

TRAVEL

Plymouth, England, writer shares her hometown best

(Editor's note: We received an e-mail from Melanie McDonagh telling us about a new book by writers from Plymouth, England, and their interest in other Plymouths here in the United States. We suggested a travel story on what it's like in the other Plymouth.)

By MEL MCDONAGH
SPECIAL WRITER

"My name is Mel and I live in Plymouth, England. I belong to a local writing group, and when I contacted The Observer & Eccentric about our first publication I was asked to write a bit about my home city which could be printed alongside some photographs.

Plymouth (pop. approximately, 250,000) is the main seaport for the southwest of England in the county of Devon. We have a busy Naval Dockyard and a commercial port for the cross channel ferry to France and Spain. Steeped in history, it is a city with much to offer to its inhabitants and tourists from all over the world. I will tell you a little about my favorite places.

The Hoe is the waterfront area with sea water swimming pools, public gardens and large expanses of grassy hills and greens. The Hoe is always busy in summer

with crowds of swimmers, strollers, sunbathers and loving couples enjoying the beautiful views over Plymouth Sound to the Breakwater and Drake's Island. Surprisingly you will also find that The Hoe is also fairly busy in winter with locals embracing an ozone laden breeze as they walk their dogs or children on a dry afternoon or men enjoying a pint of good English beer in a pub with a view.

Sir Francis Drake spotted the Spanish Armada's approach whilst playing bowls on The Hoe. He finished his game before going on to defeat their ships and stop an invasion, thus saving us from a lifetime of pacifica and sangria.

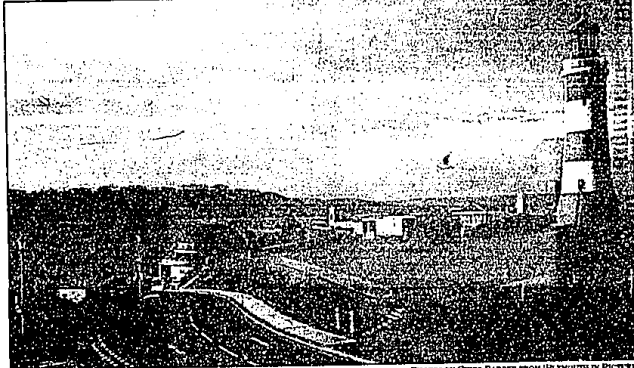
The Barbican was the original point of entry or departure for the city and was home to many rich merchant men. Today it is a shopping area for locals and tourists alike and a National Marine Aquarium has recently been built upon the site of the old fish market as a new and much improved fish market is now being used by the local fishing fleets. Here, Lawrence of Arabia stopped to have tea with family friends not far from the oldest street in Plymouth, ludicrously named New Street and an old Seaman's Bethel is now The Barbican Theatre, home to

the Waterfront Writers who meet every week. The theater is recently refurbished but still has many of its original features. The famous Myflower Stairs where the Pilgrim Fathers left for the Americas are also here now, but now only lead to the decks of small boats that run sightseeing trips or water taxis.

Dartmoor is a large area of natural beauty which borders Devon and Cornwall. Sometimes windswept and desolate and often dangerous it is home to Dartmoor ponies, Buckland Abbey (once the home of Sir Francis Drake), the infamous Dartmoor Jail and many delightful country inns with thatched roofs, home cooking and log fires (I know few people who could resist stopping a least once, for a sniff of the barmaid's apron at one of these hostleries).

Also it is said that Dartmoor was the inspiration for the Sherlock Holmes mystery, "The Hound of the Baskervilles," after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made one of his many visits to Plymouth.

The Royal Albert Bridge spans the River Tamar. Built in 1859 and at the cost of many lives, it was the last thing to be engineered by Isambard Kingdom Brunel as he became very ill. Although the general opinion at the time was that it would be able to withstand the weight of the engines, on completion, Brunel insisted on being the first person to cross the Tamar in a railway engine. Now over a hundred years later it still carries the railway line from Cornwall to Devon, although it is now being replaced by the Tamar Road Bridge. The road bridge is now the main escape route from Cornwall to Devon and, interestingly, a toll is only charged when crossing the border into Devon. Union Street or "The Strip" as it is known locally was once a



PHOTOS BY CHRIS BAKER FROM 'PLYMOUTH IN PICTURES'

Starting point: Smeaton's tower overlooks the Plymouth Dome, a good place to start a tour of the city. The dome features an audio-visual show on the city's history.

thriving shopping area by day and a sailor's paradise by night. Now most of the shops have moved into the town center leaving only Doc Price's Tattoo Parlour, still a strong attraction to many a brave hairy serviceman or civilian.

The Red Light district around Union Street is now more of a pale pink, but there are still many pubs and clubs and at 2 a.m. "The Strip" is the place to be for the serious people watcher with transport as taxis are rarer than sobriety in this part of town as closing time.

Of course, a special mention must go to Cap'n Jaspers which is praised far and wide as a catering establishment of merit. Situated on the Barbican it sup-

plies huge bacon butties and steaming mugs of tea to those willing to brave the Westcountry weather. A perfect place to eat, drink and watch Plymouth go by.

We have many local food delicacies in Devon. Clotted cream is my favorite and I think probably the most famous. This is a spreadable cream with an edible yellow crust. Wonderful with anything!

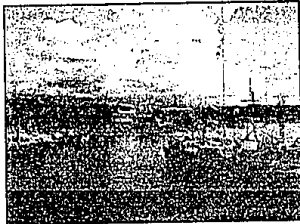
The Pasty was originally eaten by Cornish miners but has now crossed the border to become Devon's favourite take-away meal. It was originally a pastry crust containing half sweet and half savoury filling with a thick crimped edge which wasn't eaten but left for the mine pixies, who

when hungry would become mischievous and troublesome!

So this is my view of Plymouth, England, and I hope you have found it of interest. As a writer I feel that our surroundings affect creativity and I have certainly come to look at Plymouth with new eyes since writing this article. The Waterfront Writers anthology gives other writers' views of the city, both serious and humorous and is available for £2 (approximately, \$3.74) plus £1.50 (approximately, \$1.80) post and packaging (sterling).

For more information, contact Mrs. Melanie McDonagh, 3 Riga Terrace, Launceston, Plymouth, U.K. or e-mail at mel@mcndonaghmj.freemove.co.uk.

Changing harbor: Pleasure craft are replacing working boats in Plymouth's famous Barbican dock section.



GREAT ESCAPES

ZOO CRUISE

The Detroit Zoological Institute is sponsoring a one-week Alaska cruise with zoo director Ron Kagan. The cruise aboard the 138-passenger Yorktown Clipper through the Inside Passage departs May 28.

The ship's small size and maneuverability provides easy access to hidden fjords and secluded bays. Condo Nast Travelers recently named Clipper one of the top-ten cruise lines in the world for the fourth year in a row.

Kagan has led wildlife tours to South America, Antarctica, East Africa, South Africa, the Galapagos and the Arctic. Kagan will lead the Detroit Zoo travelers through Tracy Arm, where harbor seals nurture newborn pups on ice floes in the shadow of the surprisingly blue Sawyer Glacier.

The voyage includes accommodations on ship, all meals aboard ship and lectures by naturalists. Rates range from \$2,200 to \$3,300 (including a zoo discount of \$200) based on double occu-

pancy and not including airfare to Juneau. For more information or to book a reservation, contact Lisa Brancato Maucki at the Detroit Zoological Society at (248)444-5717, ext. 1202.

NEW GOLF COURSE

Shanty Creek in Bellaire will open its new Cedar River Golf Club on June 12. The course has been designed by former PGA player Tom Weiskopf. The par 72 course is one of four courses in the Shanty Creek development. A new Lodge at Cedar River will also be opening. For more information, call (800)678-4111.

CAMP HONORED

The American Camping Association has recognized Camp Tall Turf with its first annual award for community service. Camp Tall Turf, based in Grand Rapids, Mich., with offices in Baxter Community Center, operates a camp in Walkerville, Mich., approximately 75 miles north-northeast of Grand Rapids. The Christian camp was joined by its youth development programs and its Service and Leadership Training Programs for Urban Youth which involves 25 young people from 14 to 17 years young.

NEW SPA

Michigan's award-winning Grand Traverse Resort, the Midwest's largest year-round resort, has announced plans for a spa slated for completion in May.

The full-service Spa will feature an 11,000-square-foot facility for treatment areas incorporated into the Resort's 100,000-square-foot health club. To commemorate this new addition, the

Resort has changed its name to the Grand Traverse Resort and Spa.

For more information, call (800) 748-0303

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