

The Kipling Motoring Diaries

March 1911

The tour took them from Vernet-les-Bains, home to Bateman's. They had started the year at Engelberg, in Switzerland, whither they had gone by train, with John and Elsie. Their holiday had been interrupted by the death of the Pater, John Lockwood Kipling, Kipling's father. Kipling and Carrie had rushed home to attend the funeral, 27 Feb.-2 Mar. and eleven days after their return, John went home to England, to go back to school (John's holiday had been spoiled by an attack of measles, so he was late returning to school.) Three days later, the Kiplings returned to Paris, by train, and after a day in Paris, went south to Vernet-les-Bains, under the Pyrenees, again by train. They spent five weeks at Vernet.



On March 25, their car, on loan from Rolls Royce, arrived, and with it, their friend, Perceval Landon. The previous year, at Vernet, they had met Claude Johnson, Managing Director of Rolls Royce who was then giving Lord Montagu, another motoring pioneer, an extended test drive in a new 'Silver Ghost'. Johnson, spotting another potential customer, lent them the use of the car and its chauffeur for much of their stay at Vernet, and then offered them the use of the car to take them as far as Paris, on their return. Kipling had been so impressed by the Rolls that he ordered one for himself, to replace his four-year-old Daimler.



It was this car, the first 'Duchess' (the family name for the car), which should have arrived at Vernet, to take them home, but the car had been badly damaged by a fire at the coach-builders (Barkers) and could not be delivered on time. So Rolls Royce lent them a similar car, and a chauffeur, Fleck by name, until their own should be ready, to take them home.

This first motoring diary is written in note form rather than as an essay – later ones might almost have been written as one of his travel articles. The diary starts at the beginning of the second day of their trip home.

Sunday, March 26th

Nîmes to Montpellier, via Pont du Gard. Thence to Arles – a vile lunch at Hotel du Forum. Thence to Les Baux where Landon sketched for an hour. C. met Daisy Lowe at Hotel (Arles) with friend motoring and again at Les Baux. Returned to Arles and went to Aigus (Aigues) Mortes across the Camargue. Had hot chocolate after seeing fortifications. Thence in (5.20) evening light across marshes for Montpellier. Took an accursed short cut through little street at Marsillargues. Got stuck for 3 hours. Saved by Joseph Coste, Electrician and Cyprien with 4 horses. Left at 5.30, arrived Montpellier at 9.30.

Having travelled east from Vernet to Nîmes on their first day. they were now going west again. They seem to have been 'doing' Roman remains. Nîmes (Roman Nemausus) was (is) one of the best preserved Roman cities outside Rome. The 'Pont du Gard' is the well-preserved Roman aqueduct which carried water to the city from Uzès, some 50 km away. They had spent the night at Nîmes and visited the Pont du Gard and Les Baux in 1910, again on their way home from Vernet. Arles is another former Roman town (hence the 'Hotel du Forum') and lies on one of the many 'mouths of the Rhone', close to the sea, south-east of Nîmes.



Les Baux

Les Baux is a spectacular village set on a rocky ridge of what are called the Alpilles (little Alps) with a ruined castle. It lies not very far to the east of Arles. They then returned westward to Aigues-Mortes, a fortified town very close to the sea, and there they went to a café to refresh themselves with hot chocolate. (We will see that “chocolate”, meaning a drink of hot chocolate, features frequently in these diaries when they toured in France.) Their return to Montpellier was delayed by their car getting bogged at the exit of the little village of Marsillargues.



Montpellier

*Montpellier is not Roman in its origins, but Kipling probably chose it on the basis of a recommendation from the Touring Department of the Royal Automobile Club (RAC). (Pinney. **Letters**, Vol 4, pp.27-30, is a letter to an RAC official, thanking him for information provided through Claude Johnson.)*

Monday, March 27th.

Put in Europe morning at Hotel Metropole: having gone to bed at 11.30.

Left Montp(ellier) 1.20. Wet and drizzling: arr. Béziers at 2.40. (Cathedral).

Left 3.20 srr. Carcassonne direct from Béziers on a new route. First view of blind towers of Carcassonne in grey bluish twilight. Hotel de Bernard. Suite of three gigantic halls.

145 Kms

The blessed village of Homps.

Great Bed of Ware.

'Europe morning' is an Anglo-Indian colloquialism meaning a 'lie-in' (Hobson-Jobson – thanks to Yan Shapiro): Kipling used it in 'The Story of the Gadsbys' from Soldiers Three, chapter 8, 'The Swelling of Jordan'. (Thanks to John McGivering.)



La cathédrale Saint Nazaire de Béziers

Béziers lies to the west of Montpellier, and Carcassonne even further west (they were still, effectively, going back towards Vernet). In Béziers the cathedral de St. Nazaire stands above the town, and looks more like a mediaeval castle than a cathedral. (We will see that Kipling was an assiduous visitor of cathedrals.)

From Béziers, which is still close to the Mediterranean coast, they went west again to Carcassonne. We are not sure of the significance of the ‘new route’ – they certainly had not visited the town in their trip home in 1910. However this editor has approached Carcassonne from the south and can confirm that the first sight of the walls and turrets of the city make a most powerful impact.



Carcassonne

We have no information as to why the village of Homps (between Béziers and Carcassonne) was particularly blessed, and we can only surmise that the reference to the Great Bed of Ware may have been because they had a sumptuous four-poster bed in one of their “gigantic halls”.

Tuesday March 28th

Carcassonne all morning doing letters. Left hotel at 1 to see Cité and bless memory of Viollet-le-Duc who learnedly bedevilled it. Wallflowers in Visigoth’s wall and flock of shorn sheep in dark doorway. Left for Toulouse 2.25. Grey-blue luminous weather and country changing to wheat. Saw brick church (old Roman bricks) at Villefranche. Burst tyre at Bezaguiers (?) where saw Holy Stone and “real live” R.C. church of awful badness. Arr. Toulouse (Grand Hotel) (at) 5. Saw Cathedral and St. Saturnin’s church – very good dinner. Only ran 93 Kms

The Cité was (is) the old citadel of the mediaeval town. It is not clear whether Kipling admired the work done by Eugene Viollet-Le-Duc (1814-79) who had, over some 25 years, comprehensively restored the mediaeval fortifications.

Kipling, as 'Beetle', had met Viollet-le-Duc ("Violet somebody") in the tale 'An Unsavoury Interlude' in Stalky and Co.

The Visigoths had created the fortified city of Carcassonne in the 5th/6th centuries, after the fall of the Roman Empire, and the 'Visigoth's wall' must have been part of the original walls, 'unimproved' by Viollet-le-Duc

From Carcassonne to Toulouse, their route took them north-westwards. We have been unable to find either Villefranche (a very common name in SW France) or Bezaguiers on the route between Carcassonne and Toulouse.

Tyres were particularly vulnerable in those days (rudimentary tyre technology, unmade roads with sharp stones and such hazards as horse-shoe nails – a jack and a puncture repair kit, as well as a spare wheel and spare outer tyre were all indispensable equipment).

Wednesday, March 29th.

Left Toulouse 9 a.m. in the wet. Arrived Auch 11. Saw Cathedral and marvellous miserere seats. Had lunch by wayside ditch about 12.20. Passed through land of golden gorse. Suddenly changed plan and instead of stopping at M(ont) de Marsan stretched north for Bergerac through miles of turpentine forest on edge of Landes via (chocolate) Casteljaloux. Did some very fast mileage and arrived at Bergerac 6 p.m. where Mother ordered green pots.

They were still travelling west rather than heading north towards the Channel. Auch lies west by north from Toulouse and Mont de Marsan, their intended stopping place lies west by north again from Auch, half-way to Bordeaux. It would seem that they were about half way between Auch and Mont de Marsan when they changed their mind and headed north via Casteljaloux and their afternoon chocolate, crossing the Garonne at Marmande. The département of Les Landes is largely forest, created after the end of the Napoleonic wars, and was noted for the production of turpentine from the resin of the pine trees of which the forest largely consisted. They were not strictly 'turpentine trees', which are natives of Australia. As regards the 'green pots', it is not clear if Kipling meant potatoes (it is usually considered inadvisable to eat potatoes which have green in their skin): or if Carrie had found some colourfully glazed pots for her garden. Another possibility is that he meant 'new potatoes' - the earliest new potatoes might just have been appearing in greengrocers.

Thursday March 30th.

Dist. 243 Kms. Left Bergerac at 10.10 approx. Thence to Périgueux where we saw one appalling Cathedral restored by our friend Viollet*, and by winding roads to Angoulême where another Cathedral with glorious west front. Lunch at Angoulême good.

(*Note: service under auspices of the Red Cross Society held that morn in Per. Cathedral for the dead in the Services (A(rmy) and N(avy). Coffin draped in national colours.)

Left. A. for Poitiers 2.45. Arr. Poitiers 4.35, 67½ miles. Went out with E(*lsie*) in the evening. Mother tired. The land full of Joan of Arc to whom statues are being put up everywhere.

The 243 Kms presumably refers to the previous day's travel. They were now really heading north. Joan of Arc had been beatified by the Catholic Church in 1909, and her cult in France was developing all over the country (she was canonised in 1920).



Poitiers

Friday, March 31st.

Left Poitiers 12.30. Arr. Loches 2.15 (Bad hotel). Left Loches 3.30. Morning in Poitiers Cathedral – St. Radégonde. Tomb lit by candles – Notre Dame, ringstraked pillars and vile glass but glorious West Front. Salle des Pas Perdus – more and more Joan. Chapel and window to her Notre Dame Statue in Cathedral. Statue in Radégonde.

(Védrine, aviator, arr. Paris for Poitiers in 3 hours. Left Poitiers 6.18. Paris 8.30 =2-12. 338 Km = 169 m.)

Loches. Doufond girl with golden voice. St. Ours chapel below Agnes Sorel's tomb. [*Someone has inserted in m/s "This is at Loches".*] Beauty of soft spring rain and terror of donjons. Arr. Tours 4.30. Km. 146

Tours. Cathedral and stained glass. Saw church of St. Martin de Tours and tomb under altar: no statue of Joan in St. Martin's church so far but one in Cathedral

Whew! What a day: two Cathedrals, three churches and a chapel. Wikipedia lists four churches, as well as the Cathedral, as attractions in modern Poitiers. The Kiplings must have been indefatigable tourists to have seen the Cathedral, the church of St Radégonde (she was a Frankish queen of the 6th century AD) and the church of Notre Dame, all in the space of about two-and-a-half hours.

The church of Notre Dame is unusual, in that it has no transepts, but still has a large central open space, which Kipling referred to as a "salle des pas perdus" which normally referred to a central meeting place for lawyers and clients in a court house.



Jules Védrines

Jules Védrines (1881-1919) was a celebrated French pioneer aviator. At this time, he was specialising in long-distance flights. This entry should read "Paris from Poitiers": and Kipling's arithmetic is a bit off course – 338Km = 211 miles, or 96 mph, which suggests that he had a tailwind to help him to Paris – a more normal maximum air speed in those days was 80 mph, if you had a good reliable engine.

We have been unable to find out who the "Doufond girl with golden voice" may have been

Agnes Sorel was the first recognised 'official' mistress of a King of France (in her case, Charles VII.)

We are not sure why there is mention of “terror of donjons” (a ‘donjon’ is a castle keep), though there is a notable donjon at Loches. The wording of the reference to her tomb is slightly queer – but Agnes’s tomb is in the church of St. Ours, at Loches.

Finally, on to Tours, on the Loire, and yet another Cathedral and church before dinner.

Saturday April 1st.

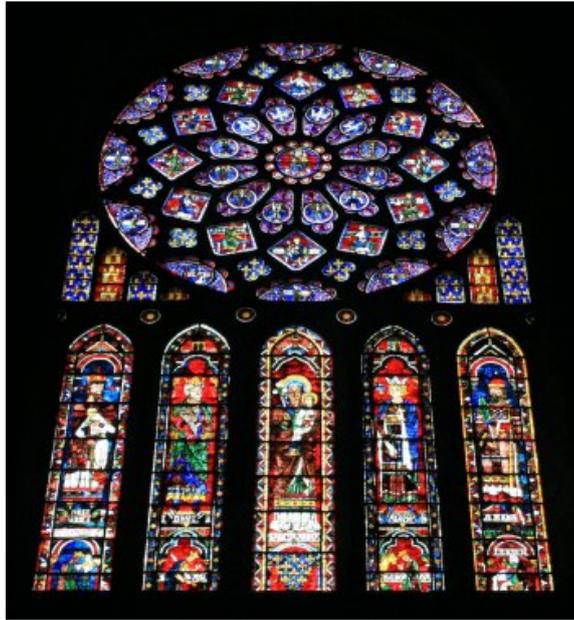
Left Tours at 9.35, fine, mild day with spring racing up France. Stopped en route at Chaumont – saw Agnes Sorel’s tomb and D de P’s (Diane de Poitiers’s) room, very human. Big empty stables. Blois about 11.45. Vile lunch at Grand Hotel de Blois. Chateau Blois after. Left at 1.15 Arrive Chartres 3.35. Cathedral. Landon climbed (glass). M. Mooton architect in his office gave me key to triforium. Saw backsides of glass windows.

Again, some of these notes must be suspect. Agnes Sorel’s tomb is not at Chaumont – they had seen it the previous day at Loches.

Diane de Poitiers (the next ‘official’ mistress – of King Henri II) had to give up the Chateau of Chenonceau for the smaller Chaumont, after King Henri’s death, at the insistence of Henri’s widow, Catherine de Medici. In fact, her connection with Chaumont was slight.

They cannot have seen much of the chateau at Blois. No matter how vile the lunch, it is unlikely that they spent less than an hour in the ‘Grand Hotel’, leaving no more than half an hour to see the chateau.

Chartres Cathedral is particularly noted for its stained glass: it has an unusually high proportion of its windows in stained glass.



We assume that the cryptic entry about Landon means that he ascended to one of the upper galleries to examine the glass more closely. And Kipling, whose name seemed to open all sorts of doors, was given a key to the triforium, a gallery just below the great rose window of the west front, the better to examine the glass.

Sunday April 2nd,

Beauvais. Hotel de France et d'Angleterre. Left Chartres at 9.30 after another look with L. at Cath. Even better in morning light for W. windows – via Dreux, Nonancourt, Louviers – tyre punc. outside Louviers delayed us till 12.45 Rouen lunch Hotel de la Poste (very slow and delay in in filling fresh tyre kept us till 3.20 before we left. Reached Beauvais 5. (80 Kms)

Chartres to Rouen 128

R. to Beauvais $\frac{77}{205}$ Km

Went to market place where J. was burned – map engraved in stone.
Lost way between Dreux and Nonancourt – never trust nice strangers.

They made a dog-leg to reach Beauvais, which itself lies just west of north from Paris (it will be seen in later years that if coming to Paris from the west, they never approached the city directly, but always made a detour round to the north). From Chartres their route took them north to Rouen, then east to Beauvais.

Monday April 3rd .

Amiens Hotel de l'Univers.

Left Beauvais 10.15. Amiens 11.30. Bitter, bitter wind getting better toward noon.

Although Beauvais has a Cathedral, there's no mention of sight-seeing. They evidently lunched at Amiens, and then turned south to Paris.

1911

SUMMARY

March 25	Perpignan to Nîmes (Luxembourg) déj (déjeuner = lunch) in Dorade, Narbonne.	G	256
26	Nîmes – Montpellier (Hotel Metropole) Déj Arles Forum	B	165
27	Montpellier – Carcassonne Hotel Bernard	B	145
28	Carcassonne to Toulouse (Grand et Tivolier)	G	93
29	Toulouse – Bergerac (lunch on road) Hotel de Londres et des Voyageurs	F	325
30	Bergerac – Poitiers Hotel du Palais Déj Angoulême (de France)	G	243
31	Poitiers –Tours Hotel de l'Univers	G	146
April 1	Tours – Chartres (Hotel du Grand Monarque)	G	156
2	Chartres - Beauvais déj Rouen (de la Poste) Hotel de France et d'Angleterre	F	205
3	Beauvais – via Amiens – Paris		
7	Paris – via Beauvais (déj Hotel de F.) to Abbeville (Tête de Boeuf)		80

*In the summary we can recognise the names of the hotels at which they stayed or lunched, and we believe that the letters B, F, and G mean Bad, Fair and Good. Kipling wrote from Abbeville to an official at the RAC (PINNEY, **Letters**, Vol. 4, pp. 27-30) (which we quoted in our annotation of *Carrie's diaries*), and used that categorisation, going into greater detail than he did in his own diaries.*

After four days in Paris, during which time their borrowed Rolls was involved in a minor collision, which required Fleck to do some rudimentary blacksmithing, to make the car safely driveable, they returned to Bateman's via Boulogne and Folkestone on April 8.

[R.K./A.J.W.W.]

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