A trip to the U.K, The Netherlands, and Germany – June 2018

I had a conference in York and a summerschool in Potsdam, so I combined the two with a trip to the Netherlands to see family and friends. I talked with people who voted for Brexit and liked and disliked various other political leaders and the World Cup Soccer was on with really interesting defeats: Germany and Argentina were playing really badly!

I flew to Amsterdam and then to Leeds and from there a bus and train to York. I had been here many years ago as a starting point on a bicycle trip through Scotland. York was an ancient Roman city and later the capital of Northumbria and Jorvik. The name is probably pre-Roman and based on a Celtic word. There are lots of Roman remains, a Scandinavian Center, and a Minster but I didn’t get to see a lot.

On the way back, I took a taxi which drove through old, picturesque towns, e.g. *Tadcaster* (with three historic breweries which are now mostly owned by Coors-Molson and Heineken). Major flooding had damaged bridges and buildings a few years ago.
After the UK, I spent a few wonderful days in The Netherlands. For some reason (open days etc), I ended up visiting two monasteries. The first (Sint-Catharinadal) is one of a cluster of three monasteries in Oosterhout, with 16 Premonstratensian sisters (called Norbertinessen in Dutch) remaining. Thanks to close to a 100 volunteers, they run a vineyard and various other enterprises. Book restoration and calligraphy is only done by the sisters. The order has been in West-Brabant since 1271 and in its present location since 1647 when they took over a small castle. During the reformation, they were one of the few monasteries allowed to continue and, after the French Revolution, they too managed to survive where others disappeared.

There was also a visit to a monastery and a northern ‘Lourdes’ in Meerseldreef, Belgium. The Capuchian brothers have been here since 1686 and built a copy of the Lourdes-cave in the late 1800s. There are pilgrimages and a saint, Father Pio. Meerseldreef is a delightful border village where, before the E.U., the Dutch went to buy (cheaper) butter, cheese, and tobacco products; it is a delightful mix of old and new.

Many churches are now being used for other purposes. I went to one that had just been decommisioned as a Dutch Reformed Church. This church is relatively modern, from after World War II, but on a historic spot where previous churches had been destroyed by floods or by bombs. The church bell will remain in this building as well as the organ and a stone commemorating an early benefactor. And right by the river was a stork’s nest. These were almost extinct 50 years ago and have made a come-back!
The next stop was Rotterdam, a city I had lived for some time. This city has grown so much in the last 20-30 years, e.g. the below is all new! Many buildings are by the Koolhaas firm OMA, e.g. the Rotterdam and the Kunsthal.
Boymans van Beuningen’s permanent collection is a joy: Bruegel’s 1568 Tower of Babel, Rembrandt’s enigmatic Concord of the Land, Toorop, van Meegeren, van Dongen, Basquiat, Dumas… At the Kunsthal, there were many special exhibits: Viktor&Rolf (amazingly beautiful creations and some less so) and Hyperrealism. And some graffiti from various places.
Basquiat, 1982, Kings of Egypt

Dumas, 1985, Mother of the Condemned

Van Dongen, 1910, Finger on the Cheek
The last stop on this trip was Potsdam, a city I have been to many times. It is always a delight to walk through Sans Souci Park. See an earlier [http://www.public.asu.edu/~gelderren/NL-D-AZ-DEC2015.pdf](http://www.public.asu.edu/~gelderren/NL-D-AZ-DEC2015.pdf) trip for more.