

Scotland and Those Lands to the South



After ten years of living in the Far North of Scotland, there are still things that we see for the first time. Like this wee beastie – a stoat that popped up between the boards of the walkway out to the Camster Cairns – 5000 year old neolithic burial cairns that I take all of our visitors to see, so that they can experience crawling in on hands and knees to access the chamber in the center. Not something you would get to do in America.



Across the field below, I noticed an odd-looking farm building – that turns out to have nothing to do with the farm at all. It is the remains of a World War 2 Defense Communication Network (CDN) station. It was part of a wide-spread defense network in the Far North that helped to protect Britain's navy, which harbored in Scapa Flow, the basin of water in the center of Scotland's Orkney Islands, just north of our home in Thurso.



We visited the island of Stroma, which sits two miles off Scotland's north coast, near John o' Groats, and can be seen in the distance from JoG.



JoG has developed the reputation of being the furthest north that you can go on the island of Great Britain – but that is false. Dunnett Head (which we see out our kitchen window) is the furthest north point on the island. JoG is the furthest village northeast on the island, and thus is the furthest point from the other extreme, Land's End, which is the furthest point southwest.

At any rate, we took a small boat out to Stoma for the day. The island was populated from prehistoric times up until 1962. Since then, it has been home only to sheep and seabirds. But the buildings of the island community still exist and the day trip to the island gives one the feel of what living there in the early part of the last century must have been like.



A bit inland from the shore on Stroma, is a collapsed sea cave, known as a gloup. At the

bottom is water, and at low tide you can actually paddle out to the sea along a passageway on the left. Straight ahead is a cave that was once used for a whisky still. It was well hidden from the excise officers, because it was so hard to reach - in fact impossible except at low tide.



Stroma is also home to some interesting flora and fauna, including a variety of wildflowers, like the rare Scottish Primrose, and many species of sea birds who nest on the cliffs.



The local community in the Strathnaver valley, an hour to the west of our home, recently acquired the land that encompasses Rosal Clearance Village. Rosal was a township of the Far North, with written records that stretch back to 1269. In 1813, the factor for the Duchess of Sutherland obtained the lease for a "new sheep farm" which consisted of many townships in Strathnaver, and the existing tenants were told that they would have to leave their homes and the land that provided their livelihood. It was a devastating time for the people who called Rosal home, many of whom had nowhere else to go. Rosal became completely deserted by 1818. The remains of over 70 buildings have been uncovered there.



In commemoration of the Clearances, and in recognition of the acquisition of Rosal, a special service was held in the old tin church at Syre. Although not an active part of the north coast parish, the structure remains in decent shape, cared for by locals. Far from the majestic cathedrals that you will read about later in this newsletter, Syre Church was constructed of corrugated sheet metal, being the least expensive material that could be obtained by the community in the late 1800s, when the territory became populated again. It was a very moving Sunday service, included a reading of a poem written about the last Sunday worship before the families had to leave. One Psalm, and the Lord's Prayer were read simultaneously in Gaelic and English. And the Melvich Gaelic Choir led the congregation in singing, including two hymns sung in Gaelic.

The following picture is of the quaint little tin church at Syre, where the service was held.



While in Strathnaver, I hiked across a field to find The Red Priest's Stone, supposedly marking the burial spot of Maol Ruadh – the Red Priest (St Maelrubha), an early Christian missionary from Ireland – who died in 722 AD and who is said to have established a chapel there. Nothing remains of the chapel, or the rest of the cemetery. But this stone, with a cross still visible on it, has been maintained in honor of venerated clergyman.



On the way south, leaving the Far North, one passes through the village of Golspie, and on the way to the southlands of Great Britain, we passed it on a foggy morning, when the top of Ben Braggie and the 100 foot tall monument to the first Duke of Sutherland stood above the clouds, looking like an island off the coast.



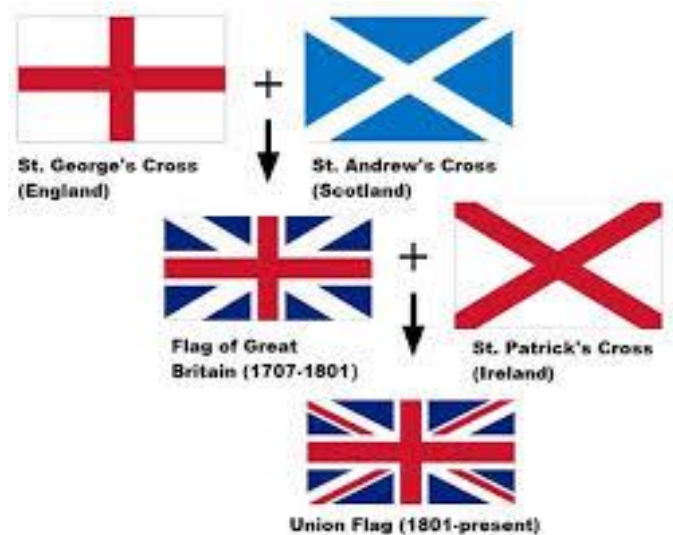
England



With me easing towards retirement at the completion of my project to build and accredit the new engineering programs for the University of Highlands and Islands, Wendy and I decided to spend some time exploring that country to the south – England.

Which reminds me of a story. Saint Peter was supposedly talking to God one day, soon after the creation of the earth, and he said, "I understand you have your own reasons for your creation. But I have to say, I think you have given Scotland too much. I mean, Scotland has the most beautiful hills and mountains, the most glorious coastlines, and the southern lowlands are lush and green. It seems that you have given Scotland more of the best stuff than anywhere else on the earth." God replied, "True, but wait until you see who I gave them for neighbors."

Well, we decided we really should explore the land of those neighbors a bit more...so south into England we went. And this newsletter will tell the story of our travels. By the way, do you know how the United Kingdom's Union Jack flag came about? Here is the explanation:



Life in the Fast Lane

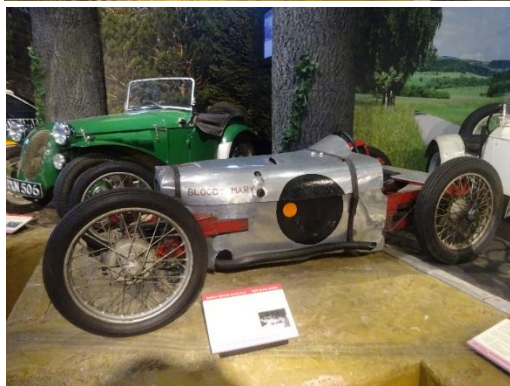
We visited the National Motor Museum near the south coast of England, specifically to see the

fast cars on display. Let's start with the historic racing cars that they have gathered.

On the right is a Napier – the oldest surviving British race car - which ran the Gordon Bennett Cup races of 1903. On the left is a 1912 three-liter Sunbeam racer.



Next is the 1929 Bloody Mary amateur-built special, representative of the home-builds that filled racing grids in the 1930s.



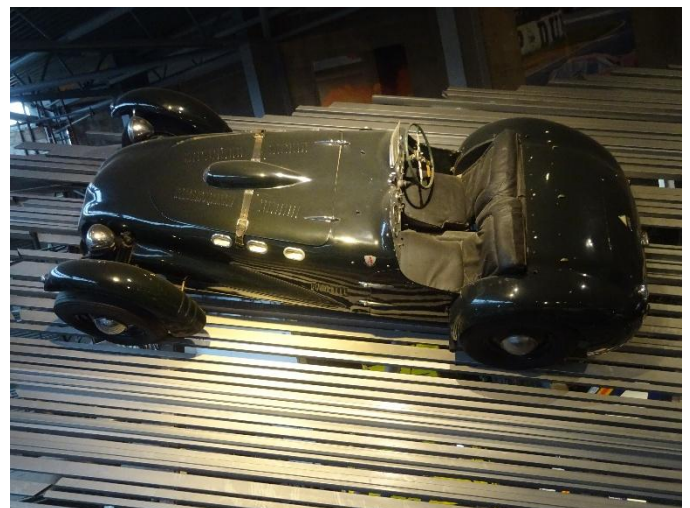
Followed by a 4.5 liter supercharged Bentley (known as a Blower Bentley), as it raced at LeMans in 1930.



Next, on the left is a 1950 BRM (British Racing Motors) V16 racecar which competed in early Formula One races. On the right is a 1955 Connaught B Type Formula One racer.



Continuing through time, next is a 1950 Allard J2 as raced at LeMans.



A favorite of mine is the 1965 Ford GT40, the first of several Fords that won LeMans in the 1960s.



Then there is a 1970 Porsche 917K, representative of the Gulf Porsches that dominated LeMans in the '70s.



And finally, here is the 1987 Walkinshaw Racing Jaguar XJR8, which also won LeMans.



Also on this southern trip, we visited Goodwood Motor Circuit, which is the only race circuit in the modern world that remains as it was

when the top racing series competed there in the 1940s. Today it is home to several historic race car gatherings. I was lucky enough to see a historic Jaguar D-Type making some laps.



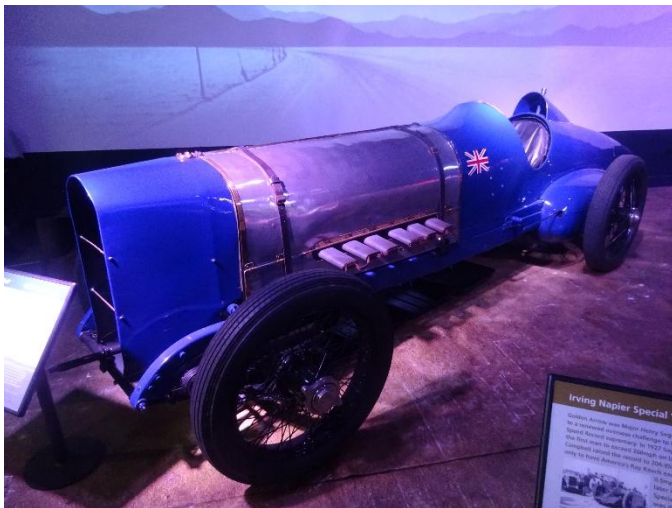
Life in the REALLY Fast Lane

The primary reason I went to the National Motor Museum was to see the historic Bluebird World Land Speed Record cars, after which my personal blue Volkswagen Polo is nicknamed.



The next photo is a 1920 350 horsepower Sunbeam, which was the first record breaking car of Sir Malcolm Campbell, in which he set 3 speed records and was the first to reach 150 mph. He named all of his record-breaking cars and boats Bluebird, after seeing a stage play "The Blue Bird" by Frenchman Maurice Maeterlinck. The story follows children Tytyl and Mytyl on a magical, allegorical quest to find a bluebird, symbolizing happiness, which is always just out of reach. Campbell said that he related to this because the land speed record is always just out of reach - no matter how fast you go, there is a new, faster record, just out of reach.

One of this car's records was set at Pendine Sands, a smooth beach in Wales. Keep that in mind.

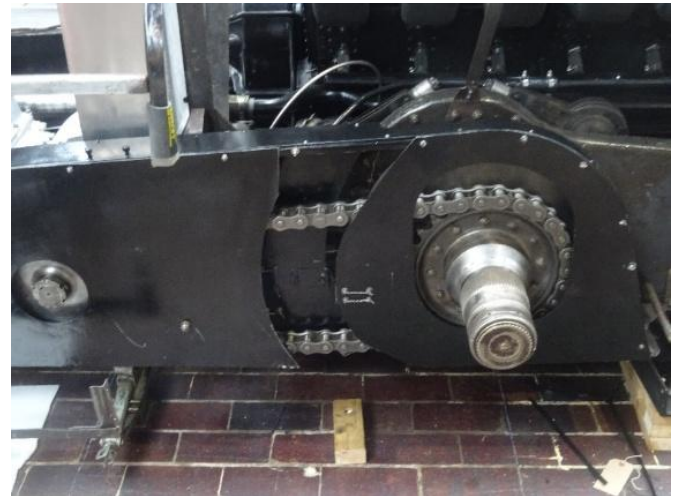


Also on display was this 1927 1000hp Sunbeam, which first broke 200 mph, setting another speed record, with Sir Henry Seagrave. It

is currently under restoration, with the intent of having it run again.



Note that the car utilized chain drive. Remember that.

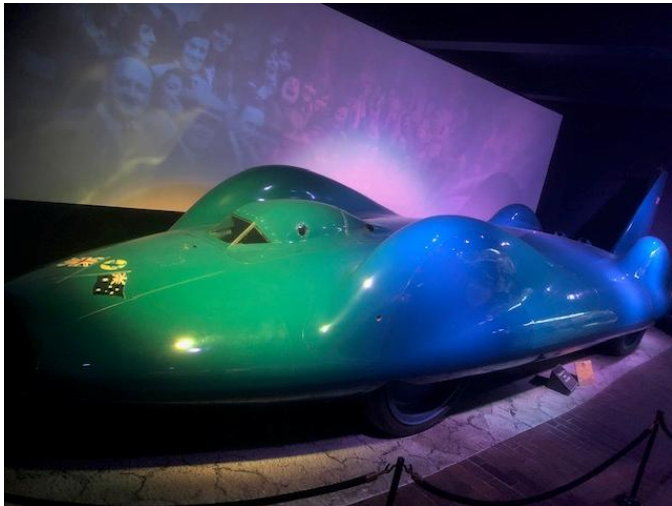


Here is the 1929 Napier Golden Arrow, which Seagrave drove to another record at 231 mph.



And finally, the car I really came to see – the 1960 Bluebird CN7, which Sir Malcolm's son, Donald Campbell, used to set another record,

breaking 400 mph. This was the last car to hold the record using a wheel driven concept, before jet powered cars took over the record. Current Formula One designer, Adrain Newly claims that the CN7 is the most advanced vehicle for its time in all of motorsports history. It was designed in 1960 for 500 mph, and Newly believes that if restored, the car could, in fact, do that today – which would exceed the current wheel driven world record speed. A truly amazing machine for its time.



Also on display is Inspiration, the 2008 steam powered record setter and another car that set a solar powered speed record.



And one cannot fail to mention the car from the famous Ian Flemming book and subsequent children's movie, Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. The car from the book and movie took its name from an actual race car - driven by Count Louis Zborowski - which crashed in the 1920s, at the world's first permanent racing track, Brooklands, in south Britian. If you recall, the car in the movie began life as a crashed racecar, before Caractacus Potts (played by Dick Van Dyke) rescued it from the junkyard and resurrected it to star in the movie.

The South Coast

On this journey, we explored a number of interesting cities along the south coast. Let's start with Southampton. This city still has a significant portion of the ancient city walls intact. The total circuit of the walls, was once a mile and a quarter.

The Old Town has over 90 listed buildings and more than 30 ancient monuments, including medieval wine vaults, an array of medieval churches, and fine Georgian houses and hotels. All this and a view of the waterfront, where ships continue the sea-going tradition of Southampton.

Shown here is the Bargate, which is perhaps the most intact portion of the old walls. It was built about 1180, and extended in 1320, to keep out intruders and impress visitors.



Other portions are not nearly as intact.



Within the Old Town, we stopped in for a pint at The Red Lion Inn. It boasts a wine cellar dating to the 1200s which is alleged to be the site of the trial of the conspirators who plotted to depose King Henry V. A mournful procession of ghosts, reportedly sighted leaving from the inn, has been linked to the plotters.



The main hall, shown here with Wendy enjoying her beer, dates to the 1500s. It has been claimed that the inn itself is haunted by a barmaid, described as being in her sixties and only visible above the knees, who reportedly drifts through the bar area.



Speaking of haunted pubs, we stayed in this one along the south coast near Southampton. The name came about because the inn (The Angel) was merged with the next-door pub (The Blue Pig). Allegedly there is a ghost piano player, and another ghost woman who cries next to the fireplace. There was a folk music night going on when we were there, so we heard neither.



Southampton has a tie to the founding of America. This is a monument to the voyage of the Mayflower. The corners exhibit three female heads, representing Faith, Hope and Charity; and the fourth is the prow of a ship, facing the sea. There are inscriptions to the "little company of Pilgrim Fathers who were destined to be the founders of the New England States of America."



We visited Dover Castle, which looks out upon the French coast only 20 miles away. It was

a key stronghold in wars from the Napoleonic era through World War 2.



Of particular interest was the extensive tunnel complex, in four levels, carved out by hand in the cliffs below the castle. These tunnels became the command center for the British defense of the island from German invasion in WW2.



Other places visited in the south of Merry Olde England included the lovely village of Rye, which looks as it must have looked a few hundred years ago with rugged cobbled streets winding amongst quaint small shops and cafes.



In Canterbury we found the statue of Geoffrey Chaucer, author of the Canterbury Tales in the 14th century.



Canterbury Cathedral, founded in 597, remains the central point of the Church of England,



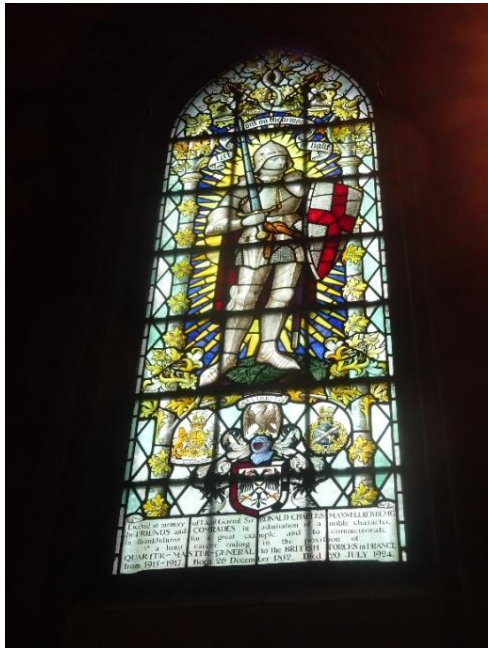
Battle Abbey was built upon the site of the Battle of Hastings, where William the Conqueror secured his kingship and completed the Norman invasion in 1066.



At Reculver, the remains of a Roman fortress (200 AD) and a medieval church exist on the same site.



Rochester Castle is perhaps the best preserved Norman fort in Britain.



And across the street from it is Rochester Cathedral. The Cathedral has many interesting stained-glass windows. And an impressive zodiac mosaic sundial.



An interesting display was going on inside the cathedral, dedicated to whales, and exploring ecological conservation, history, science and the tantalizing prospect of communication with another species, as well as the connection between all of God's created creatures. "And God created great

whales and every living creature that moves, which the waters brought forth abundantly.”.....Genesis 1:21 KJV.

The hanging art was created using “ghost netting” which is discarded or lost fishing net which floats in the sea, entangling unsuspecting sea life.



We made a visit to Windsor Castle, home to the monarchy, which houses a huge number of amazing artworks, of all kinds. This includes a number of representations of England’s ancient hero, Saint George, slaying the dragon.



On the same site is Saint George's Chapel, where many of the royal family's ceremonies take place.



Nearby is Old Windsor Parish Church which contains a historically significant painting of The Last Supper, by Francis de Cleyn, painter to King James I. Frankly, I found it more attractive than da Vinci's more famous version of the same scene.



The church has a number of impressive stained glass windows, but even more impressive are the amazing mosaic art works.



On to Portsmouth, one of England's great seaports. And home to the Historic Dockyard, full of many old ships, such as King Henry the Eighth's Mary Rose, launched 1511, sunk in 1575, and resurrected in 1982, with the remains now housed in a wonderful museum. There are Victorian ships, such as HMS Warrior (photo below) and Admiral Nelson's flagship, Victory, that led the defeat of the French and Spanish Armada. There are also a number of ships from World War 2 on up to present day. It took us three days to see everything there, and if anyone is interested in naval history, this is an absolute must-see place.



Headed west, we stopped at Maiden Castle – the name derived from mai-dun – Celtic for “great hill” – and it truly is a great hill. You could fit 50 football fields on the area enclosed by the three great protective ditches, dating from neolithic times, and increased in size when the Romans ruled Britain.



The Southwest

Then we headed through Devon to Cornwall, and the southern extreme of Britain, as far away from our home in Thurso as you can possibly get and still be in the UK. Although Cornwall is technically part of England, and does not have a devolved government like Scotland has, the folks there think of themselves as a separate country, and they have their own flag, known as St Piran's Flag. Devon does not display quite such an independent nature as Cornwall – but it still has a county flag, known as Saint Petroc's Flag.

Scotland's flag, as you know is called the St Andrews flag, an “x” in white on blue, and England's is the St George's flag, a cross “+” in red on white. St Piran's flag is the same pattern as St George's but in white on black, and St Petroc's is similar in white on green.



A visit to Devon must include a trip into the Dartmoor National Preserve. Undulating green hills, topped with rocky tors (a rocky outcrop or pinnacle that rises sharply from a hill) – home to the Dartmoor ponies, that have roamed free there for thousands of years - and punctuated by quaint villages, such as Widecombe-in-the-moor.

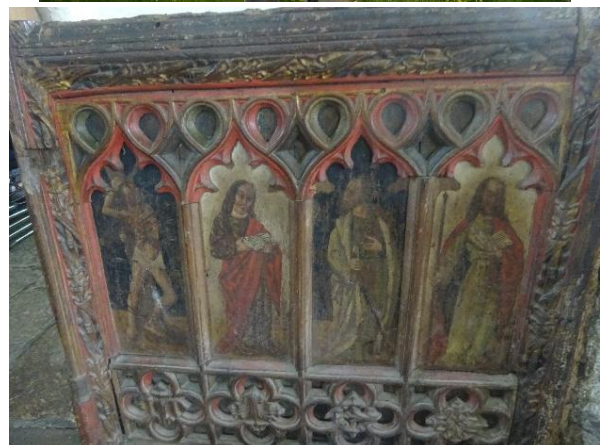


Widecombe-in-the-moor is home to the annual Widecombe Fayre. Everyone in England knows of the place because of a famous song about 7 men riding to the fayre on an old grey mare.

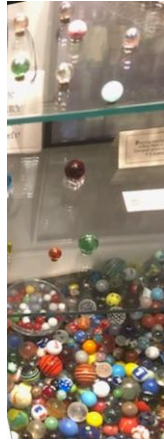
*Tom Pearce, Tom Pearce, lend me your grey mare.
All along, down along, out along lea.
For I want for to go to Widecombe Fair,
With Bill Brewer, Jan Stewer, Peter Gurney,
Peter Davy, Dan'l Whiddon, Harry Hawke,
Old Uncle Tom Cobley and all,*



In the center of the village is the 15th century parish church which contained some beautiful painted panels in the front of the sanctuary, dating to the Medieval Era, remarkably still colorful, despite having no protection whatsoever.



With a bit of time to kill, we stopped at the House of Marbles on the edge of Dartmoor. Located in an old pottery kiln and factory, it now houses a museum on the history of marbles (surprisingly interesting) and a HUGE marble track that takes up two entire stories of the wall at one end.



We travelled on to Cornwall, and a visit to Saint Michael's Mound, which can only be accessed by a causeway at low tide, or by small boat. It somewhat resembles its cousin site in France, Mont Saint Michel. However, I visited the one in France last year and found it to be over-crowded and commercialized. The Cornish version is much preferable, in my opinion.



The Jamaica Inn located on Bodmin Moor in Devon, was built as a coaching inn in 1750, and has a historical association with smuggling. It was the setting for Daphne du Maurier's 1936 novel *Jamaica Inn*, subsequently turned into a movie by Alfred Hitchcock, and mentioned in things still written today.

*The chimneys are tall, the slate so gray,
For hundreds of years, it has stood as today.
Murderers and thieves have entered its door,
When on the high road across Bodmin Moor.
Today you can still feel a ghostly chill,
For the nooseman's dead remain there still,
For those who committed a treacherous sin,
And once kept company at Jamaica Inn.*



We visited the remains of Tintagel castle, built in the 1400s, although there is evidence that the island on which it sits was inhabited since 400 AD. In myth and legend this is the birthplace of King Arthur and also where the love story of Tristan

and Isolde played out. Today there is a modern walkway to access the island (seen below). When I visited here 40 years ago, the only access was down the steep stone stairs which can be seen to the left of the bridge, descending all the way to the water level, and then up an equally steep set of stairs on the island side.



The Cornish coastline, especially around Tintagel, is just as rugged and beautiful as in our home of Caithness.



Cornwall has a number of bronze or iron age hill forts, similar to the giant one at Maiden

Castle. Castle an Dinas, is one – again with three dikes surrounding it for protection, but much less deep than at Maiden. And the area enclosed was the size of perhaps two football fields, rather than 50. By the way, legend says King Arthur visited here when hunting and that his mother, Ygraine, died here.



At the far end of Cornwall is Land's End. It is the furthest point from John o' Groats, which I mentioned is near our home in the Far North. However, just as JoG is not the furthest north as most people believe, Land's End is not the furthest south point on the island. That honor belongs to the tip of the Lizard Peninsula. However, as the most south-western point, it is the furthest from the most north-eastern point at JoG, and the two constitute the famous longest trip along the length of Great Britain, referred to as the LEJoG.



Goonhilly Earth Station, located on the Lizard Peninsula, was the world's first satellite tracking station, used for the Telstar satellite back in 1962. Its original dish, "Arthur," allowed the UK to receive and transmit the first live transatlantic TV signals, marking the dawn of global satellite communications. Today it comprises about two dozen satellite receiving disks.



Twenty-eight miles west of Land's End, but still part of the UK, are the Isles of Scilly. Being this far south, we could not pass up the chance to take the ferry out to visit, and to walk the ramparts of the defensive fortress used against the Spanish Armada in the 1590s through World War 2.



Back on the main island of Britain, we went traipsing across some obscure bits of Cornwall, looking for less frequented spots.



Such as Carn Euny ancient iron age village, featuring a unique and rare underground stone passage and chamber, known as a fogou – found only in Cornwall, in its center.





We also came across a number of stone crosses from the earliest Christian times on the island.



As well as something that may well have been a plague stone. These were stones used during the black plague (1500s), when an infected village would place a stone with a hollowed-out depression at the boundary of their quarantine where food could be delivered, and coins of payment left in a pool of vinegar (believed to sanitize the coins).



We also found the Merry Maidens stone circle. Legend has it that 19 maidens were dancing in a ring to a piper's music, when at the stroke of midnight - marking the start of the sabbath – they were turned to stoned.



And so was the piper standing nearby.



Mousehole (pronounced “mousle” like a combination the first part of “**mouse**” and last part of “**muscle**”) has been described as the most quaint

village in the UK. We can't disagree. Although driving its tiny roads is a bit of a challenge – shown here is a two-way street through the village.



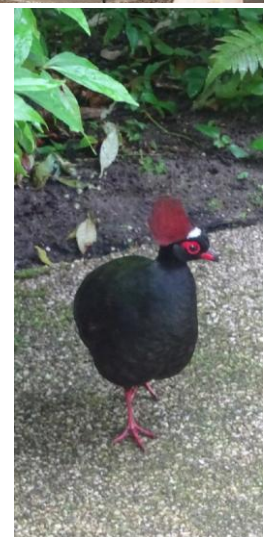
Truro is the largest city in Cornwall, and contains its only cathedral, which had some unique features. Such as the impressive Tinworth Panel, sculptured entirely in Terra Cotta Clay, depicting the walk of Jesus to Golgotha



And the unique effigy of John and Philippa Robartes, which is unique both in the fact that husband and wife are shown together and also because they are in color, rather than bare stone.



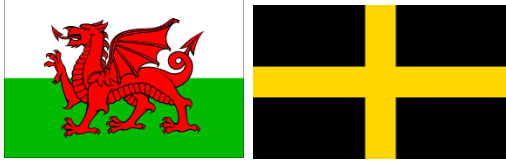
And finally, we visited Cornwall's number one tourist site, The Eden Project, an incredible facility dedicated to education about biodiversity and the value of plants. I could take up an entire newsletter with photos of Eden, but will limit to one of the bio-domes, and one each of the unique chenille plant and roul-roul birds.



Wales

Our exploration of the south of Britain also included Wales. Which, similar to Scotland, has a devolved government and their own flag. The official flag carries the Welsh Dragon, although the

St David's Cross flag is also recognized, to honor the patron saint of Wales.



First stop, Llanymynech, Wales. Where I stayed in a pub and inn that straddles the border. The front door is in England. The bar, and my bedroom were in Wales. I picked the village because it afforded me the opportunity for a hike to locate a part of Offa's Dyke. Those familiar with Scotland will know of Hadrian's Wall, which was a strong fortified defensive barrier built by the Romans to keep the Pictish and Scotia tribes north, away from the civilized Roman settlements. There is also the Antonine Wall, which is further north in Scotland, and was merely an earthen embankment, which was never fortified because it was so far north that it outran its supply lines. Both of those ran all the way across Scotland from coast to coast.

Offa's Dyke is also an earthen embankment, but it appears to have served more as a demarcation between the Welsh kingdoms and the English domain of King Offa of Mercia. Although some think that this embankment, which runs north to south along the entire England-Wales border, may actually date back to Roman times, and might have been intended as a defensive barrier just as the original plans for the Antonine Wall. Here is a photo of a very small piece of it.



I also climbed up the tall hill above the village, to the limestone cliffs.



On the way, I found a small placard with the following poem:

*Look, it's Cynddylan on the rocks,
You sometimes find him here.
Gazing at the land below
As if willing something to appear
Don't mock Cynddylan or the rocks
Like many 'round here do, be kind
He's an old man abandoned
With the banshees in his mind.
Listen to Cynddylan on the rocks,
He tells stories like no one else.
You will not ever forget his words,
Or ask to hear them ever again.*

And I found a spectacular overlook.
England is left, Wales is right.



In the cliff face I located the entrance to a mine that was used to bring out limestone for transport down the mountainside.



This was achieved by an ingenious two-track gravity system, wherein a cart load of stone was sent down the hill on rails. And in the process, it pulled an empty cart up on a parallel set of rails. The rails were long ago removed for their metal value, but you can still see places in the stone where cables ran, and wore grooves in the rock.



At the bottom of the hill the carts passed through tunnels under the drover's road.



And then arrived at a giant lime kiln, where the limestone was stacked inside and huge coal fires were used to heat the stone until it literally crumbled into lime dust, which was harvested for quick-lime which was used in early steel manufacturing, paper production, and for making lime mortars for construction. The facility was huge and quite impressive.



I took a side trip to Saint Winefride's Holy Well. Winefride lived in the 7th century, and was a very devout young woman. But she was also quite beautiful and attracted the attention of a high-born lord. However, she rejected his advances. This enraged him, and he took it upon himself to push his suit, shall we say, beyond gentlemanly conduct. At the very least, he left Winefride sorely damaged beside a spring from which gushed a small stream. Her uncle, Bueno had raised a nearby chapel, and he found her, and carried her to the chapel. Some versions of the legend say the rejected lover beheaded her, and that Bueno used the waters of the spring to heal her, reattaching her head. Well, you know how legends grow. The more likely story is that she was sorely abused and took some time to recover. At any rate, the real life Winefride became abbess of a nunnery, and the spring became venerated for its healing powers. Today it is a substantial monument to Saint Winefride as shown here, and the waters that bubble up inside the shrine are captured in a pool outside, where

twice each day, pilgrims are allowed to immerse themselves in the healing waters. The shrine is now dedicated to those who are victims of sexual violence, harassment or abuse.



I also stopped at another holy well, near the Welsh village of Llanrhaeadr Yng Nghinmeirch. Do not ask me how to pronounce that. This one required a solitary walk back into the woods, following a babbling brook, and surrounded by the most birdsong that I can ever recall hearing in one spot. After a fifteen minute walk in the peaceful woods, I arrived at Saint Dyfnog's Holy Well. Its source is a spring emerging from a limestone cliff, and the water flowing down the side of the hill has left limestone rimstones. You can see these coming down the slope on the left. The waters are then captured in a pool, that was enlarged in the 1700s to accommodate those wishing to immerse themselves in hope of the waters' alleged healing properties, which began when Saint Dyfnog blessed the spring.



I don't know about the healing properties – but just in case, I did rub a bit of water from both

springs on my sore neck and shoulders. What I can tell you is that the leisurely walk into the incredibly peaceful woods at the second spring had some very real mental and emotional healing properties.

*Can we find a place where there's a quiet hush?
Can we find a place where there's no rush?
Where we can listen to sounds of a summer's day,
And all of our worries fade away?
When all we hear is the buzzing of bees,
And the noise of wind as it whispers in the trees.
We miss all of these peaceful sounds,
As we rush through life in leaps and bounds.
We need somewhere to listen to the birds,
Where no clamor of life our peace disturbs.
Close our eyes and let the world drift by,
And all the colors in our minds will beautify.
When we have found this special place,
We can ease our lives to a gentle pace.
Then only spotless dreams our minds control,
And we can quietly harmonize the soul.*

Onward into Wales, we visited Caerphilly Castle, the largest castle in Wales, and in its time, second only to Windsor Castle in size. It was built in 1260 by the Normans.



If you look closely at the section on the far right, it appears to be leaning. But it has been for quite some time, because if you look even closer, you can see the stature of the man trying to hold it from falling.



Tintern Abbey is also a ruin, but a spectacular one. Tintern village is also the place where brass was first made by alloying copper and zinc, in 1568.



We visited Pembroke Castle, which was home to a number of lords, but most noteworthy was William Marshall, deemed by history to be The Greatest Knight of the realm. In addition to being virtually undefeated in tournaments and on the field of battle, he served as advisor to four English kings: Henry II, Richard I, John, and Henry III and was the man most responsible for writing the Magna Carta, which established the historic principle that everyone, including the monarch, is subject to the law, while guaranteeing rights to justice and fair trials. Here is his statue.

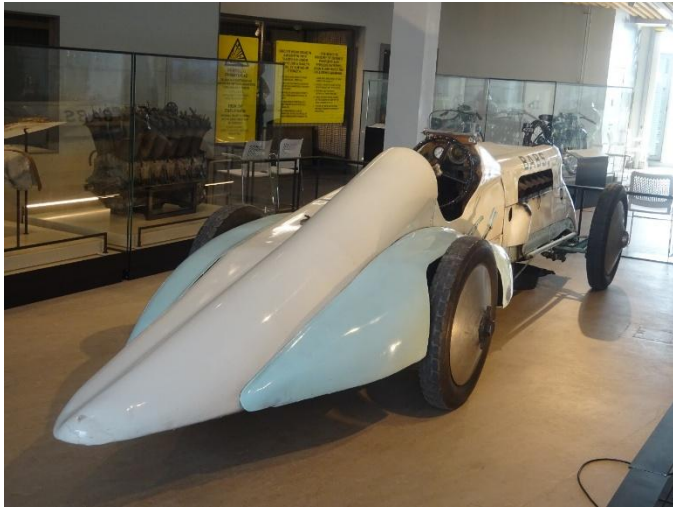
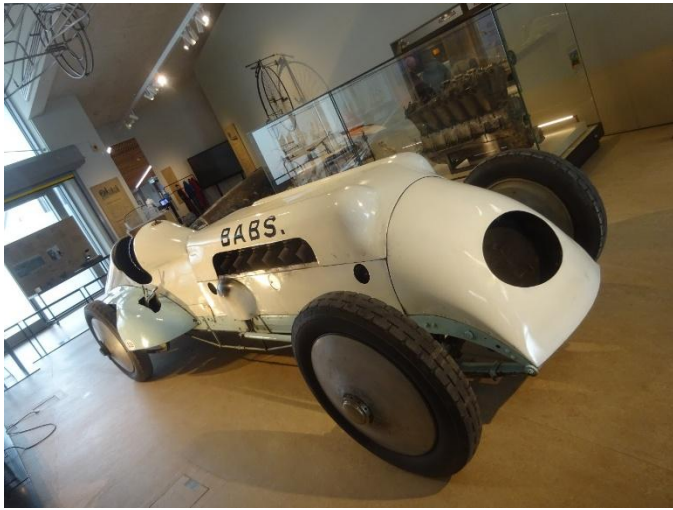


The Great Tower, within the keep, was designed by Marshal and is an incredible 50 meters in diameter.



And finally, while in Wales, we visited Pendine Sands, the seven mile long smooth sandy beach where Sir Malcomb Campbell set several of his world speed records, as mentioned earlier. In 1925-1926, the record was traded back and forth between Campbell in his Bluebird and John Parry-Thomas in Babs, a car which now resides in a museum in Pendine.





You may recall that I previously said to remember the chain drive on these early record breaking cars. Babs also used a chain, and a 27 liter Liberty V12 engine from an airplane.



It was the chain that snapped, ending Parry-Thomas' last record attempt, as well as his life. The crash was so horrendous, and the driver so mutilated, that the car was immediately buried in

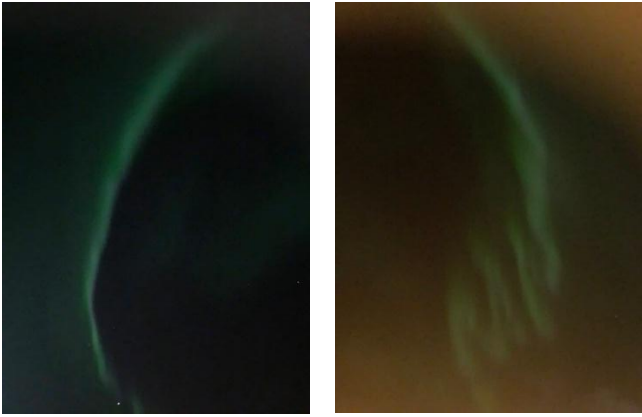
the sands of Pendine, where it remained until 1969 when it was dug up and restored to its original form.

Europe

One of the reasons we were in the far south of Britain was to board a cruise ship to Norway – one of our favorite places in Europe. It was January – why not go north of the arctic circle!



The goal was to see the northern lights, and we were afforded an impressive display at 3 AM one morning. The lights appeared on the horizon and then came towards the ship, swirling and spiraling as they went over our heads and then began cascading down the sky as it receded behind us.



Other Norway stops included a musical concert inside an acoustically interesting converted fish oil tank, near Sortland.



And a visit to the world's most northern animal park. Where we saw wolves, deer, moose, muskox, and (a bit closer) lynx and arctic fox.



The cruise also made stops in Belgium, at Ghent where we rode the scenic canals through the town, under some tunnels, and past Gravensteen Castle.



We also got a chance to wander the city a bit and walk past the famous three towers – the furthest of these being Saint Bavo's Cathedral.



The cathedral is home to the amazing 20 panel painting known as the *Adoration of the Mystic Lamb*, or more commonly known as *The Lamb of God*. It was begun in the mid-1420s and completed by 1432, and it is attributed to brothers Hubert and Jan van Eyck. It is considered by many experts to be the oldest surviving complete oil painting in the world. That it remains intact is amazing, considering the fact that it consists of 20 panels, and was twice stolen from the cathedral – once by Napoleon, and once by the Nazis. Twelve of the panels are shown here. The colors and detail are truly amazing, as is the incredible virtual reality tour that you can buy a ticket for.



We also had a stop in Bruges, another Belgian city full of canals.



The Minnewaterbrug (Lovers' Bridge) is a picturesque pedestrian bridge spanning the Minnewater Lake (Lake of Love). Local legend says that crossing it while holding hands with your partner the whole way across ensures eternal love.



Bruges is a romantic city, and a second, smaller bridge, the Saint Bonifacius Bridge, is said to ensure the same, if you kiss your lover while standing on it. Wendy and I managed to do both. So, I guess we are stuck with each other.



And so, our 2026 has been an exciting exploration of the four corners of the island of Great Britain, and a few more bits of Europe - something we are glad that we accomplished before my time at the university here comes to an end.

