

## Thence to the Orkneys

After our visit to the Shetlands for the 2012 Shetland Classic Motor Show 4 of the cars were to move on to visit the Orkneys. The Harper's had visited the Orkneys previously and elected to spend more time in Shetland at Burrastow House before returning via the Aberdeen ferry.

We had enjoyed warm hospitality and after a free day on Monday we were to catch the ferry from Lerwick to Kirkwall in the Orkneys. This ferry left at 17.00 hours arriving in Kirkwall at 23.00 making our arrival at the next hotel just before midnight a tad later than Mrs A and I are used to but a situation the islanders are quite used to. After the excellent accommodation in Shetland we were prepared for a reduction in standard given this had been booked by our now absent organizer Mr H. Our co organizer Mike had booked himself and his wife Kathleen, wisely into a tastefully converted Mill. However owing to communication problems in February, Mr H recommended booking the "available" chicken shed. Well, at least the Standing Stone Hotel were expecting us, and after our 6 hour ferry trip past Fair-isle we required very little rocking before another excellent night's sleep in spite of the short couple of hours only of darkness at this latitude at this time of year.



Tuesday dawned bright and dry, but the remaining "hundred" decided to give a little more bother and required some local assistance, whilst the rest of us booked a tour of the nearby Maeshowe burial chamber for that evening, visited an historic farm not unlike some in Upper Teesdale, and the most interesting and well preserved iron age Broch of Gurness. On leaving Gurness we witnessed the ebbing North sea meeting the incoming Atlantic currents causing an amazing turbulence referred to in some areas as a "maelstrom".



Afterwards we visited the splendid St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall, again with remarkable hospitality and an excellent guide. Apparent substantially a half scale "model" of Durham Cathedral minus the latter's two great towers, apparently not surprising as many masons worked on both buildings. For me St Magnus looked the more inviting in its warm red stone. "Aye but it's not wearing so well" said my new friend the architect from Aboyne!

After this we met Ken and Cathy and took our previously booked tour of Maeshowe a neolithic burial chamber built so the winter solstice sun would shine through the narrow entrance right into

the tomb. Were winters sunnier in those days? Again a superbly interesting guide explained how the Vikings had later raided the tomb and left their “Runic” graffiti on the walls...reminiscent, some might say of a 20th century medic! (21st century medics try to use computers)

Absorbing but now dinner beckoned so we went to see what the nearby port of Stromness had to offer. The Stromness Hotel justifiably recommended by our Maeshowe guide provided an excellent meal albeit in a quite significant draught. We sat overlooking the harbour which was host to an interesting Danish sailing ship. Although we narrowly missed a tour of the



ship due to the lateness of the hour we were able to photograph the cars on the dock in front of it.

The following day, Wednesday, Steve was leaving, having to return to his work. After wishing him well on his journey we were down to 3 cars and the day not so good, foul wet windy weather and the Brosters and the Austins were booked again by Hazza on a little jaunt by light aircraft to the island of North Ronaldsay. When we booked, we were told this flight would be subject to the prevailing weather. “How much worse can the weather be?” We asked, to be told they do not stop for a bit of rain, wind or mist. So the four of us boarded the 8 seater Islander plane apparently built on the Isle of Man and locally nicknamed the “flying Landrover”. Formalities such as check-in, security searches, announcements boarding passes were all kept to an efficient minimum. They knew our names and had the money (Dave’s in fact). The pilot welcomed us aboard personally and with the informality of a local school bus driver we buckled up and soon the twin engined plane was at 500 feet “cruising” to North Ronaldsay, famous apparently for it’s bird sanctuary and lighthouse. On passing through the arrivals hall, we found “Tom” offering island tours in his minibus at £10 a head. All four aboard he decided to revert to Mr Avis and offer car hire for the same money. So £40 bought a day’s car

hire unlimited mileage, insurance, CDW, fuel included and again a minimum of paperwork. “Would you like to see my driving licence?” offers our appointed chauffeur for the day. “noo I dinna think yee’d bee here without one”, came the response.

Off we set to see the most obvious feature, the lighthouse. 179 steps to the top to be met by the keeper.....Tom's brother. After a 45 minute talk on the history of lighthouses given on the elevated cool breezy balcony it was down to another excellent visitor centre for shelter and a particularly good lunch, prepared by one of Hazza's mates from Essex.

After lunch we visited the rather sad bird sanctuary had a short meander onto a lovely wild beach where Ken was engaged by some juvenile seals playing in the surf.

The formalities completed we returned to Kirkwall by "flying Landrover" after a short stay in the departure lounge chatting to the fireman, baggage handler and air traffic controller, and flight dispatcher, all in the island way, embodied in one person.

By Thursday the wet weather had set in, even Ken's 100 was now sporting a very smart red hood. Another excellent wet

weather attraction in Kirkwall is the Highland Park Distillery. A particularly charming guide ( a student at Dundee University no less) providing an informative tour, a wee dram to prove the worth of their product, and after that a good recommendation for lunch in Kirkwall.

On Friday we departed the Orkneys via the Stromness-Scrabster ferry passing in light mist the Old Man of Hoy. Once back on the mainland we had time for an informative visit to the Queen Mother's retreat the Castle of May before wending our way southwards along a scenic route towards the groups final night's accommodation at the splendid Altnaharra Hotel.

A relaxed evening in sumptuous surroundings made a fitting climax to our 12 day tour it seemed a long time since we met at the Kirklands hotel in Kinross. We had all enjoyed an adventurous and interesting time and are certainly older and wiser and pleasantly surprised by how much of interest there is on our "northern isles" and by the depth of hospitality given by the islanders.

Many thanks indeed to Mike and Kathleen for stimulating us all to visit the Shetland Classic Motor Show and recommending so many places of interest and good places to stay and eat. Many thanks indeed also to our absentee host Dave Haslam who did so much of the organizing but alas had to pull out due to Pam's persistent back problems and we wish her a speedy and full recovery. Indeed thanks are due to all participants for the efforts and contributions they made and their sociable company without which the trip just would not have been so much fun, which it certainly was.

