THEN AND NOW: BERTIE AND COLETTE'S ESCAPES TO THE PEAK DISTRICT AND WELSH BORDERLANDS

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Bertrand Russell and Constance Malleson visited two places in the Peak District and the Welsh borderlands during the early years of their romance, 1916–18. They wrote frequently about both places. Their biographers, however, spend little time on them. What they do write is sometimes inaccurate and in one case jaded. The author visits the places to see what they are like today and to gain insight into why vacations there intensified the couple's relationship.

onstance (Colette) Malleson and Bertrand Russell met in the summer of 1916 through their pacifist work. Both were supporters of the No-Conscription Fellowship. She was a young, beautiful actress and he a distinguished philosopher about twenty years her senior. Their attraction to one another was undeniable and they soon became lovers. At first glance, they would appear to be something of a mismatch. However, they were both aristocrats. Another common bond was their love of walking, particularly in the countryside. Weather was never a deterrent to this couple. They took frequent day walks outside of London. Occasionally they stayed over at an inn on the Thames. There were two places, however, where they spent longer periods of time—the Cat and Fiddle pub outside of Buxton, Derbyshire and The Avenue in Ashford Carbonell, Shropshire. Later in

Three of Russell's biographers (Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* [1975]; Moore-Head, *Bertrand Russell: a Life* [1992]; Monk, *Bertrand Russell: the Spirit of Solitude* [1996]) have mentioned one or both of these places. I think Clark is mistaken when he writes, p. 313, that Colette was waiting for him at the Cat and Fiddle, and he is definitely wrong that they spent a week there. With regard to Ashford, p. 328, he thinks that the couple spent two nights in Ludlow. Moorehead mentions Ashford in

their relationship, in 1918 and 1919, they also stayed at the Lulworth Cove Hotel in Dorset and the Cottage Hotel in Lynton, Devon, but these places never held their hearts in the same way that the Cat and Fiddle and the Avenue did. They were at a much more difficult, rockier place in their love affair when they visited Dorset and Devon. I felt I could not write about their relationship without visiting Derbyshire and Shropshire. My sister, Susan Turner, agreed to join me in retracing their footsteps in June 2012, leaving Canada and flying to Manchester.

THE CAT AND FIDDLE, 1916

It was Colette's idea to go to the Cat and Fiddle. On 25 October 1916 she wrote to Bertie:

... the thought that we may be able to get away to the country together sends me quite wild with delight. If we do manage it, the place to go is the Cat and Fiddle, up in the Derbyshire Peak. It's a small rough stone pub with five windows and a door. It stands higher than any other pub except the Snake. There's nothing but empty moorland. I think it must be a bit like Wuthering Heights. I'm going to find out more about it.²

Her reference to the Snake must be the Snake Pass Inn, near Bamford. Before they went there, he replied in teasing tone: "the 'Cat and Fiddle' sounds *too* delicious. I want to be the dish. How I *long* for it" (200031³). In his *Autobiography*, he took a more serious tone writing of their time there as:

only one sentence and not by name, p. 277. Monk writes of Russell's time in Derbyshire, p. 483. His interpretation of that vacation is totally different from mine. Because Monk is interested in Russell's relationship with Ottoline Morrell and other women (I am not), he looks at this time away with cynicism. He repeats from Clark that the couple spent two nights at Ludlow, p. 502. He is the only one to mention Russell's current work on "egocentric particulars" but only in Shropshire, not Derbyshire, where the subject first emerged. There is no source that I can find to indicate that they spent two nights at the Feathers in Ludlow.

² RA3 REC. ACQ. 596, "Letters to Bertrand Russell from Constance Malleson", ed. P. M. Urch, Vol. 1, letter no. 21. Her letters are designated this way in what follows.

Russell's letters purchased from Malleson all have document numbers beginning "200" in RA3 REC. ACQ. 596.

a three days' honeymoon.... It was bitterly cold and the water in my jug was frozen in the morning. But the bleak moors suited our mood. They were stark, but gave a sense of vast freedom. We spent our days in long walks and our nights in an emotion that held all the pain of the world in solution, but distilled from it an ecstasy that seemed almost more than human.

(Auto. 2: 27)

They were there from 14 to 17 November 1916. They returned *c.*22–24 April 1918 just before he entered Brixton Prison on a conviction related to his work against the War.

To get to this pub, which bills itself as the second highest in the UK at 1,690 ft., we took a train from Manchester in the Midlands to Buxton where the line ends. On the hour-long trip south, the train stops in many small villages. Signs point to various walking trails. All looked enticing but we remained on the train. June 2012 was one of the coldest, windiest and wet months that Britain had seen for several decades. At times the winds were gale force and I blew out two umbrellas on this trip. We arrived in rain and found our way to the cozy No. 6 The Square Tea Rooms for a warming cup of tea. In 1918 Colette and Bertie had Sunday tea in big cups at the station hotel (letter no. 302, 24 Nov. 1920). Perhaps this refers to the Railway Hotel on Station Road; it is however several blocks away from the station in the opposite direction from the Cat and Fiddle. There were also more trains running through Buxton then. Bertie arrived from the east in 1916, passing through Miller's Dale at 11.40 am and arriving at Buxton at 11.47 (200042), while Colette drove to the Cat and Fiddle the previous day (Urch typescript, p. 42). For most of early November he had been lecturing and attending a convention in Birmingham; he had also spent time in Manchester.

Presumably Colette met him at the station. It rained all day on 31 May 2012. But the next morning the rain had stopped, the sky had cleared and we set off, following their presumed route. Armed with an ordnance survey map and a second-hand cellphone I had bought outside Manchester Piccadilly rail station, we went along St. John's Road, turning off onto the old road to Macclesfield. We were soon out of town, climbing past sheep in the fields. The road turned into a rough track. Before too long we could see the Cat and Fiddle on the next ridge. This was an encouraging sight as I have had trouble finding my way using ordnance maps. The wild moors, now within the

boundaries of Peak National Park, stretched away in three directions with Buxton behind us, now swathed in mist which had appeared out of nowhere. Going forward seemed the best option, so down we went to the bottom of the Goyt valley, crossing by a stream. The nearby Derbyshire Bridge may be the very stone bridge where Bertie and Colette stood over a rushing stream in April 1918 discussing his new work on "emphatic particulars" (200351, 200811, 710.052262). ⁴ This bridge marked the then county boundary between Derbyshire and Cheshire, whence its name.



Figure 1. The Cat and Fiddle in 1916

The rough track turned into a macadam road on the way up the other side of the valley. But we were losing our race with the mist and it soon surrounded us. As we neared the new main road, the Cat and Fiddle was no longer visible. But a passerby assured us it was just up the road. And so it was, a very welcoming sight indeed. When we told the owner of the Buxton bed and breakfast where we were going, she

Quoted in Malleson, In the North (1946), p. 140, and "Fifty Years" (1967), p. 20. The new work appears thus in "The Philosophy of Logical Atomism"; later, in An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth (1940), Ch. 7, as "egocentric particulars". Russell's two later letters (200811, 710.052262) refer only to the Inquiry; all three Russell references are only to Derbyshire. It is only Colette who remembers the conversation continuing in Shropshire ("Fifty Years", p. 20).

said: "Oh, there are much better pubs round here than that place. Why do you want to go there?" My answer passed right over her—she appeared to have never heard of Russell. By the time we reached it, after a quite strenuous climb, I could not imagine a better place to be.



Figure 2. The Cat and Fiddle, 2012

The Cat and Fiddle was built in 1823 or possibly 1813 by John Ryle, a banker and silk merchant in nearby Macclesfield; the latter date now appears on the website while the former is on a postcard sold at the pub in 2012. In 1901 Matthew Beetham was the innkeeper followed by Herbert Frod in 1919. There were stables for horses and rooms for overnight stays. Now it is just a pub, frequented by hikers, although it is much larger. The image of the pub that appears below is from a postcard saved by Colette; she had planned on printing it a book of her letters to Bertie. There is a sign at the back entrance, "No hiking boots beyond this point". Back then, there was no special gear for hiking. My sister and I wondered what they, particularly Colette, might have worn for their rambles across the moors. On my return I looked through her photograph album. There is a photograph of her in 1918 in Lynton, wearing loose-fitting trousers gathered at the knee

with leggings below. The photograph is unfortunately of such poor quality that it cannot be reproduced. There is also a photograph of her in 1915 wearing white wide-legged slacks that would not be out of place today. Considering that women only started to wear trousers adapted from male versions during the war, she was a decade or more ahead of the times. A 1919 letter to T. S. Eliot reveals Bertie had a "rough coat for country" for walking, as well as "day dress for country". We also wondered if they signed in as husband and wife and what names did they use? Both were married, but not to each other.



Figure 3. Colette in her wide-legged slacks

The pub now takes pride in its history; old photographs are framed and hung around the main room as well as cat and fiddle images. The only incongruent note was the canned modern music that was playing. The pub has been owned by Robinson's Brewery since 1931. After lunch—we were the only patrons—we ventured out to find the dense mist still surrounding us. It was disappointing not to walk further on the moors. However, I had seen enough to know why this place was so special for them. We took the bus back into town. The new road

⁵ The Letters of T. S. Eliot, 1: 330n. The letter is dated 19 March 1919.

was steep and twisting but we were deposited safely back into Buxton within minutes. We were not to see a beautiful sunset as Bertie and Colette had done, a sunset so impressive that he remembered it in two later letters (200314, 200634). Back in Buxton, we could explore this charming town. We saw the Opera House where Colette acted with a touring company in 1920 as well as St. Ann's Well and the Pavilion Gardens.

Bertie left Buxton on 17 November 1916 at 1.10 pm (200042), gushing to Colette shortly after that: "I can't yet tell you the thousandth part of what you brought me during these days. It has been all so beautiful, so wonderful, so *great*" (200046). The month following their first trip there and after time for reflection, he wrote on 4 December 1916 about their time at the Cat and Fiddle and its impact on their relationship:

The thought of it is *always* with me—it makes me always feel a very profound union with you, which nothing can take away. It was the perfection of *personal* union. But on the basis of that I want something more—something to include that, but to be also an *impersonal* union—that we should be as much one in what concerns the world as in what concerns each other. And that means letting in pain, because the world at this time is one great cry of pain. (200052)

He wrote a third letter, which only exists as a paraphrase from Colette, 8 March 1917. She was remembering "the letter you wrote to me after the Cat and Fiddle, saying that love had come to you like some great bird out of the horizon after long days on the lonely sea" (letter no. 65). She was writing from Brighton on the south coast. Bertie was prohibited by the Government on I September 1916 from visiting the coast because of espionage he allegedly might carry out.

THE AVENUE, 1917

After a day trip to Chatsworth House, the home of the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire, we took the train back up to Stockport and boarded another train going south to Ludlow in Shropshire. In preparation for this trip, I had found that the house called The Avenue, where Bertie and Colette had stayed on three occasions, had a self-catering holiday flat on its top floor. Naturally I booked us in.

Since they had loved staying at the Cat and Fiddle, why not go back there? The first mention of a summer vacation in Wales was on 20 May 1917 (letter no. 90). Colette was concerned that their plans might fall through. On 23 June, Bertie wrote that he would definitely be able to get time away from the NCF in London where he was acting chair (200155), and throughout his life he took vacations when his work would benefit by a break. On 21 July, Colette wrote that once in the country, "you'll read to me out in the woods, and we'll have the peace and joy of being together day after day and night after night" (letter no. 104). Obviously they were looking for a place with more intimacy than the wide-open moors could provide. Bertie's letter written in late July (200169) sorted out practical details, asking whether they should stay overnight in Shrewsbury or push on to Knighton, after leaving on Sunday, 29 July from Paddington Station on the 10.20 am train. Colette wrote back that she preferred to go as far as Knighton (letter no. 105). She was concerned about her luggage, asking if she could bring two cases, both the same size as the one case she had taken to the Cat and Fiddle (letter no. 106) since they would be away for much longer.

They spent their first night of their three-week holiday in Knighton at the Norton Hotel (now the Knighton Hotel). To get to Knighton they had to go further north to Craven Arms, Shropshire and then back south and west to Knighton which is on the Welsh-English border. The train station is in Shropshire while most of the town is in Radmoreshire, Wales. "It is not clear whether Russell was recognized on arrival, or whether she was nervous that he might be, but they stayed only the one night and moved on to Ludlow the next day, to the Feathers Inn, while looking for secluded lodgings in the countryside".6 It is a mystery why they chose to go east, further into Shropshire, rather than push further west into Wales as had been their original plan. As to why they chose Ludlow specifically, Bertie wrote to his former lover, Lady Ottoline Morrell, that he had been there before and liked the place: "the Castle and the river are delightful, and there are beautiful wooded hill-sides beyond" (REC. ACQ. 69, no. 1,458). Presumably they asked at the Feathers for lodgings and were directed to the Avenue owned by Mrs. Agnes Woodhouse and her husband. It

Urch typescript, editorial text, p. 119. CLARK speculates, p. 328, that Russell chose Ludlow because he feared being recognized after the Brotherhood Church incident on 28 July 1917. This makes no sense to me. Why would it be safer than Wales?

is located in Ashford Carbonell, a hamlet about three miles south of Ludlow. She took in paying guests, giving them board and lodging, and thus supplementing the family income.⁷

We arrived at Ludlow station in the rain on 3 June and crossed the road to the Tesco grocery store to stock up on supplies. The current owner of the Avenue, Ron Meredith, then pulled up at the train station to drive us to his home. Once we arrived in Ashford, we turned down Donkey Lane, past some newer houses. Then before us was the sign "The Avenue" and the curving lane of poplars leading to the house.

Our top floor flat looked out over the fields containing cows, sheep, and horses with the Clee Hills in the distance. The cows were all expectant mothers and had been gathered together in one small field. It was slightly unreal to be there in the same house that was such a magical place in Bertie and Colette's relationship. We made dinner, took in the fabulous views through the casement windows, and hoped for better weather. There was a bell at the top of our stairs to summon servants back in the time that Bertie and Colette had stayed there. There were no servants on call for us!

Colette wore a dove-grey dress and small ribbon hat when she arrived at the Avenue the first time, one of her finest outfits. They were blessed with beautiful weather. They spent their days walking in the small quiet lanes and bathing in the River Teme. She might have worn the pair of white trousers she wore in 1915 in Norfolk. Bertie read aloud to her—"Epipsychidion" and *Candide*. "Epipsychidion" is contained in *The Complete Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* published by Oxford University Press in 1917. Bertie inscribed a copy to her at

Both Clark and Monk refer to the Avenue as a farmhouse because Colette and Bertie did. But it was not a farmhouse because the owners, the Woodhouses, were not farmers.

Descriptions of their time at the Avenue come from letters that they wrote after their visits. Bertie: 11 July 1918 (200314), 29 Aug. 1918 (200343), 17 Sept. 1919 (200548). Colette: 19 Aug., 7 Sept., 9 Feb. 1917, 15 June, 24 June, 6 July, 28 July 1918, 20 Sept. 1920. There are also several letters where he mentions Ashford as "Boismaison" (after Woodhouse the owner) while he was in prison and at first writing in French (200299, 200302, 200304; 200306, 200318, 200327, 200474). Colette referred to "Boismaison" in a message she placed in *The Times* personals, 27 May 1918. Apart from the letters, Colette wrote about Ashford in "Fifty Years: 1916–1966", p. 20. Some of her memories in this article are not described in the letters. Since there were five visits to two locations, she may be not quite accurate in what she writes.

Ashford Carbonell on 8 August 1917 and it remained in her possession until she sold it to McMaster University. He also recited from memory Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". His library has two copies of *Candide*. One was given to him by his sister-in-law Elizabeth Russell later than 1917; the other is in a nineteenth-century edition of Voltaire's *Oeuvres Choisies*. Both Bertie and Colette were fluent in French. They also read the draft of *Roads to Freedom* there during their second visit in March 1918 (200314). They took late evening walks under the stars. One evening they were several miles away at Orleton Common, watching the sunset. They had a complete break from their normal lives. Bertie escaped from his intense work at the NCF and did not write his usual editorials.⁹



Figure 4. The Avenue in the 1930s

The time together in this place was so important to them that they remembered it in letters. When Bertie was in prison in 1918, Colette sent him *A Shropshire Lad*. He was delighted, writing "Isn't it lovely having Clee and Ludlow and all the places we know coming in?"

⁹ For *The Tribunal*. Rarely missing a week, he missed 9 and 16 August 1917 and thus events between the Brotherhood Church incident and the Pope's peace note of the latter date (*Papers* 14: **51**, **53**, **64**). Immediately on his return he had "a terrific field-day" of work (20 Aug. 1917, 200174).

(200343). Colette is the source of much of the descriptive details of their time there. 10 She writes of the avenue of great poplars with "their shadows stretching thinly, like cool fingers, across the lawn". It did rain at least one day, and they lay "in bed with windows open and rain pattering in the trees". On warm days, they "lay on the grass ... while clouds sailed overhead, sun grilled our backs, and your heathery hair almost set off sparks like a heath fire." They walked into Ludlow and stood on the Ludford bridge, with the river flowing peacefully beneath. Light poured "down the Clee Hills", butterflies danced "above purple thistles". On 17 September 1919, Bertie remembered "the owl in the Avenue at Ashford ..." (200548). But mainly he wrote of the emotional affect their time together had on him. "It has been a time in heaven—a time of wonder and beauty and joy—I bless you every moment for it, My Darling. I feel so intimate, so near you—so full of this warmth and life of you—I came away full of despair and now I am filled with new hope" (17 Aug. 1917, 200171). He repeated these sentiments in later letters (200287, 200318, 200430). In 1918 he looked forward to getting out of prison:

When I come out we will go to Ashford, and there will be autumn mornings with dew and white gossamer and yellow leaves against a blue sky, and a delicious smell from leaves on the ground—and still evenings with a crisp coolness in the air. And I shall put my arms round you, and kiss your lips till our very souls touch.... (200311)

He repeated these sentiments on 23 April 1919 (200460). He also came to respect her work as an actress at Ashford (200318). And as late as 22 May 1920 in Moscow, he wrote: "Ashford is constantly in my thoughts and even in my dreams" (200664). His last recollection was written in the Far East: "Visions of Ashford float before me constantly" (30 Sept. 1920, 200705).

For us, the next morning the sun was out and it was warmer. We talked with Ron Meredith before we set out to explore. The Avenue was soon to be sold as his wife had died;¹¹ he only rented to people who had spent their summer holidays there for years, and was curious

¹⁰ The four letters quoted in what follows are 9 Feb. 1918, 710.052375; 24 June 1918, letter no. 200; 6 July 1918, letter no. 204; 19 Aug. 1917, letter no. 110.

II It was sold in August 2013.

as to how two women from Canada had found him. I explained the Russell connection. It was not news to him—his wife's aunt had been a friend of Mrs. Woodhouse's daughter. Ron had grown up at the Avenue. Like Russell, he is a Cambridge graduate. The original house had been built in the seventeenth century in stone; a later addition to the house was built in brick. When Russell visited the house it was covered in pebble dash stucco. Ron and his wife, Cherry, restored the house in stone and added the front porch as well as a conservatory on the side. The façade is now very impressive. The house is so large that they converted the top storey to a holiday-let flat to supplement their income. The Woodhouses sold the house around 1920 to a Mr. Wright, a banker who had stayed there as a guest. He had a large family and a good income; the Avenue returned to being a family home with no paying guests. Ron gave us instructions on how to reach the bathing beach on the River Teme and we set off for the day.



Figure 5. Ron Meredith at The Avenue, 2012

We first walked on Dumblehole Lane which runs south of Ashford, parallel but not in sight of the Teme. On this green, leafy lane, we saw trees and hedgerows on both sides. Eventually it opened to views of fields and rolling hills before ending. We saw no cars and apart from one jogger we saw no one. It was almost like stepping back a century

in time into the same peaceful and rural landscape of 1917. An attempt to find the beach failed, so we returned to the Avenue for lunch and to ask Ron for further directions. On our second attempt we did find the secluded stony beach which local residents still use. Although much warmer than it had been, it was not warm enough for swimming so we had the spot to ourselves. But no matter how hot it might get, it did not look like an inviting swimming place to me with its stones, weeds and dark green water. We returned to the main street and then walked east on Huntington Lane towards the Clee Hills. The views were beautiful and the sun beat down. This time we met no one at all but once again came to the end of the lane and retraced our steps to the Avenue. We then set off in a third direction behind the house along a small lane that led to the nearby parish church of St. Mary Magdalene. Colette pasted four postcards from this trip into her photograph album: Dumblehole Lane; St. Mary's Church; Ludford Bridge, Ludlow; and Ludlow Castle. Before dinner, Ron showed us two pictures of the Avenue when it was covered in pebble dash. That evening after dinner we watched the fireworks to celebrate the Oueen's diamond jubilee. We were thankful for a full day of sunshine, warmth, rural surroundings and good walks.

The next morning Ron drove us back to Ludlow where we spent our last evening at the Feathers Hotel. Dating back to the seventeenth century, the hotel features a timber and plaster façade. Its name comes from a motif of ostrich features which are etched in glass in the bar among other places. The day was once again cold and wet. People were trying to celebrate the jubilee with outdoor barbeques, ice cream and cold drinks, but it was all a bit of a washout. We explored Ludlow castle which is very much a ruins, home to many birds and other flying things. It was at one time England's defence against Wales. Without guardrails on the steep stairs and adequate lighting (now de rigueur in North America) and stepping around mounds of bird droppings, we were free to wander at will. Prince Arthur, the eldest brother of Henry VIII, died at Ludlow Castle; his heart his buried in Ludlow at St. Laurence's Church which we also visited. We took refuge in De Grey's tearoom and sat beside a big wood-burning fireplace where we had tea and apple cake. If someone had said it was November, I would not have disagreed. We went for dinner at the Charlton Arms Hotel at the Ludford Bridge overlooking the River Teme. At the Feathers, I had a glass of cider as Colette and Bertie had had. My sister does not like

cider: historical research can only go so far! The next day we boarded the train which would take us through Wales. We changed at Newport for Kemble close to Tedbury where we would spend a few Russell-free days. The rain, cold and wind, however, followed us. Then it was on to London, arriving at Paddington Station, their point of departure, on 9 June 2012.

When Bertie and Colette left on 17 August 1917, they travelled as far as Shrewsbury together before parting. They were to return for other vacations in March 1918 and in April 1919. In their letters, they never distinguish which of the three visits they were thinking about. Thus any letters written after March 1918 can refer to either visit, and letters after April 1919 to any of their three visits. They discussed returning in the summer of 1919—a booking was even made for 12–19 July—but in the end they didn't go. Their first visit to the Avenue remains as the most idyllic of all their vacations together and the place pulled them back, again and again. At the Cat and Fiddle their affair had blossomed into a significant relationship for them both. There are no photographs of them together—they either did not take a camera with them to Derbyshire and Shropshire or the photographs did not survive. It was their words that drew me to these places, and their words, which were not given sufficient weight by the biographers, do not disappoint.

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