

IMPRESSIONS
Ireland & Scotland Pilgrimage, May 15 – June 5, 2014
By Tom Kirkpatrick

Overall impressions

- The countries of Ireland and Scotland are green, green, green.
- Irish and Scottish people are welcoming, friendly, and helpful
- Our decision to schedule two tours was an excellent one.

Most moving, impactful experiences

1. As I entered the Closeburn parish church sanctuary for the first time, mindful that this was the center of life for the Kirkpatricks of Closeburn and Kirkpatricks of Kirkmichael, I was overcome with emotion, weeping uncontrollably.

Other moving, impactful experiences followed, including:

- 80-plus year old Church of Scotland Interim pastor Bill McKenzie came to offer concern and comfort, in spite of losing his wife of 60 years the week before. This wise, deeply-spiritual pastor, preacher, worship leader, and change agent has transformed the congregation from a cold, stogy, silent people to a warm, inviting, welcoming people over his four-year tenure.

- Worshipping with the present congregation on May 25 was a very special, moving experience. People received us warmly and deeply appreciated our visit.

- Carol and I were invited to speak words of greeting to the congregation during worship from the PC(USA), to present the clerk of session with a new Presbyterian hymnal as a gift from Kent 1st Presbyterian session, as well as a recent newsletter, worship bulletin and church brochure. It was a quietly moving experience for all!

- We signed the guest register before worship and joined pastor Bill at the back of the sanctuary following worship, greeting every person personally and warmly.

- After worship clerk Jack and John Kirkpatrick helped me locate gravestones in the old parish cemetery I had identified from a booklet of memorial inscriptions. I got some great pictures of gravestones from the 1700s!

- We were Bill's guests for a to-die-for lunch at Trigony Guest House in Closeburn.

- Afterwards, Bill guided us to the entry of Closeburn Castle where we had a 2-hour guided tour of every part of the castle by the Spanish Kirkpatrick owner's daughter, Maria. I was given permission to take unlimited pictures of the castle that no other modern-day Kirkpatrick has ever been able to take. I've got priceless photos!

- Afterwards, on our way out of the castle, we met the owners, Petre and Miriam Kirkpatrick.

- We presented the castle with the book, *Kirkpatricks of Magala*. Afterwards, Maria sent an email informing us that unknown to everyone, the book

was dedicated to Petre's father, and that her parents were deeply moved and very appreciative of our gift.

- After leaving the castle we drove to the home of John Rogerson, my first email contact and webmaster of the Kirkmichael, Tinswald, and Torthorwald parishes (KTT). After coffee and snacks, John showed us around the three parishes even as his sister was arriving from Atlanta

2. People in Dumfries with whom I'd been in contact prior to our visit paved the way for our visit to Wallace's House Fort, Garvald graveyard, the Knock settlement sites, and the Kirkmichael, Tinswald, and Torthorwald parishes.

- Terry Burgess, civil servant with Forestry Commission Scotland, emailed me a draft copy of a 2013 archeological survey of Wallace's House Fort that included never-before-seen pictures by American Kirkpatrick researchers.

- Brendon Armstrong, liason officer with the Harteness Windfarm, scouted the route to Wallace's House Fort, emailed and left at our hotel a map showing the route, and left trail markers without which we'd never have found our way to the site.

- Roger Grant, landowner of the Knock settlement sites, invited us for refreshments, a lunch meal at his home with his family and other guests, Anne and Jock Simpson. Then Roger took us in his Land Rover pickup on a tour of the settlement sites, none of which we'd been able to find on our own.

- Brendon and Roger paved the way for us to pass the security gate and drive to the trailhead, saving us from a long hike to the trailhead.

- Sandy Pittendreigh, volunteer at the Dumfries and Galloway Family Historical Society, left at our hotel six memorial inscription booklets and 3 local history booklets I had ordered---and two complimentary copies of a recently published survey of Troqueer graveyard MIs noting there are a number of Kirkpatrick family burials in this old Kirkcudbrightshire graveyard (e.g. a Janet Kirkpatrick, b 1733 and d 1819). Also, a book about Kirkcudbright Shipping (1300-2005) Sandy acquired for me listed the very ship (Walpole), captain, travel dates, cargo, and number of passengers (65) of which my ancestor, Thomas Kirkpatrick and his brother John Kirkpatrick, are known to have been among on their immigration journey to America in 1737.

- Anne and Jock Simpson greeted us at the train depot when we arrived in Dumfries, helped us check in to our hotel, took us to pick up our rental car, tutored me on UK driving, and led us to Roger's house. Later, Jock helped us return our rental car, took us to several important ancestral sites, and took us to the bus stop for our journey to Edinburgh. Note: Jock is a Kirkpatrick on his maternal family, and has traced his lineage back to the time of our ancestors. He also possess a priceless family heirloom pinky ring with the Kirkpatrick motto "I Mak Siccar." He is checking with a jeweler about making one for me!

3 It was wonderful to witness Carol be moved unexpectedly by awareness that she is alive today because brave Irish ancestors fled their homeland from Cobh during the potato famine and immigrated to America. Also, seeing Carol fulfill a lifetime dream of visiting the Iona community was a trip highlight.

4a. I gained great respect for ancient people's intelligence, resourcefulness, and adaptability.

- Ancestors from 500 BC built a vast fort enclosure on Aryan Island, from 2,000 BC constructed cranogs at Kenmore, from 1,000-2,000 BC constructed burial sites at Clava Cairns, and from 300 AD constructed Iona abbey. All represent "life" amidst hardship unknown to modern humankind. Also, seeing the 420 million year old valley of Glencoe was awe-inspiring.

4b. I grew to despise and disrespect fundamentalist reformers and warmongers.

- While reformer John Knox brought Presbyterianism to Scotland, he was a narrow-minded, arrogant, dangerous fundamentalist. He advocated death to all Catholics and purging of Catholic worship practices and relics.

- The massacre of the Macdonalds by the Campbells in 1692 and the battle at Culloden in 1746 represent the insanity and inhumanity of human men.

5. Serendipitous encounters made our pilgrimage more – much more than what we expected or hoped it would be.

- Met jeweler Robert O'Neil at his pottery gift shop at Bunratty Castle, Ireland.

- Met Fr Ordino, priest at St Colman's cathedral in Cobh (see pic of Carol with Fr Ordino).

- Met a Davidson Presbyterian College (NC) official who had lived in Spokane at St Mary's Church of Ireland in Killarney while attending a guest choir concert by the Davidson Presbyterian College Church choir.

- Met Sr. Noreen Gallagher, 51-year Benedictine community nun at Kylemore Abbey in Connemara, Galway, Ireland (see pic of Carol with Sr Noreen).

- Met a railtour mate who was born in Lebanon and now lives in Dubai. We told her about granddaughter Abbey Robert's work with Syrian refugees on the Lebanon-Syrian border.

- Met the Catholic and Methodist chaplains at Trinity College in Dublin.

- Met at St. Giles Cathedral Duncan Ferguson, Organist and Master of Music at St Mary's Cathedral or Michael Harris, Minister of Music at St Giles Cathedral.

- Met verger Wil and provost Graham Forbes of the Scottish Episcopal Church at St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral in Edinburgh. Heard the great organ played as the organist practiced. Attended Choral Evensong worship on our last afternoon in Edinburgh.

- Joined worshippers at the Iona Abbey for a special service for environmental peace and justice that we learned about as we entered the Abbey five minutes before the service began.

6. We had several outstanding tour guides and bus drivers.

7. We exchanged contact information with 3 railtour couples.

Most amazing travel experiences and/or challenges

Most travel arrangements went smoothly – I was well organized and had travel documents at my fingertips when needed. HOWEVER:

1. On our trip from Dumfries to Edinburgh I unknowingly dropped an envelop with \$235 inside on the bus floor. After dozens of people boarded and departed during our 2 ½ hour trip, I noticed it still lying on the floor as we departed.

2. Fortunately, I asked an Aer Lingus boarding agent to check our travel documents and we were “lucky” to board our flight from London to Dublin without getting a required “stamp” at the baggage counter prior to clearing customs.

3. We were “lucky” our train ticket reservations from Glasgow to Dumfries were honored from the Prestwick airport. I didn’t know there were two airports in Glasgow and our reservations were from Glasgow airport, not Prestwick. Turned out the train from Prestwick went directly to Glasgow central train station rather than having to take a bus and a train transfer. Consequently, we arrived with plenty of time to spare for our tight train connection from Glasgow to Dumfries. Also, we were fortunate that I asked a train boarding agent as we departed the train to check our ticket transfer reservations because we were unaware we needed to pick up these tickets from a ticket machine. When the machine failed to dispense our tickets, the agent walked us some distance to the ticket office and made sure we got our tickets.

4. I nearly had two accidents while driving on the left side of the road in Dumfries.

5. It was unnerving to get lost twice while returning to our hotel in Dumfries from day trips.

6. Our luggage met Ryanair baggage size regulations (my biggest travel concern) on our flight from Dublin to Glasgow.

7. I lost the flash drive that backs up all our important files and documents during a security check. Fortunately, our house didn’t burn down while we were away!

8. We got lost on the way to our hotel after arriving by bus in Edinburgh. Also, Carol unknowingly dropped our camera on the sidewalk from a hole in her handbag. Fortunately, someone noticed, picked it up, and returned it.

9. Fortunately a tour member discovered we left our gift bottles of Dewars Scotch on the bus overnight and returned them the next day.

10. Fortunately a tour member stopped me from inadvertently entering a womens public toilet.