



Cars, Castles, Chapels and Cathedrals

I spent a weekend at Scotland's premier racing circuit, Knockhill. It is a colorful little track.



It reminds me a bit of Grattan Raceway back in Michigan – one of my favorite tracks when I was racing. It is only 1.3 miles long, which means it is easy to walk to all the way around it. And from some viewing locations, you can see almost all of the corners. It also has a number of very interesting turns.

I went to see the British Touring Car Championship series, which is sort of like the American Trans-Am series, only it involves smaller sports sedans typical of what is driven by most Brits, rather than the larger sports sedans driven by Americans.



There are also three supporting series of Ginetta sports cars. These are purpose built racecars, not intended for the street. The slowest of the Ginetta classes uses lower powered engines and is intended for young, beginning racers. There are two progressively faster series for the Ginettas in which drivers advance as they gain experience. If I had grown up in Britain, this is where I would have

wanted to race. The cars are quite sporty and great fun to watch.



The British Formula 4 series also competes on BTCC weekends. All classes run two or three times during a typical weekend, so a spectator sees 13-15 races during a weekend.



Here is a map of Knockhill.



Turn One is a very fast downhill right-hand sweeper at the end of the start/finish straightaway, and is shown here.



After a slight kink, the cars reach another right hander.



Then there is a set of S turns that seems to be the most popular viewing spot on the circuit.



After which the cars head back uphill through some more S turns.



One of which gets many cars slightly airborne, as they try to straighten it out and use the curbing on the inside of the corner



Another right hander follows.



And the final corner is a crazy uphill hairpin, that few drivers seem to really master.



Leading back out onto the main straightaway.



The manufactures competing were Ford, Chevrolet, Vauxhall, BMW, Audi, Toyota, Volkswagen, Mercedes, Subaru, Honda, and MG (the new version). Fans are as dedicated to their favorite drivers and manufacturers as NASCAR fans back in America. Really dedicated fans can buy used body parts at the series souvenir tent.



BTCC has a unique form of grid marker to assist drivers in finding the correct location to line-up on the starting grid. Each team has its unique grid marker and drivers seem to find their spots quite effectively.



The racing was great and I thoroughly enjoyed my weekend, even tent camping and sleeping on the stony Scottish ground.

This autumn we visited Dunrobin Castle in nearby Golspie. Dunrobin is still owned by the family of the Earl of Sutherland, who operate it as a major tourist attraction in the north. Sutherland is the county just south of us in Caithness, and Golspie is a quaint little village about an hour away from our home. Here are pictures of the castle from the gardens and the gardens from the castle. Quite impressive either way you look.



This is either a wee hobbit, come to pick some rhubarb for a pie.....or Wendy's friend Nancy from Indiana, in front of Dunrobin's giant rhubarb plant..... You guess which.



You may recall that I talked about my team of high school girls from Tain Royal Academy that won the Scottish Championship in the Bloodhound competition, designing the winning scale-model

rocket car and beating all the teams of boys from around the country. They earned us the chance to go to see the actual Bloodhound rocket car run at Newquay Air Field in Cornwall. Cornwall is at the opposite end of Britain from us, but it is quite similar in that its full of small villages, with narrow streets lined by small shops.



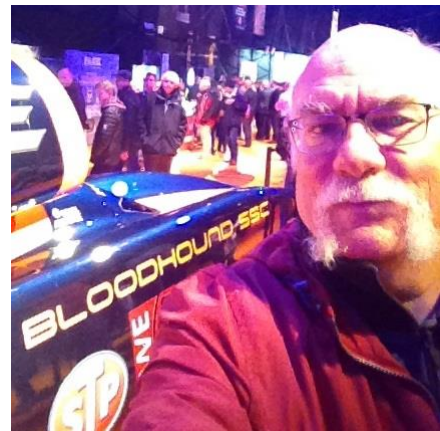
Old stone churches



And the odd surprise hiding in the woods if you look closely.



The day with Bloodhound was quite impressive. Technologically, it is an amazing car with an afterburning jet engine to get up to about 500 mph and a rocket to take it over 800 mph. It uses a Jaguar V12 racing engine just to drive the fuel pump.



The displays were impressive, and provided a superb technical education, including one display where you had a chance to assemble components like are in the car.



I got to meet the driver, Andy Green, and the designer, Ron Ayers, both of whom held those positions on the team 20 years ago that set the current world speed record of 763 mph.



The car made a run at over 210 mph (as fast as it can go without running out of runway). Next stop: the desert in South Africa to go for the record.

After Bloodhound what could be more exciting? Well, my hotel burnt down around me in the middle of the night – that's what. It was a lovely vintage inn and pub and a real shame.

Before returning, I visited St. Michael's Mount. It was originally a catholic priory built on an island just a stone's throw from the Cornwall coast. You still reach it at low tide by walking the stone causeway that the pilgrims walked in the 12th century.



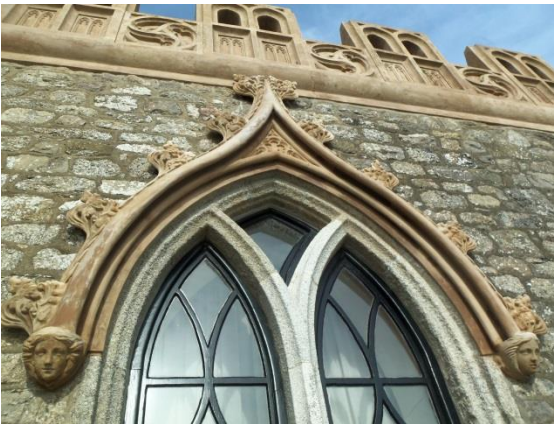
Then the pilgrims had a rough climb up the mount.



But the building is worth the trip. After the protestant reformation in England, it became a fortified castle. Eventually it passed into private hands, and the family still lives in one wing while you can tour the rest.



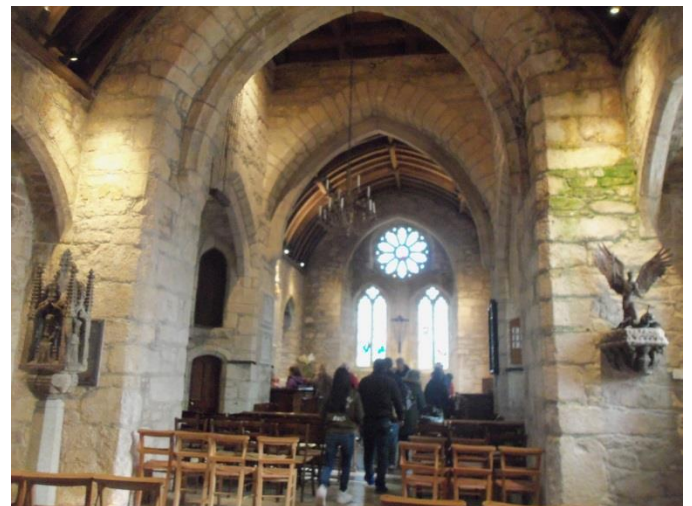
Very impressive stone structures and carving.

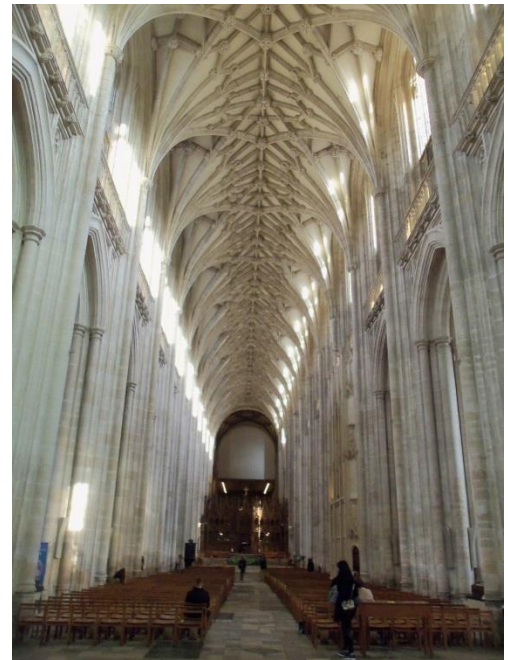


The gardens were very impressive viewed from the castle ramparts.



The chapel is still in use, and has impressive carvings including an amazingly detailed one of St. Michael fighting the devil. If you believe in the lines of power, known as ley lines, which supposedly envelop our planet, then St. Michael's mount is said to lie at the intersection of four of them, with this chapel sitting atop one.





The Chapel of the Holy Sepulchre, with wall and ceiling murals dating from the 12th century.



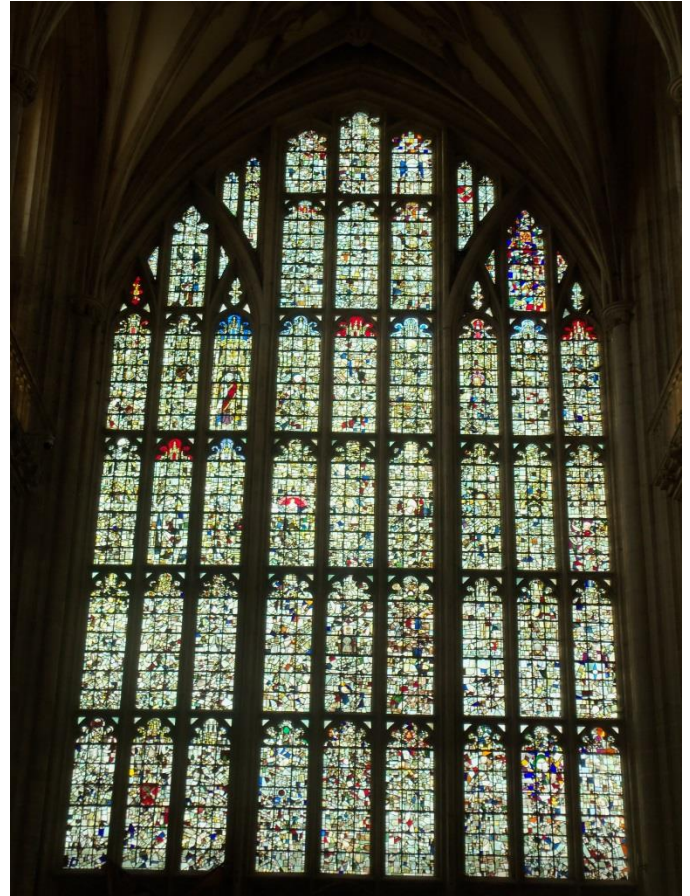
The Chapel of the Guardian Angels, with the walls and ceiling painted with angelic images.

I also stopped at Winchester Cathedral, and toured the building before attending an Evensong service. Wendy and I became very fond of these services when I was in Lancaster on my Fulbright. We regularly attended at Lancaster Priory and once made it to one at York Minster. Winchester is not as big as York Minster, but quite impressive in its own right. It has a huge main chamber and numerous smaller chapels.



Bishop Langton's Chapel, in remembrance of the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

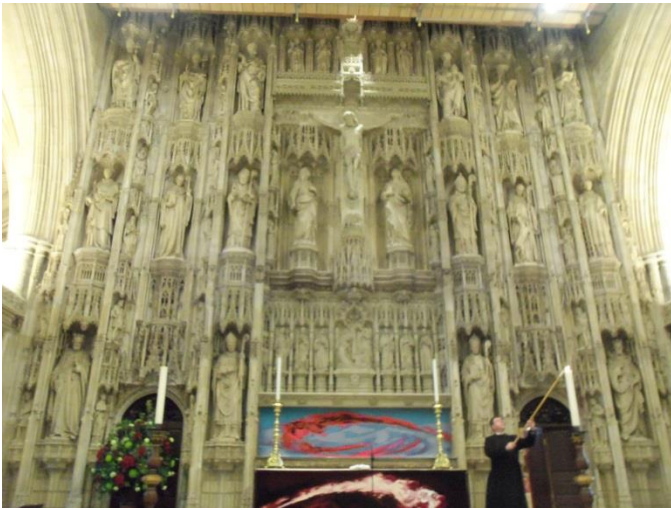
Amazing stained glass, some of it several stories tall.



Intricate stone carvings throughout.



The High Altar with incredible stone carvings of the Saints behind it.



As the order of service explains, "Choral Evensong is a gift, in which the worshipper is invited to relax and be carried along by the dignity of the liturgy and the inspiration of the music." It takes place in this lovely chapel which is acoustically impressive.



"Did not strong connections draw me elsewhere, I believe Scotland would be the country I would choose to end my days in."

Benjamin Franklin



I am back home in Caithness now, where the days are getting so short that Wendy and I leave for college in the dark and return home in the dark. Not as much opportunity for travel and exploration until spring.

Wendy and I plan to be back in Indiana for Christmas and New Year's this year, so perhaps we will see some of you then.