

Blog 9 - April 29th - Blarney Castle & Cobh



After a great sleep we enjoyed a delicious French pressed coffee in our room. We are on the top floor of the building (3rd) and each room has a slanted ceiling & dormer windows. It is lovely, so modern, with that old world feel.

I was watching a flock of white doves landing and cooing on the mansard roof, but they flew off and escaped my Kodak moment.

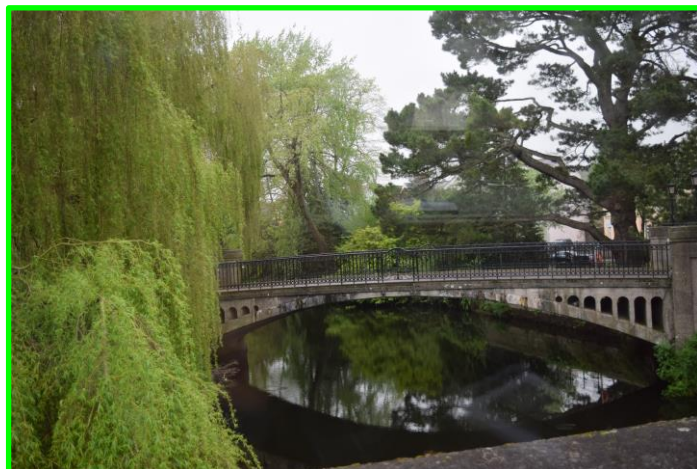


The view from the windows is of the front courtyard where a 1,000-year-old ash tree dominates the scene.

We had a very enjoyable breakfast. The Traditional Irish Breakfast was offered in both a regular format and a gluten free option. This was wonderful for me, and it was so very delicious. I sure am getting a lot of vegetables, fish and meat. I feel great - yeah!

Our private tour bus awaited us in the courtyard with our driver Richard assuring us that we were his clients for the day and welcomed us aboard for the next eight hours. Our two primary destinations would be Blarney Castle in the morning and the city of Cobh in the afternoon, with the Titanic Experience and the Cobh Heritage Centre our selected focus. As we will be in Belfast where there is a very large Titanic

Exhibition we probably won't do the one in Cobh, but it was the last port of call before the Titanic headed towards North America and we have been told the actual pier is still there, though in major disrepair because no one can figure out who is going to pay for the reconstruction.



The Cork University is located at the bottom of the small street leading up to the Hotel. It was formerly named Queen's University after Queen

Elizabeth the 1st; however, once the Irish Independence was secured the name was changed to the University of Cork. The grounds are amazing. They do offer a walking tour of the campus grounds, but I don't think we will have an opportunity to do that tour. Cork is the 3rd largest city in Ireland (Dublin, Belfast, Cork). Though once the seat of government (Dubin is now), most people in Cork still feel they are the centre of it.

As we made our way out of town Richard did not repeat the usual history lesson about the Vikings, Norman invasions etc. but rather focused on the development of Cork itself as a trading centre. Starting as a point in the River Leigh where seven islands were connected by 48 bridges into a thriving seaport of 180,000 people. 27 of these bridges are within the City of Cork. We have also learned a new Irish toast "Craic On!". Carol McG. we will be getting together as soon as we get back to share a wee dram and this toast with you. It's a promise!

He pointed out the "civil courthouse" and the "criminal courthouse" to us. We will look at these a little closer tomorrow. Richard did say that there was very little crime in Cork and that it was a safe place to walk about. He pointed out the various types of housing to us. The Council Housing explanation was very interesting to me. Given to those who could not afford housing. Once they get settled and have a job - after a few years they are given the option to buy the house. Many do and the houses are passed down generation to generation. Personally, I think this is a wonderful way of helping people, yet giving them some self-esteem when they get on their feet and can purchase their house.

Cork became the focal point for the famine migration of half of Ireland's population ie. 3 million poor people in the 1840's. Richard told us stories of how some of the "more affluent" offered jobs to the poor to build the walls around some of the estates. They were paid diddly squat in wages, barely enough to purchase food. What they needed was help Richard said, not work. Most of them were so weak and sick they could not work and this employment more than likely killed a few of them.

Such history!

Our first stop - Blarney Castle. It was not a very pleasant day weather wise. Very cold with off and on rain and a few glimpses of the sun. However, onward we go.

The McCarthy clan started to develop the Blarney area and built the first fortress of wood, followed by the first two stone towers then a full-fledged castle in the 12th century. The King of Munster appointed Dermott MacArthur as Earl of Blarney. Robert the Bruce of Scotland asked Dermott to loan him 500 soldiers to defeat the British (Battle of Bannockburn). Dermott did this and following the battle Bruce sent him a piece of the Blarney Stone back to Ireland as a gift. The stone was supposed to have mystical powers. Richard filled us in on this as we drove toward the castle.

The ride to Blarney took an hour and once we got there two large tour buses arrived just ahead of us. Richard quickly downloaded our paid tickets and was able to get us admitted and off & running ahead of the crowd. The castle was an imposing structure and somewhat sketchy in dis repair. Our first site of the castle was incredible. What an amazing spot! We really didn't care about the weather - raining, damp, windy, cold - it was beautiful.



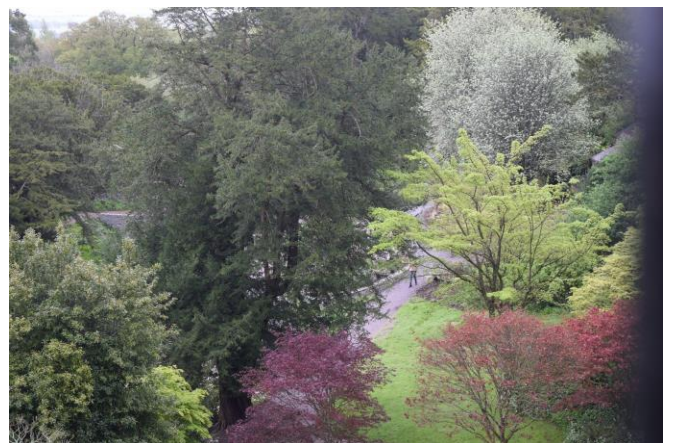
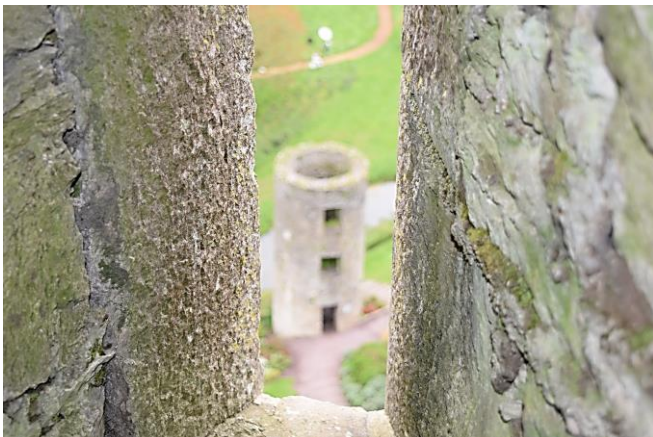
It took a few minutes to walk up to the castle. Lovely waterways, and beautiful gardens. We heard a lot of conversations from people on their way back from the castle. “The stairs are slippery, be careful”; “so many steps forget it - no way I’m doing that”; got to the top, “just couldn’t do it way too scary”; “I’m not kissing that thing if people pee on it at night”.

Now the myth about boys peeing on it at night. There is absolutely no way this can be done unless they have a garden hose to pee from and can pee straight up to the top of the castle tower. Plus, the castle is lock, guarded like the Canadian mint. Get real people.

Having said all of that, Kevin just could not do this trek. The walk up to the castle almost did him in. Due to the 120, very narrow slippery stairs Kevin decided to find someplace to warm up and to view some of the gardens.



Now my trusty energizer bunny was off to the peak. She didn’t think she would make it to the top either, but she was game to try. She was back at the bottom in less than an hour. What she told me was that she was petrified most of the way up BUT you can’ turn around and come back so she had to go all the way to the top. She said the views from the various “windows” were beautiful and she was able to get some fabulous shots. That made her happy.



Judi said that the inside of the castle was incredible and though she took a few shots she was just enjoying the historical signage in the various “rooms” t certainly was an interesting experience.

She even managed to get a photo of me walking around the gardens. In the garden photo, I am



the blob in the yellow jacket way down amongst the trees, safe on terra-firma. A tiny little dot!

She had beat the crowd up, but there was still a line up and she couldn't get passed the people to head back down. This is a photo that proves she made it to the top.

There was a man in front of Judi who was there with his daughter. He had kissed the Blarney Stone over 70 years ago when he was in his teens. He thought he would try it again, but when it came up to his

turn, he just couldn't do it, and his adult daughter chickened out as well.



When Judi got back to me, her legs were shaking and she could hardly stand up straight. I was a little worried. Another man who had come down at the same time stopped to see if she was OK. They had been keeping an eye on her, which she thanked them for.

Did she chicken out or did she actually kiss the scraggy stone? She wouldn't tell me. I figured she was embarrassed to say she chickened out, but it is understandable because she is

afraid of heights. I didn't push her. I had been watching below the opening and could see how people were hanging upside down to kiss a piece of rock. I was proud that she had actually gone up. Good for you hon!

When she did get back we toured the Poison Garden and the Stables and then part of the formal gardens and walkways before we got to the Gift Shop. The Poison Garden was interesting as we learned how some plants we actual recognized had some “poisonous”

varieties. stinky iris, catmint, rhubarb, cannabis, lupins, etc. The rhubarb leaves are poisonous, but not the fruit. We both liked that area.



Judi took a few shots of the stable area. I have finally agreed she can have a dog. We just have to figure out how to get it home. I don't think he will add a lot to our grocery bill, but it's the one she wants so as tomorrow is her birthday... she gets it.

Oops, sorry hon. It belongs to the castle. Gotcha!

Back to me! I thought that the grandkids would like the following photos. The gypsy caravans; the kids wagon and the sheep.



There is a lovely area for kids to play in and watch animals, as well as have a picnic lunch if the parents are so inclined.



We were told that in the summer the place is packed with kids, families etc.

Our visit to Blarney Castle was a highlight and we did like it a lot. While there we also learned where the word Blarney came from. Queen Elizabeth I introduced the word into the English language. *It is described as pleasant talk, intended to deceive without offending.*





As you leave the Castle grounds there is a



“photo op” that everyone uses. Here we are as we say goodbye to Blarney Castle continue on our journey for today.

We rejoined Richard and headed back through Cork towards Cobh. He pointed out the clock on



top of St Anne church which is known as the “four faced liar “ because each side of the bell tower has a clock on it and they should be in sync - but they rarely are. They always seem to show a different time. Hence the nick-name. “Four faced liar”. By the way, they were all different today.

Along our journey we had seen lots of advertisements for ‘Murphy’s Stout’. Richard suggested we give it a try. This is the local stout and is less bitter than Guinness because the brewers add a bit of

cocoa to the concoction. This makes it more palatable. We said we would take this under advisement.

Judi mentioned to Richard that there seemed to be no Georgian houses in the Cork area. Richard told her that during the War of Independence the IRA had burned down a very important Estate home. Get this now, in retaliation for the burning of ONE home, the British

burned down all the houses in the town centre - HENCE all the beautiful Georgian homes were destroyed.

Onward we go. We made a small detour to visit a cemetery outside Cobh. A local boy from Cobh became a world famous boxer and his name was Gentleman Jack Doyle. Of course, we knew of him. Judi's family roots are Doyle and Walsh - can't get much more Irish than that. Her grandfather was Patrick Walsh and his father had immigrated from Ireland to Newfoundland. Despite Jack Doyle's fame & fortune, he was known as a man who liked the drink. He died a pauper and was to be buried in a pauper's grave. A local hotel owner O'Shea, who some think was a pal of his as they were about the same age, arranged for his remains to be brought back to his home town and buried in the cemetery in his hometown.



This cemetery is also famous as it holds three mass graves of those people who were on board the Lusitania which was sunk by the Germans in 1915. Thanks to our guide who actually lives in Cobh and who knows the place like the back of his hand we were able to see things that most tourists might not be aware of.



We then made another stop at St Colman's Cathedral overlooking the harbour of Cobh. It is partially built on top of the old gaol. What a beautiful cathedral. All the churches that we have visited have been impressive and it doesn't matter what denomination, they are all works of art.

While

in St. Colman's there was a group of school children practising for their First Holy Communion. With their hands in temple shape, they sang as flat as pancakes, but they put their whole hearts into the singing.





Just below the church there is an string of interesting, identical houses. They literally are spilling down the hillside. Richard explained that they are referred to as the “deck of cards” because of the belief that once one starts to slide they will all tumble down. The old Domino effect. Once we got down into the actual town, I was able to get a shot of them. Rather cool.

Sorry the blog skips back and forth from me to Kevin and vice versa. We share the writing and after the text is finished, I add the photos.

Richard drove us down into the town centre where the Titanic Experience was located. As I mentioned we opted out taking in this exhibition. However, I did manage to get a great photo of the original dock where the Titanic

moored before it left Queenstown in December 1912. Also as mentioned above, the folks around here better figure out who is going to restore it before it completely disintegrates.



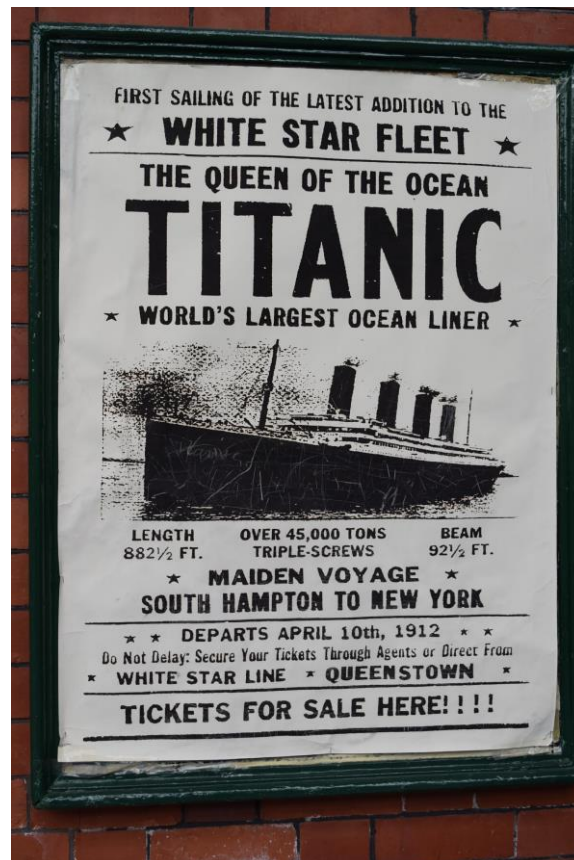
We enjoyed a lovely lunch at the Titanic Bar and Grill and through the windows could see the pier.



Judi did a bit of walking around while I was waiting for our check. That is when she took the photo of the “House of Cards” and some interesting other buildings.

I love the interesting colours that the buildings are painted. This one is DunRaven Yellow, and the one below is Malahide Orange. Families actually did have “their” own colours and at one time only they were allowed to use them. Not anymore as so

many buildings are painted with these two colours. The yellow reminds me of a mistake we made when we were wanting a pale yellow house on Cork St. - we ended up with DunRaven Yellow. Seriously!



Again, so much history.

Our next stop was at the Cobh Heritage Centre where Kevin had hoped to find out a bit about Jeremiah Toowick (Twohig) - his ancestor. There really wasn't anything helpful there and that was too bad. He was a bit disappointed. If you wanted to have help from their Genealogist, he 10

would charge 50 Euros per hour, and nothing might show up. Kevin decided that he had tried, and that was it. There were no ship manifests and literally 3,000,000 people left this port on the “coffin” ships. The exhibits were very well done though, and Kevin enjoyed his time in there.

Judi didn't go into the museum, but instead browsed around the area and learned a little more about the history. It was actually sunny by this time so she wanted to be outside. Inside the heritage centre were some interesting pieces of art depicting the Titanic passengers.



There is a brass statue in honor of Annie Moore, a 15 year old Irish lass (or was is 17 - two different references) and her two brothers who were the first Irish immigrants to pass through Ellis Island in New York.

Her story in the new world was well recorded, however no record of what happened to her brothers is available.

Inside the museum, there is a picture of Annie that her family contributed

many years later. She looks a little different. Richard said that she had a parcel of kids so I guess it would have been hard to keep that girlish figure.



In the 1840's when the famine hit the Irish population was 9 million. They lost 1.5 million to famine & disease and another 3 million emigrated leaving only 4 million population and even today it is just back to 5.5 million. Rebuilding continues of buildings and people.

On the way back to Cork, Richard pointed out a very nice estate along the river which was the family home of William Joyce otherwise known as Lord Haw Haw. Lord Haw-Haw was a nickname applied to the Irish-American William Joyce, who broadcast Nazi propaganda to Britain from Germany during the Second World War. The broadcasts opened with "Germany calling, Germany calling", spoken in an affected upper-class English accent. He took German citizenship in 1940. He was convicted of one count of high treason in 1945 and sentenced to death.

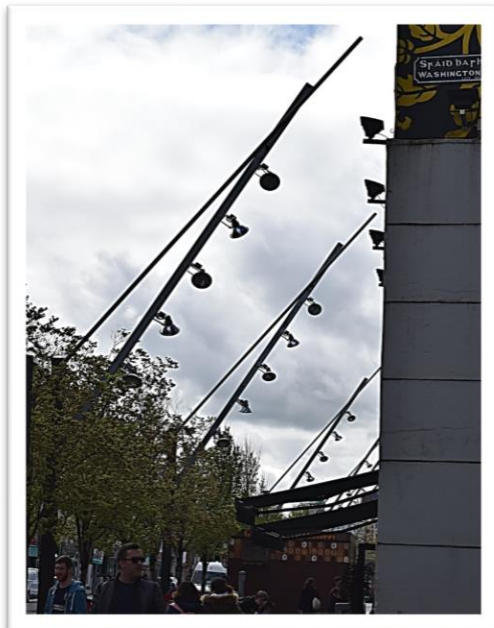


He was executed for treason because there was evidence he had applied for a UK passport years before. It is said that they literally pulled the house apart looking for the papers that showed him as a British subject. Guess they found them.

Richard brought us back via a different route through the main downtown areas pointing out highlights we might visit on our free day tomorrow and also the grounds of the Cork University campus. He dropped

us in the hotel courtyard just before five o'clock and we both thanked him very much for a very enjoyable and informative tour.

Not a very good photo, but the old Imperial Hotel was "the Hotel" in its prime and many famous people from royalty to Hollywood stars. Maureen O'Hara stayed her many times. The Irish colleen with the beautiful red hair and green eyes who played some great feisty roles. I remember her in Miracle on 34th street.



I was quite impressed with these "modern" street lights. Many of the locals hate them. They do make the area look like it is under construction. I thought they were articulating and could be lowered down to light up the Grand Parade for special events. Nope - they are just street lights.

One other story from Richard. He told us about the fact that the Irish accepted the Jewish immigrants during the war years and the Jewish community was very much alive at one time and they had 3 synagogues. Today they have none. There is though one of the bridges names after a well-known Jewish businessman. Goldman Bridge. It is affectionately known by the locals as the Passover Bridge. Loved this story. There is a picture of it below.



Our evening was spent very quietly in our room and it was definitely not a late night, we were both pretty tired. There was one last thing though that Judi had to say to me and show to me.

She had a bag from the Blarney Castle gift shop. I figured she had hit the gift shop on the way out while I was making a phone call to the Heritage Museum. She does love to browse around them. I wondered what trinkets she was going to show me, time for her to fess up to.

However I was surprise by my girl.... take a look at this. SHE DID KISS THE BLARNEY STONE!



Oh, by the way, they wipe it off after every kiss.

Way to go Judi.... you are one brave lady. The couple who had ask how she was feeling had helped her as she was a little dizzy after this experience. The husband had taken this photo. Judi did purchase the official ones as she wasn't sure these would turn out. She now has the gift of the gab. K & J