

The English Letter

Feb 2 2020



I guess it was inevitable that I would open with this bit of news.

We have left.

I am English.

I am British.

I am European.

I am also a person of the Earth.

Nothing has changed. Only the details of how we all work together.

.....



Since I last wrote we have not only entered a new year but a new decade, as illustrated by this electronic display across Oxford St.

We were in town, London Town.

A visit to the [Swingers Club](#) sounds rather sexy but in fact it is a golfing place with bars, restaurants and a fun, yet clever 9 hole mini course.



From there it was a walk via Regent St, Piccadilly, Leicester Square, China Town and Trafalgar Sq. as we headed towards the Mall to see the New Year fireworks display that was focused around the London Eye. The Mall gave us a view of it above the trees of St. James Park.



But it was still early and Andrea located this pub in St. James where we stopped for a while. As midnight drew near we took the short walk to The Mall for fireworks and then passed the Palace and home via the 13.30 from Victoria.

Before that, however, was [Christmas](#) itself, which was spent at home. We did encourage our close [neighbours](#) to join us for a drink and a small bite and we took this picture to capture the moment. We have the three neighbours plus the two children and in their case their

grandparents who were visiting from Poland.

A happy lot.



Ken was also with us for most of Christmas and Boxing Day although not in this picture.

.....



Verona and Frank gave us a “spare” gift voucher being a special birthday treat, but reluctantly declined by the couple concerned. They asked if we could do them the favour of taking it up!

It took a small part of a second to say yes and so we found ourselves approaching the day in Jan, being the first date that had been suitable.

Has anyone had afternoon tea at [The Savoy](#)?

Opulent, classy and over the top was the essence of the décor and service, given with the pleasant and gentle background music of the resident pianist.



We combined this with a visit to the National and Portrait Galleries.

.....



Close by in the Strand is Villiers St and down there under the arches is the [South African shop](#). This has all those “must have” items that became part of life when in SA. They seem able to charge ridiculous prices, with a Chappie for 10p. It does not sound much until you convert and realise that they cost R2 each. Bev was buying Ouma’s Rusks and Royco Bobotie mix. And here she is.

.....

We are aware that a few of our SA friends are out here in the UK. We have not yet met up with you all and this state of affairs needs to change. But how?

Because we do not have the large houses in which to entertain and host overnight guests our thoughts turn to a different approach. One of these is to take over a YHA venue and use this as a central gathering spot/come holiday destination even if for just two or three nights. Self-catering and cost effective, yet offering a cosy place to organise a gathering. What do you think?

.....

On this note I must make mention of the loss of Jo Brown who suddenly passed away recently. She loved South Africa and spent many a time there. Our link was via the Old Camdenians and Richard.

.....

As part of a Xmas outing from Andrea we all went up to the Romford Greyhound track for a burger, beer and dog racing.



We had mixed feelings about this as there is a lot of anti-sentiment related to how the dogs may be treated.



We placed bets on 6 races from facilities that have really improved from my recollections of visiting Harringay in the 1960's. We stood next to a co-owner and chatted about dog care. He was obviously biased but did offer up the view that matters were not as sometimes portrayed.

.....

Although this is a diary type letter about us here in the UK it was so good to have your own news from where you are. Thanks.

Our routine activities continue with U3A and Citizens Advice. Bev has interacted with the NHS recently about health issues and this may make a story in a later letter. The longer we live here the more we begin to see how the years of cost cutting have diluted services. This austerity may have been essential to get the nations finances back on track but we were not here to have a clear view. We were remarkably not in the UK between 1973 and 2016 (other than the odd year or there) being almost the exact dates of EU membership (up to referendum). So we did not really see how this arrangement affected the daily lives of UK residents.

Oh there is one other thing. I mentioned last time that I had a sort of job.

Well at 76 it is quite good to know that someone out there is prepared to pay money for your services (Citizens Advice is a voluntary position).

So what have I done?

It is all rather modest but after training and a test, plus police clearance, I became an authorised Invigilator. Whilst I did do a bit of this in SA, plus lecturing, it was a million miles away from the structure and regulations that apply here.

So every now and then I oversee, with others, Exams at the local high school. It is what is called a zero hour contract with pay just above the legal minimum. It is pocket money stuff but hey it is income being a column hardly used in my present home accounts. It just reinforces my view that if you want to work then there are jobs to be taken, however modest. I am on a 6 month probation period so we will see if I am still in place later this year.

That's all folks.

Love

Alan and Bev