

SYDNEY – AT LAST

DAY 18 – 11th July 2008

Today was another day of travel, but since our flight was not due to leave until just after 12.00 noon, and since it was a domestic flight (which meant an hour check-in rather than two hours for an international flight). Nevertheless we got up reasonably early, had breakfast, and headed out to see at least something of Perth in good sunshine, even though it was very windy.

Our goal was the Perth Mint, which just happened to be one block away from the hotel. We ventured inside, paid our dues, and then were taken on a tour of the mint. This had originally been a branch of the British Royal Mint, to deal with the gold prospectors of the second part of the nineteenth century.



We were shown models of the gold nuggets found, and Dominic could not resist posing (see above). We then moved on to the highlight of the tour – an actual gold pouring. Molten gold was poured into a mould. It was quite dramatic (but sadly no pictures permitted). The gold was heated to 1300°C (it melts at 1064°C), and then as soon as it is removed from the furnace it starts to cool quite rapidly – which is why the gold pourer needs to work quickly. It is like molten steel, but no sooner had it hit the mould, than it starts to harden and set – some 20 seconds later it was hard enough to be knocked out of the mould (but still too hot to handle), but a few seconds in water was enough to cool it down enough to be picked up without protection. It was worth going to the Mint just to see the “gold pour”.

We were then encouraged to handle a gold bar – worth about a quarter of a million pounds – but too heavy to pinch! In any case, it was well protected within a series of anti-theft devices that allowed you to handle and lift it, but not take it!!

We returned to the hotel, picked up our luggage and headed for the airport, where we checked in without any problem.

The problems started when we got on board. Somehow I ended up sitting next to someone who was dressed for the Antarctic – with a thick coat on, which meant that he took up half of my seat too. Added to that he began to fidget – and indeed did not sit still for more than two seconds during the whole of the flight. After about an hour he did decide to remove his overcoat – but insisted on keeping his seat-belt fastened –

you can imagine how much he pushed and pulled. And by then we still had not left the ground!!

The reason was because we had two extra people on board who should not have been on board. These passengers were eventually removed, but then their luggage also had to be removed. All luggage now is computer coded, but for some reason their luggage could not be located. That meant that every piece had to be unloaded onto the tarmac – over 20 containers worth. After about an hour and a half the luggage was found, and then everything had to be re-packed.

All this meant that we were about two hours late leaving. But we did have an advantage in having the wind behind us, and so finally got into Sydney at 7.30 pm. I was not very comfortable for most of the flight, thanks to the individual beside me. As soon as he landed, he phoned his daughter – in Italian!! If I had known, then I might have calmed him down by talking back to him in Italian.

A quick taxi ride into Sydney meant that we were at our hotel just after 8.00 pm. It also meant that we had finally caught up with the rest of the pilgrims from the Diocese of Menevia. However, there was a note waiting for us telling us that they were all too tired and had gone to bed!!

So, once we had checked into our room, Dominic and I set out for a quick reconnoitre of the area nearby. We headed for Central Station (since that is where we will be leaving from in about 10 days), hoping to find some restaurant open, but other than the likes of McDonalds or KFC, there was little open.

DAY 19 – 12th July 2008

Last night we hardly slept. Our room was not just next to a railway line, but on the other the other two side there were two busy roads, complete with police sirens, braking cars, lorries (trucks) thundering past, etc.

We descended for breakfast at 8.00 am and met the rest of the pilgrims from Menevia. Father Neil Evans is leading the group, along with Sister Angela Murray, and newly ordained Father Phillip Harries is also with us. That means that there are ten young people with us:- Louise Ashton, Paedar McCready, Gabrielle Browne, James Torrance and Dominic Conybeare (all under the auspices of the parish or Morrision), Helen Williams and Rachel Powell (Sketty), Martin McDonald (Tenby), Sinead Casey and Kimberley Stanford (Port Talbot) and Alex Martin (Carmarthen).

We caught up on tales and then we managed to change our room to one away from the road (but still next to the railway). It is much quieter already, and even though there may be trains through the night, they will not be running all night. That should mean that we should be able to get a better night tonight!

At 9.00 am we set off on a tour of Sydney. The guide had clearly met the group at the airport last night, and told them a few facts on the way in from the airport, but I don't think many were listening!



This morning, however, we were given plenty of facts about the founding of Sydney – its convict connection, and its flourishing due to its natural harbour. We saw so many things and sites – starting, of course, with the Sydney Harbour Bridge, as seen from the Sydney Observatory. There are plenty of signs warning that the Harbour Bridge will be closed later this week – when we, along with everyone else here on World Youth Day, will walk over the bridge!! It is not often closed to traffic, but “going to see the Pope” is a good enough reason to do so!



We then moved on to the Rocks area, which has another well-known symbol of Sydney – the Opera House. We worked our way along the southern part of the harbour until we hit the open sea – the Tasman Sea – and our first view of Bondi Beach, famous the world over for the introduction of life-guards – to help anyone who got into trouble while swimming, surfing, or who might have become part of the menu for the Great White Sharks that can sometimes be found there!



And occasionally, along the way, we would stop for group photographs!



We rounded off our tour with a visit to an Opal factory – not making chewy fruity sweets (candy) – but the genuine jewellery article. Dominic was proud to be able to tell us how opals were made – something to do with sedimentary rocks compacting silica. These beautifully coloured stones look wonderful, but the price was beyond most of the young people there. Sister Angela, however, did think of sewing a few into her wimple, but we managed to dissuade her!

We then returned to the hotel where we had Mass together before going out for a bite to eat. The restaurant where we had intended to eat, however, was closed, and so half of us went to Subway, and the rest to McDonalds.

In the afternoon while the majority went into the city to look around and to shop, the rest of us became “official”. Clerical collars were donned, and we went to the main office where we had our photographs taken for our identity cards, and were issued with our passes for what will be the restricted areas at the Papal Masses. Since I had volunteered to assist wherever needed, I was also given a list of times where I am expected to hear confessions – most of them in the late evening – finishing around 10.00 pm!! At least that will keep me busy for most evenings this coming week! Dominic will have to fend for himself – and it will be an opportunity for him to escape his uncle for a few days and spend time with those of a similar age.

We then picked up the back-packs that had been prepared for every pilgrim, containing maps, bus passes, wind-up torches (flash-lights), ground sheets, neckerchiefs, books, liturgies, etc. Oh yes – and a bottle of water!

This evening we are free, but tomorrow an early start for Mass at 6.30 am will inevitably mean that we should get to bed early tonight!