

The English Letter

July 2 2016

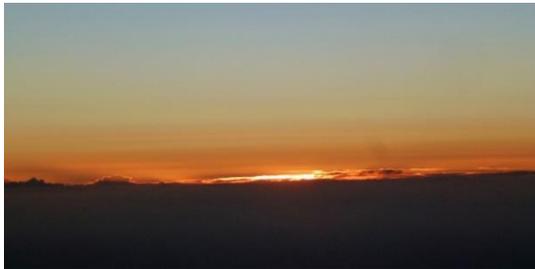
Welcome to The English Letter.

I thought it necessary to shoot this note off now, even though we have only been in Blighty for just under 2 weeks.

During that short spell I have mastered all things British and am ready to fully explain what is happening in these Isles?! Clearly, that is a load of rubbish, but I will try my best to offer up comment on events unfolding here and tread as carefully as I can before digging a hole for myself.

Perhaps a good start is to try and find some Welsh blood in my veins as the 3-1 victory over Belgium allows the UK to finish off the week with good news and an event that offers a rallying point to permit some unity and rejoicing. The rest of the news is pretty depressing!

But let us start at the beginning.



Catching a 3 am flight from Dubai, we headed off Westwards as the morning sun rose over the horizon. It was an odd feeling to have the effects of the rotation of the Earth follow us for a big chunk of the journey, thus leaving us in perpetual sunrise.

Our new home for the next 2 months is in Ilkley with Melanie, Alex and Mackenzie.

There will be a lot of “new” things to show you as we move along but the first is the car that we now own. It was one of those “our neighbour is selling his car” deals that offers up a known history of upkeep. In other respects it was a Focus that Bev has always wanted even if sporting only 3 doors and dating back to 2003. We hope that this 1800 cc Coupe will be our reliable transport for the next 2 or 3 years at least.



This picture is deliberately constructed to not only show the Focus but has other elements of interest. The house at the back is our address at this moment and to the right the overpowering Hymer is the 5 berth Camper Van that Melanie, Alex, Mackenzie and Tamba the Labrador use to go gallivanting around the countryside from the European continent to local spots.

Ilkley is a peaceful Spa town in Yorkshire and armed with the Focus and a gift of National Trust membership from Andrea and Courtney we have already headed off to two historical sites.

Our first week saw me dressed in shorts and sandals but the last few days has gone chilly and a move to longs and shoes. Our first trip was to East Riddlesden Hall. Established 700 years ago we visited their 400 year old kitchen and then 17th C rooms with enthusiastic commentary from the many volunteers who were keen to enter into dialogue. The rain kept us indoors and another visit is needed to fully explore this heritage site.

As we were in the area of Howarth we paid another visit to the Bronte Parsonage. All of you who have picked up a book will know of the great literature provided by the Bronte sisters during their short lives.



We had a spot of lunch at the Black Bull that has served customers for some 300 years.

Branwell Bronte, the brother, was a regular caller using drink and drugs to excess that is said to have led to his early death. His painting of the Bronte sisters is well known for the subsequent “removal” of his own image from the picture. A shot of Bev outside the pub with the cobbled road captures the scene.

I need to change the subject and include some political comment as the last 10 days have seen a major shift in Britain`s future. I refer, of course, to the EU referendum. I would like to concisely explain the position but I think that no one has this information and we are all left to our own views on what went on.

Cameron sensed a challenge from sections within his party and probably saw the idea of a referendum as offering the public a bit of democracy as well as cementing his own ideology from the Remain vote. Coming from South Africa we have seen what can happen when proportional voting occurs as in SA`s case millions of poorly educated people cast their vote for a political party using emotion as the guiding light and not well thought out positions.

The vote was a proportional one with no conditions in place, like say a 60% vote needed to change the status quo. All is not well with the working man`s lot in the UK and many see the free flow of EU work seekers as a threat to their own job security and way of life. Perhaps the refugee problem is somehow included in this picture. In the new world order the role of the once mighty British Empire is seen to fade as Brussels impose rules and regulations on the EU that further dilutes the UK`s control over their own destiny. To put the “Great” back into Britain is a noble cause but perhaps ignores the reality of the new Global Village.

The Leave campaign gained strength from people like Boris Johnson and was assisted by a weak Remain campaign by Labour leader, Corbyn.

And so the shock result occurred and the people voted to exit the EU. It is clear from the days that followed that no plan appears to be in place following this vote and that many Leave campaigners did not realise the implications and unintended consequences of a Leave result. Already some polls say that 7% would not have voted Leave if they had realised what would happen especially as some of the campaigning misled the public.

It is a mess. Historic in nature, and we are left with no PM, Labour without a shadow cabinet and a leader under siege to resign. Even more ironic is that we rushed our finances out of SA to beat the impending downgrade from the ratings agencies only to find that they were given a few months more to sort things out but the UK was downgraded following the Leave vote!

The people have spoken and now the powers that be must get things together and start to negotiate the exit deal. I will stick my neck out and say Theresa May will lead these negotiations.

Ok, so you have my thoughts for what they are worth.

Back to other things.



The weather forecast suggested a dry Thursday and so we packed our pic-nic lunch and headed off to Fountains Abbey that is close to Ripon. The Abbey was founded in 1132 by Benedictine monks and as one walks between the ruins there was in my mind the images put to paper by Ken Follett in his novels. It is all there in his books, the wonders of the

architecture, the politics within the church and the scourge of Black Death. The landscaped setting of rivers and water features is covered by gravel pathways providing many benches from which a packed lunch can be taken whilst enjoying the scene.



I mentioned Ripon, and we paid a short visit as it was market day and took time to see the cathedral including a crypt that dated from 670 AD. A punnet of strawberries at £1.20 saw us on our way via Pately Bridge and back to Ilkley through the Yorkshire Dales.

Bev found the roads difficult to navigate, despite large map, and so we are now users of a Tom Tom starter Sat Nav obtained from Argos for £69.

We will introduce new faces to these pages as people in the UK may well feature in our news. But I will restrict this to two that I have mentioned before.



The first is Mackenzie, who finished her GCSE course and heads to the 6th form, but only after the essential farewell Prom and we capture the occasion with these pictures.

which to appear onto the red carpet.

It is important to arrive in something special and so 5 of them chose the Camper van as that unusual vehicle from



The other shot has Mackenzie in joyous mood.

Down south Courtney was doing things as well with only one day now left before she departs with the Bullers Wood orchestra on their tour of Tuscany.



Her short time at this new school has been productive with her receiving two sports awards, including one presented by 2 time gold Paralympic medallist and a bronze certificate for academics.

I have pinched Andrea`s Facebook picture to illustrate the story.

Our time here has been short but the retailers remain active with a constant flow of specials that really make one reach out to buy. The staff are friendly, courteous and competent. It is a joy to shop and interact with people in this friendly and beautiful Yorkshire.

We are drinking wine from around the world and I have found lots of Malbec labels to try, including one at £3. Add to this pork pies and scotch eggs with Branston pickle and what more do you need.

We have even braaied on two occasions!

Of course I saw the England v Iceland game that adds fuel to the growing furore over the size of pay that these guys receive.

We have arrived into an England in turmoil and it will be most interesting to see and follow the 2 years of Exit negotiations from the EU and how the politicians and voters respond to them. We will have a new PM and Cabinet by early Sept and the Labour Party will look quite different. Nothing will be the same.

I have been in contact with the Pensions people here to try and buy back years and had a remarkable conversation with a robot! Travel passes have already been delivered and pension application forms are in the post being a system that works and works fast.

I keep an eye on other events and see that Australia have just concluded elections and that SA go into their watershed local elections in August.

In writing this letter I had the feeling that matters of an African nature offered more drama than I might be able to find from the well known and much read European events. The last two weeks may have proved me wrong.

In the meantime let`s have another Malbec and watch it all unfold. So it is goodbye from me and farewell from Bev as we bid you all good tidings wherever you may be.

Alan and Bev Shearn