

The English Letter

Sept 10 2017

Helô (Good morning),

We have been to Wales, but more about that later.

Andrea and Courtney have been off camping around the West Country and the school year finished with rewards and a concert. But these are their stories to tell although a few quick pictures cover it here.



Academic and sporting.

Solo at the concert.



King Arthur and Excalibur at Tintagel.

Gavin and Stephanie moved house from Orpington to Greenhithe with this view of the Thames and Queen Elizabeth Bridge.



We have been **TV watching** recently with lots of sport including the London World Athletics Games. Team GB managed to achieve the 6 medals that had been the minimum aim although there were a few fourth places. England cricketers have done well but my team Arsenal have started so poorly, again. The ladies did their part as well with super rugby tennis and cricket results.

The crowd involvement at the London Stadium so clearly underlined the view that those “on stage” are representing ourselves and the image of the country/region. When Mo wins then we win and when Arsenal lose then a chunk of North London and myself loses.

On the **political** front the Brexit negotiations are underway with at least two years of uncertainty. The German elections are due soon but no other split in the EU has opened up as yet. For me the best outcome would have been a “better” deal for the UK within the EU. Theresa May hangs on as too does Jacob Zuma in SA although the Kenyan elections need to be re-run. The markets remain fairly buoyant even though there does not seem to be a lot to celebrate as consumption led growth would by its` nature seem to be a one way street.

But if one looks at places like Africa, Asia and S. America then there is huge potential growth ahead for this planet. That assumes that N.Korea and Trump do not manage to destroy it.

Jacob Zuma survived a no confidence debate (8th) but with around 26 ANC MP's voting against him. The local coalitions are under strain and especially so in our old city of Port Elizabeth. In the meantime the DA hold on to some of the biggest cities in SA. Eyes now are on the ANC election for President later this year.

Much too much text-let us have some more pictures.

We have had some more visitors.

First up were some South African friends of Andrea who came in from Ireland and stayed with us for 3 nights after a bit of camping in Sussex. Courtney's ex school friend from Clarendon, Olivia, shared one bedroom on a blow up mattress. Debbie and Andrew took over the dining area with other camping beds with Philippa and friend pitching a small tent in the front garden!



After that we saw the arrival in England of Di who had come to see family and her new great- grand -daughter. Di was staying with Trudi but we managed a few days together including a braai, come tapas lunch on our patio.

This shot captures 4 generations of the Kennet family with Andrea out of view. The weather stayed clear for this multi course offering from Andrea.

A visit to the local Roman Villa and remains of Eynesford Castle were focal points for another day together.

Whilst this was going on Di was moving from PE to Pretoria in a joint undertaking with Sarah.

Perhaps a good time for us to journey to South Wales.

The last time I drove through **Aberfan** was in 1967 being a year after the Aberfan disaster.

It did not seem right that we should visit this area without remembering that terrible day by way of another stop at Aberfan. As it happens Courtney had done a school project and used the Aberfan story as her key feature and thus we all had a reason to be there.

It was a sunny day with the village sitting quietly in the Taff valley. There was no sign of coal mining or the many dumps that had built up since the mine was opened in 1869. Although these reminders of a time gone by had been removed the Bryntaf Cemetery told another story.

Beyond the old graves one can see rows of white headstones that appear as if an army is lined up for battle. But these are, in fact, the fallen.

Primary school children, teachers and others numbering 144 (116 children) who had perished at Pantglas Primary School on the fateful day when the mine dumps finally slid down into Aberfan.



Negligence by the National Coal Board and attempted cover ups with little consequences plus miserly compensation grants kept this story alive to recent times.

From this sombre scene we do need to continue our travels in South Wales.

Our base would be the Brecon Beacons YHA but a stop off in **Cardiff** permitted our first visit to this city. Tiger Bay has undergone much renewal as industry gave way to tourism and a more cultural theme.

A boat ride to the new Barrage permitted a beach side picnic with views of the bay and the Millennium Centre and Stadium.



A Park and Ride bus made light of the visit and we spent the best part of our first day here, but clearly Cardiff deserved a much longer stay next time.

By early evening we had arrived at the **YHA** where Andrea had booked a great bargain Pod Hut. As usual we self-catered and were able to use all the facilities of the YHA together with many others including a 30 person ramblers club who had just arrived from Ireland. The people who stay at the YHA's continue to please, with visitors from many backgrounds and lots of stories to tell.



The Irish headed out early the next day and tackled the hike to Pen Y Fan directly from the YHA which sat close to the base of this highest mountain in south Wales.

But our first day was focused elsewhere. First it was a 5km run for Courtney in Merthyr Tydfil (second lady home) and then off to catch the first **steam train** out of Pant Station. This narrow gauge line wound its way deep into the Brecon Beacons with two stops along the way.



Those in Port Elizabeth will be interested to hear that the driver told me that this train was saved and returned to the UK as it was standing unused from the **Apple Express**. In Wales it was returned to pristine condition, pulling in the tourists and making money and creating jobs for local people.



The first picture shows Pen Y Fan in the background.

At Pontsticill we took on the 12 km or so walk around the lake/reservoir with picnic lunch along the way.

The weather was just right and it was good to relax back with a cold beer on the veranda of the YHA and hear all the

stories of the Irish group who we could see return from the hills above us.

And so we come to **Pen Y Fan**.

At 74 with various new joints and some more groaning it was an undertaking that offered a good degree of challenge. It was not clear that my knees would take it. Bev opted out and so it was a very early start for the 3 of us.



Here we are at the bottom, looking pretty fresh. The mountain was ahead with very few afoot at this early hour of around 7 am.

Slowly but surely we made our way up as one hill top gave way to another further on!

The ladies held back to my pace and voila we had arrived at the peak.

In my youth this would have been a relatively easy walk up a very high hill but for me now it was a mountain that had been conquered.

Three generations at the top.



Our day was not over as Andrea had more plans as we all went off to the **Llangynidr Show.**



The pictures tell it all with lots more events and stalls from food, wool spinning to hawks.

It was a joy to attend this very Welsh country show.



A visit to **Brecon** took us to the George Hotel for dinner which turned out to be another value for money Wetherspoon. The weather permitted a casual and well deserved dinner in the outside courtyard.

We are near the end of this chapter but I must take you first down to **Dorset** to meet up with ex work colleague Carol and ex PE friend Judith.

Carol played host and general tour guide from her house in Poole.

A road trip down winding lanes led us to **Milton Abbas**.



We enjoyed a lovely lunch and wine at the Hambros Arms Hotel. Bev is here with Carol.

And then us both with a view into Milton Abbas.



Poole has a lovely working quay that immediately links up with the old town, shops and restaurants with a pedestrian route to the new shopping mall, bus station and trains. Not far away is Bournemouth with a vibrant city and beachfront.



A boat ride from the harbour across to the river Frome and then up to picturesque Wareham was a great day out, finished with the essential fish and chip meal.

Pam joined us on the boat and a quick trip to their house allowed us to see John with a quick WI v England bit of TV viewing followed by question time using one of John`s Wisden`s.



Our final stop was to Dorchester to meet up with Judith. She has done a lot to her quirky cottage that seems to get bigger with each visit as clever furnishing and the roof conversion adds real and perceived space. The hours went by quickly that only left time for a single drink at the local pub and hearing her news from a recent holiday in South Africa.

Well that is it really except I do tend to find some notable statue in the places we visit and those who may recall or were part of my old 20th North London Scout troop may know that the Boy Scouts started down there in Brownsea Island Poole.

It was 110 years ago when Baden Powell started the whole thing. He was a hero in England following his command at Mafeking that held off the siege for 217 days during the Anglo Boer war in South Africa in 1900.



The values of trust, loyalty, friendship, kindness, resourcefulness, respect, healthy life, courage, compassion, citizenship and perseverance amongst others, make good reading in this age when many of those features are in short supply.

I could talk sports and things but I will leave that for another day.

I hope you could relate to some of these travels and places visited.

Goodbye from me and cheers from Bev.

Alan Shearn

