

Hannah Arendt's Visit to England in 1971

A Letter from Elisabeth Young-Bruehl

In 1971, the year after Heinrich Blücher's death, Hannah Arendt traveled to Europe, as she had done the years before. She stayed in Europe for almost two months. From a note in her Denktagebuch, we know the exact dates and places she visited. She started in Paris, where she met her friend Mary McCarthy and her husband, with whom she went on a holiday tour of Sicily. Afterwards she was in Zürich, München, and Köln (cf. the details provided in H.A., *Denktagebuch*, ed. by U. Ludz and I. Nordmann [München, Zürich: Piper, 2002], v. 2, pp. 1154f.). The next and last stop of the trip was England, where she visited her stepsister Eva Beerwald and her cousin Else Aron, married to Manfred Bräude. When in England, she also met with Elisabeth Young-Bruehl, who in an e-mail to Ursula Ludz remembered her experiences with the touring Hannah Arendt. We thank Elisabeth for her permission to print her report in HannahArendt.net.

When Hannah Arendt was in England in 1971, she made London her base, but traveled to Cambridge, and I think, with the Bräudes, to see Oxford. She stayed at a little hotel -- very old, charming, with an excellent dining room -- in St. James Place, behind Buckingham Palace (I can see it in my mind's eye, but am not sure of the name, perhaps just St. James Hotel [it was the Stafford Hotel]), and went for a walk each morning to the Palace, to watch the guards and the people. She received various guests there, including [Stephen] Spender and [Robert] Lowell. I ate with her there one evening, and enjoyed her gossiping about all the people who were coming and going.

During three of those days, my then husband, Robert Bruehl, and I acted as her tour guides, and took her in a rented car all over London and also down to Hampton Court and to Blenheim Palace, too. She wanted to see all the major historical and political places (not the museums, although we did go visit the Elgin Marbles at the British Museum). We went to the Tower, to the Knights Templar, to Parliament, to all the big parks -- she loved Regents, and we went to the aviary there; and she loved the paths in Hampstead. Perhaps the most memorable event in all this touring around was at St. Martin's in the Field (I hope I am remembering correctly that this was the location, it was not Westminster Abbey, which we also visited). As we approached the church, a troop of guards in velvet suits with long trumpets filed out and stood in two rows on the steps, where a bright red carpet had been rolled out. While they trumpeted, out filed all the people, robed and with ermine-ringed hats, who had just been initiated into the Order of the British Empire (OBE) for that year, and, with them, Prince Philip and his retinue. (I don't think that Queen Elizabeth was there, or at least I don't remember her.) Hannah Arendt was like a child looking on all the panoply. When the parade had passed us, we went into the church, where the organ was still playing some "Pomp and Circumstance" like piece, marching music, and she took Robert Bruehl's arm, as though he were her tall

and handsome royal escort, and went down the aisle marching in step to it, in some kind of "pretend" inspired by the parade. She loved it! and she chattered on and on about how music makes political events so exciting and so memorable. Afterwards, Robert and I laughed about this lucky encounter with British ceremony and tradition, agreeing that Hannah Arendt had been in some kind of trance in the church. She had, of course, an amazing ability to allow herself to be touched by what she witnessed; she was the ideal witness.

Generally, as a tourist, she was a great commentator. She remarked everything and loved sharing her impressions with us, and hearing ours. She felt her way into places. Standing in the Knight's Templar, she gave a little disquisition on how seating in the round or being seated around round tables is crucial to democracy, so no one is at the head of the table, imbued with a kind of spatial authority over the others. At the Tower, she chatted about how darkness affects prisoners and why people purposefully make prisons dark in order to deprive people of hope and terrorize them.

While we were at Hampton Court, having lunch after hiking over the whole place, palace and grounds, we had a long talk about *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. I can't remember what brought up the book. But I asked her then how she felt about having been the target of such hatred, the center of such a vicious controversy. I was very struck when she told me: "In the greater picture, how I felt does not matter at all. And you behave yourself much better if you keep the greater picture in mind!"