

# Industrial Archaeology Conference

## Wick, Caithness, Sutherland & Orkney

Tour Programme 2018

Caithness offers a spectacular coastline studded with vertiginous fishing villages, harbours for herring and flagstone exports, impressively large corn mills and improvement steadings, an interesting vernacular architecture of huge sandstone slates over layers of similar horizontally-laid stone walls, a material particularly good for making pavements. The towns Wick and Thurso are the largest north of Inverness with banks (at the time of writing), shops etc. A day trip to Orkney offers a chance to see the fascinating remains of the Royal Naval base Scapa Flow, more rich landscapes and picturesque coastal towns. A simple tourist map of the North Highlands, and information on engineering heritage from ICE:

<https://dounreay.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CASVAG-leaflet-2016.pdf>

<https://www.northcoast500.com/blog/blog/january-2018/nc500-civil-engineering-past-and-present.aspx>

Thu	21 June	Depart from Inverness
Fri	22 June	Tour A
Sat	23 June	Conference & Tour B
Sun	24 June	Tour C, D, E & F
Mon	25 June	Tour G & H
Tue	26 June	Tour I, J, IRIB & JRIB
Wed	27 June	Tour K, L & Return to Inverness
Fri	29 June	ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works Summer Tour
Sat	30 June	ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works Summer Tour
Sun	01 July	ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works Summer Tour

Friday 22 June (9.30 – 17.00)

### Tour A: Inverness to Wick

If you plan to break your journey overnight in Inverness, or take the Sleeper rail service, this coach is for you. We leave Inverness at 9.30 via industrial heritage sites in Easter Ross and Eastern Sutherland. We pause at Thomas Telford's Mound sluice gates combine a road bridge and land reclamation scheme (below left) and Brora (whisky, coal-mining, salt-making). The working Clynelish Distillery is beside the soon to be reactivated Brora distillery (right, dormant since 1983). Then we greet Caithness at Berriedale (a Telford-designed Church). Oil rigs are moored in Cromarty Firth but we glimpse the only ones visible from land that are actually drilling in the North Sea. We will see Telford's portrait in Wick Town Hall and dine in the Norseman Hotel.

Saturday 23 June

### Tour B

Day Conference in Wick Baptist Church, Pulteneytown, laid out by Thomas Telford for the British Fisheries Society. Lectures include Geoffrey Stell, 'Defending Scapa Flow, 1939-45: the Caithness contribution'. Afternoon tour choices Pulteney Distillery, the Telford Trail in Pulteneytown, Wick, and Wick Heritage Society's premises in a cooperage with a kipper kiln (right). A special student rate applies to the day's events. The Conference Dinner will be addressed by Lord Thurso, Chair of VisitScotland. Business informal attire.

Sunday 24 June

7.00 Depart from Wick

8.45 Ferry leaves Scrabster. Optional breakfast on-board.

10.15 Arrive in Stromness, Orkney.

Optional tour:

### Tour C

Mainland Orkney tour from Stromness to HMSA Tern (Twatt Airfield) or Click Mill, Dounby (200m walk over rough and boggy ground, whilst Twatt has tarmac. Choose on the day as buses will make drops at both). Barony or Boardhouse Mill in Birsay grinds beremeal grown on the island (groups of 12 take turns if we can fit in). Then to Kirkwall Power Station (left, 16MW diesel 1953, with 2MW lithium battery) and the Churchill Barriers, built by Balfour Beatty and POW labour, and the Italian chapel made from two Nissen huts. The barriers are now an essential part of the road network. On to St

Margaret's Hope, a small town with similar piers to those at Stromness and Lerwick's lodberries. 19.00 ferry from Burwick to John O' Groats passes Pentland Skerries lighthouses and abandoned Stroma. 20.30 (approx) Back in Wick: pubs & restaurants available (nothing booked). Sandwiches in Orkney for lunch and evening sustenance as the timings of ferries do not suit sit-down meals.

### Tour D

Explore the most charming town in the northern isles (left), with numerous private landing piers, a stone flagged main street, museum (admission charge included) and Pier Arts Centre. Return on the 16.45 sailing to Scrabster (18.15) and get back sooner to Thurso and Wick. No lunch provided.

This is the overflow option if C is full.

### Tour E

Book own accommodation in Kirkwall, the next day visit Highland Park or Scapa Distilleries or take ferries to other islands from Kirkwall. Price will be one-way with us only. AIA leaves you at Kirkwall or St Margaret's Hope (X1 bus returns to Kirkwall at 18.15)

**Optional:** Spend day in Caithness without crossing to Orkney.

**Monday 25 June (9.30 - 18.15)**

**Optional tour:**

### Tour G

Round the coast via Keiss harbour, John 'O Groats (shopping/ comfort break) and John 'O Groats Mill (right) where there are hopes it will be conserved and made accessible to the public. Dunnet Head lighthouse and cold war defences form the northern most point of the British main land. Mary Ann's Cottage is a well-preserved croft. Afternoon tea at Castletown harbour, built for shipment of the pavement slabs that were quarried here on the north coast, then to Caithness Horizons and a short walk in Thurso.

### Tour H

Nucleus, the Nuclear and Caithness Archives will put out choice exhibits in a new purpose-built facility to cover the nuclear industry as well as local studies. On to Castletown Quarries and harbour as above. We enter Dounreay Nuclear Resaetrch Establishment (security information needed in advance. No photography.) then head to Thurso and Caithness Horizons, where the Dounreay control room is now displayed. Some time for

shopping or exploring in a tour on foot, Thurso, largest town in the North Highlands. A special exhibition on the Industrial heritage of Caithness is running in Caithness Horizons. The local history group will give walking tours.

**Note: those who don't obtain security clearance in time, or do not wish to enter Dounreay will be offered tour G or more time in Thurso.**  
Both groups can dine together in Wick, the Norseman Hotel.

**Tuesday 26 June (9.00-17.00)**

## Optional Tour

### Tour I

We take the coastal road to Latheron and Laidhay Croft Museum, which is thatched and has a portable iron horsemill, then cross the Flow Country to working stone quarries at Spittal. Here sandstone pavement slabs and monuments are sawn or cut (right) with the help of CAD. Note: uneven surfaces, and be aware of working machinery. We will lunch in the grid-plan "improvement" town of Halkirk and in Watten, birthplace of Alexander Bain, inventor of the fax, and see a bypassed Telford Bridge. At Westerdale we will see a beehive doocot and two watermills, one of them with a Gilkes turbine for domestic hydro-electric power installed in 1960. The other, Achingale, is disused but has its machinery.

### Tour J

Northlands Glass Centre creates artistic glass in a former school, the successor to Caithness Glass. Lybster harbour (right) has the Waterlines visitor centre in a fish smoking kiln and warehouse, then it's onto Dunbeath for lunch, the harbour and bridges, Latheronwheel harbour and North Shore Pottery in Forse Mill. Back via the recently restored Thrumster Station (on a narrow gauge line connecting Lybster to Wick, 1903-1944), winner of a 2017 Railway Heritage Award.

### Option J RIB/I RIB

The precipitous Whaligoe Steps (left), accessing a natural harbour set into cliffs, will be viewed from a Rigid Inflatable Boat (RIB) boat provided by Caithness Seacoast in the evening. Those who already booked this have priority but it is now possible for others to join it for £20, so you can specify I RIB too. Weather permitting, see conditions/ FAQ at [www.caithness-seacoast.co.uk](http://www.caithness-seacoast.co.uk). Free to all, the Wick Society opens up its stores in the old fishmarket this evening and there is a chance to see the yawl Isabella Fortuna before she sails to Portsoy Boat Festival next day. Get your own evening meal.

Wednesday 27 June

### Tour K & L

09.30 from Wick Norseman via MacKay's Hotel to Helmsdale (Telford's bridge, right, unusually has two arches- he preferred odd numbers for aesthetics, an Ice House and Timespan visitor centre, comfort break and a presentation), lunch in Golspie, then visit Dunrobin Castle Estate, noting the extensive improvement funded by Staffordshire coalmines, but still the Duke is locally reviled for the clearances. Charles Barry gave the castle its distinctive French chateau profile.

We will pre-book the group onto the 14.42 train from the Duke of Sutherland's formerly private Dunrobin Castle station (left) to arrive in Inverness at 17.01, looping around Attadale and Beaulieu. Connections to Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh via Perth by rail, or evening flights.

### What next?

The ICE Panel for Historical Engineering Works (PHEW) will hold its celebrated annual tour from Beaulieu near Inverness, 29 June- 1 July 2018. Contact [spurves004@btinternet.com](mailto:spurves004@btinternet.com) for details.

### Important Note

It is for delegates to book accommodation of their choice. To this end a fixed number of bedrooms at the two larger hotels -the Norseman and MacKays- are being held until April. When booking please mention IA conference to obtain a small discount:

Norseman Hotel  
e: [info@norsemanhotelwick.co.uk](mailto:info@norsemanhotelwick.co.uk)  
t: 01955 603344

Seaview Guest House  
e: [seaviewguesthouse14@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:seaviewguesthouse14@yahoo.co.uk)  
t: 01955 602735

Mackay's Hotel  
e: [info@mackayshotel.co.uk](mailto:info@mackayshotel.co.uk)  
t: 01955 602323

Bank Guest House  
w: [info@guesthousewick.co.uk](mailto:info@guesthousewick.co.uk)  
t: 01955 604001

Queen's Hotel  
e: [petersutherland@btconnect.com](mailto:petersutherland@btconnect.com)  
t: 01955 602992

Wick Caravan & Camping Site  
w: [www.wickcaravansite.co.uk](http://www.wickcaravansite.co.uk)  
t: 01955 605420

Netherby Guest House  
w: [www.netherbyhousewick.co.uk](http://www.netherbyhousewick.co.uk)  
t: 01955 603443

VisitScotland  
w: [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)

[Book on-line](#) or via the booking form by BACS payment or cheque made payable to Scottish Vernacular Buildings Working Group (Scottish Charity SC 010835), sent to SVBWG, D Kidd, 51 Drylaw Crescent, Edinburgh, EH4 2AS. Bank of Scotland Acc No: 00633200; Sort Code: 80-11-00

For event updates see HES Engine Shed [www.enginshed.org/whats-on](http://www.enginshed.org/whats-on) and conference-caithness.

Suggested O.S. Maps:

Explorer Series 450 (Fri, Tue, Wed), 451 (Mon), 461 & 463 (Sun).

Landranger series 6 or 7 for Orkney, 11 or 12 for Caithness, with much overlap.