

Visit to Scotland May 2024

It was a very early Sunday morning start.

The party of members going on the trip assembled at the pickup point near the Theatre. Their luggage was loaded on the Coach by Niall Preece and we were ready to leave.

We left Brecon and made our way North via Builth, Rhayader, Newtown and Welshpool to Chester. The road, that early on the Sunday morning, was largely empty. The weather was variable. The joy of riding in a coach is that you can pry at will over fences into fields and gardens not ordinarily viewed from a car. As we travelled north, it became obvious, the effect that the wet weather has had on the land. Empty, barren fields bared their faces towards the sky. Water and heavy farm machinery has taken its toll. However, we saw throughout this holiday in Wales, England, and Scotland a large number of lambs and calves. Along the Welsh border we also saw plenty of pig houses which I do not remember seeing before.

Our first stop was Chester Services on the M56. By then we were clear of The Principality and hit the first major flow of traffic. The Chester Services, like many motorway eating places is not in the most salubrious of spots. It is situated on the edge of the Mersey basin, below the river Weaver and is subject to the smoking towers of the Runcorn based Chemical works. The M56 meanders through the countryside towards the Thelwall Viaduct on the M6 which carries the road northwards across The Bridgewater Canal, the Manchester Ship Canal and the River Mersey.

The next section of the journey along the M6, was to take us to the junction with the road to Bowness on Windermere. We passed Preston, Lancaster, rode alongside the foothills of the Trough of Bowland, past Morecambe and Carnforth. At one point, those of us with sharp eyes could just make out Blackpool Tower through the mist. It was lunch time when we crawled into Bowness.



The booked boat trip awaiting our embarkation. Members of the party opted to go below deck to shelter from the biting wind. The tour guide joked on his megaphone that if we were to sink that there would be at least ten life jackets for every person on board! Quite the frustrated comedian.



The Lake was calm. We were in 'Swallows and Amazons territory'.



Our trip took us northwards onto the Lake, towards Ambleside and around the Islands. On either side we could see the hills of Cumberland. At times they were striped with sunshine. Apart from the large steamers there was little traffic. We saw plenty of moored yachts and a rowing boat accompanied by a canoe.





Upon our return to Bowness a number of the party sought to use the local conveniences only to discover that the cost was 50p and dependent on cash or an app which none of us had! A friendly lady, with a dog, showed us how to enter and exit the facility without paying. Now criminals, we went on our way without a backward glance.

The Coach, skilfully managed by Niall, left Bowness on Windermere for The Borders.

The next stop was Dumfries. We made our way north up over Shap Fell towards Scotland. Much of the country in this area is stark but has a beauty of its own. We passed the turn off for Gretna and suddenly we were in Scotland.





As the road we took swung left, we could see the waters of the Solway in the distance and beyond the range of the hills we had left behind in the Lake District.

We finally arrived in Dumfries, 'Queen of the South and a University City. There had been some speculation amongst the party as to what The Holiday Inn would be like. We traversed the river Nith, passed the site of Robbie Burns' Mausoleum and climbed out of the town towards The Crichton which turned out to be an area in Parkland. It was here that our hotel was situated.



The Crichton Estate at Dumfries was established in 1834.

Following a bequest from her late husband, Elizabeth Crichton



intended to found a university but she did not get the support of the powers that be, so, instead, she built and created what became known as the Crichton Royal Hospital, a Hospital which dedicated itself to the treatment of mental illness. For

the following 100 years care for those people with psychiatric conditions was developed on the site, which has beautiful grounds. Apart from the Hospital buildings a magnificent cathedral style Memorial Church was built to commemorate the founders.



The leaflet which describes the complex adds that the, 'total well being of patients was addressed not just by medical treatment but through a wider regard for their spiritual, physical and recreational needs.'

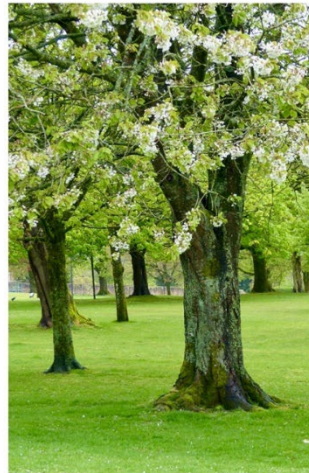
The Hotel is part of that site. The main entrance is situated in a restored 19th century building and with its modern extension offers visitors pleasant, and comfortable accommodation.

SEP



Today the site has a business Park and is part of an integrated tertiary education Campus which will be linked to the University of Glasgow, known as the Dumfries and Galloway College. In front of the Hotel is a Statue of Elizabeth Crichton.

Many of our party spent time exploring the grounds and glorifying in the magnificent show of Spring Blooms!



After a good night's sleep, we travelled across the Lowlands to Glasgow. One of the things that struck me was how sparsely populated this part of Scotland is. Population is clustered in small communities often in houses which are hunkered down into the land. We certainly saw more sheep and cattle than we did people.

Glasgow spreads across a plain. We made our way to the Burrell collection which is located in Pollok Country Park. The building, from the outside, looks like a giant greenhouse with a stone entrance, but the beauty of its design is demonstrated once the building is entered.





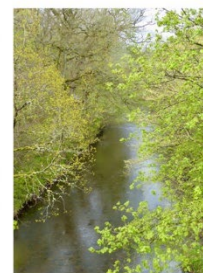
The collection is displayed on three floors with sections running seamlessly from one to another. There was far too much to see or digest. For everybody on that trip there will be a favourite item or items. Mine were the carved St Michael from Aughton in Lancashire and the manner in which the stained-glass windows from numerous churches were displayed in and around various galleries.



After lunch we boarded our coach and made our way to Dumfries House which is not In Dumfries. Dumfries House, in 2007, was due to be auctioned and its many treasures split and distributed worldwide. Due to the intervention of the then Prince of Wales the House and its contents were preserved. The Prince, with other entrepreneurs and apprentices from the Prince's Trust have bought the House and its estate back to life, so much so that in

an area where employment was limited, it now has a permanent staff of 200.

We had guided tour of the House. Some of us, who recently visited Cardiff Castle will have been aware of the links with the Butes. The House was constructed and designed by Robert Adam. Upstairs, there is a corridor which had been painted with grey paint. Conservators spent weeks removing the paint on the alcoves and restoring the original colours. There was a similar ceiling leading to the roof pool in Cardiff!





The gardens are also magnificent and worth a visit on their own. For some of our party, this day was the highlight but for others it was still to come.



Tuesday was not such an early start. A leisurely breakfast was followed by a short Coach trip to Sweetheart Abbey located in New Abbey Village. It was raining. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit the site due to masonry repairs. Instead, a custodian from Caerlaverock Castle escorted us to The New Abbey Corn Mill where we were given a History of the site.

The Abbey is a Cistercian Foundation. In 1268, Lord John Balliol of Barnard Castle in County Durham died. His grieving widow, Lady Dervorgiilla of Galloway had his heart embalmed and placed in an Ivory casket. When she died, she and the casket were buried in the Abbey, hence the name Sweetheart Abbey.

The custodian gave us a potted History of the Scottish Kings and the wars that led to Edward I being declared the Hammer of the Scots, (Incidentally prior to this, the Scots helped Edward Conquer Wales). The subsequent internecine feud between cousins and relatives led to the battle of Bannockburn.

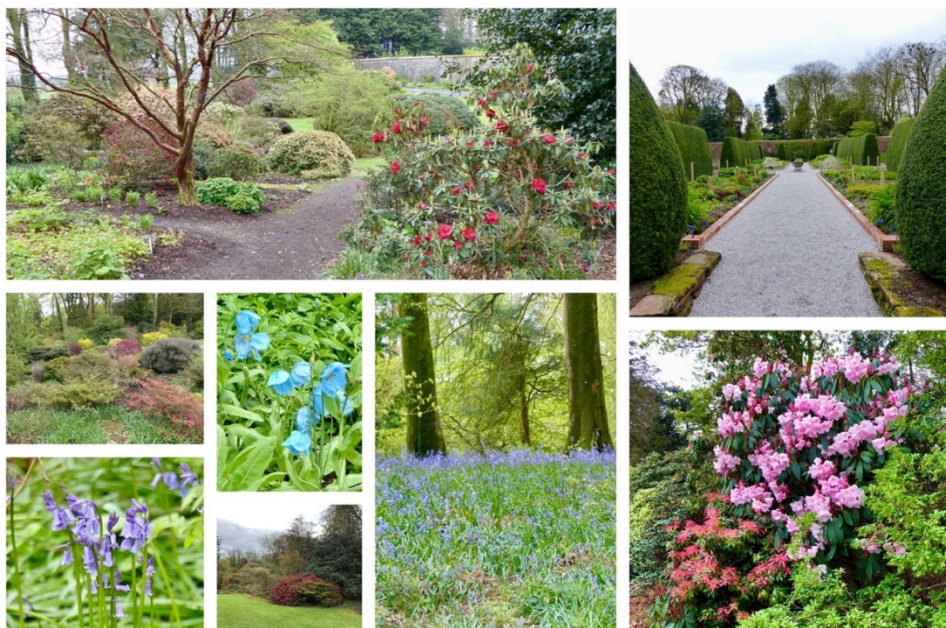
Some of us went on a brief tour of the Mill. The leet was built by the monks. On our return to the coach, we went on a scenic journey by the side of the Solway to Kirkcudbright.

Again, an attempt by some of us to visit the local Castle was thwarted by repairs to masonry. In the harbour were 3 or may be 4 trawlers, an indication that this town in the past had been a major fishing centre. The town was very clean and tidy.

At Threave Gardens the party split in two. We had heard that there were two pairs of ospreys currently nesting in the neighbouring nature reserve. A short trip by coach, took us to the site. We then walked to the hide where telescopes were trained on one of the nests. All of us managed to see the birds. Great views were seen of the female sitting on eggs and the RSPB volunteer told us that the pair had successfully bred at Threave for a number of years. The male was born in Wales and ringed at Glaslyn. He had paired up with a Scottish female 10 years previously.



The Threave estate is huge. The gardens are beautiful.





Those of us who thoroughly explored the grounds were overwhelmed by the sheer beauty and tranquility of the Contemplation Garden which had been partly constructed as a memorial to the victims of the Lockerbie air disaster. The estate had various walks which demanded further exploration but there was not time.

Wednesday morning was an early start. We had a long drive to Floors Castle near Kelso. The journey again was through spectacular scenery via Selkirk and Hawick. On the far side of Hawick, we thought we had met a road accident, but no, the road was manned by police who were aiding the delivery of part of a giant windmill! At Floors, the coach driver was directed to the back entrance of the Castle. The tea rooms beckoned with welcoming beverages and delicious cakes.



The walled garden and the millennium garden were worth a visit. They are imaginatively designed and expertly tended. The millennium garden deserves a separate mention. It was established as a parterre garden in 2000. Within the parterre are Scottish varieties of apple trees trained on frames in the French fashion.



The setting of the House is stunning. The views from the front look for miles over open country. The House was designed by William Adam. It is not really a Castle, more a very grand Estate House like Blenheim Palace. A significant Building had predated this building. Like Dumfries House it is a symmetrical Georgian Mansion with corner towers and outlying wings that house kitchens and stables.

The name Floors means rectangular place. The original building housed animals at ground level and living accommodation above. It may have had an element of fortification to protect it against the constant incursions that took place in the area from across the border. The House is owned by the Dukes of Roxburghe. The family still farm and manage the estate today. When the Castle is

not open to the public, the family use the public rooms as part of their home.

In the 19th century, by marriage, American money was bought to Floors. Two rooms that used to be a bedroom and a dressing room were reimagined to house some magnificent tapestries. American oak was shipped from the States and three rooms were fashioned with the oak by local craftsmen so that the tapestries could be displayed. In the process two of the Adam ceilings were removed though one remains in what used to be the dressing room.

The next stop was Melrose. The Abbey was closed for repairs, but the Priory Wood Gardens with their apple tree collection was interesting.





Some of the party found the local Museum and a number of interesting artefacts. For those who saw them, the monk's urinals in the Melrose Abbey Museum must surely have been the highlight of the holiday. These were worn under the monk's habits should relief be necessary during the long services.



An unexpected highlight of this day was the route back to Dumfries. We took a remote mountain road through stunning, rugged scenery. The road is known as the Grey Mare's Tail. There is a nature reserve there and a 600-metre spectacular waterfall. We didn't meet a single vehicle until we arrived in Moffat.



Two of our party decided not to visit Kelso but explore Dumfries.

Below is a report of their day: Jeannie and John:

We wandered off on foot along the banks of the River Nith into Dumfries, home to the poet Robbie Burns, whose acute observations of the nature of man, as well as the natural world have delighted generations.



Viewing his house, we were interested to learn that Robbie married his wife, Jean, twice and

after her untimely death had packed up to leave Scotland for a position on a plantation in Jamaica, but was persuaded to stay. Tragically, he died at the age of 37, and a magnificent Mausoleum, spearheaded by Wordsworth and Coleridge, can be seen in the local Churchyard.



The Turnocks puffed their way up to The Observatory to enjoy panoramic views over the town and learn more of the citizens, from militant suffragettes to pioneering women doctors and Kirkpatrick Macmillan who allegedly completed the construction of the first pedal (actually treadle) driven bicycle in 1839. Their return amble took them past Kingholm Quay and the local hostelry.





Getting together for dinner in the evenings at the hotel was particularly enjoyable; lots of banter and laughing. Sometimes serious discussion regarding tomorrow's plans.

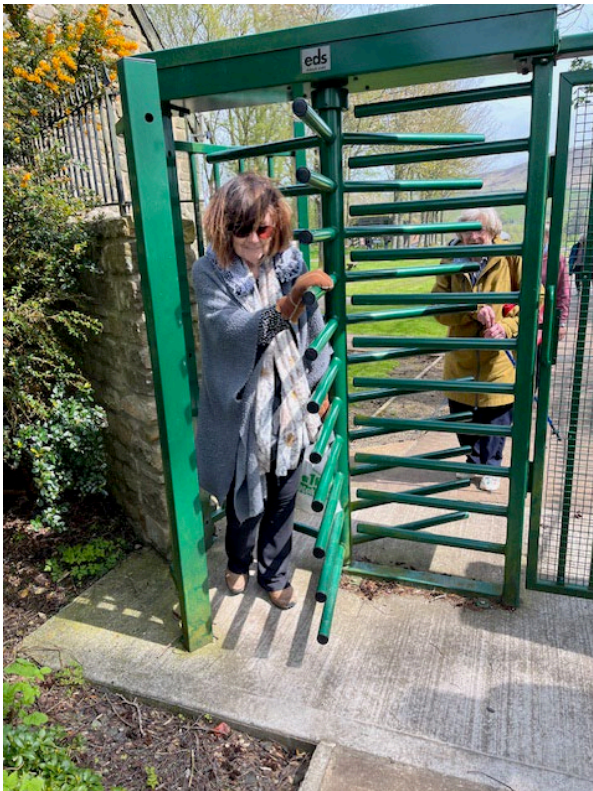


Thursday was booking out day. We packed our cases, had breakfast, and loaded the Coach. We were off home via Vindolanda, just south of Hadrian's Wall. The site has been developed since the 1970's and the archaeological discoveries there have helped a revision in understanding the Roman Occupation. Nine separate Roman forts have been found on the site dating from AD 85 till AD 213.

We arrived from Dumfries circa 11am and were given two hours to explore. The sun was out and the day was warm but upon entering the Fort we were hit by a biting east wind which led to comments by the party of how uncomfortable it would have been if the soldiers had come from a warmer climate.

There was an excavation in progress but the pièce de résistance is the Museum located below the main site down a steep pathway at Bardon Mill. The Museum contains translations of the original letters found on the site, hundreds of pairs of shoes, a wig, tools and other day-to-day artefacts. The Museum is laid out in such a way that it is easy to understand what life was like when the fort was occupied. Life on the site continued after the end of the Roman Period. The significance of the site is the discovery of the

written tablets which survived because of the condition of the soil.



Finally, we left Vindolanda and turned south stopping very briefly at T Bay where some of us purchased groceries for home. We had a comfort break at Chester and after an uneventful journey arrived back in Brecon at 8.30pm.

A big thank you must go to the travel desk team for organising this trip especially Margaret.

The comment above is mine but many thanks to John and Jeannie Turnock, Gill Evans, Sue Cooper, Andrew Pyne and Pat Blake.

Elaine Starling.