

The English Letter

July 21 2018

We have been in England for two years now.

The stay in Swanley has lasted for some 20 months and we are still renting.

It is odd, yet obvious, that as we go about our daily lives that we begin to set up a routine of some kind. We start to not only get used to our surroundings but see positive features whereas before it all seemed rather drab and soulless. Swanley has many advantages for us as the U3A, CA and library aspects provide a deeper and more varied view of life around here.

Familiarity can bring satisfaction! It is a danger really as it can mean that we begin to accept what was earlier the unacceptable or put positively, a better view on what we had only previously seen on the surface. Of course it is tough going to the UK with a Rand based sum of money and income. We knew this and perhaps our continued enjoyment is a factor of how well we have adapted to doing things and living a life that matches our wallet. I think that is pretty key.

Arriving here and starting a new job and career is one thing but to arrive in retirement is another and more sober experience.

So what have we been up to as we go about this more regular and mundane lifestyle?

Among the U3A activities are **monthly walks** that have the delightful habit of finishing at a lovely pub where a good lunch just has to be enjoyed. At some 6 kms it is not a hike but rather more a stroll. One such "stroll" took us into the Kent countryside and these pics tell the tale.

The Kings Arms dates back to the 16th Century and the village of **Offham** is based upon Saxon words.



It's history in fact goes all the way back to Roman times.

Near the village green is this interesting telephone box that now houses an honour "book shop" where books can be exchanged for free i.e. take one and replace with another.



The village green itself still retains the original Quintain. What you may ask is a Quintain? A reasonable question.



Well, it goes way back to a time when jousting was a sport and riders galloped at the post (Quintain) that held some kind of target which they needed to hit with their poles.

The Oast houses to the left are used to kiln the hops in the brewing process. A fire is lit in the lower level and the heat rises to dry out the hops that are spread out across the top area. The air escapes through the cowl in the roof. It is, of course, a common and typical site in this hop growing region.

The **Brexit** discussions rage on and there seems to be no solution that enjoys enough support to be voted in by Parliament. It is a shambles and a mess. It illustrates only too clearly how the referendum was undertaken with little or no thought as to the outcomes of the vote. It started off as a mess and continues this way. The Pound has suffered and before long investment decisions will be affected. The economy is sort of on hold.

Since I last wrote there has been a soccer **World Cup in Russia**. It all seemed to go off very well and even the England team found themselves in a very soft group and managed to progress to the semi-finals where they lost to Croatia, being a team that they really should have beaten. In the meantime sales of waistcoats have increased and Southgate tube station was renamed Gareth Southgate for a few days.

Anyone fancy Tea on the Thames? A Xmas gift was delayed until June when the weather was just right. We were tourists for the day as the boat departed from Tower pier in a circular route via Westminster. Apart from forcing us to look at the Tower Bridge/Castle area it prompted a thought that the lovely late afternoon sun would provide a fitting background for a walk back to Westminster using the north bank and south bank pedestrian walkways.

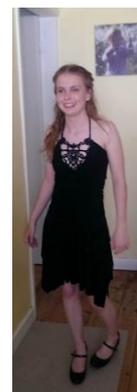


Office workers started to line the river banks at the many drinking holes along the way. The Globe theatre, Millennium Bridge, Tate Modern, Festival and Queen Elizabeth Halls, the London Eye, buskers and book stalls lined our route. The Queen Elizabeth Hall even provided me with a rather niche based lecture/discussion on dance in the court of Louis XIV. Not everyone's cup of tea but yet engrossing in some strange way. The auditorium also had a bar area with some strong real ales that were just right for us to knock back as we leaned against the river bank walls and watched the world and all its' players go by. Many found the clever fountain irresistible and darted in and out to try and avoid the walls of spray that varied every

few seconds.

Melanie, Alex and Mackenzie went off to France in the Motorhome and we agreed to look after the dog and house whilst they were away. It is always a pleasure to go up to **Yorkshire and the old spa town of Ilkley.**

Mackenzie had finished her A Levels and was free of school and attended the Prom night before dashing off to France the next day.





Ilkley has a history that also goes back to the Romans but it also has a lively theatre complex and we decided to attend the production currently being staged which was **Yes Prime Minister**. Not our first choice of play but an enjoyable and dark humoured look at the goings on in Government that are troublingly rather realistic.

Volunteer staff welcomed and steered one to bar and café area where the essential wine could be ordered for speedy interval consumption.

Just around the corner is the river Wharfe with park and bridge. The bridge is on the old Roman Road and was built in 1675.



The Romans built a fort in Ilkley which was then named Olicana. The history can be traced back to 11000 BC when the earliest indicators of habitation have been found. The Moors show the remains of druid circles and other stone carvings.



It is, perhaps, best known to the British because of the folk song **“Ilkley Moor Bah`t`at”** i.e without a hat, as illustrated by Bev as we “conquer” the Cow and Calf rocks on the Moor.

We had great weather in the high 20`s and virtually no rain.

Andrea and Courtney have been up to The Lakes and are now attempting the climb up Ben Nevis to add to that of Helvellyn.

We are back now in Swanley.

As I started by saying, there is no big drama in this letter, merely a gentle look at life in the UK as we enter our third year.

Wishing you all well from a sunny and dry UK.

Alan and Bev