

Fishburn Tours goes to Scotland or: A Week at the Ritz

6th to 14th June 1995

Day 1

Ray drove me to the airport in pouring rain. He dropped me off at Terminal D and continued on to ESO. Schuerers and Paul arrived at the same time. I was very glad to see Wolfgang, as he had picked up all our tickets at Take-a-Ticket on Friday, not without complications, and he had been heard muttering something about "flights to New Zealand". Gradually the other members of our party arrive and despite Mr Van den Bremer's exhortions not to look as though we are a group, there we are, standing in full view of the check-in counters, as groupie a group as ever there was! Two married couples, 2 mothers each with one son, one mother without a son, one aunt, one nephew, one grandson, one grandmother, three bachelor boys and me. We go through to the departure lounge where there is plenty of time for drinks and shopping. One married couple show commendable signs of independence and vanish until just before our flight boards. An incredible number of people seem to want to fly with us - why? It emerges that half of the seats are taken by 53 Bavarian teachers on a tour of Scotland. The ubiquitous Japanese are also on board. I sit next to Paul.

First stop is Birmingham, where I have time to phone Lesley for a brief chat and we all descend like vultures on the airport bookstall and clear the stock of town plans of Edinburgh. This much to the amazement of the sales assistant, who wondered out loud why we just didn't buy one between us. I assured her a) it was better business for her to sell as many as possible, and b) although we might look like it we're definitely NOT a group and therefore we all needed a plan each for our own highly individual tours.

On board again, a cup of tea, and then we're flying in over the Firth of Forth, with views of Arthur's Seat, the Castle and Leith Docks before landing. Taxis are organised, luggage and bodies thrown in and off to the Ritz, on schedule, about 17.30.

The Ritz is situated near the Haymarket Station in the West End. It's off the main road, but handy for all buses going to the centre (and there are very many!). There are telephone boxes at the corner and a superior-looking Indian restaurant, there's a post office and a newsagent's nearby, and a somewhat larger, posher-looking hotel opposite.

We are welcomed in the small hallway by a large (stuffed) bear in full Highland dress. Fortunately there is also a female human being there, who panics, however, as 17 individuals and luggage threaten to demolish the entrance. She thrusts a pile of keys at me, so I just dole them out, thus making my first mistake and committing Hanni and myself to a week of mountaineering. Some lucky people got rooms on the 1st and 2nd floors, and 8 of us were allocated rooms at the top. Not too bad really - all rooms were clean and adequately furnished, with private bathroom, TV, telephone and tea-making facilities, plus the hairdryer and trouserpress as promised in the brochure. In the middle of all this hubbub Dad rolled in from some voyage of discovery. He had a room with a four-poster bed on the 1st floor!

After a suitable interval for showers and unpacking we all assembled at the entrance and walked into town. We made for Rose St a good decision, as here are pubs and restaurants to suit all tastes and pockets. We found a welcome and plenty of space in Oliver's Pub. No need to push tables together, thank goodness! Later on, Dad and I, together with Windheims, Brigitte and Josef, walked further down the street and I found the Abbotsford, exactly as depicted inn my book of drawings of Victorian Edinburgh. This discovery was celebrated by a drink at the huge central mahogany bar, like an altar, below the tastefully plastered ceiling. Then a stroll home along Princes St, with views of the Castle, all illuminated, and the still-light northern summer sky.

Day 2

Breakfast in the basement is presided over by a nice friendly waiter who was probably once batman to some General in a Highland regiment. He is assisted by a very young, shy, pale red-haired boy. There are always the same items on offer, but one can vary them. tinned grapefruit segments, prunes, individual cereal boxes, porridge in a large pan tried by everyone at some stage or other and generally pronounced acceptable, I think. Then there is fruit juice, tea or coffee or hot chocolate, toast, soft floury baps, bacon and egg - NO sausages or tomatoes however. Well-fortified we set off to explore. Our first stop was the Waverly Tourist Information Centre via Princes St Gardens. A lovely fresh, clear day and a wonderful view of the Castle. Cameras and video cameras spring into action. The InfoCentre is very good. First souvenirs and presents are bought and I accumulate lots of brochures and information. Next, a Classic Tour, on a topless bus. We are a Group and get a discount. Off we go with tour driver-guide. In Edinburgh they don't seem to have thought of employing

hostesses to give multilingual commentaries. You have to listen to Kevin/Jock/Harry's original Scottish commentary and if you don't understand it - tough luck. We drive around and look dutifully at George St and George Square, various churches and St Giles' Cathedral and several monuments, but the highlight of the tour is Greyfriar's Bobby. If you've never heard of him before, believe me, after Kevin/Jock/Harry has told you the tale about the faithful little dog you will never ever forget it. Forget the centuries of history, of battles between the Scots and the English, of Kings and Queens, of plots and quarrels, of Catholics and Reformers. All that is of nothing compared with Greyfriar's Bobby!

After the tour I bought a 7-day bus ticket and tried to interest the others in the idea but without success. (However, after 24 hours of always having to have the correct change for all buses they changed their minds and next day all wanted such tickets). After lunch we met up again for a walk down the Royal Mile to Holyrood House. Some of us then continued, led by Dad, to make the ascent of Arthur's Seat. The weather was mixed: cloud, sunshine, rain and wind, but we had superb views all round, across the Forth and out to sea with the Bass Rock in the distance. The Holyrood House group hadn't been in at £5 too expensive for the blood of Rizzio and the memories of Mary Stuart.

I had made some enquiries at the Waverley Shopping Centre at lunchtime (haggis, tatties and neeps) and found out that the newly-released film "Rob Roy" was showing at the Odeon Cinema. Surprising lack of interest among fellow groupies so ended up going with Dad and Windheims. What a cinema! It was like a night at the Opera - décor pale blue and white with 3 classical statues in niches down the side walls, and the ceiling studded with stars. The armchairs weren't as comfortable or as generous as the ones in our own new cinema in Pfaffenhofen. The film is an American version of the Rob Roy story - very romantic, grossly exaggerated but with lovely scenery and appropriate music, and, as Dad somewhat disapprovingly reported to Chris later, three very explicit sex scenes! We missed our last bus back and took a taxi not - expensive.

Day 3

We all go to the Botanic Garden, individually, of course. It's more fun like that, one keeps meting up with other small groups and then you go and do your own thing again. Unfortunately it was rather dull', but the azaleas are lovely and the glass houses were fascinating. There were in lots of school classes go ground, mainly little ones, all very well-behaved, with their rucksacks and plastic lunch boxes and all with work-sheets to fill in. We had a good lunch in the restaurant there, then had to make sure Dad got his train at 14.45.

I went back to the Ritz for his bag and was able to have a quick cuppa and rest in my room before meeting Dad again at Waverley. After his train left, punctually, I had quite a busy time. I booked the tours we had decided on and collected information at train and bus stations in case anyone wanted to go further afield, e.g. Glasgow and Stirling, and I checked times of trains and buses and prices (for groups!). After all this I felt in need of revival so collapsed with a pot of tea in Jenner's tea room. There I sorted out our finances and made a list of what everyone owed me. Then I made my way to our rendezvous at the Abbotsford. There I joined forces with Schürers, Windheims and Paul and we went to eat in an Italian restaurant in Rose St. Later on I couldn't help wallowing in nostalgia and led the way to Deacon Brodies, one of the places Enid and I visited with our new-found boyfriends way back in 1963! This time at least no-one queried whether I was old enough. Bus back to the' Ritz another beautiful light summer sky.

Day 4

I set off alone after breakfast, calling first at the Post Office to buy stamps and to post the cards I'd written, including one to Malte of a Scottish piper. I walked up to the Castle, noting that they were already constructing the stands for spectators for the Tattoo in August. There were several groups of people watching the, boy soldiers doing their marching around 6 steps to the left, stamp, turn round, march back, stamp, stamp, clack, clack with the rifle and back to the starting position. Click, click go the cameras and the girls giggle as they pose beside the young lads. One group seems to be composed of American schoolgirls, all in Bermuda shorts. I tagged on to them and walked through into the castle. I looked for somewhere to pay but didn't see anywhere and there were no attendants to ask for my ticket so I assumed it must be further up the slope. I noticed a gift shop but no ticket office. I reached the terrace where the canon are, and there I came across some members of our party, in fact in the course of the morning I think I came across most of our party up there, along with many other groups from *(Germany. The Castle was over run by Germans. I had a great time exploring the whole castle area, Queen Margaret's Chapel, Great Hall, Honours of Scotland (Crown Jewels), War Memorial, dungeons; Scottish history and heritage in stone and all for free.

Later I found out that the ticket office was outside on the esplanade, to the right of the main entrance and I just hadn't seen it and so I'd saved +5.50! Immediately on leaving the esplanade I turned off right down a flight of steps. On my right there was a little sign

"Nature Reserve". The Nature Reserve was an old, overgrown garden with all kinds of wild flowers and grasses, a little stone path led all the way round it and there are lots of birds enjoying the peace and quiet. Just above is the Castle and carpark full of tourists and coaches from every corner of the country, and here is an oasis of calm, which I enjoy, alone, for a few minutes, before continuing down into the Grassmarket. Here is another surprise prise. What was once a no-go area with a reputation for wickedness and pubs of ill-repute has now developed into an area of "in" pubs and bars and interesting little shops. In one of these, a music shop which claims to sell CDs cheaper than in Princes St, I buy the CD soundtrack of "Rob Roy". Then I walked up to the Royal Mile and down the Mound, marvelling at the cloudless blue sky and enjoying the atmosphere of this old corner of the city. At the National Gallery I decide I've got time to see a few pictures before our 1/4 to 2 rendezvous. On entering, I realise I am just in time to listen to the lunchtime lecture. Every Friday one of the curators talks for 1/2 hour about one of the pictures. A large group is already sitting on folding chairs in front of a large painting. I join them, taking an empty chair in the centre. A natty, youngish fellow comes along and introduces himself as today's lecturer, and then follows an entertaining, instructive, fascinating half-hour when we are told about the French painter Gérard and the portrait he painted of Napoleon's motherhistory, family background, Napoleon's motives for commissioning the portrait all related in a relaxed, self-assured style. When this was over I walked through 2 or 3 rooms quickly and then out into the lunchtime sunshine. Office workers and shop assistants, students and tourists, all sitting, strolling, putting, sunbathing, eating sandwiches and ice-creams a peaceful scene to the wail of the pipes as the indefatigable piper on the Waverley Bridge does his best to please the tourists. I buy an ice-cream and wander slowly to the bridge to join the others for our Trossachs Tour.

Kevin, our driver-guide, turned up punctually and we boarded the coach and set off out towards the airport. I'm sitting next to Paul. He seems to have the knack, as soon as he is being transported, either by plane or by bus, of falling asleep. Like this he misses a lot of "scenery", which is perhaps a pity, as we turn off the motor-way near Stirling and take a country road passing through green meadows and pastures with sheep and cattle, and then, above Aberfoyle, we pass through the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park and there are carpets of bluebells and fresh green fern fronds on either side of the narrow winding road. Max isn't too happy about the latter, and we are all relieved to arrive at Loch Katrine. Unfortunately this is only a brief stop, 15 minutes, just time to walk a little way down the road and into the cool forest, and to see the cruise ship "Walter Scott" coming to pick up some lucky people who have more time for a lake cruise.

A short, winding drive through the trees and past large estates brings us to Callander. There's a Visitor Centre with the usual selection of more or less interesting souvenirs, and there's a lovely riverside path (R. Teith) which I walk along with Rita and Bärbel before it's time to return to the coach. An uneventful drive back and Kevin drops us off at the, Haymarket. Where to go on a Friday night? Memories of York last year where all the pubs were full of kids enjoying a night out. After a quick shower and change I decide to join the „Mums and kids" group, i.e. Ute, Susanne, Hanni, Patrick, Max and Daniel. We head for Rose St and the Kenilworth worth with its welcoming(Family Room(. There we all have a good meal and a pleasant evening. The boys enjoy ordering the meals and drinks. It's amazing how much food Max manages to put away. It's much cooler now, with quite a breeze coming along off the North Sea. I phone Jane at her mother's to make(a arrangements for tomorrow. A relatively early night and I dream of the tennis club ladies!

Day 5

I was still lying in bed thinking of getting up when Liddy phoned from some place in the wilds of the Highlands. We arranged to meet at the Scott Monument at 1pm on Monday. Then, after breakfast, I went out to meet Jane after organising a rendezvous with the others. Jane and I had coffee in a nice „green", organic, vegetarian, alternative' cafe in the Grassmarket. On the way to our midday rendezvous we stopped on the Mound and watched and listened to (in that order) the 21-gun salute in honour of Prince Philip's birthday. Of course, he is Duke of Edinburgh after all. We met most of our lot as planned outside Registry House. Jimme now knows where he can get information about his ancestors. Jane suggested lunch in the John Lewis cafeteria with its superb views over the Forth and Calton Hill. It reminded me of sitting in the panorama windows in the dining room of the ferry from Sweden(to Finland. Afterwards we saw a procession of motorbike riders - all kinds and categories I think they were rallying to protest about something thing, but don't know what.

We took a No. 10 bus to Silverknowles, passing Leith harbour on the way. From Silverknowles we walked along the riverside walk to Cramond. Lots of dogs and kids and bikes. Notices warning of pollution and against swimming. The chemical works down-river are responsible for most of the pollution, I think. Fortified with ice-creams we make tracks for the Cramond Inn. We arrange to return for a meal later on and reserve a whole room, with open fire, very cosy. Then we decide to have a drink there and get into conversation with a couple of locals, who have been there quite a while already, by the sound of things. However, it's all quite amusing and Wolfgang swings his video camera into action. When I

suggest abandoning the Scottish ruins in favour of visiting the Roman ruins the said Scottish "ruins" were a bit put out at first, but took it all in good part. There wasn't all that much to see of the Roman ruins up by the kirk, but we had a nice walk around and met up with the rest of the group who had come out later. Now we were all there except Susanne and Max, who preferred to watch penguins at the zoo. We returned to the inn and Wolfgang made an excellent start to the evening by standing a round of drinks to celebrate his recent birthday and that was how Patrick and Daniel managed to get hold of a gin and tonic each (or whatever). Anyway, something a bit stronger than Fanta. They were feeling pretty good, wearing their newly-purchased £30 T-shirts which glow in the dark and the disco, so they say. everyone enjoyed the food and drink and atmosphere very much. With bus No. 41 we rode back to Charlotte Square, said farewell to Jane and walked back to the Ritz.

Day 6

Sunday morning in Edinburgh. A little bit grey and drizzly, church bells, quiet and peaceful. I suggest a walk along the Water of Leith to Dean Village and St Bernard's Well. All want to go it's not too far, but we could be miles away from the hustle and bustle of Princes St. After the walk we split up and arrange a rendezvous for lunch. Then some of us decide. to make the most of our go-anywhere bus tickets and jump on a bus, 3A to Gorebridge where's that? Don't know never mind, go upstairs and enjoy the ride. The sun comes out and we drive and drive, out to the south, through dreary housing estates, on and on, almost to England, ending up one hour later, at about the time we were supposed to meet the others, in Gorebridge. The same journey back in reverse, with splendid views of the Pentland Hills and the Firth of Forth and the hills beyond. As a special bonus we make the acquaintance of Andrew Sharpie, piper, in full Highland dress, on his way to play at a wedding and very proud to display his costume to our curious eyes. Once again Schürer Videos Inc. springs into action. Of course, we had missed the others when we finally got back to town, 'but we had a good lunch at Henderson's son's veggie bistro. Afterwards we looked round the Georgian House, which is guarded by several quite fierce old ladies. I wangled a reduction for my group of students, but Lady X insisted on me paying the full amount, so they (my lovely students) clubbed together and refunded me the extra £1.50 really sweet of them. I thought Fairfax House in York was much better, but nevertheless less it's still a good idea to preserve these buildings.

Tea in the Mount Royal Hotel tea room overlooking Princes St was a good idea too, then Wolfgang, Gretl, Alfons and I decided to go up to St Giles' Cathedral to the concert being given by a German girls' choir. I had found out this information in a "What's on" leaflet. We were somewhat surprised to find that the girls' choir from Germany had turned into 2 young men bass baritone with piano accompanist. However, they gave an excellent short concert so we felt rewarded. Afterwards we walked in and out of various pubs in the Grassmarket area, including Greyfriars; all were very full and very loud, but we finally managed a drink in a) Deacon Brodies, and b) Kenilworth, before returning home on foot.

Day 7

Beautiful day, clear and sunny and sparkling. Rita and I set off for the old town looked around Gladstone's Land, a wonderfully-restored example of an old town house. The staff were very friendly and informative and couldn't tell us enough about all the furniture and bits and pieces in each room. After that we spent some time shopping and browsing up and down the Royal Mile before going to Jenner's and then the Scott Monument where I met Liddy. I went with her and Gil to the Abbotsford for lunch and chat and heard all about their Highland walks, which had been a bit disappointing because of wet and cold weather. They left to drive home and I continued with my shopping spree, ending up at a supermarket near the hotel for Typhoo tea, ginger biscuits and jellies. The interesting feature there was the pocket calculator attached to each shopping trolley, so one could add up the cost of one's purchases on the way round. I did, and came., amazingly enough, to the same amount as the cashier.

In the evening a group of us enjoyed an excellent Indian meal at the Omar Khayam at the end of our street. After a stroll around the surrounding crescents we retired to the hotel bar "served" by the surly barmaid, and then came the Danish invasion a whole bus load of Danes and large suit cases is decanted into "our" hotel we suffer more in the morning.

Day 8

Just the day when we need an early breakfast because of our whole-day excursion the Danes also have to have their breakfast at the same time ! Our little waiters are getting desperate as more and more people come into the already overcrowded and smoky breakfast room. I eat quickly and leave as soon as possible. We all manage to get to the Waverley Bridge at the appointed time, 8.45. Our Wilson Tours bus arrives on time and off we go to the Borders. We leave Susanne behind with Max. Susanne has a bad cold and Max doesn't like bus tours. The rest of us had a wonderful day Scott's view above the Tweed, Melrose Abbey and Abbotsford (Walter Scott's residence), lunch at Selkirk then a lovely drive through the Yarrow Valley to the Grey Mare's Tail waterfall beautiful weather, sheep, moors and an

atmosphere of calm and peace, makes this a day to remember. We are taken to the Woollen Mill in Moffat in the hope that we will buy yet more pullovers, but we escape to a cafe for tea. On the return journey we look down into the Devil's Beef Tub and travel down the Tweed Valley in the golden evening light and the driver even briefly plays a cassette with Scottish folk music. We arrive back in time to have a last drink in the White Hart in the Grassmarket market before returning to pack our bags. The "grandma" of the hotel helped us by organising a minibus to take us to the airport tomorrow.

Day 9

The minibus arrived even before 7 a.m. and transported us all to the airport in no time. The baggage security asked some quite searching questions Had I packed my suitcase myself? You bet I had! Uneventful journey, in Birmingham again, breakfast from Edinburgh to Birmingham and lunch from Birmingham to Munich. Paul sleeps. Our plane is called "Mistress Quickly" (a Shakespearean character). We arrive on time in Munich, where it is still pouring with rain! While we are waiting for our luggage to appear, Brigitte, on behalf of everybody, presented me with a litre bottle of Laphroig, my favourite whisky I am very touched.

Ray is there to meet me, but seems a bit confused. No wonder on his way to the airport his windscreen was shattered, and he continued in the wind and pouring rain and no windscreen. Fortunately it had now stopped raining and we drove, slowly home, where I slept for about 4 days!

And, of course, the motto of Fishburn Tours is: Where are we going next?