

The Kipling Motoring Diaries

March/April 1920

They left England, via Dover, on March 16th, and stayed at the Burlington Hotel. The Lord Warden, hard by the pier from which the steamers sailed, had been the customary hotel used by cross-channel passengers, but we believe that it was still in use by the military authorities (it had been commandeered for the duration of the war), or was still being refurbished.

They had laid up their car (the second 'Duchess') in December 1915, and re-commissioned it (or her) in January 1919. They made a tour in England and Scotland in September 1919, going as far north as Comrie, in Perthshire, but no diaries, if any were kept, have survived.

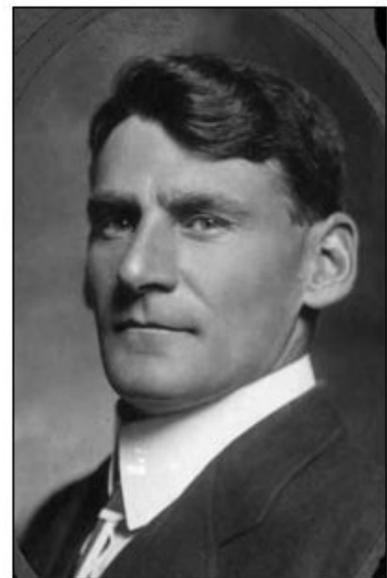
Now, in March 1920, they went to northern France on Imperial War Graves Committee (IWGC) business, spending between 17 March and 24 March on IWGC matters. The diaries start at St. Omer in the Pas-de-Calais.

1920: St. Omer to Biarritz.

Mar. 24th.

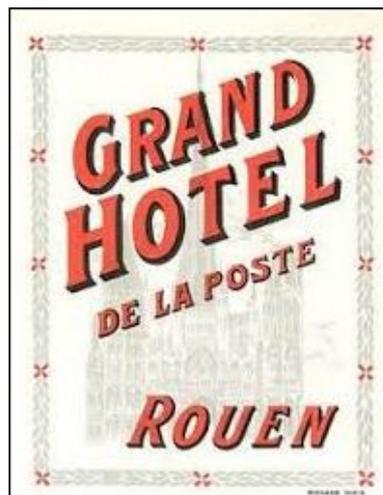
After IWGC visit to St. Omer and down with Colonel Goodland and his wife to Rouen by car, where stayed at Hotel de la Poste. Left Rouen 1 p.m., arrived Alençon 4.35 Roads fair and improving S. of Bernay. Hotel du Grand Cerf good and clean. Petrol at Cooperative stores. 90 miles (144 km).

Colonel Herbert Goodland, DSO (later CB, DSO) (1874-1956), a Canadian, was the Deputy Controller of the IWGC, with particular responsibility, at this time, for the construction work on the cemeteries in France and Flanders. His wife was Mrs Ethel Goodland.



Col. Herbert Thomas Goodland

The Kiplings had stayed at the Hotel de la Poste in Rouen in 1911. They were now heading south west from Rouen.



March 25th.

Dep. Alençon 10 a.m. Fine small rain, clearing later, but overcast throughout. Déj. La Flèche where small sausages v.g. Man tried to extort money for petrol. No deal. Filled with 40 litres (66.50) at garage Malinge (Angers). Arrived Nantes 6.30. Spent ½ hour in bewitched town hunting Hotel Central (very good). Rooms 33 and 34 with bath. 227 Km (144 miles)

La Flèche is a very pleasant small town at the junction of the river Loir with the river Loire (very confusing). It is also the place from which the first French colonists set out for what became Canada, in the mid-17th century. Nantes is a major city on the N. bank of the Loire, some 60 miles from the sea.

Mar. 26th.

Dep. Nantes 11a.m. Lunched on road 12.30-1. Overcast, strong SW wind. Arr. La Rochelle, 3.5. Hotel de France. Roads mostly good. (147 Km 92 miles) Amazing rooms with magic doors. Elsie had a bad toe dressed at frequent intervals. Filled with 35 litres *essence*.

It would be interesting to know in what way the doors were 'magic'. Also, who dressed Elsie's toe?

The figures suggest that they had consumed 35 litres (7.65 gallons) of petrol (essence) for 87.4 Km (Angers to Nantes) plus 147 Km (Nantes to La Rochelle) or 234.4 Km in total (146 miles), to give a consumption of just over 19 miles per gallon (m.p.g) – which was good – according to the Rolls-

Royce web-sites, a consumption of anything over 20 m.p.g. was very good, with the normal range being anywhere between 10 and 20 m.p.g.

La Rochelle is a port at the mouth of the river Charente, and had been a French naval base during the 17th to mid-19th century. The French have recently (2014) built at La Rochelle a replica of the frigate Hermione which took Lafayette, the French aristocrat who fought for the American colonists against the British, back to America in 1780.

Mar 27th.

Dep. La Rochelle 10.15. Déj. Saintes Railway Station (bad). Grey and rainy turning off to a perfect day. Rested in wayside wood, 2.30-3 for Lyre. Arrived at Bordeaux (last 20 Km awful) at 5.15. Hotel Montré. Went for a stroll till 6.30. Saw the fair at Place des Quinconces, by monument to Girondins.

They must have been unlucky at Saintes railway station: French station restaurants have a reputation as being a reliable place to eat if you're in a strange town, and have no other knowledge of where to eat well.

We think that 'Lyre', in line 2, must be a mis-reading for 'tyre'

The Place des Quinconces is a very large open space in the centre of Bordeaux, on the west bank of the river (the Gironde).



Place des Quinconces

The Girondins were one of the two main political factions in revolutionary France in the early 1790s. They were the moderates, tending to intellectualism. Although in the majority in the National Convention, they were ousted from power by the extremist Montagnard Jacobins in 1793.

Many of their leaders (who came from the Département of the Gironde, around Bordeaux) were executed. This event is generally taken to mark the beginning of the 'Terror' during the French Revolution.

Mar. 28th.

Rested, Bordeaux.

Mar. 29^h.

Bordeaux to Biarritz via Mont de Marsan, Podensac, Langon, Grignols, Casteljaloux, to avoid Pol (*ice?*) Lunched in wet pines with tin of unopenable foie gras. Hunted for petrol at Dax and St. Germaine where paid 15 Fr per bidon. Arr. Biarritz (Hotel du Palais) 5.30 in heavy wet and wind (248 Km 155 miles)

Presumably there was a known speed trap, or else the police were being officious about foreign vehicles' documents,

A 'bidon' was a standard can for petrol. In the UK it contained two gallons. We have been unable to find the standard size for a bidon – it was perhaps about the same as the UK one – 10 litres.

They spent 10 days in Biarritz, before retracing their steps, but finishing up in Paris. Before setting off, they made a one-day excursion to Pau.

Apr. 8th.

Biarritz to Pau. (70 miles and back). Left 8.10. Burst a tyre opp(osite) a farm house where talked agriculture. Lunched at fine Hotel de France in warm heat at 2 p.m. Bought hat for C. Left at 4. Reached Biarritz 7 p.m. Bought new oversize tyre.

Kipling would happily 'pump' any chance-met acquaintance: he could talk agriculture happily with a French farmer, based on his own experience of the farms at Bateman's. We wonder if some of this conversation didn't provide a background for "The Bull that Thought".

We would be interested to know in what precise way the tyre was 'oversize'. It cannot have been in diameter, or the car would not have steered in a straight line. It can only have been wider in the tread, we suppose.

April 9th.

Left Biarritz 9.40. Lunched Mont de Marsan (perfect roads) 12 – 1. Rested by wayside near Casteljaloux. Reached Bordeaux, heavy wet, 5.30. New Goodyear tyre. Car pulled like silk.

At Bordeaux that eve, C & E saw woman at street door in chemise and hat only. Was arrested by police and put into cab. I, alas! missed it.

April 10th.

Dep. Bordeaux (Hotel Montré) 9.45. Wild wet weather, awful roads. 110 miles, bumps included into La Rochelle for déj. 12.10. (C bought pair of bronze slippers.) Left La Rochelle 3.45. Found roads very good tho', after heavy rain. Reached Nantes, 7.15 (Hotel Central) 220 miles or 352 Km. A hard day and C. tired.

The mileage figure of 220 miles would have been for the whole day.

April 11th.

DEVIL'S DAY. Dep. Nantes 3 p.m. after déj. for Angers. Only 50 miles. Punctured tyre 8 Km from Ancenis. Weather wet and squally. Later took wrong turning at Anetz for 3 Km and on retracing steps to main roads, burst again and had to put on and pump spare by roadside about 6 p.m. Burst third tyre under Blue Beard's Castle (Champtocé) 25 Km from Angers. Put in ling talk with local postman about Wilson and Madagascar where he had served. Reached Angers (Hotel d'Anjou) over damnable roads.



Hotel d'Anjou, Angers

Not surprising that Kipling headed this entry in that fashion. Presumably, their chauffeur had to repair one of the earlier punctures by the roadside, since they'd already burst both spares. 'Blue Beard's Castle was a ruined mediaeval castle. Its most famous resident was Gilles de Rais, a fifteenth century nobleman nicknamed Barbe Bleu because of his murderous nature.



Bluebeard's Castle, Tiffauges

Kipling's talk with the postman concerned the Versailles Peace Conference, at which President Wilson of the USA was a major player, although, from the European point of view, not always a helpful one.

April 12th.

Left Angers 10.30 after shopping for various ladies' things (caps and gowns). Punctured after awful roads in American Camp dump 5 Km from Le Mans and talked to old man and woman and their pet pig over the gates. Pig was allowed into house by day – never at night. Lunched Le Mans (Hotel de Paris) 1.20. Spent till 3.30 getting new Bourguignon tyre at garage. Left old tyre. No more punctures but roads vile until after Nogent de Rotrou (*probably a mis-reading of Kipling's writing – the name is Nogent le Rotrou*) (heavy wet, unable to get even a cup of chocolate). Arrived own hotel Beauvais (Grand Monarque) 7.30, where received with cordiality and love and reminiscences of war and tender enquires after John.

The "American Camp" would have been one of the store depots established by the US Army in 1917-18 as a staging point between the western ports and the front line. They had last visited Beauvais in mid-April 1914, with John and Elsie (Motoring Diary – March 1914).

April 13th.

Beauvais to Paris, (Hotel Brighton.)

The Hotel Brighton seems to have been their Paris equivalent of Brown's, in London.

This motoring diary ends here. Carrie's diary records that they spent a week in Paris, then left to return via Dieppe-Newhaven, spending the night of 21 April in Dieppe.
