

2011 - IRELAND

11 June 2011



St Brigit is the patron saint of travelers, chicken farmers and seaman, among others.

Irish National Horse Stud

IRISH NATIONAL HORSE STUD

On the drive out of Newbridge today we noticed on a large road-sign that the Irish Derby will be held at the local race course at the end of this month. It reminded Heather that Irish horses have been winning races all over the world - including our Melbourne Cup. Heather has been looking forward to seeing an attraction that explains why Irish horses figure so highly as winners of horse races around the world. The Irish National Stud is located near Kildare, an area that has an ideal climate and lush green rolling terrain. Kildare also had far sighted horse lovers who could see that horse breeding could become very profitable.

As early as the 1700s the owners of a local Kildare farm began to raise horses that could run very fast. For the next 200 years success was sustained due to the family's careful breeding and innovative horse management techniques. In 1915, when the owner died, the stud was bestowed to the British government who in turn handed it over to the Irish government in 1945. The government set up the stud as a company to promote the interests of the Irish bloodstock industry. Today you will find an Irish horse figuring in the winners circle at almost every premier horse race around the world.



Beautiful setting - green grass, safe fences, glorious gardens.



Japanese garden



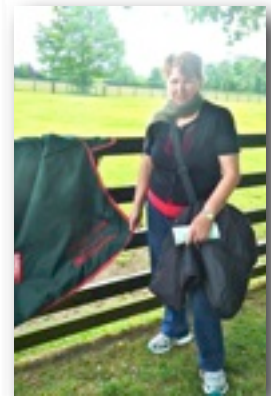
Bonzai gone wild

Pity the poor "teaser" horse.
Mares are paraded past "Tommy the teaser" who chats them up to see if they are on heat. If they are (receptive) then they are "covered" by a stallion and the poor teaser misses out. If not they will meet the teaser the next day, or the next, or the next.





Retired champion race horse Vintage Crop



Heather waxing lyrical over Vintage Crop's poo covered horse rug.

The equine museum on the stud documents the history of the horse, horse racing and steeple chasing and has horse paraphernalia such as saddles and bridles. We also watched videos of a foal being born and taking its first steps plus there was a number of famous horse racing finishes.

We joined a tour and the guide took us through the whole breeding and birthing process. Some of the more sordid detail made the audience laugh. He also made us aware how profitable the stud was with individual "covers" worth up to 75,000 euro - stallions get to "cover" up to 4 times a day in peak season. The stud has its own saddlery, forge and tack centers and a separate foaling unit. We were shown the stallion boxes, including one for the past Melbourne Cup winner - Vintage Crop.

It was time after the guided tour to walk around the stud itself and meet the stallions and the mares and their gorgeous foals. Heather was enthralled as she took it all in and demanded that we took as many photos as possible. I thought the horses looked like

horses. The antics of the foals were delightful though.

The grounds of the stud were vast, clean and beautiful. There were two award winning gardens - a Japanese design (which we strolled through) and a more traditional Irish designed garden. There was also ruins of a "black abbey" with an ancient cemetery.

KILDARE

We had lunch in Kildare and then strolled around the the grounds of the imposing St Brigid's Cathedral. We did not enter the church but did enjoy reading the many grave stones and entering the mysterious tomb which was only recently unearthed. Also within the church grounds was the 33 meter tall 10th century round tower. The tower can be seen towering over the town from a distance. We did not feel the 4 Euro was justified so we simply took photos and drove home via Kilcullen.

KILCULLEN

We took a detour to check out the narrow medieval streets, old ramshackle buildings and 4 arched stone bridge. Very interesting.



Legend has it that St Bridget was the chosen patron of the medieval Knights of Chivalry.

It was these knights that first chose to call their wives "brides".

St Brigid was also said to have been so strong willed to have pulled out one of her eyes to stop her marriage to a man chosen by her father.

FLORIDA PEARL

VINTAGE CROP



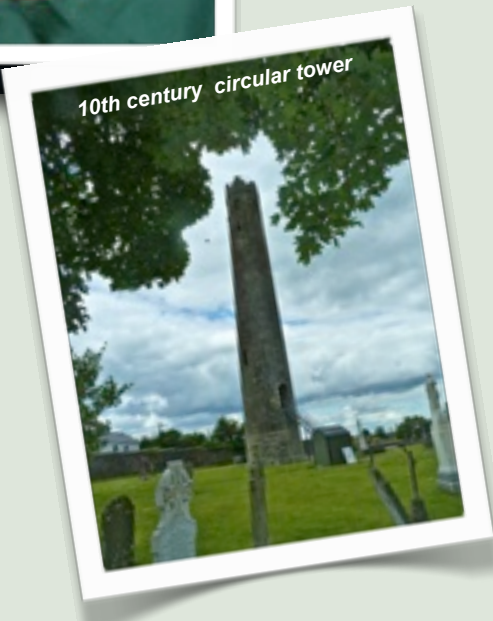
Heather checking out a future Melbourne Cup winner



Invincible Spirit the main stallion at the stud



St Brigits Cathedral



10th century circular tower