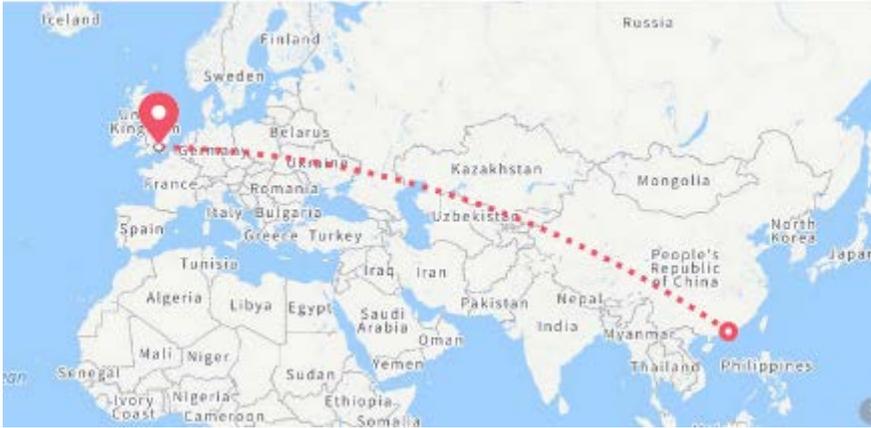


Journal of European Trip, May-June 2019

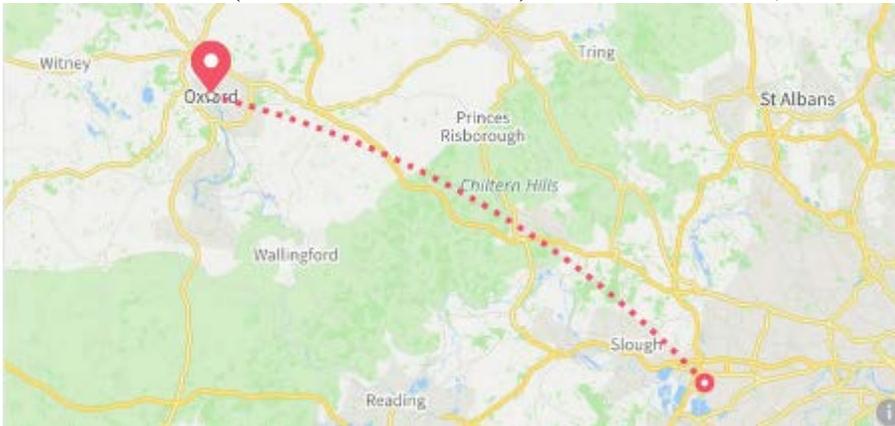
This blog is based on Facebook posts covering the period 4-May to 25-Jun-19, during which we toured Ireland (by car), cruised on Russian rivers from Moscow to St Petersburg, visited Liverpool, cruised between Scottish Islands, spent a week near Oxford with friends, travelled to Tallinn (Estonia) for a work TNC (networking) Conference, and then had a couple of days in London before returning home. It has been constructed as separate Blogs (Ireland, Russia, Scotland, etc) to make each file manageable. Return to the Blog home page at <http://www.alex-reid.com/Blog/> to see the next.

Saturday, May 4: Hong Kong – en route to Heathrow, London. Quite a long lay-over here, but had access to the Lounge, and worked on the biography I'm helping to write.



Hong Kong to London.

Sunday, May 5: London, Heathrow. Very bumpy flight, but good otherwise. Now off to Oxford to meet the Brooks. (not Oxford Brookes!!) Brilliant sunshine, but chilly at 4°.



Heathrow to Oxford.

Sunday, May 5: (near) Abingdon, United Kingdom. View of Wittenham Clumps from our bedroom - what a green and pleasant land (apart from its politics!).



Wittenham Clumps.

Monday, May 6: Fishguard, UK: Just aboard ferry from Fishguard to Rosslare, but we had to turn back because they couldn't close the car door.



Fishguard.

Monday, May 6: last view of Wales (Fishguard), first view of Ireland (near Rosslare). Curiously, we left Fishguard with the loading car door at the bow still open; maybe not too bad given the relatively calm seas; but I recall the ferry that sank out of Zeebrugge because the car door was left open. After we had left the harbour, the captain announced we would be returning to the quay to fix the door; this we did and it was closed immediately. So, I'm not sure what had gone wrong, how they had fixed it so readily alongside the quay but not at sea, and why they had left with it open in the first place!



Stena Ferry leaving Wales.



An outpost near Rosslare.

View from our accommodation on the first night in Ireland - this is the Suir River (which flows through Waterford), as it nears the sea (and has been joined by 2 other rivers).



“Russian Side”, near Waterford.

Tuesday, May 7: Of course, you can't go through Waterford without checking out Waterford Crystal!



Exotic crystal creations (but the grandfather clock is now inside, visible only if you take the tour).



More wonderful crystal creations.



Lismore.

Gin glasses in the pattern of our wine glasses,



31cm Seahorse Oval Bowl: €3,300.

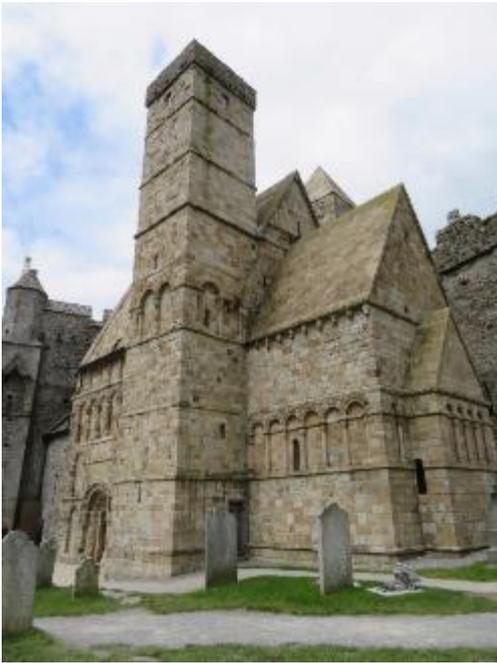
Took a modest diversion to visit Cashel, to see the Rock of Cashel, which looms over the town. Mainly a ruined cathedral and the recently restored Cormac Chapel (built in an exotic fashion, Irish Romanesque, wowing the locals, in 1130). Cormac McCarthy wanted to put his stamp on his right to be King of this area (not the whole of Munster, I think), at the cost of the O'Brien clan (who it turns out won out in the long run, and built the cathedral next to and cutting off the main entrance to the chapel! Also home to the "original St Patrick's Cross").



The Rock of Cashel.



The old ruined St John's Cathedral.



The Cormac Chapel (recently restored, older than the ruined Cathedral).



Inside the Chapel.



Inside the Cathedral.



The original St Patrick's Cross.

Finally today (Tuesday) visited Blarney Castle (near Cork). We were planning to go in and (maybe) kiss the stone (I had already done that, years ago - too right, some may say!). But the lateness of the day, and the cost to get in, saw us opting instead to continue our journey to Tralee for the night.



Blarney Castle

Wednesday, 8 May: Drove round the Dingle Peninsular in Ireland today. What fabulous scenery (and we were blessed by the weather!).



Inch Beach



Dingle Peninsular



Sleas Head rocks



Clogher Bay



Clogher Beach

The Dingle Peninsular has not just got dramatic cliffs and beaches, but also super-green fields, inquisitive cows, and intense field walls!



Green everywhere!



Old field walls.



Dingle Peninsular: inquisitive cows.

Leaving the town of Dingle, we headed up over Conor Pass, with dramatic views back South towards Dingle, and North showing glaciation.



View South, towards the town of Dingle.



View North.

As well as the natural scenery, Dingle also has many places of historical note, especially to do with the Great Famine of 1840-1845, which hit particularly hard in this remote area. Here are some "Famine Cottages" (with heart-wrenching stories of deprivation, starvation, etc), as well as a Beehive dwelling, a relic of an earlier age.



Famine Cottages.



Old Beehive dwelling.

Overnight, Wednesday, in Limerick, which sits on the Shannon River before it enters the Atlantic Ocean. Well-preserved King John's Castle on its banks.



Shannon River, Limerick.



Shannon River, and King John's Castle.

Thursday, May 9: Left Limerick and just a few km North is Bunratty, home for many years to a Computer Security Conference, giving its name to a flaw in Microsoft's software, which they didn't address till shamed by the Conference to do so; it also has a nice castle, which has been there a bit longer!



Bunratty Castle.

So, our first "proper" stop today (Thurs) was at the Burren National Park to witness these really strange limestone formations. Created 350m years ago when Ireland was in the tropics!





Then on to the Cliffs of Moher. Still very impressive, though now much more highly "developed" since I was last here in August 2000. Apparently, it attracts more visitors than any other natural feature in Ireland. We were blessed with a beautiful day, though the wind was bitter!



The Cliffs of Moher.



The Cliffs of Moher (wildflowers in foreground).



The Cliffs of Moher.



The Cliffs of Moher.

Thursday, 9 May: Enjoying our 55th Wedding Anniversary with our special friends, the Brooks.



Enjoying a celebratory dinner in Galway.

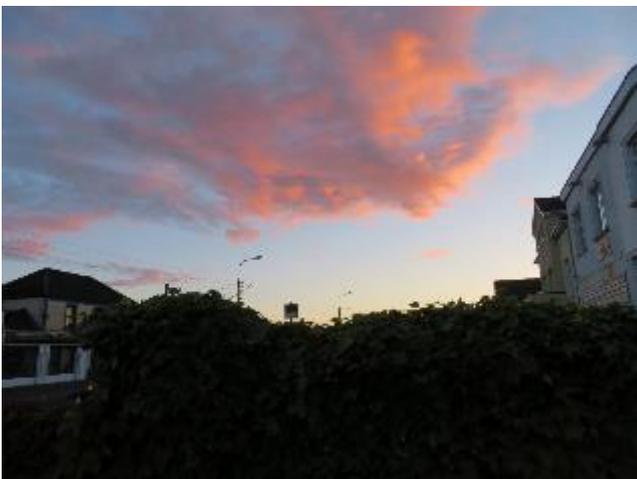
So, end of the day (Thurs) finds us in Galway for the night, in time to "watch the sun go down on Galway Bay!"



Galway Bay.



Galway Bay.



Sunset over Galway Bay.

Friday, May 10: Before leaving Galway, we had a stroll along the Salthill promenade. Michael and Lynda are pictured trying to decide whether or not to take the plunge. Air temperature of 8 meant they didn't give the idea much thought! Though some hardy souls did indulge...



Salthill Promenade Diving Platform, Galway.

Arriving in Dublin, we had to visit Molly Malone (of course!); but she doesn't seem best pleased with the (constant) fondling she was receiving!



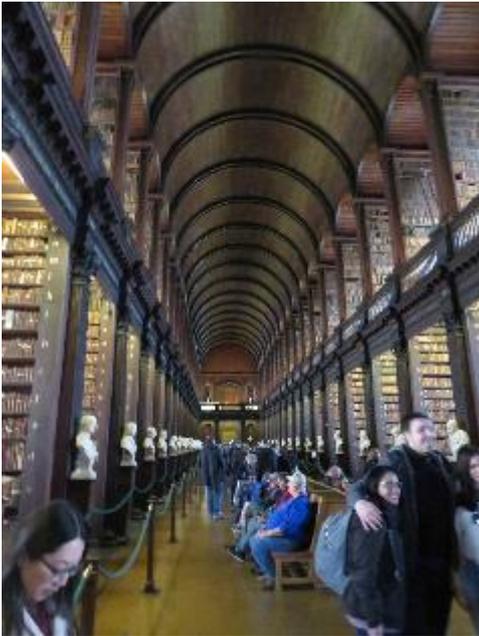
Molly Malone, wheeling her wheelbarrow.

The other "must do" when in Dublin was to visit the Book of Kells, created in about 800AD, and regarded for centuries as "the most precious object of the Western World" when it was (briefly) stolen in 1007. Here is a collection of illustrated letters chosen to depict the whole alphabet as used in the book. It used to reside in the Trinity College Long Room - now in its own exhibition, and no photography at all permitted of the book itself - today open at Matthew chapter 5 (Sermon on the Mount).



Book of Kells.

The Alphabet, using decorated letters from the



Trinity College Long Room.

After a meal in a pub in the Temple Bar area (I had "traditional Dublin Coddle"), we strolled around the area and across the Ha'Penny Bridge (the original toll cost for a pedestrian) - across the Liffey River in the centre of Dublin. Those with acute vision will detect my political preferences when it comes to Europe...



Ha'Penny Bridge, Dublin.

Saturday, May 11: We visited the Glasnevin Cemetery in Dublin today. Saw several notable graves, including that of famous revolutionary Michael Collins. The Daniel O'Connell memorial tower (198 steps) of course had to be subdued... Great views from the top - you can even see Wales in a good day. The grave of Colonel Francis Edward de Groot is also in this cemetery - he famously beat the dignitaries to the gun in 1932 by opening the Sydney Harbour Bridge. Meanwhile, the Brooks visited that other must-not-be-missed attraction, the Guinness Factory (we had done the tour a couple years earlier).



Glasnevin Cemetery, with O'Connell tower.



Michael Collins' grave.

On our way from Dublin to Belfast today we stopped to visit the wonderful Newgrange neolithic burial mound - on the Winter solstice, the sun (when it shines!) reaches the inner chamber briefly through the gap above the door. Built about 3200 BC. This monument is to be found, BTW, in Meath (but not the Meath where we live in Perth!).



Newgrange



Entrance to the chamber.



Ancient carvings at the entrance.



The restored wall of the tomb.

Sunday, May 12: Today, Helen and I spent the whole morning in the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast A&E department: Helen didn't have an accident, and it wasn't really an emergency, except that because our next stop is Russia, if her condition got worse we wouldn't know what to do. She has had a blocked ear for >2 weeks (since having it syringed), with occasional pain pangs. Eventually, a doctor (Julian) examined her ear and declared that it was a little inflamed (drum OK), and prescribed some antibiotic & steroid drops. So, after 2.5 hrs we were back on our way (meanwhile, the Brooks enjoyed the Titanic Experience, which we had seen before).



Sculpture outside RVH (the landmark we were given to find it!)

Before leaving Belfast, we did something of a C S Lewis crawl - his birthplace (blue plaque), St Marks Church where he was christened, and the newly created C S Lewis Square (2016), with statues of various creatures from Narnia - including the dramatic cracked Table, and Aslan (with remarkable spiky hair!) looking on.



C S Lewis' birthplace.



St Mark's Church.



The Cracked Table.



Aslan.

Thence to Portrush, where we spent the night: beautiful beach, beautiful weather, beautiful dusk across the water. And an amazing meal at Ramore (quality and value - desserts to die for - bought some to take away for tomorrow!). Portrush also gearing up for the North-West 200 motorcycle street race this coming week (hence the cushion barriers, even on the curbside), as well as for the British Open golf early in July at Royal Portrush Golf Club nearby.



Portrush Beach: on the way to the restaurant.



Portrush Beach after dinner



Motorcycle barriers outside our B&B.



Royal Portrush Golf Course.

Monday, May 14: Highlight of today's travels was the visit to Giant's Causeway, "built" by the giant Finn McCool to keep his feet dry when he went off to attack the Scottish giant Benandonner. The more prosaic explanation of its origins has to do with volcanoes, basalt, cooling, erosion, etc - all rather implausible! A quick stop on the way to admire Dunluce Castle.



Dunluce Castle.



The Causeway promontory.



The Giant's Causeway.



Basalt columns that make up the Giant's Causeway.



Basalt columns – the Organ Pipes.

After Giant's Causeway, we took in the Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge. Built by fishermen in the 19th century to enable them to get out to a point where the salmon ran in Summer. Now only tourists run by...



The promontory across parts of which Carrick-a-Rede bridge spans.



Carrick-a-Rede Rope Bridge.



Carrick-a-Rede rope bridge, 100ft above the water.

Next after the rope bridge was the sinister "Dark Hedges", built to frame the drive up to a stately home. Used briefly in Game of Thrones, I'm told - which might account for why it is one of the most photographed locations in N. Ireland...



Finally today, Monday, the drive along the Antrim Coast Road (adjacent to the beautiful Glens of Antrim) was a beautiful drive up to our destination, Larne.



Antrim Coast Road.



A Glen of Antrim.



A bridge over the Antrim Coast Road.



Another bridge over the Antrim Coast Road.

Tuesday, May 14: Flying from Belfast to Heathrow, ready for the next part of our adventure - to catch up with cousin Christine at Heathrow, prior to our flight to Moscow tomorrow.



Return to the List of Alex's Blogs to see the next chapter... <http://www.alex-reid.com/Blog/>