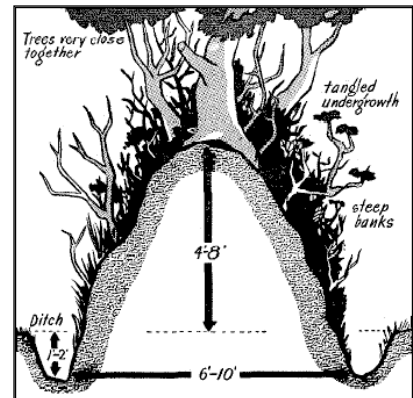
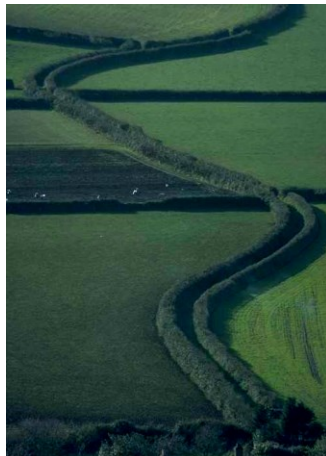


Dear Friends,

So on May 14, after the New York high school reunions told about in my last letter, I flew from Newark Airport across the ocean to London's awful Heathrow Airport, sleeping almost all the way thanks to St. Ambien, patron of jetlag.¹ I picked up my car the next morning at an isolated exurban Sheraton (Colnbrook Bypass, West Drayton) and headed west on the ugly M4 Motorway, which felt like a grim extension of Heathrow.

PART ONE: SOME ENGLAND BUT MOSTLY WALES

My aim was to get to Wales. I had been there once before years ago and had been so impressed by the beauty of the place I wanted to see it again. But my first stop was Ramsbury, in Wiltshire, to visit a specialized heraldic bookseller called Heraldry Today. As soon as I turned off the Motorway I found myself on a tiny one-lane rural English road, tall flowering hedgerows on both sides running through fields of green grass and brilliant yellow rapeseed, as if I had gone in an instant from *Blade Runner* to *The Wind in the Willows*.



Hedgerows were to be the dominant roadside feature for the next two weeks. They are built up over many years – sometimes centuries – to divide fields and isolate roadways; once grown they become quite impermeable to people and animals of any significant size, and form relatively permanent boundaries. Hedgerow trees sometimes meet above the road and make tunnels – indeed driving in hedgerow country feels like being in a maze, as you can't see over them into the surrounding fields or woods. Without GPS it is hard to know where you are.²

¹ Actually it was Temazepam.

² Max Hooper, in his book *Hedges* (1974), says that the age of a hedge can be determined by counting the number of woody species in a length of 30 feet and multiplying it by 110 years.

I had bought heraldic books from Heraldry Today for 35 years, but the illness of the owner meant the business would have to close, or at least be sold if they could find someone to buy it, so it might be my last chance to shop there. If this had happened 30 years ago, when I was a lot younger and looking for a chance to move to England, I might have bought the business myself – by now I would have been the one trying to sell! But it didn't happen at the right time, and now I no longer want to move to England. The owner's daughter told me that lots of people said the same thing to her – if only this chance had come sooner.

I didn't find all that much to buy at HT this time, because I already have almost everything of interest published on my subject in English, but I did buy some lovely foreign books – two in Polish and one each in Spanish, German and Dutch. And it was very gratifying to see my own book, *Emblems of the Indian States*, offered for sale at HT, and to learn that some copies had already been sold.

After Ramsbury I headed for Great Ashley deep in Wiltshire, to the farmhouse bed & breakfast I booked on the Internet so I would have somewhere to go my first night in-country. It was the first of many such places I stayed in – not perfectly comfortable, but adequate, and situated in fragrant green countryside amid the lowing of cattle and bleating of sheep, with a nice pot of tea waiting for me. I went to the local pub (the Fox and Hounds) for dinner. My first taste of bitter (real English ale) was like rain on parched earth. There is no drink as good, except maybe Guinness. The Fox and Hounds had a very sophisticated dinner menu using local ingredients – the days of English food being a sour joke may be over.



I chose Great Ashley because it was near to Bath (arms left), a place I had never visited but wanted to see. And it was worth the visit – Bath is a lovely town, very trim, lots of elegant structures and Bath stone of softest yellow. Bath is called that because of the Roman bath, sited here for the medicinal spring. The Roman baths have been nicely restored (see below left), and it is possible to imagine Romans splashing around in them, and being oiled and scraped down by bathhouse slaves. Bath Abbey next door is crammed with memorial plaques (below right) and heraldic glass and carved wood and laid-up military flags and heraldic roof bosses on the fan vaulting (below center). I spent quite a while there and could have spent a lot more. The Pump House where Regency folks took the cure is now a fancy restaurant, but the spring water is available free inside the Roman Bath complex. I tried it and it is not bad, warm and strong but not sulfurous or nasty.



One of the most impressive sights in Bath, and indeed anywhere, is the Royal Crescent, a masterpiece of Georgian architecture designed by John Wood the Younger and completed in 1774. As with the Taj Mahal or the Eiffel Tower, pictures do not prepare you for the presence of such a mighty monument. The Royal Crescent is so enormous it is hard to find an image of the whole structure, but the photo at right should give some idea.³



After Bath I crossed one of the shiny new bridges over the Severn and finally reached Wales (badge below).⁴ I spent my first night there with Hazel and Douglas Kenney, my friend Simon's parents, near Newport – a slap-up dinner and a pint in the pub afterward.



Driving in Britain can be very stressful. Staying to the left is no problem, but the roads are so narrow, inches on the left to hedgerow or wall, inches on the right to hideous death, sometimes just a single lane, and if slightly wider then cars are parked right in the road. There is often no view of the countryside because of the hedgerows, and when you do see something you can't stop as there are no verges, no shoulders, and cars moving in both directions. Sometimes the road is too narrow even to open the door. I decided to head toward less populated country, north into the Brecon Beacons National Park.

So I drove out of the traffic and onto the high and barren place called Mynydd Llangynidr. Still hedgerows, but places to stop, and after a while even the hedgerows

³ For a panoramic view of the Royal Crescent, see <http://www.virtualtourpro.com/tours/September09/Bath-Balloons/Royal-Crescent.html>

⁴ The motto PLEIDIOL WYF I'M GWLAD means *I am true to my country*.

ended and revealed lovely views in all directions. Little villages in the distance; sheep everywhere, and horses and shaggy ponies looking after themselves. There was a harsh wind, and rain on and off. Warm for a moment, then cold as clouds hid the sun. But hey – if you want the Bahamas, don't go to Wales.

Right from the Severn Bridge all the signs were in Welsh, although usually (but not always) in English too. The English helps a lot. Otherwise who would know that *cylcheodd winwys mwen eytew cytew cwrw* means *homemade onion rings*? Or that *Peidewch â dringo'r meneb* means *Do not climb on the monument*? But no worries: Mae dewis o bwdinau ar gael, holwch os gwelwch yn dda.⁵ It helps to realize that *w* is a vowel, but it doesn't help much.

I stopped for a look at the melancholy ruins of the Blaenarvon Iron Works, a World Heritage Site for its importance to the Industrial Revolution, and afterwards had a good lunch at the Red Lion in Llangynidr. There was no network available for my mobile phone, but the host at the Red Lion hooked me up with a B&B in nearby Talybont-on-Usk. I kept my traveling *shabat* there and slept through most of the next day – it was my first day off in quite a while. Great food at the Coach and Horses, and delicious Welsh cider on tap. Lovely green hills deep in vegetation; mist and soft rain. Continual bleat of sheep from every quarter. Slept more.



After Llangynidr I got into a rhythm of traveling in rural Wales. One or two nights in a bed and breakfast place – Llanarthe, Tremynydd Fach – and then on for more, heading generally westward until I reached the sea, and then south. Bright green pastures, dark green hills, fluffy tree canopy, darker trees and hedgerows. Dark gray skies always about to rain. Sheep and cows and sometimes goats, and then lots more sheep.

Songbirds and caw of crows, and soft patter of rain. Green and brown and sometimes yellow fields, hedgerows and trees disappearing in mist into dead white sky.

⁵ A selection of desserts is available, please ask. Some Welsh phrases don't need translation, for example *pot o te*.



Wildflowers – I stopped at the National Botanic Garden of Wales (see clever logo left) to pick up a field guide, as I didn't recognize most of them. Bluebells and buttery buttercups, yes, but not red campion or rag rose or herb-robert; blue campion or speedwell; yellow celandine, papery

Welsh poppy or rich spiny gorse; white chickweed and garlic mustard and wild radish and mile after mile of cow parsley (right), sometimes turning whole hedge-rows white. I drove along at 10 mph – no hurry as distances were very small and anyway there was nowhere I needed to be. I got better at stopping in the road, waving others past, blocking feeder lanes. I hooted my hooter around every bend – no one else did this, which seemed a little crazy as you could not see or hear anyone approaching, hidden by the hedges on a winding one-lane road with no shoulder to escape to. I had a chat about sheep with a sheep farmer who said he would not recommend the life to his young daughters. He offered to sell me one of his nicest sheep for £200. I was only slightly tempted – I knew I couldn't eat a whole sheep in the time I had left.



I kept going west on country roads, aiming for the sea. I stopped at Castell Henllys to see the reconstructed Iron Age hill fort (right), a fascinating installation of thatched buildings made with iron age materials and technology exactly upon the remains of the original fort. The height of the thatched structures was based on runoff patterns around the excavated postholes.

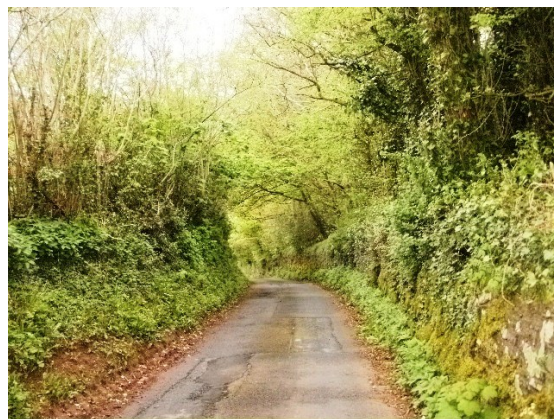


I was aiming for the intriguingly named town of Fishguard on the coast, but first: sheepdogs! A sheepdog trainer was offering demonstrations at £5 a head; dozens of people showed up with their own dogs, to sit in the bleachers and see how it was done. A sinewy lady made a sensation by entering on a golf cart driven and steered by Doris the Sheepdog, something I'd never even imagined could happen. Then we watched as her dogs herded sheep (and indignant geese) in and out of pens at her command.⁶

I stayed that night with the sheepdog people and had a good dinner at The Sloop Inn at the little cove village of Porthgain. But the room was not comfortable, so I moved on the

⁶ For a useful list of sheepdog commands, see http://www.herding-dog-training-border-collie-sheepdog-dvd.com/herding_sheepdog_command_terminology.htm. You never know.

next day to an organic farm at a lovely spot just down the road, with a view over an encattled pasture to another cove with a romantic tower overlooking the sea. You can't get much more Welsh than that! I was making friends with the cattle when my hostess approached and startled them, but they came back at a few words of Welsh from her and licked my hand. A cow's tongue is hard muscle. Crunch of grass – Wales smells like new-mown fields. Below are a few pictures to give a sense of what I saw.





My last tourism in Wales was in St. David's, the smallest city in the United Kingdom.⁷ Lovely cathedral (left) with the usual heraldic plaques, tiles, stained glass, and laid-up banners. But the highlight of my visit to Wales was a trip around Ramsey Island on the excursion boat *Viking Pioneer*. We nosed the boat into sea-caves and watched the razorbills (which looked a lot like flying penguins), kittiwakes, guillemots, falcons, red kites, and playful Atlantic gray seals. It was wet but fun, and good that I took a Dramamine before boarding.



Beautiful though it was, I was getting a little tired of Wales. I was drifting along at 10 or 15 mph, driving usually no more than 30 miles a day, and the country lanes and woody copses and sheep-filled pastures and rocky coasts were beginning to look rather similar. I only had two days left before I had to return the car, so I made a dash for England on the Motorway and pulled off at the first exit across the border. It was Avonmouth, a gritty suburb of Bristol. I wanted to see Bristol, but not this time – as in Wales I just asked at a pub and was directed to a cheap and adequate Avonmouth hotel. The next day, May 26, I went back on the Motorway and allowed the GPS lady to guide me to the Sheraton Heathrow to return my car. The Sheraton found me a taxi, driven by a military-looking Indian with a clipped white moustache, who dropped me off at my London hotel.

PART TWO: LONDON



It felt good to be in London again (arms at left).⁸ I used to go very often, but had not been there for several years. My hotel was cheap but respectable (a step up from the dives I usually stay at), on Guilford Street half a block from Russell Square and a block from the Russell Square tube station. I bought a two-week transit pass (now called an Oyster Card) and gulped a bit with sticker

⁷ St. David, Patron Saint of Wales, was a sixth century monastic leader and bishop and not David King of Israel.

⁸ These arms are only those of the ancient City of London, roughly one square mile within the old Roman walls. Metropolitan London has not had arms since the dissolution of the Greater London Council in 1986.

shock: £64 (about \$100). But as a single one-way trip without the card cost £2.30 (about \$3.50), the Oyster Card was a bargain. It had the Queen's picture on it, for the Jubilee.



After I landed and caught my breath, and switched to hot weather gear because London was having a heat spell instead of the rain and mist of Wales, I took a stroll to savor being back. I was pleased to see I still knew my way around. London is very crowded, but not as overwhelmed by cars as it used to be, thanks probably to the congestion zone instituted in 2003 that requires paying £10 just to enter Central London in a private car. It seems to be working well.

London is still a busy, active, happening place, with as much bustle and as many languages in the air as New York. Unlike New York, though, I don't feel I can any longer call London a *beautiful* city. The elegant red brick and gray stone London I



remember from the last Diamond Jubilee in 1897 exists now only in patches. Elsewhere, sometimes randomly placed and sometimes filling whole streets, are structures ranging from stupefying banality to an almost superhumanly brutal ugliness. They are still building these horror-pieces all over London: for example Jean Nouvel's hideous One New Change, right next to St. Paul's (left; note the deliberately uglified surface colors). They are constructing a vast alien spaceport right at St. Giles. Seventy years after the Blitz, it's no good blaming the Germans any more. Prince Charles was right about this. "You have to give this much to the Luftwaffe," he said. "When it knocked down our buildings, it didn't replace them with anything more offensive than rubble. We did that."⁹ Manhattan, with its height and amazing mass, can absorb a lot more visual poison than fragile London.

London has some of the best theatres and museums in the world, and I went to a lot of both. The English are especially good at farce, and the best show I saw in London was *One Man, Two Guv'nors*, at the Royal Haymarket, adapted very closely from Carlo Goldoni's original first presented in 1743. This time it is set in Brighton in the 1960s rather than 18th century Venice, but the action is exactly the same: Harlequin, a hungry servant who is not due to be paid until the end of the week, signs on with a second master

⁹ Prince Charles' speech, delivered to the Corporation of London Planning and Communication Committee's annual dinner at Mansion House on December 1, 1987, is very wise and still worth reading 25 years later. The full text is given here: http://www.princeofwales.gov.uk/speechesandarticles/a_speech_by_hrh_the_prince_of_wales_at_the_corporation_of_lo_161336965.html.

to get paid and fed *today*, and then has to conceal from each master that he is working for the other. There is a fabulous set piece where he serves two dinners in adjoining rooms at the same time without either guy nor finding out, and eats most of the food himself. This kind of thing takes enormous skill to keep funny, and the night I was there an understudy dressed in a suit of clashing plaids gave an inspired performance in the main role. Also very funny, but serious too, was *Posh*, at the Duke of York's Theatre in St. Martin's Lane, about a self-consciously riotous Oxford undergraduate club dinner that suddenly went very wrong. I wanted to see some Shakespeare too, but it was all being presented in foreign languages.

Shakespeare's Globe
 020 7401 9919, 21 New Globe Walk,
 Bankside, SE1 9DT
 ☉ London Bridge
 All's Well That Ends Well (Gujarati)
 Antony and Cleopatra (Turkish)
 The Comedy of Errors (Dari Persian)
 Henry VIII (Spanish)
 The Merchant of Venice (Hebrew)
 The Taming of the Shrew (Urdu)
 The Winter's Tale (Yoruba)

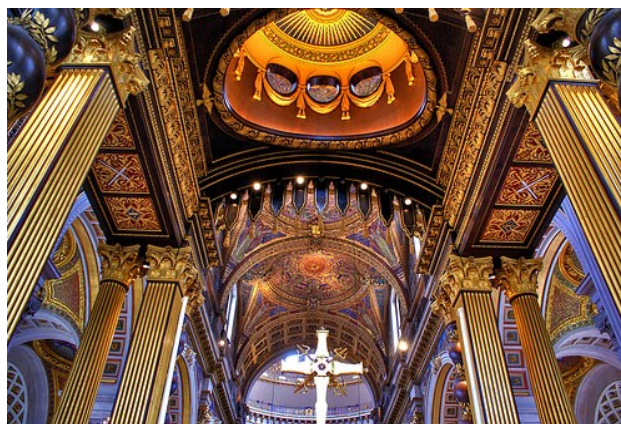
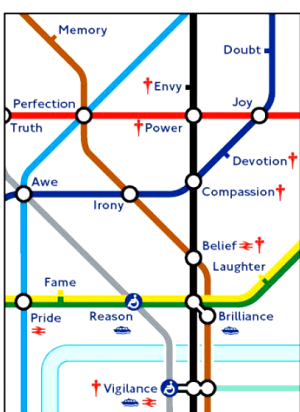
The best of the museum shows I saw was “Gold: Power and Allure,” at the Goldsmith's Hall in the City, which assembled hundreds of dazzling objects made of gold, some contemporary and some going back 4500 years. Gold has remarkable properties, not only rarity and luster and incorruptibility but also the power to fascinate and even to enchant. Seeing whole rooms of bright gold, in so many different forms and styles, was a mesmerizing experience. There was lots of antique gold, heavy torcs from ancient Britain, some worked and twisted into simple elegant forms that could have been Art Deco. And of course much heavy plate, and graceful chalices that somehow survived the predations of Henry VIII, and coins, and sleek modern jewelry, and a dazzling pearl-encrusted mechanical mouse. Below left: an Anglo-Saxon pendant from the 7th century, inlaid with garnets and glass.

Also interesting: “Animals Inside Out” at the ornate Natural History Museum in South Kensington, with its magisterial statue of Darwin on the landing of the grand staircase. The exhibit showed animals dissected and embalmed in a plastic solution, done by Gunther von Hagens, who made a sensation a few years ago in “Body Works” doing the same with human cadavers. I show a bull below center; there was also an elephant and a giraffe.

The Museum of London at London Wall always has interesting and evocative objects. Below right is a 16th century painted panel from Austin Friars, showing King Stephen (died 1194) – we recognize him by the sagittary at the upper left (a centaur with a bow), his attributed but not actual arms.



There was lots more interesting stuff. The London Transport Museum at Covent Garden had a deeply interesting show about the evolution of the Tube map, first designed by Harry Beck in 1931.¹⁰ Below left: an untitled cover for the pocket Tube map, by Barbara Kruger (2010). The National Portrait Gallery mounted a Diamond Jubilee exhibition called “The Queen: Art and Image.” Below right: a striking icon, from *Lightness of Being*, a hologram by Chris Levine (2007). And St. Paul’s (below center) was as overwhelmingly magnificent as ever.



It was of course the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, marking her 60 years on the throne.¹¹



Shown at left is the official Jubilee logo, designed by a 10-year-old girl who won a competition.¹² There were spectacular displays over several days – artillery salutes and a grand river pageant, a thanksgiving service at St. Paul’s, and a procession through the streets of London



in an open carriage, a balcony appearance before vast flag-waving crowds, and a flyover

¹⁰ The catalogue, called *London Underground Maps: Art, Design and Cartography*, by Claire Dobbin, the curator of the show, is especially interesting and well-produced and will appeal to *aficionados* of London and the Tube.

¹¹ Come to think of it, it is my Diamond Jubilee too – 60 years since my first trip to England in 1952.

¹² This design has everything – the royal crown and the national flag, the official title and the number 60, the national colors and some diamonds, structural coherence and an engaging tilt, and a disarming *naïveté* to balance the Jubilee pomposity.

by the RAF (which I could hear in my hotel). Great uniforms, great flags, fanfares and trumpet-banners, two royal barges, bells pealing from a special belfry boat, a detachment of heralds in full drag, and plenty more. All this was a delight to me, as a fan of royal ceremonial and a not-so-closeted monarchist.¹³ London was blanketed with union flags (see right, at Covent Garden), but also with signs saying streets closed, buses suspended, Underground to be clogged. So I didn't try to see any of these events in person, but stayed at home in my comfortable hotel room, eating smoked salmon sandwiches from Pret a Manger while huge crowds stood cheering in the rain. I got a better view than they did, although the BBC's coverage was badly marred by cutting away from the action to show silly presenters nattering to each other or interviewing spectators. This is a far cry from the way the BBC used to cover royal events in the days of St. Richard Dimbleby, peace be upon him, or even his sons.¹⁴ It got so bad I had to switch to German television.¹⁵



There was also a pop music concert in front of the Palace – the Queen was observed wearing yellow earplugs before leaving early. I skipped that too, but I did attend the lighting of a Jubilee Beacon. Thousands of beacons were lit all over Britain (and the



Commonwealth).¹⁶ I was not inclined to join the crowds in the Mall where the Queen lit the main beacon, but I did find out that an official beacon was to be lit in a hotel courtyard a block from my own hotel. I went to this event, even though I wasn't sure why anyone would light a beacon inside a courtyard where no one outside



could see it. Almost no one was there, but there was a sort of iron cresset rising from a base holding a propane tank. The night shift manager turned on the gas and lit it with a rolled up newspaper, a few people clapped, and that was it. But G-d save the Queen anyway!

¹³ A monarchist, that is, for countries with monarchies. I wouldn't want a monarchy here.

¹⁴ The BBC were much criticized for their crummy coverage. See, e.g., http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/the_queens_diamond_jubilee/9310547/BBC-Diamond-Jubilee-Pageant-Coverage-slammed.html.

¹⁵ *Das Thronjubiläum: Schiffe und Boote begleiten die Queen*. It is interesting that German TV called her *die Queen* rather than *die Königin*, just as we used to speak of the *Shah* rather than the King of Iran.

¹⁶ See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2154541/Lighting-Diamond-Jubilee-Spectacular-beacons-lit-Britain-rest-world-honour-Queens-60-years-throne.html>.

The peak experience of the trip for me was not the Jubilee but my visit to the College of Arms (badge at right), the English heraldic authority founded in 1484. The College has one of the finest collections of heraldic manuscripts anywhere, but the heralds understandably do not open their library for public use. I went there to buy heraldic books and postcards and learned there were tours for groups of 20, but you had to organize your own group. I asked if I could hitch on to an existing group (no), but I left my card anyway, and sure enough Bluemantle Pursuivant (Peter O'Donoghue) called me that afternoon and asked if it would be convenient for me to join an evening group set for a few days later. Would it be convenient? Try and stop me!



So I turned up at the College in Queen Victoria Street, a block toward the river from St. Paul's, and joined a group organized by one of the heraldic artists and made up not of heraldists like me but mostly people from her choir. O'Donoghue, who had just been promoted the day before and was now York Herald, gave an entertaining talk.¹⁷ Then we were admitted to the hidden back rooms, where he took a number of the College's priceless manuscripts off the shelves and laid them out on the counters for us to look at. I



knew many of these manuscripts from illustrations in books, but had never before seen any of them in person. It was a particular thrill for me to see the Hyghalmen Roll (left) and Mowbray's Roll (right), as I had published images from both (with the College's permission) to illustrate an article of my own.¹⁸



And that was it for this trip. On June 7th I flew back to San Francisco, tired but glad to have made the trip and glad to be coming home at last.

David

June 2012

TAILPIECE: FACE OF A SUN GOD, FROM THE RUINED
PEDIMENT AT THE ROMAN COMPLEX, BATH



¹⁷ I later saw him on television, among the heralds preceding the Queen in the Jubilee processions.

¹⁸ *Hyghalmen*, pronounced *High Almain*, means *High German* (*Allemagne* = Germany). The angel from the Hyghalmen Roll, holding the arms of the Church and the Empire perfectly balanced against each other, represents the medieval conception of the spiritual and temporal aspects of the world governed by these two complementary divine institutions. A post-Reformation hand had prudently drawn X's through the arms of the Church and the Pope's tiara, so as not to offend King Henry VIII's idiosyncratic but firmly held view about who governed the spirituality of England.