

# Part 6: London

Samuel Pepys

Brick Lane Market

To Greenwich

Life On Ice

Columbia Rd Flower Market

Regent's Canal & Camden Market

Finale: Kew Gardens

To Gatwick

Journey Home

# Samuel Pepys

## London: Mid 1600s

*London in the mid 1600s bore not an iota of resemblance to its meticulously planned Roman predecessor Londinium. Gone were the forum, bathhouses, temples, the governor's palace and amphitheatre. Gone also were the sewers, the fresh water supply, public toilets and open spaces. Twelve hundred and fifty years after the last Roman left in 410 AD, London had devolved into a medieval chaos of windy, narrow lanes.*

The poor lived in overcrowded tenements and garrets — airless, dark and filthy. Slops were thrown from windows, animal dung and debris littered the slippery cobbled streets, in the centres of which ran open

drains. In the summer London was beset with flies and mud, and in the winter, it was awash in sewer.

The city hired rakers who cleared the detritus from the streets and piled it outside the city walls. The stench was insufferable. The air was choked with the smoke of soap factories, breweries, iron smelters and 15,000 coal-burning fireplaces. Rats, fleas and haggard dogs were everywhere. Wagons, horses and pedestrians filled the streets, congesting at the city gates and queuing to cross London Bridge. It was a medieval version of rush hour today.

Those who could afford it travelled in hackney carriages and sedan chairs to avoid the filth. Those who could not afford carriages suffered the splashes of

their passing. Just beyond the Roman-built city walls lived those poorer than poor in a shanty town of a quarter million souls. All told, the population of London had grown to 460,000 people. London was ripe for something terrible.

## **The Admiralty**

Living and working in London at the time of the Great Plague was Samuel Pepys (1633-1703), pronounced peeps. Samuel came from an upper middle class family of notable politicians. He was well-educated, a quick study, articulate, politically astute and highly social. Through his extensive connections, hard work and his skill at administration he rose through the civil service to become Chief Secretary to the Admiralty under King Charles II and his successor King James II. Samuel's job was complex and demanding. He was to

keep the Royal Navy supplied with men, ships, materials, food and finances, and advise and report to the Admiralty, Parliament and the king.

Samuel's acumen brought a number of important modernizations to the Royal Navy. Yet he is notable in history not for those but for the diary he kept from 1660 to 1669. The diary provides a unique and entirely candid account of his personal and work life and of everyday life in London in the 1660s. Much happened during those years. Oliver Cromwell died and the republic collapsed, King Charles II was returned from exile, and the Second Dutch War, the Great Plague and the Great Fire of London occurred in quick succession.

## **The Black Plague**

In June of 1664 a seaman arrived at the port of

Weymouth in South England. With him came the Black Plague (bubonic plague). The Black Plague was nothing new. Western Europe including Britain had been devastated by it on several occasions, the most deadly in 1348 when up to 60% of Europe's population was killed. Experts peg England's death toll in that year to two to four million of its six million people.

The Black Plague was a horrid disease. The skin turned black in patches. The glands of the groin inflamed into 'buboes' and victims suffered vomiting, a swollen tongue and severe headaches. Death followed within several days.

Once infected, the victim's symptoms appeared in 4 to 6 days whereupon, the house was sealed, condemning the entire family to death. A red cross was painted on the door with the words "Lord have mercy

on us." At night, carters hired by the city called through the streets "Bring out your dead," loaded the corpses on their carts and took them to the plague pits.

Within eighteen months of the seaman's arrival, the plague had engulfed all of England. In the fall of 1664 a bright comet appeared in the sky over London. It proved a portent of what was to come. By June of the following year the plague was deeply entrenched in London, infecting the poor in the crowded boroughs with vengeance. There, wretched living conditions and plague infected rats and their fleas rapidly spread the disease. Seven months later, 100,000 Londoners, almost one quarter of its population, were dead. The wealthy including King Charles II and his court escaped the onslaught by retreating to their country estates. For the poor, there was no escape.

As a small child, I gathered in a circle with friends. We held hands and sung this song, versions of which children have sung for hundreds of years since those horrifying days of 1665:

“Ring around the Rosies,  
A pocket full of posies,  
Husha, husha, we all fall down”

The ring of rosies is a reference to the red rashes, the pocket of posies refer to posies of herbs carried to lessen the smell of the disease and as protection from the disease, and husha, husha were the coughing fits, a final symptom before the victim fell down, dead.

The City of York also suffered terribly from the plague. When we visited York our B&B was several blocks beyond the old city wall. Each day, we walked down a street, on one side of which was a steep, grassy

embankment. On the top of that embankment was the old city wall. What I now know is that the depression at the bottom of the embankment is an enormous plague pit filled with the bones of countless victims.

## From Pepys Diary

The Great Plague in London peaked in August 1665. Samuel's diary entries during that terrifying month reveal his horror and fear as he walked the eerily empty streets of London. Shops are closed, friends and acquaintances are dead and the few passersby are but shattered shells of souls:

*Tuesday 8 Aug 1665*

*The streets mighty empty all the way, now even in London, which is a sad sight. And to Westminster Hall, where talking, hearing very sad stories from Mrs. Mumford; among others, of Mrs. Michell's son's family. And poor Will, that*

*used to sell us ale at the Hall-door, his wife and three children died, all, I think, in a day. So home through the City again, wishing I may have taken no ill in going; but I will go, I think, no more thither.* Wednesday, 16 Aug 1665

*... how sad a sight it is to see the streets empty of people, and very few upon the 'Change. Jealous of every door that one sees shut up, lest it should be the plague; and about us two shops in three, if not more, generally shut up.*

*Wednesday 30 Aug 1665*

*...Lord! how every body's looks, and discourse in the street is of death, and nothing else, and few people going up and down, that the towne is like a place distressed and forsaken.*

By the end of August Samuel could risk living in the city no longer. He and his wife Elizabeth join family in

Woolwich, now Greenwich, beyond the city walls:

*Thursday 31 Aug 1665*

*Up and, after putting several things in order to my removal, to Woolwich; the plague having a great encrease this week, beyond all expectation of almost 2,000, making the general Bill 7,000, odd 100; and the plague above 6,000... Thus this month ends with great sadness upon the publick, through the greatness of the plague every where through the kingdom almost. Every day sadder and sadder news of its encrease. In the City died this week 7,496 and of them 6,102 of the plague. But it is feared that the true number of the dead, this week is near 10,000; partly from the poor that cannot be taken notice of, through the greatness of the number, and partly from the Quakers and others that will not have any bell ring for them.*



*The Triumph of Death by Peter Bruegel the Elder*



*Black Plague*



## The Great Fire of London

Shortly after midnight on Sunday 2 September 1665, a fire broke out in the bakery of Thomas Farriner of Pudding Lane, central London. Wind spread the flames rapidly from house to house. Normally, firebreaks were created by demolishing streets of houses, but doing so required the Lord Mayor of London, Sir Thomas Bloodworth, to obtain the authority of the king or risk reconstructing the houses later at his own expense.

By the time large scale demolitions were ordered, it was too late. The fire had become a conflagration. It pushed north on Monday into the heart of the city. Rumours spread that foreigners were responsible; many French and Dutch were lynched and assaulted. By Tuesday, the fire had spread across the entire medieval City of London inside the Roman wall.

Destroyed were 13,200 houses, 87 parish churches, St Paul's Cathedral and most of the city's administrative buildings. Seventy to eighty thousand inhabitants were left homeless. The social and economic challenges which followed were enormous. The death toll, officially reported as minor, has been debated by historians, some arguing that many of the poor who died were unaccounted for.

## From Pepys Diary

Sunday 2 September 1666

*"I was called for, and did tell the King and Duke of Yorke what I saw, and that unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down nothing could stop the fire. They seemed much troubled, and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor —[Sir Thomas Bloodworth. See June 30th, 1666.]— from him, and command him to spare no houses, but to pull down before the fire every*

way.

*At last met my Lord Mayor in [Canningstreet](#), like a man spent, with a handkercher about his neck. To the King's message he cried, like a fainting woman, "Lord! what can I do? I am spent: people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses; but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it." That he needed no more soldiers; and that, for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked [home](#).*

*[Of Thomas Bloodworth Pepys found him "a mean man of understanding and despatch of any public business," an opinion widely held in the day. I am directly related to Bloodworths. Could it be...?]*

*[ I ] walked to my boat; and there upon the water again, and to the fire up and down, it still*

*encreasing, and the wind great. So near the fire as we could for smoke; and all over the Thames, with one's face in the wind, you were almost burned with a shower of firedrops. This is very true; so as houses were burned by these drops and flakes of fire, three or four, nay, five or six houses, one from another.*

*[We] staid till it was dark almost, and saw the fire grow; and, as it grew darker, appeared more and more, and in corners and upon steeples, and between churches and houses, as far as we could see up the hill of the City, in a most horrid malicious bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire."*

## Thoughts

Samuel's womanizing would hardly 'cut the mustard' today. Yet despite that, he did care deeply for his wife,

always ensuring her well-being. Although his claim to fame today is his diary and the light it has shed on the period it referenced, 1660-1669, there was much more to Samuel's accomplishments. He was a hard-working, highly competent naval administrator who brought much-needed modernizations to the British Navy at a critical time. What made Samuel so effective at his job was his capacity as a connector and influencer of people and ideas.

The glue which made those attributes so effective was his nature. He was straight forward yet tactful, intellectual, politically astute, an incomparable conversationalist, affable, fun-loving and caring. Samuel had the ear, it seems, of every important person in his day, including the king, the Duke of York and the aforementioned Hans Sloane. His friends and associates stretched from intellectuals, politicians, merchants and government officials to humble

servants and pedlars. He was truly a man of the people who earned the love and admiration of all those he touched.

---



*Great Fire of London 2 September 1665*

*Samuel Pepys (1633-1703)*

*1st cousin 7x removed of wife of 1st cousin 2x removed*



## 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*

# 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*

# 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.

---



*Regent's Canal, London*



*Camden Market*



*Camden Market*

## Thames to 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 which, according to the guide books, 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*



*Thames River Cruise*



*Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London*



*Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London*



*Cutty Sark, Greenwich, London*

# Life On Ice

*It seems fitting that while in Greenwich, the home of all things nautical in the British Empire, that I should tell the tale of Sir Ernest Shackleton's ill-fated voyage to the Antarctic.*

*Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton, CVO, OBE, FRGS (1874-1922) was born into an Anglo-Irish Quaker family. Ernest was a polar explorer at the beginning of the 20th century, an era known as the Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration. For his first polar experience, he joined Robert Scott's Discovery Expedition (1901-1904) as third officer. Much to his dismay, Ernest was sent home early with heart problems.*

Not to be thwarted by this perceived assault on his character, Ernest returned to the Antarctic in 1907 as leader of the Nimrod Expedition. In 1909, expedition members marched south to within 190 km of the pole, a new record. On his return home, Shackleton was knighted by King Edward VII for his achievement.

The race to the pole ended in 1912 when Roald Amundsen reached the South Pole using dogs, sleds and skis.

Shackleton's pressing need for glory led him to propose the penultimate Antarctic journey — crossing Antarctica from sea to sea via the pole. The Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-1917 began.

The expedition's ship, the Endurance, powered by sail and steam, was extensively refitted to withstand the rigours of Antarctica. Shackleton had chosen a deep



narrow hull for Endurance which would break through the ice rather than a rounded hull which would rise up onto the ice when squeezed. Once in the Antarctic, Shackleton likely wished that he had chosen the latter, for the Endurance became trapped in insurmountable pack ice and was slowly crushed and sunk.

The crew salvaged whatever they could take with them, then began an arduous trek in search of land, dragging the ship's 20 foot lifeboats over endless high ridges of uplifted ice. As the ice floe disintegrated that spring, the crew were forced to sail for five horrendous days to reach a tiny pinnacle of rock called Elephant Island, their first solid ground in 497 days.

Elephant Island was an exposed, inhospitable place, well off the shipping lanes. There was no hope of rescue from there. Shackleton decided to risk a dangerous open-boat journey to South Georgia Island where a whaling station could effect rescue.

Preparations were made for the trip.

## To South Georgia

The chosen lifeboat, the James Caird, was refitted with raised sides, a strengthened keel and a wood and canvas deck. Then on 24 April, 1916, the James Caird was launched with six men aboard — Shackleton, Endurance's captain Frank Worsley, Tom Crean, two strong sailors John Vincent and Timothy McCarthy, and the ship's carpenter Harry McNish.

Navigating across 1200 km of horrendous Southern Ocean seas, Worsley brought the Caird abeam of the south side of South Georgia Island. Hurricane force winds kept them offshore through the night but the next day they landed safely and set up a base camp where they rested for several days.

Then Shackleton, Worsley and Crean, with 16 metres of rope and an ice adze scaled the mountains,

covering 51 km over 36 hours to reach Stromness, a whaling station on the north coast of South Georgia Island. Forty years later, in October, 1955, the British explorer Duncan Carse traveled much the same route as Shackleton's party. He wrote "I do not know how they did it, except that they had to...."

## Rescue

At the whaling station, Shackleton forthwith arranged for his three crew on the south side the island to be picked up, then organized a rescue of the remaining men on Elephant Island. Three attempts to reach them were foiled by pack ice. Shackleton appealed to the Chilean Navy who sent the navy tug *Yelcho* with Shackleton aboard, to rescue his crew who had been on Elephant Island for four and a half months.

Shackleton and his entire crew returned safely to

England. It was a feat of leadership and collaboration which placed Ernest Shackleton firmly among the ranks of great British heroes, the place he had always dreamed of being — for entirely different reasons.

---



*The crew huddles around the ship's stove*



*The crew wave goodbye to the James Caird*



*Captain Frank Wild surveys the remains of the Endurance*



*Shackleton and 5 others sail 1200 km to South Georgia*

## Tea With Sir Ernest

*If you were granted an hour with the ancestor of your choice, who would you choose? For me, it would be a tough call, but Ernest would be right up there in the top three. I'm speaking of Sir Ernest Shackleton, Antarctic explorer of the early 1900s. He was a legendary figure, famous for his courage and leadership in rescuing his crew from shipwreck and certain death.*

Yes, I'm proud to say that Ernie and I are close relatives. He is my grand nephew of the husband of my 2nd cousin four times removed. He often speaks of me

(I'm certain). I'm expecting a letter from him any day. Still lost in the post, I suppose.

No matter. I arranged to meet him in the flesh in the reading room of the Royal Geographic Society, London at twelve noon sharp, August 4, 2013. Sir Ernest is a stickler for punctuality. I get there early. The reading room's grandfather clock chimes out the hour. I've got goose bumps....ah, here he is now....

"Sir Ernest. Peter Bruce, your grand uncle and so on. What a great honour this is. Thank you for seeing me."

"Well, quite honestly, I had nothing better to do. This 'being dead' business gets frightfully boring, I'm afraid."

"I see. Remind me, then, not to rush into it."

"Shall I arrange for tea, Mr. Bruce?"

"Please, call me Peter. And yes, thank you. Just

black.”

“Right. Back in a moment.”

Fifty-five minutes pass before Sir Ernest returns empty-handed.

“I’m awfully sorry for the wait, old chap. I’ve had a dreadful time. When I reached what used to be the dining hall, it was gone. Sealed up as though it had never existed.

I enquired with the maitre d’ as to its new location and was informed there was no dining hall, that it had been leased to the Salvation Army as a meal station for the homeless. Cost-cutting measure, he said. Tea could be obtained at the...what did he call them?...dispensing machines in the basement. Dispensing machines? What the devil are those?”

“Its a different world, Sir Ernest.”

“At any rate, in the manner of explorers I persevered and started to make my way to the basement. On the way I inquired with a young lady as to the location of these machines and she offered to take me to them.

“Very kind.”

“Yes, but I wish she hadn’t. Because it was then that I noticed a most extraordinary thing. Her legs were completely exposed from her ...well, you know...right here. I

was, to put it mildly, non-plussed. There she was, in full view of anybody who cared to look her way, half naked! Just a bit of cloth about her middle, the rest, well, exposed flesh as it were.”

“Sir Ernest. That’s how women dress these days.” I don’t think he heard me.

“The curious thing was she seemed to have no inkling of her predicament, poor soul. Of course I promptly removed my jacket and attempted to wrap it about her

mid-section, believing I was doing the gentlemanly thing and that she had somehow lost her bottom half without knowing it. She pushed me away, called me a “bloody pervert” and ran off yelling SECURITY, SECURITY. A minute later two large men looking for all the world like bobbies, grab me, yell “AGAINST THE WALL NOW”, then run their hands all over my body. I briefly considered yelling ‘pervert’ myself, then thought the better of it.

Naturally I remonstrated, and told them my name and member number, thinking they would quickly come to their senses, feel stupid and apologize. Not so, I’m afraid. One of them replied that he was King Ferdinand of Spain and that henceforth, I was to address him as ‘Your Highness.’ The impudence.” “Furthermore,” said he, “our members have 5 digit numbers, not 3.” “What happened to your other 5 digits, said I. Stuck up your bottom, I suppose.” He was not amused.

“Oh gosh. What happened next?” I didn’t really want to know, but I felt compelled to ask. Sir Ernest needed to vent.

“Well, they strong-armed me to a back room. The maitre d’ joined us and there, they proceeded to grill me as to my identity and purpose here. I repeatedly told them who I was but they simply did not believe me. I told them my cousin of sorts was waiting in the reading room and that he would vouch for me. So here we are.”

Standing before me were the maitre d’, the two security men and a rather confused, distraught Sir Ernest in the firm grasp of his captors. Being marooned on Elephant Island must have looked rather appealing to Sir Ernest about then.

I, of course, provided the required vouchsafe. When I picked myself up off the sidewalk and turned to check on Sir Ernest, he was gone. I looked at my watch. One minute past one. The hour was up.

Bon voyage, Sir Ernest. The tea was a trifle weak but your company was grand.

*Note to self:*

*It doesn't work to go back. Enjoy the present to the full Peter. It is all you have.*

---



*Sir Ernest Henry Shackleton (1874-1922)*

*CVO, OBE, FRGS Antarctic Explorer*

*Relation: Grand nephew of the husband of the 2nd cousin 4x removed*



*Sir Ernest Shackleton about 28*

# Finale: Kew Gardens

## **Life and Stuff (There he goes again!)**

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 lump-less 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.

## Kew Gardens

We spent our last day at Kew Gardens in southwest London. Kew is a botanical reserve today, but earlier, the site served as private gardens on various royal estates, beginning in the late 1500s.

The Kew Gardens of today was established in 1759. It belonged to the Crown and was used as a repository and research centre for botanists and related scientists. In the 18th and 19th centuries, explorers, wealthy adventurers and the learned scoured the world for exotic plants which they brought back to Kew for scrutiny and cataloguing. Joseph Banks was one. He circumnavigated the world with Captain James Cook and, along with other voyages, contributed immensely to the Kew collections. Banks Island in the Canadian

Arctic is named after him.

In 1840, the 132 hectares of Kew Gardens was opened to the public. No idea how big a hectare is? You're not alone. Millions of my baby boomer compatriots, myself included, will tell you this: we have no clue how hot it is, how fast we're going, how much sliced ham to buy or, in this case, how big the Kew Gardens are. Well, after a few calculations, it turns out that Kew Gardens is the size of precisely 250 Canadian football fields including the end zones. That's big.

Big is good because there are plenty of plants to put in it. It has 27,000 taxa or classifications of living plants (not counting the plants themselves), over 8.5 million preserved plant and fungal specimens and a 40,000 specie seed bank. As well, Kew has a library with 750,000 volumes dedicated to plants, excluding one softcover volume found opposite Security Post E63 subtitled 'The Best of Playboy: A Retrospective,' found

tucked between 'Exotic Specimens of Tahiti' and 'Propagation: Bedding and Planting Musa Paradisiaca.'

When all those plants, fungi, seeds, books, and drawings are happily tucked in, spaces must be found for Kew's 1100 employees and their vehicles, tools and buildings. And, ah yes, let's not forget the 1,300,000 annual visitors who must be entertained, educated, fed, toileted and first aided.

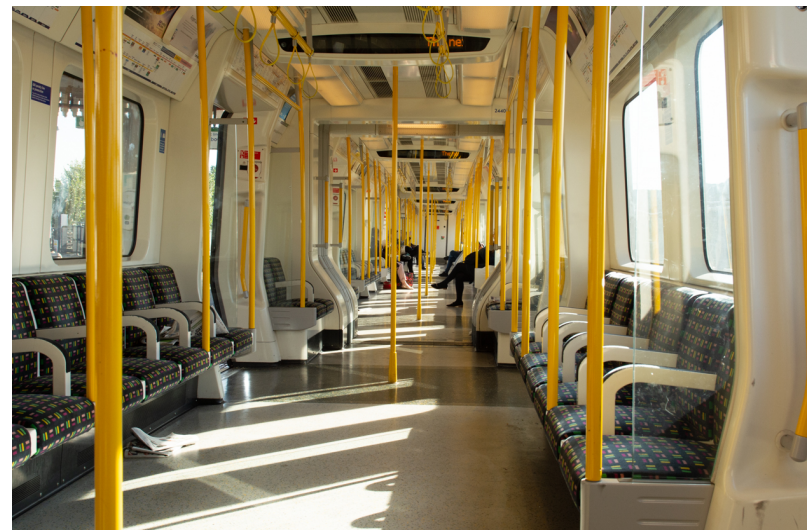
Yes, Kew Gardens is a big deal and a wonderful place to visit. The world is lucky to have her. UNESCO thought so. They named Kew a World Heritage Site in 2003.

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

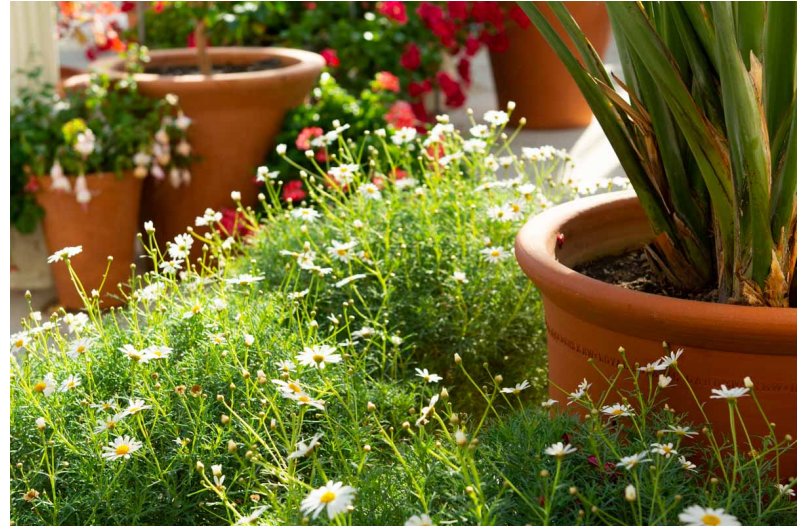
way, people stopped to chat, helped with directions, made way for us in tight quarters and offered us a seat. We must have looked pathetic indeed.

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 threw 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*



# 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 WestJet. 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....”



Rt



*London: Ever the same, ever changing, ever*