



The Gottliebs Travel to Scotland

By Deborah Bruce Gottlieb, FSA Scot

My husband Ben and I had the wonderful opportunity to travel to Scotland for nine days in September 2010. We were lucky to experience incredible weather with moderate temperatures in the 60's and blue skies most of the time. Yes, we did rent a car and drove on the left side. You have to remember when you drive in the UK that "*left is right and right is wrong*".

Carlisle was our first stop after landing in Manchester, England. We visited Carlisle Castle, the location of so much history between the Scots and the English. After a good night's sleep, we headed to Annan, a short drive over the border into Scotland. There is much Bruce history here and we saw the recently installed statue of Robert the Bruce at the town hall for which FOBI donated funds in 2009. We then rendezvoused with some friends in the quaint village of Kirkcudbright (pronounced kirk-coo-bree) in southern Scotland at the mouth of the River Dee near the coast. We stayed at the Selkirk Inn which was built in the 1700s and where Robert Burns was said to have stayed in Room 1!! It is also *alleged* that he wrote the famous Selkirk Grace at this hotel. Well, believe all of this or not, it was an enjoyable stay. It was special to have a wee dram and make a toast to the Bard in the Burns Sitting Room.

After eating an excellent Scottish breakfast and saying goodbye to our friends, we headed north to visit St Andrews in the Kingdom of Fife. St Andrews today is most famously known as the "Home of Golf". Since Ben is a golfer, we spent several hours around the Royal and Ancient Golf Club. Many centuries before the game of golf was established, St Andrews was an important religious capital of Scotland. We visited the ruins of the St Andrews Cathedral and the older church of Saint Regulus (St. Rule) which are great monuments to that era of Scottish history. King Robert I attended the dedication of the Cathedral in 1318. A visit to St Andrews Castle was very interesting. Its tale will be related in a future article. Also of important note is the University of St Andrews which was established in the early 15th century and is the oldest university in Scotland. As you can see there is much to see and do in St Andrews and one needs more than a day to visit. From St Andrews, we took the scenic route along the coast and meandered along lovely winding roads. The village of Charlestown in Dunfermline was our base for the next couple of days.

Knowing that driving and finding parking in Edinburgh would be difficult, we decided to take the bus. This was my 4th visit to the city and Ben's first. Time constraints kept us in the Olde Town visiting the Castle and walking down the Royal Mile. In the Castle, I revisited the War Memorial where the names of my grandfather's brother, Hugh Bruce, and my grandmother's brother, William Trimble are listed in their hallowed books. They both died in France fighting in WWI. Visiting this memorial was my way of paying my respects to them and thanking them for their service to their country and the world.

Our visit with Lord and Lady Elgin in their home at Broomhall was exceptional and we were honored to meet with them. We reflected on the 700th Celebration in 2006 and how the event exceeded all our expectations. We also talked about the 700th Anniversary of Bannockburn in 2014. It was amazing to discuss the Bannockburn Battle and other historical times with Lord Elgin, and to get a true historical perspective from one who has studied and focused on the correct historical significances of these events. I learned that part of the strategy of putting King Edward's army in the exact position King Robert wanted was the fact that the men and their horses would be thirsty after such a long journey. The English camped on the banks of the Bannock Burn (burn in Scots is for stream) at the exact place where King Robert "influenced" them to go. At that spot they didn't have room to maneuver their horses and pick up speed at the commencement of the battle. Of course there were many more strategic moves in the battle, but this was one little known fact that set the stage.

After a visit to the Bannockburn battle field, we visited with Charles, Lord Bruce in the afternoon. Again we were quite honored to visit with him and discussed Scottish and American history, architecture and other topics. We visited nearby Culross Abbey where Benedict, Lord Bruce's youngest son, proudly gave us a very comprehensive tour of the Abbey. The main chapel was full of fragrant flowers and we visited the tombs of Sir George Bruce and his family which is in one section of the abbey.

This article can only give evidence to some of our experiences and I will save more for future articles. Our visit to the Robert the Bruce Heritage Centre in Renton, West Dunbartonshire is the first of those articles and is located on the next page of this newsletter.

Needless to say, our visit was magical. For those who have traveled to Scotland know, that no matter how long the visit, there is still so much more to see and experience on the next trip.



Visit to the Robert the Bruce Heritage Centre

By Deborah Bruce Gottlieb, FSA Scot

When my husband Ben and I visited Scotland, we scheduled a visit to the Robert the Bruce Heritage Centre in Renton, West Dunbartonshire. The Centre opened in March of 2010, and is run by the Strathleven Artizans. The May 2010 issue of the Blue Lion featured a story on the opening of the Centre.

As we arrived, we were warmly greeted by Duncan Thomson, dressed for battle in his chainmail regalia. Duncan is Chairman of the Strathleven Artizans and the inspiration behind the Centre. It was obvious they had prepared and were looking forward to our visit as much as we were looking forward to visiting them. We met Jim Tannock, Treasurer, and his wife Lynn; Paul Hunter who portrays King Robert I very effectively and his wife Susan; Jeanette Ryan who portrayed Robert I's wife Elizabeth; as well as Brenda Cameron and Elspeth Crocket who are key members of the group.

The Centre is a converted ScotRail station which was adopted and transformed by the organization into a remarkable exhibition to honor Robert the Bruce and his supporters. The Artizans volunteer at the Centre to host visitors and educate them about the life and times of our ancestors who dedicated their lives to free Scotland. The members also spend much of their time visiting schools, festivals, and other events to teach and commemorate the history of Robert the Bruce and his supporters.

As part of their generous hospitality, we were treated to delicious sandwiches, pastries, and tea!! As we were transferred back in time, the Artizans showed and told us of their achievements in the short time the Centre had been open. It was obvious to us that their spirit and love of history enabled them to realize all they had accomplished in the Centre.

The Centre contains many art and glass works, 14th century artifacts and memorabilia including battle weapons, armour, and much information. 14th Century Renton was formerly known as Cardross and is the area where Robert the Bruce settled in to raise his son David II and to rule the Kingdom. Please note the modern day Cardross is approximately 10 miles away on the west coast and is not the area King Robert lived. King Robert built a great Royal Manor House in an area called PillonFlatts at the east end of the current day Renton. A few years ago the area was excavated to build

some homes, and in doing so 14th Century ancient foundations were unearthed which may be the foundations of King Robert's buildings. Experts were brought in to authenticate the find and time was afforded to dig out the priceless "cement". Pieces of the foundation can be seen in a cabinet at the Centre along with many other artifacts of the time.

Another topic of interest is the Bruce Oak which was a sapling 700-1000 years ago on Bruce's Estate. It sadly fell after a fire in 2005; however, the Strathleven Artizans were able to recover the timber and they have made items from it that are available. They also plan on making a new throne at the Centre out of it! I do cherish my key chain and a carved oak acorn from the tree.

In addition to celebrating the life and achievements of King Robert, the Artizans participate in many activities to honor his closest knights and companions. Each year, the Strathleven Artizans travel to Teba, Spain for a festival to honor the Good Sir James Douglas. As many of you know, after King Robert's death, Sir James took his heart on a voyage to the Holy Land. However, he and a number of others were killed in Teba, Spain during a battle. King Robert's heart and the remains of Sir James were returned to Scotland for burial.

While celebrating the close relationships between the Scots and Americans, we focused on how King Robert and the kingdom of his time were influential on the future and on democracy. A book, "For Freedom Alone" by Edward J. Cowan (professor of Scottish History at the University of Glasgow) was shared with us. It is an excellent expose on the Declaration of Arbroath, and a chronological essay on the people and political events of the time. It is so interesting I have worn out the pages on my copy!

As we concluded our visit, we said goodbyes to our new friends with a response from them of "Haste Ye Back", and yes, we certainly look forward to coming back to the Centre and to the Renton area. It proved to be another day in our visit that we realized needed much more time to spend at the Centre and in the area that was the home of King Robert and his family after the wars and his gallant efforts to free his country.

I certainly recommend accessing their websites for much more information and visiting the Centre when in Scotland. You will find it to be a real treat!!

www.strathlevenartizans.com

www.roberthebruceheritagecentre.co.uk