



Hadrian's Wall 1900 Year Celebration



At the height of the Roman Empire, when it had been extended all the way to north Britain, Emperor Hadrian oversaw the building of a stone wall, running the entire width of the island, about 70 miles. Its purpose was to keep the barbarians (Picts and Scotia tribes) in the north, away from the civilized Roman territories in the south. There were forts spaced periodically along the wall, and watch towers, known as Milecastles, essentially every mile, to maintain line-of-sight security along its entire length. This became known as Hadrian's Wall, and some of it still exists today, roughly along the border between England and Scotland. When it was fully intact, it must have looked a lot like the Great Wall of China, ranging between seven and nine feet thick, and about ten feet tall.



This year is the 1900th anniversary of the building of Hadrian's Wall. So, when we had to make a trip south to Durham we allocated a day to stop and explore some of the ruins. Specifically, we stopped at Chesters Roman Fort. The first photo is of the foundations remaining at one of the gates to the fort. I took this picture specifically because of the clear view of the water channel. These ran throughout the fort ruins. The next photo is of the foundations of the barracks. The soldiers slept in one row of buildings and their horses were stabled in the adjacent row. The third photo is of the bath house, which was outside the walls of the fort, down by the riverside. Bathing was a particularly popular activity during free time. There

were ovens underground, so that both a steam sauna and warm bathing water were available.

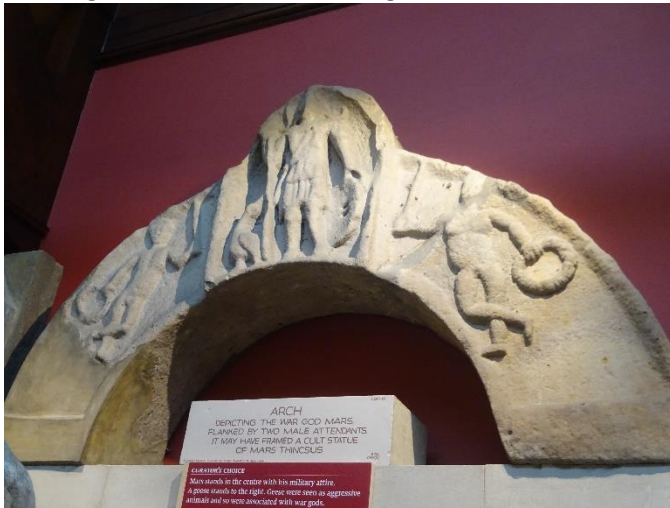


In the museum adjacent to the ruins of the fort, a number of items uncovered during the excavation are on display. In the first photo you see two altars. The one on the left is to the Fortuna who was the goddess of good fortune. It was found in the bath house, where the soldiers would have spent free time gambling,

rolling dice, etc. So good luck was desirable. The one on the right is to Minerva, a goddess associated with the supernatural.



The next photo is an archway from one of the buildings. It is dedicated to the god Mars.



Not everything uncovered during the excavation was large. This photo is of a very detailed small metal dog statue. Finding something like this must be hugely exciting when engaged in an excavation. I plan to participate in one later this summer, and hope I uncover something cool.



The Roman Soldiers worshipped many gods. The ones mentioned above you may recognize as traditional Roman gods and goddesses. However, a few miles away from the fort, was a completely separate structure, a temple to the god Mithras. Mithras was worshipped by soldiers coming from the eastern end of

the Roman Empire, in what would now be the Slavic nations. The altars have been left in the ruins



The Mithras mythology claimed that the god had wrestled with a mighty bull inside a cave.



So, the temple would have been constructed to resemble a cave inside, and kept dark during ceremonies, lit only by small torches. Participants in the ritual moved up through progressive levels, similar to

the levels that Freemasons move through in their journey.

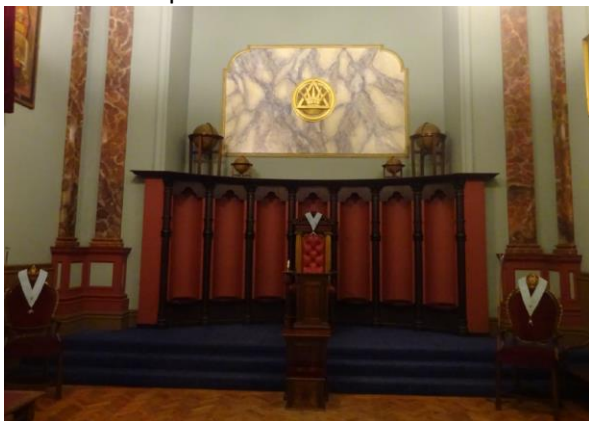
Our trip to Durham was for the annual European Masonic Association spring meeting. We met in this iconic Victorian era hotel.



We had a group visit to the Beamish Historic Park. Beamish has various villages from the 1820s to the 1950s. The most interesting thing for me, personally, was this Masonic Hall. It was originally located on the Hylton estates in nearby Sutherland, before being moved to Beamish. I had previously visited the ruins of my family's historic castle, now I got to explore this hall from my ancestral heritage.



The next photos are taken inside.



Other features at Beamish included this chemist's shop (pharmacy).



There was an interesting motorcar repair shop, shown in the next photo.





There were many interesting street scenes and also period transportation for those who did not want to walk.



This final photo from Beamish shows a thatched roof house and a small church from the 1820s village.



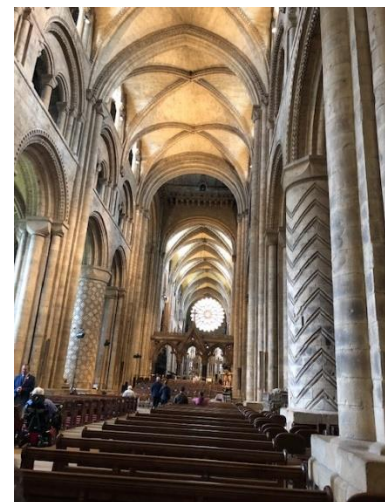
We also took a group trip to Durham Cathedral (actually the Cathedral Church of Christ, Blessed Mary the Virgin and St Cuthbert of Durham), one of the best maintained Norman cathedrals from the 11th century.



The door at one entrance to the cathedral carries this knocker. In the middle ages, people who had committed a "great offence" could use the knocker and be admitted and granted sanctuary for 37 days, during which they had to decide between trial or voluntary exile.



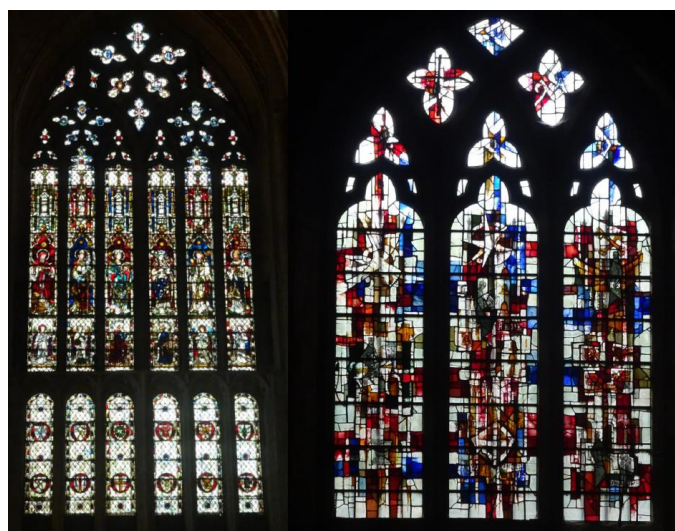
Inside, the arches of the cathedral are quite impressive.



While impressive, the walls of the cathedral are much of one single color: gray. However, when built it would have been colorfully painted, as can be seen in a few places where restoration has uncovered colors under layers of plaster, as shown in the next photos.



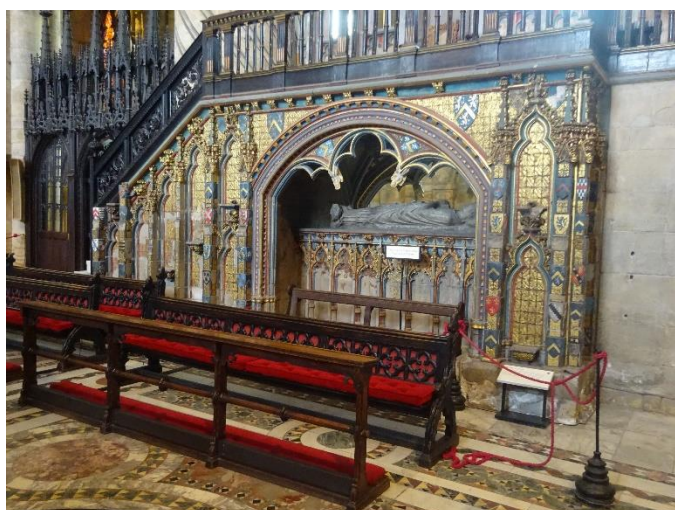
Next are photos of two pulpits. The gold one is the pelican pulpit, created to represent the story of pelicans opening their own flesh to release blood to feed their young. This, of course, is used to represent the sacrifice of Christ. Following that is a photo of the royal box.



A final interesting photo from Durham is of the castle library. It is full of many very old and unique books. The most prized, is a first folio of Shakespeare. But looking through the protective screens, you can see an amazing assortment of very rare books.



On our way back home to the far north, we encountered a typical Caithness traffic jam, on one of the main roads into Thurso.



The stained glass windows of the cathedral are quite interesting, because they come from many different eras. The first photo shows (left) an original window from the Norman era. The one to the right is from a couple of centuries later. The next two were created in the 20th century, so have a much more modern look.



I said earlier that I was going to participate in an archeological dig. It was an excavation of a former longhouse at Greeanan, in the Strathbrora – the valley of the River Brora, west of the village of Brora, in Sutherland, just south of Caithness.

Amongst the inhabitants of the building was a minister of the parish of Clyne, from 1776 to his death in 1825. He supposedly took a rented plot of land at Greeanan, and spent summer months there, preaching to the local population being a gentleman farmer. He was also notoriously rumored to have stored smuggled spirits in his church. Later inhabitants at Greeanan were newlyweds 79-year-old John Mathieson and his 27-year-old bride Isabella Baillie.

Following are a 200 year old photo of the site, and photos of the dig while I was participating.



This was the trench I worked most of the time. With a lovely view of the River Brora.



I uncovered the threshold for the front door of the croft. The decorative tiles would have been quite ostentatious for a croft house of that era, so indicate that the Reverend was at the upper end of the social ladder of the time.....or perhaps that hiding whisky was a profitable sideline.



Another interesting find was the remains of a Codd bottle. I had never heard of these ingenious self-sealing bottles from the 1870s. A glass marble inside the bottle was pushed to the top by the effervescence of the fizzy drink, and formed a seal that kept the liquid inside until such time as the marble was pushed down and lodged on a ridge cast into the neck of the glass.



We also uncovered a nest of slow worms in the trench. These wee beasties are not considered snakes, but rather legless lizards. Don't ask me what the difference is.



Our last bit of news is that we are now dual citizens of both the USA and UK. Here is a photo of us being congratulated and presented with our citizenship papers by the Lord Lieutenant of Caithness, Viscount Lord Thurso.



Naturally we celebrated with a night on the town with some of our Caithness friends.



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