

The 2018 Friends' holiday was to the walled city of Chester. Here are some memories of the trip from Veronica Armstrong and Anne Chapman. A full version of their article will appear in next year's Spire.

The holiday to Chester was full of sunshine, beautiful gardens, splendid houses and wonderful experiences.

On the way up we visited Wolverhampton's Wightwick Manor, with interiors inspired by the Arts & Crafts movement.

The first morning in Chester was a guided walk along the great walls to see where the Romans founded their fortress of Deva circa AD74, and how the city extended during the Saxon and later Middle Ages.

In the afternoon there was a guided tour of the Cathedral and the day ended with tea in the original refectory with the Friends of Chester Cathedral and Evensong in the Quire.



Enjoying the sunshine.

The following morning we shopped in the two-storeyed Rows or explored the city further before everyone enjoyed a boat trip on the River Dee.

In the evening there was a performance of the Medieval Mystery Plays.

The next day there was a trip to Arley Hall, the family home of Lord Ashbrook.

Jodrell Bank Observatory was the destination for the afternoon.

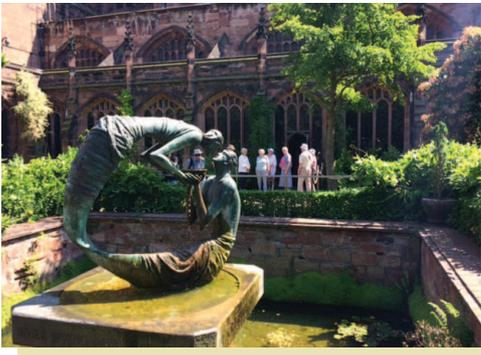
The final day took in 17th century Hanbury Hall, the home of the Vernon family.

Its gardens provided a last chance for a wander together around the sunken parterres, orchards and lawns before the holiday ended.

“Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. It matters that you don't just give up.”

Stephen Hawking
Mathematician, Physicist

How remarkable, writes Veronica, that a few days after the interment of Stephen Hawking's ashes in Westminster Abbey, we should visit Jodrell Bank and see a performance of the Chester Mystery Plays.



Friends admire the sculpture in the Cathedral cloisters.

The Mystery Plays enacted in Chester Cathedral have their roots in the medieval origins of the Mysteries, performed by Benedictine monks at the Feast of Corpus Christi. Due to their popularity, other Bible stories were added and ordinary citizens became involved. Plays and players became ever more boisterous and bawdy so that the Abbot decreed the Guild companies perform them at their own expense! The plays reflect the strong religious beliefs that were held in a Catholic England at the time, and a deep knowledge of the Bible stories.

I was struck by how forcefully contemporary they remain. There were challenges for the producer aware of making the stories clear for an audience who today might not be familiar with the Bible stories.

What an interesting bit of juxtaposition it was that placed our visit to Jodrell Bank on the day after the Chester Mystery Plays, writes

Anne. That had been a spiritually uplifting experience because it showed the work of God through the ages. The next day we saw the wonder of how it was done!

The Hubble telescope, the third largest in the world, scans the universe feeding back information and data about other galaxies, black holes, pulsars, neutron stars and other wondrous things.

We were given a talk under the Orrery to demonstrate how our solar system works. Afterwards we walked to the visitors' centre, where we had a play with models demonstrating the effects of pulsars on plasma and made a marble disappear down a 'black hole' – great fun.

On our way out of the complex, the automatic exit barrier jammed, and we were stuck waiting for over 15 minutes until someone acquired a crowbar and, resorting to physical man-power, smashed the barrier, allowing us to drive out, smiling and possibly comforted?



Jodrell Bank.