

Auchinleck House, Ochiltree, Ayrshire, Scotland.
The home of James Boswell.
14-21 September 2007

Excerpts from my diary:

Friday 14 September 2007. Today I left Gargunnock House near Stirling and headed for Auchinleck House in Ayrshire. All we SIAFU reunioners were off by 9:15. Carl and I dropped off Sue, Janie and Ray at the rail station in Stirling. I drove up toward the Church of the Holy Rude, found a parking space, and had another look for James Wordie's grave in the churchyard. Failed to find it. (Once home I wrote Peter Wordie who sent me some photos so it is indeed there.) Checked e-mail at the Library, then on my way, with a stop at Rhu at the **Royal Northern & Clyde Yacht Club**. There's a Shackleton connection there. Talked to some of the members and the archivist by phone but no one was familiar with the details. Over the Erskine Bridge, through Paisley to the M8 to Kilmarnock, finally to Auchinleck, arriving at 2:30. I was to meet Carl Lindbloom outside the house and we were to reconnoitre the neighborhood before moving into the house at 4 p.m. No sign of Carl though, so waited at the bridge over the burn on the road up to the house. Chatted with a local walker, only understanding every other word at best. At 4, with no one else in sight, I went up to the house and met Mrs Kelly, the regional manager, and some of her helpers just finishing up getting the house in order. She gave me a tour of the house pointing out such things as the heating controls, etc. Carl and others arrived soon after and we settled in. First order of business: fill the ice cube trays! Some go off to Auchinleck to shop and have dinner; some wait for the Carrolls, David, Conrad and Mary to arrive (7:30 or so). When they do, we drive (through the local cattle herd) into Auchinleck, too, and find the others at the **Boswell Arms** (the dining room is a charmless but interesting 50s retro interior) where we have dinner. Once back at the Auchinleck House we all decide it's a magnificent place for a week's stay.

Saturday 15 September 2007. Got familiar with the house. Two shopping trips to the Tesco in Auchinleck. We asked where we could get a leg of lamb. Were told to go to the "bitches" up the road. This was puzzling until we discovered they meant the "butchers." Also drove to Ochiltree; both are rather grim looking. Auchinleck is mostly one long main street. That night, roast chicken dinner cooked by Ann and Charlie. Very good. Daphne and Jonathan Shackleton showed up and joined us for dinner. They brought their car over from Ireland and are staying at the Railway Hotel in Auchinleck.

Sunday 16 September 2007. First rainy day in a long time. Jonathan and Daphne arrived and we headed off for **Culzean Castle** south of Ayr. Very wet. There were horse trials going on in the grounds. The Castle is an interesting place. Still lived in. Eisenhower had an apartment here after the War. Lunch at the coffee shop. Back to the house and started preparing for our usual "**Garden Party**." (Unlike all the other Landmark Trust houses we've stayed in—with the exception of Cloth Fair in London—there have been lovely

gardens. Not so, Auchinleck. Lovely fields and trees in the distance, yes, but not a single flower anywhere.) Weather cleared and became sunny. Among those who came: Carol Gowing, Ian and Yvonne Cumming and David Lockwood with several friends. Lots of food and drink.

Monday 17 September 2007. A nice day. I went off with Jonathan and Daphne, headed to Largs to take the ferry over to **Great Cumbrae Island**, which has Antarctic connections through William Speirs Bruce. A ten-minute trip (round trip for £26 with car and three people). A small island, encircled by a road, and one settlement, Millport, at the south end. Drove towards Millport and as we neared it saw the "Scotia Stone" beside the road. It commemorates Bruce and his ship *Scotia*. This is the spot where the expedition first touched land when returning from the Antarctic. Across the street stands the Biological Laboratories which has a small museum (nothing about Bruce). We drove into **Millport** which is a picturesque, somewhat old-fashioned town stretching along the sea-front. Had a cup of coffee in a cafe, then continued around the island and back to the ferry. Had lunch in Largs at the 'Townhouse'—fish n' chips. Continued north along the coast. Nice views out to Bute. As we drove, saw a nuclear submarine and a flotilla of RN ships go by. To Greenock and The Esplanade and the house where Birdie Bowers was born. On into Greenock and onto the motorway and back to Auchinleck. Jonathan and Daphne went on their way, south to Wigtown. That night we had Chicken Tetrazzini.

Tuesday 18 September 2007. Sunny. After breakfast, Mary, Conrad, David and I set off for New Lanark, about two hours away. Toured this interesting mill complex developed by Robert Owen who later went to America and started the utopian community of New Harmony, Indiana. Great stone buildings sited down low in a wooded valley. Now a World Heritage Site. Had lunch at the hotel. Back to the house. Later I went into Auchinleck and used my computer at the Railway Hotel which has free wi-fi. That night the meal was salmon and scallops. (The Carrolls had a tale to tell about the salmon.)

Wednesday 19 September 2007. I stayed all day at the house except a morning shopping trip to Auchinleck. Lovely day. Did laundry and tidied up the house. (At past Landmark Trust houses we always seemed to go off each day and in the end regretted not spending more time in the always interesting and usually grand houses we were renting.) That night I cooked Beef Bourguignon, noodles and peas for dinner.

Thursday 20 September 2007. I went off on my own after breakfast to find and photograph Dr Macklin's grave in **Melrose**. (Macklin was on Shackleton's Endurance and Quest expeditions and his son, Sandy, had told me that his father was buried in Melrose, why is unclear as he was from Aberdeen.) It was a long drive but one through lovely countryside much of the time. Through Moffat—quaint and active—and along a lovely long valley with steep hills. Very deserted. Buzzed by a jet fighter plane. Arrived in Melrose about midday. Very attractive somewhat tony village. After some searching found the cemetery and eventually the Macklin grave. The headstone mentions both expeditions. Had lunch at The Ship Inn (fish n' chips yet again) and then walked over to the ruins of **Melrose Abbey**, very nicely kept. Returned to Auchinleck via Peebles and Lanark, over some of the same route as Tuesday's drive. For our final dinner we had left-

over Tetrizzini.

Friday 21 September 2007. Up about 6:30. Saw some of the group off, then breakfast, packing, stripping beds, etc. Off just at 10 as the cleaners arrived. Drove to Glasgow Airport with Mary, Conrad and Dave. Turned in the car (892 miles in two weeks). Hertz charged me for a new tire (tiny little flap of rubber; once home I called about it and the £44 charge was immediately taken off.) We were headed for France via Gatwick and had plenty of time so took the bus into Glasgow, leaving our bags at the Holiday Inn at the airport. Ended up with not enough time to do much so had lunch at the **Ingram Bar** (guess what: fish n' chips), then by bus back to the airport and near the end of the afternoon we were on our way to Gatwick.