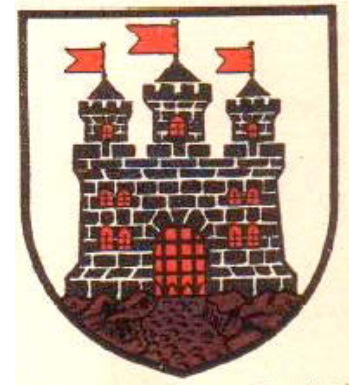


Dear Friends,



The International Congress of Heraldic and Genealogical Sciences is held every two years, and I go whenever I can. This year it was held in Glasgow, Scotland, and I signed right up.¹ Although the Congress was in Glasgow, I went first to Edinburgh, the Scottish capital, a famously beautiful city where I had only been once before, in 1988. Arms of Scotland, left; arms of Edinburgh, right.²



My mobility is much reduced since 1988, and I wasn't able to do the kind of exploration on foot I did then. But I did take a tour bus, and rode taxis through the town on various errands, and I can report that Edinburgh is still beautiful in a somber gray-stone manner, unlike pastel Italy or whitewashed Morocco or ornate Prague.

The New Town (left, dating from the 18th century, not so new any more) is Georgian and Palladian and classical revival, laid out in regular quadrangles. The Old Town (right), lying along the so-called Royal Mile between the castle (from which Edinburgh takes its arms) and the Palace of Holyroodhouse, is more twisty and medieval, although not the warren it used to be, back when I was a lad and it was called *Auld Reekie* from the smoky coal fires.

The New Town



Despite my mobility problems I did quite a bit of tourism, including the Palace (not the best palace in Europe or even

¹ Originally this trip was planned to include an expedition to Greenland (via Iceland). That would have been fun, and interesting, but too much all at once with Scotland too. So I postponed Greenland until later, but I still hope to go. I have flown over Greenland so many times I really want to see what it is like on the ground. (Hint: probably cold.)

² What I have shown as the "arms of Scotland" are really the arms of the King of Scots before the Act of Union (1707). The version I show here is by the English chronicler and heraldic artist Matthew Paris (c. 1250). The Queen and the government now use arms for Scotland that also quarter England and Ireland, but the earlier Scottish royal arms are still widely although unofficially used as a patriotic decoration.

in Britain), and the dreary modern Scottish Parliament across the street, and the National Portrait Gallery (interesting exhibition on self-portraits), and some shopping (fruitless search for heraldic books, but I found a few heraldic covers), and lots of Guinness and bacon rolls in the local pubs.³ Guinness is the food of the gods, and while it doesn't travel well (*viz.* the undrinkable swill served as Guinness in the United States), it doesn't have to travel all that far to get to Scotland, where it is served at a reasonable temperature and goes down like nectar.

The best tourist site I saw was the Royal Yacht *Britannia*. She was the royal family's floating HQ for almost 44 years until taken out of service in 1997 (the Queen shed one of her very rare public tears at the ceremony). The yacht is now beautifully arranged for visiting, and you can go through the royal apartment and the special verandah out back, and even peer into the royal bedrooms (single beds). Below: the Main Sitting Room.⁴



As it happened I was in Edinburgh during the Fringe Festival, when the city is crammed well beyond capacity with people who have come to wallow in theatre and performance art. I thought I might catch a show while I was in town and asked at my hotel if they had a program of events. They gave me a book of at least 200 large-format pages. It was

³ I also had a demonstration of a special British power chair, with a 13-mile range (26 with a spare battery) that folds up like a piece of wheeled luggage and can be easily taken almost anywhere, lifted over curbs, etc. If I had something like that I would be able to explore the streets of foreign cities again, more closely than just from tour buses and taxicabs. Investigation continues.

⁴ For a brief video tour of *Britannia*, see <http://tinyurl.com/royalyacht>.

about the size of the telephone directory of a fair-sized American city, and even then only listed official Festival events. But there were hundreds of others, too, including one where my friend Lynn-Ruth Miller performed comedy in an improvised space up several winding uneven staircases in an ancient rejiggered building down a blind alley in the Old Town.⁵ She was listed with dozens of others on a banner strung up at the entrance to the street, and there were many such banners listing unlisted events. Lynn-Ruth was doing five shows a day in venues all over town. I am a big theatre fan, but this was more theatre than I could deal with.



The highlight of my trip to Edinburgh was a visit to the Office of the Lord Lyon, King of Arms, the head of the Scottish heraldic authority (similar to the College of Arms in England but organized as a law court).⁶ Elizabeth Roads, LVO, Snawdoun Herald and Lyon Clerk, was kind enough to invite me to visit her bright spacious corner office, and showed me the Lyon Register, with original paintings by prodigiously talented herald-painters of the grants of Scottish arms back to 1672. Here she is at left, in her civil uniform (not the dazzling herald's tabard she wears in the photograph at the end of this letter).⁷ Above right is her banner of office.



The Lyon Office is in New Register House, on the outside a middlingly-grand classical revival building. But inside it has one of the most dramatic interior spaces around – a sort of huge silo, leading up to a skylit dome, containing the official records of births, marriages and deaths in Scotland as far back as these records go. The photo at left gives only a poor impression of this astounding space.



⁵ The Old Town picture on page 1 of this letter shows the approach to her space.

⁶ Lord Lyon takes his title from the lion in the Scottish royal arms, shown on page 1 of this letter. A King of Arms is the chief of an establishment of heralds.

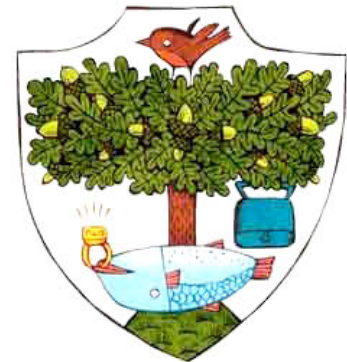
⁷ LVO means Lieutenant of the Royal Victorian Order. In the picture she is wearing a Chain of Esses, an ancient emblem of high office in Britain. Note also that the crown on the banner is defined as the Crown of Scotland by specific heraldic details including the pearls on the finial cross, the buttons on the red cap, the ornaments on the arches, and the fleurs-de-lys on the diadem.



After Edinburgh I went to Glasgow, Scotland’s second city, about 40 miles away, where I met up with Lee Oestreicher, a friend from high school days and my companion for the rest of the trip. I took a picture of him to include in this letter (left) but it didn’t come out all that well. Lee is tall and thin to my short and fat – together we look like Mutt and Jeff (right).⁸



The Congress was very successful. It was held in a charmingly archaic building called the Glasgow Trades Hall, where the city guilds, now largely obsolete as trade associations but still active as charitable foundations, have their assembly rooms. There were three days of learned papers, delivered three at a time in four to six slots a day over three days – an immensely varied offering. Of course, even trying very hard a person cannot attend three lectures at once, so we had to make choices, but as some of them were about genealogy that narrowed the field. I found something of interest in every slot.⁹ It was also a chance to meet some distinguished scholars, a few of whom even knew my own work (very gratifying). There were two young heraldic artists at work in an upper room, and I gave them a spontaneous master class on heraldic design. We didn’t get to see much of Glasgow beyond our awful hotel, so awful we didn’t feel like staying on after the conference. But here at right are Glasgow’s bizarre arms anyway, in a jaunty modern rendition.¹⁰



⁸ Mutt and Jeff were the main characters – “two mismatched tinhorns” – in a comic strip by the great Bud Fischer that began in 1907 in the San Francisco *Chronicle*. It was the first comic feature to be drawn as a strip instead of a single panel. There are lots of examples on Google Images. For a history of the strip, see the profiles on Wikipedia and on www.toonopedia.com.

⁹ Among my favorites:

- “The System of Personal Arms of the Bulgarian Royal House”
- “The Crown of Scotland: Evolution of an Image”
- “The Origins and Evolution of Civic Arms in Medieval Portugal”
- “The Story of the Manx Triskelion”

I agree, it’s not for everyone.

¹⁰ The tree, bird, and dead salmon with the ring in its mouth all refer to miracles of the city’s sixth century patron St. Mungo. The bell refers to a medieval bell named for him. I wish I knew the name of the artist.

The high point of the Glasgow Congress (and indeed of the whole trip) was a full-dress sitting of the Court of the Lord Lyon. For the first time in centuries (indeed perhaps the only time) Lord Lyon held court outside Edinburgh. Every seat in the extraordinarily beautiful Glasgow Burgh Court was filled when Lord Lyon entered, wearing an ermine robe and preceded by his macer carrying an ornate silver mace.¹¹ He swore in a Messenger-at-Arms (a special kind of Scottish process server) and ruled on four heraldic petitions, kindly explaining the procedures to us as he went along. Below left: the Lord Lyon's arms of office (note the Scottish royal crowns, and the thistles on the lions); below right, a very unbecoming picture of me with the LL, in which I seem to be doing an impression of the dead salmon in the Glasgow civic arms.



The next day Lee and I set off in a car to do some tourism in the Highlands. The first stop was Inverness, where a tour bus drove us around very mildly interesting suburbs at a reckless speed. Later we glided down Loch Ness on an excursion boat called the *Jacobite Queen*. The loch is more than 700 feet deep in places, and as usual the monster kept to the depths, so we couldn't see her.¹²

We did, however, learn just how full of tourists Scotland can be in August. We had planned to ramble north, stopping for the night in likely farmhouse bed-and-breakfasts. But we found there were almost no vacancies anywhere among B&Bs listed on the Internet, and that disinclined us to take a chance on finding unlisted ones. We imagined ourselves roaming the back roads of the Highlands in desperation, likely as not in the rain, trying to find some accommodation, a barn, *anything*.¹³ Rather than risk this, we

¹¹ Unlike American bailiffs, who go through a long spiel to call a court to order (“Oyez oyez! All rise! The Court of Common Pleas for Watalotahuey County is now in session. All having business before this honorable court draw near and cease all conversation...”), Lord Lyon’s macer had only to say “Court!” in taciturn Scottish fashion, and it was enough.

¹² Well, maybe a shadowy glimpse, if that’s what that shadow was.

¹³ “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.” Matthew 8:20.

went back to Inverness and spent a couple of hours at the tourist office until they found us something, and even then we had to share a bedroom for a couple of nights. But we were out early the next morning, in a car that had so many modern safety features it



hardly worked at all, driving obediently on the wrong side of the road, through the dazzling bright Scottish countryside toward Perth. The heather was in bloom, richer and purpler than Lee,

old Scottish hand though he is, had ever seen. The sun glinted prettily off the River Tay (above).

After Perth we intended to get to the far north. I chose an easterly slant for our route because I wanted to see the area around Balmoral. We couldn't visit the castle because the Queen is there in August, but I wanted to get a sense of the surroundings, and see the church at Crathie (right) that the royals attend when they are there. So we idled our way up there and arrived about one in the afternoon, to learn that we should not have idled. We had just missed the



Queen (and Philip, and Charles and Camilla, and Andrew, and six other members of the royal family) who had come to the 11:15 service where we would have been welcome, plenty of room for us, better luck next time! Very frustrating, as the Queen turned 90 this year and next time may be too late. I was stewing in regret as we left Crathie, but a few miles up the road we were overtaken by a motorcyclist wearing the silver greyhound badge of a Queen's Messenger, who handed me a note on heavy engraved stationery which I'm sure HM would not mind my reproducing here.

BALMORAL CASTLE

Dearest David,

How I long for you! But it was not to be. Star-crossed, we are like ships that pass in the night. It was ever thus.

xoxoxo,

Elizabeth R.

After this heartbreaking episode, there was nothing left to do but head north on back roads, some of them single lane roads (below, top row), through the fabulously beautiful scenery of the Highlands, to Thurso on the northern coast. The heather, as noted, would not quit (below, center left); also purple thistles and Scottish bluebells and wayside flowers in yellow and red and white. Hairy Highland cattle (below, center right) and brawny Angus bulls; more sheep than could ever have been imagined (below, bottom left). Icy streams, dark tunnels of trees, sea-light reflecting on the North Sea shores, villages of stone houses (below, bottom right).



We spent a couple of days in Thurso, where we could see the southern shore of the Orkney Islands (we would have liked to take the ferry there but didn't have enough time). We did go to John o' Groats, where there was not much except a romantic name, a fabulous view, and a sense of being at an extreme.¹⁴ We toured the Castle of Mey, just a few miles away, which the Queen Mother bought as a country retreat (Charles occasionally uses it now – his banner hangs in the front hall). Right: a painting of the QM (by Mara McGregor) displayed inside. The castle is in the background; the QM instructed the painter to make the corgi the center of attention.



And then we headed back south again, toward St. Andrews (where the ancient university was inconveniently closed to visitors) and the airports and home. Any questions?

- No, it didn't rain all the time – it was mostly either sunny or misty (next page: Scottish mist).
- Yes, we could understand the Scottish accent, but it did get a trifle thick at times, and full of glottal stops. Words like *wee* were part of common speech.
- Yes, we saw lots of Scottish men wearing kilts, and not all for dress-up, either (photo next page).
- Yes, there were lots of bagpipes, too – bagpipe festivals and competitions and displays and practice groups all over the place.
- No, we didn't hear a word of Gaelic, although it did appear occasionally on government notice-boards.¹⁵



- Maybe the Scots *are* about to vote for independence this time, it's hard to say. But except for a few royal buildings, we didn't see a British flag anywhere – only the saltire flag of Scotland (right).



- Yes, there were lots of thistles, but rather than show a real one, here's a heraldic one (left: the Scottish royal plant badge).
- Not only was the food not awful, it was terrific – sophisticated, varied and delicious, day after day. Smoked salmon, cullen skink (a local smoked fish soup), steak pie, duck à l'orange, vegetables *al dente*. I even had haggis, which didn't come in a sheep's stomach as I'd hoped, but as a kind of couscous dish.

¹⁴ The route from Land's End in Cornwall to John o' Groats in Caithness is the longest possible one-way journey in the British Isles.

¹⁵ Gàidhlig, no an Gàidhlig na h-Alba, 'S e cànan Ceilteach dùthchasach do dh'Alba. Glè bheag de dhaoine a-nis a 'bruidhinn na cànan seo. [Gaelic, or Scots Gaelic, is a Celtic language native to Scotland. Very few people now speak this language.]



SCOTTISH MIST



MILLENNIAL WITH KILT

Now that I'm home, I would rather not leave again, but I'm about to leave again anyway. Watch this space.

David

September 2016



THE SCOTTISH HERALDS (TWO LYONS BEFORE THE PRESENT ONE). THEIR TABARDS SHOW THE QUARTERINGS FOR ENGLAND (THREE LIONS) AND IRELAND (HARP). ELIZABETH ROADS IS ON THE FAR RIGHT.