

## **Our Trip to London 9-13 January 2011**

We had a busy day before we set off, when we had to take lunch round to Anna's parents and provide suggestions for Murray Donald on how to word their latest letter to Argyle Court owners. We also spent some time watching the snow and wondering whether to take the car to Leuchars,. There was no real reason not to do so except a vague feeling that one ought not to go driving in bad weather. Anna's mother was very keen for us not to take the car, and after spending a sleepless night rang us up at 5.30 on Sunday morning to emphasise the point. In the end we decided that the bus was best.

The journey down was all straightforward and we arrived at Kings Cross almost bang on time. I read *1984* most of the way and dozed the rest of the time. Anna was deep in the latest *le Carré*. As we were leaving the train I recognised Tobias who used to work at the helpdesk and who had been sitting just a few seats in front of us. He now works for the Cass Business School, working most of the time from home in Cupar but commuting to London every few weeks. We had a brief chat. When he said he now had two children I replied that it seemed no time since he was a gay bachelor working on the Helpdesk, which was rather Pooterish, first because it was banal, and secondly because I immediately worried whether he would suppose that I had thought that he was gay in the special modern sense. I managed to avoid, though only by a hair's breadth, the ultimate Pooterism of explaining that I didn't, that I meant it in the sense of carefree. I think in fact that there were some who did conclude from his manner and his always immaculate dress that he probably was gay. I never really penetrated beyond his exceptional politeness, but I was fond of him as I was of the other students who worked for us in those days. He was probably the best of the Helpdesk people, and got on well with everyone, as is shown by the fact that the full-time staff would have been pleased if he had got the post of Helpdesk manager. While he was working with us he had family troubles back in Germany – his mother died, and he had to sort things out for his siblings – so I suppose it wasn't even true that he was carefree.

From Kings Cross we had to get to Bank station and then on the Docklands Light Railway to Deptford Bridge. Christopher had been very insistent that this was the best route. For years now there have been warnings against changing lines at Bank because the escalator system is incomplete, but it turned out to be very easy. The DLR trains are much more frequent than I had imagined or remembered. Christopher came to Deptford Bridge to meet us as we had forgotten to bring our map with us. Their little house in Burgos Grove is very close to Deptford Bridge, a little further from Greenwich station. The first thing we saw as we came down to street level was a signpost to Blackheath. It all seemed vaguely familiar, although I doubt if I was ever in exactly that spot before.

The house has two-up and two-down, plus a large basement kitchen which is where they live together. We had a curry cooked in no time by Daphne. The children had their own plates with each different element of the meal in separate compartments. Arthur ate from every compartment, though not with his usual gusto because he had a bad cold. Nayana was reluctant to eat anything and had to be cajoled and encouraged and offered alternatives. Mealtimes are often quite long drawn-out. We drank to Christopher's success in his new job and to Daphne's in her interview with Save the Children. Christopher and I went (Christopher driving Lal's car) to pick up

an overcoat for Daphne to wear to her interview from her friend Emily. Presumably Daphne's coat is still in transit from America. We got a little bit lost on the way back. I found it difficult to work out where to go, because it was dark and because I everywhere had the same feeling of vague recognition. We went to bed early, on the sofa bed in the sitting-room, which was comfortable but hot.

On Monday morning Christopher left before eight, and Daphne got the children up and gave them their breakfast before handing them over to us while she disappeared to get herself ready for her interview. She was naturally worried, in particular about whether she was leaving herself enough time to find the place. It must be very difficult to cut yourself off from your children, but Daphne manages to do it very cleanly, with the minimum of fuss. I'm sure this is best, as there is no advantage in prolonging any unhappiness that the children feel – rather the reverse, because the longer it goes on the deeper the hole of misery that the children, Nayana in particular, will dig for herself. Apparently Arthur is usually quite happy about being left, but this time he was inconsolable for a little while. I think this was partly due to his cold, and partly because he is missing his American child-minder, Hazel. We spent the morning in the kitchen, reading stories and drawing pictures. We had had lunch by the time Daphne came home. The children watched television for a little while, Arthur had a nap, and then Anna and I took him out for a brief twilight walk in his push-chair. In the evening there was another tussle with Nayana over eating, and when the children were in bed Christopher and I went out to the chip shop (The Golden Chippie, which is next door to an off licence called the Golden Vineyard and then a café called the Golden Café) to buy supper. The young men in the chippie were very good humoured and the portions were enormous. I remembered that when I used to patronise a chip shop in Greenwich the portions cost 3d and 4d; now the proportion is the same, £1.50 for a regular portion and £2 for large. I had a large one and thought they would never stop spading chips into the package. The food was good. Our conversation centred mainly on Christopher's strategy for the children's schooling.

On Tuesday morning Daphne went to Brockley to see a possible school for Nayana. While she was out Nayana made a big picture on a piece of packing paper from the boxes of freight from America which were delivered on Monday. Nayana's pictures tend to have a princess theme, and to contain a collection of separate items rather than a scene. This picture contained the tower where the princess lived, with its staircase; a horse holding the princess's dress; other smaller pets; a bird; a dragon flying through the air breathing fire and smoke; the sun – but interestingly, not the princess herself. Then she wrote the title. I told her the letters and she wrote them, and some of them she worked out herself. She wrote her own name without assistance. She is undoubtedly a very bright girl. She is so articulate that perhaps her ideas have outrun her experience, leaving her puzzled and anxious. She makes up stories, or draws pictures, or does both together as with this picture of the princess and the dragon, and the effort leaves her exhausted.

Once Daphne had returned, Anna and I set off for Waterloo and our lunch with Michael and Sue at County Hall. The journey (by South-East Trains from Greenwich to London Bridge and then Waterloo) took less time than anticipated, so we went to the South Bank Centre shop and bought a birthday present for Rowwy, a matching mug and notebook in the famous Festival Hall carpet design. We also bought a rather nice ABC book for Mo. Walking to County Hall we had to take a slight detour because of maintenance work on the London Eye. We enjoyed our lunch. Michael

was very contrite for having prepared soup containing lactose, and Sue produced a miso-based soup for Anna. Then we had baked potatoes and salad. It was all very nice, and we enjoyed the talk, about the past and about our families. Michael's son Joe, after several false starts, is now in the first year of a course at Ruskin College, and enjoying it immensely.

Our next stop was Hackney (by the 243 from Waterloo) where we found Mo just about to start her tea. She is uncharacteristically off her food, but Valentina managed to get quite a lot into her in the end. Anna and I bathed her in a bath so deep that I couldn't bear to see the water wasted so I got in myself while Anna saw Mo into bed. We spent the evening with Jessy and Jules and got back to Greenwich after Christopher and Daphne were asleep.

On Wednesday morning Christopher left early again. Daphne went to look at another school, coming back quite enthusiastic, impressed both by the children who showed her around and by the headteacher. She spent some time on the phone and although it is all very complicated it seems that Nayana might be able to find a place there. I had planned to pay Rowwy a birthday visit in the afternoon, leaving Anna with Daphne and the children, but in the end we decided that we would all go together.

We left in a rush and made it to Farnham by just after 3 o'clock. Nayana drew another of her complicated pictures inside the birthday card. Rowwy was very pleased to see the children, and have Nayana's picture. With the help of her friend Angela she provided tea and cake. Mark called to deliver a birthday present but left in a hurry as the room was very full. Rowwy had lovely presents for the children. We could not stay long as we had to get the 4.28 train in the hope of getting back to Greenwich in time to let Christopher into the house, as he had neither a key nor a mobile phone. Angela swept up after us.

We reached Waterloo at the height of the rush hour and after watching the crowds for a little while decided that we should take a cab. It turned out that Christopher had come home early, and after a couple of pints in the pub was just on the point of getting worried when our cab turned up. The excitement of the journey took its toll on the children, and Nayana in particular was very over-wrought and made a terrible fuss over her tea, and was sent to her room and threatened with the confiscation of Peppa Pig. She quietened down eventually and all was sunny again.

We had a short but re-assuring talk with Christopher and Daphne about their plans. Daphne had been offered the job at Save the Children, but was still waiting to discuss the terms with them. She hoped they would agree to her working part-time – say four days a week, with one day working from home. She also needs to put off the start date as far as possible. Apparently it usually takes only a few weeks to arrange child-minders, but they might want to get their next move (into larger rented accommodation) over before she starts. I think they both feel that the single most urgent task is to get Nayana settled, both at home and at school. When it comes to deciding where to look for a house (initially somewhere to rent, then somewhere to buy) Christopher was adamant about getting close enough to Askes to maximise the chance of getting in. Daphne was afraid that this would complicate the process of finding a primary school, but Christopher clearly had the strategy worked out in his head. I suspect they will get what they want. Christopher's job is very demanding of his time – he has to be in the office by seven most days. Still, he seemed very positive about it. He suspected that some of his colleagues were frighteningly

focused on making money, but he thought he would get on well with his immediate boss, who sits next to him in the large open-plan office. There will be pressure to work long hours, I suspect, but once Christopher has established himself and shown what he can do he will be able to make his own terms, although I think the early starts are part of the deal that he can't get out of.

We woke up early to see Christopher before he went to work on Thursday. I had time for a brief chat with him. Then we got ourselves ready, prepared a picnic for the evening, and set off at about 9.15. We had plenty of time to get to Kings Cross, although this time we found ourselves walking a long way from one part of Bank station to the other, either because we took the wrong direction or because things are different during the rush-hour. At some point in the journey we realised that we had left our picnic behind. We got off at Peterborough and got the train to Stamford, arriving at Jeffy and Martin's just after twelve.

Jeffy seemed more cheerful than when I saw her before Christmas. She is taking an anti-depressant pill, it seems. She can hardly speak, but she understands what you say to her and she can respond with gestures and by making faces. Martin cooked us a vegetarian lunch and Jeffy ate with an appetite. Anna is always better than me at finding things to say in these circumstances, and Jeffy clearly enjoyed their conversation. There is a charity which has been providing a 'befriender' to visit Jeffy every so often, but it seems that Jeffy has been less and less responsive to this woman's befriending efforts, and the arrangement is to be reviewed. Martin was expecting a visit from the supervisor later in the afternoon. Among other things we talked about with Martin was the flat he lived in at the top of 144 Shooters Hill Road, which he remarked would scarcely meet the regulations nowadays.

We left in time to buy our evening picnic and get to Stamford Station for the 16.01 train. It was late, and we missed our connection in Peterborough. We were still in time to get to Edinburgh to catch the last train to Leuchars, but we tried to think of an alternative route to get there sooner. While we were looking at the timetables the station-master offered help and advice, and saved us from several wrong moves that we were contemplating. Unfortunately, however, he did not hit upon the route with changes in Grantham and York which would have got us to Edinburgh sooner. I had almost worked it out, but didn't check the timetables in time and so missed the train for Grantham. We had almost two hours' wait in Peterborough, and then almost an hour on Waverley, but we were lucky in that the Dundee train was on time. While we were reading at Peterborough a man noticed that Anna's book was about the Italian chapel on Orkney. They exchanged a few words about it. The man said he lived in Aberdeen, and we should have asked him if he had any advice on getting back north, but didn't think of it in time. I suspect he went off and caught the Grantham train. We phoned Swithun at home to ask him to check the timetables to find out when the last bus was due from Leuchars and we were in good time for it. We got home before one.

To make the frustration of our journey home worse, the strap on our grip, which had been giving trouble all along, broke completely. After carrying it even the short distances required between trains I was quite exhausted. But it was a good trip. I finished two books, *1984* and *The Day of the Triffids*, which I needed to read in preparation for my teaching. We saw all the grand-children, and the other people we hoped to see, and I think we were of assistance to Christopher and Daphne.

When we got home there was a letter from Michael containing a photocopy of a memorandum by his father. It consists of a handwritten sheet which Michael found inside Jim's copy of David Maxwell Fyfe's memoirs, and it describes two incidents which, Jim wrote, influenced him against capital punishment. I was very impressed by it when Michael read it to me a year or so ago, and I asked if I might have a copy. Jim wrote first of his impressions of Maxwell Fyfe, the Home Secretary who refused to reprieve Derek Bentley in January 1952. Attacked by Sydney Silverman, Maxwell Fyfe sat 'like an expressionless robot' on the front bench before rushing out of the chamber. Jim held the door from the lobby for him and was able to see his 'staring and wild' eyes and 'haunted look'. He compared this moment with what must have been one of his earliest memories of the Commons, when after the war he saw Leo Amery 'hanging about' in the lobby trying to interest members in saving his son John who was to be hanged for treason.

In his memoirs Maxwell Fyfe described the agonizing decision he had to take over the Bentley case, and the criticism he received, including so many telephone calls to his home that they had to have the line disconnected. He also referred to press descriptions of his own appearance in the Commons, saying they were 'over-dramatized', but Jim's memorandum suggests that they were probably about accurate. Michael enclosed a copy of the relevant pages of the Maxwell Fyfe memoirs, and also a of a paragraph from Kenneth O. Morgan's biography of Jim describing events in 1969-70. Under the 1965 act, the abolition of capital punishment had to be ratified after five years by a resolution in the Commons, and the Wilson government decided to bring this forward, despite a Conservative vote of censure, to ensure the resolution was passed before the election, a courageous move considering the unpopularity of the abolitionist cause among electors. I was pleased to read this, because it confirmed my recollection of those times, which is so often unreliable. I recall writing to Jim to applaud his action, although I think I rather spoilt things by adding in a sweeping way that it was the only good thing the Wilson government had done.