

Journal of European Trip, May-June 2019: Scottish Component

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 others.

Wednesday, May 29: Today we boarded the MS Black Watch (a Fred Olsen line ship) in Liverpool, and



set sail for the Scottish Isles.

hotel room in Liverpool – sadly, the intervening building obscures most of it!

MS Black Watch from our



Royal Liver Building.

View back to Liverpool from the ship, featuring the

Thursday, May 30: Our first port of call, the very next morning, was Greenock, in the Clyde near Glasgow. Greenock was the primary ship-building location on the Clyde, and has many fine buildings. Sadly, it rained almost the whole time we were there, so we cut short our visit, which just comprised a self-guided walking tour, culminating with a visit to the big covered Oak Mall Shopping Centre. Greenock (pronounced green-nock, unlike Greenwich) is a relatively small town, but did rival Glasgow at one time - indeed, its town hall was built to be a few feet taller than Glasgow's! It does have some nice buildings, including many churches, such as the Old West Lyle Kirk which has some notable pre-Raphaelite stained glass windows (but it wasn't open), and was moved in 1925 stone by stone from its original location to make way for Harland and Wolff's shipyard. Greenock had special significance for me as I had just finished reading Andy Adam's biography of his step-grandfather, "Thomas Cochrane and the Dragon Throne" (2018 – see <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Thomas-Cochrane-Dragon-Throne-Confronting/dp/0281080364/>). Cochrane was born in Greenock; I found the street, but no "blue plaque". He was a medical missionary in China for the first decade of the 20th century, and won the favour of the Dowager Empress Cixi (of The Last Emperor fame), who then permitted him (and very largely funded him) to build the first Western Medical School and Hospital in China (later underwritten by the Rockefellers) - hence the photo of Mount Pleasant Street.



Greenock Law Courts.



Greenock: Lyle Kirk.



Greenock: Clydeport.



Greenock: Town Hall.



Greenock: McLean Museum and Art Gallery (has James Watt exhibits, who was born in Greenock).



Greenock: Mount Pleasant Street, birthplace of Thomas Cochrane.

We left Greenock this evening, and had a wonderful bagpipe send-off – braving the rain.



MS Black Watch moored at Greenock.



Greenock Pipe Band farewelling us.

Friday, May 31: Today we arrived at Tobermory on the Isle of Mull. Tobermory is a picture-postcard fishing village, which even in the very persistent rain lived up to its image (for us, largely created/reinforced by being the setting for Ballamory, the very successful BBC children's programme). Sorry for so many pictures of it, but it **is** rather nice... (one ring-in photo, to show what it looks like when fine!).



MS Black watch at anchor off Tobermory.



Tobermory coloured houses, to the R of the jetty.



colourful)

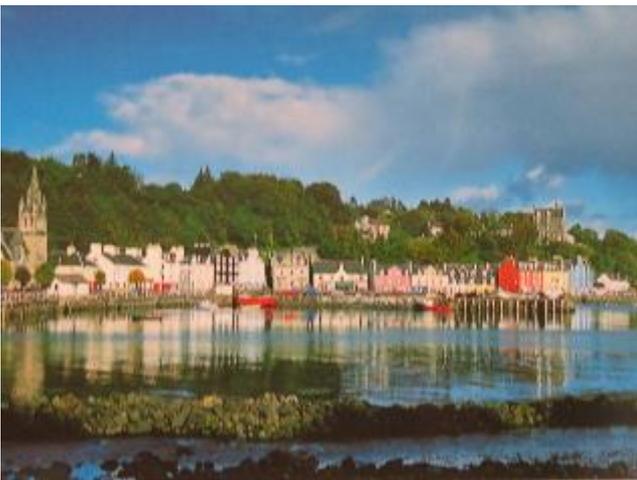
Tobermory houses to the left of the jetty (not **quite** so



Tobermory main street.



Tobermory colourful houses.



Tobermory picture postcard – apparently, the sun does shone sometimes!

Tobermory has a rather nice aquarium, largely run by volunteers, and with the principle that all creatures in it are returned to their original locations in the ocean after no more than 4 weeks. Here are some of the exhibits. They rely on local fishermen, tourists, etc to acquire their exhibits, so always varied.



Tobermory Aquarium: small shark.



Tobermory Aquarium: Cuttlefish



Tobermory Aquarium: Starfish, Urchins, Scallops.

From Tobermory we took a "panoramic tour" of the Island of Mull. The "panoramic" aspect was rather diminished by the weather - it rained persistently (or did I already say that!?). We visited the quaint village of Dervaig, followed by the fascinating location of Calgary Bay, where there is a "Machair" - a meadow created from sand being blown in from the beach, then producing a wealth of wildflowers (a little limited when we were there). Dervaig also has a tidal fish trap - seen here through rain-splattered coach windows! We did get a good idea of what a "mull" is, despite low clouds - it's a flat-top hill or mountain, which is characteristic of this island with its volcanic origin. The Mull of Kintyre has similar formations.



View over Dervaig, Isle of Mull.



The Bellachroy Pub in Dervaig (rainy day!).



Tidal fishing in Dervaig (still raining!).



The Machair at Calgary Beach, Isle of Mull.



Mull.

Stream entering the sea by the Machair, Calgary, Isle of



Flowers on the Machair, Calgary, Isle of Mull.

This evening (Friday) we sailed past and round the island of Staffa, most notable for housing Fingal's Cave. One of my all-time favourite pieces of music is the Mendelssohn Overture "The Hebrides", which was played over the ship's PA system as we passed by. It was especially good to see it, having visited the Giant's Causeway earlier this month - not too far away and also created from basalt columns.



Island of Staffa, location of Fingal's Cave.



Fingal's Cave, Island of Staffa.

Saturday, June 1: This morning, we travelled out into the Atlantic and sailed round the islands of St Kilda. Following that (no stop made) we continued on our way back to the Scottish mainland threading our way through the Outer Hebrides. St Kilda now has no permanent residents, the last remaining settlers being relocated (at their request) to the mainland in the 1930s. But it is a great bird sanctuary. Here are some pictures, including nesting gulls, guillemots and a puffin - which I didn't realise I had photographed till I transferred them all to my laptop.



St Kilda.



St Kilda.



A Puffin at St Kilda.



Nesting birds at St Kilda.



Guillemots at St Kilda.



The old settlement and field walls at St Kilda.

Sunday, June 2: After St Kilda, we sailed back to the mainland, stopping at Ullapool. We had a tour of Wester Ross, the area around Ullapool in NW Scotland. Great view over Inverbroom (the head of Loch Broom, on which Ullapool sits). One feature was the Corriesharroch Gorge, and the Measach Falls, complete with Suspension Bridge, which Christine braved.



View of the row of houses at Ullapool.



Inverbroom, leading down to Loch Broom.



The Measach Falls at Corriesharroch Gorge, Inverbroom.



Corriesharroch Gorge suspension bridge.



Christine braving the Corriesharroch Gorge suspension bridge.

Our tour from Ullapool also took us to Gruinard Beach. Also saw Gruinard Island which was the site of an anthrax experiment during WWII. Made safe after locals threatened to dump loads of contaminated soil out the front of Westminster. Still bluebells around here (much to our delight). Also wild rose at Aultbea. After boarding the ship, we sailed up Loch Broom and enjoyed some (almost fine) weather for a change!



Gruinard Beach, Ross and Cromarty.



Gruinard Island, Ross and Cromarty.



Bluebells, Invergordon.



Wild rose at Autlbea.



Loch Broom, up from Ullapool.

Monday, June 3: Today we visited Kirkwall, capital of the Orkneys, and joined a tour which featured Skara Brae, a Neolithic village dating back 5,000 years (ie before Stonehenge). Discovered in 1850 when a storm uncovered the tops of some of the walls. When excavated, a village of houses accommodating about 100 people was discovered, complete with furniture and other artefacts. You can't go into them now, as they are too fragile, but there is a reconstructed one you can wander through. At one time the local children used them as "Wendy Houses"! They were partly subterranean.



The reconstructed Skara Brae Neolithic dwelling.



Skara Brae Neolithic Village, Orkneys.



Skara Brae Neolithic Village, Orkneys.



A house in the Skara Brae Neolithic Village, Orkneys.

Adjacent to Skara Brae is the biggest "stately home" in Orkney, Skail House. Now open to the public, and set up as it was in the 1930s. It was the home of the local laird, William Watt, who discovered Skara Brae. It was his children who used it as a playhouse at one time - but he was a meticulous excavator, in contrast to others who helped uncover it. He set up his dining room as a museum of the artefacts he uncovered (now all moved to Edinburgh).



Skail House, Orkney.

After Skara Brae, we traveled a short way to see the Ring of Brodgar, a stone circle (originally of 40 stones) that was 300 years younger than Skara Brae. Not far away was another group of standing stones at Stenness. We also passed Maeshowe, an ancient burial mound with a chamber inside that gets illuminated by the setting sun on the Winter solstice (a bit like Newgrange in Ireland). We had visited it last time we were here.



Ring of Brodgar.



Ring of Brodgar.



A large member of the Ring of Brodgar.



Stenness standing stones.



Maeshowe ancient burial mound.

After the tour to Skara Brae, I stayed on in town, and visited St Magnus Cathedral (fine sandstone structure) in which was a memorial to John Rae, born in Kirkwall, who investigated what had happened to the Franklin expedition in Northern Canada. He revealed that there had been cannibalism, but Franklin's widow castigated him and he was discredited; but ultimately rehabilitated (hence the memorial). Also saw the ruined Earl/Bishops palace. At every turn, I thought I was in Lerwick, Shetlands (having been an avid watcher of that TV series); I had to keep reminding myself I was in the Orkneys, not Shetlands, they looked so much alike. Our cruise was scheduled to visit Lerwick, but the wind was so strong that had to be cancelled, and we sailed straight for Invergordon, spending an extra day there.



St Magnus Cathedral, Kirkwall.



The memorial to John Rae, St Magnus Cathedral.



The ruined Earl/Bishops palace, Kirkwall.

Tuesday, June 4: This morning we arrived in Invergordon, a little way from Inverness; this was last stop on our Scottish cruise. We stayed here 2 days (as I said, the visit to Lerwick, Shetland, had to be cancelled because of high winds (☹)). So, the first day (Tuesday), we just walked around the town (which had free town-supplied WiFi), and checked out the many interesting murals.

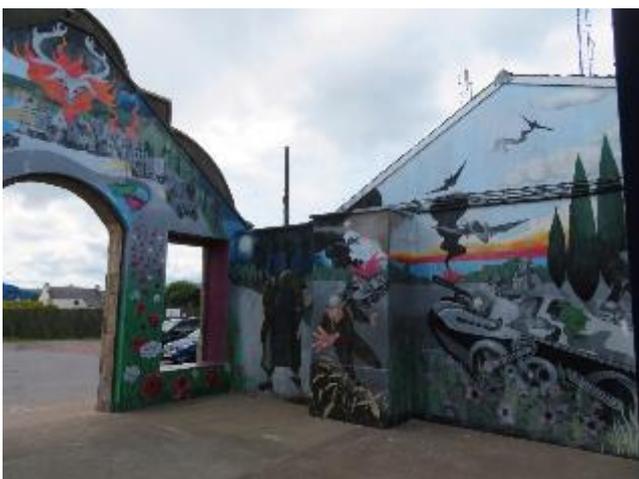


Royal Hotel.

Invergordon mural, depicting the fire that destroyed the



Invergordon mural.



Mural at Invergordon Railway Station.



Mural at Invergordon Railway Station.

Wednesday, June 5: This was our second day in Invergordon, and we took a tour to see Dunrobin Castle, which dates back to the 13th century, and is the family seat of the Earls then Dukes of Sutherland. A very fine stately home, some lovely rooms, and delightful Italianate gardens.



Dunrobin Castle.



Dunrobin Castle parterres.



Dunrobin Castle Dining Room.



Dunrobin Castle Green Bedroom.



Dunrobin Castle Library.



Dunrobin Castle Study.

As well as great gardens, Dunrobin Castle also had a falconry demonstration, with 3 birds shown off on this occasion - a Falcon, a Hawk and a Peregrine Falcon. The Falcon swooped at 55mph, the Peregrine at much the same speed (it was a young bird), though Peregrine Falcons have been measured at 248mph.



Dunrobin Castle: Falcon.

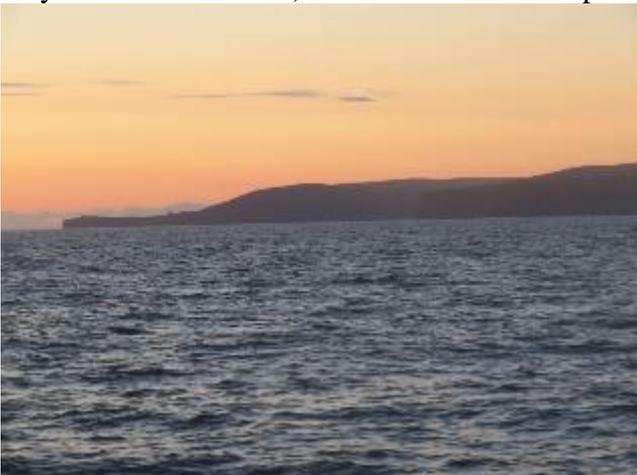


Dunrobin Castle: Hawk.



Dunrobin Castle: Peregrine Falcon.

On returning to the ship, I had hoped to find time to seek out a deep-fried Mars bar in town (I had acquired some Mars bars, and located a fish and chip shop); sadly, we didn't have enough time for me to do that, so I'll have to wait for another trip to Scotland to savour this delicacy! And so we said farewell to Invergordon, and to Scotland, sailing from there back to Liverpool, past the Orkneys as the sun sets on Wednesday, June 5 (if you have sharp eyes, you may just be able to make out the top of the Old Man of Hoy over the headland). We arrived in Liverpool early on Friday, June 7.



View of the Orkneys at sunset as we sailed past.

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