

The English Letter

July 2019

A Personal Record of our return to England from 2016

So much has happened since I last put finger to keyboard.



All that sport to start with, and then the vote for the new leader of the Conservatives followed by the Queen accepting Theresa May's proposal that [Boris Johnson becomes the new Prime Minister](#). Like him, loathe him or even love him. But it is he who we have.

Fasten your seat belts and enjoy the ride.

Yes it has been cricket and cricket with both the ladies and men having a go.

The ladies met their match when facing Australia who seemed to be a league above everybody else but the men played out a final to be remembered as they sort of somehow managed to find a way to beat NZ and [win the World ODI cup](#) for the first time. Wonderful stuff. (NB Stokes born in NZ!!)



Although the men and ladies soccer teams did ok (no disgrace) it was the [netball World Cup](#) that played out on our TV screens. Who would have believed that so many people would be watching netball!

A close semi and final saw England placed third behind Australia and NZ with SA fourth.

The soccer season starts next week and then we have the rugby world cup in Japan. It never stops.

But for those watching the cricket ODI tournament you would have noticed how full and noisy the grounds were. In addition you should have also seen the enormous fan support for all teams. It was a clear illustration of how the UK has changed over the last few decades with the arrival of so many immigrants.

Lots of noise, lots of flag waving, lots of singing and dancing, but no trouble. Just national support for their country of heritage.

A sign that integration is working?



We were in Yorkshire when I last wrote and on the way back we met up with some old ex neighbours from St. Neots and spent a day wandering around Cambridge before heading there.

Great to be back in this lovely city of academia.



St. Neots was our home base for around 18 months before being posted to South Africa. We did the daily train commute into London being some 100kms each way. It was a green site housing development and all of us were new. We had a street (Close) of good neighbours with whom we easily socialised in pubs and on the soccer field.

I did not realise until visiting the museum that the town is named after a Cornish monk named Saint Neot and it seems that some bones were transferred to St. Neots from Bodmin Moor when pilgrimages started to take place. The history goes back a long way to the 12th C and beyond.



Now [Derek and Sandie](#) went on to become Mayors in their own right and this pic of Derek sums up his style where he displays the Mayors Brew that he organised with a local brewery in order to raise funds for good causes.

We spent the night with a braai and lots of discussion and even managed a pic of the scars from Derek's remarkable leg op although not included here.

Still on our way back we went over the M25 and had a hit and run lunch with [Verona and Frank in Palmers Green](#).

A great lunch and lots of chat, including the hope from Frank and myself that we might see better things from Arsenal in the 2019/20 season. Not putting any money on that one.



Two weeks ago we drove out to Rochester to meet up with a couple who had come all the way from Rhodesia. They are now based in CT and look north to Zimbabwe to see their wonderful country being torn apart. [Mike and Jenny](#) were undertaking a series of house sits in order to spend many weeks in the UK and thus it was to them and the cats that we journeyed.

It was one of those lovely sunny days that so take one by surprise to leave one unprotected from the sun as the garden and shaded patio was our base for the day. We stayed late and enjoyed dinner when this pic was taken. We will meet up again during their time here.

Well, we were on a roll now as we continued one more trip to see old friends and on this occasion it meant a car ride down to the old town of [Hastings](#). This happened about a week ago and was my first visit to the old town. This pic of [Ken and Sandra](#) was taken but a few metres from where they live being a simple walk to coast, cliffs and the wonderful bustling pedestrian roads full of interesting shops, eateries and pubs.



Ken was also moved by Coates to South Africa and it was they who introduced us to Mondeor in Johannesburg when we spent the day with them in 1973. During this

visit we looked at a house in the suburb and made an offer the same day. Although we undertook many extensions during our time there, it was our home for 22 years.

As I write this I begin to realise how many of our old friends from South Africa are now back in the UK. I am starting to count and although some have been back for a few years, I easily total a dozen or more. The links are work places, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth. If I had the sort of house we had in SA then I might well propose a gathering. But I don't have that resource now, yet we should not exclude the idea of a suitable meeting place. Mind you I hear more are on their way so we should hold off for a few months.

We hit a record of high temperatures and then the skies opened and down came the rain. This was a much needed cooling off that yet permitted a result in that incredible 4 day test match between England and Ireland.

However, Andrea and Courtney have gone off to the Chiddfest for a 3 day music festival with camping and all that goes with a festival. Fortunately they took their wellies. Not back yet to tell how it all went.

I need to include an old pic from a visit to The Lake District many years ago when we were all proud to display the new democratic flag of South Africa. You will note the weather conditions and my "subtle" plastic poncho. That is Mackenzie in front and Alex in blue with Bev as Mary Poppins.



[I noticed something a year or more ago.](#)

I guess it was known to others before my own realisation. It happened in a clothing store where Bev was trying on things and I was merely strolling around in order to fill in time. I went down one aisle that had facing me, a few metres away, a large wall mounted mirror. It was impossible not to watch one's own reflection. I seemed to lean to the left a bit. I tried standing quite upright and as I did so the left foot was slightly off the ground.

My left leg was now shorter than my right and clearly a result of the reconstructive surgery on my hip in 2015. I waddle! This is also caught on camera when small videos are taken as we undertake our walks and hikes around the country.

[Energy provision.](#) I noted the other week that the UK had gone through a stage of at least two weeks when only renewable energy provided the power needed for the country. I found this quite remarkable which just shows how possible it will be to extend this in the years ahead.

We must not get carried away here though as the UK coal mines were largely exhausted of viable deposits thus making the search for other means of power generation essential. A developing country with huge low cost coal, gas or oil resources will have little localised incentive to change to more expensive yet sustainable and cleaner methods.

Our old car from 2003 runs on petrol. At what point does one buy electric? For us clearly not yet but there will come a time for people to make this call and I just wonder how the transition will occur. It is difficult to see how the old petrol/diesel based industries will taper down production and support whilst around the corner others are actively churning out electric vehicles. How will this work I wonder.

We are now starting our fourth year back in the UK and it is certainly not the country we left in 1973.

As SA went down then the UK went up. This is so clearly reflected in the exchange rate move of 1:2, £:R in 1973 to the 1:22 when we returned. Financially we have missed out enormously both by way of salary and then pension. Apart from the financial disaster (only pertinent if you return from SA) then there is a new culture and society. I touched on it when talking about sports crowds and you see it wherever you go. It is just part of the new fabric of society.

It might be a Polish plumber or an India surgeon as people from diverse backgrounds establish a new order that combines the old traditions with the new. Of course it is early days but a transition in motion.

There is much to be thankful for and some things that are not so good. I am thinking particularly of crime as the extent of knife crime and other blatant and callous acts are the stuff of other continents and remind us a little bit of Africa.

But when we think of Africa we see the wonderful countryside and people, the wildlife, mountains, deserts and coast line. A tremendous number of years spoilt only by the politicians.

That is all folks.

Love to you all.

Alan and Bev