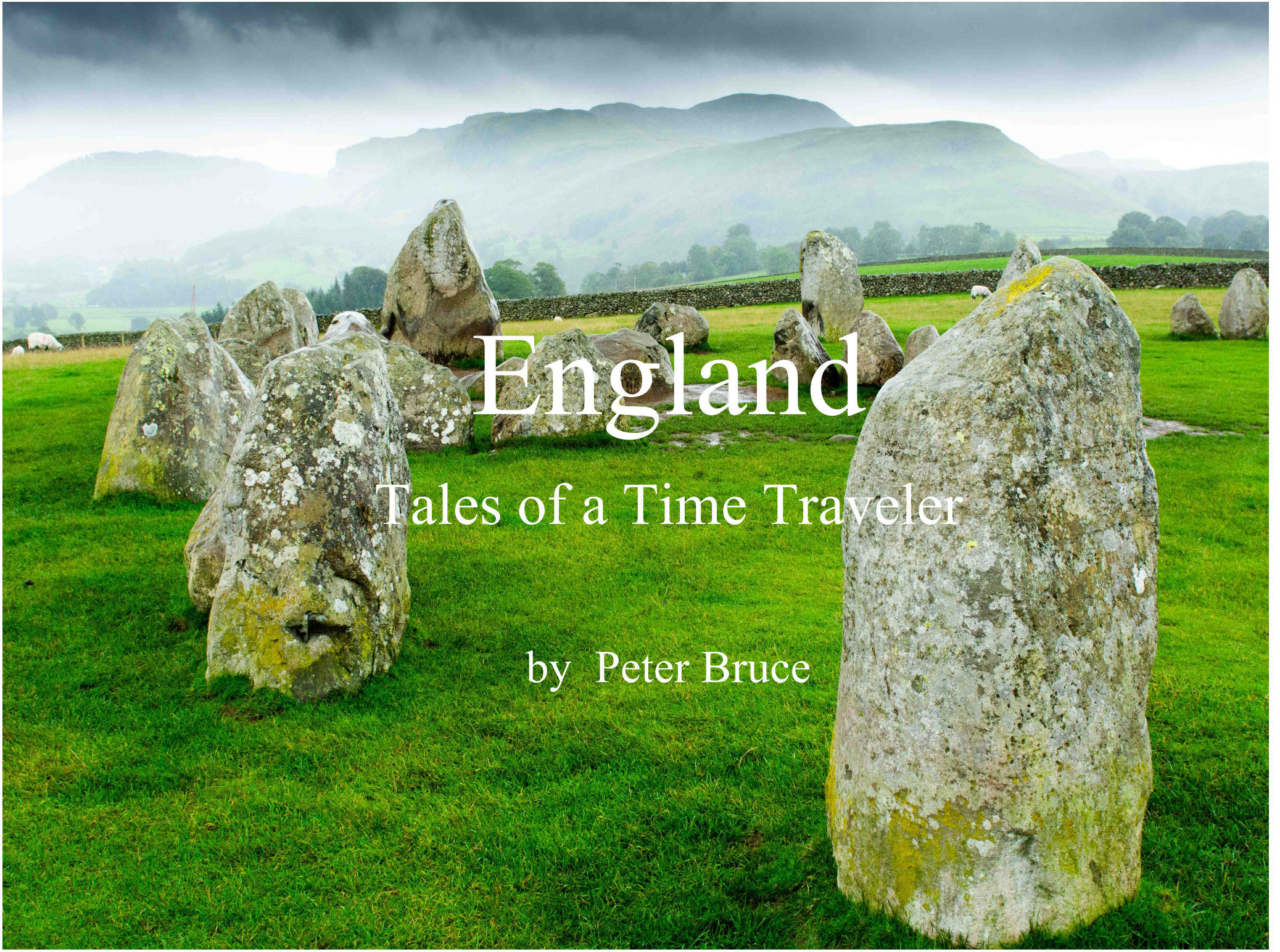
England
Tales of a Time Traveler
by Peter Bruce

Dedication

To you Randi – you who supports me, endures me and loves me.

You are a gift from the Gods.

Acknowledgements

A huge thank you to my friend and editor Joanne Will whose writing skills and political acumen keep me on the right side (not Trump right) of propriety and kindness. Almost.

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Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Introduction

Why England?

Why not England? My wife Randi and I are from there. Well, not exactly. My parents were English; Randi's ancestors left England for the American colonies in 1630. But our roots are in England and they're deep, almost 900 years deep. Visiting England was a chance to see a country my ancestors called home, to learn something about the lives they led and the challenges they faced, perhaps tread in their very steps and maybe, just maybe, feel their presence.

Sleuthing For Stories

I'm a genealogist. Ah hell, that's a lie. My cousin John is a genealogist. My forté is copying John's hard work and passing it off as mine. I'm a dreamer, a romantic. Facts are good – the when and where of my people. But for me, stories are better. I want to know who my people were as people, what they did for a living, how they lived, the times in which they lived, their adventures, missteps, achievements and loves. I want to know their stories.

Travel As Discovery

Travel, I find, is a great teacher, if I'm listening. Travel reminds me that people are, at the heart of things, the same the world over. It has always been so. Parents everywhere rock their child to sleep, complain about their teenagers, and feel the joy of holding a grandchild. They aspire to a comfortable life, do good for others, leave a legacy, love their family

and friends, complain about the neighbours, and argue over money and their in-laws. There is comfort in that -- comfort in knowing that I am part of a greater whole, the human community, comfort in understanding that we are indeed all one.

I must learn to slow down, engage with the people of a place. When we know something about a place's history and culture, when we've chatted with shopkeepers, talked politics in the pub, discovered something about the person sitting next to us on the bus, we add a depth, a richness to travel that a river cruise or another venue cannot replace. There is little substance for me in staring through the rain-streaked glass of a tour bus watching a country and its people swish by. I must connect to understand.

I like to think of travel as a state of mind or better yet, a way of being in the world – wide-eyed, inquisitive, accepting. If we bring those qualities along when we travel, we invite others to engage with us, befriend us. The universe provides; we grow richer. For that matter, why not be that person every day, be that traveler right in our own backyard – with our partner, family and friends?

Travel in Your Old Backyard

Travel doesn't have to be exotic. Flying off to Katmandu or Timbuktu (no longer recommended for non-Islamists) sounds exciting (guaranteed at the latter) but the thrill you derive may not be more satisfying than visiting the neighbourhood of your childhood. Better yet, you get to come back. We can't all do that. Your childhood home might be on another continent; it might have been razed and redeveloped; or it might require time and/or money you don't have.

But if you can get there, consider it. Travel back in time. Are the places I knew as a child still there? Does lemon balm still grow among the Hamilton's shrubs?

Do water skeets still live in the big ditch on 11th Street? And rats? Is the tree house still 25 feet up in the Favelle's Douglas fir? Is the ramshackle cottage of ancient and kindly Mrs.Trail still hidden behind the undergrowth? What of the sweet long grass behind Donnie's house where I lay on warm summer days? Or the rafters of Sharon's garage where I hid from an enraged man whose car was mysteriously crushed by a flying boulder? What of huge Ghost Hall perched high among the trees, its three kindly spinsters, and the rank smell of must and decay when they opened the door? Or Goat Trail, the narrow rock ledge six terrifying feet above the forest floor in Leyland Park.

I've returned to my childhood town many times. The memories flood back as I idle the car down mainstreet. There's the cop shop; remember the cells? And there's the fish shop with its tile walls, iced counter, the fresh smell of the ocean and the wide-eyed stares of ling cod and salmon. And there's Mr. Munn's laundry. And the Herrington's flower shop.

Julie lived over there in that alley with her mum. There were little shops where that parking lot is. Shane lived above one of them with his rough, chain-smoking photographer dad. Down there was the Lions Gate Times where I stuffed flyers into newspapers for a paltry sum. And right there was the empty Hollyburn Theatre where my buds and I kept five cops busy for an hour hunting us down. Remember pretty Miss Middleton with the bright red lipstick who sold admission tickets in the booth – the one who rented our bedroom downstairs and entertained men in the evenings to make 'ends meet.' She was nice; her stay was short.

Not all our memories of childhood are pleasant. Unhappy memories might arise too. Yet perhaps there is value in recalling them – a chance to let go of what cannot be changed, return to what can be changed and more fully appreciate what is.

Chance

Have you ever stopped to consider how some tiny decision on your part changed the course of your life? I have, and I've come to realize that my life IS the result of many small decisions, and not much more – decisions made by me as well as decisions made by others I've never met.

In 1925, the chocolate business started by my father's family went broke. Had it thrived (as it did in the hands of my mother's family) they would have remained in England and my father would not have met my mother in Canada. My mother would not have been in Canada had her brother not been blinded in one eye in an accident, prompting a family move to Canada where he could find a suitable occupation like farming. As it turned out, it was engineering. And if my mother and father had not met, chances are, you would be doing something else right now which might have brought you fame, fortune and the happiness you deserve. Not to be.

Thus, one begins to see how decisions, which may seem inconsequential at the time, even go unnoticed, can immensely impact your subsequent personal life and all the lives that flow from you. Indeed, every action, large or small, reverberates across society and through time. Serendipity shapes the world, for good or for bad, despite the best efforts of human beings to plan things otherwise.

The Three Roads

And that brings me to the matter of how we choose to travel. There are three ways to travel as I see it. The first way is the 'One Road Approach' that calls for establishing destination choice criteria, researching the options, making a Plan B, and creating a detailed itinerary. It takes months. Yet there is great comfort in knowing where one will spend the night, with whom, ("With me," says Randi) and where one will be between 10:30 and 10:45 the next morning.

The second way to travel is the 'Any Road Approach' favoured by my son Robin, an inveterate traveler, who, when the urge strikes, stuffs a few items in a backpack just large enough to house my travel socks, and within the week, he's gone. Not for 2 weeks, for five months.

The more I travel, the more I think he's got it right, at least right in good measure, for despite my best laid plans, I (we) invariably end up in the same place as Robin anyway, with no plan or a plan in tatters. You see the plan just never works. A good chunk of it anyway. Stuff comes up, 'unexpected contingencies.' -- the two museums planned for Tuesday morning are swapped out for a long breakfast; the cathedrals do not allow photography; we can't find the venue (that's a big one); we eat up the time for two venues looking for a 'toilet' and when we find it, are obliged to spend another 30 minutes rounding up the 40 pence entry fee; and an evening we might have spent lingering in a quaint English pub is instead spent in bed…sleeping.

Furthermore, we can merrily plan a trip -- where we go, where we stay and what we do when we get there. However, if we haven't been there before, it's all a craps shoot, isn't it? We never know what we're in for until we get there. In the split second that it takes to click 'Submit' on the sign-up form, we are at the mercy of the universe. It may take us to a joyful place; it may not. But wherever it takes us, we're in for the ride.

Thus, struggle as we might to design and orchestrate our lives, we are in the hands of a greater power. There is no escaping it. We might just as well go with the flow and let serendipity whisk us into the magical world of the unexpected. "Fine," says my good wife, "but at 4:30 sharp, I take my bra off and pick up my book." That could be interesting.

There is a third way to travel: the Middle Road Approach. The Middle Road Approach calls for making a plan. It does not require one to stick to it.

The tricky bit is accommodations that, for places in high demand like Britain and the Continent, need to be booked well in advance. That limits your 'in the moment' options to hotels and to outfits like booking.com which sometimes allow cancellations with full refund within days of check-in. Accommodation aside, though, the rest could and in my growing view, should be up for grabs when you get there. By allowing who you meet, how you feel and what you bump into to dictate your itinerary, your visit in all likelihood will become a real adventure. The Middle Road Approach is the one we took on this trip, not because we wisely chose it but because the universe chose it for us ... on Day 1.

I'm learning to 'go with the flow,' to let go of the plan when sticking with it subtracts from the adventure. I'm learning to treat my Great Plan as a guideline, even as a point of departure from which the Great Adventure will unfold as it will, growing here, shrinking there, adjusting to whim and circumstance.

In This Book

This book is part travelogue (an odd one at that) and part time machine. My wife Randi and I travel to England for the first time where we explore the haunts of our ancestors, enjoying 'what is' today and pondering 'what was' in days gone by.

It is also about the capacity of serendipity to render our plans useless. The point is that all of it — the stuff that should have been and was, the stuff that should have been and didn't happen and the stuff that happened that was unexpected — IS the travel experience. All of it is grand.

WARNING

Reading this is the equivalent of digesting the travelogue version of War and Peace. It is suitable only for the retired, the un-employed, road maintenance personnel and advisors to Donald Trump -- people with copious amounts of time on their hands who view reading this as an opportunity to put off waxing the car or having sex or waxing the car while having sex.

So put together a ham sandwich, a glass or two of wine (hell, bring the bottle), grab some overnight gear and head for the recliner. This could take a while.

Broadway, Gloucestershire

Bath, Somerset: a UNESCO World Heritage City

Whitby, Yorkshire

Whitby, Yorkshire

Gatwick to York

WestJet found Gatwick Airport, just south of London where it's been for a good long time. We found the washroo...uh, the toilets. The One Road Approach called for us to go first to York, then move counter clockwise around England, arriving back in London where we would stay for a week. In total, we'd be in England for 23 days. Yup, we'd be on the move, all right. No time to dally on the beach at Brighton or surf the curlers in Cornwall. There were landscapes to see, people to meet, villages to wander, a thousand years of history to uncover, friends and ancestors to visit and all of it, to capture in photos.

York it was. But how to get there? I had the train tickets, I'd plotted the steps and estimated times. What I didn't yet know was that the devil lay waiting in the detail. Indeed, the devil would be our travel companion.

It's a bit of a trek to York. It's tucked away in the northeast corner of England. Although by Canadian standards, the distance is hardly notable. It takes under 3 hours to drive there from London, the same time it takes me to drive on Vancouver Island from Victoria, where I live, to Courtenay. If you drove the length of Vancouver Island one way, you would have covered the distance from London to York and back to London again.

The real challenge in getting to York is to clear customs at Gatwick Airport in a timely way, catch a train into London's St Pancras Station, find King's Cross Station nearby, validate your train tickets, find the right platform, the right train at the right time, the right car and the right seat and sit on it, ideally before it departs. We did so with a great deal of running about like headless chickens and had little time to spare.
Trains are a quick and painless way to travel in Britain. It's

because they endure no roundabouts; it's A to B as the crow flies. Although their average speed ranges between 95 and 105 kilometres per hour, they can reach speeds of 210 kilometres per hour. British commercial trains are another animal. Maximum speeds for them run to 300 kilometres per hour and 400 kilometres per hour for Maglev trains. Magnetic Levitation trains do away with conventional wheels and track and use powerful magnets to minimize friction by suspending the train above its guide. Fascinating, eh?

Three seats down and across the aisle from us was a woman who believed she was still in her office. For the first two hours of the trip, the entire car was treated to the inner workings of her job. She was on the blower, at full volume, non-stop. One woman, who apparently could take no more, moved to another car; the rest didn't seem bothered. Perhaps they were all Yorkies heading home and that's just how Yorkies talk. Certainly, she herself was not bothered. I did ponder inquiring with the conductor as to whether they still had open cars at the rear of the train where social misfits could wail into the wind with abandon. Ah, but we Canadians don't complain; we grumble beneath our breath.

York appeared at the end of the line precisely on time at 4:47pm. Had I looked closely, I might have seen train spotters on the platform, clicking their stopwatches at the exact moment the train's wheels came to a halt, then penning an entry into their little black books, disappointed perhaps, that they had failed again to catch out the rail service. I did see the train spotters later. They were chatting over coffee in a rail platform cafe, debating the best routes to get from Huffington to Pough Corner.

York, Yorkshire

York, Yorkshire

York, Yorkshire

York, Yorkshire

York and the North York Moors

We rolled our baggage along the platform with the half-hearted energy of new arrivals thinking ‘what now?’ “It’s an easy 20 minute walk to our digs.” I said to Randi. I had plotted a route and calculated the time. It pays to plan. “Which way?” she replied. Well, how should I know, said I very much to self. I’ve never been here. Boldly, I pronounced “This way.”

It was a ‘hither and yon’ adventure, the first of many on this trip. We left the station by the front door, which seemed reasonable, except it was the back door we needed. Like lost dogs, we wandered the streets, asking the way from sequential good Samaritans, retracing our steps, consulting Google maps. By the time we turned the key at 45 County House, twenty minutes had become two hours. There are times when having the name ‘Brrruce’ is a distinct liability, or more to the point, being married to one. “Aghh, Mr Brrruce. Hail a cab next time, ya cheap jock.“

If you ask a Londoner if he’s ever visited York, he’ll likely reply “What for?” or “Where is it?” or “No time.” It’s not that they’re down on Northerners, they’re just caught up with being a Londoner. A good number of Northerners, on the other hand, have a firm view of Londoners that is less than admiring. In a 2013 poll, 42% of Northerners held a low opinion of Londoners, one percent more than the Scots even and much more than the rest of the UK. Yet only 28% of Londoners thought less of Northerners, possibly because they had never given a thought to anything more North-ish than the Manchester United, so how could they think poorly of folks they knew nothing about?

The animosity of the North for Londoners is summed up in

this popular Yorkshire joke:

A Yorkshire farmer see's a bloke drinking from his stream & shouts,
"Ey up cock! Tha dun wanna be drinkin watta frm theer, it's full o hoss piss an cow shite".
The man says "I'm from London. Can you speak a bit slower please".
The farmer replies "IF-YOU-USE-TWO-HANDS-YOU-WON'T-SPILL-ANY!"

Yorkies, much as they'd like to, have hardly cornered the market on English wit. Londoners are not slow to rebut:
A general inspecting troops in Hampshire ordered the parade to don gas masks. He paused opposite a northern soldier. Pointing to the eyepiece of his respirator, he inquired: "Soldier, where is your anti-mist?" Don't know Sir" came the reply" Think she's oop with Uncle Albert in Oldam."

Where was I? Ah yes, Yorkshire. It is by far the largest county in England, although two of them will fit comfortably on Vancouver Island. At least the land will; the Yorkies will not. They are a bawdy lot, loud spoken and opinionated, frugal and proud, and as full of fun and as kind-hearted as one could find anywhere – provided of course that you don't wear a red rose on your jersey to footy matches or hail from London.

Things were fairly peaceful in the days when Celts controlled Yorkshire. Then the Romans came in 43 AD and shook things up. Here's the thing: when the Romans come to your neck of the woods they typically don't knock on the first tree. They knock the trees down and use the wood to build a massive house smack dab in the middle of your neighbourhood. Then they come calling – house to house, to get acquainted.

I'm just guessing now, but when a phalanx of highly trained soldiers wearing head to foot armour and holding spears behind an impenetrable wall of shields halts in perfect unison atyour door, it would give you pause for thought. My

thought is that one would quickly find a soft spot for the newcomers and invite them in for dinner. That they did…and like boorish guests the Romans overstayed, for four hundred years. By the late fourth century, Rome was rapidly losing its grip and by the early fifth century they had left England forever.

For two hundred years the Celts and the Angles happily filled the vacuum left by the Romans until the arrival of a new top gun – the Vikings from Denmark and later Norway.

Yorkshire folks thought they knew something about strong-minded intruders. The Romans had meant business. If you met a Roman century on a country road, you likely wouldn't stop to chat; you'd run for the nearest copse and lay low. But if you came face to face with a horde of screaming Vikings with descriptive names like Eric the Bloodaxe and Bjorn the Skullcleaver, chances are you would simply shit yourself on the spot and stand there, jaw in hand, until one of them lived up to their family name.

In this way, the Vikings took over a large swath of northern and central England and called it the Kingdom of Jorvik (thus York). For a hundred years, Vikings with anger management issues hung out in England until the locals finally said "This is ridiculous," and kicked them out.

Next came the Normans who were actually Vikings who had forgotten they were Vikings. They were Vikings with a difference. The Normans had completed therapy, quelled their anger issues and learned to use their brains more than their reproductive gear.

The Normans were the new Romans. They rapidly built hundreds of large stone castles that served as bases to suppress rebels and control the land. The Normans never left. They just became the new fabric upon which the tapestry of England would be woven for centuries to come.

Those centuries passed. There were more hardships and wars – the Great Famine of 1315-1322, the Black Death of 1348-1349 that killed one third of the population, the Wars

of the Roses in the 1400s, the English Civil War of 1642-1651, and multiple foreign wars before and after including the Crusades, the Hundred Years War, two World Wars and the Great Depression. There you have it – one thousand years of “I never said that.” “Yes you did, just now.” “No I never.” “Yes you did...”

Back to 2018. York is a fortified town, that is, it is (or was), surrounded by a wall, significant remnants of which survive today and can be walked. Inside the wall is the old town, where lie all the interesting venues for tourists, notably the cathedral known as Yorkminster and the Shambles, a fabulous and quaint medieval neighbourhood filled with pubs, eateries, boutiques, hotels in period conversions, 18th century government buildings, gardens and museums. The entire area can be walked from any side to the other in twenty minutes. Car traffic is light and limited to people with business within the walls. Everyone else walks and rides bikes.

Our lodging was just outside the city walls in an 18th century hospital conversion. It is a stone three story Georgian structure called County House. It suited us perfectly. Just inside the front door of County House on the wall to the right is a plaque with the names of the donors who contributed the capital to build it.

These were the days before income tax when all major non-military expenditures were underwritten by the good graces of the wealthy. On the plaque was a Dr. William Richardson, probably a relative of mine, as the Richardsons of our family hailed from Yorkshire. Did he work in this hospital 150 years ago, walk in the room in which we slept?

Time to move on, I’m afraid. In three days, we did a lot – took a walking tour of York, visited Yorkminster and the National Train Museum (fabulous), learned about the Romans, Vikings and chocolate, toured the North York Moors, passed through the little village of Great Ayton where Captain James Cook was raised, visited Whitby on the coast, and rode a steam train from Whitby to Pickering.

Villages in the North York Moors, Yorkshire

Whitby, Yorkshire

Helmsley, North York Moors, Yorkshire

Helmsley, North York Moors, Yorkshire

Whitby, Yorkshire

Goathland, North York Moors, Yorkshire

Quakers

I am not a religious man. Indeed, I abhor organized religions for the grief they have brought and continue to bring to this planet. Yet I make repeated references in this book to the Quakers. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, for three hundred fifty years, my mother's family was largely Quakers and thus I have a vested interest in learning about them. Secondly, the Quakers in my view are worthy of honouring for the astonishing amount of social reform that they were instrumental in bringing about at the cost of much heartache to themselves. So it is curiosity and admiration, not an intention to proselytize, that brings me to speak of them here.

My mother's extended family knew the streets of old York well. Indeed, they knew the streets of cities and towns all over England well – York, Worcester, Birmingham, Lancaster, Gloucester, Cornwall and London. They were Irish too, with roots in Dublin, Belfast, Limerick and Cork. They were Quakers and deeply involved in social reform.

In the 1600s, there was growing unrest among commoners over the wealth, power and dominance of the Protestant Church. These 'non-conformists' were losing the faith in increasing numbers -- enough to be seen as a threat by the establishment. They were heavily persecuted and, routinely prosecuted – their animals, crops and lands were confiscated, and many were imprisoned, some for years on end; some died in prison. In the early days, Quakers were obliged to hold clandestine meetings in a member's home, taking the chance that neighbours would not report them.

By the 18th century, persecution was more limited to constraints on what a Quaker could do for a living. They could not hold public office or work in the military or clergy

(nor would they). This, as it happened, served them well, for it required them to make a living as merchants, craftsmen, educators, inventors and scientists. Many became wealthy.

Quakers married within the Quaker community and Quaker businesses collaborated for mutual gain. They were devoted to their faith that called them to live a life of integrity, devotion directly to God, and hard work. Their businesses were renowned for quality and fairness and thrived accordingly. By the advent of the Industrial Revolution, Quakers were an established merchant class and quickly realized the potential that lay in mass production. My family made chocolates (the Rowntrees of York, the Cadbury's of Birmingham and the Fry's). They manufactured woolens, cottons, beds and furniture, and were clothiers, tailors and silversmiths. Many owned real estate and lived in lavish homes with cooks, maids, gardeners, governesses and chauffeurs.

Yet wealthy or not, Quakers were devoted to their religious commitment to serve the community – not just the Quaker community that required little help, but the community-at-large. During the Irish potato famine of the 1840s, my Irish Quakers were on the streets of Dublin, Belfast, Limerick and Cork, operating daily soup kitchens that kept many from death's door. Fellow Quakers lobbied for prison reform (Elizabeth Fry), the cessation of press-ganging and child labour, better working conditions in the factories and on ships, the abolition of slavery and equality for women, including the vote. Quakers were, I believe, the most progressive, effective, comprehensive, intractable force for social reform in the western world – ever.

Quakers valued education and educated with values. For hundreds of years, they built and operated their own schools, one of which, Bootham School, continues today in York and is renowned for its quality. Many of my family attended Bootham including Lady Ursula Hicks (nee Fisher-Webb) who, with her husband, Sir John Hicks, contributed immensely to economic theory of the 20th century.

Also schooled at Bootham were Horace, Wilfred and

Christopher Alexander. Horace Alexander (1889-1989) became a teacher, writer, mediator, pacifist and ornithologist. Disturbed by the outbreak of pro-independence violence in India, the Quakers dispatched Horace in 1930 to mediate discussions between the Indian Viceroy, Lord Irwin and Mahatma Gandhi. In 1931, Horace arranged for Gandhi to attend a conference on the issue in London. Following the conference, Horace co-founded the India Conciliation Group, became a fast friend of Mahatma Gandhi and wrote extensively about Gandhi's philosophy. In 1942 Gandhi described Horace as "one of the best English friends India has." When, on the 15th of August, 1947, Indian independence was declared, Horace Alexander was standing by Gandhi's side.

Horace's brother Wilfred (1885-1965) was a noted ornithologist and entomologist. In 1920 Wilfred was hired by an Australian government board to find a solution to Prickly Pear Cactus that was taking over vast areas of subtropical Eastern Australia. Wilfred traveled to North and South America looking for an insect agent that would destroy the invasive species. He returned with an insect called Opuntia that solved the problem.

And there were other remarkable Quakers in my mother's family. Horace and Wilfred's father Joseph Gundry Alexander (1848-1918) was an eminent lawyer in London who took up the cause of stopping the trade in opium that was devastating China. The British government and the opium traders were in no hurry to oblige. They were making fortunes from it, to wit: Jardine, Matheson and Company of Hong Kong and the East India Company. Several notable American families also made fortunes by trading in opium – the Astors, the Forbes, the Russells, the Delanos (Warren Delano was grandfather to Franklin Delano Roosevelt) and the Perkins.

Joseph served as Secretary of the Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade and made a number of fact-finding trips to China to ascertain the nature and extent of the issue. The society's lobbying based on his findings led finally tor the abolition of the opium trade in 1906.

Consider also William Pengelly, the husband of my second great aunt. In the 1850s, William Pengelly, a self-educated geologist, archeologist and educator, gathered indisputable fossil evidence of Darwin's theory in a Cornwall cave. In 1858 the undisturbed Windmill Hill Cavern was discovered. Under the supervision of the Royal Society and the Geological Society, Pengelly and archeologist John Evans exposed an unbroken stalagmite sheet covering the cave floor and beneath it, cave lion and wooly rhinoceros bones together with human-crafted flints. In other words, they had proved the case for the ancient presence of Stone Age man, supported Darwin's theory and thus categorically disproved the biblical theory of the origins of man.

A word too of Sir Ernest Shackleton, the famous Antarctic explorer whose ship, the Endurance, was crushed by the ice in October, 1915. For two years, in the midst of a sea of ice, Shackleton and his crew waited for rescue on a pinnacle of rock called Elephant Island. When all hope of being found was lost, Shackleton and five others sailed 1300 kilometres for help through heavy seas in a jury-rigged lifeboat called the James Caird. Sixteen days later, they made their objective, a tiny dot in the massive Southern Ocean called South Georgia Island. Then, with the barest of clothing, footware and equipment, Shackleton and one other climbed over its ice-covered mountain range and descended to the whaling station on the island's north coast. After a brief rest yet still exhausted, Shackleton guided a Chilean navy steam launch to Elephant Island and brought back all 22 of his crew safely to England. In the early 1920s, Shackleton returned to South Georgia Island on the first leg of another Antarctic expedition. There, ironically, he had a heart attack and died.

Here's a name you'll recognize: George Cadbury (1839-1922). George was the third son of the founder of the famous chocolate manufacturer, John Cadbury. The Cadbury's, the Rowntrees and the Fry's were all Quaker families. George was the uncle of the wife of the brother in law of my great aunt – not exactly a close cousin but family none-the-less. George and his brother Richard took over

the family business in 1861. As the years passed the brothers became increasingly concerned for the wellbeing of their employees who lived in difficult circumstances in the heart of the grimy industrial city of Birmingham.

When it came time to build a larger factory, the Cadbury's decided that they would build a town to go with it -- which they did, out in the country with affordable housing for their employees -- houses with yards, gardens and fresh air. They called it Bourneville. Bourneville still offers affordable housing today. After Richard died, George organized gender-based committees that made recommendations to improve firm effectiveness. Further, he set up deposit accounts, annuities and education opportunities for each employee.

In 1901, George was so disgusted with the government's lack of support for people of modest means that he bought the Daily News and used it to campaign for old age pensions, rail against the Boer War and denounce sweatshop labour.

Stories like these are common amonf Quaker families. Quakers practiced what they preached, in spades – service to others.

Lake District

Derwentwater, Lake District

Honister Pass, Lake District

The Indomitable Mary Fisher

In December of 1651, in the small town of Selby, Yorkshire, a man gave a talk to the Tomlinson family. Invited to listen was their indentured serving maid Mary Fisher (27). The man was George Fox who several years prior, had begun to preach his new religion, later known as Quakerism. George was a year younger than Mary, affable, magnetic and well-spoken.

Mary listened intently and by the end of the talk she had committed her life to the cause of spreading the word of Fox's simpler, individually defined way of relating to God. Mary lost no time with her quest. Within the year she was imprisoned in York Castle for 'speaking to a priest.' She remained there for 16 months.

Following her release in the autumn of 1653, Mary and Ann Austin, a 50 year old mother of five, arrived at Cambridge University where they admonished the students of the seminary for choosing a life in a church filled with privilege and corruption. The incensed Mayor William Pickering demanded the Constable to "whip them at the Market Cross till the blood ran down their bodies."

The executioner stripped the women to the waist and "executed the Mayor's Warrant far more cruelly than is usually done to the worst of malefactors, so that their flesh was miserably cut and torn." Those watching were astonished to observe that the two women showed not the slightest discomfort, even invited the executioner to carry on should he feel the job was not done.

Mary was on a roll. Within two months she was again imprisoned, this time in Castle Garth, York, where she was

thrown in with 60 Dutch prisoners of war. The men soon made threatening sexual advances. But the courage shown by Mary and the other Quaker prisoners so moved both the prisoners and their gaolers that they ceased to harass them.

When Mary was again released she set her sights on spreading the word of Quakerism abroad. In 1655, she and her companion Ann Austin boarded a ship in London and became the first Quakers to arrive on the shores of Barbados. Their conversion attempts were not well received by the largely Anglican residents, many of whom were too busy cavorting and drinking good Barbados rum to listen. And I'm guessing that most of them were not of a mind to free their slaves who allowed them the luxury to drink and cavort. However, Mary and Ann did manage to convert the Lieutenant-Governor.

After a brief stay, they must have decided that Barbadians were a hopeless cause and that discretion was the better part of valour, for they sailed for New England. Their ship, the Swallow, docked in Boston, Massachusetts Bay Colony on the 11th of July, 1656. Word had reached authorities earlier that the women were coming and they were immediately imprisoned without food, water or visitors.

In the last half of the seventeenth century witch-hunts had become common practice in both England and New England. At its peak in England (1645-1647) over a hundred people (largely women) were put to death; in New England, thirteen women and two men were executed in the witch-hunts of 1647 to 1663. In the Salem trials of 1692-1693 20 more were put to death; five died in prison.

The two women, suspected of being witches, were intimately examined for any sign. A mole or any unusual mark on their skin would be a death sentence. None were found. For five weeks, they were imprisoned. Mary and Ann survived only through the kindness shown by the elderly owner of a Boston inn, Nicholas Upsall, who through bribes, brought the women food and water. The captain of the Swallow was ordered to return the women to Barbados.

From there, they found their way back to England.

What happened to Ann at that point, we don't know. But for Mary, this was just a test run. She next decided that the entire Muslim world was needful of enlightenment and that the quickest way to convert the unwashed millions of the Ottoman Empire was to convert their leader, Sultan Mehmed IV, aka 'The Warrior.'

After a lengthy sea voyage, Mary and her five companions arrived at Leghorn (Livorno), northwest Italy. There she sought the help of the English Consul to arrange an audience with the Sultan. The consul quickly realized that such a meeting could result in political disaster for England, in no small measure because the English navy had just the previous year sunk nine of the Sultan's ships, and too, that Quaker zeal was likely not a good match with Muslim propriety. The consul suggested that her quest was perhaps, unwise. Undaunted, Mary persisted until the harangued official relented; arrangements were made for Mary and her companions to board a ship then in the harbour that would take them to the Sultan.

Once underway, Mary discovered that she was the victim of a ruse; the ship was heading only for Venice. However, en route, a terrible storm drove the vessel well to the east of Greece. Mary saw an opportunity. She arranged with the captain for her group to disembark at Zante in the Greek islands. Mary had learned that the Sultan was not in Constantinople; he and his army were encamped at Adrianople on the modern day border with Greece. At Zante, the party of Quakers went separate ways, leaving Mary to make her way to Adrianople alone. For four or five weeks she walked through Greece, Macedonia and over the mountains of Thrace, relying on the freely given generosity of Greek peasants for food.

In the autumn of 1657, just prior to Mary's arrival at Adrianople, the Sultan had decided to move his capital from Constantinople, a place he loathed and feared for its disloyal and mutinous elements, to Adrianople. With him came his court and his 20,000 man army, now camped on

the outskirts of the city. Two thousand tents were arranged in circles along the banks of the River Moritza. It was a dazzling display of power. In the centre were the sumptuous, gold-embroidered tents of the Sultan and his Grand Vizier. The Grand Visier was the Sultan's chief council and overseer until the young man reached the age of majority. He was but sixteen at the time. These central tents together constituted a fabric castle complete with administrative offices, accommodation for pages, summer houses and of course, lavish dwellings for the Sultan and Grand Vizier. The opulence and magnificence of it all took the breath away.

The immediate challenge for Mary was to convince the Grand Vizier, Kiipriilli the Elder, revered and feared chieftain of the Albanians, to grant her an audience with the Sultan. Kiiprilli was elevated to Grand Vizier to carry out an agenda. His task was to return stability to the Ottoman Empire. It was crippled with internecine struggles, failed foreign campaigns and a demoralized army. Kiilpiili was a strong governor and a man of ruthless reputation. During his five years in office, Kiilpriili had 36,000 influential persons summoned to Constantinople and quietly strangled. By the end of the purge, not a man remained in the empire that could or would offer resistance to the Sultan.

There is no record of Mary's interview with Kiilpiili. What we do know is that he heard her out, then advised the young king to grant her an audience. The following day, Mary, aged 35, was ushered into the throne room with all the pomp and ceremony of a visiting Ambassador. Ranks of servants, guards, eunuchs and pages surrounded the Sultan, all dressed in a splendour of gold-embroidered coats and feathered caps.

Amidst this riot of gold and scarlet stood Mary, dressed in a simple grey frock, her countenance quiet, her deportment confident, her face filled with intelligence, intention and the presence of God.

Mary was received by the Sultan with kindness and deference -- a sharp contrast to the treatment she had

borne at the hands of her countrymen. In the way of Quakers, Mary said nothing, waiting for the inward light to guide her words. There was an awkward silence. The Sultan offered to dismiss his courtiers, that Mary might feel more disposed to speak. She declined and at length, when the light came to her, Mary conveyed her message.

All in the room listened carefully and with gravity until she was done. Then she asked the Sultan if he had understood her message. He replied “Yes, every word and what you have said is truth.” He invited her to stay in Turkey, and when she declined, he offered her an escort to Constantinople, for the journey was treacherous. Again she declined and made her own way there unimpeded.

There can be no doubt that this plucky young woman, Mary Fisher, with her unwavering determination, courage and devotion inspired countless people across centuries to convert and advance the Quaker cause.

Time to move on, I’m sorry to say. In three days, we did a lot – took a walking tour of York, visited Yorkminster and the National Train Museum (fabulous), learned about the Romans, Vikings and chocolate, toured the North York Moors, passed through the little village of Great Ayton where Captain James Cook was raised, visited Whitby on the coast, and rode a steam train from Whitby to Pickering.

Sizergh Castle, Kendal

Sizergh Castle, Kendal

Sizergh Castle, Kendal

Getting About

Why Bother

I've noticed that once you're in a country you must find a way to get about. One could just stay at the airport, I suppose, but my thought is that plane spotting would have limited appeal by Day 3. Apart from that and awkward sleeping arrangements, the airport could have real merit -- for those on a fixed income and for Scots, like me.

There is plenty to do in airports beyond plane-spotting. You can go for a cruise on the people-movers (one way only), make involved product inquiries at the duty-free shops (time is on your side), plug in your razor and curling iron at the corridor outlets (no charge) and learn your choice of foreign languages in the seating areas.

I have not run this idea past Randi, but I am fairly certain that her vision of foreign travel is a notch or two beyond the concept of 'airport-as-destination' and involves moving about occasionally. And that notion brings me in a roundabout way to the topic of this epistle — getting about in England.

The Wrong Side

It's easy enough to get about in England— discount airlines, trains everywhere, rental cars and (I know this will sound odd to Canadians) walking. We've tried the discount airlines and we've tried the trains. They do get you there but attempting photography en route is a lost cause. I'm a photographer, you see, so being able to take photos of discernible objects which do not resemble the inside of a dryer mid-cycle is important to me (Brits: we colonials use dryers to render our clothes wearable after a wash). As an added bonus, one's undies never fall off the over-the-stove drying rack into the soup pot.

Renting a car has distinct advantages. With a car, one has full command of the itinerary. I can stop at will to take shots, giving Randi time to calculate the hours remaining to bra removal. Thirty-nine percent of Americans aside, 'freedom' is not spelled T-R-U-M-P, it is spelled H-E-R-T-Z. At least that was my theory.

You might have noticed that I did not speak to walking. It's because we can't. Colonials, by and large, are not taught to walk. We can shuffle with an odd sort of gait, (more like a duck than a stately Canada Goose), just far enough to sit in or on some form of conveyance. Brits, on the other hand, walk. In their cities, only an idiot would drive a car. In the country, only an idiot would drive a car.

Wherever one lives in Britain, the roads are narrow (more on that to come), the cars fast and the traffic thick. People walk to the shops, to work, to the cricket pitch, to the pub and slither home. That's it.

Who actually drives all those cars, though, is a bit of a mystery. Tourists, I suppose, including us. We rented a car. No more airports and train stations. We were heading for a great adventure, flitting hither and yon as the spirit called. Serendipity was our companion now. She sat right next to Garmina on the dashboard, sporting a wry smile and a twinkle in her eye.

On our last day in York, we made our way to the Hertz lot. Getting there was routine — 40 minutes to find it, 10 minutes to get the car. The 40 minute bit was merely irritating; the 10 minute bit was bizarre. When I opened the driver's side door, you would not believe what I saw. Nothing. There was no steering wheel. I returned to the office. "Look, I'm impressed that self-steering vehicles have gone mainstream in Britain, but I believe I ordered a car with a steering wheel."
"You'll find it on the right side, sir."
That was annoying. "If it was on the right side, I would have found it on the left. However, I did not. I'd like a car with the wheel on the left please, which IS the right side."
"Not certain I'm following your logic, sir, but that is the car

we have available for you. Actually, you will find that all 253 million British cars are the same, sir. Wheel on the right."
"Remarkable. And not one Brit thought to make inquiries at the factories? There is something seriously wrong there."
"Yes sir, have a nice day. By the way, do drive on the left."
"On the left!! On the left! I'd be dead in a minute."
"I'm afraid you might be if you don't sir. That's how we do it here."
"Ridiculous," I grumbled.
"STAY LEFT!!," screams Randi as we left the lot. Ah yes, momentary lapse. Shift to second. "Where's the stick?"

Day 1 of the Great Road Adventure was, shall we say, interesting. Randi might describe it with a tad more zeal. "Oh God!" was commonly heard; "look out!," was equally popular. In this way, we lurched (standard shift) and staggered our way through the Yorkshire dales to Liz's house, our friend in Kendal, on the edge of the Lake District.

Fortuitously, our friend Garmina joined us for the drive. She is English, thirty something, confident, elegant and smart as a whip. I really don't know what we would have done without her. I am not demeaning your navigational talents in the slightest Sweetie, but one must admit, Garmina was a life-saver.

Tucked inside the little screen on our windshield, (uh, windscreen) Garmina gave us moment by moment directions: "In 500 feet, enter the roundabout on your left and take the third exit to Mulberry Lane." Or "Stay in either of the two right lanes and in 100 feet take Exit 23 to Gone By Road…. Recalculating…" Well, she wasn't perfect. And those dirt roads through the forest were somewhat unsettling, but, in the end, they did get us to where we wanted to go.

At the roundabouts, things got tense. Were you with us, you might have heard something like this:
"Keep going, keep going. NO! That's the second exit! We want the THIRD exit!"
"Bloody hell."

“Recalculating. Continue on this road for 9 miles, then turn right.” Unspoken: You are about to tour three counties, eleven villages at 20 miles per hour and experience the exhilaration of 23 roundabouts. Enjoy. Oh, and cancel your accommodation for this evening.

Yes, corrections could be lengthy affairs, yet dear Garmina, unlike her fleshy companions, never uttered an angry word. After the sixth foul up, your average navigator would have popped a blood vessel: “You bloody idiot, you’ve done it again! What did I tell you the last time? LISTEN. Now we’re in the royal soup. We can’t turn round ’til the next county!” No, Garmina -- patient, calm, understanding Garmina -- was the digital equivalent of Buddha.

You might have picked up that after a few roundabouts, we concluded that driving in England was a two-person affair: one to steer (me) and one to navigate (Randi). The steering bit went so-so. Remember the intelligence tests in primary school where you were given an object, then had to identify its mirror image? Let’s just say that my response likely led to my new home at the back of the class, next to a boy who hummed. The point being, (is there really a point to all this?), Randi was indispensable, counting down the distances to the next heart-pounding roundabout, giving comforting feedback such as “Good job, honey, you missed him completely” and so on.

Barelies

As with most folks, I love to observe people. After a half century of doing just that, I have arrived at the conclusion that when it comes to getting from A to B in a vehicle, there are two kinds of people.

The first group, whom I call ‘Barelies” provide barely enough information to survive the journey. A Barely will typically indicate a change of direction by saying, “Turn left.” On the surface, this seems entirely appropriate (assuming it was left that you wanted to go). However, and herein lies the rub: that is only half the required instruction. The missing information is “in 400 feet.”

The omission of this key piece of information usually proves to be a mere inconvenience. The travelers may find themselves in the wrong county at dusk and spend the night by the roadside huddled or more accurately, interlocked in their rented Morris Minor. However, the omission can result in grievous mishap. If the navigator says "Turn left" (full stop) where there is no road to the left, well, one can see that there is an immediate problem. Furthermore, a Barely is also prone to saying 'left' when he or she means 'right' and vice-versa. This of course, gets awkward, particularly at roundabouts and when you find yourself in Wales and your Gaelic is not up to snuff.

There is one other thing. And this is important. A Barely uses the English language loosely. Compass directions have no meaning to a Barely. He or she prefers less precise terms like "over there," "turn at the building," "look at that!," "Oh my God," and the perennial favourite "Watch out!

Tights

Like all things in the universe, Barely has an opposite -- 'Tights.' Tights walks erect with a noble air, confident that his or her highly rational mind will resolve all problems. However, when rationality falls by the wayside, when Barely and Tights are completely lost – the roads have changed, Garmina takes a coffee break or a detour appears -- Tights does an odd thing: he or she loses it. Any artifact of rationality is tossed to the wind. Tights crazy glues his or her mind to the last failed option, argues that it is indeed correct, then proceeds, even in the face of evidence to the contrary.

As a psychology major, I studied Tights. More precisely, I studied rat behaviour, which we all know parallels human behaviour closely.

I recall one experiment in which four separated feeding stations were positioned in front of a rat. However, there was a tricky bit. There usually is in life. To get to a feeding station, the rat had to jump from a starting platform to one

of the four platforms where the feeding stations were located. He could not access a subsequent feeding station without returning to the starting platform first. Thus, jumping to a given platform/feeding station represented a discrete choice. Initially, any station the rat chose to explore provided food (a reward).

When the rat 'got' the situation, the conditions were changed. Three of the four stations were randomly locked. Furthermore, when the rat chose a locked station the platform gave way and he fell into a pit (punishment). Eventually, he discovered the unlocked feeding station. Then, every time he jumped, he chose that station and successfully fed.

Again, the conditions were changed. All four stations were locked. What do you suppose the rat did next? He continued to jump to the last station that provided food, receiving punishment each time -- not five or ten times, but for hours on end. He appeared to have developed a fixed mind set which ignored his experience (locked station and punishment). When he jumped, he was operating from a 'wing and a prayer.'

This is Tights to a tee. When repeated attempts to find the correct route fail, Tights fixates on one option and insists it is the correct one. Further, Tights refuses to seek out untried sources of information such as asking the way from a local, a technique happily and effectively utilized by Barelies. For the record, none of this describes myself. Just ask my wife...ah, she just stepped out to make an inquiry.

The Roads

Thoroughfares, called carriageways in Britain, vary in nature, notably in width. The term 'carriageways,' of course, goes back to the days of horse and carriage. For me, it conjures up a scene of upper class Victorian England. Horse drawn carriages jiggle along a gravel road to the sound of clopping hooves. The occupants, dressed to the nines, are waving and greeting friends passing by. The man in one carriage stands and calls out "Good day, how aw you?", then gives

a slight bow and a sweep of his hat. As the carriages move apart, he shouts a proposal: “High tea at the Blethering Place? Good show!” Ah, how times have changed….

At the other end of road choices and several notches below the carriageway is the ‘Lane.’ The lane is narrow – very narrow and remarkably common in England. It was originally designed for small people on foot. Passing another traveller required one to turn sideways. In Canada, we call them trails. Here’s a curious fact: the waltz was invented on English lanes.

The lane is guaranteed to strike terror into the hearts of ‘right-siders.’ You see, all too often, lanes, with just enough room for little Perky, are two-way. Perky was our peppy bright blue Vauxhall. I’m certain that bright blue is the colour reserved for foreigners driving rental cars in the UK. To locals it says “Foreigner on the loose. Stand clear.” That suited me. Perky, it turned out, is not considered a compact car in England, but a full sized sedan.

Moreover, these typically two-way lanes with room for one vehicle come complete and without exception with two constant companions -- the stiff and silent Prickly Hedge on one side and the equally reserved Stone Wall on the other – always there, never the first to engage, yet always at the ready to do so.

If one chooses to cast fate to the wind and use a lane, one had best have a neck that flexes like a giraffe and the nerve of a high steel worker -- for driving in reverse.

*Tip 1: K*eep all body parts you hold near and dear *inside the vehicle at all times.*

Tip 2: Should you meet an oncoming car and are obliged to back up through multiple blind corners, bear in mind that English drivers are fast. Very fast. As you shift into reverse (this is where being Catholic is a huge bonus), begin your Hail Marys. Don’t know them and didn’t bring any? Ah, what a shame.

And so it went. We drove for twelve days. I must say it was brilliant. A handful of locals we… uh, bumped into along the highways and byways of England…all right, six or eight, but no more… might hold a different opinion, but really, I think they were just being picky.

City of London

City of London

City of London

City of London

The Yorkshire Dales

It was Day 5. We were off to our friend Liz's house on the other side of the Yorkshire Dales. Like Little Red Riding Hoods, wide-eyed and high-spirited, we stuffed our bags and bodies into Perky, our four-wheeled puppy, and off we went, lurching along to grandma's house as I got reacquainted with gears.

It was overcast, perfect weather to draw in the spirit of this special region of Yorkshire. We took the highway west to the edge of the dales, then turned north into the hills. This would be an outstanding day with plenty of time to soak up the dales' iconic landscapes and take pictures. I had savoured this day for a long time.

Ah, but you know what's coming, don't you? That did not happen. The sleepy days of James Herriot's Yorkshire Dales were long gone. The roads had not changed. They were still post-war narrow, flanked almost to the tarmac by Prickly Hedge and Stone Wall. There are no shoulders, no pullouts; we could make no stops and I took no pictures. And there were cars, plenty of them, piling up behind, streaking by in both directions. When they passed, some turned their head to the side to size up the under-performing driver of the offending vehicle. What they saw was a timid-looking man, wide-eyed man with a funny hat, leaning into the wheel and clutching it with a death grip. They surely cursed.

The drive was excruciating bar this: the landscapes: patchwork quilts of emerald green and ancient stone wall surrounds. Here and there, clusters of trees added mass and balance to the composition and more to the point, offered shelter to the sheep on cold winter days. On that

day in early September, though, the sheep grazed carefree across the rolling hills, until on the far side of the valley, they were reduced to dots of white.

There, the ridge slipped in and out of the mist and beyond that ridge was another and then another, each a fading look alike of the one before it. Over it all was a soft, luminous light that left an edge on everything it touched. No, the day was not all that I'd hoped, but it is etched in my memory, the land and its people bookmarked for another time.

Steam Train from Whitby to Pickering

Steam Train from Whitby to Pickering

Steam Train from Whitby to Pickering

Steam Train from Whitby to Pickering

Green Acres

Garmina found it with the help of directions from friend Liz, who lives there. Green Acres, the name given to Liz's cottage, is tucked in a corner of the little stone village of Natland near Kendal, Cumbria. Perhaps a few hundred people live there. Cumbria is the county to the west of Yorkshire and lies in the northwest corner of England. Liz is a retired fisheries biologist and planner. She and I attended the School of Planning at the University of British Columbia in the 1970s. Along with Randi and two other friends, we shared a house together. That was a long time ago, yet the three of us picked right up where we left off and shared a wonderful two days together.

Liz is full of life, Scots by upbringing, English by circumstance. She is lithe, an avid walker, prone to boisterous outbursts to make a point or laugh. Liz loves to laugh. And she loves to socialize, so she and Randi chatted at length at the kitchen table while I, in my usual fashion, headed solo to the garden with my camera.

Green Acres is a one-story 1950s white stucco cottage. It is thoroughly English. Rooms are small by our standard, filled with an eclectic assortment of furniture, books, photo albums, framed pictures of family and knick-knacks, all precious items with memories attached, each carefully chosen. Doors are everywhere, perhaps to restrict the heat to occupied rooms on cold days or perhaps because that's the way it's always done in England.

The small kitchen has a bright red enamel range, an AGA look-alike I was told, that is many times more efficient. The AGA is a traditional fixture in British homes since the blind Nobel Prize-winning Swedish Physicist Gustaf Dalén invented it in 1922 to make cooking easier for his wife.

Made of cast iron, the smallest AGA has two gas-fired ovens and a gas hob (range-top). AGA owners are quick to extol (read defend) its virtues, pointing to its capacity to replace a clothes dryer, electric kettle, space heater and toaster. Critics call it an energy hog. A standard non-AGA gas range uses only 2.6% of the AGA's consumption. In other words, the AGA consumes 38 times the energy of the standard range. That's almost as much gas in a week as the standard range uses in nine months.

AGAs are much like Donald Trump. You love them or you hate them; they fire up predictably and belch waste unreservedly; and regrettably, they rarely die. Many AGAs operate for over 50 years. In 2009, the Daily Telegraph ran a competition to find the oldest AGA still in use. There were thousands of entries but none older than the 1932 model owned by the Hett family of Sussex.

Imagine how many AGA ranges like the Hett's are still dutifully cooking away in tens of thousands of row houses across Britain, burning up vast and unnecessary quantities of natural gas and spewing untold thousands of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere.

In fairness though, while Brits walk everywhere, this writer and all his North American compatriots are driving cars to any destination farther afield than 100 metres -- with the same result times 100,000.

In a thousand years time, the human species might have all but disappeared. Yet I can readily imagine the Hett family in their little Sussex cottage. I see them now – Hettie Hett, Pott Hett and their six little children. It's a cold winter's day. They're gathered in the kitchen, their hands raised to catch the heat from their 1932 AGA range. Hettie speaks... "I'm just so thankful our AGA burns anything."
"Yeah, like my year's pot supply."
"Well the wood shed is empty. What's a girl to do, honey bunny?"
"What's a bunny?"
"A Pott Hett who doesn't store wood for the winter."

Next to and above Liz's range is a clothes drying rack, common to North American homes until after World War II, but seen today in North America only in museum re-creations . If you're over seventy, you'll be familiar with this contrivance. The rack consists of five or so wood bars in a rectangular wood frame. Attached to its four corners is a cord harness that runs through a pulley on the ceiling, then ties off on a cleat mounted to the wall near the range. Wet clothes are hung over the bars and the entirety is hoisted to the ceiling close to the range where hot air works its magic at no additional cost.

However, some folks, I gather, have discovered a lamentable drawback to this drying method. Items have been known to fall off the rack onto the floor next to the range. This is precisely where the cat hangs out. Cats are experts at maximizing their comfort and life doesn't get any better than curling up next to the range. Well, that's not entirely true. When an item falls off the drying rack into the cat's bed, life instantly shifts from good to exquisite. The upshot is that things placed on the rack to dry can simply disappear. Or parts of an item can disappear. For some diabolical reason, the parts that do disappear are invariably the parts which one treasures the most – the crotches of undies and the breast pockets of bras.

The bathroom lights are operated with a pull-cord attached to the ceiling. The shower is 'on-demand.' You turn it on by pushing a button on a white control box near the showerhead, then stand in the tub that is raised up from the floor to accommodate the plumbing. In the winter, the bath towels are dried on a heated chrome rack mounted to the wall. In the summer, they dry on the line with the rest of the laundry. Tumble dryers, it seems, are only for the rich and foolish.

The garden is, not surprisingly, an English garden. It has numerous stone-edged flowerbeds, a small lawn with a proportional shade tree, a lounge chair and table, a fish pond with no fish, a greenhouse, a woodshed and just enough gravel drive to park four Mini-Minors or one Dodge Ram 1500 pickup.

English gardens are decidedly un-North American. They ramble, they have no particular symmetry (short of gardens attached to castles), they are stuffed with plants that wander this way and that. All of which, I believe, is by intention. English gardens are designed to appear like an accident of nature.

Staying at Liz's was a reminder that change is not compulsory. It is a choice. It is a reminder too, that all that is new is not always better. Brits and Europeans generally seem happy with that notion; they prefer the old to the new. For that I am exceedingly grateful, for had they been more like us, there would be nothing left to see – no ancient villages, no magnificent landscapes.

The English live their history. Every day they see it, move through it, feel it. Many can visit the house their ancestors lived in, loved in, died in. History and roots, I'm thinking, are not abstract thoughts in this land, but part and parcel of one's very being. How fortunate is that?

Green Acres Cottage, near Kendal, Cumbria

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Green Acres Cottage, near Kendal, Cumbria

The Lake District

On the second day of our stay with Liz we climbed aboard a mini-bus with fifteen odd others to tour the Lake District. The Lake District is a region of the County of Cumbria. It is also a national park. Tourism has a long history here, beginning in the late 1700s. As early as 1724, Daniel Defoe described it as “the wildest, most barren and frightful of any that I have passed over in England.”

In 1774 Father Thomas West published “A Guide to the Lakes” which led to visits by Wordsworth, Southey and Coleridge. Wordsworth was so taken he moved there. Indeed, you can visit his house and as you gaze at his writing desk, ponder why he got all that talent and you didn’t. Once the poets had done their thing, the tourists did theirs. The wealthy arrived first.

My great grandfather William Spriggs, a clothier from Worcester, took walking holidays there in the mid 1800s, capturing the landscapes with pen and ink. Later came his children and their children, including my mother. Today, though, they arrive, not in horse-drawn conveyances, six to a carriage; they come in buses, sixty at a time.

This was our second bus tour, possibly our last. Don’t get me wrong; they did a good job, taking us places we would not otherwise have seen and telling us much along the way. Yet it’s rushed and canned and according to their schedule, not ours. Taking pictures was almost a lost cause. The tour included a sedate boat ride on Derwentwater in a vintage 1920s varnished wood cruiser. The boat was beautiful; the ride was boring; the landscapes were stunning. It is a moody, magical, entirely unique land. And the light! We must return.

The Lake District, Cumbria

The Lake District, Cumbria

The Lake District, Cumbria

The Lake District, Cumbria

My family in the Lake District, Cumbria, 1898

My family in the Lake District, Cumbria, 1898

My family in the Lake District, Cumbria, 1898

My family in the Lake District, Cumbria, 1898

Ashton Hall

Randi's mother's mother was a Lawrence by birth. Now that's an interesting family. They were Normans before they were English, possibly landing on the beach near Hastings with William the Conqueror. That was 1066 and the first mention of a Lawrence in Randi's family tree is Randi's 25th great grandfather, Robert Lawrence, born in Lancaster in 1100. For 300 years, the family remained in Lancaster where from about 1300 to 1400 they resided at Ashton Hall. That's why we went there: to walk the halls that her ancestors did over six hundred years ago.

I had done the research. What greeted me was no surprise – a golf course with a rather unique clubhouse, a mini castle of sorts with towers, crenellated walls and a grand stone staircase to the front entry. The grounds were meticulously maintained. A verdant, undulating golf course lay to the front of Ashton Hall, accentuated by attractive clusters of mature trees. On the path to the hall were occasional pots of bright yellow and red flowers, just enough to make the entirety pop.

We walked in, ready with the line "we used to own the place; what's for lunch?" We didn't need it. The three members hanging out in the baronial lounge were most welcoming and invited us to explore. We did.

The old bones were there, but Ashton Hall was tired. She had done her time and more – almost a thousand years. Now she seemed sad – an ancient painted lady anxious to say goodbye but propped up to carry on for just one more year, a thousand more rounds of golf. The heady days of titled occupants, gala affairs and political intrigues were gone. Still, Ashton's grace and pride remained; her head

unbowed, she listened once more to the whining of the club members: “She’s a liability now,” the member complained, “we can’t make changes that would improve her usefulness because she’s historic, protected. We’re very frustrated.”

The old girl had a notable visitor. In 1648 the Duke of Hamilton spent the night at Ashton Hall on his way to the Battle of Worcester. Although when choosing sides in such matters, one has a whopping fifty percent chance of getting it right, the good duke did not. Despite the odds in their favour (20,000 Royalists to 8500 Parliamentarians) the Royalists lost the battle to Oliver Cromwell and his forces. A month after Charles I was relieved of his head, the Duke of Hamilton’s followed. Perhaps the good duke should have lingered at Ashton Hall, played a few rounds of golf. He just lost his head I suppose.

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Ashton Hall, Lancaster

Part 2: Mid & South

Haddon Hall | St Bartholomew's Church | Ludlow Castle | Gloucester | The Cotswolds | Bath | Stones | Clock House |

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Haddon Hall

Our next stop, a two-hour drive to the southeast from Ashton Hall, was Haddon Hall. Haddon Hall is in Derbyshire, a county in central England. Within Derbyshire is Peak District National Park. Both it and Lake District National Park, the first national parks in the UK, were created in 1951, surprisingly late by Canadian standards. By comparison, our first national park, Banff National Park, was established in 1885.

Peak District National Park lies at the southern end of the Pennines, a range of high country running north-south that separates North West England from North East England. The first cotton mills of the Industrial Revolution were built on the streams rolling off these hills. Today, it is bikes that roll off the hills and hikers who walk them. Tourism is big here for a reason. The landscapes are stunning and access is easy. Walking holidays are popular in Britain and the Peak District is a popular place to do it. The epicentre for all this activity is the quaint little village of Bakewell. Just down the road from Bakewell is Haddon Hall.

I am a fortunate man, for I am overflowing with grandparents. And so are you. I stopped to count once and quickly gave up. You see, all of us have two parents whether we like it or not. Each of our parents had two parents whether they liked it or not and so forth. Mathematically speaking, the number of grandparents we have increases by 2 to the power of n, where n = the number of generations we go back.

Haddon Hall first came into my family in 1170, when

my 26th great grandfather, Sir Richard de Vernon, married Avice Avenell, the heiress of Haddon Hall. Back to the maths. When I apply the above formula to the 26 generations since Richard and Avice, I discover I have accumulated 2 to the power of 26 or 268,435,456 grandparents. They're not living downstairs, you understand. Come to think of it, they're not living. Nor did I actually count them. Imagine the pain of doing so:

"Two hundred sixty-eight million, four hundred thirty-five thousand, four hundred fifty-five. Two hundred sixty-eight million four hundred thirty-five thousand four..." "Sweetie, I need a lemon. Would you mind running down to the ...." "NOT NOW...five hundred fort.... BLOODY HELL!"

No. The figure I gave is a statistical average. To give you an idea of just how many people that is, if you stuffed all of them (that's eight times the population of Canada) into a bowling alley, the bowling alley would be...nah, just kidding.

Some argue, my friends and family among them, that attempting to claim a relationship with someone who lived 900 years ago is a fatuous exercise, as staggering numbers of people may be related to any given individual who lived hundreds of years ago. As if to drive home the point, my cousin Bill tells me that David, his tablemate at the retirement residence where he lives, is also related to the Vernons of Haddon Hall. Frequently, when I find myself putzing about in some obscure corner of my family tree, I stop to check the connection of a couple to me – they're my umpteenth great grandparents!

And judging by the number of claimants to my DNA and the following facts derived from genetics research, I am hard-pressed to argue the point. The facts are these: the amount of DNA we possess from our ancestors diminishes rapidly with each additional generation. By as little as five generations, we may

have only 3% of each ancestor's genes and by the seventh generation, less than one percent.

Yet despite the science, I still feel that sense of connection to my ancestors of centuries past, for good reason. If any one of those 268,435,456 individuals had made a different choice of spouse, I would not be here. I may not have much of their DNA, but each and every one of them allowed me to be on this planet. How can I not feel connected? And so on the afternoon of Day 10 we drove from Randi's Ashton Hall to my family's Haddon Hall.

The Vernon family called Haddon Hall home from the late 1100s to the mid 1500s. The family came from Vernon, France, in Normandy at the time of William the Conqueror. As fellow Normans, they were granted extensive lands in the lush rolling hills of Derbyshire and neighbouring Cheshire – the Midlands of England.

Our entrée to the Vernon family came in 1510 with the marriage of William Fisher to Mary Vernon. We know little about William but his Fisher family is prominent in my family tree from the 1500s to the 1800s. Both the Fishers and the Vernons had the knack of doing well from the people they called their friends and importantly, from the carefully chosen marriages of their children.

The Vernon family seemed never in a rush to part with their wealth or position. On multiple occasions through the centuries, cousins married each other in order to combine two estates into one grand estate, doubling the wealth of the family with a mere two words -- "I do". Power, influence and more wealth came with their strategically arranged marriages and connections. Among them were three High Sheriffs, two Chief Justices, two Members of Parliament, a Speaker of the House, two Treasurers of Calais and a governor and treasurer to Arthur, Prince of Wales. Some were earls, dukes, barons and knights. You might say they were 'plugged in.'

Sir George Vernon was the last male of the Haddon Hall Vernons. He owned a vast acreage and was appropriately referred to as 'King of the Peak,' a reference to his dominating character, wealth and power, and the region in which Haddon hall lay. King of the Poke, however, he was not, for he died without male heirs, a circumstance much dreaded in his day, for it meant that the family's wealth and power would fall to the in-laws. When he died in 1565 Haddon Hall passed to his daughter Dorothy who married Sir John Manners. The couple's descendents are the Dukes of Rutland, who own Haddon Hall today.

According to legend (never verified), Dorothy, a famously beautiful and kindly young woman, fell in love with John Manners. However, her father Sir George Vernon, forbade Dorothy to see Manners, perhaps because Manners was Protestant and the Vernons were Catholic or perhaps because John, as the second son, had uncertain financial prospects. The couple, however, had a plan. During a ball hosted by Sir George, Mary slipped away through the garden. On the far side of a footbridge (still there today) Manners was waiting for her and away they rode to be married.

This is hardly the script for a modern-day gripper but there is no denying love. Novels, short stories, plays including a Broadway play, a light opera and a film starring Mary Pickford in1924 have all retold the legend of Dorothy and John.

The brother of the current Duke of Rutland lives somewhere in the back of Haddon Hall. I thought it only proper to introduce myself while we were on the premises – to let him and his folk know that they were not forgotten in the colonies and that if he ever felt the urge to visit, he must stay with us. The entire bedroom in the basement would be reserved for his exclusive use. Regrettably, I could not find the door to his apartment. It's likely a hidden panel in the armoury or a secret stairway from a bedroom to yesterday's

maid's quarters. He will be so annoyed to learn he'd missed me.

For 200 years, starting in 1700, Haddon Hall lay vacant. The Manners still owned it; they just chose not to live there. They had other, more upscale castles at their disposal, with bigger fireplaces, fewer cracks and more doors. The hall must have fallen into dreadful disrepair but in the 1920s the challenge of bringing Haddon back to life was taken on by the 9th Duke and Duchess of Rutland. Today, Haddon Hall is touted to be "probably the finest example of a fortified medieval manor house in existence."

Haddon Hall is open to the public. We parked in the lot adjacent to the estate, walked through the arch of the designed-to-impress gatehouse and carried on up the road as it crossed an expanse of grass field, passed a pond large enough to float the British Navy and up a rise to an extensive castle-like manor. To our left were the stables, converted now to a cafe. Ahead, was the manor's entry, its ancient wood doors with iron fastenings cast wide. Randi made small talk with the attendant, a rough-hewn man who was likely more at ease patching plumbing than punching tickets. "My husband is related to the family," she offered.
"What?," said he, his interest instantly peaked. "Hey Arnold," he yelled across the inner courtyard to what appeared to be his superior. "The last of 'em has just walked in. Bloody hell, I thought we'd ever hear the end of 'em. It took 23 freakin' years but there you have it – 268,435,456." "Right," said Arnold deep in thought. "Now how do we keep 'em from comin' back?"

Haddon Hall is brilliant. Randi absorbed the place, methodically, room by room, then sat on a bench in the sun and chatted with strangers while she waited for me; I ran about with my camera, clicking here, clicking there in no particular order.
"Did you see the kitchen? she queried on the way out.
"Ah no, missed that I guess."

“The bathroom was grim.”

“Bathroom...?”

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Bakewell near Haddon Hall

Bakewell near Haddon Hall

Bakewell near Haddon Hall

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

Haddon Hall, Derbyshire

St Bartholomew's Church

It was well into the afternoon when we left Haddon Hall. It took us two hours to drive to the village of Tong near Saint Bartholomew's Church, leaving no time to explore the church that day. But at 10am the next morning, refreshed with a sound sleep at the Ramada Inn, we arrived at the church as planned. Our guide, David Lewis, showed us about.

David was a good-looking, affable man in his 70s. He was dressed in a less than crisp sports jacket and casual shirt and had a manner that suggested he was equally comfortable in an office or the garden or just about anywhere. For an hour, David walked us through this medieval church of modest proportion, describing the life and the times of its parishioners.

In the middle ages, it was largely the wealthy who could afford to build churches. So often it was the wealthy who owned them. When the title of the estate changed hands, the church went with it. Such was the case at Haddon Hall. During the period the Vernons owned Haddon Hall, St Bartholomew's Church was part of the package. Effectively, they owned its parishioners too, for they were largely tenant farmers, employees and others dependent on the good graces of the Vernons for survival. Attendance at church was mandatory, explained David. Any tenant who missed a service without good cause (e.g. death or the black plague) was removed permanently from the congregation and from the estate.

In the church were a number of sarcophagi in which I

had a particular interest. They were my Haddon Hall relatives. The Vernon family frequented the nearby church in Bakewell, but when they married into the Tong lordship, they chose to be buried at St Bartholomew's in the village of Tong. And there they were. Sir Richard Vernon (1394-1451) and his Benedicta de Ludlow (1392-1451), their son Sir William Vernon III (1421-1467) and his wife, Margaret Swynfen (1425-1471), and grandson Sir Henry Vernon (1441-1515) and his wife Anne Talbot (1445-1494). There lie my 16th, 15th and 14th great grandparents, who lived, loved and died near here over 500 years ago.

Their tombs are works of art, with elaborate stone carvings on the sides of each tomb depicting religious figures, events or family crests. On the top of each tomb lay effigies of the reclining couple, their hands placed as in prayer on their chests, the entirety magnificently carved in alabaster.
There is an unexpected resident in the churchyard – Little Nell, from Charles Dickens novel "The Old Curiosity Shop." In the novel Little Nell and her grandfather fall on hard times and move to a small village to become beggars. There, Little Nell dies and her grandfather sinks into mental decay.

Little Nell's burial plot is, of course, as fictitious as Little Nell. George Bowden, Vicar of the church in 1910, created the burial plot and entered Nell's name in the church register as a ploy to bring more tourism to the village. People came. However, the village economy seems to have dropped off again, as Little Nell's plot was recently moved to a more conspicuous location, right outside the church door.

St Bartholomew's was looking her age. She was yellowed and gray. On her north wall was a cannonball hole and impressions from lead shot, left over from the English Civil War of 1642-1651. The maintenance fund, it seems, has not been particularly robust. In the same war, her lead roof was stripped for cannon balls and ammunition and in recent years, stripped six more

times by salvage thieves. A door on that same north wall was bricked up. It was once used as the final exit for the excommunicated. The tombstones in the churchyard, tilted at odd angles, have been defaced by time. She is what she is, St Bartholomew's -- an old lady from another time, a last vestige of a way of life owned and controlled by the very rich on the backs of the very poor. Yet even in her decrepitude, this old lady, still loved, still valued, continues to serve the people of Tong.

My 16th great grandparents Sir Richard Vernon VII & Lady Benedicta de Ludlow, St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

Child of Isabel de Lingen (died 1446), my 17th great grandmother with her third husband, Fulke de Pembrugge (died 1409)

Sir Thomas Stanley, husband of my second cousin 13X removed , St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

My 16th great grandparents Sir Richard Vernon VII & Lady Benedicta de Ludlow, St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

David Lewis, our guide at St Bartholomew's Church, Tong

Ludlow Castle

An hour's drive to the southwest of St Bartholomew's Church near the border with Wales is Ludlow Castle. It peaked my interest because Benedicta de Ludlow is my 16th great grandmother and I assumed there was a connection between her family and the Castle. I have no doubt there is a connection. Oddly, I just can't find it. I know the Ludlows didn't build it, the Norman castle builder Walter de Lacey did around 1075. Yet all reference to the castle names it Ludlow. One must assume that de Lacey himself named the castle, perhaps during a conversation with his Second in Command which might have gone like this:

It finally arrived: Castle Completion Day, June 1, 1076, Shropshire, somewhere near the border with Wales. A day of feasting and celebration has been declared in the adjacent Village of Kumquat. Two VIPs are seated under the large, open-sided tent, pondering their massive accomplishment. On the left is veteran castle builder Walter de Lacy. On the right is his friend and long standing Second In Command, Two Eyes See or simply Two:

Two:	Man, I thought this day would never come.
Walter:	You always say that.
Two:	I always feel that. I'm getting too old for this.
Walter:	You weren't too old to disappear into the back room with that serving wench at the Swan last night.
Two:	Never said I was. I said I was too old for THIS. By the way, what IS this?
Walter:	Whaddaya mean?
Two:	Well, what's the name of the castle?

Walter: Dunno. I've been a little busy lately. How about de Lacy Castle? Has a nice ring to it.

Two: A little self-serving, don't you think?

Walter: Suppose. Any ideas?

Two: Well, I've noticed that castles are often named after some big-wig or after the place they're built. So maybe something romantic for a change to soften up the locals, like "Big-Castle-Of-Nice-People-On-The-Hill-Overlooking-The-River-Dene."

Walter: Oh, good one. I can see it now. The mighty FitzOsbern says to me "Nice work on that castle Walt. By the way, what have you called it?"
"Uh, Big-Castle-Of-Nice-People-On-The-Hill-Overlooking-The-River-Teme sir."
Then he's going to say "A little lacking in chutzpa, don't you think? When's your contract up for renewal?"

Two: I see your point.

Walter: We could name it after you.

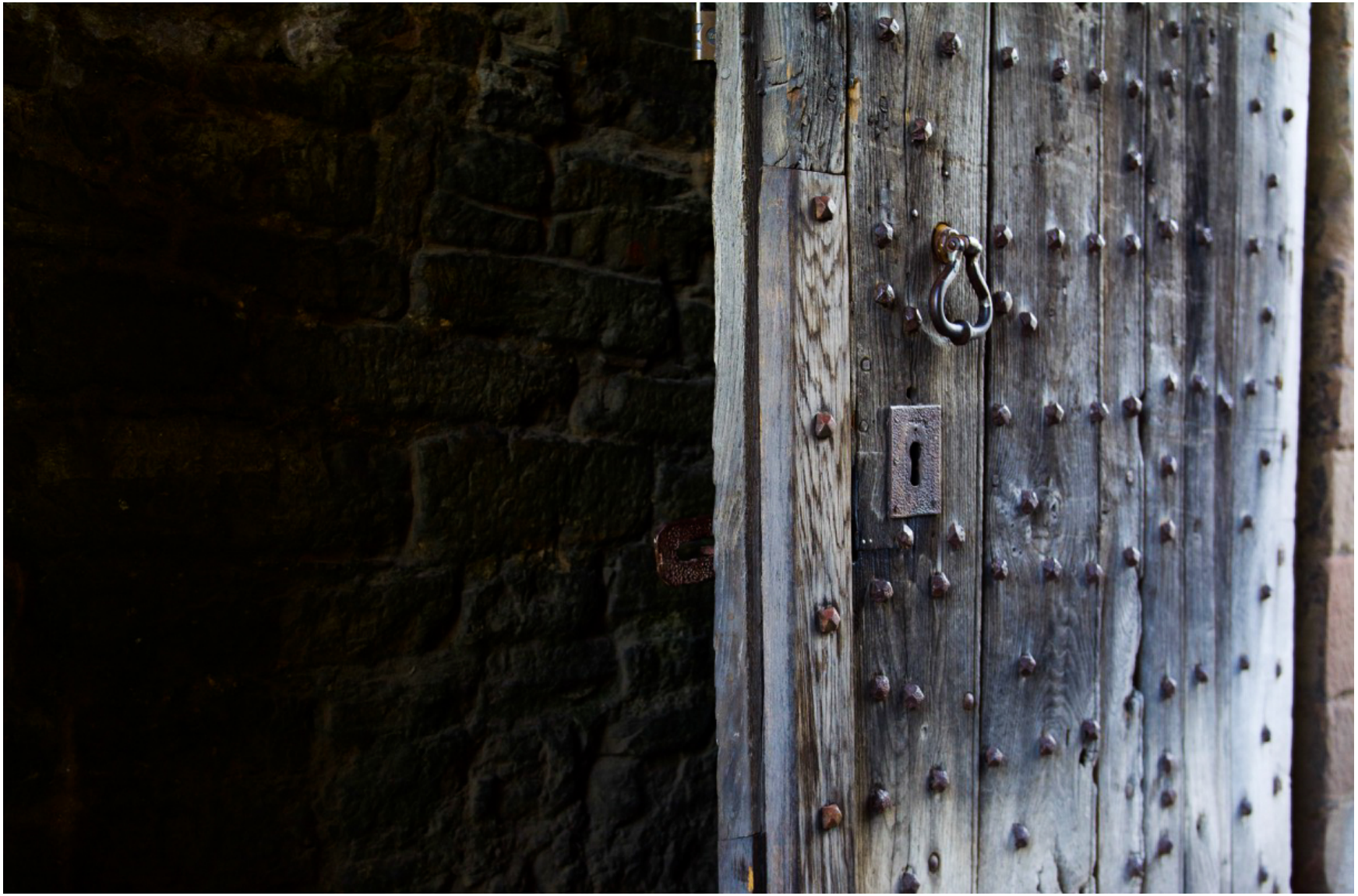
Two: After me Walt? Wow!

Walter: Yeah. Let's call it Ludlow. It's old English for bloody idiot.

Two: Well, it's your castle....

Walter: Agghh!! I need a drink. Swan?

Two: Right. Let's do it. That young lady I met at the Swan...she has a sister....



Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

Ludlow Castle, Ludlow, Shropshire

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

Ludlow Castle, Shropshire

Gloucester

We covered a lot of ground on Days 10 and 11 – from Kendal to Lancaster (Ashton Hall) to Bakewell (Haddon Hall) to Tong (overnight) on Day 10; from Tong (St Bartholomew's Church) to Ludlow Castle to Gloucester on Day 11.

In Tong, as mentioned, we stayed at the Ramada Inn. The experience was predictable, hardly memorable. Perhaps I am unduly suspicious, but I seem to notice that rooms booked through Booking.com or its equivalent have characteristics different from those booked directly with the hotel. The former are typically located at the far end of the complex and/or directly opposite the gym and ice machine. They smell of smoke, sport rips in the wallpaper and display badly executed drywall patches carried out by a local 'dine and dasher' whose one beer too many reduced his Great Escape to running on the spot in slow mo'. Simply put, he didn't make it to the door and subbed as maintenance man for a month.

The Ramada Inn was on an island of sorts. It was surrounded by arterial roads and well removed from anything identifiable as quaint, village-like or walkable. We were marooned. Dinner was therefore in the Ramada pub, exact clones of which can be found in Missoula, Montana, Prince George, BC, St John's Newfoundland or for that matter, in my hometown of Victoria, BC.

Were we hankering for a taste of Canada, we might have considered this experience as a welcome oasis. We were not. This was just another cattle pen of

inebriated cows and bulls competing at top volume for airspace alongside multiple TV screens belching their own brand of indiscernible nonsense. It was insufferable. I looked around and found a back room for special events, nobody in it and a door. I placed our order at the bar and told the waitress where we were. I don't consider a beer and a hamburger to be a challenging order but apparently the Ramada does. It took 40 minutes to arrive. Perhaps we were being punished for anti-social behaviour. No matter. It was quiet and when the hamburgers did arrive, they were great.

Anyway, in that manner we dined, did not dash and fell asleep to the sound of crashing ice and the banging of the gym door. We had booked through booking.com.

It was a two and a half hour drive from Ludlow to Gloucester (pronounced Gloster) and we were running late. So before we left Ludlow, we texted the rental agent to give an adjusted ETA for our meet. We arrived per the new ETA at the docks of Gloucester where we had rented a flat in a warehouse conversion. The agent was not there. We waited and before long she appeared wearing a troubled look. Something was up. A frustrated Greta blurted out that she had been looking for us for the last two hours. She hadn't received our text. We had texted the wrong number leaving Greta to conclude we were sticking to the original plan.

Greta quickly put the foul-up behind her and happily showed us the flat. The conversion was brilliant -- a tasteful, historically sensitive interior design both in the common areas and in the flat. In the latter, the small warehouse window openings had been retained; the replaced windows hinged outward like little French doors. Although the inside was modern, history remained. It was warm and cozy (not large) and along with the vintage sailing ships tied up just beyond the windows and five stories below, the entirety had a

distinctly European air about it. It was as if we had made a wrong turn (read 'right' turn) and ended up in Amsterdam.

The Gloucester Docklands reach back to the 1840s when Gloucester was an important south coast seaport. It competed intensely with nearby Bristol that ultimately outshone it, possibly because Bristol had cornered the lucrative slave trade.

Clustered around the edge of a finger of water sit perhaps 12 huge five-story brick warehouses through which metals, raw cotton, lumber, dyes, tea, coffee, spices and sugar from the colonies flowed in to Britain and manufactured goods from the furnaces and factories of Industrial Age Britain flowed back out to the colonies.

For the two hundred years of the 18th and 19th centuries, trade with its colonies was a good gig for British manufacturers, merchants and investors, and a good gig for Britain. All four became extremely rich. The national treasury filled to the brim with tax revenues which enabled Britain to build a formidable army and navy. Then, at the end of a gun barrel, it assembled the British Empire "upon which the sun never sets." The golden era for Gloucester occurred at the peak of Britain's wealth, power and influence.

The earlier 1600s, however, were a different story. For much of that century, Britain was gripped by revolts, civil wars, religious conflicts, the growing pains of parliamentary democracy and the desperate acts of monarchs hanging onto power. It was a mess.

The second day of our visit to Gloucester fell on a Saturday and that weekend happened to be Gloucester History Festival. That afternoon at a large playing field near our flat, two hundred or more re-enactors assembled to relive the Siege of Gloucester.

The troops of each side were dressed in period

regalia, including helmets, body armour, 15 foot pikes (long thrusting spears good for wacking cavalry off their mounts for re-education sessions), and muskets. At one end of the field were the Royalists, forces loyal to King James II. At the other end were the Parliamentarians, those under the control of Parliament, specifically, under the command of Oliver Cromwell. Each side had field guns and a contingent of horsemen.

At intervals, one side attacked the other. First, there was a barrage from the artillery guns; clouds of blue smoke obscured the field (Archers were not employed. Perhaps there had been a bad experience in past years). Then out of the smoke came a hundred men from one side, running down field as best they could for their age and condition. The defending force was ready. A volley of muskets split the air and those who fired them disappeared in the smoke.

Then chaos reigned. The two sides clashed and battled it out in hand-to-hand combat that degenerated into a rugby scrum. Casualties dropped to the grass and were dragged off by comrades. Mounted soldiers with big grins on their faces appeared next, harrying those on foot and adding to the chaos. When energy levels ebbed to the point where combatants were engrossed in conversation and exchanging phone numbers, the retreat was sounded and both sides, in pub-like arm-on-shoulder clusters, laughing and jibing one another, sauntered back to their respective ends to re-load and await the command to do it all again.

All this was carried out to replay the events of 1643 when Royalist troops laid siege to the town of Gloucester. Gloucester had chosen to side with the Parliamentarians and Oliver Cromwell. King Charles I had brought in a Ship Tax in 1634 that seriously reduced trade throughout the local Severn Valley. Businesses were suffering. They saw no reason why they should have to pay a tax to fund the Royal Navy

so Charles could advance his own political agenda. And folks objected to the monarchy on religious grounds. Although Charles I was Protestant, his queen, Henriette Maria, was a French Catholic. Many believed that the queen extended preferential treatment to fellow Catholics at their expense and worse, they worried that Henriette might convince Charles to re-introduce Catholicism to England.

It took ten years to subjugate the West Country, but by 1643, Royalist forces had secured most of it, sentencing thousands of objectors to ten years of hard labour in the cane fields of Barbados and executing thousands more agitators. Among the lists of those transported in 1634 and 1635 were sixteen boys and men with names common to my family tree: Fisher, Hayward, Williams, Webb, Knight, Bellamy, Adams, Mitchell, Lawrence, Cox and Hicks. On the lists of those executed family names appeared again: Knight, Evans, Cox and Hicks. These were perhaps the same families who, ten years after the Siege of Gloucester, listened to the ideas of George Fox, then rejected the status quo in favour of a new way of being in the world, Quakerism. Those that did, did so at great cost.

Gloucester was the last holdout. Royalists pounded the town with cannon balls for days but failed to breach the walls. What the Royalists thought would be a walk in the park turned out to be a fight to the last man, woman and child. Gloucester held out against the Royalists until Parliamentarian reinforcements arrived from London and routed the attackers. Word of the courageous defense of Gloucester spread, raising the hopes of people in the West Country and adding to the rising tide of anti-monarchists. In 1644 Cromwell and the Parliamentarians prevailed and the Commonwealth of England was born. It would last for eleven years, from 1649 to 1660.

The itinerary called for us to see a number of venues in Gloucester – museums, Roman ruins and Gloucester

Cathedral. We opted to pare it back, giving us more time to just walk the streets, take photos and get a sense of the place. It worked.

Siege of Gloucester 1643

Siege of Gloucester 1643

Siege of Gloucester 1643

Siege of Gloucester 1643

Siege of Gloucester 1643

The Cotswolds

The Cotswolds lie in south central England. It comprises a range of rolling hills which rise from the meadows of the upper Thames River. Along its east side is an escarpment called the Cotswold Edge. The Cotswolds is large: 1280 square kilometres in area, 160 kilometres long and around 40 kilometres wide. Its perimeter falls within five counties.

For walkers, the Cotswolds is an unimaginable treasure. In a week, on the Cotswolds Way, one can walk the entire east side of it, taking in views of the valley below and on a clear day, Westminster Abbey (just kidding). Each night, a village will appear where one can muster a well-earned pint, a good meal and a sound sleep.

The name Cotswolds derives from the Anglo-Saxon word ‘wold’ meaning ‘high land’ and Cod, the name of an Anglo-Saxon chieftain who owned the land in the 12th century. Hence: ‘Cod’s wolds’ which became ‘Cotswolds.’

We gave ourselves a day to explore the Cotswolds, not nearly enough but all we had. It was a one hour drive from Gloucester to Broadway, not the bustling centre the name implies but a lovely little village on the northwest edge of the Cotswolds. It was just 9am when we arrived so we picked out a cafe, already bustling with patrons, and enjoyed breakfast. By the time we had finished, an hour later, the village was alive with visitors.

The Cotswolds are an AONB – Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. AONBs were first proposed by John

Dower in 1945 as a way to protect and enhance areas of countryside with exceptional qualities that are too small and lacking in wildness (read stuffed with villages) to qualify as national parks. There are 46 AONBs in Britain; 33 of them lie within England.

Of all the AONBs the Cotswolds is perhaps the best known and most visited, for good reason. You could not imagine a country setting more quintessentially English. Tucked here and there within the rolling hills of the Cotswolds are dozens of quaint little villages, their houses all built from honey-coloured Cotswold stone, each village impeccably returned to its original 16th to 17th century state. There are no gas stations, no neon signs, no strip malls. It is almost a walk back in time.

I say almost because what the Cotswolds do have is thousands and thousands of cars, occupied by yet more thousands of tourists intent on experiencing the slow, measured pace of medieval England. It is possible to feel something of that earlier time, provided you're able to arrive at a village mid-week before 9am on a blustery November day. Otherwise, I suggest you fashion a set of blinders similar to those used by the cart horses of old, secure them to your head and walk about thusly. The effect will be to minimize what you see to what's dead ahead – shop windows, twelve assorted people and the pavement, but no cars.

The wherewithal to do that, of course, is predicated on finding and securing a parking space, so that you can walk about. We tried. Like octogenarian snails at a snail convention, we inched Perky through Chipping Camden end to end three times, placing our faith in a chance offering by a sympathetic and beneficent God – the possibility, however remote, of a car pulling out just as we happened along. Such things do happen but this day no cars pulled out; no spaces materialized. There would be no Chipping Camden. It was disappointing, but we were armed with enough

memorable glimpses to place the Cotswolds on our 'Return List.' In the early afternoon we left for Gloucester.

On the way and still well into the country, we happened upon a line of bumper-to-bumper traffic, fortuitously in the oncoming lane. The cars were creeping along at two kilometres per hour and were backed up for what must have been 8 kilometres. An accident I suppose for it was too early for commuters.

For me, the question was not "Why are they backed up?" but "Where are they all going?" We were in the country. There was no significant town nearby. The possibility I am led to consider is this: England has judiciously zoned for small pockets of housing here and there throughout its rural areas with the effect of reducing population pressures on historic towns and villages that they wish to conserve. If true, then rural areas in England, despite their appearance of being sparsely populated, are not. But by spreading people out, a slower, saner lifestyle, devoid of the commercialism so rampant in North America, is achievable. Brilliant. Is it true?

The Roses of Mickleton

There is a village in the Cotswolds that holds stories of my family. It is Mickleton. In the 1600s the family Rose lived there. My ninth great aunt Francesse Fisher married Reverend Thomas Rose in 1639. Francesse was descended from my aforementioned 13th great grandfather William Fisher who shrewdly married Mary Vernon of Haddon Hall in 1510 and thereby added four centuries to my family tree.

Francesse and Thomas were quick to lie down in the face of a challenge, a particular challenge at least – having a large family. They had twelve children. Five of the brothers were an enterprising lot: William, an apothecary in London, Fulke, a physician, John, a

ship's captain and merchant, and Francis and Thomas.

Two significant events were going on in England at the time that presented opportunities to the Rose brothers, opportunities that they could not pass up. The first was the immensely lucrative sugar trade. In 1625 England declared Barbados theirs and in short order, after experimenting with a variety of crops, sugar plantations were established. And sugar rapidly became a hot ticket, high status item for the wealthy back in England. Sugar was extremely expensive. If you had sugar on your table, you most certainly had a mountain of money in the bank. You had arrived.

Like the North American gold rushes of the 1800s, growing sugar was, for the adventurous, the path to quick riches in the mid to late1600s. From a small settlement on Barbados in 1627, the population of the West Indies grew to 44,000 by 1650. Compare that to 12000 on the Chesapeake and 23000 in all of New England.

The second opportunity arose from political events. The Monmouth Rebellion broke out in1685. Upon the Restoration, Charles II, a Protestant assumed the throne. All went well until his death, when his brother James II took over. James was a Catholic. That did not go down well with the Protestants of the west counties. Then the Duke of Monmouth, a popular figure in that neck of the woods and an illegitimate son of Charles II, laid claim to the throne. He began recruiting troops in the south and west counties with plans to march on London.

Things did not go well. His brigade of farmers and artisans were ill equipped to deal with the regular army. The rebellion collapsed. Monmouth was executed for treason on 15 July 1685. Many of his supporters were tried and condemned to death. Some were drawn and quartered or boiled alive in tar – to make a point. Eight hundred and ninety rebels,

the more fortunate, received a sentence of 'transportation' -- ten years of servitude in the colonies, unless they died en route, packed 'tween decks' like cattle.

Those transported largely went to the West Indies where they laboured as slaves on the sugar plantations. Criminals of the day fortunate enough to avoid the executioner's block were also shipped en mass to the West Indies. 'Transportation' had become a masterful solution to a costly problem for whoever was in power: what to do with the thousands of folks who don't 'tow the line.'

For two hundred years through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the sugar trade flourished, bringing untold wealth to a fortunate few, and doing so on the backs of hundreds of thousands of African slaves and more thousands of English rebels, criminals and indentured servants. To put the wealth generated by the sugar trade into perspective consider this: it exceeded the economies of *all* the British colonies combined.

Enter the Rose brothers who seized the day with a brilliant idea. In the 1670s, perhaps by pooling their capital, the brothers purchased a sugar plantation in Jamaica. It was agreed that Fulke, who also ran a lucrative medical practice for the wealthy of Jamaica, and brothers Thomas and Francis, would operate the plantation. John, with his three ships, would transport rebels and criminals at government expense to Barbados and Jamaica, assuring a steady supply of labour to their plantation, then return to England with a hold full of Rose sugar. William, the London apothecary, would serve as the family banker. All of that happened and the Rose brothers lived prosperous, privileged lives.

There is little question that the Rose plantation used African slaves, as they were by far, the most cost-efficient form of labour. Sugar plantations were the

most labour intensive of any crop in the day and were considered the 'worst of the worst' in terms of the nature of the work. Cotton plantations in New England could get by with one slave per ten acres; sugar plantations required as many as one slave per acre. A three hundred fifty acre plantation was viewed as sizable. So even if the estimate of one slave per acre is off by 50%, such a plantation would have 175 adult slaves. The average lifespan of a slave was said to be a scant nine years.

There is no evidence that the Roses traded in slaves. The Triangular Slave Trade operated almost wholly out of Bristol, south England. John Rose was based in London. The Triangular Slave Trade was so named for the three-legs of the voyage and the three trades that made it so lucrative: Bristol merchants shipped copper pots to African slave-traders on the Ivory and Gold Coasts in exchange for slaves; the slaves were shackled in the holds of the same ships and transported to the West Indies where they were sold for sugar; the sugar was shipped to London and sold for a massive profit. By the time the sailing ships were secured again to the docks of Bristol and London, inexpensive copper pots had turned to gold.

In 1833, after almost 200 years of lobbying by Quakers (including my Quakers) and others, the Slavery abolition Act was passed, and slavery was abolished in Britain and its colonies. However, the corporate world, as we know, is quick to adapt to change. Immediately following 1833, the plantations switched to indentured servants -- slavery by another name.

The Apothecary

Apothecaries are no longer around. In good measure, it's because of a court case involving our William Rose. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there were three providers of medical services, not counting midwives

(midwives were not considered part of the medical community): surgeons, physicians and apothecaries.

Surgeons carried out basic surgery – amputated crushed limbs, set broken bones and carryied out other duties related to the mechanics of the body. Physicians were the highest order of medical practitioner. They were sometimes university trained, as was Dr Fulke Rose's grandson, Dr Rose Fuller. They diagnosed a wide range of ailments, illnesses and other conditions, carried out medical procedures of the day with hit and miss results and prescribed medicines. The apothecary made up those medicines and unlike the pharmacists of today, apothecaries also provided medical advice and treatments, blurring the roles of apothecary and physician.

Apothecaries had moved into the physician's territory in order to service people who did not have the means to pay the physicians' fees. Naturally, physicians were not pleased with this state of affairs and at every opportunity, they jealously guarded their right to diagnose and prescribe.

In 1701, a butcher from Hungerford Market whose name was John Seale consulted William Rose about what was probably a sexually transmitted disease. William tried various treatments over several months without success. He finally called it quits and presented Mr. Seale with a bill for 50 pounds, a considerable sum.

Mr. Seale complained to the College of Physicians who brought the matter before the court arguing that William was practicing illegally as a physician. The case was extensively debated and ultimately, a decision was made in favour of the physicians. Next, the Society of Apothecaries appealed, arguing that physicians' high fees excluded the poor from their services and thus, the apothecaries were providing an essential service. William won the case on appeal in 1704.

Not to be outdone, physicians set up free dispensaries for the poor, designed, no doubt, to undercut (unsuccessfully) the apothecaries' business.

Both sides of this issue were entrenched in the family, for it was the second husband of Dr Fulke Rose's wife, Elizabeth Langley (1662-1724) who formulated the plan for the free dispensaries and largely financed them. His name was Dr. Hans Sloane (1660-1753), eminent physician, naturalist, philanthropist and originator of the British Museum.

The ruling in favour of the apothecaries is still considered to be the beginning of General Practice in England. That is to say that apothecaries later became our general practice medical doctors. Today, the Rose Prize of the Royal College of General Practitioners is named in William's honour. It is awarded 'For original work in the history of medical practice in the British Isles.'

Broadway, in the Cotswolds near Gloucester

Broadway, in the Cotswolds near Gloucester

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Broadway, in the Cotswolds near Gloucester

Bath

Bath is named for the famous Roman baths in the centre of this small town of 88000 people. It is 80 kilometres and an hour's drive southeast of Gloucester, at the southern end of the Cotswolds, in the County of Somerset.

It was Day 14. We had the day to drive to Bath but we chose to get there directly and poke about. Faithful Garmina was on board with the plan and we found our next digs without having to perform HCS (Headless Chicken Shuffle). We were too early to check in but we claimed a parking space on the narrow road outside the flat and walked for twenty minutes into town. The town centre is very compact. Like the Shambles of York, one can walk its breadth in twenty minutes. So in the space of that afternoon we were able to get our bearings, visit Bath Abbey and the Roman Bath and return to the flat in time to check in.

The building that housed our flat was likely Georgian, early eighteen hundreds. Characteristic of the era, our building stretched an entire block and comprised a series of conjoined townhouses. Once homes for the wealthy, these old girls had long ago been sliced and diced into multiple self-owned flats. At the appointed hour, our lovely host, Sue, 40s something, unlocked the front door of 32 Grosvenor Place, then led us down a long, steep staircase to the lower floor. It did not bode well. As we descended into the abyss, a vision of 3 nights in a windowless cave left me gritting my teeth. Accommodation is always a craps shoot. Sometimes you win; sometimes you do not. At the bottom of the stairs there was one door — ours. What greeted us was beyond imagining.

The flat faced a small garden enclosed by a stone wall which provided complete privacy. Large multi-paned windows and a French door flooded the flat with light. There was a comfy sofa and chair and tasteful, homey furnishings that said 'You're still in England.' Behind the small living room was a glass dining table and behind that again was a bedroom and bathroom. The flat was modern, painted in quiet designer colours and clean. Brick arches were everywhere apparent, revealing the building's foundations and the flats original use as a cellar. We were tickled…and relieved. This would be a good stay.

The following day, we walked into town to rendez-vous with a pre-arranged tour. It would begin with a boat ride on the River Avon (no, a different River Avon) and end with a walking tour of the town. Suffice it to say, finding the rendezvous was like an Easter egg hunt hosted by a sadistic adult. Randi found it (she usually does) at the last minute, after I finally abandoned my own ideas that had come to naught (Say, you wouldn't be a Tight, would you Peter? Just asking). It was not up the highway after all, but on the canal, where boats like to be — floating. Still, we should have walked up the highway. It would have been vastly more interesting than the boat ride.

The subsequent walking tour was fine, not inspiring. I spent the time shooting, mostly. In the afternoon, we joined the masses at the Roman Bath. There was a queue of course, but it was painless. This venue was worth every penny. Wonderfully done. I was astonished at how much of the bath is intact: the structure, the massive columns, the pool and surround, and on the upper balcony, numerous statues of ruggedly handsome Roman potentates. Duty and determination were etched on their faces; they cast glances to the pool below, a firm reminder to its occupants that there was still much to be done.

There were multiple levels to the bath — the upper

balcony, the pool below and two or was it three levels below the pool which displayed artifacts of the Roman period and the inner workings of the bath. Around the pool, cadres of fresh-looking uniformed students spoke volumes. They lounged, listened to audio pods or chatted in low tones. Some slouched against columns, their vacant stares suggesting they had long since left the bath for more interesting places.

And there too were the Selfies, posing against strategic backdrops designed to impress back home. One young woman approached me on the upper balcony to take her selfie. I did. She checked the result. “No, no. Over here,” pointing to a spot where both the Roman Baths and Bath Abbey could be seen behind. I took the shot; she checked the result. Not good enough. “Again please,” her voice firm with no hint of apology. It took about eight shots before Selfie was either satisfied or had deemed myself and the project hopeless. She offered a perfunctory thank you and moved on to the next photo op and her next assistant.

When I got home from the trip I related this incident to my middle-aged friend Maria who had recently been in Venice with her husband. She wanted to take a picture from the Rialto Bridge, but it was packed with people. A young Selfie was at the rail, her boyfriend taking the requisite dozen shots. Maria waited patiently, then waited some more…and some more. Maria is Italian. Finally, she broke, screaming back to her husband at the end of the bridge, “I CAN’T TAKE A PICTURE BECAUSE THIS F*****G BITCH WON’T STOP POSING! Revolution nears.

Settlement in the area of Bath predates the Romans, but I am hesitant to convey the entirety. Should I do so, I fear the worst. Already you are slouched in that armchair I suggested at the outset (well done), bottle of Bordeaux clasped loosely at the end of your dangling left arm. I fear the slightest reference to Celts of the pre-Christian era may see the bottle slip from

your grasp as you slip from consciousness. Such a mess to clean up and oh, look what it's done to the Turkish rug!

Let us not forget the wise words oft repeated by our mothers, those of John Wesley, theologian and minister who moved to Bath in 1851: "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Here then is the executive summary, for those of you who are on the verge of changing your mind -- deciding that waxing the car etcetera holds more allure after all than reading this tome.

Ten years after the Romans invaded Britain in 54BC, times were quiet. Peace reigned, except for the Scots, of course. But that little problem would be fixed with a wall soon enough. Ring any bells? The Roman elite was bored, homesick and dirty. They hadn't had a good bath since they arrived and the smell was making it difficult for them to hook up with the locals.

Enter Cleanius, man servant to Aulus Plautius, the Roman Governor of the day. Cleanius arrived back on the job in Londinium after extended time off (the Romans offered a good benefits package):

Aulus: Ahh, wine. Thank you Cleanius [pause]. There is something different about you Cleanius. I can't quite put my finger on it...you look... well, fresh, invigorated...[sniffing]...you smell nice. What have you been up to?

Cleanius: I was visiting family Sire, a hundred mille passum to the west of here. There are hot springs there, which I frequent daily to cleanse the body and raise the spirit.

Aulus: Christ (Aulus was a man ahead of his time), let's go.

Cleanius: I'm sorry Sire?

Aulus: Let's go. I could surely use a good bath and a spirit-raising. Some days this job really sucks. I'd rather sell sandals in the

market. Mind if I invite a few friends along?

Cleanius: I'd be honoured Sire. Shall I pack the usual for the trip – wine, grapes and cheese?

Aulus: Yes Cleanius. And toss in a goat, would you? Enough for all of us. Did you catch that?

Cleanius: Catch what Sire?

Aulus: That's a play on words, Cleanius. Aulus...all-of-us.

Cleanius: Brilliant Sire. Very catchy.

Aulus: I'm losing it, aren't I? A spa, that's what I need. Somewhere to get in a little R and R. Just hang out, read a few scrolls.

The rest is history. The baths were built as part of a larger spa the Romans named Aquae Sulis or 'waters of Sulis.' During the Middle Ages, Bath was an important centre for trading wool. Queen Elizabeth declared Bath a city in 1585. Regrettably, a pundit of the day described her ankles as "ugly." The queen never revisited Bath and when her coach was obliged to pass through, the blinds of her carriage were firmly down. The queen was pissed.

"Damn the press. Insufferable blackards. Fake news, that's what it is. A witch hunt. Strike that. 'Gerald, how much room do we have in the tower these days? I see. Well, bloody well build another one. Make it two for God's sake. Get on with it man. It's time to clean house...again.'"

Bath Abbey, Bath, Somerset

Re-enactors at Bath

Roman Bath at Bath, Somerset

Heritage Day: Royalist Camp at Bath, Somerset

Entry Hall, Roman Bath at Bath, Somerset

Roman Bath at Bath, Somerset

Stone Circle

After two nights in Bath, we were on the road again by 8:30am of Day 16. It was an hour's drive to the first of two Neolithic sites on our itinerary -- Avebury Stone Circle and the iconic Stonehenge.

Standing stones, stone circles and megaliths have been found all over the world. We know that they were built by Neolithic peoples five thousand or so years ago. We don't know how and we don't know why. They may have been astronomical calculators or places of ritual and worship. They differ in nature.

Carnac in Brittany, France consists of over 3000 stones, some more than 20 feet high. Lined up in rows, they go on for six kilometres.

In the 1930s, labourers clearing land for the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica discovered spherical stone balls that vary in size from a few inches to six feet across. Korea has a massive ancient burial site containing hundreds of ancient dolmens – tombs built from large stone slabs that resemble the mathematical symbol pi.

Avebury Stone Circle

Avebury Stone Circle is not surprisingly located in the village of Avebury, not far from Stonehenge. More accurately, the village is located in the stone circle: the stone circle is so big it incorporates a portion of Avebury. Indeed, it is the largest stone circle in the world. To my delight, I found I could walk up to and around the stones, unlike Stonehenge where visitors

must stand hundreds of feet back. Avebury is more than a stone circle. Surrounding the stone circle is a broad, deep ditch. The distance between the top of one side of the ditch and the other must be in the neighbourhood of 200 feet. On the outside of the ditch is a high berm. This extensive ditch and berm structure was all dug by hand with stone and bone tools. The sheer amount of work and the degree of collaborative effort that was required is stunning. Just the task of quarrying and transporting the stones leaves one in awe.

Avebury, Wilshire: largest stone circle in the world

Avebury, Wilshire: largest stone circle in the world

Avebury, Wilshire: largest stone circle in the world

Stonehenge

The following day we arrived at Stonehenge at 9am, the start of our appointed two-hour time slot. We would not be alone.

We almost didn't go. It was a push to see Stonehenge in the morning, drop the rental car off in Salisbury early afternoon, catch a train to London, find the flat in a new-to-us city of 18 million people and meet with the landlord. Yet that's what we did.

I was hesitant to go too because it felt like I'd been there and done that. I had been there, in pictures: glorious pictures of Stonehenge at dawn, Stonehenge at dusk and Stonehenge on the solstice. Yet all doubts vaporized when I stood before it, shoulder to shoulder with a throng of human beings from across the planet who had come to witness the miracle. There is something deeply, viscerally spiritual about Stonehenge, something akin to hands reaching across the millennia, quiet voices whispering "You, us, all things living and not living upon this earth, we are one."

The creators of Stonehenge were hardly 'primitives.' Nor were the constructors of the pyramids, the masons of Machu Picchu, the architects of Angkor Wat or the cave painters of Laseaux. They were all masters of their trade. It's humbling.

How good were these folks? Consider this. Test 1: If you were given a basket of torches, asked to hike two kilometres inside a pitch black cave with pouches of red and white ochre and ash 'crayons', and were then asked to draw something in 3D that you were intimately familiar with – your spouse, for instance –

how well would you do? Uh, remember to start out of the cave before you've used up your last three torches. Experience as a Buddhist monk is helpful for this exercise. Life insurance would be prudent.

You got back out before the last torch whimpered and died? Good work. Many don't. Rest assured your stick person depiction of love-butt will remain there for millennia. Love-butt is still there? Well, I'm sure, in time, he'll find his way.

Test 2: Build a pyramid. Gather all the friends you know...and their friends. You'll need a chisel, a measuring tape, a GPS and a wack of free time...and pack a lunch.

There was a mixed reaction from onlookers. Some observers appeared to retreat to a spiritual place. They stood silently at the rope barrier just staring, wordless for minutes. Others chatted in small groups, about what I don't know – the enormity of it, the mystery of it or lunch plans. Still others seemed to view Stonehenge as an opportunity to impress friends and family, not with Stonehenge, with themselves, that they had been there. I speak again of the Selfie, who cuts a swathe through the crowd to allow a friend's camera to capture their theatrical poses.

Stonehenge has become a people-moving machine. In an admirable attempt to preserve the spirituality of Stonehenge, the Visitor's Centre was built some distance away and out of sight of it. One can walk the distance in 20 minutes or ride a bus there in three. Visitor numbers are now so large that a steady stream of buses moves people to and from the site all day, every day. It was a crazy, busy place but I am ever so glad I went.

Stonehenge, Wiltshire

Stonehenge, Wiltshire

Neolithic Habitations at Stonehenge

Clock House

Forty-five minutes to the southeast of Avebury is the little village of Shrewton, a ‘stone’s throw’ from Stonehenge. It is semi-rural with lots large enough to satisfy the most serious of hobby farmers. It was there, tucked up a long gravel drive, that we found Clock House, precisely where the detailed instructions of our friend Gill Wallis said it would be. Clock House is the home of Gill and her husband Peter Wallis. The term ‘house’ does not do it justice; it is more a commodious cottage. It didn’t start out as a house; it was the stables. That was hard to believe. It is lovely -- unpretentious, warm and inviting.

To anyone who knew the Wallis’s it would be obvious that it was they who built Clock House, for the qualities apparent in the house were precisely those of its owners. This was the first time we had met Gill and Peter, yet we were greeted like family.

Gill is a youthful 60s something, of average height with the healthy, slender build of one who stays physically active. She is animated when she speaks, oozing life and good humour, and has a gentle, easy way about her that belies her capacity to think deeply and speak her mind. She is retired now; she taught school for a living – a perfect match.

Peter is also 60s something. He is tall and lanky and wore glasses that hinted of his intelligence. He has an open, kindly face and a becoming shock of tousled white hair. His voice is clear and loud, almost decisive,

yet his words tumble out in such an easy, relaxed manner that one cannot help but be drawn to him. He was, I suspect, a leader of men and a good one. He had a career in the Royal Air Force that took this couple to Hong Kong, Singapore and Penang for extensive periods.

Peter's Aunt Sheila was there too. She is a handsome woman, short, large-boned and slightly stooped. Sheila has the slow and careful movements of a person intent on not falling. Like her nephew, her voice is clear and strong. When she speaks, her words are measured, her thoughts are well considered and her memory and intellect are fully intact. There is strength to this woman; she was likely a formidable force in her day, a person you would be well advised to have on your team.

These folks are a rare find -- friends we could happily share a winter's fire with, chatting and laughing until the wee hours. As it turned out, we did just that for that entire afternoon, starting with a sumptuous lunch. Mid-afternoon, Aunt Sheila's son Bob joined us, a well-built, affable, straight-talking man, who for a living, sets up training courses for lorry (truck) drivers. He kept us in stitches with his brilliant renditions of English accents.

The story of my friendship with Gill began several years ago online. I had placed a notice on a Hong Kong website seeking information about my great great grandfather, Daniel Caldwell. Daniel was a well known, controversial figure in Hong Kong's early days. Gill got in touch and explained that she had a robe that was originally his. Peter's Aunt Sheila had been a fast friend of Leslie Caldwell, a great nephew of my great great grandfather. Leslie had passed the robe to her upon his death. Over the months that followed Gill worked with me to uncover more of the Caldwell Story.

One day a box arrived at our front door – from

Shrewton, England. In the box was Daniel's 150 year old robe. I was stunned. This was an unimaginable gift. It is a magnificent piece, festooned with brocade dragons in heavy gold thread. Once a year, at Christmas time, I pull the robe from its box and wear it briefly at Tai Chi. It is a nod of respect to my colourful ancestor, Daniel Caldwell – opium smuggler, court interpreter, Assistant Chief of Police, Registrar of Brothels, inmate, entrepreneur, 'Protector of the Chinese', pirate hunter and father and provider to 32 children. It is a nod of respect too to Chan Ayow, my great, great grandmother, who raised all those children and managed their huge household. All that is another story.

Friends Gill, Peter and Aunt Sheila at Clock House

The lovely Aunt Sheila at Clock House

Part 3: London

To London | The Flat | Thames Cruise & Greenwich | Hyde Park & the British Museum | Brick Lane Market | Columbia Rd Flower Market | Regent's Canal & Camden Market | Kew Gardens | To Gatwick | Journey Home |

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To London

Day 17: Within a block of dropping off Perky at the Hertz lot in Salisbury I did a curious thing. I switched to the right side of the road. Perhaps I was anxious to be back on home turf. Whatever the reason, there was a scream from the woman to my left which brought to my attention the error of my ways and I cranked the wheel hard to the left, in time to avoid the lorry who had a split second earlier was approaching fast in my lane.

A minute later, we drove triumphantly into the Hertz lot to drop off Perky. It was early afternoon on a Wednesday. We were there at the appointed time but the compound was oddly quiet. Perky seemed relieved. Quiet was good. I tried the door of the office. Locked. There was no one there. We had a train to catch.

I called the woman who apologized profusely. There was an emergency and she was obliged to rush off. “Just put the key on the top of the front tire and you’re good to go.” I did and we did – go, this time by cab. Remember York? I did. Randi did.

Our cabbie, an older man, dropped us at the train station in good time. I tipped him well for the short ride. He seemed surprised and pleased and with gusto helped us with our bags.

Tipping does not seem common in England. Of the 30 odd folks we joined on two mini-bus tours, I believe

we were the only ones who tipped. We are visitors in their land and representatives of ours. We owe them something, at the least, a good impression. What if the cabbie had gone home that night and said to his wife, " Picked up some Canadians today, Lovie. Bloody nice folk." That would make my day.

Train stations can be tricky places. For example, it's important to know which way you're headed. If you know that, you'll also know which side of the tracks to stand on. And that's a pretty good start to getting on the right train. If you're not on the correct side of the tracks, serendipity will prevail and you will find yourself on a new and unexpected adventure in God only knows where. That may well be a good thing.

We got on the right train, which depending on your approach to travel, might have been the wrong train, for it was the train we planned to be on. The next stop would be tricky indeed – Waterloo Station in London.

It was. Waterloo is big -- bigger and busier than any other train station in the UK. Combined with the adjacent Underground and Waterloo East stations, Waterloo is the busiest station complex in all of Europe. When it opened in 1848, it hosted 14 trains a day. Today, 274,000 trains a day come and go. That's almost 100 million trains a year. That's *million*.

At Waterloo it was the usual scene for the intrepid twosome. Run about, one way, then the other, look for helpful signs, ask a person in uniform. No go. Ask a commuter. Got it. Line up for the escalator, down into the vortex to the underground: Waterloo Station to Green Park Station to Victoria Station to Brixton Station – at rush hour. We made it to Brixton. It remained to find the flat.

Brick Lane East London

Brick Lane East London

Brick Lane East London

Brick Lane East London

Brick Lane East London

Brick Lane, East London

The Flat

The up escalator belched us from the tube onto Brixton Road. Almost. There were the inevitable stairs, then daylight. Now what? Which way do we walk? We were late for our meet, so I called Will, the owner. He offered to pick us up. Relief.

London is one of the most expensive cities in the world. Two hundred dollars Canadian per night is standard fare for a very standard room. For that money you are spared the run down a darkened hall to a shared bathroom but I assure you, you will not be overlooking the Thames and popping grapes.

I found our London retreat online. What else can one do?. “Forty-nine pounds per night,” it read. London for 49 pounds a night? The headline promised “A Lovely Bright Place, Perfect For Exploring London.” I signed up. Silly boy. It was not 49 pounds a night. There was a cleaning fee of 25 pounds, an additional guest fee of 70 pounds and a service fee of 43 pounds. Still, for London, it seemed a reasonable deal. The flat was in Brixton -- not exactly Kensington. But we’re flexible people.

Will arrived on foot. Do you remember me saying only idiots drive in Britain? Will is no idiot. He is fifties, tall, affable and physically fit. “Just this way,” he announced briskly, and off we went, walking... well, perhaps something closer to waddling. There was a pack on our back, another on our neck and a suitcase dragging behind. Did I mention how Brits love to walk? “This is the long way,” crooned the optimistic Will ten minutes into the trek, “but it gives you a chance to get acquainted with the neighbourhood.” Swell.
In three agonies past the hour we came to the house.

These are brick row houses, conjoined for blocks on end, likely built in the1890s. They were all very much the same, nicely kept, with gleaming white trim around the windows and doors. Stacked up in front of our house, however, was a pile of construction materials. Hmm. Once single family dwellings, the houses are narrow, two stories high with an attic. Now, they are mostly converted to three suites: main floor, second floor and attic. We were in the attic.

Will stuck the key in the lock but it would not turn. "You just have to fiddle with this lock. It's a bit temperamental. There we go." The door opened to reveal the hall floor, covered in filthy plastic. "Pardon the mess, they're renovating the first floor." I chose not to check the expression on Randi's face and we moved forward to the stairs.

The stairs were narrow and steep, with a small landing on the second floor, wide enough for one person. Here, Will unlocked the door to our suite and swung it open to reveal another long, steep, narrow staircase leading up to the unit. The roller bags bashed up the stairs behind us and with our last ounce of energy, we achieved the summit. The back half of the attic housed two starkly furnished bedrooms and a bathroom; the front half, separated by three stairs down, consisted of one large room with the 'dining' and 'living' areas. Will directed us to the latter half. "Mind the stairs."

The upper half of each side of the dining-living room sloped inward, as attic ceilings do. At the far end of the room, there was one small window two feet by three, a love seat on life support and a television. That was the living room. At the end closest to us was a metal folding table and four metal folding chairs. That was the dining room. Across from the dining room was a rudimentary kitchen complete with two side plates and three glasses. Fortuitously, I brought two bowls from home (I should have been a scout in my youth but being a delinquent, I found, was a full time

job). “As you can see,” states Will, “the skylights bring in lots of light but the rain comes in if they’re not closed in a timely way.” Like the middle of the night, I mused.

The bedroom revealed a bed. A pleasant surprise, for our flat in Paris two years prior did not. That was it for the tour. Will left wishing us a grand stay and disappeared with a flourish “If there’s anything you need, just call.”

As it turned out, there were a few things we needed. A bathroom sink that let the water run out, an oven bottom element to bake chicken on the other side, a mattress without ribs to allow sleep, a carpet that bare feet did not stick to, an elevator to give one the courage to leave and the strength to return and a picture on the wall to raise the spirits. Ah yes, and a new front door lock to let us back in, once out.

“Suck it up Peter,” I whispered out loud to self, “this is London. What do you expect for $100 a night?” “More than this,” growled Randi.

Brixton, London

Gus at his Pizzeria, London, near our flat

Brixton, London near our flat

Brixton market, London

Brixton, London, near our flat

Stefan, Brixton, London near our flat

Thames Cruise and Greenwich

We were near spent. I could not muster the energy to write a note to family and friends yesterday, but rose early today to get it done. Memories are short-lived these days. It’s write or flight.

6am. First light suggested another mixed weather day. More rain perhaps; no doubt more howling wind. Very unusual, said Londoners. These weather shifts do not bode well.

Today was designed as a casual affair: a cruise on the Thames and two museums close by. I thought we had mastered the tube, that magical conveyance that makes all rapid movement in London possible and thus all outings effortlessly achieved. Nay. It was not so.

Snake remained a formidable foe ('tube' is a term far too innocuous for this creature). Just when you think it's yours, you are lost in a maze of tunnels, pummeled by throngs of silent, terrifyingly fast-moving people, entertained by tone deaf Jamaican steel drummers, whisked down escalators so steep they take the breath away (one left Randi dizzy).

Snake has a daughter, Sincerity, who works in the trade. Nepotism thrives still in some quarters. A pleasant yet business-like young woman, Sincerity takes to the loud speaker to ensure all conform to the protocol:

"Please keep to the right to let others move by; as you

depart, mind the gap between the train and the platform."

A score of souls, it seems, did not mind the gap and never arrived home that night. Now their children, raised in poverty by a single mum in the tenements of East London, take their father's place on the Snake. When they board and depart, they stand out from the crowd, bridging the gap between train and platform with a careful, exaggerated stride born of fear.

"Please be sure to take all your personal belongings [arms, legs and dangly things] when you leave the train."

This one, at least, presented no problem, as upon departure, all our personal belongings were embedded in our chest, back and legs.

We arrived at Westminster Pier and queued to present our London Pass to City Cruises. A man at the teller on the right insisted on exploring every nuance of the offering. The man at the teller on the left did not bring the critical document but argued at length that he had paid. Minutes remain to cast off.

Finally, an opening. We were on; our boat pulled away from the dock and slipped down the Thames. The guide, it appeared, worked a second job as stand-up comedian. We chuckled all the way to Greenwich. Behind us sat a young couple from Mumbai. They would soon apply as immigrants to Canada. We exchanged addresses and mutual invitations to visit.

Greenwich. First venue, the Cutty Sark, famous tea clipper of the mid-1800s that set the record for a passage from China to England of 70 days. Then hunger drew us to the Greenwich Village Market for a memorable pulled pork sandwich. A block away, we took in the Maritime Museum. Back on Snake we leaped, and headed for the Museum of London -- Docklands for the history of British Trade. Superb. It

was a wrap. 4:30pm. Snake was waiting patiently for its next meal.

Rush hour, Friday afternoon. This is Snake's big meal of the week. Londoners leave town. Confusion. The signs for Snake took us to an upper platform. Wrong side of the tracks. Down again, up again. Back we went one station to change lines but our next station was elsewhere and where was elsewhere? Signs directed us to a mall where a helpful soul suggested we try Canada Square. Even this massive plaza is dwarfed by the office towers which envelope it. We were lost in the enormity of it all. Yet this is but one facet of Canary Wharf, the massive financial district built and lost by Canadian property developer, Paul Reichmann.

By accident, I spotted in the distance the symbol for the underground. Again we submitted. The platform was stuffed with humanity. Trains came and went; we inched forward until we stood on the edge of the platform, the tracks five feet below. This was no place to trip. The next train arrived; the horde shifted in anticipation. The train doors in front of us slid apart revealing room for perhaps seven people, no more. A hundred would wait for the next train.

Kindly veteran commuters pressed us to the front as the next train arrived minutes later. Randi was on -- just. My turn. It did not seem possible for me too to squeeze in. "Come on," yelled Randi, panic in her voice. "Go now," commanded the man behind me. I crushed my way in.

Pressed cheek to jowl, we were human anchovies. "Doors are closing. Please ensure you are fully inside the car." It was Sincerity with sage advice but little on-the-ground experience. Yes, I was in! The doors closed behind me. BAM. My backpack was not in. I pressed forward again; the doors closed. This was a memorable ride. The heat and humidity made breathing a labour. There was no room for social

niceties here. The anchovies are silent.

We did get home, eventually. Once free of Snake, there was still the bus to catch from Brixton Station. "Get the 133," cried Randi, pushing through the horde. What a girl. For a moment, I lost sight of her and when I arrived only metres away at the door of the 133, she was nowhere to be seen. She caught the 33!

She'll find her way home, I reasoned, but what if she's not back by dinner? I hopped the 133. It was stuffed. Should be there in a ...jiff. Traffic. Heavy traffic. The bus moved centimetres at a go. Twenty minutes later, we had advanced one stop.

A veteran rider next to me at the exit snapped open the overhead emergency button console and sprung the door. Gone he was, mid stop. I was tempted to follow, but Canadian propriety held me back. I waited another 15 minutes for the next stop, then fled. Walking felt great. Fresh air, lots to see. Uhh, where am I? Damn, I'm freaking lost again. Don't tell Randi. I wandered, inquiring with passersby where Helix Road was. "Sorry, I'm just here visiting a friend. "Sorry, don't know that one. Try Google."

I did and found my way home. As I staggered up the steep stairs to the attic flat, Randi called out " Peter, is that you? I was so worried. What happened?"
"Just connecting with the neighbourhood."
"Ahh, you got lost." Bloody hell.

Cutty Sark, Greenwich, London

Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Cutty Sark, Greenwich, London

Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

Thames River Cruise

Thames River Cruise

Thames River Cruise

Thames River Cruise

Hyde Park and the British Museum

It was a late start. We were dragging our heels. Too late to catch the walking tour of the Jewish Quarter. It was raining but we opted for a saunter in Hyde Park anyway, followed by a wander through the British Museum. Despite the rain, the park was alive with people. On the lake, a major swimming marathon was in full swing.

From one end of the lake to the other, hundreds of swimmers in wet suits were thrashing the crawl. It was the London equivalent of a killer whale feeding frenzy. Hundreds more of their friends and loved ones huddled under umbrellas and urged them on from the shore. Coffee drinkers crowded the concessions, chatting in groups or thumbing devices. Joggers loped by in twos and threes. Occasionally, a few horses cantered past, their riders decked out in helmets and haute couture. Here and there lovers dawdled. This is London. The rain went unnoticed.

We walked, expecting at any moment to see Kensington Palace through the trees. It never appeared. Randi was tired; so was I. Our pace slowed; the rain did not. The sooner we found shelter and food the better – for me. Change in plan. We headed for the nearest underground station. The nearest station was not near. This is a large park, equal in size to Massachusetts or the Canadian national debt. Our pace shifted from slow to glacial. The water weighed us down.

In time, (everything takes time here) we found the gaping maw of the underground and offered ourselves up as belligerent sacrifices. The hunt for the British Museum had begun, now more an act of self-preservation than a desire for cultural enlightenment. Snake was obnoxious, of course, but we were desperate. In a state of uncaring semi-consciousness, we ignored the crowds, the noise and confusion and at the other end, we ventured again into the rain.

The museum is not a small place. Trump Tower could comfortably fit inside where Trump would dearly like to see it. The trick though is to get it through the doors:

Donald: Ya know Theresa, I think there's an opportunity here for us to do a little business together. That museum of yours pulls in a lot of folks. If I was ta put the Trump Tower inside, we could make a lot of money, you and me. I don't mean us personally, you understand -- for our countries. We'd split the profits, ya see — 20 % for you, the rest for me, well, you know, for the United States. There'd be enough to float your navy.

Theresa: How do your propose to get it in there Donald?

Donald: Ah, that's just detail. I'm the idea guy. My team will figure out the rest. Maybe we'll fold it up. Yeah, I like that.

Theresa: Ah. Like the way you folded your trade cards with the world?

Donald: Hey, you're one to talk, Ms. Brexit.

Theresa: Or folded your border with Mexico leaving families divided and the poor and beleaguered of Central America without hope?

Donald: Say, if the Trump Tower could use the museum's washrooms, that would sure help us with the costs of getting it in there. And maybe my hotel patrons could get a free museum pass. Whataya

say? I've got a couple more ideas. Could save your ass in the next election...Theresa? Say, Theresa....Where ya goin'? I'm just gettin' warmed up! Women.

You would think that a large building like the British Museum would be a slam-dunk to find. No, it is not. Trump Tower is not in there yet. It takes time. Have I mentioned that everything in London takes time? We knew the general direction, thanks to the helpful advice of a pizza delivery chap who kindly checked Google Maps, then waved his hand in a sweeping movement to indicate 'over there.' So sweep we did. We walked -- left, then right, then left again, then forward and back....

Eventually, we arrived at the museum gates. There was a queue -- a snake of another sort. London invented the queue. They were everywhere. People are not troubled by them. I rather think they are viewed by the natives as opportunities for meditation, a form of stationary Tai Chi. This queue was outside... in the rain.

At the head of the queue, an official was splitting visitors into two lines according to some criteria known only to him, the security team and God. We lucked in. He put us in the fast track for V.I.P.s, it seemed, along with a family fairly reeking of money and privilege. We walked past a hundred soggy souls to the head of the line.

I'm guessing that, in our case, the sorter's decision was not based on appearance. No, I believe the fellow spotted the twisted expression on my good wife's face and decided that the threat posed by asking her to open her bag was greater than the likelihood that she had a bomb inside it. At security, I placed my backpack on the table and began to unzip it. "No, no", barked the checker keeping a wary eye on Randi, and waved us through. We had arrived at the massive,

incomparable bastion of world culture and pillage. Fittingly, the entire world was there -- every language spoken, every colour of skin, pushing, jockeying, gesticulating and bellowing. It was chaos. I was momentarily confused. Had the United Nations moved to London? The vehemence with which they moved about suggested they were not happy campers and had come to claim their goods. And why not? No, it was not so. They were just people having fun, including, of course, the Selfies who were there, en force. For them, the British Museum was a rather expensive fun house, a photo-op. Full stop.

Were there really that many Selfies in the world? Was it possible that the BBC was filming a follow-up to Fawlty Towers. Perhaps it was a version of Candid Camera that was tracking my every move around England, planting a steady stream of pretend Selfies in front of me to capture my bent expressions for the entertainment of the masses?

First priority: washroom, second: food. The Pizzeria was a no go, all tables taken. We headed for the restaurant, 78 steps above the floor of the massive central rotunda. Seating seemed a shoe-in. Who in their right mind would climb to such a height just to eat? We joined the queue.

Lunch was a casual affair. We lingered there into the afternoon, worrying our shared fish and chips with our forks, desperate to hang onto the last remaining seat in London. When we could linger no more, we left. I cast a final glance back to our table, as if to secure the memory forever.

Our time in the galleries was half-hearted for we were bone-weary. There was little to see anyway; one could not get close to a display case for the crowds. The Selfies were there naturally, insisting that whole exhibits be cleared for their modeling sessions and obliging those moving past, by English custom, to squeeze behind the picture taker.

After 90 minutes we called it quits, having seen but a tiny fraction of this treasure trove. Perhaps we would return – on a stormy, cold winter's day when snow lays thick on the ground; we'd have the place to ourselves, wouldn't we?

Hyde Park, London

Hyde Park, London

British Museum London

British Museum London

British Museum London

British Museum London

Brick Lane Market

Rain. It was pouring. That worked for us. We needed a morning off to collect ourselves. By 11:30am the weather had lifted. The high overcast was just the ticket for the camera and me. We dug ourselves out of the flat and headed for the Sunday Brick Lane Market, East London. The 156 took us down Brixton Hill Road where we hopped the Snake to Green Park, changed to the District Line, got off at Aldgate East, then walked up Brick Lane to the market.

Oh my. It was photographer's nirvana. Already it was noon and the sun was threatening to poke through. Shots were everywhere. I began bashing them off, moving quickly to cover as much ground as possible while the light held. Throngs of people of all colours and ethnic attire crowded the streets and sidewalks. A multitude of languages pocked the air. For culture addicts like me, this was a bonanza. While I worked on capturing the scene, Randi slipped out of sight. I wasn't worried; we'd bump into each other, but I couldn't stop to look.

Minutes counted. Check the light. Shoot from the shadow side. MOVE. Cover that alley. Look up, look back. Wait for that one. Good. Try another angle. Chase that guy. Wow, there's a shot. Ask permission. No go. Nuts. I passed a 40s something man with a crutch, begging. A hundred feet beyond, I stopped, returned and placed a coin in his hand, then, with permission, took his picture and chatted. I shot the street until the sun popped out. As if planned, Randi appeared and we went for a bite at the food market.

Ohhh, the food market. It's an old warehouse off Brick Lane. Against it's four walls are food stalls offering

street food from the breadth of the planet -- Pakistan, India, China, Indonesia, Singapore, Korea, Malaysia, Vietnam. Ahh, the smells, the colours, the textures. Vendors urged us to taste. We chose the Singaporean stall, shared the 'something of everything' offering and found a seat outside.

An American couple joined us. We told them we are Canadian and the woman promptly apologized for their president. "I am so ashamed," she confessed. “He has treated your country terribly. We do not share his politics." These are thoughtful, intelligent people. There is a sensible, ethical America – waiting, hoping. I tipped my hat to my father's family who once called Singapore home and we left for the next adventure -- the Columbia Road Flower Market.

Brick Lane, East London

Brick Lane, East London

Brick Lane, East London

Brick Lane, East London

Brick Lane, East London

Columbia Road Flower Market

“It's 3:30, I said to Randi, “the vendors will be wrapping up. Probably not worth the effort." "Oh come on, we're here,” she countered. “Let's try." But which way? "Let's go that way," says Randi. "Follow the flowers." We could, for a stream of people -- human bread crumbs with flowers in hand -- were coming down Brick Lane. In ten minutes, we were there. Flower stalls with bellowing vendors on both sides of the street, and a crush of people between. Nirvana revisited. "Meet you here in 30 minutes," I call out to Randi. "No. You're not leaving my sight." "Okay. Let's get to it. I'm going to the far end, then shooting my way back against the sun. Okay?" "Okay, Go."

I moved through the crowd, taking pot shots when I could, then worked my way back as planned. It was cramped, to say the least, and shots were hard to get. When it seemed that the crush of people could get no worse, a man appeared, walking his bicycle, patiently inching it through the crowd. On the back carrier was a wooden crate and in the crate were seven little pups. In seconds, the pups were spotted by one person, then another and another. A knot of people, men and women, with outstretched hands were fondling the little beings, then picking them up and pressing them gently to their chests. The owner, an older man, stopped, smiled, chatted amiably and happily let it happen. Getting past this knot within the knot was possible but difficult. Nobody seemed to mind. In the midst of this, a young flower vendor pulling a six foot high multi-shelved trolley of plants appeared. How she and her trolley got to that point is a mystery. She was an animal lover. All movement came to a halt. In an instant, she had picked up one of

the furry balls and tucked it under her chin. She was going nowhere, nor was her trolley, nor was anybody else. But no one cared; there were puppies to cosset. In time, the man and his puppies moved on. The rest slipped away. I got my shots of puppies and people; they got their shots of puppies and love and all of us were smiling. Randi and I called it a day.

Columbia Road Flower Market

Columbia Road Flower Market

Columbia Road Flower Market

Columbia Road Flower Market

Regent’s Canal & Camden Market

Sun. Not short for Sunday. It was Monday. The sun had returned. A normal person would rejoice. I did not. Photography is more challenging when it's sunny. Sun causes lens flare, bleaches out colours and creates high contrast which blocks up shadows and burns out highlights. The human eye has vastly more capacity to see detail in high contrast conditions than our cameras have, which is why we're often surprised and disappointed when the wonderful picture we saw through the viewer turns out to be a throw-away.

High overcast, that's my favourite -- soft, diffused light which still gives shadows and thus dimension to people and objects, assures detail throughout the image and bestows rich colours and dramatic reflections, especially after a rain. But you get what you get and that day it was sun. I would work mostly in the shadows shooting towards the light to capture dramatic effects.

Once again, we sallied forth on the Great Hunt. This time the objective was Jason's Little Venice Boat Trip.' If we managed to locate Jason, he would take us up Regent’s Canal to Camden Road Market, where, the theory goes, we would arrive in plenty of time to explore the market, have lunch and be off to other venues.

Finding Jason was indeed a big ‘if’ which I found very odd. Jason makes a living from this. He might well have a wife and nine young children to feed, children

whimpering with hunger in a small holiday trailer tucked under an overpass. Why on earth would he make it so difficult to be found? There are 18 million people in this town. If you want customers, would you not wish to stand out in some way, tell people where you are, for example?

I'm not an idiot. I don't think. I've said that before, haven't I? I'm beginning to sound defensive. All right, I admit that matters of navigation do not come naturally. But really, it's as if Jason chose his dock site something like this:

> "Now let's see, we don't want hammers for customers. They might do something stupid like lean overboard with their cameras and knock a body part off going through the tunnel. How would that play out on Trip Advisor? Not well I can tell you. So I suggest we tuck our Jason well away from the other trip boats and forget about signs. That way, only intelligent people will find their way here. And thus, we avoid the insufferable wailing of distraught customers and the dreadfully messy business of scooping parts out of the water. It's brilliant, what?"

It was 11:30am when we found the dock for 'Jason's Little Venice Boat Trip.' The hunt began at 9:30. Next departure, stated the sign: 12:30. Swell. I killed time shooting the boats tied up along the canal. Randi sat on a bench and chatted with a local -- an older lady who lived on one of the 'narrow boats' with her husband. They came by canal from Birmingham 26 years ago and never left -- their boat or London.

Jason arrived on time, with his boat. Once we were seated, Sarah, our guide, was quick to make clear who was boss on this expedition -- and it wasn't us.

> "As we carry on down the waterway, I will be giving a commentary on the history of the canals and of the boatmen and their families

who worked them. I ask that you do not talk, for doing so will spoil the trip for those around you."

Not stated but implied:

"Should you see fit to ignore my advice, you shall be placed on Browning Island over there, so named for Robert Browning, famous English poet, where you shall wither and die a painful, lingering 'death by peck,' compliments of a thousand irate ducks, hand picked by me for the task."

Okay fine.

We arrived at Camden Town Market, body parts in tact, and explored the myriad alleys chock-a-block with stalls -- belts and purses, tops, suits and ties, shoes, ethnic food, baubles, scarves, used books..... The light was good in the narrow alleys. I was off.

"Must go, Rand, see you back here in half an hour."

Three thirty arrived and we rendezvoused at the dock. It was too late to fondle the wares in Harrod's or terrify the horses with my camera at the Royal Mews. Randi had been a Trojan all week, stoically enduring significant knee pain. It was time to head home to Brixton for a little R and R.


CAMDEN

Regent's Canal, London

Regent's Canal, London

Camden Market, London

Camden Market

Camden Market

Final Day:

Kew Gardens

London. What a girl. A wonder of contradictions -- hard working yet playful, rough hewn yet cultured, ancient yet modern, brash yet polite, rich and poor. There is no pinning her down. She is just... London. We've been here a scant six days, yet already I feel her pull.

Okay, we struggled to get our feet on the ground. But that was no fault of hers. That was us, two analog seniors staggering through a fast-paced world. We got your message London, not whispered exactly. More like 'tough love.' "Better get on board folks, or stay home and watch the paint peel."

What's travel without lumps. If it's a lumpless experience we're looking for, we'd best take a tour. Or watch a travelogue in the den. It's less work and cheap. And if we *really* want to experience the essence of a place, why not throw on a backpack or climb on a bike, stay in hostels, hitchhike, drive a beater that breaks down, live on the edge. I did it once for a year as a young man. It was phenomenal, mind-bending, life-altering. Could I do it now? I like to think so...maybe.

Don't get me wrong. I am not saying my life is dull and wanting. I cherish the life I share with Randi. Like many in the Western World, our lives are chock full of routine and comforts. Too much of that can dull life's edge. Perhaps it has for me. I'm hardly un-engaged with life, but I sometimes feel I'm not as *en*-gaged with the real stuff of life as I could be.

Yes, the ‘real stuff of life’ -- getting out there in the world, rubbing shoulders with, sharing life’s moments with, listening to the stories of people – people of different cultures, persuasions and life experiences. I’m talking about exploring the human condition. Now *that* intrigues me.

Have you noticed that as our wealth increases and with it our comforts, we put more between ourselves and the ‘real stuff of life’? Take, for example, the difference between walking and riding a bike. Then consider the difference between riding a bike and driving a car. The more affluent we become, the more we insulate ourselves from life around us, and the less of life we experience. It is the tragic irony of our modern North American world. In our (misguided) attempts to find lives of substance -- opportunities to connect -- we frequent dating services, build gated communities, create theme parks and ‘friend’ on Facebook. We are dehumanizing at an alarming rate.

Europeans, Brits included, get that. Not all, of course, but many. They go to great lengths to preserve that way of being in the world so essential to human wholeness -- village life, living life *in* society, where people shop at the fromagerie, the boulangerie, the boucherie. They take time to chat, connect with neighbours and friends. It's not about physically living in a village (although Brits have done an impressive job of protecting, reconstructing and populating the ancient villages). I'm speaking mostly of a state of mind, a value set that places relationships above personal gain. Enough.

We spent our last day at Kew Gardens, a botanical reserve hundreds of acres in size, where the world's largest collection of plants live quite happily, side by side, and have done so for the better part of 200 years. Yes indeed, the plants live quite happily, side by side. Inspiring, isn’t it?

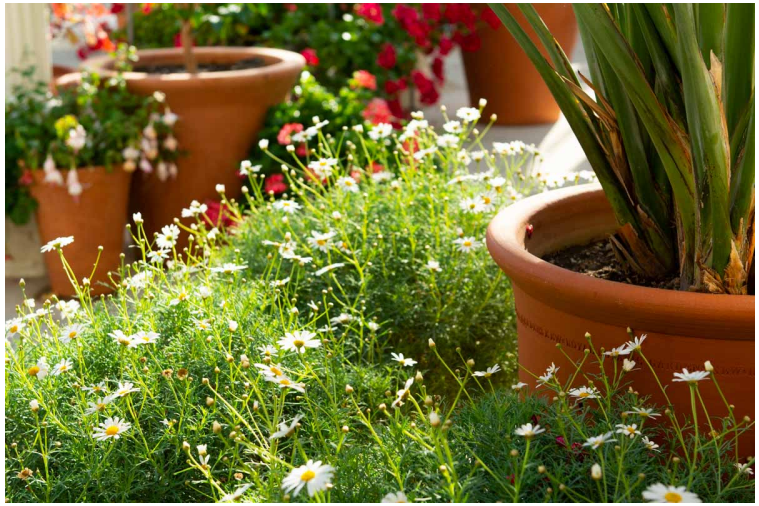
Like every London venue, Kew Gardens is an intense

experience. By 2:30pm we had covered only a fraction of the grounds, but it concerned me not. I had by then seen more than enough to make the day trip worthwhile. By 4:30pm we were spent and left for Snake. Along the way, people stopped to chat, helped with directions, made way for us in tight quarters and offered us a seat. We must have looked pathetic indeed.

Back in our neighbourhood, we dropped in to the 'Fish Lounge' for take-out fish and chips. Gus, the affable fifties something owner talked of his life in London and throws fresh fish in the fryer, just for us. By 10 pm, we were packed and ready for the journey home. It was time for bed.

Kew Gardens, London

Kew Gardens, London



Kew Gardens, London

Kew Gardens, London: end of the line

Journey Home

Day 24 and homeward bound. We were in the air, settled and snug in seats 34 H and K. Ahhh. No more hassles, nothing to do but sit back and relax and let the Big Bird fly us home. The four course macaroni au fromage arrived. The assiduous planner, I ordered our meals ahead of time online. It was a five star sum but this was the last hurrah. What the hell. Randi ordered the buttered chicken. On the tray in front of me sat a preliminary to stimulate the taste buds (a bread roll in a sealed bag with a wee pat of butter in a sealed plastic cup). There too was the entree (macaroni au fromage, in a Little Blue Box), fruit to cleanse the palate (six slices of apple in a sealed bag) to be followed by desert -- a KitKat in a red sealed wrapper, not to be confused with the Red Seal Certification for chefs. I took the presence of the KitKat as a kindly *adieu* from the Rowntrees, my Quaker relatives who created the KitKat in 1911.

Regrettably, I found myself lacking in appetite, perhaps because I had just stuffed myself with granola. I carry a bag of granola everywhere to stave off death in the event of a famine. Although a more plausible reason for downing the granola was my earlier acquaintance with the macaroni au fromage on the flight out. I was fully apprised of its nature, you see. And there I was again, face to face with the Little Blue Box. How odd. I suppose I could have asked the pleasant attendant to suck it down the terrifying tornado toilet but my Scots blood got the better of me. I had prepaid. I was in.

The Blue Box has two ends, of course, but attempts to open either end proved fruitless. They were firmly glued shut. This is ridiculous, I thought. Why would

WestJet go to the effort of creating macaroni au fromage for their valued customers, then cram it into a tiny unassailable fortress? Well, I was obliged to persevere. Not that I was salivating down my front, but, as mentioned, I had paid good money for the pleasure.

On closer inspection, I noted that each end of the Little Blue Box had a hole. Surely it was a finger-hole for pulling the end up and open. No go, but when at the same time, I pulled at the same end with my other hand, I managed to rip enough of the box end open to allow me to grasp the plastic tray inside. Ah ha. Progress. It remained to pull…to pull the tray out of the remnant of the Little Blue…. It's stuck. What the hell, come out! Beyond polite, I ripped off the remainder of the box's top, then grasped the tray with the vehemence of a Trump supporter at a West Virginia rally. With gritted teeth, I wrenched it from its comfy quarters, rendering the Little Blue Box unrecognizable. I dared not look up in case I should come eye to eye with six people who might spread the word to their listless neighbours about the on-board entertainment in 34K.

Just as I finished liberating my lunch-to-be from its mini-prison, and feeling a tad righteous, I happened to glance to my left. Randi had found a tab on the top of her Little Blue Box of buttered chicken and the clever little bitch (forgive me, I love her dearly) was peeling it back to reveal her lunch. I hate that.

Lunch was, to be blunt, a sordid affair. My guess was that WestJet's secret recipe for macaroni au fromage was invented by WestJet CEO Tommy West's mother's mother to stave off hunger pangs in the Great Depression. Macaroni is macaroni. The fromage is the key ingredient.

Fromage, of course, is French for cheese, but cheese this was categorically not. Yes, it was yellow and when a fully grown adult, might have leaned toward the orange of good old Canadian cheddar. But that is

really as far as it went. I concluded from prior WestJet experience that, in the bad old days, Mrs. West could not afford real cheese, so substituted something else. God knows what. And that something else was handed down through the West family and landed firmly on the fold-down tray in front of me.

More accurately, the plastic tray of macaroni au fromage inside the Little Blue Box landed firmly, not the faux-fromage, for the latter, you see, was closer to the consistency of thin soup. That, in itself, would not have been an insurmountable problem, if the faux-cheese had actually been cheese. I've had cheese soup and it's not bad. In this case, this unidentifiable medium proffered as cheese serves only as a lubricant, causing the macaroni on your plastic fork to slide off onto your shirt and lap, smearing as it sallies forth on the way to the cabin floor.

Randi, as I mentioned, chose the buttered chicken. It seemed an astute choice at first taste, but with the passage of time her impressions changed. She began to complain of stomach cramps and threatened to pass more than time. And I, poor soul, was in the aisle seat.

I am prone to speculating on the why of things and on this, a nine-hour flight, I had the luxury of time. Here then, is the theory I arrived at on the origins of WestJet's buttered chicken. I return again to the recipe book of the now famous Mrs. West. She was, I believe, a shrewd manager of money, a necessity in the dirty thirties. To make her nickel go further, Mrs. West came upon a cheap, indeed, free source of meat to nourish her growing family — road kill. I share your feelings, the thought is abhorrent, yet there is no need to dwell on this. Those days are long past, thank goodness, and the West family have prospered, in large measure by carrying on the family tradition of frugality.

Now please, I am not suggesting for a moment that

WestJet serves road kill to its patrons. Preposterous. However, could it be that WestJet marketers took a page from Mrs. West's playbook, that is, that they stumbled on using vastly cheaper Grade B chickens. 'B' stands for 'battered.' Battered chickens are those unfortunate feathered creatures who are pecked to death by pissed-off co-habitants.

The quick-minded among you might now see the ruse. To the prospective diner, 'battered' chicken means floured and deep-fried; to WestJet it means profit. Thus the theory goes that WestJet initially offered 'battered chicken' (an entirely honest statement) which became, due to a typo not yet corrected by WestJet staff, 'buttered' chicken or alternatively, 'battered' chicken spoken with a London accent. I confess this is all a titch speculative but I encourage you, dear reader, to find your own truth — fly WesJjet.

Lunch done, Randi attempted to connect to the internet.

"I've followed the instructions to a tee" she complained, "and nothing happens."

I scanned the instruction sheet. "It says 'Open the WestJet Connect app. You don't have the app."

"Well, how do I get the app?"

"Go to Apple Store and download it."

"I tried, nothing happened."

"That's because you're not connected to the internet."

Randi said naught and pulled her book from the seat-back. She was overwhelmed, I suppose, by the complexities of the digital age. My nemesis: Little Blue Boxes.

September 26, 2018. Victoria Airport: 4:47pm. We were home. "Hey, there's Chuck." How are you bro'? Thanks for the pick up. The trip? Oh man, it was awesome...."

London: Ever the same; ever changing

That's all folks!