

## The English Letter

Dec 2018

The last news from us was in early October and the thought was made that we would all know so much more about Brexit by the time of this note. It has been quite a remarkable time as the debate rages on. Watching the live broadcasts from parliament and other debates makes for gripping viewing (I realise a lot of people may not share this opinion). There is this splendid civility as protagonists lock horns across the floor. Such wonderful turn of phrase and piercing commentary.

In the midst of all this stands the calm, determined and resilient Theresa May. Hard working and seemingly honest and conscientious. She soldiers on in her endeavours to provide the exit from the EU that the majority of people within the UK voted for in the referendum. My goodness what a task she has accepted. A no win hospital pass.

One might argue that our arrival in June 2016 could not have been worse.

But we were returning from the battered economy and shocking political environment of South Africa which provided a perspective on what was unfolding before us in the UK. We once more watch history being made as we did with the rise of democracy and a new nation in SA.

Perhaps we will go to another “peoples vote” and this time my vote of Remain can be made in time. It might just tip the scales.

Wedding bells were metaphorically sounding on Oct 18 as Ben and Jade tied the knot in the luxurious atmosphere of Chilston Park Hotel wedding venue near Maidstone.



We were all delightfully spoilt at the sumptuous event with an overnight stay to finish matters off. In an ironic manner the newlyweds flew off to.....South Africa for their honeymoon with Mauritius added on.



I am aware that as each year passes that I am likely to repeat functions and events that are of an annual nature. One such activity is the Old School Reunion which takes the form of a lunch at the school together with AGM and tour of the enlarged site. A free bar provided the grounds for meeting up with old faces and names. This note does reach a few Old Camdenians but they have been well covered with a full OC Lunch/AGM report and pics which are all available on the Old Camdenian's web site. And so I have included a shot of the background people who cater and run this big multi course lunch. Well done.



A few days later we once more encountered the day when Goy Fawkes failed in his effort to blow up the Houses of Parliament and King James I, on Nov 5<sup>th</sup> 1605. The religious origins were lost in the bonfire and fireworks display at the Swanley recreation grounds. A rain free mild evening was much appreciated, although the curry at the Clove provided a fitting end to a fiery evening.

The CA parted company with our Swanley manager as she moves up the ladder to take on a more senior role. My voluntary work continues each Tuesday together with a lot of support training. The complex benefits system remains a maze to me as I search for some focussing vision on which to hang payments. In the fog of it all there exists a real opportunity for people and families to abuse the rules in a spirit seemingly outside of the intention to support and then motivate people back to work.



A farewell dinner at the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Lion Hotel in Farningham was caught on camera.

As you can see we have rather speedily arrived at the month of December which provides some respite from Brexit and other global matters of a darker nature.

It is the time of goodwill.

It is also the time of Xmas markets but little in the way ringing tills. This is not due to a falloff in commercialism but purely because so much is done on line or with silent plastic cards. It is normal for us to journey to one of these Xmas Market Towns for some festive spirit and to use the trip to visit a place that we wanted to go to in any case. This year it was Bath.

We have been using Travelodge as our value for money overnight stop. Andrea is an active researcher for special deals and if you are on the ball then a night here can cost no more than £15



impressive Pulteney Bridge.

pppn. Good sized room, TV, coffee/tea facilities and en suite. The deals tend to be a bit away from the town so a car is necessary. Park and ride is, in any case, the way to go and so off we went for what to me seemed like my first trip to this ancient Roman town with its` Georgian architecture. We are seen here by the Avon with the





Andrea and Courtney went off to tour the Roman Baths but Bev and I decided to visit the Jane Austen Centre. This was in Gay Street where Jane lived for a while. The city was well used in such novels as *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion*.

The day was spent looking around the city, Xmas shops and stalls, with a drink overlooking the ice rink and a



welcome pause at the Abbey to hear Christmas carols and a short service. The Abbey was packed, being the same situation as experienced when in Bury St. Edmonds in 2017. Despite the secular nature of British society they flock in large numbers to hear Christmas Carols in the hallowed confines of historic sectarian places.



The Christmas activities continued with a [Secret Santa buffet evening](#) at Swanley on Dec 22. Andrea had done all the catering and the evening was full of conversation with a few empty bottles by the end. We have a group pic of us all and



the tree shot has Stephanie playing Santa as Jemima watches over the flock.

Along came Dec 23 and we were jollyng around again. Melanie, Alex and Mackenzie were down from Ilkley to spend Xmas in Oxford and this provided the opportunity for both of us to meet up in central London. The core event was a [Carols by Candlelight performance at the Barbican Theatre](#). The cast was a Choir, Mozart Festival orchestra, soloist and the whole huge auditorium packed full of some 2000 people, all willing to sing.

But before that we split into two groups. Bev and Melanie met at Moorgate to attend an art exhibition whereas Courtney and myself headed off to Oxford Street and then eventually joining Alex and Mackenzie in the Leicester Square Xmas market.

I had suggested a walk to the Barbican using a meandering route past some of London's iconic sites.

With all in agreement we headed off.

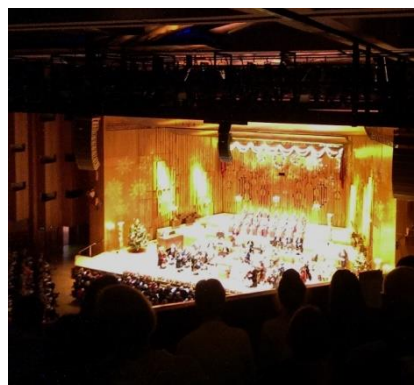
Soho, China Town, Trafalgar Square, Westminster, London Eye, Festival Hall, South Bank Xmas market, buskers along the way, Millennium Bridge, St. Pauls and then the Barbican complex. According to cell phones apps we had managed around 16 kms. and my legs knew it.





I have some pics of the Barbican theatre although that of the stage and performers did not work out well.

The Barbican complex was opened in 1982 and is one of the largest art centres in Europe with 3 theatre venues, art exhibition area, cinemas and bars and restaurants. The whole Barbican Estate including residential apartments is built with concrete and replaces the structures left after heavy bombing in WWII.



The architecture seems to have resulted in a new design term called Brutalist

And The Barbican was even voted as the ugliest building in a poll in 2003. But it's maze of walkways takes you into a whole world of the arts. My first visit but certainly not the last.



The day was still not done as we headed off to Islington and the now trendy Angel area (who would have believed this in the 1950's?). Melanie had booked a table at the Mem and Laz Mediterranean restaurant being a lovely delight of a friendly place to eat and drink.

And so it is now December 24 2018.

What will 2019 offer up? It is all a bit of a mess out there right now but first up for us will be a trip to Snowdonia to see in the new year after a day in on Christmas Day when we have Ken coming over to join us.

But those tales will be relayed in the next exciting edition of The English letter. Ha!

All that is left is for us to wish you all a splendid Christmas time and that 2019 will be a healthy and kind one to you all and especially those who are thinking about or have actually taken the decision to journey back to the UK at this time of uncertainty yet history making moment.

An adventure. Another adventure. Add it all to life's journey.

Love and best wishes from.

Alan and Bev