

Part 3

Many of the place names here have a very familiar ring. They are identical to many of those I came to know well in Connecticut and Massachusetts. I often shake my head at just how many names the British appear to have stolen from New England. While in London the other day, we visited Covent Garden, which is not a garden at all but a quaint old shopping center, the very design of which was blatantly stolen from Quincy Market in Boston. The nerve of these people!

Immediately across a plaza from Covent Garden lies St Paul's Church (not to be confused with the enormous St Paul's Cathedral). St Paul's Church was first completed in 1633. Its modest-sized burial ground is said to have seen so many burials that they must be somehow ingeniously stacked. In 1665, the first known victim of the great plague outbreak was buried there, the first of more than 100,000 lives (15-25% of the entire population) consumed by a bacteria that is still an occasional risk in part of Arizona. The church was spared in the great London fire of 1666, which of course is how the epidemic is thought to have ended — a novel solution to problems that perhaps bears greater consideration in Arizona.

While we were at the church, Nancy saw an email from a dear friend that his mother had passed away. Without skipping a beat, Nancy replied that we were currently in St Paul's, "So we are in a good place to put in a word for an accelerated journey into the afterlife." Pausing to consider our friend's lack of fervent religiosity, Nancy added, "Like TSA pre-check."

:-)

Many of you familiar with London will know the phrase, "Mind the Gap." It adorns cups and stickers and all manner of tourist schlock. It's actually a polite reminder to watch your step as you exit or enter a train and traverse the often significant gap between the rail car and the platform.

Well, on one trip into London, we were at last treated to a demonstration of just what happens when one does not "mind the gap," when a young woman in front of us did a face-plant into the car, legs dangling out the door as the doors began to close. One of her friends forcibly shoved her legs under her to clear the doorway. As I hovered over her momentarily, it became quite clear that it was not merely her inattention that caused her tumble, but also what must have been an impressive blood alcohol content. Judging the only real injury to be to pride, Nancy and I took up seats toward the center of the car, with these three hapless friends at one end.

This woman struggled mightily, and loudly, for the next three stops, to somehow pry her legs out from under her prostrate torso, her friends' assistance to no avail. Her high heels having

somehow swiveled into reverse position no doubt didn't help. At the third stop, a half dozen young men entered the other end of the car.

Now, football here is a big thing. But not *that* football. Soccer is appropriately enough called football nearly everywhere but the US, and somehow this spectator sport which may see a single point scored in an entire game inspires passions like I've never seen. Upon entering the train, these 6 young men immediately began belting out some anthem for a team whose game they no doubt had just witnessed.

Immediately, our prostrate inebriant summoned the strength to spring to her feet, and answered with a roaring chorus of her own, no doubt representing a different team. The young men wasted no time bellowing out a few lines more, in harmony, to which she responded heartily with lines of her own, not so melodically, while being restrained by her friends as she endeavored to stagger towards her opponents. Back and forth they went. It was amusing, but we were thankful that our tube stop was next, as we exited toward the National Rail station.

To our dismay, both groups of carolers exited with us, but we were able to meld with the crowd and leave them to entertain other patrons behind us. Or so we thought.

As we stood with the crowd in the main room at Euston Station, gazing up with hundreds of others at the "split-flap display" (the train departure schedule board), I noticed a familiar person slide in right beside me. Almost immediately, she began belting out another tune, while a friend tried to shush her. "Focus... focus..." her friend implored while struggling to hold her up. Both groups of balladeers soon left for another track, and for a few minutes I wondered whether they got off without further incident, until we saw a group of four of London's finest sprinting in that direction.

The Beast from the East (see Part 2) departed as suddenly as it arrived, and freezing temperatures were replaced by the "big thaw." This saw water mains all over the country burst, and a real calamity ensued as emergency supplies of water were needed by many for days on end, although not in our area. The temperature here, even for the low, never dipped below 20 degrees Fahrenheit. It was colder further north, but I don't think by much more than another 10 degrees or so. That the infrastructure (roads, railroads, schools, water supplies, fuel supplies) were so challenged by this surprises me. Weather resilience is something they really *should* have stolen from New Englanders.

So it's a balmy upper 40s now, which means more walks, and more mud. I've noticed several signs along the footpaths, such as these:



We made another, final trip to the vet for the dogs' imminent immigration to the UAE. These supposedly house-trained dogs proceeded to pee, poop, and puke all over the pet store that houses the vet's office. Chalk it up to "white coat syndrome," I suppose.

There have been a couple of public health items in the news here in recent weeks, both nutrition-related, and the level of attention, I must confess, took me by surprise. The first was a report from the Office of National Statistics that "one third of Britons underestimate the number of calories they consume." It said that on average, among this third of the population, men claim to eat 2000 calories per day while consuming more than 3000, and that women claim to eat 1500 per day while actually consuming nearly 2500.

Duh.

The second story was a challenge from Public Health England, their version of the CDC, for the food industry to cut calories that they typically offer as a meal by 20%.

Both of these are good stories, of course, but I was struck by how much attention they got. Over and over they played in the news for days, with panel discussions, and industry representatives responding, as if this was some sort of revelation. The coverage rivaled that of the poisoning in England of that former Russian spy. And all this attention appears to have been generated merely by a couple of press releases. Wow, I wish the media paid so much attention to what Public Health says in Arizona. Maybe we can learn their secrets.

Speaking of British food, it is a curious combination. They have lots of international influences, yet render them in their own style. Lasagna, for example, always seems to consist of lasagna noodles with béchamel sauce, ground beef, and good, British cheddar cheese. A favorite snack is a “chip butty,” which consists of two pieces of buttered white bread, with chips (read: French fries) in between. Yes, I’m talkin’ a French fry sandwich. Of course, additional toppings range from mayo or ketchup to malt vinegar. Yum!

While in our neighboring pub one night, Nancy spied the above-mentioned snack being consumed by locals she had just met, and behaved in a most un-British manner by approaching them, asking whether that was, indeed, what she thought it was, and then asking whether she could take their picture:



The 4 basic food groups:

Ketchup

Mayo

Buttered bread

Chips

There is a really great pub and restaurant, the Paddock, perhaps a mile and a half from here. It's run by an Israeli immigrant, with all sorts of international influences, and the food is really spectacularly flavorful. Therefore, few of the locals like it. Typically, home-made dishes are prepared leaving out, for example, garlic or onions that a menu may call for, as these would impart "too much flavor." Suggestions to the contrary are likely to be met by a bemused, "What are we, French?" So there is a mixture of a few foodies and a lot of people who prefer comfort food as they know it, which is to say a lot of meat and potatoes with very little spice. Thankfully, I live with Chef Nancy!

But in the city, you can find every spectacularly created style of food you want. We have found our share already, much of it reasonably priced. We've twice been to a restaurant with hands-down the best seafood I've ever had. So come on over! We'll share.