

The English Letter

July 2 2017

We have been in the UK for one year and I wanted to highlight the changes from life in SA, but this was far too big a topic and thus have modified the approach to talk about just one or two aspects.

My remoulded hip has stood up to some par 3 rounds which prompted a visit to the local boot sale in search of a set of golf clubs, as all of our kit was disposed of in SA. I had £30 in my pocket, care of a gift from Melanie, Alex and Mackenzie and headed off in search of bargains. The first picture is of the clubs, bag and trolley that I was able to pick up.



And so it follows that I will talk briefly on this subject.



This is a shot of myself, Ben and Gavin at the local Pedham course in June 2017 and the next is of Greg, me, Barry and Brian at the Milnerton club in CT In 2015 when my femur broke up resulting in hip replacement number 3.



By the way that means there are 3 Old Camdenians on show.



We used to have an annual "event" and the following picture is in the Drakensberg Mountains with Brian and Stephen.

To the right is the group of 4 who played at my local Port Elizabeth course, the Walmer Golf Club, with Colin, Quentin and Stephen.



The shirts were provided by Colin on a special SA v England Riderless Cup contest. The outcome? Not important. Although that probably means I lost.

So one could argue that not much has changed other than the people, scenery and weather. Golf can be an expensive sport but there are ways that seniors can reduce costs and the Pedham par 3 course will allow some monthly golf at about £12 for 18 holes mid-week. The Walmer senior's rate was more like £5 for the 9 hole/18 T course.

I was also a regular player at the Sardinia 9 hole course with Claude, where a green fee of around £4/5 applied although the course needed some work and hence the move to Little Walmer.

We took up an offer to go along to the **Swanley Bowls Club** open day, and played for about 2 or 3 hours in really hot weather. We are thinking about joining and will take part in some more sessions first. As with the golf, all of our equipment was sold in SA.



But let us look at some pics.

First we have Bev on the green the other day. Please note the white items in the back. They have small wheels and are used to scoop up all the bowls after an end has finished. Never saw them in SA.



Then we have us both a few and the final picture really when we used to form a week end to Utopia. This was Range not too far away from

This has Liz (watching with Sam and Kim.



years ago at the Fish River Sun takes us back to the 1970`s crowd and shoot off for the a resort in the Magaliesberg Johannesburg.

Gillian) and me playing with

I include these shots purely because I have pictures of these times and not the many others when we played at the 1820`s Club sessions etc.

These two sports were really about the people, the personal challenge and most of all having some fun in lovely surroundings. The Swanley set up is at the Olympic Club where a friendly atmosphere greeted us on our first visit. The hips and knees have taken a hammering over the years and Bev is also complaining about her shoulder that might affect the bowls idea.

We have had some visitors to Swanley.

Our small patio/garden is big enough to permit a braai on a sunny day which makes for a chatty spot to have lunch. A 30 minute train ride from Victoria takes one to Swanley and from there it is a short and perhaps brisk walk. This means that a good time can be spent chatting about all those important things like.....well old times and the state of the world, to name a few.

First up was **Bill and Lynn** who live in CT but planning their return to Ayr in Scotland. A stay in London with daughter Tracy allowed them to journey down to us for the day. We go back many years to Johannesburg, being introduced to them via Barry.



The first is an attempt at a selfie to get all 4 of us in. This is on the patio in Swanley.

We talked about the move back to the UK and all things around this. It is an important subject as the destruction of the SA Rand v the GBP has meant that no return can be done lightly and careful assessment needs to happen to see how the financial situation works out. For us it is on the edge and only viable due to the combining of resources with Andrea. Their position was a lot better but tight.

The second pic is of us all plus Barry (2 from left) and Denise (2 from right) as we met up on a glorious sunny Cape day to visit the wine regions and particularly the Fairview estate of wines, cheeses, olives and homemade chocolate. They moved from Bedfordview to the Somerset West area to try out the W. Cape before deciding on the big move to the UK which will be completed in a year or so.



A few days later their place was taken by **Ken and Sandra** who drove up from Hastings.

Ken was transferred by Coates Inks to Johannesburg in the late 60's. They moved again, ending up in Amamzimtoti. Our contact has been brief since then but they have also made the move to up anchor and head back to the UK and set up a base in Hastings.



There were years of old times to talk about and the current condition of SA and the challenges of setting up again in the UK. Our patio takes centre stage once more although Andrea was around to take a proper picture.

Please note the wearing of shorts now summer is here.

We did the braai thing and talked a lot.

But in keeping with the earlier precedent I need to find an old shot, which was difficult as we did not have digital cameras in those old days and photos were scarce. But I found one and here it is.

I must have been about 29/30 and it comes from around 1973/4. This is a shot of the mighty Coates Inks Jhb. soccer side. A hotch potch of would be players who came together to play against a customer team. We were soundly thrashed as I recall it. Ken is in the red top (2 from left back row) and me? Bottom left and still wearing the Old Camdenian socks that somehow were taken with our bits to SA.



Will the Coates people try and recall the names of all of these as some have fallen from my memory.

Those of a political disposition and human rights leaning will notice the whiteness of the team! We are talking here of heavy apartheid times but I should go on to mention how we started to change things. I set up a 6 a side competition at Coates which included all people of whatever colour and background. I also refereed a match in Soweto in 1976 and the Coates team went to the other end of the spectrum and became all black. It was a beginning that continued to unfold in the years ahead.

As a post script I see that the old Coates factory in St Mary Cray has hoarding up and looks as if it will be refurbished or knocked down to make way for a new development. The end of an era.

Another PS on this point. The soccer shirts were donated being left over or seconds from a silk screen printer that had a picture of a gravestone on them!

Life here is different and there is so much about South Africa that is splendid, from people, countryside, weather and attitude to life. Of course it has its` darker side.

But it is natural for me to consider things like **UK Benefit payments** against the backdrop of SA and I am finding it hard to understand the process. I am not seeking benefits but have been attracted to a system that has little logic in its` workings. As a result I am keen to try and understand how it functions and seek out articles and programmes to learn from. So far with little clarity.

In SA one must work hard and diligently, to create a career path or establish a small business. There is little or no safety net of benefits and thus the approach to work is about what one does oneself and not what others will do for you. The wonderful support of benefits in the UK for those who fall into tough times is admirable but undermined by the millions who appear to see them as an entitlement to replace hard work and wise saving and investment decisions. I will keep asking questions to find the illusive logic.



The month of May saw Courtney take me up to the Emirates Stadium.



The home of the **Arsenal**. The timing was spot on as they had just won the FA Cup the week before. Arsene Wenger is under enormous pressure from a fan base that wants more than a top 4 finish, which they even missed out on this year.

On the way back we detoured The Serpentine for an al fresco away) and a look at the Diana



through Hyde Park and lunch (posh for take water feature.

But let us quickly go back one week.

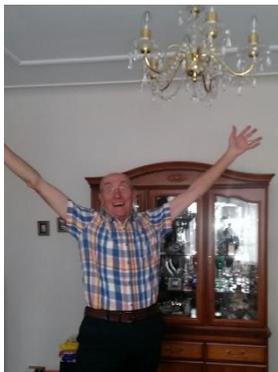
We had meant to meet up with Gavin to watch the Chelsea v Arsenal FA Cup Final but we had already booked to stay at **Wellingborough** for Bev's birthday and could not make it back in time.



We were drawn to this spot as Groupon had a special deal on the **medieval Hind Hotel** that implied in its` advertising that Cromwell used to stay there during the civil war. Well, according to the local museum that may not be so but we happily drank and dined in the Cromwell Bar.

The Battle of Naseby in 1645 is one of those pivotal events in British History and resulted in the demise of King Charles II.

Just before arriving in Wellingborough there had been the tragic terror attack in Manchester and I have taken a picture of the small crowd that gathered outside the Hotel in the nearby square to hear the voices from all religions condemn the attack. If one thing has come out from this and other events e.g. Westminster, London Bridge and Finsbury Park, it has been a very loud voice against these radical elements and the realisation that society and mosques etc. need now to be proactive in a way not seen before. Plus any information provided needs to be treated seriously. In the meantime the new wave of cyber-attacks is underway, being a trend that will probably only get bigger.



On our way back to London we stayed overnight at Verona and Frank's. We had not seen them since 2016 and we were able to do the journey just in time to join them for the FA Cup Final. Frank is also an avid Arsenal supporter yet both of us saw Chelsea as the stronger side and most likely to win. Miraculously this was not to be the case and Frank is seen in happy abandon as the match concluded during which he managed to dislodge a piece of the light fitting.

I include Verona in this garden selfie.



On the social front Jemima and Richard have a new son, **Arthur**, (many more pictures on Facebook) and after a 10 year wait, Jade has finally received a **proposal**, and ring, from Ben. In a romantic move he asked the big question whilst on holiday in Las Vegas.



I am near the end now with just a few words about **Kenwood House** that is an English Heritage spot on Hampstead Heath. It was a pleasant day and people had come out in droves to stroll around the grounds and head off, no doubt, further afield to Hampstead Heath itself and Parliament Fields.

We had tried to link up with my brother, Ken, but he proved elusive.

I have avoided the normal picture of the house to show this view of The Guitar Player, painted by Vermeer in 1672. It was stolen in 1974 but remarkably found in a cemetery a few months later, damp but sound. The IRA were thought to have been behind it.

The house is full of such works by Rembrandt, Turner and Gainsborough. Have a look, it is free.

I cannot end without reference to the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower. It was a mini 9/11 all over again with the drama unfolding in front of us all. There are so many questions that need answering but heads have already rolled at the Council level. But still so many questions that go beyond the local ability to handle such disasters to a national enquiry. We have seen from the 1989 Hillsborough tragedy how long these matters can take to completion.



It is a sunny day here and we have just got back from attending the Priory Park fair whilst Andrea and Courtney are camping down in the New Forest.

The "Andrews Sisters" to a '70s Rock Group and lots more.



Good bye from us once more and good wishes to everyone wherever you may be.

Alan and Bev