day would be our penultimate one...

### **Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> July – Day 6**

Today was our pre-booked trip to Brownsea Island, owned by the National Trust, with the northern half managed by Dorset Wildlife Trust. My memory of our first visit in 1987 was vague, as was Alan's and also Dan's. What I mostly remembered was catching the ferry from Sandbanks and spending our time walking through lots of wooded areas until we came to a Baden-Powell commemorative stone.

Instead of Sandbanks, the ferry this time was from Poole Harbour, a drive of about 45 minutes. The weather was cloudy but dry and everything went smoothly, as we boarded the ferry and sat on top in the open air, along with a troop of Scouts and their jokey leaders. It was somewhat windy, but very interesting to see the land we passed, until we approached Brownsea Island 20 minutes or so later.



**Arriving at Brownsea Island** (photo by Alan Santillo)

I was quite excited, as the island is one of the few places in southern England where indigenous red squirrels survive and to see a red squirrel has been on my bucket list for many years. I don't exactly know why, except maybe because they belong in the UK and as a species have had a very hard time since non-native grey squirrels were introduced. Somewhat alarmingly, though, the red squirrel population of Brownsea Island is the only one known to carry the human form of the bacteria stem that causes leprosy in humans. We'll gloss over that...

We disembarked and walked along to an open grassy area where we sat and ate our packed lunch, before starting out on a woodland walk. The areas of woodland and heath on Brownsea Island are home to a wide variety of wildlife, including a large population of sika deer, along with ecosystems including a salt marsh, reed bed, two freshwater lakes and a brackish lagoon. There is a small population of peacocks and a heronry in which grey herons and little egrets nest.

However, I was eager to spot signs of red squirrels and soon saw plenty of trees with stripped bark high up, where the squirrels would make a rough nest called a drey out of leaves, twigs and strips of bark in the tree canopy. There were also lots of nibbled pine cones on the woodland floor, somewhat resembling apple cores, after the squirrels had obviously eaten the more succulent bits.

Unfortunately, there was not a red squirrel to be seen all the time we were there, so I decided to enjoy the moment with whatever it had to offer – the bucket list tick would have to wait. There was plenty to enjoy, since I love trees. I particularly liked a commemorative tree that must have been dated by dendrochronology to have been growing since 1687, until its demise in 2014:



**Growing since the time of King James II**

There was coniferous woodland and deciduous woodland, all clearly being looked after well, with ongoing conservation work. In the past, invasive species such as non-native rhododendrons have been cleared in many areas.

In time, we reached a natural play area and stopped there for a while, taking the chance to sit down on a handy log and have a drink of water. After playing with the different wooden structures, Reuben and Dan played 'hit the fir cone with the branch', since there was a plentiful supply of both branches and fir cones.



**'Hit the fir cone with the branch'**

More walking took us on to the Scout Stone, one of my memories from the first visit. This time, some Scouts were standing around it having what seemed like an investment ceremony, so I was loath to go and take a photo. Alan, on the other hand, had no qualms and for this I was thankful, as the stone is rather special.



**The Scout Stone** (photo by Alan Santillo)

In 1907, Robert Baden-Powell held an experimental camp on Brownsea Island to test out his Scouting ideas. For a week in August that year, 21 boys from mixed social backgrounds took part in activities such as camping, woodcraft, lifesaving, observation and patriotism, which led to the formation of the Scout movement the following year. I'm not sure patriotism would go down all that well nowadays, along with the fact that the camp was only for boys.

The international Scouting movement became incredibly successful and Boy Scouts carried on camping (but presumably not in the *Carry On* film sense) on the island until the 1930s, when the island's reclusive owner banned all public access. However, when the National Trust was able to purchase the island in 1962 for £100,000, a permanent Scout camp of 49 acres was opened in 1963 by Olave Baden-Powell, the widow of Robert Baden-Powell.

In August 2007, Brownsea Island was the focus of worldwide celebrations for 100 years of Scouting. Four camps were set up on the island, one of them a replica of the original 1907 camp. Hundreds of Scouts and Girl Guides from 160 countries arrived to take part in the what must have been a jamboree to remember and also present were 17 Baden-Powell descendants. The ferries must have been very busy... Incidentally, UK Scouts became fully mixed in 1991.

We walked on and came across a snack van selling ice cream, so gladly availed ourselves of some tubs containing various flavours – not in the same league as Lulworth's home-made cones, but very welcome nevertheless, as we were hot and dusty by then. Just across from the van (and some very functional, clean, camp-like toilets) were a number of wooden signs on poles that Scout visitors had left, from far-flung places including Calgary in Canada, Chile, Damascus in Syria, Korea, Norway, Poland and Portugal.





**Too close to the edge at Old Harry Rocks**

I somewhat grudgingly agreed to return to the place of past terror and I'm not entirely sure how it happened, but Alan and I ended up going there by ourselves. Horror upon horror! The path there from the car park was about a mile long and as it opened out and we eventually approached the chalk stacks after 20 minutes or so, I became aware that my heart had begun to beat more quickly than usual. Also, my breathing had become a little shallow.

Shallow is definitely not an adjective that can be applied to the stacks themselves, with their steep, sheer chalk drops into the sea way below. The stacks are around 100 million or so years old, their chalk having formed from plankton skeletons during the Cretaceous period, which slowly eroded over the millennia. Old Harry Rocks originally belonged to a long stretch of chalk reaching to the Needles at the Isle of Wight (which we saw (from a safe distance in 2015), until a process of erosion rendered them into the breathtaking shapes seen today.



**Old Harry Rocks** (photo by Alan Santillo)

Small cracks in the chalk were enlarged by a process of hydraulic action, when air and water were forced into them by the force of the sea, gradually becoming caves and then arches. The tops of these arches proceeded to collapse after being weakened by wind and rain, leaving disconnected stacks. One of the stacks became known as Old Harry. Harry originally had a wife, but 'she' eroded until her top fell off, leaving a stump. What a way to go...

So who was Harry? Legend says he was the Devil who slept on the rocks, while another explanation is that he was Harry Paye, an infamous Poole pirate, whose ship waited behind the rocks for passing merchant vessels. Another just as unlikely tale is that a storm thwarted a ninth-century Viking raid and one of the drowned, named Earl Harold (which sounds very English), was turned into a pillar of chalk.

However, it was time to face my *bête noir*, or in this case, *mes roches blanches*. I approached the danger zone, noting there were a lot more people than last time, some of them sitting unconcernedly on the grass. One man was taking a time-lapse photo, while a woman was painting the dramatic landscape. It was a scene of calm serenity – although the sea was still roiling around the rocks below.



**Calm serenity** (photo by Alan Santillo)

I quickly took some photos and waited for Alan to finish, first in one direction and then in the other direction. I was a little alarmed when he returned to have another go at the first direction, but I endured the anxiety and at last we walked away into safety. We'd probably only been there about ten minutes, but it felt like an hour!

It was still fairly hot as we retraced our steps, with plans to join the others on one of Studland Bay's beaches. We had about a quarter of the way left to go, when Dan came striding along the path to meet us. I can't deny he was a most pleasant sight, having thoughtfully reasoned that we'd be hard put to locate where they'd settled on the sand.

We sat down with them and ate our packed lunch, watching various activities in the sea. I was happy to have survived Old Harry Rocks and went to paddle my feet in the water in celebration. Not really, but I did feel as if I wanted to hold on to the holiday feeling. We sat for a while longer and then decided to drive to Durdle Door, the iconic Dorset site, dropping Levi back at the house en route.

Again, my memory of our first visit was hazy, but I do know we didn't venture down onto the beach and this time was the same. After parking in the clifftop car park, we did our best not to slip and slide down the path, which was decidedly tricky with loose rocks. One lady did fall, but didn't seem to be hurt too much.

I was glad to reach flatter ground where we could view the amazing seascape, although there was a cliff-edge situation here too and to my surprise, Dan seemed just as anxious as I was when Alan went rather too close to the edge, in our opinion. Nevertheless, I was grateful to Alan for his photos.



**Busy Durdle Door** (photo by Alan Santillo)

The path from the car park had been thronging with people and the number of people on the beach was quite surprising too, considering the very steep steps down there – and back up again, obviously. Durdle Door is a natural arch, formed from a layer of hard limestone standing almost vertically out to sea. This is unusual, as layers of limestone would normally be horizontal.

Originally, a band of resistant Portland limestone ran along the shore, the same band forming the narrow entrance to Lulworth Cove, a mile along the coast. Durdle Door probably began as a small point of weakness in the limestone facing the sea, that was constantly battered until it widened to form a cave. Once waves broke through the back wall of the cave, the weaker rocks behind would have eroded, so that over time the beach would have formed in that space. The cavity in the wall of limestone would have gradually enlarged to form the arch as it is today.

I think I understand all that! What is both sad and amazing is how the weathering processes that formed the arch in the first place will continue their work, until the upper bridge of the arch can no longer be supported. It will collapse and leave a freestanding pillar, which itself will erode away over time. I have learned that Malta's Azure Window, a similar natural limestone arch that we visited in 2009, is no longer there, having collapsed into the sea after a violent storm.

'Durdle' is derived from the Old English word *thirl*, which means to pierce, drill, or bore, which in turn comes from the word *thyrel*, which means hole. The name 'Durdle-rock Door' was known to exist in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, while early 19<sup>th</sup>-century maps referred to it as 'Dudde Door', 'Dirdale Door' and 'Duddledoor'.

After taking photos, we walked back the way we'd come, stopping to look down at Man o' War Cove, where remnants of more resistant rock strata could be seen:



**Man o' War Bay** (photo by Alan Santillo)

This band of Purbeck limestone is known quite logically as Man o' War Rocks, but offshore to the west, the eroded limestone outcrop has formed a line of small rocky islets known as The Bull, The Blind Cow, The Cow and The Calf. I can't help feeling sorry for The Blind Cow.

After trudging our way back up the tricky path, which didn't feel as treacherous as it had on the way down, the desire for ice cream was gathering strength. While Dan drove Alan, Reuben and me back to Lulworth in the car, Neeka, Ella and Leila decided to race us back to Lulworth along the footpath. By the time we got back to the house, collected Levi and walked down to the home-made ice cream place, the others came racing along at the same time – it was a draw!

It was also a fabulous ice cream, as good as any Italian gelato, which is saying a lot. My last chosen flavour of the holiday was chocolate orange and it was the best. As we sat on our usual wall to eat them, I felt rather sad that tomorrow we'd be heading home and leaving Lulworth behind.

Still, there was our last evening yet to enjoy and because it had proved too tricky to find a pub within walking distance that suited our needs, namely with a child-friendly garden that wasn't too hideously expensive, we'd decided to eat at the house before going for an evening walk, to a special place that Dan and Neeka had found on a previous evening walk of theirs.

Therefore, after eating, we put on our walking shoes and made our way up from the house – and up – and up. We were, in effect, walking up the cliff behind the house, but it was a beautiful early evening and as we gained height, the view below started to open out. It's true that I became hot and was lagging behind most of the others as usual, but Reuben kept more at my pace (except when he streaked ahead because something had interested him).

At one point, the horseshoe shape of Lulworth Cove became visible in almost all its glory way beneath us and together with a few boats anchored in the bay and an ever-changing sky, it was a magical sight.



**Magical Lulworth Cove** (photo by Alan Santillo)

We reached the top of the cliff and walked along for a while until it was time to start going down again. Suddenly, we arrived at the special place, a shallow basin-type dip in the grass that acted as a semi-secret shelter in which to sit and look at the wonderful view spread out beneath us. The grass had been quite slippery and it was a relief to sit safely and not feel in danger of sliding downwards.



**Celebrating a special holiday** (photo by Alan Santillo)

To our surprise, Dan and Neeka produced a bottle of Prosecco and some glasses, to celebrate our holiday. I like to think they weren't intending to celebrate the end of our holiday as such, but the fact that it had been a happy, interesting and pleasurable experience, shared together in a remarkable place – which it had!

As the sun moved on its inexorable journey towards the west, we decided it was time to head back. Reuben had been great and in fact, when we'd met some other walkers, they'd stopped to say how remarkable he was to be walking so well.

We had to scramble down the steep steps we'd first descended after the fossil forest walk, but from a different direction. Back on the beach below, Reuben was still full of energy ... unlike his grandma, it has to be said. The sky and the scenery were so uplifting, though, that after traversing the constantly sliding, unfriendly large pebbles (that I was becoming accustomed to), we walked up the hill to sit in the beer garden of the Lulworth Cove Inn.

I didn't have beer, but a rum and Coke hit the rapidly depleted spot, as we all whiled away about 45 minutes in conversation and reminiscences. As it became darker, Reuben was enjoying seeing the stars come out and he went around the table sitting on everyone's lap, as if to cement the family feeling.

However, we couldn't stay there all night, so walked for the final time up the hill to the house, where the dreaded process of packing needed to be done. Reuben fell asleep quickly and it wasn't too long before Alan and I wended our way down the stairs to bed, for our final night at Lulworth.

Although we weren't strangers to Dorset, it had been a week that had effortlessly made happy memories, with the right balance of the easy-going, the interesting and the exciting. Yes, I'll admit it, even including those cliff-clambering moments, stumbling across Lulworth beach and the slippery path to Durdle Door. Not Old Harry Rocks, though. No, definitely not Old Harry Rocks... 😊

