

## The English Letter

Dec 2016

It is **Christmas**.

This last letter of 2016 will carry a lot of festive bits and pieces.

Whether you see this time as Christmas or Xmas, it is a moment in our lives when we do think more of others and our friends and family. An opportunity to give, to share and care. These are the expressions that transcend religions and thus a time of year for all.

There are some really good people who manage to have a Xmas every day.



This wintry scene looks across Chislehurst pond to the high street, and behind the trees is a little tea and gift shop called Annabel's. A delightful Cornish tea

took us beyond sunset and up to the arrival of Santa on his mechanical sleigh and the turning on of the lights.



A few days earlier, however, we attended the Swanley event where a carol singing choir sang in the lights.



Our own trees went up even earlier. A forest of Xmas trees and we have only just got going!



In our lounge you will find the full set of **Dickens** works. I am not sure how old they are but perhaps from the 1940's. Now we are back in the places from which his novels were based, it adds an extra ingredient to any visits to these literary spots. It is a little like going to Baker street to see the house in which Sherlock Holmes "lived". It was with this background that we went off to **Rochester**, which sits at a key spot on the river Medway. As a child Dickens spent a few years in the area and found inspiration for some of his great characters and settings.

As a town it dates back to the Romans who defended the bridge over the Medway as its` soldiers and supplies moved inland from the coast. The castle was started after the arrival of William in 1087 but the Cathedral dates from 604 AD.

They had a **Christmas Dickens market** and off we went.

It was a really good afternoon/evening and using the park and ride took the hassle out of parking. People were dressed up in Dickensian style and the organisers had plenty of others who interacted or performed for the visitors.



There were far too many to mention in detail but a few pictures provide a good look at what went on



from market, fairs, castle, cathedral, performers and museum.

Gluhwein, Fagin, faux snow, Punch and Judy shows and so much more.



We are not done with Xmas as I will tell you later about the Canterbury Christmas Market and Chaucer.

Actually it is difficult to include anything that does not have a Xmas tree in it but in Nov we did have another wedding anniversary and this handsome lunch fare (not the person) was on offer at Ruxley Manor.

We are fans of **Wetherspoon Pubs**.

This is a chain of pubs now listed on the LSE with over 900 premises where they provide a value for money offering of drinks and meals. It is not Michelin nor French cuisine but good wholesome fare in a warm and inviting atmosphere. This pic from the Bromley outlet saw us with two lunches and two drinks for about £11 for the lot. Mind you we have never been there late at night!



**Courtney`**s school, Bullers Wood, put on a play last week that incorporated three sections of their arts programme from the spirit like ballet dances that heralded the 3 ghosts to actors (all girls) and music. Courtney found herself in the orchestra and the production was....A Christmas Carol by...Charles Dickens. I told you there was no escape from these subjects.



She also received the book that contained her very short scary story that had been published together with other entrants selected from young writers around the

country.

I am reading from a device! This is Stephanie`s Kindle like, **hand held “book case”**.

She had read all the books and this storage system was no longer supported and thus could not be enlarged. So I have been working my way through many of the books.

I read in bed and have found this lightweight instrument to be very convenient. It clearly has a role to play in terms of space saving if one wanted to take books on holiday etc. and the ease of reading would help those with more fragile wrists. The big debate rages over the fact that it is still not a book , does not look like a book and does not feel nor smell like a book. I don`t quite know how we got onto this topic but the guy delivering our boxes told me that these devices can be bought that have a book like smell.

Our bookcases, the real ones, mainly have non- fiction these days and thus I can see that electronic forms could be used for fiction, and paper for non - fiction. But how can a Kindle type machine replace an almost 100 year old set of Dickens? But talking books let us move to another author of note.

I did mention that we were scheduled to go to **Canterbury** and the destination of the pilgrims. Of course this was a leg of the longer journey from London to Rome. **Chaucer** wrote about it with his Canterbury Tales.



The weather was wonderful, with blue crisp days and a Canterbury that glowed and bustled with the Christmas Market that actually played a fairly minor role in a city that offers up a glorious array of architectural and historical sites.

Andrea had booked the YHA a few weeks ago and this gave us accommodation within walking distance of all the places we wished to go to. It was full by the time we arrived but this compact building provided us with a good 4 bedded room and all the other facilities were fine.

Perhaps a good picture to start with is that of Chaucer himself. I note that he was, in fact, a poet, being the first to be buried in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey. One of his greatest works was The Canterbury Tales written in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

It is difficult to know which of the many places to include but I have added a few.

We did manage to enter the **cathedral** and grounds but a service was in progress and thus we were limited to an area just inside the main doors.



I know that this centre of the Anglican Church has a history going back to 597AD being a period when the Romans had largely been replaced by the invading Angles, Saxons and Jutes.

I know these things because I have looked them up!



The market was in full flow with the pedestrian areas and squares illuminated not only with lights and decorations but with music and song from the many performers from solo players and singers to choirs offering up the traditional carols.

The history from Roman to Medieval times was all around us with trips to the Castle, West Gate prison, the city walls, the Abbey and a walk by the Stour and Watling Street.

This slightly misty view is from the top of West Gate towards the Cathedral with a bustling crowd of people along one of the main pedestrian areas. The new building in the bottom left is the Marlowe Theatre.



If you turn around a bit you see the river Stour being a walk we took as shown in this next picture.

The ubiquitous Wetherspoons occupies an old building (pictured just above my head)

which we managed to include in our Sunday itinerary.



There was an awful lot of learning going on from the demise of Thomas Becket in 1170, Cathedral after falling out with Henry II. It came on our walk. This and Queen around the 6<sup>th</sup> C English? Do tell me if this is not so. Bertha was from Tours in France and thus the marriage must have done a great deal towards improving relationships with the French.



awful lot on from the demise of Thomas who was murdered in the falling out with Henry II. It came encounter an old King and Queen was Ethelbert the King of Kent Bertha. We are talking here and perhaps the first King of the English? Do tell me if this is not so. Bertha was from Tours in France and thus the marriage must have done a great deal towards improving relationships with the French.

**Swanley** has a market each Wednesday and it is fortunate that we can walk there as all the car parks quickly fill up. It is not a market town and so the stalls tend to have lots of manufactured items and probably imported from places like China (what isn't these days?). Never the less it produces a good busy vibe to what is otherwise a fairly quiet Swanley Square.





It is now Dec 24 and two days ago we took the train into Victoria Street station and used the underground to exit at **Westminster**. I was very impressed with Victoria St. Station as I could not recall it ever being this huge and with so many services and retail outlets around.

Westminster was an old hunting ground for Bev and myself as we both worked at BAT in Millbank back in the mid/late '60's.

But this trip was to explore the **South Bank** and take a circular journey past some notable spots at this time of the year.

Over the very busy bridge and down past the old LCC building that is now home to a mixture of game arcades , tourist attractions and restaurants etc.

As we moved along by the river and under the shadow of the London Eye, we were entertained by various professional buskers all of whom performed well. The Royal Festival Hall was soon in view being a venue at which I had volunteered to be an usher which had the advantage of being able to watch the many symphony concerts that were performed in this 2500 seater theatre.



**The Tate Modern** with paintings by Picasso, Miro, Matisse and a Degas statue added some substance to what might otherwise be looked at with various degrees of uncertainty. It is, of course, the old Power Station and they have retained this with the enormous sounds of a working building in the great open spaces.

**The Globe** theatre made famous by Shakespeare came along and we took the new Millenium Bridge to move back to the north side and **St. Pauls Cathedral**.

Ice skating was on show at **Somerset House** and the Strand led us into **Trafalgar Square** with the traditional





Christmas Carols around the tree. Groups can book a time slot to sing and collect money and our arrival was met with the Harrow on the Hill Church group trying to raise money for a new roof.

Leicester Square with a Xmas Market on the green led to Piccadilly Circus and the start of Regent St. We had done 12 kms. The legs and knees were telling us this in dramatic fashion. We were done for and a train home and a fish and chips take away completed the day.



I have so many scenes on camera but I show a small few here to try and reproduce the atmosphere of pulsating London at Christmas 2016.

So that is about it. I am sorry it took so long to tell you this small part of our lives, being Christmas 2016. I hope the pictures and places had resonance with you and perhaps bring back memories as no doubt many have walked our little route before.

We have no politics nor economic news.

We live at the moment as if the horrors of the Middle East are just newspaper articles and that the Brexit vote did not happen; we seem unmoved by the verbal build-up of weaponry as Putin and Trump “talk” to each other; we are immune to more tyrant like behaviour in Africa.

For now it is Xmas and we wish you all a great time with a peaceful and healthy 2017. There may be the odd “deliberate” mistake in this letter like the Budgie that was pictured last time (thanks Jenny) instead of a Parakeet. If so then please tell me.

But for now we bid you a farewell to 2016-our first Xmas back in England.

Love

Alan and Bev