

FEDERATIONS VISIT SCOTLAND

Sunday 14th – Thursday 18th May 2023

This year we made a return visit to Scotland. We had made a visit there in 2014 to visit the Lowlands but this year we travelled further north and up into the Highlands. We had representation from



thirteen counties including Kildare, Armagh, Down, Dublin, Meath, Derry/Londonderry, Roscommon, Cork, Louth, Galway, Wicklow, Westmeath and Tipperary We had members from twenty-one societies on board including Clane LHG, North Dromore Diocesan Society, Banbridge Historical Society, Foxrock History Club, Kildare Archaeological & Historical Society, Clondalkin History Society, New Buildings Historical & Archaeological Society, Co Roscommon Historical & Archaeological Society , Kinsale History Society, Kill Local History



Group, Old Drogheda Society, Knocklyon History Society, Galway Archaeological & Historical Society, Newbridge Local History Group, Rathmichael Historical Society, West Belfast Historical Society, Malahide Historical Society, Rathdangan Historical Society, Cork Branch Western Front Association, Carrickfergus Historical Society and Tipperary County Historical Society. Our Coach Company this year was Letterkenny Coaches and we were privileged with an excellent driver in Garvan Boyce. Starting in Naas we travelled to Belfast Ferry Port picking up members along the way at Heuston Station, Drogheda,

Banbridge and then at the ferry. A most unusual sight at the ferry was hundreds of motor cycles waiting to board on their return to Scotland after the North West Motor Cycle Road Race. We had a very smooth crossing to Cairnryan and were soon on the road along the picturesque Ayrshire coast and heading for Glasgow. It was here that we picked up our Blue Badge Guide, Kenny Kerr, who was to be our guide for the trip. Kenny was a lovely person and a wonderful guide. After a short comfort stop at the lovely little village of Luss on the shores of Loch Lomond we continued into the magnificent Trossachs along the shores of Loch Lomond to our destination in Oban. After a welcome dinner in the Alexandra Hotel it was off to bed ready for the road in the morning.

MONDAY

Today it was planned to visit the Isle of Iona and follow in the footsteps of Colmcille; we were not prepared for what happened next. On arriving at the ferry we were told that the booking was cancelled and you cannot imagine our shock. All our plans for Iona were in tatters. The story behind the cancellation is for another day so we will not dwell on it. Suffice to say that we were really disappointed.

Undeterred, the "A" Team of Larry, Kenny and Garvan came up with an alternative plan which we ran with and the rest is history as they say. We adopted the Tuesday Schedule and off we went north to the Caledonian Canal and Loch Ness where we stopped at Fort



Agustus, a nice little town on the shores of the Loch. The weather was fine and after taking a break for some refreshments we boarded our boat for a tour around the Loch, hoping of course for a glimpse of "Nessie", but we

were out of luck. We were fortunate to have a really good guide who made the whole



history come to life with some great commentary. After this most interesting and relaxing experience we set out on our return journey towards Oban and in doing so passed through some of Scotland's most

beautiful and scenic country side. Our destination was the unique valley of "Glencoe" in the

Lochaber area of the Scottish Highlands.



Scene of the infamous massacre of members of the Clan MacDonald by their guests, the Campbells. It was a spectacular sight with the horizon being dominated by the “three sisters mountain peaks” rising majestically from the valley and reaching for the sky. We were all blown away by the sheer magic of the place. A memorable day even though we had to change the day’s itinerary.



TUESDAY

On Tuesday after an abortive attempt to get a standby place on the Mull ferry, we decided to venture south of Oban, having been north the previous day, and east the day before that. Our first stop was the “Clachan Bridge”.



Dating from 1792/3, it connects the Scottish mainland with the Seil Island, and crosses an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean. So, we were able to claim that we crossed the Atlantic. The Inn across the road was called “Tigh an Truish”,



The House of Trousers (Trews) and was so called because men were forced to abandon their kilts when off the island and could change out of their trousers and into kilts again when returning. On the day the south facing parapets of the bridge were alive with the colour of fairy foxgloves. After stopping for some photographs, we then ventured further onto Seil Island until we reached the wee town of Easdale. From here we were afforded views out to the Island of Scarba and the western seaboard of the Inner Hebrides. Hidden behind Scarba, lay the Isle of Jura made famous by Eric Blair (George Orwell), resident there when he wrote “1984”.



Afterwards we returned to the mainland and arrived at Kilmartin. Situated just to the north of Dunadd, where the Scots made their capital in the ancient kingdom of Dal Riada, Kilmartin is home to many prehistoric monuments and stone circles but we were able to view burial slabs from the 13th - 18th Century



. We also enjoyed some time together, snugly, in the little pub nearby where we shared a welcome libation around a little fire

. On returning to Oban, we let everyone loose to explore the town and chill out for the afternoon. This

proved a great success with people enjoying the freedom to roam without being under the watchful eye of "big daddy" Larry, looking on.

Oban proved to be a most interesting town and some of the more energetic in the group even managed to climb up to Mac Craig's Tower



and were rewarded with a magnificent view across the bay and out to the islands.

WEDNESDAY



Oban

It was time to bid farewell to Oban and the Alexandra Hotel as we headed south on our way to Inveraray Castle and again soaked up the sheer quality and magnitude of Scotland's awe-inspiring scenery radiant in the early morning sunshine

Inveraray castle, the seat of the Duke's of Argyll since the 15th Century, is one of the earliest Gothic Revival Country Houses in Scotland. We split into two groups and the Inveraray guide along with Kenny took us on a wonderful tour of the castle outlining the beautiful rooms and architecture abundant in the



building. Particularly impressive was the Gun Room with its huge display of pikes, muskets, swords and all manner of weaponry.



We were able to meet the present Duke in person as he was to be found serving in the castle gift shop.



Outside, the castle presented an impressive picture blending harmoniously with the surrounding grounds and gardens. On leaving the castle we enjoyed a drive through the quaint and picturesque little village of Inveraray.

After another stop at Luss for a break we travelled east to Sterling to visit what is arguably the finest castle in Scotland.

Surrounded on three sides by steep cliffs affording it a strong defensive position; the castle dates from the 15th-16th century. Several Scottish Kings and Queens were crowned here including Mary Queen of Scots. Kenny



took us on a guided tour of the castle courtyards including the Great Hall and explained the important history of the castle. There was a great view to be seen from the turreted walls over the surrounding countryside including the unique grasslands called “the Kings Knot”. We were then left to our own devices to explore the castle interior. There were many interesting sights including ornate marble fireplaces, the “Hunt of Unicorn” tapestries and the ceiling covered in the “Sterling Heads”; these are some of the finest examples of Scottish

Renaissance Wood Carvings, now extant.

Reluctantly leaving the castle we took a short tour of the area passing by the famous Wallace Memorial on our way to Bannockburn. In the struggle for Scottish independence, the Battle of Bannockburn is considered a landmark in Scottish history. It was here that Robert the Bruce defeated the army of King Edward II of England. Kenny outlined the history and significance of the battle in fine detail. We then walked around the monument area dedicated to Bruce and his famous victory, on what is considered to be the site of the actual battle





. The most impressive monument to be seen was a huge statue of Robert the Bruce on horseback which dominates the area in the centre of the site.



That concluded our days sightseeing so it was off to Glasgow with some commentary from Kenny along the way until we reached the Glynhill Hotel in Renfrew. This was the same hotel that we stayed in during our 2014 visit.

After dinner presentations were made to our guide, Kenny, in appreciation for the wonderful job he did over the days of our tour and also a presentation to our Coach driver, Garvan, for the tremendous job he did in guiding us safely all around the Highlands.



Another special occasion was to celebrate the birthday of Jimmy (Jimbo) Conway who had a birthday on the day, we did not have time for a cake but Jimbo got a lovely “wee” bun instead.

There was still time for some of us to have a “wee” libation before bedtime in celebration of a wonderful trip we all had together.

Thursday

After breakfast we left on our final journey to catch the ferry at Cairnryan but not before we made a stop to visit the Robbie Burns Centre near Alloway.

The centre housed the Burns Cottage, where the Bard was born, and also the Burns Museum which was full of Burns memorabilia and lots of his personal belongings.

A special treat was when Kenny took us for a walk around the old church graveyard, "Alloway Auld Kirk", and showed us the resting place of the Burns family.



He also took us down to see the bridge at "Brig O' Doon" and the impressive Burns Monument Garden and Tower and enthralled us with tales of Tam O' Shanater and the Souter Jonnie.



This was a wonderful trip that will not only be remembered for the wealth of history and outstanding scenery that we encountered but by the warmth, hospitality, friendships and camaraderie within our group and the many people we had the pleasure to meet along the way.

Larry Breen FLHS