

TO ALL COMPANIONS OF EXMOOR CHAPTER, No 2390

When I retired as Grand Superintendent, the Companions of Exmoor Chapter very kindly presented me with a Gift Voucher for which I truly thank you. Jenny & I spent many hours deciding what to spend this gift on and finally we decided that we would have a couple of days away.

We had visited Guildford in Surrey about 10 years ago and when we were there, we paid a visit to The Watts Gallery in Compton. At that time the Gallery buildings were in a sorry state but since then a trust has been formed and, thanks mainly to a Lottery Grant, the Gallery was closed for 2 years and during this time the building and surrounding land was completely refurbished, and so we thought that it would be a great idea to pay a return visit.

The journey from Clevedon was not great and we had torrential rain most of the way up the M4 to Newbury but from there on the weather improved and it became very hot, but this did not have any effect on our visit to Compton.



George Frederick Watts OM, who was born in 1817, was one of the great Victorian Artists, not only a Painter but also a Sculptor, he is also unique amongst other artists of the age in that he never belonged to any school of painters and was very much a 'loner'.

Late in life in 1886 he married Mary Fraser-Tyler who was at that time 36 years old, George Frederick Watts was 69. Mary Watts was one of the first women to have professional training as an artist but after her marriage and discovering a seam of clay locally she started the Compton Pottery. Together they designed the Gallery and the Foundation Stone was laid by George Frederick Watts himself. They also built an Arts & Crafts House for themselves 'Limnerslease' which we also visited.

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The Village had at that time a Cemetery but there was no Chapel and so Mary Watts, inspired the villagers to build one that she had designed, not only to build one but to decorate it. Compton Cemetery Chapel is covered with remarkable Celtic and Art Nouveau style decoration tiles, all being designed and made by 74 villagers. The outside is magnificent, but the interior is beyond words.



Our hotel for the night was situated in Aldershot and from the bedroom window we could see the wonderful statue of the Duke of Wellington which once stood on the Wellington Arch at the top of Constitution Hill in London but was removed to its present home in Aldershot because it was too heavy for the Arch.



The following morning, we made our way to West Green House Gardens at Hartley Wintney in Hampshire. This house was gifted to the National Trust by Victor Sassoon in 1971 but is not itself of importance although it is a beautiful house. A few years later the lease was taken by Alistair McAlpine who was Deputy Chairman of the Conservative Party during Mrs Thatcher's premiership and as such was an IRA target. Three weeks after Alistair McAlpine gave up the lease an IRA bomb was planted in the front garden which caused extensive damage to the house.



Following this the National Trust restored the House and then a 99-year lease was taken by Marylyn Abbot who is a professional Garden Designer but was formally the Marketing and Tourism Manager for Sydney Opera House and as a result of this instituted an Opera Season each summer at West Green House.

The resulting garden at West Green House is testament to her work and now provides a delightful series of walled gardens and beyond these a dramatic woodland garden that has many interesting follies and a wonderful walk around the lake. The small on-site restaurant also provides wonderful food and coffee.





Thank you Companions of Exmoor Chapter No 2390 at Minehead. We had a memorable time away and are very grateful to you all.

With our Best Wishes and Kind Regards

Jenny & John.

