

Travel and Adventure: English settlers left historical ties that bind towns on both sides of the Atlantic

by Robert Selwitz

To the endless roster of reasons to visit Great Britain, this year you can add one more: the 400th anniversary of the founding of Jamestown, Va., the first permanent English settlement in the New World.

POCAHONTAS STANDS TALL - A life-size statue of Pocahontas stands outside the Gravesend church where she is buried. She died at sea returning to Virginia in 1617. CNS Photo by Robert Selwitz.

ENGLISH CHARM - Lincoln itself is a must-see. The town is full of wonderful, centuries-old medieval dwellings. CNS Photo by Robert Selwitz. **TOWERING TATTERSHALL** - Tattershall Castle overlooks the grounds where John Smith, sponsored by the noble Willoughby family, did graduate work and learned the finer points of horsemanship and jousting. CNS Photo by Robert Selwitz. Although many of the original 105 souls aboard the three vessels that departed England on Dec. 19, 1606 - starting from a dock not far from what today is London's Canary Wharf - found disappointment, disease and death soon after their 1607 arrival, prospects are much brighter for today's visitors. Those who want to see where the first white Virginians (some of whom may be their ancestors) came from can find plenty of places - from London to towns and hamlets in Essex, Kent, Lincolnshire, Norfolk and Suffolk - with plenty of Jamestown-related appeals. While it's challenging to reach the actual expedition launch site - now marked by a stone monument within the Blackwall Docks housing district - a better starting point is a major Jamestown exhibit now at the Museum in Docklands. Docklands itself is also worth a serious look. What today is replete with restaurants, night spots, hotels and banking headquarters was, for centuries, a former private commercial shipping center that was heavily bombed during World War II.

Nearer to the heart of modern-day London, visit St. Mary le Bow Church, the parish church of Capt. John Smith, as well as St. Sepulchre-without-Newgate Church on Gillspur Street, where he also worshipped and is buried. There's also a stained glass window on the church's south wall honoring Smith's achievements. Also noteworthy is the Banqueting Hall at Whitehall Palace, where Pocahontas was presented to King James I in 1616. She was royally welcomed, since the crown regarded her - the daughter of a powerful Indian chief - as an official emissary of a sovereign state.

You'll also want to visit Hampton Court, famous for its magnificent staterooms and gardens, an hour's rail ride from London. The former residence of James I, it was where, at a major conclave, he announced his support for a second attempt to establish an English New World Colony. The first ended disastrously in 1587 with the disappearance of all settlers from Roanoke, an island off North Carolina.

Another easy day trip out of London is Gravesend. In 1617, while aboard a vessel taking her home to

Virginia, Pocahontas fell ill and died. She was brought ashore and buried there at St. George's Church. The church has a stained glass window honoring the 22-year-old, as well as a life-size outdoor statue, similar to one in Virginia, that was given to the church by the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities.

Incidentally, the actual gravesites of Pocahontas as well as John Smith are no longer known. Both churches subsequently burned to the ground, and their replacements were larger than the originals, possibly expanding over the locations of their graves.

A two-hour train ride from London lies Bury St. Edmunds, the home of Bartholomew Gosnold. A notable discoverer, in 1602 he explored what is today's New England and named Martha's Vineyard after his daughter. He was one of the prime movers in the creation of the Virginia colony, and also captain of the *Godspeed*, one of the expedition's three ships.

Bury St. Edmunds also boasts the stunning St. Edmundsbury Cathedral, has remains of a 14th century abbey and gardens, and is a fine jumping-off point for excursions to such prime draws as the cathedral town of Ely (site of one of England's most imposing Gothic churches) and the beautifully preserved medieval center of Newmarket.

You'll also want to visit 15th century moated Otley Hall, Gosnold's birthplace, a gorgeously preserved home with extensive gardens that shows how comfortable life could be for upper-crust English gentry.

Further on lies Harwich, a historic coastal town that was home to Capt. Christopher Newport, who had overall command of all Jamestown-bound ships and passengers. An ancient seafaring town, Harwich also boasts a renowned maritime museum and Redoubt Fort, an anti-Napoleonic defense position overlooking Harwich harbor. Two hours north by train from London lies Lincolnshire, a sizable region John Smith knew well. Born in Willoughby, he was baptized in its St. Helena Church, where his baptismal font still stands. There's also a window depicting Smith's gory coat of arms featuring severed heads of Turks he slew during early European service.

Nearby is Alford, where Smith is thought to have attended school. Also here is a gorgeously restored 1611 thatched manor house, plus an impressive collection of art and antique shops. A visit to nearby Tattershall Castle is also noteworthy, for here, sponsored by the noble Willoughby family, Smith learned the finer points of horsemanship and jousting. The 15th century castle itself has a double moat and a tall, red-brick tower that provides fine views on clear days all the way to Lincoln.

Also well worth a stop is Grimsthorpe Castle, the ancestral home of the Willoughby de Eresby family, which sits amid a 3,000-acre park. Worthwhile excursions can also be enjoyed in nearby King's Lynn, the seaport where John Smith briefly worked and which many feel contains England's best collection of medieval merchant's houses and warehouses; and Boston, the namesake for its American counterpart, with strong ties to the Pilgrims.

Lincoln itself is another must-see. Dating back at least as far as the Romans, it became increasingly prominent after 1068, when William the Conqueror ordered construction of Lincoln Castle. Today, it still sits atop an ancient Roman settlement. Here, too, you can see one of the few existing copies of the Magna Carta. Lincoln's best-known structure is its cathedral, built and destroyed several times prior to its present version, which opened in the late 12th century. It remains one of England's most important and impressive churches.

By 1150, Lincoln was among Britain's wealthiest towns, its prosperity based on cloth and wool exported to Flanders. That wealth spurred the development of a commercial center that today is a veritable museum of the nation's medieval past. A day or two spent exploring Lincoln's major structures, as well as wending through its beautifully preserved streets and alleyways, would definitely be time well spent.

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IF YOU GO

VisitBritain - www.visitbritain.com/usa, 800-462-2748.

Visit London - www.visitlondon.com.

The Museum in Docklands - www.museumindocklands.org.uk/English.

Apex Hotel (in London) - www.apexhotels.co.uk.

Athenaeum Hotel (in London) - www.athenaeumhotel.com.

The Angel Hotel, Bury St. Edmunds - www.theangel.co.uk.

Lincolnshire - www.visitlincolnshire.com.

The White Hart hotel, Lincoln, www.whitehart-lincoln.co.uk.

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