

## TALES FROM THE ARCHIVES

### Travellers' Tales

At this time of the season, with memories of summer holidays having receded and plans perhaps not yet made for this year, there is much on offer for the imaginative traveller at the Archives Division of Birmingham Reference Library. Without sea-sickness, sunburn or loss of luggage, you can drift back in time and join any number of travellers in the pages of their diaries and journals.

The problems have altered little. Firstly, what do you pack? In 1798, James Watt jr took with him on his 'Northern Journey':

6 shirts; 6 pr of cotton stockings; pr of silk Do; pr of short Do cotton; 8 neckcloths & 2 stiffners; 6 pocket hdkfs; 2 nightcaps; pr of shoes; 2 pr of halfboots & pr of tops; Dresscoat and Greatcoat; 2 white waistcoats; 2 striped Do; 1 pr pantaloons; 1 pr of nankeen & 1 of Dress breeches; 1 pr of casimir Do; Dressing gown; powder and pomatum; shaving apps & box; pocket glass; hammer and paper; engine memorandums; pencil & writing paper; . . . Road Book Map of Scotland . . .<sup>1</sup>



From the Diary of Daniel Hill, BRL

Obviously a working holiday! You did not travel light in those days and sometimes your transport went with you! At Leghorn, Watt paid 16s for a 'Landing carriage' and 7s for 'putting [it] together'.<sup>2</sup> The Russells took a carriage from France to New York in 1795, which they had assembled on arrival to tackle the marshy road to Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup> Other vehicles could be problematic. Helen Caddick on a visit to China in 1913 describes the Peking carts:

It is just like getting into a dog kennel! You have to go in on hands and knees head first, then turn around and double your feet under, or sit cross-legged - the first to get in sits right at the back and sees nothing . . .<sup>4</sup>

Your travelling companions can make or mar the journey. William Withering listed his fellow voyagers on board the *Expedition* sailing to Portugal in 1793:

There was Mrs Nukey the wife of a capital hair dresser in Lisbon, who from his excellence in that art has obtained a place at Court. Mrs Kennelly was a true Irish Woman & of course (in my opinion) not very agreeable. She was going to Gibraltar to her husband who was a surgeon in the Army . . . Mr Tuck is either an Englishman or a German, seems to be a tradesman, a shrewd little fellow & very fond of disputing, which sometimes afforded us excellent diversion . . .<sup>5</sup>

D R Thomason was less fortunate:

1822 Dec 27th This morning at seven o'clock took my place in the Tally Ho Coach for Birmingham. The weather extremely cold. Unfortunately I was the only inside passenger. With both windows closed, which being covered with frost almost excluded the light as well as the air and wrapt up in my travelling cloak I could scarcely keep myself tolerably warm. I

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had omitted my usual practice of taking with me a book supposing that conversation with passengers, surveying the country, which was entirely new to me, a few silent musings would afford me sufficient employment. . . . I had nothing to do but think. Happy is he . . . who carries about within him the elements of enjoyment . . .<sup>6</sup>

Sometimes the companions were not as expected. The report of a ramble to Tanworth-in-Arden in 1930 begins:

Another hen ramble! 'Where are the boys of the village tonight?' At any rate it was greatly enjoyed by those poor lorn females who participated in it,

and ends,

And now I've forgotten to mention the cows we met!<sup>7</sup>

Unexpected events can provide amusement on the journey. Martha Russell describes four men playing whist, each lashed to his chair, with a board on his knees for a table.

. . . just now I heard an out cry, turned to look and saw instead of four heads three heads and two heels they had all rolled upon Mr Astor & thrown him over, they hoisted him up again shouting as the sailors do when pulling the ropes . . .<sup>8</sup>

Daniel Hill saw the King of Naples while on a visit to Italy. The King's companions were all mounted on asses and

they rode through several streets and examined some of the paintings and then went into one of the Basilicas and ran races with their asses.<sup>9</sup>

Mary Russell got an unexpected soaking:

I [was sitting] at one end with my chair lashed - a very high sea however came suddenly threw me off the chair. . . & washed me some way on the deck . . . I was as completely wet except my head as if I had been dipped in the sea & was obliged immediately to go & put on dry cloths . . .<sup>10</sup>

Bad weather can ruin a day out. The Birmingham Municipal Evening Schools Rambling Club's outing to Shustoke on 27 October 1925,

. . . was one of the wettest in the history of the club. Mr Mason, regardless of the steady downpour led his followers along the allotted route across the mazes of muddy Maxstoke. . .<sup>11</sup>

Or it can be taken in good spirit. Elizabeth and George Cadbury with their family in Western Scotland in 1889 recorded this:

Monday Aug. 19th. Seemed rather favourable to boating, so we packed a large hamper. . . & all sailed off for the head of the loch. But . . . as we neared Ardchatton the rain came down in torrents. Landing, we sheltered under some trees while our ancient boatman . . . prepared a gardener & his daughters in a very pretty cottage entirely overgrown with every variety of creeper, for the advent of 12 guests. Here we partook of our repast . . . we found as usual a number of books in the room . . . a good many theological. The daughter, Miss Carmichael, spins and dyes wool: so we ordered a tartan & some homespun for dresses. It poured all the way back, but we were too cheerful to mind, & nobody caught cold.<sup>12</sup>

Other causes of unpleasant moments are the difficulty of securing a ticket and failure to understand the language. This can cause great anxiety, as Helen Caddick found at Tientsin in China:

I . . . rushed to the train to get a seat. They walked me along 5 long cars and declared my name was not down for a reserved seat! . . . 3 times they walked me up and down till I was in a fever & boiling hot in my heavy fur coat and wraps - I told them to fetch someone who could speak and understand English and refused to budge from a vacant seat till they found me my own.<sup>13</sup>

A more pleasant aspect of travelling can be the enjoyment of the local food. On his walk to Tivoli, Hill, on passing a vineyard, asked a man for a few grapes.

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He immediately cut three or four bunches from the nearest vine from which they were hanging in luxurious clusters and gave them to us . . . we had before stopped at a house on the road and got some eggs and wine for breakfast.<sup>14</sup>

The Russells, on their voyage to America, dined well and their journals are full of menus. Martha lists their breakfasts as

tea, coffee, chocalate eggs & cold meat.

Suppers were tea, and cold meat or sago! Mary records

. . . for dinner today we had a fine meat pye made at [Le] Havre . . . also stew'd ducks boiled fowl pork peas beans soup currant & bilberry pye & cream cheese - figs & pruens after dinner.

14th [July] wind fair tho' not much of it dinner meat pye from Havre again, peas soup, rice pudding, fowl cream cheese - a bowl of punch in the evening to commemorate the french revolution . . .<sup>15</sup>

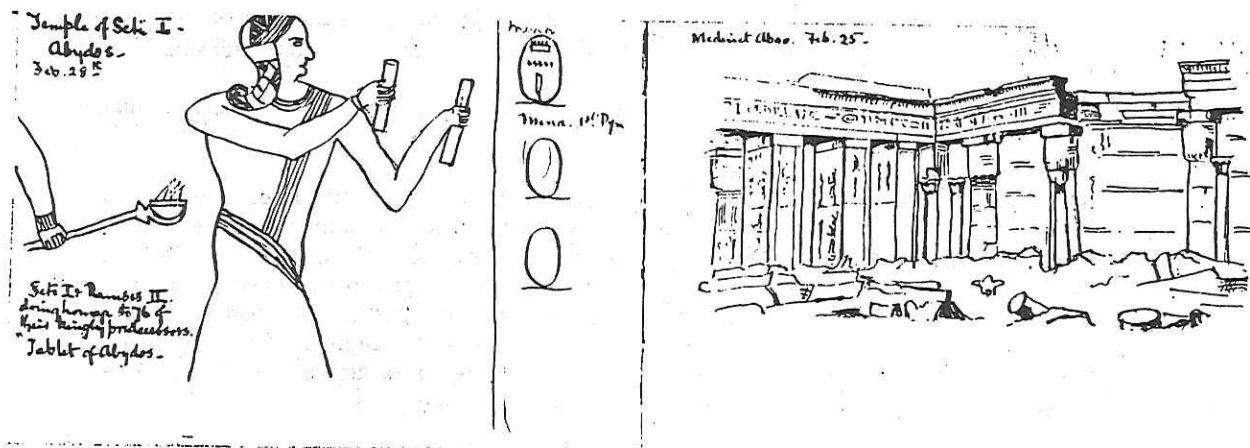
And what of mementoes of the journey? Fossils and minerals seem to have attracted Watt in Bohemia, and Withering in Lisbon. The latter writes:

The Elastic Stone is in great Estimation here; it is a thin flat piece of micaeous sandstone which will bend nearly double (Papa brought home a small specimen of it).<sup>16</sup>

George Cadbury jnr returned from Connel Ferry with a delightful little water-colour of a Highland cottage and this memory:

The cottage is just below our walls where an old woman lives and she says she has been there over 40 years. It is a dirty, dark little hole with one tiny window and she says it is over a hundred years old but I do not think it is true. She has something the matter with her eyes. Her bed is a niche in the wall.<sup>17</sup>

Members of the Albright family brought back from their visit to Egypt a sketch book of drawings of Egyptian temples and lists of hieroglyphs and their meanings.<sup>18</sup>



from the Albright Sketchbook, BRL

In Peru, Helen Caddick

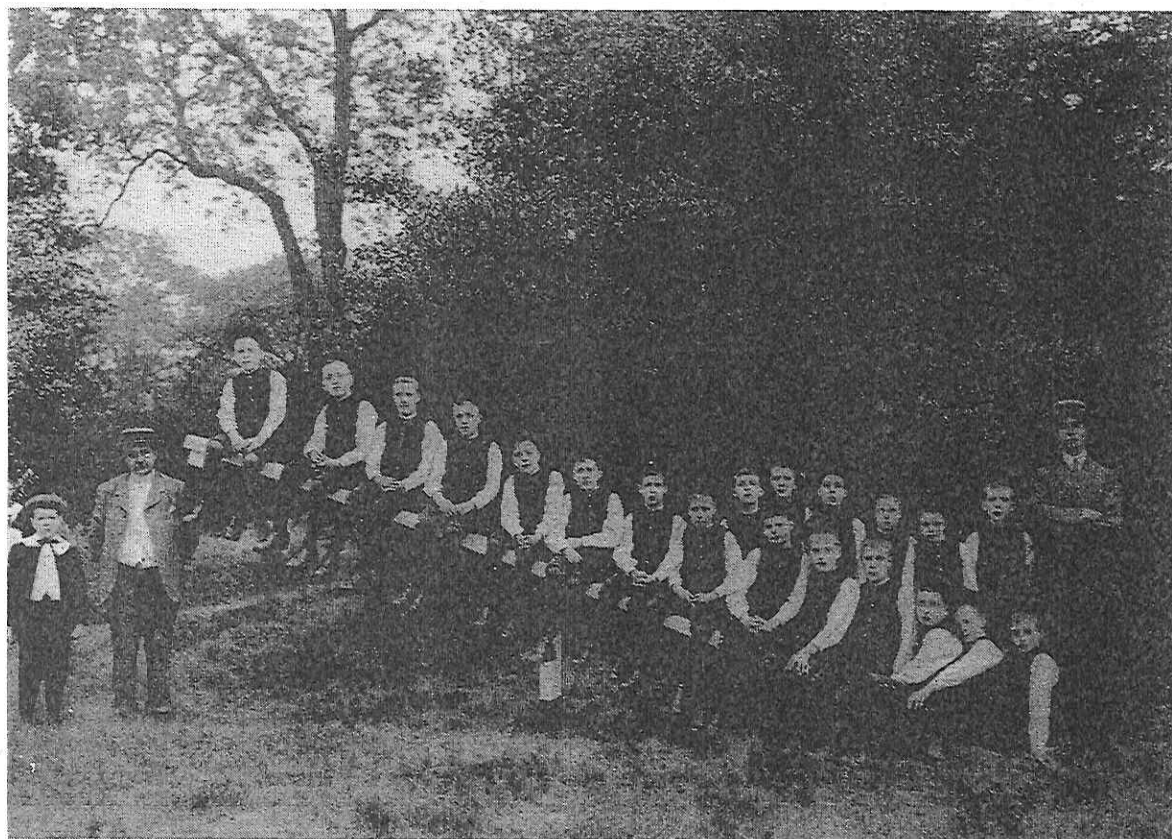
Did some shopping, buying beetles and small Armadillos.<sup>19</sup>

What more need be said? Interested visitors are welcome to present their passports in the Archives and accompany the observant travellers, of which these are but a small selection.

## FIONA TAIT

### REFERENCES (all BRL)

1. Boulton & Watt Collection, Notebook of James Watt jnr (1798) MI/6/7
2. *ibid*
3. Diaries of Mary & Martha Russell; Journey to New York via France, 1795, 660349, 660357 etc. [ZZ 324]
4. Travel Diaries of Helen Caddick; China, 1913, MS 908
5. William Withering, Journal of a voyage to Lisbon, 1793, 386806 [IIR 21]
6. D R Thomason, Journal of a visit to Birmingham, 1822, 662441 [IIR 21]
7. Birmingham Municipal Evening Schools Rambling Club, Minutes 1928-33, 414017 [IIR 23]
8. *op cit*, Martha Russell
9. Diary of Daniel Hill, 1831, MS 1421/2
10. *op cit*, Mary Russell
11. *op cit*, BMESRC
12. Holiday Diary of Elizabeth & George Cadbury, 1889, MS 466/206/3
13. *op cit*, Helen Caddick
14. *op cit*, Daniel Russell
15. *op cit*, Martha Russell, Mary Russell
16. *op cit*, William Withering
17. *op cit*, E & G Cadbury
18. Albright family, MS 1509
19. Helen Caddick in Peru, 1905, MS 908



Children's party at the new site of the Bluecoat School, Harborne: 1913  
(photographer: Benjamin Stone BRL, Local Studies Collections)  
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