

The English Letter

May 3 2017

Around 10,000 years ago South Wales was a bit chilly!



We had walked into the Ironbridge Gorge that had been formed during the last Ice Age I had not realised that the glaciers went this south. The river Severn dashes by and we managed a post dinner evening at the Boat Inn which we accessed by the footpath from the YHA.

The black door has various lines painted upon it with one

recording what happened in the next picture after a lot of rain had fallen.

It was a dry evening now. Whew! So we could settle in and taste some of what this very local pub had to offer.



Chess, some darts and a bit of tinkling on the piano was all washed down with the local ales.

But that was all an aside to the main purpose of our visit which was to see the home and perhaps starting point of the Industrial Revolution.

There was a need to bridge the river here and the development of cast iron permitted the opening of the world's first Iron bridge in 1781 and all the rest is history (well the short version).

Those in the Johannesburg area will be interested to learn that this was a toll bridge which quickly made profits (people paid the toll) despite a cost of perhaps £6000.

Abraham Darby is the name you were all thinking of.



As you will gather we were again staying at a YHA, with this one a nice riverside walk away in Coalport. The building was one of the old factory sites that made up the Coalport China Works.



All that talk of Ice Age and the reputation the UK has for bad weather made me notice the use of solar panels. I learn that in fact over 1 million GB homes have solar energy installations. Figures for SA are difficult to find (local Government makes money from Eskom main supplies) but they are far below where they should be. One figure has the UK at 1 GW v SA at 10MW. 1 GW = 1000 MW.

A sunny picture needs to follow this, even if the “summer” only lasted for 2 days or so before returning to spring. Of course the braai came out and this pic has the starters being cooked on the grill and interestingly in little cast iron containers. I am experimenting.



We also braved a less warm day to repeat the process last week and we had with us our next door neighbour Sheila and Trudi who had recently arrived in the UK after leaving SA.



As the day progressed the evening chill took us indoors for some old fashioned Charades. A drop of wine always helps and these pics capture Sheila's effort and a more thoughtful Trudi whilst enjoying cheese and biscuits.



Andrea gets into the mood with Alfie.

Our local travels have continued with a surprise stop- over in Stratford on Avon.

This took Bev and I back to 1969 as Stratford was the first night of our honeymoon and also our first



anniversary. We took pictures of us outside the two places involved, being the Shakespeare Hotel and the White Swan Inn.

We had a good look around the town with boat ride, riverside walks and the theatre. Of course this is all about Shakespeare and no visit is complete without the essential picture of this world renowned playwright.



We toured the area a bit and returned via the Cotswolds being another place that Bev and I have visited and once again we have a shot of the Old New Inn that we stayed at many moons ago in lovely Bourton- on- the water during our whistle stop trip.





As you can see the day was quite cold but it did not stop Courtney doing another of her 5 km runs on the first day as we drove through



Wycombe.

There have been a few more of these runs around and about and her PB is certainly reflecting this effort.



These are not races as such, merely fun runs that intend to stretch one to achieve better times. The First Lady home at the Decathlon event in Stevenage was notable and I also show here the Dartford start with a swan dwarfing Courtney in Wycombe. It takes us to some interesting places.

I have mentioned before how fortunate we are to have received gifts of membership to the National Trust and English Heritage which we try and make good use of with Andrea building them into our various journeys. Some are local to us in Kent/London.



To the left I am sitting next to George Bernard Shaw as we undertook a significant country hike ending at his house.

His literary works, including Pygmalion, saw him win both a Noble prize and an Academy award. It was the first time I had seen either close up and it should be noted that he is the only person to have achieved this double.



Another notable person in our sights was Charles Darwin who seems to have bravely continued the work started by his father in his search for the answers to who and why we are, ending up with the principles of evolution. Views that some would have seen as heretical then and probably still do today even though scientists have embraced and confirmed these findings. His house is to the left.

If one goes back to the dawn of mankind and traces their footsteps one sees an interesting pattern as ancient man returns to the cradle of human life in Africa, but as modern colonialists. Colonising their own historical places of origin!

Our stop -over in Stratford on Avon was en route to Ironbridge and then Shrewsbury. Along the way we saw lots of castles and medieval places and even visited the remains of an old Roman town just outside Shrewsbury. We could not find a YHA that was right and instead took up a super bargain deal at the Travelodge being a large chain of hotels at the lower end of the star ratings. It was a good stay, however, and worth repeating in future if special prices can be found.

Some pictures capture the time spent here.



First up is Warwick with castle and a long history including this original gateway into the town.

We came across a statue that brought back memories from the wireless in the 1950's.



British champion.

I can recall listening to the fight between Randolph Turpin and Sugar Ray Robinson for the World Middleweight title in 1951. This statue was suitably unveiled by Henry Cooper. Because it was on radio I have never realised that Randolph's father was born in Guyana and that Turpin was the first black British world champion boxer. I will continue to just remember him as a great



Kenilworth Castle takes us back to Elizabeth 1st and the Earl of Leicester, Robert Dudley, in the mid 1500's. Before that Henry 1st (1120's) and 2nd played their part with the fortress being strengthened in the time of King John. It is so easy to name drop when touring around GB.

This little tower was found on top of Shrewsbury Castle and was, perhaps, the earliest form of conservatory. It was a sun room intended for the lady of the castle to pass the time with painting, afternoon tea and the like.



Wroxeter was a Roman site formed initially as a fortress and became Britain's fourth largest city of some 5000 people.

When listening to the audio tour guide one gathers that many positive things flowed from this bit of colonisation and it is worth noting that Helen Zille is embroiled in a similar line of thought in Cape Town and being maligned for it.



We have here the YHA building in Stratford on Avon whose charm contrasts with the modern functionality of the Travelodge in Shrewsbury.

The latter was neat, clean, and comfortable with an en suite, TV and coffee making facilities. The YHA offered a communal style with lounges and self-catering options.



I feel you have more than enough of castles and medieval places. We need to change the focus.



We do not have a castle in which to paint but the sun did come out on our little patio where Courtney and I had a go at reproducing a still life. You will see that we have to point to the item as it may not be obvious from the paintings themselves!

I have told you that this letter goes to the Old Camdenian's web site but it would be true to say that there has been little mention of these chaps of late. That theme continues again but I have got a little closer by including this picture from yesterday of a lunch meet of some young Old Camden School for Girls that operated from close by to Holloway (Camden County).

I will mention the names as we have found that much interaction has arisen between these schools if for no other reason than social proximity.



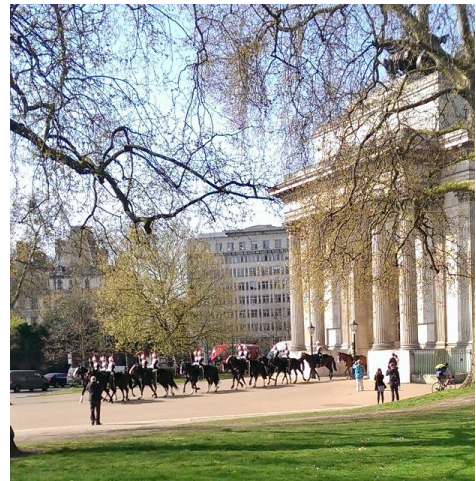
They met at a St. Martin's lane restaurant just up the road from Trafalgar Square. Most of them no longer live in the central areas of London and the location is a neutral spot offering much pre and post lunch possibilities.

From left we have: Francis Nesbit, Paula Lee, Barbara Reder, Cleo Sylvester, Bev Seller (Shearn), Linda Spanner.

I have purposely given their maiden names as these are the ones people might recall from those times around the mid- 1950's to early 1960's. I know, I know, they all look younger.

We travelled into London ourselves a few weeks ago and used our time to visit some places of interest. As the train comes into Victoria the first destination was a short walk up to Hyde Park and the Wellington Arch. I don't think that I have ever been this side of Hyde Park before. But you really should go.

The arch itself is open and is a museum about Wellington but basically centres on the Battle of Waterloo which was won by Wellington (he had lots of help) in 1815. Napoleon was, of course, on the "other" side. As we were walking around we chanced upon this most delightful scene with the household cavalry moving through the arch on their way to the Palace.



Opposite the arch is Apsley House being the home of the Duke of Wellington. A tour of the impressive house followed. Although Wellington is known because of Waterloo he did become Prime Minister as well and the luxurious dining rooms and art galleries provided the backdrop to remind all who entered of his standing and achievement.



Here is the picture you have all wanted to see. Yes, the original Wellington Boot as made especially for Wellington and worn at Waterloo. You will also notice in the bottom left the sword he used (worn might be a better description) at Waterloo.

Napoleon found himself on St Helena and it may be of interest to note that the mail ship from CT that called on the island was discontinued last year because a new airport had been built. It appears that the strong winds encountered on the island has meant that the main airport could not yet be opened and thus more than Napoleon is left stranded.

We are nearly done.

Bev's wrist is progressing and my hip/knee issue was not too bad to stop me playing 18 holes at the local Pedham Place Golf Course. We used the par 3 course that was in super condition and did not permit any excuses for high scores other than oneself.

I have a picture of Gavin teeing off with heavy rain laden clouds and a cold wintry breeze. Four layers of clothing was enough to keep these elements away and ensure an enjoyable round.



I have a tiny bit of space left to talk economics and politics.

I have been a keen investor in the stock exchanges using very small spare money over the years. It has grown to a significant level and hence why it is useful to try and keep an eye on local and global events. I saw that in the Biotech field a company called Biosure was doing well and a prominent recent product was a speedy HIV test kit. This sells for £29.95 per kit which at 18:1 is some R539. For the last few years in SA we undertook a simple health check at the local pharmacy chain (like say Boots in the UK). As Vitality members this was free and included the HIV test with a result within minutes. Perhaps Biosure were testing it out as I also notice that the new plastic card with added security features has also just completed tests in SA. The debit card here has a tap and go offering and thus if one "mislays" it then anyone can use it up to around £30. Imagine the possible downside to this feature in SA.

The markets rallied despite Brexit, elections in Europe and now the UK. The USA market is also on the rise as Trump talks up the potential for more profits. Yet there is this doubt that it cannot all keep going up. A weak pound sees import costs rise and soon inflation will hit the high street and dampen optimism.

The June elections in the UK should see May strengthen her hand in order to take on the Brexit negotiations.

Immigration, and the control of it, becomes a big election matter in Europe with millions of people around Europe wondering what their future holds. The Brexit negotiations will go on for up to two years although all parties seem clear that the position of EU workers in the UK and UK workers within the EU need urgent attention. But they are negotiating chips at the moment and need to wait for the game to play out. For me the one big plus factor is the quality of the negotiating teams and their likely inclusion of a pragmatic middle of the road solution. But we will see.

If I read the news in SA correctly then Zuma and his pals are being driven into a corner as opposition to their perceived "criminal" ways takes to the streets as mass rallies are set up. Ratings agencies finally downgraded SA to less than investment grade following the reshuffle of the cabinet and sacking of the Finance Minister amongst others. But perhaps there is nothing more dangerous than a cornered and wounded lion. The Presidential elections take place in Dec and who will be the new leader of the ANC?

That has to be it.

Good bye from me and farewell from Bev.

Alan Shearn