

The Kipling Motoring Diaries

March/April 1914

This year they had gone to Engelberg with John and Elsie in January, as had become their custom. John had returned to England, to return to school, while the Kiplings and Elsie had gone by train to St. Moritz for a fortnight and had then returned, also by train, via Paris, to Bateman's at the end of the first week in February.

The Kiplings (but not Elsie) returned to France ten days later, also by train, and went south to the Pyrenees to take the cure at Vernet-les-Bains, as they had in 1910 and '11. They travelled south by train, but returned in their own car, with their new chauffeur, Eaves, in late March.

The car was a new one, their second Rolls (or third, if you count the one damaged by fire at Barkers) ordered in the autumn of 1913. It was another Silver Ghost, LC 7507, taking the registration from their previous car. They picked up their car at Bordeaux whither it had been shipped. (Our Society member, Meryl Macdonald Bendle, in an article in KJ 306, gives some details of that voyage – appalling weather, and distinctly 'hairy'). We are not sure why Kipling chose to get his car to Vernet by this means – in 1911 and 1913 their chauffeur had driven their car the length of France, to Vernet (in 1911) and to Marseilles in 1913. But, given the state of French roads at this time (very variable), he may have considered that there was a smaller risk of damage to the car with a sea transit.

They returned to Vernet and three days later set out on their tour, and the diary begins.

IDEA OF TOUR

Sat. Mar. 21	Vernet-Avignon
Sun. Mar. 22	Avignon.
Mon. Mar. 23	Avignon (after visit to Aix-en-Provence)
Tue. Mar. 24	Grenoble (Grand Hotel)
Wed. Mar 25	“
Thurs. 26	Autun (St. Louis et de la Poste)

(They did not go to Aix-en Provence on Mar. 23 – see diary below.)



1914

Mar. 21

Left Vernet 8.51: weather doubtful, not too warm. Arrived Narbonne, 11.30. Déj. at the Hotel Dorade – good and varied – while there, came down very heavy storm of rain with high wind. Regular deluge for about 40 min. Left Narbonne 12.45 with clearing skies. Had no more rain all day tho' cold winds, threatening skies and very little sun. Pushed straight through to Béziers; Montpellier and Nîmes (with 1½ min. halt only, at Nîmes) and reached Avignon at 5 precise. Running time for 200 miles, 6 hours which is not bad considering traffic. Road generally very decent, except in and out of Nîmes for a bit. Note that young proprietor of Hotel de l'Europe is doing his mil(itary) service, but he comes in of an evening to look at the hotel from barracks.



Hotel de l'Europe, Avignon

The Kiplings had come this way and visited various attractions in 1911 and 1913.

Mar. 22

Left Hotel at 10.35 for St. Rémy via Graveson and Meillanne. Found two Roman remains (arc de triomphe and a mausoleum) grey stone on a grey hill – ride among olives and almond trees in bloom – cheerless day but good light. Thence to Arles for déj. (as usual, not good) and saw amphitheatre afterwards. Then to Les Baux – most satisfactory visit yet. Pearly grey stillness breaking into luminous haze and presently sunshine. Plucked thyme and lavender roots for Bateman's and Keylands garden and so shortly back to Avignon. A thoroughly good day. Thanked God we had seen Les Baux.

St. Rémy lies south of Avignon, and the Roman remains were almost certainly the Roman and Gaulish archaeological site of Glanum, between the centre of St. Rémy and Arles: the arch of the arc de triomphe is complete, though its upper works have gone.



Glanum Triumphal Arch, Saint-Remy-de-Provence

This was the third time they had been to Les Baux – they had been in 1910 and 1911: and in 1911, the lunch at Arles had been “vile” – hence the “as usual” comment above.

Mar. 23

Left Hotel at 10.15 for Vaucluse. Some bother in getting out of city owing to small boy's proffered advice. Reached Vaucluse (lovely day) about 11.30. Walked to fountain where C. bought some coloured grasses and dried lavender. Déj. at Pet. & Laura Hotel. Left for Carpentras (Church of St. Siffrein) which was not much but small triumphal arch in C(*arpentras*) rather a find. In low relief was picture of typical Gurkha kukri with strap and buckle. Back to Avignon by 3.30. Interesting day but rather tiring. Country lovely.

Vaucluse is actually a ‘département’ rather than a single place. But from the description they went to the village of La-Fontaine-de-Vaucluse where a subterranean river comes to the surface. The village lies due east of Avignon, and Carpentras in turn is due north of La-Fontaine.

Mar. 24.

Left Avignon at 9. Montelimar, where C. bought nougat. Valence 11.45 (a bad lunch) Grenoble at 3.10 p.m.: dull and rainy – setting in heavy wet after 3.30. Walked about and visited old Cathedral which is not lovely: also church of St. Andrew. The night set in, wet and beastly. Grand Hotel Grenoble is not too good, and they charged 5 fr. to wash car, which I must report to A.A.

Montelimar and Valence lie north, up the valley of the Rhone. From Valence they continued north for a short while before turning east to Grenoble. Montelimar's nougat had become famous about ten years earlier, when Émile Loubet, a former mayor of Montelimar became President of France and 'pushed' it on every possible occasion.



Montelimar nougat differs from other nougats in using almonds, rather than walnuts, as part of its recipe.

5 francs was then about 4s. 2d, one third of a labourer's weekly wage, so for a car wash this was undoubtedly excessive.

Mar. 25

Waited for weather to break which it began to do about 12.30. Got away about 1.10, but I funked the road across the mountains to Bourges as it was raining hard and the mists were low on the hills. The instant we gave up the idea and headed for Lyons via Romans, picking up the north road at Tain, the weather broke and the rest of the day was hot, humid and summery. Halted for 10 min. at Vienne to see a battered and hideously cold cathedral. Then on to Lyons wh. we reached at 5.30. Grand Hotel at 6. Went out for walk and bought coffee and sugar and milk pot for guest rooms at Cristofies, F71/90 – small thanksoffering (*sic*) for not doing the road to Bourg.

He meant Bourg(-en-Bresse), not Bourges (and got it right at the end of this entry). Romans was Romans-sur-Isère, a river which flows into the Rhone between Valence and Tain. They returned to the N.7, the great route up the Rhone valley – the route which the Roman Centurion would have to follow, in reverse, when his Cohort was ordered home (The Roman Centurion's Song):

“You'll follow widening Rodanus till vine and olive lean
Aslant before the sunny breeze that sweeps Nemausus clean
To Arelate's triple gate: but let me linger on,”

*(Rodanus was the Rhone: Nemausus was Nîmes, and Arelate was Arles.)
Vienne is another town on the N7, between Tain and Lyons.*

Mar. 26.

Went to the Cathedral in the morning – a clear, clean, windy day. Left Lyons at 1.10 under unsettled skies for Chalons-sur-Saône beside flooded river. Got caught in one of the storms: ran into Chalons-sur-Saône at 3.45 for chocolate and to dodge another storm. Left at 4.30 but took some time to get out of town and belted into heavy rain and wind for an hour and ten minutes before we got into Autun where had a delicious dinner in a most comfy hotel. High wind all night.



la ville d'Autun

In Lyons the Rhone is joined by its major tributary, the Saône. The Rhone swings in from the east, while the Saône has come down from the north through the heart of the Burgundy vineyards. To get to Autun, they had diverted to the west of the main N.6, and had left behind the valley of the Saône, which, north of Mâcon, had turned away to the north east, while the road turned north-west. Autun itself lies on the south eastern side of an area known as the Morvan, a jumbled, up-and-down, heavily-wooded country

Mar. 27.

Went out at 10 to send wire to Landon and H.R.H. and also to fix band on E 's(?) hat. Then for a walk to Cathedral, cold and wet and spitting with rain. Lovely cathedral.

In aft(*ernoon*) asked French General if I could see cavalry school for children of his officers which I did on a most extensive scale, 2-4.30 in company with Commandant of the school and Colonel of the 29th line and one or two other officers. One instructor turned double somersault backwards from a high scaffold. Saw kitchens, dormitories, infirmary, etc, and talked for an hour afterwards for an hour with Col. of 29th. An amazing insight into a new world. Weather still damnable. To bed at nine with a cold in the eye.

*We are not sure why he wanted to wire to Landon, nor which HRH it might have been nor why. The only HRH with whom he was particularly acquainted was the Duke of Connaught. In a letter to Sir James Dunlop Smith (PINNEY, **Letters**, Vol.4, pp.232/3), Kipling outlined the visit much as above, but stated that it was the Cavalry School (presumably for conscripts doing their service militaire), rather than a school for children. Today, the Instructor's gymnastics might not have excited comment – television has made us well-acquainted with, and blasé, about, such feats.*

It is not clear how, nor why, he had obtained an introduction to the General. In the letter cited above, Kipling remarked that “[We've been motoring all over France \(and looking at the French army in between\)](#)”, without giving any explanation of why, nor how. Possibly it was based on a casual meeting – we remarked in a comment on their tour in March 1913, when they visited Chartres Cathedral, that his name seemed to open all sorts of doors.

We do not know what the reference to the band on E's hat may mean. Carrie's diaries for this period reveal that, while they were in Paris (see below), Elsie joined them for fittings of her court dress: possibly there was a hat associated with it.

Mar. 28.

A fine day at last. Got away on the tick of nine and made a run of it via Château Chinon for Nevers. A lovely and a perfect road rising to powdered snow as we crossed the highest point, 682m. Got to Nevers at 11.20. Then after lunch for a small walk, in the course of which C. was tempted and fell thrice – once a small porcelain bénitier ; one a ditto Nevers ware bouquetière in the similitude of a trunk, and lastly a soup-tureenish piece of blue porcelain which came from an apothecary's and purported to hold Electuaria Catholique. The vendor was a Jewish female but we think we didn't pay much too much. Déj. Nevers Hotel de France again and got away on the tick of one for the 164 (km) into Orleans. Good roads and good dining. Our running time for the 100 miles – 3 hours flat. Turned aside to visit St. Benoît-sur-Loire – loveliest of them all next to Vézelay – with its triple-bayed porch and amazing chapters of columns.



Abbaye de St Benoit-sur-Loire

Arr. Orleans at 6 exact and went to Cathedral at once for the sake of the Joan of Arc windows.



Much liked the single forlorn statue of forlorn Joan behind the high altar. Got letter at St. Aignon (Aignan) Hotel from Mrs Cattoni (Cattani) saying the baby (a son) was born to them.

A bénitier is a holy water bowl: a bouquetière is a holder for fresh vegetables (the word is used, in the masculine form ‘bouquetier’, in English (see Oxford English Dictionary) when it means, as one might expect, a flower-holder, but Kipling was using the French form which refers to vegetables); and an electuary is a preparation of a drug which has been powdered and mixed with syrup or honey.

As has been observed elsewhere, Kipling had the customary English middle and upper class prejudice of those days against “the Jews”, who were always suspected of driving too hard a bargain.

St. Benoît-sur-Loire (above) has a magnificent Benedictine Abbey. The ‘them’ in ‘loveliest of them all’ must refer to all the cathedrals and churches they had visited. Mrs. Cattani was the wife of the proprietor of the hotel at Engelberg at which they usually stayed (though not this year – it had probably closed for Mrs. Cattani’s lying-in).

Mar. 29.

Orleans to Paris, via Fontainebleau where lunched and stayed till April 13th.

Slightly misleading as written – they stayed in Paris in the Hotel Brighton on the Rue de Rivoli



Hotel Brighton

WITH E AND J.

John and Elsie joined them in Paris, and made the journey home with them.

April 14th

Left Brighton at 3.30. John as guide. He made a bad mess at Versailles, ably assisted by Elsie. Found road at last, ran through Rambouillet and so to Chartres vis Maintenon – John guiding not so badly. To Cathedral as light was failing. Almost, but not quite too dark to be impressive. Chartres (Hotel du Grand Monarque) at 6. As usual bathroom Hot was cold. Had some talk with a man in a 1905 Wolseley.

Maintenon was where Madame de (Mistress of Louis XV) came from. They may have been the ‘good old days’, but one factor on which you can rely in hotels in our degenerate days is instant hot water. By 1914, a 1905 Wolseley would have been a mechanical period piece, although they were always good cars, on a par with Lanchesters.

April 15th

C, E and I to Chartres Cathedral again. John shirked going. Chartres still to my mind the loveliest. Left Chartres (bill 69/-) at 10. Landlady asked me for an autograph. John piloted, but, panicked by Elsie, got us mixed on turn from Evreux to Dreux. After that he guided well to Evreux (Grand Cerf) wh. reached at 11.40. A vile lunch with uneatable earth-flavoured fowl. I made a remark and we finished on ham and cheese. The Cerf wants its tail twisting. Must report it. Left at 1. I guided. Reached Beauvais via Gisors (where lovely cathedral and wandering Englishman in car who wanted to know road to Mantes) at 3.30. Had chocolate at own beloved hotel after having look at Cathedral. E. excelled herself by absolutely denying the existence of Beauvais and Cathedral as we entered town from S. Left Beauvais at 4.30. Reached Amiens at 5.20 - 37½ miles in 62 mins. Went to Hotel du Rhin (remembering iniquities of Hotel de l’Univers). Thence to Cathedral unusually lovely and then bought lollipops and macaroons. John afterwards devastated family by bathing

They had been to the Hotel du Grand Cerf at Evreux in August 1911, and had had a bad experience there on that occasion, too, “expensive and meretricious Hotel du Cerf”.

It was Beauvais, rather than Gisors, which had the “lovely cathedral: and their “beloved hotel” was the Hotel de France et d’Angleterre which always earned their praise. As regards the “iniquities” of the hotel de l’Univers, they had lunched there in March 1911, but it had not then attracted any written comment.



The Cathedral Basilica of Our Lady of Amiens

As regards their average speed of 36 mph from Beauvais to Amiens, it is of interest that this editor has found that that is the average speed which he makes in the UK on roads other than motorways today, and which has remained a constant since he started to drive his own car in 1954 - regardless of the type of car and performance capability.

The motoring diary ends there. Carrie's diaries tell us that they spent the night in Amiens, and crossed to England via Boulogne-Folkestone the next day, with one night in London at Brown's Hotel before they returned to Bateman's on 17 April.

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