

England, Scotland, Wales and the Dales, and Oh Yes, St. Andrew Too

by Fred D. Opperman

I just returned from a family vacation in England. It was an anniversary present to ourselves and it happened that our son was traveling in Europe at the time and he was able to join us for the two weeks.

We rented a car and basically looped England and never did get into London. We wanted to see the countryside and meet the people. Our goal was accomplished for we drove over 2100 miles on the "wrong side of the road" and stayed in 10 different B&B (that is Bed & Breakfast, not balled and burlapped!) that ranged from farm houses to country estates that were built and lived in since the mid 1700 up through 1920's. Our hosts were always extremely friendly and delightfully charming English.



Fred & Todd loading the car after a night at the Heaves mansion.



A thatched roof house in Chipping Camden.

The countryside of England has varying terrains and geography. The thing that impressed me was the amount of labor that it took to clear the many fields where the sheep and cattle were grazing. Most of the paddocks, as they were referred to, were walls of neatly laid field stone. One would look down, or up onto the hillside and see field after field of a grid lock of interconnecting stone walls. It was beautiful and mind boggling to think of the hours upon hours and centuries of labor to lay all of that stone to clear the fields.



A typical farmers "paddock" or field in the country side, where the stone walls march on forever and intersect with each other.

The countryside is clean and neat. The English love to garden and it shows. Every house has their flower garden and flower baskets and pots are profusely abundant around their homes. The trees are huge on the estates, castles and cathedrals. One maple on the grounds of Windsor Castle must have been 6-7 feet in diameter, height of 80 feet plus and a width of 120 feet. Purple beeches were everywhere with diameters of 3-5 feet. Many hedgerows were made out of either green or purple leaf beech.



A huge maple tree on the grounds of Windsor Castle.

The larger trees were very impressive, but the smaller trees that were just planted were really in our system, just park grade quality. They didn't know what a B&B tree was, let alone a spade planted tree. The largest tree I saw available for the home owner would be a 1 1/2" caliper in a 2 1/2 gallon container. From all I could find out, there were only a few tree nurseries that had field grown trees and then they were placed in these pots.

On the grounds of Windsor Castle they had a beautiful mature row of Horsechestnuts lining the walk, yet where they lost a tree, it was replaced by a 1 1/2 inch tree!



I just love a Larch tree!



Fred Opperman & son Todd in front of a large green beech in a grove of many.

I was able to spend a morning at St. Andrews with Walter Woods, B.E.M., (an honorary title bestowed on him last year by the Queen. I must admit I forgot to inquire what the letters stand for.) Walter drove my all around the 700 acre complex in his jeep for it was lightly raining at the time. Speaking of rain, St. Andrews gets only 20-22 inches of rain per year! That is 10 inches less then we receive here in the Chicago area. He has a tough time establishing grass due to the lack of rain and an almost constant wind that dries out the soil. He is just completing an additional 27 holes to help alleviate the heavy demand of golf. On top of that a new clubhouse will be built for the public golf and new driving range and tees. He carries a crew of about 30 men during the winter months and goes up to 60-70 during the tournaments and summer months. The courses are completely irrigated with a new system and pumping station in the last few years. Like most golf course superintendents his maintenance facility is in a couple of buildings and inadequate for the amount of equipment he has. There is some hope he states in getting a new building to replace the ones he now operates out of.



The landscape of St. Andrews Golf Club.



This is a double green, with a foursome and caddies on the "other green".

I was in awe to be able to get into the clubhouse and have a tour of this very exclusive cathedral of golf. The trophy room with the history, of all the trophies, pictures and golf clubs was something else. The members locker room resembled more of a library and sitting room than the locker rooms of our clubs here in the states. The library itself had a collection of books dating back to the beginning of golf and all that had been written on the game since.



Judy & Todd sitting in front of "The Buck Inn" having an afternoon "tea". After taking the picture, I had a pint of bitters and let Todd drive ...



Pubs & shops on a street leading up to Windsor Castle.

One can't talk about England, without mentioning their pubs. The pub in England is the social place of every community. The names of the pubs weren't "Joe's Place" or "Harry's Lounge", but "The White Horse", "King's Crown", "Shield & Sword", "Bull's Roar" or the "Crossed Arms". Really great names of various items, animals or places. Plus they had great beer! I'll really miss walking up to the bar and saying, "A pint of bitter, please".