

Day 16 Aug. 9 – Edinburgh, Scotland – HO-HO Bus Tour – Castle –Festival

During the early morning hours our day started with the Maasdam cruising into the mouth of the Forth River in Scotland. The wide area at the mouth of the river is called a “firth” which is an old Scottish word still in use around here. The maps of the area show this estuary as the Firth of Forth. On the way to our anchorage we passed by this outer lighthouse guarding the channel.



About 8am the

Maasdam anchored in the Firth of Forth near the massive railroad bridge that passes over the river between the towns of South Queensferry and Rosyth. This bridge brought back

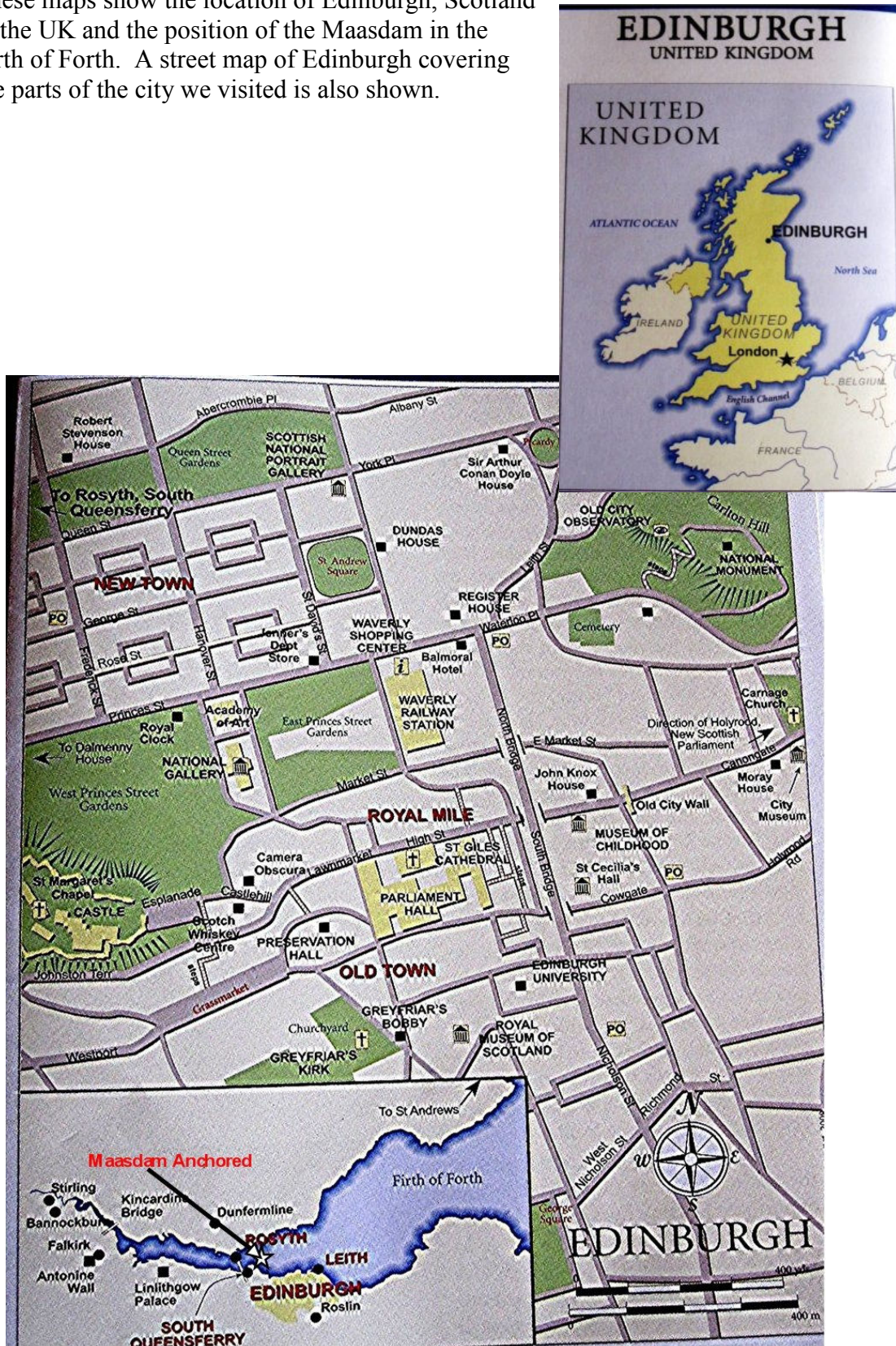


memories to Orlin who visited his first foreign port here several years ago as a young US Navy midshipman.

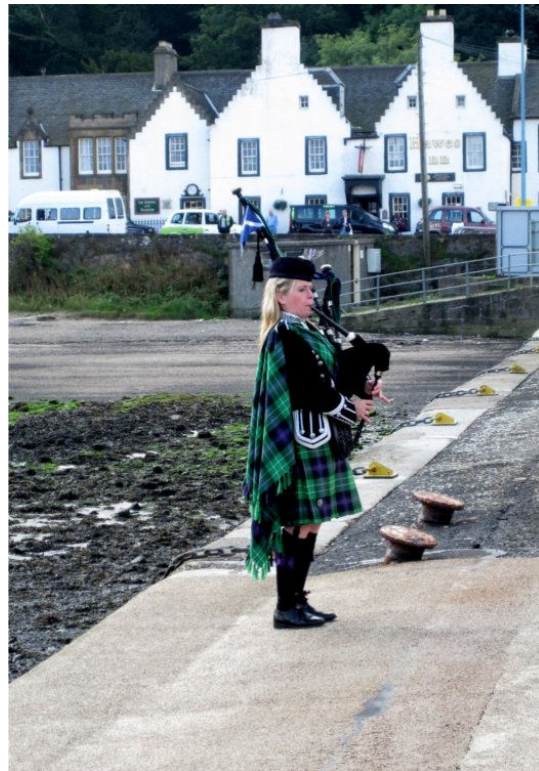
Like Orlin, the bridge had aged a bit over the years and was undergoing extensive maintenance with the work areas shielded from the weather by white plastic covers.



These maps show the location of Edinburgh, Scotland in the UK and the position of the Maasdam in the Firth of Forth. A street map of Edinburgh covering the parts of the city we visited is also shown.



Edinburgh: We got our act together and caught the tender boat over to the passenger landing at the village of South Queensferry. There were two people dressed in Scottish costumes greeting us at the Queens Ferry pier. This added a nice touch to begin our visit.



The Maasdam had provided complimentary bus transportation which got us to the city of Edinburgh after a 30 minute ride. It was about 10am and already the city was busy with plenty of tourists like us. The first order of business was to visit a rest room so we followed the posted signs into a food court at the Princess Street Mall. We found the rest room but then another challenge was to come up with a couple 20 pence coins to operate the turnstile so we could enter. Luckily they provided a coin change machine and with a little squinting to read the fine print on the coins we were able to successfully complete this transaction.



We had fairly simple plans for the day. We wanted to tour the city on a Hop On – Hop Off (HO-HO) bus, tour the Edinburgh Castle and then walk the length of the Royal Mile (High Street).

HO-HO Bus Tour: The Visitor's Center was nearby and it was well staffed and stocked with maps. We had planned to use the Hop On – Hop Off (HO-HO) busses for sightseeing and there were plenty of them cruising the streets of Edinburgh. At the Visitor's Center we purchased two tickets for a HO-HO bus to take us on a tour around the city (£22 or \$39 USD). It was a short walk down Princess Street to where the buses were lined up on Waverly Street.



We planned to get off the bus at the Edinburgh Castle and go inside for a tour so we purchased two tickets for the Castle from the bus agent on the sidewalk (£21 or \$38 USD). The agent said a ticket purchase here would save us a lot of time at the Castle and this turned out to be very good advice.

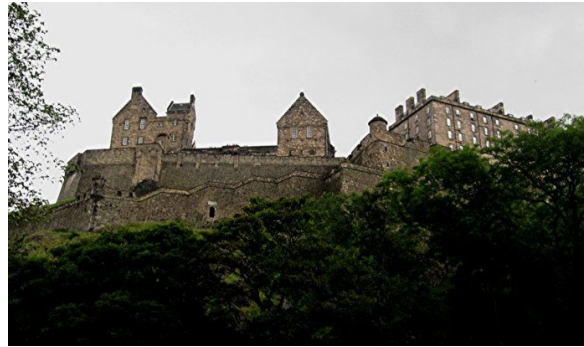
We boarded the bus and started our tour. The HO-HO style of bus is a fairly low cost way for tourists to get acquainted with a city. The buses pass by most of the really famous sites and there are throw-away personal earphones that plug into a fixture where you can select the language and sound volume of choice. As you pass by the points of interest a voice on the earphones tells about that site. You can exit the bus when you want to explore a specific site and then re-board later in the day. The tickets are good for a 24 hour period from time of purchase.



The bus wound its way through the squares and streets of Edinburgh where it seemed like each block was filled with historic sites or monuments to famous people. We were charmed when the bus paused at a statue of Greyfriar's Bobby. Bobby was a little dog that lived with his master in the Greyfriar's area of Edinburgh. His master died and was buried nearby. Bobby then visited and sat on his master's grave for the next 14 years until he himself died. This story of complete dedication has touched so many hearts that Bobby is now immortalized.



We soon approached the Castle of Edinburgh and it was even more imposing as we drew closer. The site of the castle and the fortresses built on it has played an important part of Scottish history since the 1400s. It is built on a basalt rock hill extruded by an ancient volcano. Subsequent geologic epochs shaped it into its current form now adorned by a magnificent castle. Here, on the right, is how it would look to an attacking soldier.



Our bus stopped near the entrance to the castle and we got off. As we walked up Castle Hill Street a torrential downpour of rain overtook us. We, along with hundreds of other tourists, took refuge under the grandstand that encircled the Esplanade in front of the entrance to the castle.

The deluge continued and soon water was pouring down through the cracks in the floor of the grandstand. We had raincoats and an umbrella so the rain didn't do much damage but we all felt a little soggy. After about 10 minutes the torrent turned into a sprinkle and the sun came out so we could continue our tour.

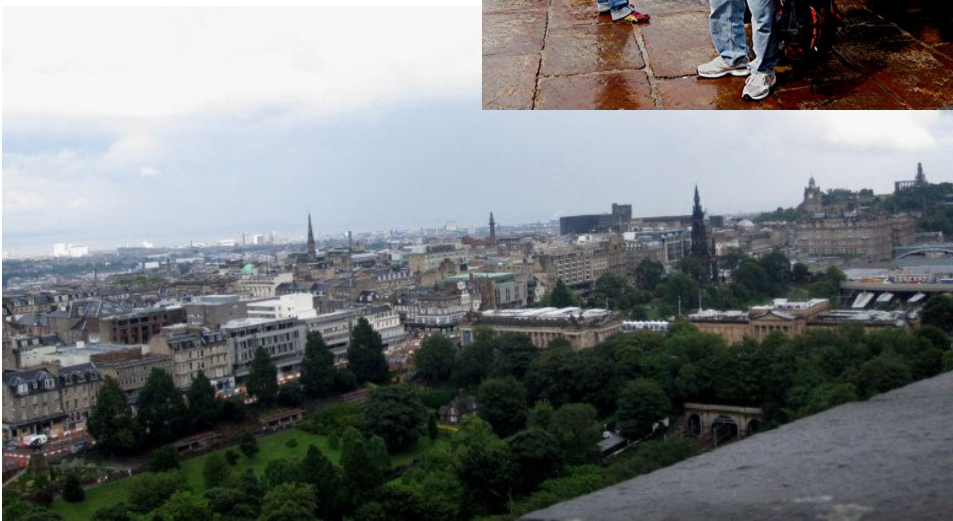


Edinburgh Castle: The Castle entrance tickets we had purchased from the bus agent now became very valuable when we saw the line of people waiting to buy a ticket at the entrance to the castle. There were huge crowds all over Edinburgh today and it looked like most of them were trying to buy a ticket, as shown on the right. We were able to simply show our ticket at the gate and we walked on in.



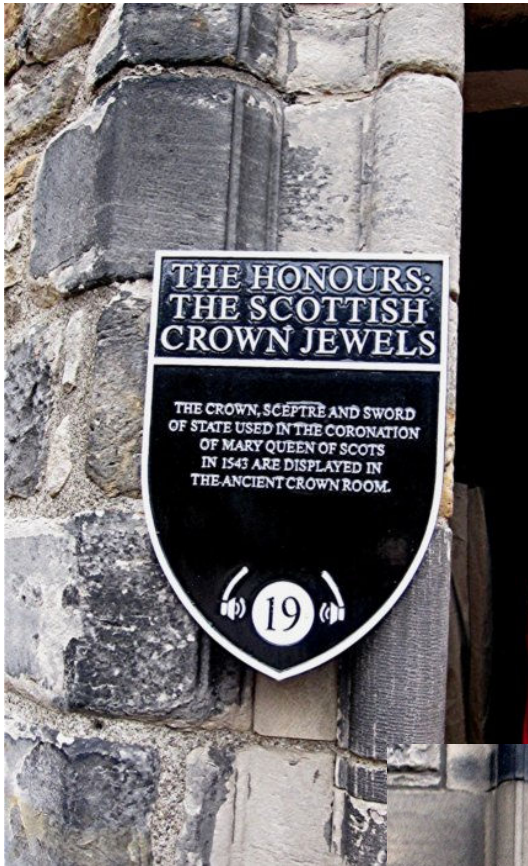
The castle has been fought over and used by Scottish and English Royalty over the centuries. It has a history too convoluted for us to really appreciate. Fortunately, Rob, an excellent castle-staff guide conducted a brief complimentary group-tour that covered the basics for us.

Here are some scenes from inside the castle walls.



This view of Edinburgh from the Castle wall was spectacular.

We could walk in and see the Scottish Crown Jewels. They were beautiful but unfortunately no photographs were allowed.



Our guide, Rob, pointed to the royal coat of arms shown below and drew our attention to the fact that near the bottom the rose of England and the thistle of Scotland were both included. This design was adopted to show the unification of the Scots and the English.

We finished our tour of the castle and made our way out through the gate where we had come in.



Edinburgh Festival: As we left the castle we were greeted by a throng of people working their way into the castle.

This picture shows the crowd coming across the esplanade where a grandstand had been constructed.

The grandstand had given us partial shelter from the rain a short time ago. It was constructed for the Military Tattoo Event that was scheduled later in the month as part of the Edinburgh Festival.



These crowds made us feel like the poor little country mice that moved to the big city. We had just been conditioned by tranquil days of touring Greenland and Iceland where the only other people we saw were fellow Maasdam passengers. Now we were mixed in with thousands of other tourists eager to see the sights. We hustled through the crowd and on to the Royal Mile (High Street) that stretches from Edinburgh Castle to the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

The timing of our visit to Edinburgh coincided with the Edinburgh Festival (www.edinburghfestivals.co.uk) and arrival of a huge number of people who attend this annual celebration. The festival is divided in a series of events and this week was dedicated to activities that were organized under the title called Fringe. The Fringe organization incorporates artists of every type of entertainment and art which explains some of the bizarre sidewalk performances that we saw later. This was the first weekend of the Festival and today, August 9, was the date for the Edinburgh Festivals' Cavalcade. The Cavalcade is a massive free entertainment event that has attracted over 150,000 spectators in past years. Judging by the crowds we saw as we walked the Royal Mile this year's crowds may have been even larger.

Some of the arts and crafts were displayed in booths set up along the streets of the city. The white tents like those shown on the right were a common sight earlier while we were on the bus.



Now while we walked the Royal Mile there were other groups of tents containing exhibits and items for sale that were being checked out by thousands of perspective customers (including Barbara in blue jacket).



There were entertainers of all types giving sidewalk performances, usually with a box nearby for collection of a few donated coins. This human statue simulating a white marble work of art was one of the better ones we saw.

This guy in a chicken outfit represents another form of entertainer who was there to represent his chosen field.



These guys, shown below, had some kind of a ladder balancing act that had attracted a large street crowd. However, after waiting five minutes for a demonstration we just took a picture and moved on.



This photo below of the Royal Mile says it all for the size of the crowd.



We boarded the HO-HO bus again and continued our tour of Edinburgh. On Princess Street, which is one of the main thoroughfares, a major renovation job was in progress. This kind of disruption, coupled with the large crowds seemed to be handled without too much trouble by the cars and buses filling the streets.



We caught the picture of the Sir Walter Scott Monument, on the left, framed by some tall buildings. The soaring Sir Walter Scott Monument dominates the Princess Street Gardens and much of the skyline of Edinburgh.

As the HO-HO bus made a stop on Waterloo Place we got off in preparation for return to the

Maasdam. The Information Center was nearby which gave Barbara an excellent opportunity to record the visit of her library card to Edinburgh, as shown on the right.



The complimentary bus provided by the Maasdam picked us up on Waterloo Place where it had dropped us earlier in the day and we had a pleasant 30 minute drive through the countryside on the way back to the village of Queensferry.

Along the way we photographed this pastoral scene of sheep grazing in a field which had barrels stacked in a curious configuration.



We caught a tender boat back to the Maasdam and got back on board just in time to catch the show that had been

arranged to present some authentic Scottish dress and music featuring Highland pipers, fiddler, dancers and singers. The highlight was when they played Amazing Grace on the bagpipes. It was a great show and turned out to be a great way to end our day in Scotland. We got these photos of the performers during the show.





The ship got underway about 11 pm bound for Rotterdam, The Netherlands. Tomorrow will be a day at sea. Some passengers will be getting off the ship and returning home from Rotterdam and they can use the day at sea to get their things in order. We will use it just to rest up.

