



Travel Dispatches

from

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&
Carolyn Kinsman

A Note to Readers:

This is a continuation of our 2024 UK-Euro Dispatches that were interrupted in July by major technical problems and never published during our excellent summer sojourn. We'll plan to finish them up over the next several weeks. Thank you for your patience. (Our three previous 2024 UK/Euro dispatches are online at: dispatches.wilkeskinsman.com)

Edinburgh

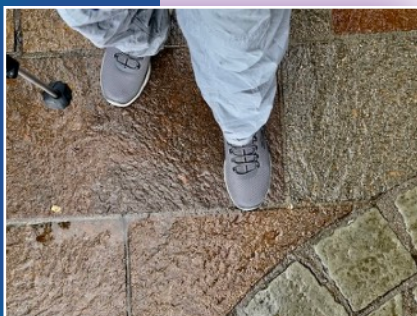
July 16-19, 2024

And the time had come to lift a final glass to charming Windermere and the pretty Lake District. It was a wonderful place to immerse ourselves into a verdant corner of England's deep poetic and artistic history. It was a good opportunity to finally replenish my fading college memories of those old romantic Lake Poets – and even gain a new awareness of their youthful radical political ideals.

But again our self-imposed schedule for this trip dictates that we move on, as

we try to experience a great number of places that are yet unseen by us, while we're still able. And by now it's chilly enough that I'm wearing long pants and closed-toed shoes (we're 'closed-toads' now!) as we board another train that's heading even further north. We're off to Edinburgh and into the land of the Scots,

those tribes who refused to be conquered by the Romans, and have given the English so many centuries of trouble. Their frequent raids even forced the Romans to build a futile wall or two. We also want to see where our Scottish friend Maggie Becker came from, and maybe even meet a few of her surly relatives.



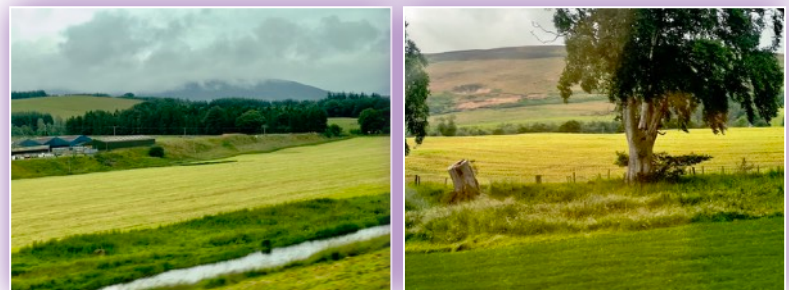
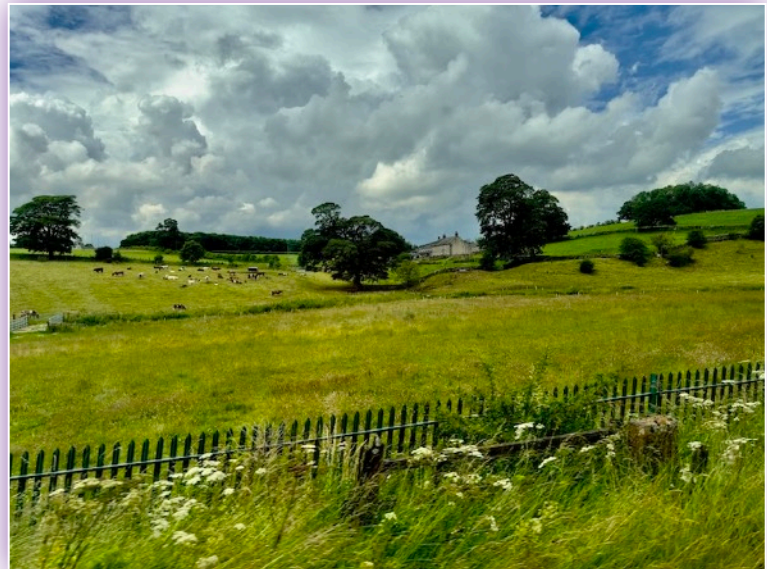
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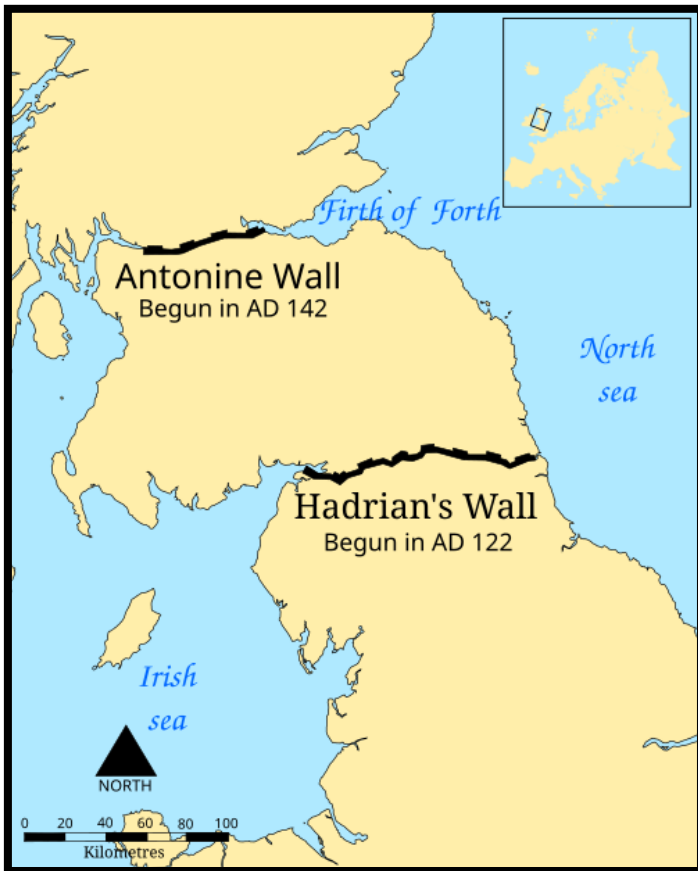
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A Wikipedia entry charmingly describes the Scots of yore:

Cattle raiding, known as "[reiving](#)", had been normal practice prior to the 17th century. It was also known as *creach*, where young men took livestock from neighbouring clans. By the 17th century, this had declined and most reiving was known as *sprèidh*, where smaller numbers of men raided the adjoining [Lowlands](#) and the livestock taken usually being recoverable on payment of *tascal* (information money) and guarantee of no prosecution. Some clans, such as the [Clan MacFarlane](#) and the [Clan Farquharson](#), offered the Lowlanders protection against such raids, on terms not dissimilar to [blackmail](#).



On our way north, we pass through Carlisle and then glance about for Hadrian's Wall, built in AD 122-128. But the major remains of that project are off to the east and out of our view. About 20 years after Hadrian, the Emperor Antoninus Pius built another less-ambitious wall, of turf and wood, farther north across the narrowest section (39 miles) from the Firth of Forth by Edinburgh to the Firth of Clyde near Glasgow. But that far less sturdy Antonine Wall was soon abandoned and has mostly melted away over the millennia.



In many ways, this is a crazy trip for us because we're getting to a 'certain era' where we may not have many more such 'certain eras' in the years ahead. And there's a big chunk of the world that we haven't experienced yet in any degree of detail. We prefer to settle in for a while to learn more about wherever we are, instead of quickie one-day tours. But over this four month trek we'll still be moving quite a bit to many places that are new to us; and only two – London and Amsterdam – that we've ever visited before. And it should be interesting, if not head-spinning.



And so, instead of ancient stone fortifications we see only pleasant farmlands, trees, and distant mountains. And sheep.



After we exit Edinburgh's massive Waverley train station we grab a bus to our lodgings at "Dobbie's Garden Center," an odd bus stop that's way out in the countryside.

We're booked in to a newish hotel in the rural landscape because it's the only reasonably-priced location that Carolyn could find in the area. While



it's not a charming Scottish cottage under an ancient slate roof, it's a nice place and it's quiet.

In the morning a perky bunny or two shows up to trim the plant life just outside our window. And they may also help out, though probably unbidden, next door at the very large plant nursery operation beside the hotel.



For a good breakfast we make our way to the Melville Inn, which is just next door, where they would love to see your dogs enjoy the snacks left by the front door. As for us, coffee and a hot bowl of porridge will do just fine.

But an actual visit to Edinburgh will have to wait, because there's laundry to be done. And laundry is forever, especially on these long trips.



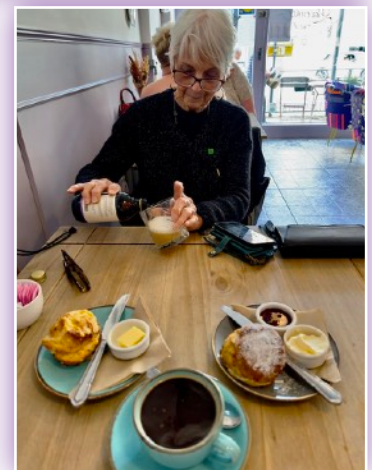
“Between 1800 and 1836, 231 people were executed in Scotland for crimes including “*hamesucken*” – which means assaulting a person in their own home – “*stouthrief*” (use or threat of violence against a householder who defends themselves during a break-in) and “throwing vitriol”, which is attacking someone with acid. It was only 1965 when the Murder Act abolished the death penalty for murder in Scotland, and by then executions had become rare.”

There's a nice little cafe about a block from the memorial, where we settle in for a round of lavender scones and coffee. And to lament the sad fate of poor William Thomson. “Lavender Coffee & Crumbs” is also very happy to welcome your muddy pooch, and you as well, for a rest-up from the weather over a hot cuppa. It's just the perfect thing for a Scottish day, whether overcast (quite probably) or not.



So right after porridge we're on the bus again and heading further away from Edinburgh, to Dalkeith in search of an alleged laundromat. It's a pleasant town in the countryside and we find a pleasant lady who will have our laundry ready by 5pm.

We trod over a memorial in the sidewalk almost without noticing. But a glance at the message gets our attention, as it commemorates the last public hanging in Dalkeith of an unfortunate highwayman named William Thomson. His demise has the dubious distinction of being remembered these days for the nefarious robbery, in league with two other men, of a farmer named George Dickson as he returned home from Dalkeith market in November of 1826. According to a recent article in the Edinburgh Evening News:





Since our laundry won't be ready until late in the afternoon, we now have the rest of the day to go looking for where the relatives of Maggie Becker, our favorite Scot, used to live. And

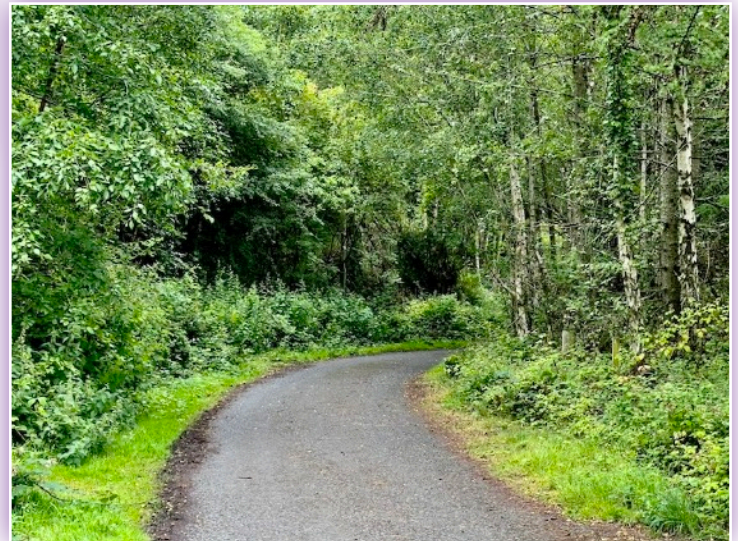
apparently it's in Arniston, somewhere out by the Scottish Mining Museum. We board the next local bus heading that way (as best we can tell) to get a cheap tour (£2 each) of the countryside and maybe even find the place.



The bus stops off in hilly country at a sign leading us to believe that Arniston may be somewhere nearby. Over an hour or two of pleasant walking and looking around the neighborhood we actually find little evidence of Arniston, or of Maggie's

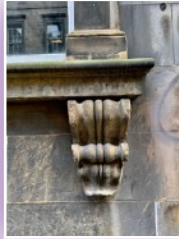


relatives. But it's been a very nice day for a rural outing to rid ourselves of excess scone calories and breathe deeply of that cool and fresh Scottish air.



By 5pm we've returned for our fresh laundry and we're heading back to the hotel. And upon our return to the Melville Inn we're both ready for a round of Old Speckled Hens before dinner.

So finally we've finished our chores and we're off for a visit to the big city of Edinburgh, its important museums and buildings, its charming winding streets, and its famous Royal Mile. But the place has become yet another Euro-tourist magnet, and the crowds are enormous as we make our way past a well-bronzed Marie Curie, a bearded Celtic warrior in pelts, and the occasional odd bagpipe or kilt store.



At this point we should pause to get a few bagpipe jokes out of the way:

- Q.** Why do bagpipers always walk while playing?
A. They're trying to get away from all the noise.
- Q.** What's the difference between an onion and a bagpipe?
A. Nobody cries when you cut up a bagpipe.
- Q.** What's the definition of a gentleman?
A. A person who can play the bagpipes after dinner, but doesn't.)

One wonders what Robert "Rabby" Burns, the "Ploughman Poet," (1759-1796) might have said about all this rampant modern commercialism, and the toll it has taken on the simple pastoral life of his



Robert Burns

Scotland. While he wasn't actually from Edinburgh, he spent time there and had much to say of lice and mice and rural themes in general in his delightful poems. He brought us much cheer and wisdom, and he died far too early, of ill health, at the age of 37.

A few favorite Burns poems (available on Gutenberg.org):

"Tam O'Shanter"

"A Red, Red Rose" (A favorite of Bob Dylan)

"To a Mouse, on Turning Her Up In Her Nest With the Plough, November, 1785"

"To a Louse, On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church" (1786)

"A Man's A Man For A' That"

And among the 100 or more songs that he wrote, he also penned the version of "Auld Lang Syne" which we all sing to greet the New Year.

We struggle our way uphill through the modern invading hordes toward the imposing Edinburgh Castle sitting at the top of the hill. A large open space by the castle entry is filled with massive stadium seating for major events – including the upcoming and spectacular Edinburgh Military Tattoo. (Tickets are £40 – £970, and

it's scheduled for August 2-24.) We'll miss it this year, but here are a couple of very entertaining links provided by Maggie Becker:

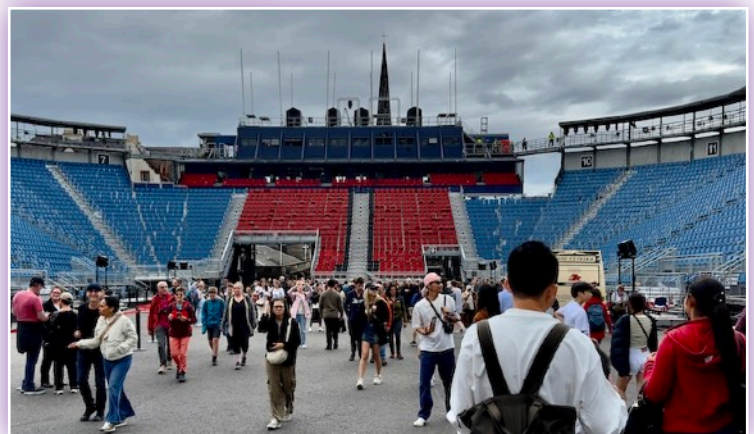
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(You'll need to copy the links and paste them into your browser window, since this PDF format does not allow for live links. Sorry!)



And then, as we draw near to the castle doorway itself, we're confronted by 'Sorry Signs' telling us we should have booked well ahead if we had notions of actually getting inside the castle today. I wonder if marauding warriors of old were also required to book their invasions so far in advance. But Monty Python has probably already done that skit.





We face up to our disappointment and make our way back downhill as I fancy being measured up for my very own custom kilt. With the magical thoughts of Yeats rattling in my head, and maybe with my own pet owl. But as I'm unlikely to move to chilly Scotland, and kilts are not likely to work out well in our hot Sonoran Desert habitat, I'll pass on a full Scottish kit-out this time. Reality can be a harsh master.

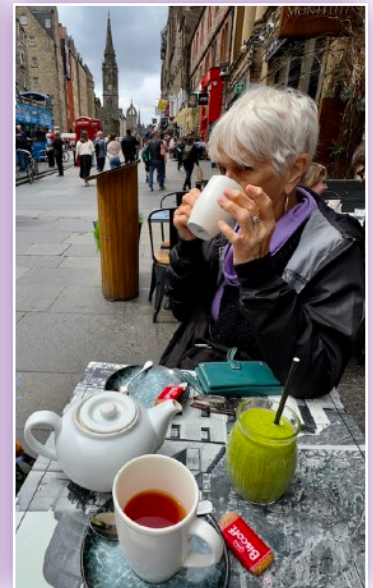


There are many curious sites to behold along the Royal Mile, and even places to indulge one's secret deepest lustings for a platter of genuine haggis. And there be bounteous bottles of fine Scotch whisky bearing alluring labels rarely seen across the Atlantic, along with other such entertainments and distractions.



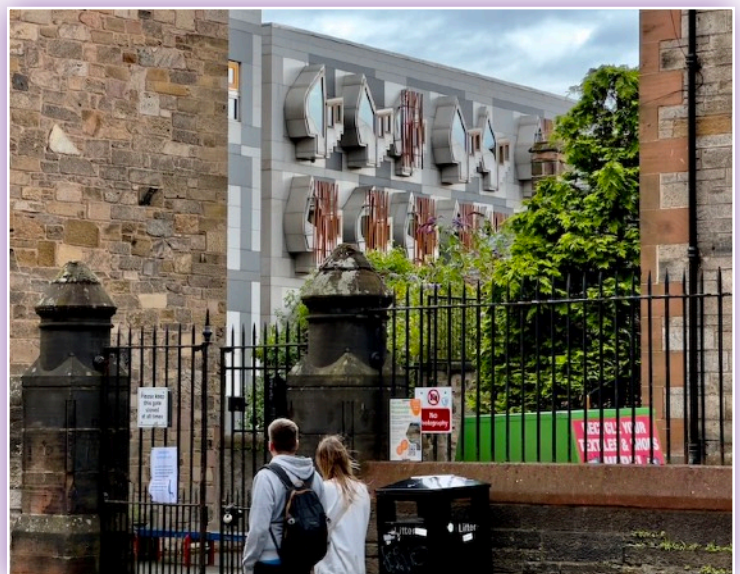


The Royal Mile is a royal day-full and much more than that. And even at the bottom of the hill there are still plenty of kindly merchants willing to lighten that load of Scottish Pounds which may be weighing heavily upon your pockets. Bless them for their concern.





Encountering the brutal-modern Scottish Parliament building, which is also sitting at the bottom of the hill, is something of a shock. It just seems a bit of an odd concrete duck elbowing its way uncomfortably amongst all those elegant classical buildings of yore. Perhaps the biggest problem with modern architecture is that it takes a true master in that niche to design something worthy of the term ‘architecture.’ And many who practice modern

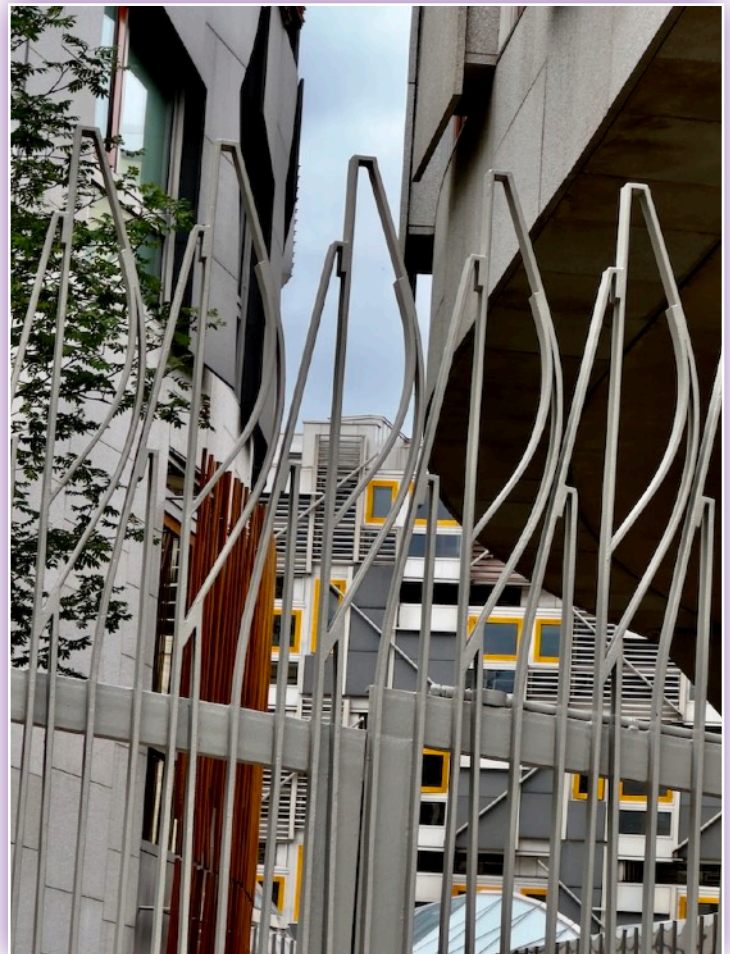


architecture only produce buildings that never rise to that exalted level.

Robt Burns said:

O wad some Power the giftie gie us
To see oursel as ithers see us!
It wad frae mony a blunder free us,

And maybe from a lot of bad architecture as well. But if you can overlook the unfortunate and uninviting Parliament building itself, the exterior walls along the street are covered with a maze of excellent quotes from Scotland's greatest poets and scholars.



Then yet again, it's been a long day. It's time now for us to board a bus heading back to our countryside hotel right next to Dobbie's Garden Center, where reversing your delivery vehicle requires a 'banksman,' This will sadly be our last night in the Edinburgh area, but we're both ready to split another hearty meat pie with a salad, and pints of golden ale, as the sun sets nicely over the Melville Inn.



Yet happily, our last night here is also the First Night of the BBC Proms 2024, playing at the Royal Albert Hall back in distant London. We had looked for an event at the Royal Albert during our time in London but nothing was on. So now we have decided to just kick back in our hotel room, and slug a mug of tea while we enjoy the Proms after dinner.

Elim Chan is the debut conductor, and she brings the fireworks to Beethoven's powerful Fifth Symphony – the 'Destiny' or 'Fate' Symphony, with its famous

thunderous opening of 'dit dit dit dah.' It was first played in Vienna in 1808, during the Napoleonic Wars, and it led the enraptured music critic E.T.A. Hoffman to proclaim, "How this wonderful composition, in a climax that climbs on and on, leads the listener imperiously forward into the spirit world of the infinite!"





And then Elim Chan and the orchestra follow all that drama with a fine bit of Handel and Clara Schumann's Piano Concerto. It was a good night.

Elim Chan was born in Hong Kong and educated there in music from an early age, later earning her Bachelor of Arts from Smith College and her MM and Doctor of Musical Arts from the University of Michigan. She has conducted orchestras in Sweden, Scotland, Belgium, Spain, Germany, France, the US, and England. As a child she recalled being inspired by the conducting of Mickey Mouse as the Sorcerer's Apprentice in Disney's fabulous "Fantasia." And she's a boxer in her spare time.

NYT Article:

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/05/arts/music/elim-chan-conductor.html>

So we've had a fine visit to Edinburgh, although far too brief due to our crazy itinerary. Scotland certainly warrants a much longer return and a deeper exploration sometime in the future. But we'll be catching an early plane to Amsterdam in the morning.

We'll let some of the finest words of robust Scottish character by Rabbie Burns call us back someday to fair Scotland:

What though on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey, an' a that;
Gie fools their silks, and knaves their wine;
A Man's a Man for a' that:
For a' that, and a' that,
Their tinsel show, an' a' that;
The honest man, tho' e'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that.



Please watch for our upcoming Dispatches through Europe on a river boat up the Rhine from Amsterdam through The Netherlands and Germany, to Basel, followed by trains to the Swiss lakes and Alps, gorgeous Lake Garda and Lucca in Italy, then a swing through Montpellier and Bordeaux in southern France and back to dynamic Rotterdam. So be sure to join us again on our 2024 Euro travels. — *PRW*