

# The English Letter

December 2017

I was preparing a Movie Maker project for Gavin and Stephanie about their times in South Africa which needed much searching through old pictures of our adventures. It is as if we had stepped into a blue police box and been transported to Africa back in 1973. **Our journey and adventure had begun.**

The pictures re-awakened our memories of Port Elizabeth, the Drakensberg Mountains and Baviaanskloof; the Karoo and coastline and, of course the Game Parks and wildlife. Add to this the friends we had made and the diverse cultures amongst South Africa's friendly people. It all made a compelling picture for anyone wishing to travel to those distant places. **Our thoughts are with all those we have left behind.**

**Jacob Zuma** is no longer head of the ANC although he remains the President of the country. Cyril Ramaphosa is the new man at the top but he is surrounded by all the old and damaged faces of a corrupt and incompetent regime. The result was a good one for SA providing he can turn the tide but it leaves the opposition weaker as a successful Ramaphosa will take back many voters who have recently sided with the DA.

We wait and see whether Zuma will resign with some kind of "deal" and head off to the alleged "palace" built for him by the Guptas but the case of Zimbabwe is clear-**Mugabe** and wife have gone from the scene with a "deal" amidst a bloodless coup. I do not know the new guy, Mnangagwa, but it does seem that he, and those around him have been part of the historical problem rather than offering a solution.

In 2019 there will be new elections in SA and by then we will have a much better idea of what lies ahead for these two wonderful countries. They will be great again –it is just a question of when.



I have joined the **Citizens Advice Bureau** as a volunteer!

The CAB office has just opened in Swanley and hence why I responded to the call for volunteers. It is a short walk away although apart from that I did not have much idea of what I would be doing or really who the CAB are.

Some 5 or 6 weeks of training, both theoretical and on the job, has taken up two days each week and I am now at that stage to handle minor issues. We hand out information and offer options and generally assist people who have difficulties for many diverse reasons.

This picture has me talking to Princess Anne during the official opening of the Swanley Office.



We spent a night in **Bury St Edmunds** to attend their Christmas Fayre. It also meant that we could visit **Constable** Country for the first time. The Hay Wain painted in 1820/21 is among the most well-known of his great landscape works and here it is in 2017.



A Suffolk breakfast in this cute cottage styled tea room assisted the feel of country life in a 19<sup>th</sup> century setting. But this was more about Bury St Edmunds and the Market.

This next picture is of one of the many choirs/performers that were seen around the town but this one was quite unique.



I will zoom in a bit closer and you can then see the choir a little better. My cell phone camera whilst good, was not able to go right in with clarity but you may be able to see that the people's mouths are not open! But the hands are moving and all seem to be "saying" the same thing.



The choir is made up of people who cannot speak and they were performing a carol using background music and **sign language**.

On the other hand we met someone from our Johannesburg days who had no difficulty in chatting about our time in SA and what has happened since then.

We were at our usual Wetherspoon Pub which was once more a tremendous building with a glass domed roof.

It was **John von Khayser** from Purchasing at Hoechst in Jhb. around 1980.



As you can see we managed a pint or two and this last picture from Suffolk has Bev with some gluhwein in front of a lovely log fire at Valley Farm in Flatford.

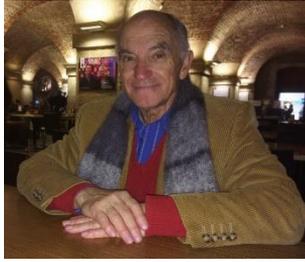
We are not church going people yet found ourselves associated with **churches** a few times.

In Bury St Edmunds we visited **St. Mary's Church** and got involved in the back end of a service and some carols. A lady vicar conducted matters assisted by a microphone and CCTV support that sent her message into the many TV's positioned around the church.

There is always something very special about churches. The singing, the sounds, and the general awareness of being in a place of great history offering hope and direction to so many. There is passion and feeling that flows around the pillars and architectural features to enter all the spaces and find a way into the bodies and minds of those present. Uplifting and humbling.

Another church visited had two parts being the crypt and main building. This was **St. Martins in The Fields** in Trafalgar Square.





The crypt was used as a restaurant and we had a drink and a small bite on top of the many grave stones that featured in the stone floor. A flight of stairs then led to the main church entrance where we had tickets to attend a candle lit concert of music by the likes of Pachelbel, Mozart, Bach and Beethoven with a rousing encore of Palladio, a work by a living Welshman named Jenkins.



This is a shot of the inside with music played by The Belmont Ensemble.

Our third church connection is to the right being a picture of another **St. Martins Church** from the 16<sup>th</sup> c, in the near- by village of Eynsford.



I walk through the church grounds once a week to a small building at the rear and it is in here that we meet to play **bridge**. No 5 Card Major just Acol. After not playing for a few years it is a beginner friendly group with a wide spectrum of new to skilful players.

Our activities with the **U3A** (University of the Third Age) in Swanley continue and I have now added the Creative Writing group to the list! They seem so talented yet welcoming to my modest offerings. So that makes, Quiz Night (2), Bridge and walks plus Book Club for Bev. If one includes the CAB then our week is beginning to fill up. One problem we have is that these roots are being put down in our temporary place of residence as we must move on and try and buy property somewhere but only after Courtney`s A levels have been concluded.

I need to make mention of our meeting up with **Catherine** in London after the monthly lunch gathering of a few Camden School for Girls. They were visiting the National gallery and Catherine Bazell (Calcagni) also realised that her daughter Katie was working at the Garrick Theatre opposite and they popped over to chat to her. Theatre goes back a long way with Catherine as it was at the Tufnell Theatre productions that I first met her back in the late 1960`s. Bev was an assistant stage manager with Catherine and husband under the lights. We still have some of the programmes from then including Oh What a Lovely War. Ben performed in The Rocky Horror Show with music and the arts being part of their lives. Catherine even reads books for CD recordings for those who can no longer read well due to poor eyesight.



A quick shot of us at Piccadilly is another recording in this pictorial diary of our lives as we continue our journey.

The tree is up the carols are being played for it is Christmas and we wish you all a lovely time and we will talk again in the new year.

Love

Alan and Bev

