

Journal of European Trip, May-June 2019: UK/Tallinn Component

This blog is based on Facebook posts covering the period 4-May to 25-Jun-19, during which we toured Ireland (by car), cruised on Russian rivers from Moscow to St Petersburg, visited Liverpool, cruised between Scottish Islands, spent a week near Oxford with friends, travelled to Tallinn (Estonia) for a work TNC (networking) Conference, and then had a couple of days in London before returning home. It has been constructed as separate Blogs (Ireland, Russia, Scotland, etc) to make each file manageable. Return to the Blog home page at <http://www.alex-reid.com/Blog/> to see the others.

Saturday, June 8: So, our cruises have finished, and we are now staying with friends near Oxford. Today we walked around Blenheim Palace grounds, using a public entrance near where we used to live in Freeland. Beautiful parklands, great vistas of the Palace, and what is claimed to be "the finest view in England". We had actually been on a quest to find the Whomping Willow tree from the Harry Potter films. We did find the tree, but it was not the one used as a basis for the whomping willow, which was a yew located in Ashridge Estate, Hertfordshire, but has since collapsed. But this **is** a Harry Potter tree, and is the last remaining "Harry Potter" tree; it was used in The Order of the Phoenix.



View of Blenheim Palace, across the Vanbrugh Grand Bridge.

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Blenheim Palace: "the finest view in England" (from just in front of the Harry Potter tree).

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The "Harry Potter" tree, used in The Order of the Phoenix film.

The "Harry Potter" tree, used in The Order of the Phoenix film.



A frame from the movie, 1hr 29 minutes in, where the tree makes a very brief appearance!

Tuesday, June 11: Today, we visited Bourton-on-the-Water, checked out "The Nook" (which we used to own and run as a holiday let), and some of the shops, such as Bourton Basket (which sadly was closed on the day), the Rainbow Christian Bookshop, Cotswold Perfumery (trying to dodge hordes of Japanese and/or Chinese tourists on *the* bridge); also, River Windrush and its lovely bridges as it runs its course through the centre of the village.



The River Windrush, Bourton-on-the-Water.



Bridges over the Windrush, Bourton-on-the-Water.

Wednesday, June 12: This morning, before the rain set in, we visited the NT property Grey's Court, which has really lovely gardens, including a world-class rose collection, and a marvellous 128-year old wisteria. It also happened to have a sculpture exhibition around the grounds.



Grey's Court house.



Grey's Court garden borders.



Grey's Court clematis archway.



Grey's Court gardens with cut-away sculpture



Grey's Court White garden lily pond: Otter sculpture.

Thursday, June 13: Tilda, our little bear who stowed away on this trip with us, when she found we were visiting Russia and might see some bears, found a new friend at the Brooks' house! I'm just hoping she doesn't refuse to come away with us on Saturday 😊

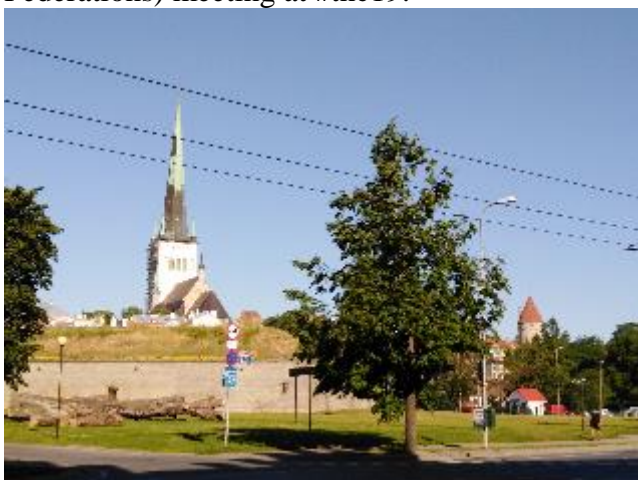


Tilda and her new friend.

Saturday, June 15: Traveling via Helsinki to Tallinn, Estonia, to join TNC19 conference (Pan-European Research & Education Networking).



Sunday, June 16: Here we are in Tallinn, Estonia, ready for the Refeds (Research & Education Identity Federations) meeting at #tnc19.



Tallinn, with part of its walls in the foreground.

Refeds just gets bigger and bigger, #TNC19.



I've just realised why the venue for the Refeds meeting is called "Woodblock Hall"! Plenty of gaps for tiny e-devices to slip between!



Monday, June 17: Teasing Christine – there are lots of "Wool & Linen" shops right near our hotel - but Helen had already got herself sorted, with wool from Wallingford (of Midsomer fame).



One of the many Wool and Linen shops near our hotel.

Wednesday, June 19: Here are some photos of the venue for the TNC19 conference I have been attending in Tallinn. It's called the Kultuur Katel (or Creative Hub), and was formerly a power plant. They have retained a lot of the character (actually, a *huge* amount of the character!) of the building. And included some intriguing flooring in appropriately named "Woodblock Hall", one of the meeting rooms (see above). The view taken from the tower of St Olav's church shows the chimney stack of the centre, as well as the nearby ocean and ferry terminals.



Tallinn KulturKatel entrance.



View to the harbour from St Olav's tower;
KulturKatel under the tall chimney.



KulturKatel meeting room, with character backdrop!

So, the sun sets over Tallinn and on the TNC19 conference (23:10 tonight). A great opportunity to catch up with friends and colleagues, hear about (and contribute a little to) the latest in the Research & Education Networking world.



Sunset over Tallinn (at 11:10 pm)

Friday, June 21: I have had a bit of time to walk around Tallinn - partly because the hotel was about 1km away from the conference venue, at the opposite end of the city; then today, with the conference (and side meetings) over, I did a bit more walking before we headed for the airport. It's a really lovely town, now displayed to good effect. When I was here in 1999, I don't remember the walls being so extensive or well-preserved, nor so many souvenir shops and museums, nor so many tourists! It is almost fully cobble-stoned, sometimes quite severely! Here's Alexander Nevsky Cathedral (Orthodox) overlooking the town, the town hall square, some bits of the wall (including Fat Margaret's Tower!), some of the delightful alleys, and lovely view from the top of St Olav's tower. Margaret Hill might appreciate that - I believe she worshiped there as a child, or was it her mother? I was impressed that they had notices everywhere saying "there is no entrance fee" - in contrast to some of the other churches (but then, I don't begrudge them a little to help with the upkeep).



Alexander Nevsky Orthodox Cathedral.



Tallinn Town Hall Square.



Tallinn Town Hall.



Tallinn walls with walkway on top.



Twin Gate towers at the entrance to Tallinn near our hotel.



The Tallinn "Fat Margaret" tower.



Tallinn: an alleyway.



View over Tallinn from the tower of St Olav.

Saturday, June 22: Back in London, at the Victoria Apollo Theatre, London, to see a performance of the musical *Wicked*. Nearly the back row, but good view...



London's Victoria Apollo Theatre, prior to a performance of *Wicked*.

Today, walked around Belgravia/Victoria prior to (and after) going to the performance of "*Wicked*". Some interesting buildings. Nearby is the branch of Barclays Bank where I opened my first account with them in 1978 (I still have it).



Buildings in the Victoria/Belgravia area.



A “Green” building in Victoria.

Sunday, June 23: This morning, we attended a worship service at Holy Trinity Brompton (known as HTB). Really lively, packed to the rafters, in contrast to many little Anglican churches. Senior pastor is Nicky Gumbel (who started Alpha), and he interviewed the worship leader, Matt Redman (who has 5 Grammy awards), and whose songs are globally admired. HTB has had a real impact, with people like Bear Grylls, Miranda Hart, Sally Philips, Geri Halliwerll (I believe) among those becoming Christians through its ministry. A lovely sculpture of the Prodigal Son outside.



Holy Trinity Brompton (HTB) morning service.



Prodigal Son sculpture outside HTB.

This afternoon, we visited the Natural History Museum, London, after the church service at HTB. I've tried to do this several times in the past, but there have always been huge queues which have put me off. This time, however, though there were lots of people, no queues! I don't recall ever going before. Wonderful, world-class exhibits of all sorts (of course, impossible in 2.5 hours to do full justice!). But did see the Blue Whale skeleton, the Dodo skeleton (actually, a composite work), the Ichthyosaur and Plesiosaur skeletons uncovered by Mary Anning, an Iguanodon skeleton (whose footprints we saw in the sand at Bexhill in 1978 when a storm uncovered them - note: not necessarily the very same Iguanodon!), and Helen with the weight of the Moon on her back!



The Natural History Museum, South Kensington.



The main hall, with blue whale skeleton, Natural History Museum.



Natural History Museum: Dodo skeleton (actually, a composite)



Natural History Museum: Plesiosaur skeleton, uncovered by Mary Anning.



Natural History Museum: Ichthyosaur skeleton, uncovered by Mary Anning.



Natural History Museum: Iguanodon skeleton.



Natural History Museum: Helen with the weight of the Moon on her back.

Monday, June 24: At the start of our journey home. This holiday/trip has been a long haul, and we're well and truly ready for home! This FB "traveling to" option doesn't seem to give you the option of saying "via Hong Kong" which is what we're doing... Farewell Europe, till next time (but nothing planned at this stage).



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