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Travelling through Britain

DOWN the centuries many people have travelled around the British Isles and have recorded their thoughts and impressions for posterity.

I have recently read several accounts of Britain ranging in date from the late sixteenth century to the late twentieth century.

In the 1690s Miss Celia Fiennes, a thirty something gentlewoman (daughter of one of Cromwell's colonels) made several journeys around the country visiting her numerous friends and relations and kept a journal of her travels which has been published as "The Journeys of Celia Fiennes".

England at this time was predominately pastoral with manufacturing carried on in small workshops in most towns.

Celia Fiennes was not greatly interested in history and antiquities and comments on the towns and villages she visited, particularly liking recently rebuilt places like Nottingham and new houses like Stoke Edith in Herefordshire.

In this part of the country she passed through Taunton on a grand tour of the West-country. She describes Taunton as "a large town having houses of all sorts of buildings both brick and stone but mostly timber and plaster."

She then describes the countrywomen in their "West Country rockets" a kind of shawl made of serge, white ones were worn

in summer and red in winter.

Twenty five years later the writer Daniel Defoe travelled around Britain on fact finding missions for his patron, the politician Robert Harley.

Defoe wrote a series of letters about his travels which he later published as "A Tour Through the Whole Island of Great Britain".

He was very interested in trade, in markets and manufacturing and as a dissenter he comments on the meeting houses in the towns he visits.

He travelled from Exeter to Taunton and then towards Minehead, and passing through Wellington Defoe's party was mobbed by beggars.

Taunton was a "large, wealthy and exceedingly populous town" at that time - there were about 1100 looms at work in Taunton.

Defoe, a townsman, was not fond of the untamed countryside; he describes Exmoor as "a vast tract of barren and desolate lands".

In the late eighteenth century a London based civil servant called John Byng spent his holidays making carefully planned tours of Britain exploring the country and visiting places of interest. The journal of his tours has been published as "Rides Round Britain".

Byng's often caustic comments on the places he visited have been frequently quoted by later writers such as Nikolaus Pevsner.

He is believed to have made a tour of the West-country in 1780 but no

account of it has survived.

In August 1782 Byng rode through Surrey, Hampshire and Dorset to Weymouth, then a fashionable watering place, where his wife was staying with some friends.

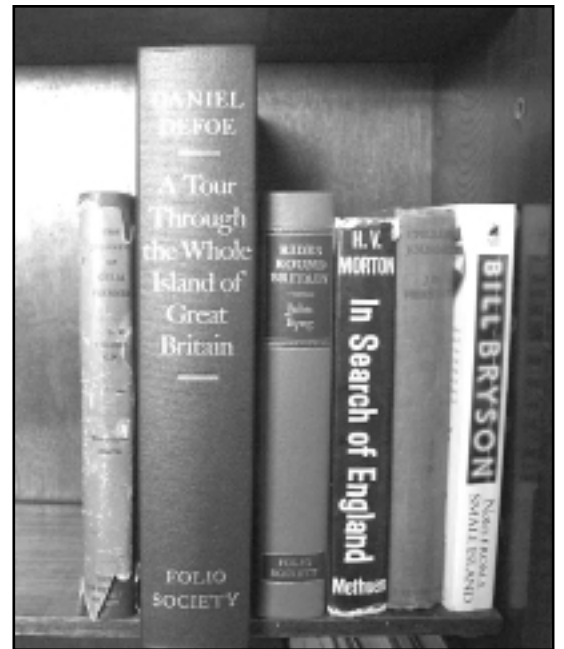
He was not impressed "for it has no good sea prospect, wants the cheerful country and good roads of Margate and Brighton or the compact society of Tunbridge Wells."

He paints a good portrait of the social life of Weymouth which he obviously found rather tedious, although he did have the opportunity for some good rides in the surrounding country.

H. V. Morton's "In Search of England" was something of a bestseller when it was published in 1927. Morton toured England in his little blue motor car, visiting the more picturesque and rural parts of the country and avoiding most of the industrialised areas, although he did visit Devonport Dockyard and saw a new warship under construction.

He drove through North Devon and then along the Somerset coast to Minehead where he sang the praises of the Somerset hills: "The Devon hills are fair and woody, the Cornish hills are wild and craggy, but the hills of Somerset rise up to the sky clothed in the cloths of heaven."

Morton's purple prose and rose tinted spectacle view of England may not be to everyone's taste these days but it seemed to strike a chord with post World



War One Britain.

In the Autumn of 1933 the playwright J.B. Priestley undertook a tour of England, gathering material for his book "English Journey".

Travelling at first by public transport and later in the comfort of his own chauffeur driven Daimler limousine, he visited the relatively prosperous south of the country as well places in the north that were suffering badly from the effects of the great depression.

Priestley did not get any further west than Bristol where "we came to a place where trams and coasting steamers seemed in danger of a collision and I realised that I had been deposited very neatly in the very heart of Bristol".

Whilst in Bristol Priestley attended a fascist meeting where the blackshirt speakers were given a very hard time by the audience who were mostly communists.

My last traveller is the anglophile American writer

Bill Bryson, whose book "Notes from a Small Island" was published in 1995.

Bryson's travels by public transport took him to Exeter and then by train to Barnstaple, but, being unable to get a bus going in the Minehead direction, he went back to Exeter and caught a train to Weston-Super-Mare.

On his arrival, on an out of season Tuesday evening, Weston appeared deserted, and the evening got worse when it poured with rain and he found himself locked out of his hotel at 9 o'clock.

The next morning the place was transformed "Weston was surprisingly lovely in the morning sunshine".

Bryson's account of his adopted homeland and it's people is affectionate, witty and very entertaining although his language does become rather coarse at times.

David Bond

Courgette Fritters

IF as summer disappears for another year and you are left thinking I must find some new recipes for next year's garden glut, I hope that this will be a useful addition to your 'what shall I do with courgettes' file.

It also has the added bonus that children who usually refuse to eat courgettes have been known to enjoy eating these.

Ingredients:
2 small courgettes
30 g hard cheese (e.g. cheddar, gouda, parmesan)
1 large egg
2 tablespoons plain flour
4 tablespoons milk
Salt and pepper
1 - 2 tablespoons oil (olive or other vegetable oil)



Frying pan, preferably non stick to reduce amount of oil needed.

Method:

1 Coarsely grate courgettes and cheese and put to one side.

2 In a bowl beat the egg, add the flour then beat until smooth.

3 Add the milk to the egg and flour mixture so that the batter has the consistency of thick custard.

4 Lightly season the mixture, then stir in the grated courgettes and cheese.

5 Heat a frying pan over a medium heat and add 1 tablespoon oil to the pan. When hot, but before it is smoking, add tablespoons of mixture into the pan, so that you have 3 -4 separate little heaps. Do not cook too many of the fritters at once as it will cool the pan down too much.

6 Keep the pan on a medium heat and fry the fritters gently for 2 -3 minutes, then turn them over and continue to fry for another 2 -3 minutes.

7 When browned and firm remove from pan and put on paper towel to drain. Mixture makes approximately 8 fritters.

The fritters can then be eaten as they are, or they can be used as a side dish for meat or fish, or they can be put into a warmed pitta bread pocket with some mixed salad. Enjoy!



Saturday September 9th saw the UK "keepy uppy" record holder Dan Magness open Wiveliscombe's latest venue, "The Silver Street Centre".



Another sighting of the world famous Wivey tee-shirt