

Barry gives us a thumb nail sketch of this excursion Easter 2024.

A kind friend invited us to spend Easter with him at his home in Dallas Texas USA, and enjoy the experience of worshipping with him at Downtown First Baptist where he attends and sings in the choir. It was an amazing opportunity of worship.

This was followed by flying to Nashville, Tennessee where we embarked on a road trip of 1400 miles visiting first the Ark Encounter at Williams Town, Kentucky which is a full size replica of Noah's Ark.

Our next location was Charlotte North Carolina where we went to the Billy Graham Library.

We then travelled back to Nashville where we spent time going to music museums and a music concert at the Opry Theatre, and fitted in a visit to the Hermitage Home of President Jackson. A great time was had before flying back home to the UK.

A longer version follows below

Barry's email to me

Dear Andrew,

Many thanks for your company at the SOA Annual Lunch at Newbourne in November, and hearing all the lovely sounds and registrations that came from the organ at Stowmarket when you were playing for us.

I did promise some memories of a trip that we made to America last Easter.

I thought that I would give you a little past history before I risk boring you with our recent visit to America.

Many years ago now one of our young friends at Church decided to go to the Spurgeons Bible College in London to train for the ministry. When graduating he had been very successful in his studies, and each year one of the top students had the opportunity to be sent to the First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas as the British Minister. This internship was for twelve months, and this particular year that person was our friend John.

Whilst there we had an opportunity to go and visit and stay with him and his wife, so my wife and our three sons, the youngest (and he is now aged forty one) of whom was just under three invaded their apartment. Our friend John had asked one of the choir members named David to come to the airport with him in case he could not get all of our luggage into his car.

When John's time at Dallas came to an end and he returned to the UK, we still kept in touch with David in Dallas. For some strange reason David loves coming to England and particularly, London, and his journeys around England then stretched as far as Suffolk with him coming to stay with us on many occasions.

The other side of the coin is that every few years David gives us an invite to go and stay with him and he suggests some places that we could visit, this means that over the years we have made several visits with our own personal tour guide and chauffeur, who also makes all the arrangements.

Here is the full version of Barry and his wife on a trip in the USA Easter 2024

On Thursday March 28th my wife and I, flew to Dallas Texas USA to stay with our friend David at his home in Garland, Texas. David is a member of the Choir at First Baptist, Dallas which numbered around 230 for each of the two morning services on the Easter Sunday. These are drawn from around 350 choir members on the register, with a congregation in the order of two thousand people.

The organ is a Renaissance Heritage five manual Allen digital Instrument complete with a set of traditional pipework in the ceiling area of the worship centre. This plays alongside a large orchestra.

To say that the hairs on the back of your neck stand to attention when you hear the sound of praise produced, is an underestimate, and cannot be captured on recordings. However a YouTube search can give you a flavour of the occasion.

We spent a few days catching up, and eating out with good friends that we have made there over the years, and on Tuesday April 2nd we flew out with David to Nashville, Tennessee. On arrival at around 1.30 pm David had arranged a hire car and we set off as soon as possible to avoid an incoming hurricane.

Our destination was Dry Ridge, Williams Town, Kentucky arriving at around 9.00 pm, we were beginning to think that we had come to the end of civilisation as the properties became further and further apart. Then suddenly we came across a main street with shops and a group of large hotels. We had arrived. We just managed to find an evening meal in a Cracker Barrel restaurant specialising in home cooking, just before it closed.

The next day we travelled a short distance to our destination 'The Ark Encounter'. My wife and I thought that this was going to be a non-event because we had seen Noah's Ark when it came into Ipswich Docks from the continent floating on a barge, how wrong can you be! This was a full size vessel built according to the dimensions given in the Bible. It consisted of many levels set out with displays and working exhibits, three film theatres. You will be relieved to know that I could not begin to recount what we saw, however you can experience a glimpse by looking on You Tube for the Ark Encounter, for us it was a life changing experience.

In the afternoon we had to set off on the next stage of our journey which was a mid-journey overnight stop at Pigeon Forge, Tennessee amongst the Smoky Mountains, arriving again in the early evening. Perhaps an unlikely title for an area heaving with things to do and see. , I will just mention that this is the home town of Dolly Parton, and her own Dollywood Theme Park, however, we were only staying overnight and passing through getting glimpses of all sorts of attractions on the way.

Our next destination was Charlotte, North Carolina, nearly a full day's travel again heading for an evening meal with a former Minister of Music and his wife from First Dallas who our friend David knew. After a happy evening of fellowship and dining we had a short drive the next day to the Billy Graham Library.

The name Library is perhaps misleading because it often means working exhibits and displays telling the story of the person's life or career. This library was built on the land where Billy Graham grew up working on the family farm, the family farmhouse has been moved to this location. This was also the final resting place of Billy Graham and his wife, also his musical director Cliff Burrows and a well-known soloist George Beverley Shea, and their wives. The visit to this location ticked off an

important item on my wife's bucket list, outstanding for many years. After lunch we set off again this time to an overnight stop at Asheville.

The intention was the next day to visit the Biltmore House mansion former home to the Vanderbilt Family, unfortunately we could only get a late afternoon entrance slot which did not fit in with our plans. It was decided to take a more leisurely journey to our final destination Nashville.

On route we stopped off at Knoxville the State University and had lunch in the students eating area, and we managed some retail therapy by visiting the Buc-ee's Store on route. Buc-ee the Beaver certainly has a phenomenal store.

The next six days were spent in Nashville staying on Music Row. First off we had a tour bus ride around the area which was a great help to gain ideas about where to go and what to see, the number of recording studios and the musicians who used them was very impressive. A visit was made to the Hermitage, the home of President Jackson the 'Peoples President', while we were here the eclipse took place. There were visits to two music museums, the original home of the 'Old Opry' which was also a Church in the Ryman building, there was also the opportunity to visit the Johnny Cash tour bus. The Final night was an actual concert at the new site of the Opry Theatre, before flying back home the next evening.

A road trip of 1400 miles with lots of wonderful memories.

Update No. 1. Around ten years ago our friend arranged a trip for us so that we were present for the last Sunday Service in the Old Sanctuary (Original Church) and present for the first service in the new adjacent Worship Centre. Imagine the shock on July 21st 2024 when we heard that the Old Sanctuary building had been gutted by a fire overnight leaving just the external walls standing. An appeal has been raised to cover the cost of the Churches Ministries over the next two years, also the cost of rebuilding the Old Sanctuary. The Church is being asked to pledge their giving for the next two years towards the estimated cost of \$95 Million dollars. So far they have raised \$88 Million dollars.

We had really considered our visit last year as a Swan song event, however our friend David is thinking about a return visit to be there for the opening of the rebuilt sanctuary building and the updated worship centre. Yet again there is coverage of the fire (available on YouTube) which also destroyed the original pipe organ.

Update No. 2. Our Friend David thought that it would be fun to experience a British Christmas, and we had the pleasure of entertaining him over Christmas 2024. However it is not likely to be an experience that is repeated because he did not like Christmas pudding, Christmas cake or mince pies.