The Turkey trip

May / June 2021



Here is breakfast

Government restrictions on travel were due to ease on the 17th May and I was feeling the need for some sun on my skin. Where to go ? Not on my wish list really were Tristan da Cunha, St. Helena nor South Georgia or the Falkland Islands, all on the green spectrum. As I had £300 credit with Turkish Airlines (who had messed me around a year previously), research was showing that a room at the 5* Movenpick Izmir was £45 a night including breakfast and taxes plus there were masses of early Christian sites nearby, notably the 7 churches of Revelation chapters 1-3, it became a no brainer. I booked a two week break 18th May to 1st June through the initially efficient Turkish Airlines office in Istanbul and the Movenpick through hotels.com.

Trustedhousesitters.com came to the rescue with Hannah happy to look after Benny the lurcher for the duration, even extending her stay should I be required to quarantine for 10

days on my return. Somewhat optimistically I hoped that Turkey would be moved off the red list before I returned.

Bag, 23kg allowed, packed with Aldi freeze-dried coffee (cheaper than but indistinguishable from the Sainsbury's version), a few sandwiches, long-life milk cartons, my music CD player, enough books and medication to last 24 days and off I trot early on the Tuesday to Heathrow via bus and bus, parking my little Toyota free in Witney. No questions asked at the airport as to why I am travelling to somewhere Boris doesn't want me to go, although a small paragraph on the gov.uk website said I could travel and Turkey were keen to welcome visitors again.

Outbound via Istanbul to Izmir went smoothly but the food on Turkish Airlines was pale by comparison with its fare in years past; on the second leg we got just a cup of water. On arrival at Izmir airport it was frustrating to discover that my bag had gone to the International Arrivals area not the Domestic where we had been unloaded, necessitating a long walk there and back. Lonely Planet had talked about a bus but it was nowhere to be found so I took a taxi the 45 minutes into town which cost just £8.30 including tip. All prices I shall express in £ and pence – there were 12 Turkish lira to a pound.

Now I hadn't been in Turkey for 42 years. Back then I didn't like it – it seemed very alien to a youngish Englishman, my first time in a Muslim country where everyone appeared to rip you off. The loos were holes in the ground with footplates, indeed some still are but few now. From Ankara to the Iranian border I travelled with a friendly group of Afghanis transporting second-hand Mercedes buses eastwards whenever Turkish bureaucracy and petrol availability allowed. Our last

night together was in a scrubby smelly hotel in Dogubayazit, my worst night ever, and this was followed by the worst loo ever (don’t ask !) on the Turkish side of the border with Iran.

Well, the Movenpick was a different kettle of fish entirely.- It turned out its swimming pool was an indoor one and even the neighbouring Swissotel had closed its outdoor one because of Covid but there were sun-loungers to use on the grass lawns of its well-tended gardens. I spent the first couple of days acclimatizing to Izmir, Turkey’s third largest city . Everyone wore masks all the time outside and inside, the stray cats and dogs were all fed and watered at pavement stations and guys pulled canvas rubbish containers keeping the streets clean. There were plenty of elegant shops, small supermarkets and a well ordered city landscape. I saw just one lady in a burqa, some with hijabs but overwhelmingly Turkey showed its secular colours. No muezzin calls for prayers either – it seemed my concerns over the autocratic , nigh despotic Islamic tendencies of the President Mr Erdogan were overplayed, at least here in Izmir. In comparison with 1979 people were friendly polite and helpful.

Economically, Turkey appeared to be doing well – the choice in shops was plentiful, there were many shopping malls in the suburbs and scores of expensive cars. We would do well to strike a post-Brexit trade deal with them – I know Beko supplies us with many fridges and washing machines but they make all sorts of other domestic appliances too. More of their fruit and vegetables could be imported – sadly I saw only 4 Minis (one in a showroom), 4 Jaguars, 30 Range Rovers but quite a few Massey Ferguson tractors so I am sure we could increase our exports with lower import duties. With Erdogan at the helm Turkey is turning towards Russia and China for trade; let’s persuade him to buy British !

My quest to visit all 7 churches of Revelation began in Izmir, Smyrna as was back two millenia. I got close to the Agora, the Roman ruins which would have housed the first Christian basilica and was kindly allowed inside the Catholic church of St. Polycarp even though it was officially closed.

On day 3 the holiday began in earnest – I took the ferry (12p) up towards the port area, walked 10 minutes to the main Alsancak railway station and bought an Izbann metro ticket (12p again) out to the airport. First attempt to rent a car with Green Motion failed because they insisted on me paying with a credit card and my MasterCard wasn't being compliant. Even after a long call to the Scottish headquarters it was still no dice but nearby Erboy Car Hire took my Visa debit card and for £116 for a week I was united with a Citroen 4 door manual and set off towards Ephesus in pouring rain. Fill the tank in Celcuk (petrol is 55p a litre) and first visit the Grotto of the Seven Sleepers where 7 Christian martyrs were walled into a cave on the orders of Emperor Decius. Then on up the hill to Meryem Ana (entrance £5.83), the House of the Virgin Mary.

This is where John, commanded by Jesus on the cross to look after her, bought a house for Jesus' mother in AD 42 where she lived until her death in AD 50. As I park up above the house my mobile rings … it's Michael Gormley, my Catholic doctor who saved my life back in 1992. You'll have to buy my book to discover how ! Anyway, it's an apposite place for a call from a good Catholic. Funnily enough, when I was at the Jordan river at the site of Jesus' baptism 10 years ago my phone rang and it was Anne, my eldest sister with whom I was friends at the time.

Mary's house, rebuilt in 1951 on the foundations of the

original, is set in charming wooded surrounds – the site features a one-roomed shrine and a gift shoppe full of the Lourdes / Knock-type tat that demean venues connected with her.

Last call that day was to the entrance of St. John's Basilica, the so-called Persecution Gate, back down in Selcuk . An information board tells me one of the carved reliefs from the pediment was taken to the Woburn Abbey Gallery in 1812 – more on such 'cultural appropriation' later but couldn't the current Duke of Bedford arrange its return as a nice gesture to Turkey ? Traffic is heavy in downtown Izmir but there is free parking on the road outside the hotel and on all adjoining streets. Take note Oxford !

Day 2 with the car finds me heading north without satnav at 7.20am. I rectified this later downloading a TomTom app to my phone. I went through the town of Thyatira (now Akhisar) but found no trace of Lydia's church and on quieter roads to Pergamum (Bergama). The Acropol (£5) is empty of tourists – it's just me and a tortoise but there are fine views and the region's steepest theatre. Down in the town is the Asklepion (£4.58) which was an early healing centre and features the Serpent Column but its best relic, an ornate altar, is in a Berlin museum. Wouldn't it be nice to return some of these purloined treasures, like the Elgin Marbles back to the Parthenon from the British Museum ?

So that's 2 more of the 7 churches notched up. I am back in Izmir by 2pm and spend the afternoon soaking up the 32 degree rays in the garden of the Swissotel – nobody questions my entry into or my presence within this elegant establishment. Supper is a kebab in French bread from a street stall (£2).

Having made contact with James Buxton via WhatsApp I meet up in his flat the following morning at 11.30am. James is the Anglican vicar of Izmir whose church is close to Alsancak station. We have a mutual friend in Adam Boulter, vicar of Aqaba, the Poitiers region and latterly Dean of Toliara, Madagascar. We chat for an hour or so and he gives me plenty of useful information on sites to see in this corner of Turkey. I set off soon after to Sardis where under strange cliff formations stands a huge restored Roman gymnasium building and synagogue. Nearby is the beautifully situated Temple of Artemis with a small church stuck on to a corner, limpet-like. This is the most special site seen so far. As I am not too far away I drive to and through Philadelphia (Alasehir) and as in Thyatira fail to spot any ancient Christian ruins. I am back in Izmir at 7pm.

Day 4 with the car starts early again and it’s an hour plus drive to Ephesus. Entrance at the Upper, Magnesian gate isn’t cheap at £18.33 including parking but it is one of the premier Roman cities of their empire. It’s a steep down and up on the Sacred Way, exploring the Terraced Houses with their mosaics and murals. The vast 4,000 seater is closed for renovation but Hadrian’s Gate is impressive as is the large Christian St. Mary’s church close to the Lower gate. One wonders how she got here from her house in the hills. I suppose horses and donkeys were the cars of the day. There are perhaps 20 tourists here whereas pre-Covid there must have hundreds daily.

I discuss tourism woes with the owners of a souvenir shop at the exit from whom I buy a pair of ‘Rayban’ shades for 7 euros cash to help driving in the sun’s glare. James has recommended a village, Kaynarpinar on the Karabunan peninsula for a nice swimming beach and I head that way. But within 12km of Selcuk I spot promising beaches on my left and little Concakoy proves the perfect spot to spend an afternoon on a fine sandy beach

with warmish water – it’s a gentle gradient out into the bay and there is grass on which to sunbathe. There are very few fellow bathers on the beach.

On returning to Izmir I start to make enquiries as to getting the required PCR test for the flight home; a nurse at an Alsancak hospital recommends the airport but it’s too soon, apparently, to fill in the online Passenger Locator Form for the UK government. The next day I undertake a long 4 hour journey south to Pamukkale and Hierapolis, more Roman ruins above extraordinary ‘terraces’ of calcified limestone shimmering white with water coursing over them, once graced by Cleopatra herself. I park the car in a shady spot in the village, enjoy a slightly pricey squeezed orange juice (£1.67) and start the climb. Entrance is £9.17, one has to remove shoes and socks and I tentatively ascend. It is certainly unusual and a mega tourist attraction for locals, young females cavorting in bikinis as they rub the clay over their bodies in the warm shallow pools. Saudi Arabia this ain’t ! For a further£8.33 one could swim in the Ancient Pools in apparently mineral-rich waters.

Above the terraces things are quieter in the manicured Roman ruins of Hierapolis and I climb in the afternoon heat above the ubiquitous theatre towards the Martyrium where the disciple Philip was strung upside down, nailed to a tree and was placed in a small mausoleum only recently discovered. The inside of this little building is redolent of Jesus’ tomb off the Nablus Road in Jerusalem with slabs for laying out bodies on 3 sides. St. Philip had come up against snake worshipping locals. This site deserves more exploration but I was getting hot and tired so descended and set off to ‘do’ number 7 of the Revelation churches at Laodicea which is close to the large town of Denizli.

Entry here is £3.08 and it’s a huge spread out set of ruins with a sacred Syria street and, for once, an unrestored theatre. But it is also the site of the largest Christian basilica in the area, well restored with mosaic floors and an impressive baptistry for performing full immersion rituals. A house close by even has a chapel within it. So that’s mission accomplished – all 7 church locations visited. 4 hour drive back to Izmir, the roads are good, mostly dual carriageway with many miles of motorway. Highlight on the return was a roadside stall where I purchased 1kg of strawberries for 83p – yum yum.

The next day I eschew driving, avail myself of the hotel laundry, purchase 3 peaches, a pound of cherries and a litre of yoghurt drink for £1.75, enjoy more sunbathing and play host in the evening to James at the rooftop bar in the Movenpick where we enjoy Bomonti beers looking out over Izmir bay.

Thursday 27th is my last full day with the car so off we go to Soke beyond Selcuk – three sites in the offing today, the first is a steep one, Priene (£1.46) with wonderful views, a small theatre and adjacent church. The sea used to come right up to Priene but it’s 20km distant today. St. Paul may have visited; he certainly spent time at Miletus along the coast towards Didim. Entry here was £2.08 to another huge site rather poorly signposted but good exercise wandering over the acreage. Last port of call was Didymus (£2.50) in the town of Didim, the port nearest to the island of Patmos where the exiled St. John wrote Revelation from AD 81 before returning to Ephesus in AD 95. Didymus is home to a massive temple to Artemis with splendid relief carvings of Zeus and Medusa, for once still on site and not in a European museum.

Friday sees me returning the car without a hitch, sussing out PCR tests at the Medifema unit which will cost less than £21 and be ready in 6 hours – eat your heart out U.K. My Boots test for the outward journey had cost £99and the result came 24 hours later. Then it's back on the metro train (£1.17), half an hour to Alsancak station and a half hour's stroll back to the Movenpick. Another afternoon is spent agreeably at the Swissotel, sunbathing and reading.

So, I- now have 3 days left to organise all matters to be homeward bound. Quarantine beckons – I had hoped the rules might have changed by now but they haven't. Initially I thought you could make your own choice of hotel for quarantining and had provisionally booked one in Witney and one in Feltham but sadly these cheaper options are not possible and you must select the government's package at £1,750 for the 11 nights, 10 days required – gulp, someone's making a profit here. Done – they have allocated me a room at the Arora Hotel near Gatwick despite my landing at Heathrow; one muses that as the 14 days in Turkey have cost relatively little, 10 extra days at enormous expense sort of levels things out.

The Ephesus / Selcuk area merits more of my time and more exploration so back I go – £1.17 takes me all the way on a 2 hour ride, changing trains at Tepekoy. Stomach is loose: was it the soft fruit ? Reach a loo above a tea shop (tea 25p) then buy a pack of Lopermid pills for 42p at an open pharmacy. While Izmir goes very quiet at the weekend, more was happening here in Selcuk. I walk towards the Artemision and spend a fruitful hour in the excellent museum (£2.50). The rooms are well lit, the gold and pottery artefacts remarkably preserved – its shop furnishes me with a stack of postcards (not available anywhere else) and a good book on St. Paul and the 7 churches, all for about £10. It isn't far to the Artemision,

the ruins of the once vast Temple of Artemis, larger than the Parthenon with 128 columns of which just one has been reassembled. Goodness, this place was one of the Seven Wonders of the World – not today it isn't.

Back to town to spend time on what I christen St. John's Hill, not to be confused with the one near Clapham Junction ! I explore the basilica, clamber to the top of the Ayasoluk castle and enjoy the views. A single souvenir shop is open briefly and I buy a couple more postcards and an excellent little booklet on St. John, bartered down to £1.67. I then write up 3 of my postcards sitting astride a Roman slab, inspired by the fact that John wrote his Gospel and his epistles on this very hill.

The journey home starts poorly when jobsworths at the station want to deny me passage because I don't have the Turkish HES card to show my Covid status. Eventually they let me pass after microscopic inspection of my passport. Phew. I get off at the airport to have the PCR test within 72 hours of landing in the U.K. Back in Izmir by 5pm, buying a litre of Kefir live culture yoghurt drink (70p) to help settle the stomach.

Next day it is cloudy and cooler and I walk to the Agora but entry there is denied to me by a pack of snarling dogs – tant pis. I write up all of my cards and spend the rest of the day relaxing. My last day is a Monday so the streets are buzzing again. The main Post Office is right opposite the Movenpick, stamps are 54p each and the 14 cards are duly dispatched. En route to the Agora I purchase a new pair of ordinary glasses for £1.25 as my existing pair were a bit scratched. This time the dogs let me in, £2.08 at the booth, and I wander round the site with its impressive vaulted undercroft.

As recommended by James I then taxi up to the Kadife Kale, Alexander the Great's 'Velvet Castle' overlooking Izmir, £1.67 well spent, stroll around awhile before walking down for a last sit in the Swissotel grounds. Mid-afternoon an email pings in from Turkish Airlines – we have cancelled your flight from Istanbul to Heathrow … this is at 15 hours notice ! Thanks a bunch. A protracted telephone call at hotel reception eventually secures me an alternative flight to Munich as the best option later in the day and on the Lufthansa website I get, for £308 (!) a one way ticket Munich to Heathrow via Frankfurt – last screen said 'Payment Successful' and it didn't concern me much that no e-ticket was forthcoming.

Hindsight reveals that a better option would have been to cancel Turkish Airlines and rearrange completely with KLM who I discover later fly Izmir to Amsterdam or perhaps go with Pegasus to Stansted. Destined to arrive at Heathrow at 10pm means my PCR test would be invalid so out I go again to the airport for swabbing. Each flight change needs to be logged with a new 'Passenger Location Form'.

At 4am on Tuesday 1st June I take an £8.33 taxi out to Adnan Menderes Airport where I pick up my PCR negative certificate and catch the 5.45 am Anasolu flight to Istanbul. My bag is checked through to Munich and I start to fill out the required Germany entry form.

But, disaster. I present all documents at the gate trying to get on TK 7738 to Munich and am denied my seat on the plane because I can't show them an e-ticket for the onward German flights. Ringing Lufthansa in Germany and then Turkey reveals that my tickets were cancelled – nobody told me ! Lord knows why … my NatWest Visa card has been working well. Airline staff are reasonably helpful, my bag is retrieved, and finding

a little travel agency called Easyticket who organise KLM flights from the other Istanbul airport (85 km away, taxi £33) via Schiphol to Heathrow. This costs me £528 ! I hope to get reimbursed by somebody but you never know. Turkish Airlines weren't keen to accept any responsibility.

The other airport is swanky and new. Once I have printed off new gov.uk forms, proof of my quarantine payment etc. KLM efficiently transports me home – I even get 2 Heineken beers on board and Schiphol Duty Free has the Niederegger marzipan chocolates that Istanbul Duty Free used to sell.

La di da. UK Border Force let me in with scant queueing: I am escorted by an elderly Sikh with my bag via customs to the holding area downstairs at Terminal 2. Here G4S take over proceedings shambolically and inefficiently – the quarantine ordeal begins and it is poorly run to say the least. But that's another story. Meantime let's just say 'tesekkur Turkey'.

Abyssinia !

France 20th to 29th July 2015

Monday 20th July

Pick up Lizzie & Peggy (her Kerry Blue chienne) in Kennington. M2/M20 to Eurotunnel. Arrive Calais roughly noon their time.

Motorway to Gare Montparnasse, Paris at 3.30 p.m. then back via the busy péréferique to Trosly-Breuil at 5.30 p.m.. Spruce up a bit … change shoes etc.

Outside Jean's chapel

Messe at 6 p.m. – Catholic communion service. Sit frontish left. Alina arrives near me in middle section & a few minutes late Jean Vanier sits on an armed chair just 10 metres behind me on the right. To be in his presence. During the 'peace' greetings Alina and I greet each other warmly & others nearby.

Then I approach Jean, shake his hand –

"Salut. Je suis Jamie de L'Angleterre"

"Summers"

"Oui"

Service continues – I am only picking up certain words and phrases "Seigneur" etc.

"Je suis Anglican" … blessing only at communion time.

When the 40 minute service ends Jean and I give each other a big hug. I show him my gifts for L'Arche (2 bottles of Pixley blackcurrant cordial) – Ivan & Alina join us. I then give Jean the framed photo of Jesus (of Akiane's picture) & a copy of Todd Burpo's book 'Heaven is for Real' with a Revelations bookmark at the photo page.

Jean looks well – stooped but well. He is 85 you know. Alina asks me to stay for supper with her and a few others. I buy 3 postcards and a little Pilgrims book by Jean which I ask her to, if possible, have signed for me ' demain matin '.

What an evening what a joy. As I said, " Ma vie est complete.

Je peux mourir ! ” But not yet please God.

Depart at 8.30, sat nav on again & head to the Ibis Compiègne – glacons pour mon G & T. Sleep.

Isis atrocity near Syrian border in Turkey 30 dead.

Tuesday 21st July

2/3 mile walk along the river towards Compiègne centre. Brief view of Musée de L’Armistice near Trosly-Breuil.

Site of the Armistice

Ivan makes me a coffee as I write in their garden. Peaceful. Compose thank you letter in French + 2 page selection of phrases from Excuse My French book for Alina.

She makes me copy of the letter on red notepaper and at 12.15 p.m. we hug on leaving.

” On a besoin de toi “, she says. How kind.

I an sitting in the car, stabbing at the sat nav with Elbow on the Sony CD player when soudainement the 6′ 4” frame of Jean leans into the Merc on the passenger side :

“Jamie, I read the book. Very good”.

He reaches over and clasps my hand with both of his …

“You know that letter I sent you when I returned from Nepal ? Well, this is one of the songs I told you about, ‘ … the birds are the keepers of our secrets’ “.

He listens – I am wracking my brain for the sentence in French that I want to say (nous sommes logés à la même enseigne) but it doesn’t come – of course the man speaks perfect English anyway so I say,

” You and I are in the same boat, but it’s a good boat to be in. ”

What a broad génial smile he has.

The long journey south commences giving Paris a wide berth to the right. Sézanne, pretty town where a blonde appreciates my motor from a central square café – via fields of hemp / marijuana (the sweet sickly smell alerts me) at Louptière-Thénon through Sens to Bourges (vast cathedral). Fill up the tank in La Chapellotte at a small shop opposite the church where I take an expresso.

It’s been ‘ good tank country the entire way – large open fields, not much traffic. Souillac final destination and the last 2 or 3 hours are on the excellent E20, a mostly free motorway.

No parking spaces near the Hotel de Quercy but nearby at the museum are spaces. Phew it’s after 10.30 p.m. and it’s been about 9 hours plus driving – what a huge country. Check in is at the adjacent sister hotel & it’s a hot somewhat poky room. Bath in one of those French ½ baths & struggle to sleep in the heat and humidity – no a/c no fan it seems.

Wednesday 22nd July

Snooze till 9 a.m. then stroll through Souillac – big church/Abbey is a little uninspiring.

Head off through Sarlat to St. André d’Allas & on to the fascinating Cabanes de Breuil (Huts in the wood) which date from 1500 but seem older.

The Shepherd’s hut

3 postcards one intended for James & Bel Dallas. It’s quite well off the beaten track but there are 10 or so cars visiting.

Next is Les Eyzies, home of Cro-Magnon man with caves in the limestone cliffs above the Dordogne river. Dally awhile at the Hotel Cro-Magnon where I stayed 40 years ago with Mary Rose – looks charming, now with pool & €80/90 per night. Another time maybe.

Fill tank & purchase €6 of picnic (milk, Président ripe brie and a pack of ham) at InterMarché, Montignac. Crammed with tourists – apparently to enter Lascaux 2 one must buy a ticket in town but there is a 30/40 minute queue so I demur.

Up to the caves, text to Suzanne; shop is overpriced & I think it's wise I have avoided entry. Perhaps there are other quieter locations with original cave paintings – done some 15,000 years ago.

Back route to Souillac – rain start. Rest by pool & in room from 3 p.m. but it's too soporific to achieve much rest.

Later, walk down to the river which is a mile out of town – finish picnic. One couple have parked two deckchairs in the water and are sipping rosé ! Lads with motorbikes & one lady rider.

Find fan but still very poor night – decide it will be my last in Souillac.

Thursday 23rd July

Pay the bill @ Hotel de Quercy (€117 for the 2 nights). On my way towards Rocamadour I turn into the delightful Château de la Treyne perched above the Dordogne river & now a Relais & Châteaux hotel.

Sit on a bench in the beautiful gardens – chapel of the house is closed but charming.

Chapelle de la Treyne

Write up my diary & then brief tour of the exquisite

downstairs rooms – elegance & not hyper-expensive so perhaps in the future …

On to the PrehistoDino Park at Lacave where I hoped there might be cave paintings but it's a trail through the woods with one animatronic T.Rex vs Stegosaurus & many other creatures. Informative I guess but better for children really who love dinosaurs.

Lovely countryside to Rocamadour where I park in the valley & take the little train up to the pedestrianised area. A bit lazy but it's very hot. Staircase up to large chapel & church by the tomb of St. Amadour & espy the famous Black Virgin statue. Absolutely zippo vibes. Continue up to the Château atop the cliff passing 'stations of the Cross' …

As I approach No.11 (string him up & nail him thereon)

The eleventh station

the only significant moment of the day occurs – a 2 year old girl with dark hair is being pushed downhill in her pushchair. Our eyes meet and lock. She looks a bit startled but the mutual moment is intense.

Brief photostop at the Jerusalem cross then descend the crowded steps & back on the little train to the car park.

Off we go on the side roads to Cahors. Lovely quiet roads. Lidl stop €5 for Coulommiers cheese, yoghurt drinks & tonic. Past the famous medieval Pont Valentré to my hotel, unbooked but they have a nice room overlooking the river Lot. So cool with the air-con & less than twice the price of Souillac but so worth it. Spend the afternoon by the pool & its perfect temperature before a tour of Cahors which is a nice little town. I'm on the Camino for some of the way – Casino supermarket for more yoghurt drink, over the Valentré bridge &

Le pont Valentré

round to my hotel.

Apple & Coulommiers for supper & glacons for my gin. Compose email to friends on the laptop which takes quite a while as annoyingly the cursor keeps moving around the script – curse the cursor !

So wonderful to be in a cool room with comfy pillow. Chouette.

Friday 24th July

News from Simon Williams who will be in Perpignan environs this weekend. Write up diary on the terrace before setting off to the Grotte de Pech-Merle outside Cabrerets.

Arrive at 10.30 – am given 11.30 entrance time. Shop for cards then 1hr 20 mins of 'guide time' – much waffle as our group of 15/20 is escorted round the stalagmites and tites & interesting but mediocre quality prehistoric cave paintings. Cost €11 to see 28 mammoths, a few bison & 2 horses (spotted). Apparently some are 29,000 years old. Get rather bored – then back through Cabrerets & a nice road via the hillside town of St. Cirq Lapopie – it's €3 to park; don't have enough coins so drive on through (looks v.touristy anyway) – uphill then left back to Cahors on side roads.

Back at the hotel there is grief as 'turning up on spec' yesterday for a 2 night stay has not been recorded & they need Room No.46 for proper booked guests. Why is it that many French pretend they can't speak a word of English or even understand my French ? Woman @ reception annoys me … says there are no rooms available.

Back to the pool but it's cloudy now & starts to rain. Decide to head to Lourdes but as I load car reception miraculously finds Room 30 has become available – so I stay. It's not quite as nice as 46 but it's fine.

Back to Lidl for €6 of Coulommiers again, some profiteroles

and an apple – small change to a beggar with 3 dogs outside. Freshen up & out into central Cahors, €80 from a hole in the wall, visit the the Cathedral (St. Stephen's … cooler inside & not too ornate) – attractive side streets in the older bit of town. Buy a Spanish knife €4 for my apple & cheese.

Back on the laptop I answer a few emails – nice one in from Andrew Nunn. Kindly Scruff Williams has secured me a bed for tomorrow night with his HSBC mates at Céret. Exchange with Louise (Goodall) & plan to meet her and Janie Gill at their hotel/restaurant in St Girons on Sunday night perhaps en route to Lourdes – we shall see. It's a little dis-organised this cruise sur le continent.

Shame about the spat with the receptioniste but weird my turn up booking was not registered. They said there was no man on duty when I arrived but there was.

Mystery. No gin tonight !

Plus ça change.

Saturday 25th July

Up at 6.30 a.m. – 7.45 I'm off towards Albi & points south. Pay the bill €200 for the 2 nights … I'd thought I might get away with half that ! Cooler today so Merc has its lid on. Countryside not quite as pretty as Dordogne / Lot & first stop is Charlie Mould's hilltop village, Castelnau-de-Montmiral where I have an excellent 'café crème' in the main square. Text her to tell her … she is shopping & staying in Toulouse.

Onto the motorway sat nav says, flatter country round Toulouse before spotting traffic jam so exit onto side roads – sat nav readjusts to say it's still 2 hours to Couiza.

First to Rennes-les-Bains but spot nothing special – looking for the Poussin tomb (turns out it's been razed to the ground by the private owner who was fed up with tourists … site of

‘Et in Arcadia Ego’ from Holy Blood & Holy Grail, near Arques) then up to Rennes le Chateau,

The village sign

Saunier’s extraordinary garish church atop the hill with with magnificent 360° views.

Saunier’s folly

On beautiful side road through Bugarach (poor café crème), Cubières and its fête & then through the epic Gorges de Galamus, gorgeous – Cheddar Gorge phooey ! Decide against descending to the Ermitage of St. Anthony & continue through wonderful Cathar country towards Perpignan. At Rennes le Chateau bookshop I have asked which of the books in English is the best & have purchased at great expense (€20) one on the Cathars & the mystery of what was found in the church in 1880.

Superb road with just one other car between Estagel & the Perpignan plain over the Col de la Dona. On to Céret were I arrive at 5.10 p.m.. Locating Geoff & Ulla’s house is a trifle difficult but wow, they are the highest property in the town. A converted house and pigsty with much charm. Gift them the Hendrick’s gin and 16 cans of FeverTree tonic – great to see Simon Williams again & wife Amutha.

Sur le patio

Am given wonderful guest suite – supper is prawns and aioli & salad & cherry tart al fresco near their pool. 2 g&t’s and fizzy white from Limoux through which I passed earlier in the day.

Knackered by 10 p.m. so to bed – no sleeping pill tonight but sleep not too badly … views through my 3 windows to shrubs, the Mediterranean and a tree.

Sunday 26th July

Up at 7.30/8 – Geoff shows me where the washing machine is, a top loader but excellent. Dry my clothes on rosemary bushes. Ulla returns with croissants and épée bread & we breakfast leisurely under the large olive tree beneath my suite of rooms. Home made muscat grape juice and apricot jam.

The morning passes leisurely once more by the pool with English & French Sunday newspapers – 'Pinot wins Tour de France' (stage) shout the French papers when it's actually Chris Frome the Brit who wins and wears the yellow jersey !

Lunch is a delicious omelette cooked by Geoff in his pottery kitchen with chillies and octopus washed down with a 1664 lager beer. I depart at 3.15 p.m. thinking it's about 3½ hours to St. Girons.

Geoff & Ulla give me back the gin & the tonics & I pluck a lemon from the tree nearest the house. Result !

Sat nav misbehaves early as I've probably stabbed the wrong St. Girons into its system so it seems about half an hour before we clear Céret & head over a hill on the road towards Prades. Then up sharp-sided valleys into Catalan country – ski resorts at Font-Romeu, a flatter plain then up again to towering scenery over the Col de Puymorens

My 'ship of steel'

which seems to have the most extensive ski area – then down to Ax-les-Thermes, Tarascon & Sinast with fine cliffs and obviously prehistoric sites nearby – Europe's largest cave apparently.

Then at Foix turn left towards St. Girons. We are now finished with hairpins & windy roads & it's a beautiful 40 kms valley with drumlins created in the 'basket of eggs' topography post glaciation. Lovely English-style country & a beautiful mill house at Lescure just before St. Girons. Sat nav takes me direct to the Chateau Beauregard where I have arranged to meet

Louise Goodall & her fellow walkers for supper. It's 8.15 as the open-topped Merc pulls up outside this house/hotel used as the local Nazi headquarters in WW2.

Louise and Janie Gill greet me – they are milling outside- luckily there is a room free, the George Sand (Chopin's mistress) suite – LUXURY. Supper at the poor St. G restaurant in town takes till midnight. Fun walk back chatting to L & J & Ed Creasy (Eton 1 yr behind me). G&T's & giggles with the girls on my balcony & bed (alone sadly !) at 1.30 a.m.

No sleeping pill again.

Monday 27th July

7 a.m. up after not much sleep – walkers are congregating their rucksacks.

Outside the hotel

Distribute a few charity leaflets and newsletters to people who showed an interest the previous evening (Dennis, Mandy, Ed). Lug L & J's suitcases downstairs.

Morning is drizzly & dull overcast – they, & there are 15 or so of them being bossed around by the tour leaders, head off to the hills for their first day 30 kms. Most have those silly ski poles & even gaiters. Wheeze's day pack rucksack is too heavy so she unloads much kit. Take their photos for them.

Back up to my lovely suite of rooms (€198 for the night, gulp) – write up diary, brief walk in the grounds & then it's off towards Lourdes. Part A roads part motorway past the airport Tarbes-Lourdes – was intending to stay the night here but sat nav couldn't locate the hotel I had opted for from Trip Advisor. Find it's free parking between noon & 2 p.m. down by the river with large hotels either side. One is the Sainte Suzanne which makes me laugh – so does Suzanne who is the vice-chair of Being Alongside/APCMH.

Hotel Sainte Suzanne

Up the Rue des Grottes & its grotty souvenir shops selling religious tat. Find the tourist office for a map – visit nearby church then down via the Soubirous' townhouse to the massive Grotte where the 18 visitations were supposed to have happened. Brief look inside the world's 2nd largest church then down into the extraordinary oval underground Basilica (the size of a greyhound racing stadium) with seating for 5,000 & banners of many saints

Mother Theresa

– sadly not one for St. Nino of Georgia, originally from Armenia. Walk round the outer ring then the inner ring taking photos of the banners of my favourites

Saint Francis

– then out and up around the castle/museum the highest point of Lourdes back to my car via an average café crème at the Sainte Suzanne bar.

Fortuitously I stop in a souvenir shop to find a postcard of the Bergérie in Bartres & discover it's only 5 kms away. There are scores of mixed youth in blue shirts – turns out they are from Essex, Romford in fact.

Through the main town and out into the country to the village of Bartres. Many fewer visitors here and I am the only one climbing up to the shepherd's hut

The Soubirous' hut

where Bernadette aged 14 looked after her family's sheep back in 1852. Inside the hut, wouldyabelieve it !, are a few plastic sheep & a statue of the Virgin Mary. Descend back to the village & park up looking for the family's other house but signposting is poor & I fail to locate it although Bernadette's 'Fontaine'is there – somewhat dried up & mucky &

tired.

I have decided against staying more than 2 or 3 hours in this famous place & drive north towards Bordeaux. Caramel sundae @ McDonalds, Tarbes then good roads through flat countryside, then Armagnac country with better architecture. Stop at a Carrefour Local to stock up with milk, yoghurt drink (good, not as sweet as Lidl's), apple & organic camembert + 2 Danish pastries. Tea stop at a Parking soon after then reckon the town of Marmande should be my destination tonight. Arrive at 7 p.m. & find the Ibis Budget for €48 & it's fine. Finish my 'pique-nique' read a bit of my Cathars book, check my emails, text the girls down in the Pyrenèes but they must have no signal.

Third night running no Zimovane/Zopliclone & pretty good night's sleep.

My take on Lourdes – for what it's worth. 5 million visitors a year – so it's a congregation of Christians with those massive churches.

But sacred sites they are not. I think this little bored schoolgirl invented her visions perhaps to please her parents & the local Catholic priests, & boy, did it work ! Many shrines and associated relics have brought wealth to many towns and villages. Lourdes is just the largest. Who really cares if 'Sainte Bernadette' (not in my book) invented the whole thing ? Does it really matter ?

It's a convocation of Christianity / catholicism & it's not going to change.

Tuesday 28th July

Wake at 8.15 and set off towards Angoulème where I have arranged to drop in at Lizzie's sister & hubby. Text to say I'm running late – plus ça change !

Have estimated that Marmande to Angouleme area is about an hour but it’s over 2 hrs 20 minutes before I locate the laurel hedge where I need to turn left to their property.

Earlier I had driven through the pretty village of Aubeterre where astonishingly I encounter 7 or 8 English cars.

J and A have a substantial old property sitting in a couple of acres + with a wood above, a courtyard with barns around and a side field with a ‘poissonerie’, apparently full of grass snakes, which one day may get turned into a plunge/swimming pool. Overgrown trees in the courtyard obscure the probable wondrous view south and south-west.

First to greet me is Peggy, Lizzie’s dog. There are an assortment of local English builders & helpers around – the former precariously up a poorly-placed ladder reassembling gutter pipes. We chat on the terrace over coffee – I stay perhaps a couple of hours; writing up my diary on the swing seat in the courtyard.

I learn that when Mother Theresa came to Holland where J lived, she insisted on meeting J who had always sent her parcels and donations on behalf of students in her school.

Wonderful – there’s me with my Jean Vanier connection and J with her Mother Theresa one.

Next mission is to Royan on the north side of the Garonne above Bordeaux where my friend Didier Rousseau used to live – discover his nice large house a street away from the sea front. Chat with the cleaner there & go round the back where I am told people may know where Didier has gone. News is he’s in the USA and married. My quest to track him down (we met in S.America back in 1978 but have met subsequently in Paris and London) continues – I compose a letter in Franglais to the docteur Vilar who now lives at 8 rue Auguste Rateau & drop it back with the cleaner. We shall see – let’s hope he responds.

On up north through brackish salty oyster beds – previously I came through cognac country. Originally I aim for Challons – it's 4 p.m. now but the route is uninspiring so I track right towards Saumur on the Loire. In Vic en Bigorre I stock up at the Carrefour market with a couple of pains aux raisins, yoghurt drink, milk & an organic camembert some of which I eat in a nearby lay-by.

By 7 p.m. I'm getting a bit tired and so somewhere north of Niort there are 4 or 5 budget hotels to choose from.

The Campanile is my choice, €69 and rather better than the Ibis Budget. There is a larger bath than usual in French hotels, a kettle, a better telly and generally more mod cons. Finish my picnic in the grounds, read a bit and conk out @ 10.30, this night taking a sleeping pill as it will be a long day tomorrow. Sat nav says it's 3½ hours to Paris.

Wednesday 29th July

Leave at about 8.15. Take the motorway as A roads would have been 6 hours plus. About €36 in toll charges but easy driving with good service stations – one has Paul bakery & good coffee. Arrive at the Montparnasse station in perfect time to 'ramasser' Lizzie & Peggy at the noon pick-up time. We have the top down for the 1½ hours north-east to Trosly-Breuil – sat nav takes us through small section of lovely countryside nearby with the sunken spire and village of Haupterolles. We shop first at the good InterMarché

Peggy in the Mercedes

where I get 2 bottles of Macon-Villages, 2 bio camemberts, a Coulommiers, a causse blue and a nice ½ bottle of Sauternes for €26.

Result.

Then I'm keen to show Lizzie round the main L'Arche buildings

– sadly no-one I know is around & I don't want to disturb anyone but she sees the set-up and the chapel & we visit the craft shop over the road with Peggy allowed in.

Many of the houses in the village now belong to L'Arche & we meet a couple of residents with twisted bodies being wheeled around by volunteers in the shop.

Then it's soft top on for the journey north to Calais. Brief visit to the Armistice museum again & then quite a few hours from Compiègne up the A1 autoroute.

Get there at 6.30 or so, check in Peggy at the pet reception & then have to wait for the 8.20 shuttle as a consequence of earlier delays – due mostly to the previous day's 'storming' or 'swarm' of migrants trying to enter the tunnel sous La Manche. We spot several tryers & even a couple of French police cars on duty, a rarity before recent days one understands.

Once over the other side there is a lorry parked up with British police processing two black fellows who have been discovered stowed away.

Then a massive queue develops on the M20 – police have closed off a large section (for God knows what reason). We escape at the first opportunity towards Faversham on a fast twisty road & join the M2/A2 which also has massive road works going on near Rochester.

Honestly, what do people coming to tour England think of our road services ? Drop Lizzie home at 10.30 & I'm back home by 11. No pill again.

Jamie’s Israel Diary January 1992

Saturday 18th January 1992

Spring from Springfield at 9a.m., having written letter to Graham re Patrick Estate / Wellesley Estate monies.

This is one Graham Millar who it turned out, after much detailed investigation by myself, family members and ultimately the Securities and Futures Authority, had ‘churned and burned’ some £250,000 of my Trust and Lloyd’s deposit inheritance. He had even used £13,500 of my money to pay one of his own tax bills !

Post it at Lillie Road – van started first time; surprised me! Park outside Queens Club Gardens where John Piper slapped me 12 years ago (soon forgiven) & walk to Baron’s Court Tube. Plenty of time at Heathrow … walk round Terminals 2,3 and 1. See Steve Davies + cue-case in No.3, smaller than expected, trying to look inconspicuous. Stock up stomach on coffee, coke, Burger King chicken concoction (not as pretty as picture!) & Danish pastries. Check in bag at CSA desk after long Q redirected to TAP desk. Chat with Romanian off on TAROM. Aeroflot desks to the left, Russian models and their minders; extraordinary guy in panic obviously smuggling currency / cocaine into Russia with his girlfriend who seemed to be in on the game. Kept zipping / unzipping his taped-up bags and shifting the trollies around for no good reason.

Expect he's in the Lubyanka now. Slight delay on flight but only 1⅔ hours to Prague – good plane, Tupolev 144, (a direct rip-off of a BAC 1-11 apart from the seats which were only marginally inferior) excellent snack meal of bread & meats etc.. Free drinks & newspapers – take note BA !

Arrive Prague 5.30p.m. their time, hop onto tarmac & into bus which takes us all of 100 yards ! Not many planes around – one Mongolian, two Czech. Clear customs/controls & collect bag – leave it at left luggage. 6p.m. now, bus to town not going for ½ hour or so so take very smart clean taxi ($9 cash much appreciated) to St. Nicholas Church in main square of Old City. See about 60 cars in total on 25 minute drive in & that's Saturday night on the airport highway !

See letter/article sent to Vole for Prague interlude …

Lots of checks & piss-poor scanning equipment – TU 154 (Trident copy) → Tel Aviv. Leaves on time.

Sunday 19th January

Arrive 5a.m. at Tel Aviv – incredibly efficient airport. Through all checks & bag in hand 10 minutes after leaving aircraft – eat your heart out Gatwick. Bus to town. Check out Adiv Hotel (no Diners Club) so walk on to Hotel Moss & sleep till 1p.m.. Walk round town for 5 hours + . Highlights – Russian shop, camera guy, Spanish run café, silverware. Lowlights – dearth of books on Prague, dogs at the yacht club. Gloomy pictures bar one at modern art museum. Good cappuccino at London Café – why can't we make squirty cream non-UHT ? Synagogue on Allenby won't let me in without little hat – anorak hood not good enough ! Buy old maps, T-shirts, film.

Evening taxi trip out to beyond Hertzliya to the Daniel Hotel (very plush), Bali Hai restaurant with Thai staff. Table of 6 Germans & thoughts thereon. Back 11p.m.. Good sleep.

Monday 20th January

Slightly shoddy b/fast at H.Moss. Buy amazing Mozart and Prague book from German-Jewish run old bookshop – pay about $18 but it's worth much more. Nice people. Get nail clipper to tackle awkward little toenails ! More coffee / croissants with the Spaniards. Suss out car hire prices & decide to take bus to Eilat for 29 shekels ($12). Arrive Central Bus Station on No.4 town bus – bolshy slob on bench – eat snack & board bus with loads of army guys & gals for 5 hour trip to Eilat. Stop at Beer'Sheeva & again just before Dimona Power (Bomb) Plant at Azad – Mordechai Vanunu and all that hooha. Negev desert. Last stop at weird animal sanctuary – nearly miss bus. Taxi from Eilat to the excellent Coral Beach hotel, masses to eat at supper including steak but with conversation-less krauts. Write half Prague saga. Good sleep again.

Tuesday 21st January

Multi-choice breakfast. Test sea and pool waters – sea warmer. Wander down towards Taba past coral reserve, funky observatory & submarine ride where 2 camels say hello, marine research centre, hotels being built & Eddi's café 1km from border. Return to hotel & continue towards Eilat. Check out 'Texas Ranch' rodeo centre, enter dolphinarium (nice), on past oil terminals & port (thousands of S.E.Asian cars), past army bases & along sea front round hotels. Looking for centre but signs not great so get rather lost climbing amongst the new settlements built for Soviet émigrés (1,600 here so far). Eventually reach bus station after some poor directing. Good snack bar there. Enter department store & purchase Cougar radio/cassette £20 ace value. Drop film for developing at Shalom Centre (Shopping Mall) – good cappuccino at café there. Browse around 11 miles today ă pied, I reckon. Managed some sunbathing at lunchtime but factor 12 Body Shop is perhaps too screening in this good but gentle sun.

Talk to drunk Finn & interesting chat with 2 young Danes re scuba diving. One is instructor – tells about guy who had to spend 115 hours in the decompression tank owing to overdoing life on holiday the week before (sans sleep) & trying to rescue friend's diving belt whilst underwater. Doesn't sound the sport for me !

Soup/salad supper – finish Prague article.

Wednesday 22nd January

Write postcards to Sue & Andy Garber. Get photocopies of Prague piece – send one to Bernard Levin & another with letter to the twins. Whatalot of words I'm doing at the moment ! More serious sunbathing with Factor 4 after a brief excursion by bus to Taba, Egypt. Lots of form filling, tax paying, customs etc. Very little over there apart from Hilton Hotel & the Nelson Club Hotel – no army, few people. Territory returned to Egypt after Camp David accord 1980 ?

Sun loses its strength at 2'ish – so more scribbling until 4'ish when I bus in to Eilat. Buy map of bible locations, batteries – film not ready. Post Office shut. Check out 'Reliable' car hire, more expensive than Tel Aviv, haven't yet decided whether to bus up or rent car. Walk down to Galei Hotel to watch documentary (Canadian) in Finnish (!) on treatment of Jews in Russia in 1990 – apparently it's got worse since then – & their immigration here. Introduced by sweet little man from Coventry who helps their cause. Brilliant dinner at Tandoor restaurant … Tandoori Nan, Chicken Korma & mixed veg. Sweet rice dumplings in honey, Turkish coffee £12 – I assure you the best Indian food I have ever tasted accompanied by live sittar & dancing. Underneath King Solomon's hotel, v.large.

9p.m. attended lecture given by Jacky Pri-Gal, Honorary Consul, at Neptune Hotel supposedly on foreign policy, economy & tourism but the bore concentrated on domestic policy &

Eilat. He was interesting on David Gurion, later Ben-Gurion who founded this country. Left early – too hot, too dull !

And so to bed.

Thursday 23rd January

Write letter to Diana. Hope it works.

My sister-in-law, a poor choice of go-between in my attempt to rescue my marriage, who binned my letters to her.

Bus to Eilat 9a.m.. Buy envelopes in Post Office, film not ready – organise car hire $310 for 8 days from Sat.a.m.. Reliable Car Hire. Buy 5 tapes at £5 each, 2 Marianne Faithfull, 1 Police, 1 Stevie Wonder, 1 Dvorak/Smetana. Coffee – film ready – none of Prague … photos they had registered as negatives ! Post letter to Diana & to Vole. Back by bus, sunbathing nearly 3 hours. Then to Coral World – underwater observatory, best aquarium in the world (?), living coral, myriads of wondrous coloured & shaped fish. Turtle pool, shark pool. Well worth 22 shekels entry – evening nap, Arab evening in dining room, belly dancer & her minder/fleecer . Leave before end to read.

Friday 24th January

Wake early & read B.Levin. Write postcards to Pip & Charlotte + Steve Morris. 7.45a.m. bus comes for tour – Timna Valley. Brief documentary showing mining/smelting of copper. Plutonium here too. Sculptured rocks, Solomon's pillars, little Egyptian holy site to 5/6 gods. Then to Timna Lake (funded by Missouri Jews) where Bedouins encamp and camel escapes to come and check me out. Coffee milk good. Discover it's made at next port of call the Yotvata Kibbutz (considered one of the best in Israel). Friesian / Holstein / Charolais cross milkers looking forlorn but get good diet of cotton seed / straw / fresh fruit & have classical music played to them. Visitors' centre. Back past

Hai Bar gazelles / ostriches to Eilat new settlements at top of hill. $130,000 for 5 bed house. Jewellry centre – malachite green/ blue stone & silverware. Back 2p.m. – nap. Read, early supper, early bed.

Saturday 25th January

Shalom Shabbat. Postcard to Piers F-A. & Minnow. 9a.m.Suzuki Spirit arrives → Eilat, sign papers & off on Ovda Road up along Egypt border (wire fence) through marvellous Negev scenery to Sdi Boquer. First to Ben Gurion graves then his simple home 1 mile away. Pass Avedat fort on hill. On past Dimona to Masada. Cable car up, walk down (20 mins) – walk round edge. Essenes & Zealots. On to Qumran, Dead Sea Scrolls found in 1947 in caves. Dead end street past burnt out jeeps (1967 ?) – looking for road to Bethlehem, end up in Jerusalem. Lucky to find sign to American Colony. $50 B&B in annexe, perfectly comfortable. Walk around first to St. George's Cathedral & chapel. Keith-Roach plaque …

In gratitude to Almighty GOD and in loving memory of Violet Oliva Keith-Roach who worshipped for many years in this cathedral. This memorial is erected by her husband Edward Keith-Roach, District Commissioner of Jerusalem, and by her two sons, Martin and Anthony. 1939 A.D.

"She opened her mouth with wisdom and in her tongue is the law of kindness".

On to Scolus Hill, across ring road to Jewish quarter, past the Romanian Church & 'Italian Hospital', & to St. Paul's Church where evangelical service going on, attend for ½ hour – rather odd little songs with poor accompaniment, but they mean well. Back for supper in hotel, 9p.m..

Sunday 26th January

Superb breakfast. Eucharist at 8a.m.. Congregation 4. My 3rd communion. Into Old City at Post Office gate. Tomb of

Kings closed Sunday. Franciscan cloister & church & garden. Greek place of Jesus' prison in Via Dolorosa. Round & about & into Dome of the Rock. 13 shekels entry – shoes off, bolshy Muslim guard in cave shrine under rock. Allah sign & plastic bin sitting on rock. On through Arab market (saffron 50p) into smart chic Jewish quarter. Expensive coffee 4.50 shekels but good Gaggia type. Out of gate by Armenian church round walls to Jaffa Gate – enter Jaffa Gate & enter Christ Church. Vicar waffling on … service started at 9.30, it's now 10.40 & he's still rabbiting on. I got here at 10.20, 10.55 now & he's still going – lot of sore bums here. Time to go ! Left onto Patriarchate Road, left into St. James' Street – discover Rothschild Centre. Enter, look around, introduce myself as friend of Miriam's son/grandson ? Entymology → good discussion / debate on Israeli politics / Chunnel / neo-nazism / Le Pen (losing his battle in Paris – vive le peuple). Very bright Sumatran brought up in Germany. Give him card. ½ hour at least there. Back down St. James', left into Armenian church (St. James' Cathedral) – dead ends at rear. Down through gardens with deep wells (Romans) & out of Zion Gate. Right up hill to Tomb of David, cost of entry 2 cigarettes + 1½ shekels for 1 candle & Jewish little cap (cardboard version). Light candle – see tomb. Round to site of last supper, downstairs an absolute disgrace – uncared for , rubbish everywhere , nearby graves used as dump . Discuss with female caretaker – Jews have picnics there & don't take their rubbish away ! Back along Western wall past Jaffa Gate & along Jaffa Road sussing out camera shops – buy yetanothermap 20 shekels. Return via Schlomzion Hamalka (King David Street) enter Jaffa Gate – back to Rothschild centre to try to change $20 as banks now closed. John takes me to Arab money changer in market who gives me worse rate than hotel would ! Never mind, c'est la vie. Directs me to Wailing Wall – nose around, eventually turfed out due to lack of little hat. Round Arab market again (got new film for 5 shekels) & out via lower Via Dolorosa (pass monks with lightweight cross !) to Lion Gate. Down & right to Mary

(Mother of God)'s tomb – rather dark & spooky & Catholic . Up into Garden of Gethsemane (padlocked !) & into beautifully fronted Basilica of Agony. Mosaic floor inside, interesting altar paintings – pray awhile. Out & up hill past lovely Russian orthodox St. Mary Magdalene church (closed), into Dominus Flevit church with disconcerting sepulchre but masses of rosemary. On up steep hill (Mount of Olives) to near Nablus summit. Ace view of old city – couldn't find Maxwell's grave as all inscriptions in Hebrew. No loss ! On up hill, round Dome of Ascension leaving Russian tower to right. Its cross gleams, however. Along Martin Buber St. & left down hill on Shmuel Ben Adaya St.. Get smile from very pretty girl playing handball & wave in return ! Round wall, avoiding Rockefeller Museum, up Saleh El Din & round to Nablus Rd.. But unfortunately Garden Tomb closed. This is where Christians believe Christ rose from the dead – the rest think it happened at Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Return to hotel for a coffee. Was planning to go to Yad Vashem Holocaust museum but read it shuts at 5. So decide to go to Bethlehem instead. After 11 miles (once more) it's time for modern transport.

Hit Jerusalem rush hour at its peak. Road out is poor, compounded by maniac drivers particularly Arab taxis & Israeli Army jeeps. Hundreds of near misses in the twilight. Miss sign to Bethlehem so continue to Hebron – suburbs to the right then suburbs to the left before explosion rocks car ! Assume direct hit from intifada stone-throwing youth & curse Arabs but soon discover interior light has blown plastic cover out (although mysteriously light still works !?). Made one heck of a noise I can tell you ! Hit Jerusalem road and stop when near B'hem at roadside café. Very kind Arab speaking good English gives me baclava & coffee flavoured with cardomam seeds + box of matches. First gift of food in Israel & it's an Arab who obliges. Shukran. Keen Hussein of Jordan fan (makes 2 of us) – nobody buying his bakery products because people stay indoors. If Arabs venture out at night

it's," Oi, where do you think you are going ? " from the soldiers. He's thinking hard about selling up & going to Jordan, where life would be easier.

Find Bethlehem turn off – down Manger Street to Manger Square – place deserted apart from army sniper in a watchtower over the Post Office. Walk round side of Church of the Nativity (closed naturally) meet private road & return to square where pandemonium sets in – jeep & guns hurtle off westward, more scurry upstairs above shopping centre. Decide to leave them to their fun & games & return to Jerusalem. More army panic by Rachel's tomb – 10+ jeeps, eventually clears. Drive round north of city, through Hasidic quarter before returning to American Colony.

Supper $19 – Melon / Smoked Salmon, Fish Soup en Croute, Squid + veg, Strawberry Ice Cream / Pineapple Fritter. Very good value.

Monday 27th January

Letter to Steve & Wendy, postcard to Tony Yeldham after somewhat restless night. Breakfast 7.15a.m. , get car from garage, tip car-man, drive to Garden Tomb. This is the site of the cross and site of the resurrection – lovely garden



run by society based in London. Plants thriving – you name it they got it. Anti-clockwise to wooden platform overlooking bus station, past well / wine-press to tomb entrance … one bay dry one damp in the corner – out to take photos. Listen to guide with group, sitting to their right when Kerblam! SONIC BOOM ! shatters our peace. Ta very much Israeli Air Force. Buy postcards in shop after much browsing. Leave this magical place & drive round walls towards Gethsemane. Park & wretched 'guide' (this is the worst spot in Jerusalem for pestering) tells me that unless I fork out 20 shekels to him I am liable to get 'stoned' & that parking there will cost me

150 sh. . Crap. Walk down to view Absalom's Pillars (son (3rd ?) of Abraham) from above . There are 3 high canopied stone belvedere-type structures. Up through Jewish graves & back to car . Around city walls – get lost in West J .. Eventually find Knesset, Israel Museum, Biblical Lands Museum (shut). Looking for Yad Vashem now – get directions in Israel Museum. Find it – visit museum of holocaust history. Tears & I'm not the only one. Art gallery of objects & pictures done under duress. Hall of names – they try to discover each person lost to Nazis. Round trees of remembrance covenanted to Jews from all Europe. Coffee & cigarette, bookshop browse & off towards Tel Aviv.

Get lost once more amongst new settlements – signposting abysmal, standard of driving worse ! Eventually locate right road & cruise to Tel Aviv. Park by bus station close to Dan Hotel in south. Purchase Catherine Cookson hardback (£2) – try to get money on Diners Club card. No luck twice. Collect plastic bag left at Hotel Moss . Enter Kulti shop – fine T-shirt designs etc.. But no money no buy. Ya-Harkon St . – lots of drunks around. Drive north, foiled by one way system again, & hit road to Haifa 120k.p.h. all the way. Park before port. Visit Templer War Graves 1869-1945 British, Jewish & German. Photo of C.B.Patrick grave , age 33 killed 1914? Relation ? Also one of Rea – a relation of Chris Rea ? Long walk, 5 miles, round upper Haifa eventually locating Elijah's cave & tomb. Here he met followers before outwitting Baal (Kings 2). Back to car – coffee & bad chocolate bread microwaved. Much traffic on road north – see Marks & Spencer so stop at smart shopping centre with ice-skating rink at top ! On towards Akko, then right round populous town, Qir Bialik, as usual left / right up / down before seeing signpost for Haifa . Fill up with petrol near Qir Ata & finally notice there's a dent in the car roof just 1cm from the windscreen … so it was a stone / rock that was thrown at me in Hebron. Well, 1cm is as good as a mile in this case but that could have been nasty – hope

Reliable Car Hire are used to this sort of thing ! Rejoin main Haifa / Akko road & decide to go to Caesarea as originally planned this time by going over the top of Mount Carmel past enormous University tower (observation floor on 24th level). Right at sign to Atlit & peace descends. Lovely hairpin road through Carmel National Park (3 cars, 2 army vehicles in 10km compared to 3,000 in 10km on highway). Back onto motorway & down to Caesarea which seems nice & quiet. Check into Dan Hotel by golf course – ritzy prices, food a bit dowdy. Interestingly I wasn't allowed to eat cheesecake after steak. Milk & meat don't mix in kosher practices. Americans at table next to me. Bed 10.45p.m. after reading how much there is to see around Galilee.

Tuesday 25th January

Awake 5.15a.m.. Good radio station – The Voice of Peace. Write Major & Betsy . Early morning walk round part of golf course – looks a bit moth-eaten & under repair. Expensive anyway, decide not to play. Back for 7.10a.m. breakfast – cold coffee, fair food. Dan Hotels rather jaded. Leave at 8a.m. for Roman amphitheatre – quick tour, photo. On to Herod's city, Temple to Augustus Caesar, massive breakwaters (no JCBs then), walk across beach where Jesus departed these shores? Back to car & up to Herod's Stables near the hotel but everything shut although lovely horses stabled there now. Into Hadera in heavy traffic – lengthy process cashing 400 shekels on Diners at Israel Discount Bank. Nice coffee & pastries opposite – 1st parking ticket all in Hebrew !

Head N.E. to Megiddo (Armageddon) through pleasant countryside. Naturally miss sign & end up going through Afula & out other side. Pick up student / hitchhiker who gives none too great directions. Drop him back in Afula & get lost. Eventually find Megiddo – quick look at museum & out round this powerful site. 4000B.C. buildings, Solomon's Palace, Ahab etc.. Walk round clockwise, strong wind at

times, more air force jets but no booms today ! Staircase. Tunnel closed.

Decide to check out Nazareth on way to Mount Tabor. Pick up Swede & Dane girls going to Haifa. Tortuous hairpin road up to Silesian Hospice & above to Islamic tower & reservoir (not yet on postcards). Force 9 wind as I stand on A1 ley line between University on Mount Carmel, through where I stand atop Nazareth & on to summit of Mount Tabor along pylon lines. Feel inner strength.

Descend to central Nazareth & park by Arab market / Church / Basilica of the Annunciation. Wander up market (buy 75p saffron) before church opens at 2p.m.. Very Catholic – little service going on under dome of rock where stood Mary's house ? Who knows – anyway something happened here ; maybe Jesus met disciples here after rising from the dead.

Head for Mount Tabor – of course get lost in Nazareth Illit. Large circle & back to square one ! Left on Afula road , more hairpins; skirt edge of Afula & on to Mount Tabor. Pick up high class Bedouin studying Italian & on up the hill to Mount Tabor via very steep slightly hairy road in poor nick. Park by Greek Orthodox church (pretty) there & enter using one of my very few Greek words έφχαριστω which opened the doors anyway. Not that great inside. Back down the road a bit , park & wander through rocks & bushes to drive leading to beautiful Terra Sancta Church next to Monastery. Incredibly heavy doors reveal fantastic interior of stained glass windows above & below. Sacred stone altar but roped off. This is where the transfiguration of Christ to Heaven occurred … (allegedly !). Wander round graves of apostles (?) – there's the Pope that died in 1962 buried up here as well – buy 2 postcards from sweet nun in monastery. More wandering around the old stones of this ancient fort – discover amazing cave . Photo. Return to car & descend going round hill the other way at bottom & on to Kinnaret,

Tiberias & look for hostel on Mount of Beatitudes. Get lost again ! Go beyond Capernaum before turning round, going up hill to north & finding right road. Hostel closed for renovation & church (built by Mussolini, probably not personally !) Fine position, however. Alsatian sees me off. Check out Ginnosar Kibbutz Hotel & kibbutz itself but doesn't look v.nice. Pass serious car accident, body on side of road with paramedics attending. Check out Galei Hamat Hotel near hot springs, lobby too hot, leave. Check in at Gai Beach Hotel – expensive but takes Diners. Nice receptionist recommends me restaurant, Pagoda in town. Thai veg soup (v.good), crispy duck (masses) & spring roll. £10. Fast service. Good long sleep.

Wednesday 29th January

Wake 6a.m. to see dawn breaking over Sea of Galilee (or Kinnaret). Choppy – won't take boat. Think this is a glacial lake as saw signs of glaciations last night. Breakfast 7a.m. with German working at Beit Shona. Cold coffee. North round lake to Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves & Fishes with mosaic. Pray inside chapel. Even more impressive is church next door, Deification of Peter Church where Christ made his only joke, "You are Peter & on this rock I found my church". Mensa Christi (Table of Christ) inside – for once one can touch stone & I sit on edge of table. Outside is fine bronze statue overlooking lapping lake. Walk on foreshore, take photo & return to entrance of church where lady tourist sitting. Suddenly it starts to hail – "Hail Mary", I say & walk through rocky garden & underneath 2 arches of ancient well-type structure. On to Capernaum – Roman (Herod) temple on site of Jesus' church. Shinto service going on in modern auditorium. No paper in grotty loos which causes slight grief, but manage. On up hill to Rosh Pinna & left to Zefat thinking Hazor ruins up there. Coffee & 1 felafel with good Moroccan & buy new film. Pick up Gordon, hitchhiker, who "works for God" – bit

confused but spoke good English – drop him back at Rosh Pinna. Fail to find Hazor ruins – on to Qir Shemona and right towards Mount Hermon. 2 army hitchhikers. Then another who speaks English well, take him all the way to skiing area. Past Banyas where 100 Israelis lost their lives capturing place from Syrians in 1967. Past Nimrod Castle, superb site atop hill.

12.30p.m. now. Coffee & rolls, then rent skis etc. & get lift pass, £30 total cost. Up long cold chair lift, ski down icy crusty run to drag lift then down better snow to base. Up lift again – mosey around above station before Army tick me off. Broken truck & jeep up here . Very security conscious. Photo of peak & a bit of Syria. Down to base by a different route & return skis 3p.m.. Descend to Qir Shemona , left towards Shamir, right to Gonen & up over ridge to En Ziwan. Booms (artillery practice ?) as I ask army about Quneitra border which am told is Syria not Jordan as I assumed ! So head along Route 98 all the way back to Tiberias. Extraordinary road – bomb craters, burnt out jeeps, war debris, memorials. Mostly in 2nd gear – anti-tank obstacles to negotiate . For 30kms do not see another car ! UN positions on left. Solitary deer enlivens the spirit. Excellent Arabic coffee near Tiberias & head for Jericho. Good fast road. Arrive 8.30p.m. – place utterly deserted (Intifada) but find Hishan Palace Hotel. Pretty grotty & £10. Get ripped off for OK meal ½km away … 20 sh when should have been about 12. Back to hotel – 85 year old man who was in British Police Palestine.

Thursday 30th January

Awake 6a.m. after night of dog barking and distant wailing. Café arabische in square. Leave hotel, no-one around. Drive to Allenby Bridge but told politely border closed till 8a.m.. Back through Jericho to Mount of Temptation. Climb to Greek Monastery; guidebook says open at 7a.m., difficult Greek monk says 9a.m. so descend. Coffee at Temptation

restaurant – visit old Jericho. Walk round walls – already tumbled down ! Oldest city in the world they say but Megiddo must be a rival. Similar shaped archaic structures. Look for Elisha's grave to north but fail to locate (as usual) go some way before U-turn by some grazing camels. Left to Jericho & Allenby Bridge again. This time told no way in except by taking taxi from Jerusalem. Tant pis. Decide to give St. George's Monastery a miss as it's another Greek Orthodox number & they don't welcome tourists. Ascend to Jerusalem & check in at American Colony. Assemble laundry $11 which returned immaculate in evening. Go to Old City – boy selling kids' trousers vanishes within 20 mins.. Coffee near Damascus Gate, paint on ceiling falling onto my table ! To Jewish quarter via longish route – buy presents & find bargain Yiddish cup for Tony Y. Lunch on main shopping street – drop 2 films to be developed. More bargains in pleasant souvenir shop . Enter New Gate – another closed church, get lost (this place is a tangled web of narrow twisting lanes) but find 3 English looking for Christian sector. So they guide me out of maze & I take them to Garden Tomb & St. George's. They leave; I visit British Council which only has Sunday Times & it's Thursday – could do better. Return to hotel & unload plastic bags. Soon out seeking but not finding the Kings' Tombs so enter at New Gate, quickly reverse, round to Jaffa Gate, left on St. James' Street & browse around smart Jewish area near synagogue & Roman ruins . Coffee & Danish pastry – art gallery 12 Visions of Israel exhibition. Back same way to evening prayers (6p.m.) at cathedral. Psalm 69 read alternately, vicar & congregation of roughly 12 . Then back to hotel. More Intifada explosions as I leave church. Sirens. – good browse in Arab run hotel stores – nice bag & box look tempting. Bath then supper … rigatoni, veal wrapped in ham, choc. cake + orange juice. Wander round Pasha's room upstairs – bellissima.

It wasn't until many years later that I realised I was following in my parents' footsteps here at The American Colony

Hotel where they lived during the war my father organising cavalry forces at Haifa and my mother working with Colonel Bryant, Chief of Police of Jerusalem.

Friday 31st January

Wake 5.30a.m. Write postcard to Anne & Antony. Large breakfast 6.10a.m.. 7a.m.Eucharist . 4th communion. Back to hotel. Visit Kings' Tombs just south of hotel – some filled with water fed by drainage channels in side of cliff. Northern tombs more powerful. On down Nablus Rd. & right to my favourite bank, the Israel Discount. Longish wait for 300 shekels. Round corner to bus station – photo of Golgotha, Place of the Skull . Try to enter Jewish cemetery above skull rock but gates shut. Syrian Catholis centre, dead end. Wander round area between Nablus and Az Zahara roads – incredibly strong wind in my face as I stand at eastern edge of wasteland & car parking square, on east side of Salah El Din. What happened here ? Into small park further east with olive trees, very strong winds again. Jewish Synagogue at corner … round garden & back to wasteland square where stands



a tired-looking donkey. Photo. Round & about then across Sultan Suleiman – colourful Arab market going on outside Damascus Gate. Buy Charlotte some trousers – bargain. Enter Old City, discover fine shop run by good Arab who has brother in England – buy box & round silver little box. Bargains again. Next looking for shirt or dress for Pippa – find lovely embroidered number. Bidding starts at $65, I pay 75sh. Rather awkward shopkeeper. Longish search round the tangled web for Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Strong wind as I walk along S.E. side, enter. Church not that impressive. Front left pew wobbles noisily as I kneel down to muse awhile. Ascend tower, spiral staircase, many steps. Fine views at top. Photos.

Down Via Dolorosa – obstreperous guide latches on to me

leads me towards quieter Jewish quarter, takes cigarette as tip but wants much more. Foul-mouths me, so I swear back ! Walk up St. James' St.. Hoping to see my friends in the Alex Rothschild Centre but shut so stop for Arab coffee in St. Michael Restaurant by Jaffa Gate. Good. Back to hotel to unload gifts. Soon decide to visit sights south of city. So drive out on the appalling Bethlehem road – always traffic jams & nightmare drivers. Arab Mercedes taxis causing the most heartache. Rachel's Tomb closed, so on to amazing Solomon's Pools at Aflit about 4 miles past Bethlehem turn off. Large unkempt fort-type building on left, then walk round 3 one acre each reservoirs in pine valley. Very muddy. Pumping station broken but looks mendable – shame to waste this pure water. Astounded at the guile of Solomon – this was eons ago. On to Herodium, 12 km left of road but good road. Army checkpoint, drive up to near summit & park. Fierce wind shakes the car. Pay to enter & struggle against wind to walk round Roman Temple inside top of hill. Do not linger as wind in danger of pushing me over cliff – brief glance at Roman city below hill. This is where Herod, a good man turned evil, dispatched his troops to murder the children and babies of Bethlehem 5km away. His tomb is allegedly here but I care not to seek it. Back to main road & on to Hebron. To Abraham's mosque – directions given by Sheffield guy in Israeli army checkpoint. Guns everywhere in mosque & carpets. Velvet covered tombs , nice roof. Out into wind past more army & back to Jerusalem. Plethora of blue number-plates (Arab) gives way slowly to yellow (Jewish). Stop by Zion Hill Hotel & climb up through gardens. Coffee & browse in King David Hotel (most expensive here) – across road to YMCA and its tower. On up hill round some sort of closed stadium. Eventually locate top of Mount Zion (?) – an olive tree in small garden amongst flats behind electrical shop : dog barks. Return to car & hotel, lost again, take longish route over side of Mount of Olives. To evening prayers after buying bag in Colony Stores. Service given by Ian someone, the vicar of Shotton ! John Summers Steel.

Bath & 7 course supper – good as usual. Tears from receptionist being harangued by nasty Arab who won't apologise. Letter to Steve & Wendy again & post it.

Saturday 1st February

Wake 6a.m.. Eucharist. Snow starts as I leave. American priest, Ian of Shotton in congregation of 4. Breakfast. Off to get film developed – play good Samaritan … old frail Arab lady across street from hotel calls me. Wants me to carry heavy flagon of water for her. Trudge to Damascus Gate – no way could she have managed it. Drop film & pick up 1 hour later. Arab shops open although it's Jewish day off. Pack & leave 11a.m. – advised against going to Nablus & Jelen. So go to Ashdod (nothing happening) then Ashkelon, south of Tel Aviv. Enormous archaeological site from way back to Herod's time. He was born here. Walk along beach in drizzle, up sand cliff & round ramparts of city before exploring middle. Much still to be excavated. Find possible site of Herod's burial although Herodium may be place. Beach lovely, strong crashing surf with Roman stones & columns everywhere. Probably did 6 miles round site, took 2 hours plus. Decide to visit Gaza strip where Israelis fear to tread though much of their labour force lives here. 1 million people – near Gaza & Khan Yunis massive used car dumps (like Panama), almost biblical scenes of donkeys & horses & carts. Countryside on east side rather pleasant. Went wrong way at Gaza & told by patrol, 100 yards further & you're dead so reverse sharpish. Just short of Khan Yunis told I can't go on, so head past Kissufim on good road towards BeerSheva. At Netivot pick up delightful Ethiopian girl hitchhiker Abiba (language problem here) & take her to Ethiopian community on outskirts of B'Sheva. Then go to shopping mall in town where she has to endure appalling racism from just about everybody. Expensive coffee & strudel. Then to bus station to meet her friend, drop them up the hill & head off to Tel Aviv. Get lost in Ramla, wretched signposts again,

get lost again in Tel Aviv before eventually parking near Diezengoff Center (very plush, ă la MetroCentre). Eventually locate Tandoori Restaurant – not as good as Eilat one. Raining once again as it has for most of day – back to car & off to airport. Told car has to go to a hotel 10km away, naturally drive 20km finding it ! Explain about dent in roof & parking ticket & get driven back to Ben Gurion Airport where I have to bide time from 1a.m. to 6a.m. when flight goes.

Sunday 2nd February

Have worked out that I have driven 2,063 kilometres in last 8 days + maybe 110 miles ă pied – phew. 3a.m. check in. Takes 50 mins of questions & bag searching. Get free biro for the hassle ! Nice German guy going back to Frankfurt, buy him ciggies at Duty Free. Tupolev 154 (2?) (the Trident copy) to Prague. Bank won't change my shekels so fellow traveller swaps them for German marks, thanks. Manage 40 minutes walking around Prague Castle area – strong feelings in St. Thomas' Church but don't stay long – up steep hill to lovely cobbled square & round Loreta anti-clockwise. Film being made – lots of extras. Down & back to tube & back to Dejvickă – then taxi, fare agreed at 80 krone – have to pay 96 on arrival. 2½ hour delay before Tupolev 134 (loaded up with coriander !) leaves – bad mistake by (trainee ?) pilot at Heathrow nearly hurts child. Back on dry land. Tube to Baron's Court – van starts 1st time – merci Dieu ! Home to Altenburg to give presents to family, answer letters & then drive to Carole's for night.

Italy diary Autumn 2014

Sunday 26th October 2014

The trip gets off to a really bad start, courtesy (or lack thereof) of 35 year old man at the Goldcar rental counter. There was no transfer shuttle at the terminal so a few of us walked round, not far, to the car rental building. I passed the Firefly counter and thought, phew, thank God I am not using them – they gave and continue to give much grief to Sara over a minor scrape (responsibility totally accepted by Dutch family who hit her when she was stationary) in the hills above Rayol in August.

No queue at Goldcar. Having already paid for the car hire in the UK via auto-europe I am surprised when this bloke demands an extra €98 for petrol and wants €137 for insurance. When I tell him this is a rip-off (not angrily) he says he will call the police & I won't be able to rent a car from him or anyone else in the building. The alternative option to his terms is to surrender a €1,200 deposit, one small scratch would cost €300 minimum and if I "break glass", "a wine glass?", I say, this would mean €4,000 cost to me. "That's more than the car is worth", I say. "No, it's worth €15,000", he says – a Fiat 500? Eventually I have to settle for his 'all taken care of, no excess' insurance addition. There is no pre-rental checking routine.

Absolute blackmail – most unpleasant, tantamount to corruption.

Leave Pisa Airport at about 5.30p.m.. Busy dual-carriageway towards Firenze – somewhat claustrophobic because of concrete central reservation. Join the autostrada at Firenze with long stretches between exits. Coffee at bland services before the exit towards Perugia & Assisi – I have lost my ticket but girl at the booth accepts my explanations and it costs just €6-90.

Yet another dual-carriageway & I reach Assisi just before 9p.m.. No-one seems to speak English but more by luck than judgement I find St. Anthony's Guest House within the city walls. Park car safely in their garden. Unostentatious room with shower in bathroom attached but less than €50 per night . Short stroll to local café/restaurant.

Monday 27th October 2014

Weak coffee (enriched with my Sainsbury's Gold Choice) & white rolls served by the Sisters. Chat to nice American doctor and chaplain wife, Steve and Kerry from Minnesota, but there are few other guests.

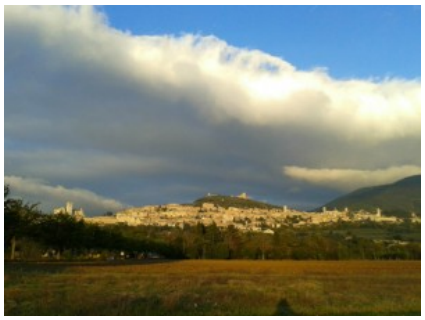
A big walking day follows – must have covered some 30kms. My route is charted on the 'museums, galleries and sights' page a few pages back (in original journal). Many of the churches visited were rather gloomy, the exceptions being Damiano and Eremo. The former is below the town walls and where St Francis first encountered God who told him to repair this church. He later (in 1225) wrote his 'Canticle of the Creatures' here. This was the home of St.Clare, his friend and founder of the Order of the Poor Clares – wonderful worn wooden seating in the refectory.



From there I walked some 5 or 6 kms uphill to the Eremo delle Carceri – no fauna alighted on me here where birds flocked to hear St.Francis preach . But I did meet 2 Austrian ladies who were back-packing towards Spello & one robin ! On their recommendation I returned downhill on the forest path.



Then via his birthplace (Piccolino) to the enormous and impressive Basilica on the edge of town. Superb ceilings, his tomb in the crypt, and an inspiring side chapel for Mary Magdalene + a newish bronze statue … Gesù Bambino appare a Sant'Antonio. Buy a few postcards before walking many more miles to the 8th largest church in the world beyond the railway station – Santa Maria degli Angeli. The road there , well the pavement actually, is made of thousands of terracotta bricks each inscribed with a name and a town. This massive church includes the Capella della Porziuncola where our man passed away. Purchase bus ticket in nearby shop for €1-70 or so & catch the 5.15p.m. back to Piazza Matteotti.



On my way to supper I visit the central square church atop Minerva's temple – well preserved Roman pediment and pillars across the way from the bookshop, Libreria Marco Zubboli.

Tuesday 28th October 2014

After breakfast I give Steve and Kerry a lift up to the Eremo (means 'sanctuary' in Greek as at Tabgha, Galilee) & suggest they use the forest walk down. "You are an angel in disguise", says Steve. I am trying to reach Spello via the back road on Mount Subasio but navigation poor and I end up back in Assisi – so Spello abandoned for a while and it's up through beautiful Umbrian countryside to Urbino in the neighbouring province of Marche.

Underground car park & stroll up through the town. Obviously a particularly imposing hilltop town dominated by the Palazzo Ducale – the abode of that Duc Montefeltro, him of the extraordinary nose in that painting by Pierro della Francesca. The town is full of students, the black ones (and there are surprisingly few black people in these parts) trying to catch my eye to dish out some flyer or other. Not interested thank you. Visit Chiesa di San Domenico briefly, then a few large rooms in the Palazzo – some very interesting Roman and earlier stone inscriptions but I don't pay for full admission. The Cattedrale is open but not inspiring and sadly the Chiuso di San Francisco is 'chiuso'. Wander around town awhile before descending back to the carpark – I'm glad I chose not to stay here for the night ; there ain't much going on.

Back south through the pleasant valleys on quiet roads to Gubbio, my next port of call. Get a bit lost in the modern town on the outskirts but soon find a large square with parking (€1-20 per hour) beneath Gubbio's Palazzo Ducale, also frequented by that Duc Montefeltro. My faithful Lonely Planet guide has recommended the Hotel Bosone Palace and it does not disappoint. Complicated one-way system, dropping off my

baggage en route before eventually parking free underground outside the city walls. Charming small church, the Chiesa San Marziale undeneath St.Anthony's monastery is my first stop to say thanks to Him and a brief visit to the Chiesa di Santa Maria dei Laici at the other end of town.

My room in the converted palace is more than adequate, a little dark but an enormous bed after Assisi's single and the adjoining bathroom has a bath – joy. The family who run the hotel also own a couple of nearby restaurants … the first one I try is the Bosone Garden. The €20 menu dei oggi looks pretty good so I go for that with a bottle of still water and a glass of my now favourite Grecchetto.

Jesus, what a meal …

Bruschetta, 4+ varieties with local parma ham and salad

Penne pasta in cream with green broad beans & crispy bacon + pecorino shavings

Fegato, calves' liver with white grapes in rich gravy + spinach with lemon

Dusted chocolate cake laced with kirsch



All that for a total of roughly €30 including tip to the pleasant Romanian waiter. Prima.

Wednesday 29th October 2014

Good breakfast in panelled room with frescoed ceilings. Another out and about walking day, but probably only cover 12 kms although Gubbio is on equally steep slopes as Assisi. I love the fact, that as Iguvium it was where Rome exported its lunatics, 'which has left a lingering influence on the populace', says Cadogan Guides. The Eugubini have seen off hordes of Goths, Huns and Avars but the Nazis gunned down 40 citizens in reprisal for partisan attacks in 1943.

Charming streets and interlocking alleys, cobblestones and steps all beneficially graded. Sort out the correct adaptor to charge my laptop – Italy has different sockets to the rest of Europe – but fail to get a connection on my mobile phone at ITim where at least I secure a Samsung charger which of course I managed to leave at home in Wandsworth. So much less touristy than Assisi. Once round the Fontana dei Matti (mad people) … thrice and you risk insanity. Into the massive and fine Palazzo (€2-50 ridotto/concession for old people) which dominates the town, up to their Cathedral, short shrift at Montefeltro's palace from just about the only unfriendly citizen so decide not to enter. Walk around the upper city walls to the Funivia station for the rickety €6 (allez et retour) ride up Mount Ingino.

Tour the excellent museum to Saint Ubaldo, who came before St.Francis, in the courtyard cloister in front of his Basilica. Friendly shop & see the 3 Ceri wooden icons that form a major part of the 15th May festival … second only to the Palio Festival in Siena, apparently. Why have I not heard of Gubbio before ? Everybody knows Florence, Siena, the leaning tower of Pisa but where has Gubbio been in the pantheon ?

Dante's Paradise, canto X1 talks of Ubaldo's chosen hill. It was Ubaldo who by his presence alone saw off Barbarossa in 1155. He died on 16th May 1160 and rests in the Basilica.

Back down to town, wandering around the little streets and side-alleys each with mesmerising vistas. Then quite a long stroll outside the city walls to the highlight of all the churches and sites – The church of Santa Maria della Vittorina, given to St. Francis by the Bishop of Gubbio in 1213.



Here he founded the first home for the 12 Friars Minor & nearby he tamed the Wolf of Gubbio who had been eating livestock and human beings, terrorising the town. Inside it is wonderfully peaceful … Chiesa dalla Vittorina.



Inside La Vittorina

Quick shop in the La Mura complex where ITim try to connect up my Virgin mobile phone but fail and purchase some organic milk and biscuits in the adjoining Co-op. On to the Roman semi-amphitheatre at dusk – the mausoleum commemorating the 40

martyrs is closed, so it’s back to the Bosone Palace.

Supper this evening is in the sister establishment to the Bosone Garden – same price menu del giorgno but, even though it has a higher reputation Michelin * etc. it is not so good : La Taverna del Lupo – I have parma ham & melon, gnocchi with parmesan, a few slices of roast pork + rosemary potatoes. The best course is pudding … a pile of whipped cream with caramel and chocolate flakes. Wonderful vaulted rooms where the Via Anseidi crosses the Via della Republica.

Thursday 30th October 2014

Last bit of sightseeing in Gubbio, two churches, one undergoing restoration the second closed, then it’s off to retrieve the Fiat 500 from its underground resting place. I am Spello-bound, once again through delightful countryside on quietish roads. Just a brief word about Italian drivers – there are quite a few annoying habits, the worst being tail-gating inches from one’s back bumper … white van men being the worst culprits. Very little indication, aggression the norm.

Park free at the bottom of Spello. Wander up the steep main street and round the city walls to the right. Pretty, as are all these hill towns but once again I am relieved I did not choose to stay. There is not much action amongst the place’s 8,000 inhabitants. Caffe latte by the main Roman gate.

Read up about my next stop, Perugia, and where to park … head for the Piazza dei Partigiani. Big underground car park and then a succession of escalators takes one up to the elegant Piazza Italia where the broad pedestrianised Corso heads up to their Duomo. Busy busy studenty city.

Absolute highlight here is the Galleria Nazionale dell’Umbria (about €8 entry) on the left hand side. A treat, even for a bit of an alleged Philistine like myself. Beautifully lit and described, there are works by Vanni, Vanucci, Nelli, Piero della Francesca (take photo), Buoninsegna, Pisano,

Pinturicchio – a Bernini gold tree of leaves leaves a lasting impression. There is also a temporary Canaletto exhibition with 4 or 5 of his masterpieces. Walk around the upper part of town – a panoply of fine medieval architecture. Back through the arched brick vaulting on the down escalators and out of town on fairly busy roads towards Siena.

Skirt round the Roman walls going left round the hills and valleys past the Porta Romana, the Porta Tufi to my destination the Porta San Marco … just below the hotel I have chosen from 2 guidebook recommendations – The Palazzo Rivazza. Park car by the city gate while I investigate room availability (yes, single is €80 b&b), luggage drop & how to get to their private car park.

My hotels on this trip, Assisi, Gubbio, Siena have been 'good, better, best a my friend Vole describes my Israel diaries ('92,'95 and 2012) ! The Palazzo Rivazza is fabulous value, my room on the 4th floor has a side-view of the Cathedral and tower – a sumptuous pillowed bed, blue and white tiled bathroom, wifi on tap. Italianate gardens on terraces down towards their car park & a bench where Aldous Huxley is pictured sitting. Helpful staff.

I drop my washing at a local Lavanderia – €15 for 4 pairs socks & knickers, 4 T-shirts, 2 shirts & 2 trousers – expertly done and hand-delivered back to my hotel the following day.

Little bit of evening exploration in the local area … street patterns are somewhat confusing at first. On the Via di Stalloreggi close to the Pian dei Mantellini junction is a calligraphist and artist at work in his shop – sadly he was always shut when I returned to make a purchase. Supper is at a great and popular, even in this quiet section of Siena, little pizzeria by the Carmine church @ Villa della Diana. Choose one with onions, salami, bufala mozzarella & tomatoes followed by an indifferent tiramisu. The place is run by the partner of the Lavanderia lady – they are agreeable and friendly hosts.

Friday 31st October 2014

Siena wakes up slowly – it's 10a.m. before anything really gets going. Good breakfast of decent coffee, fresh breads, cut your own salami & cheese; comfortable Lloyd loom chairs and glass-topped tables. My street savviness improves as I descend towards Il Campo – Siena's scalloped central circus – home of the Palio horse race contested by is it the 17 ? local Contrades (effectively gangs from each neighbourhood) with names like Porcupine, Dragon, Eagle, Goose and Panther. The Palio takes place on July 2nd and August 16th each year.

First port of call is the splendid Basilica di San Francesco set behind a large open Piazza, home to St.Bernardino and the Eucharistic Miracle of Siena. Then to possibly the world's most beautiful bank head-quarters in the Piazza Salimbeni named after the 15th century founders of the Monte dei Paschi di Siena. There is a rival for that accolade, some private bank operates from rather a gorgeous building above and to the west of the Campo.

Anyway, I am given a private viewing of the bank's archives and told of its important history helping to rescuscitate Siena with its lending and charitable acts after the Black Death. Fascinating ledgers and manuscripts housed in quite a fine modern framework & the loos were spotlessly clean.

Also devoting herself to the poor and sick in post Black Death Siena was Caterina Bencassa, born in 1347 – experiencing visions from the age of 5 and painted by her friend Vanni in 1414 during one of her ecstasies. At the Casa e Sanctuario di Santa Caterina (her family home) I am brusquely admonished for taking a picture in the downstairs chapel of one of the 'mostly unexceptional Baroque canvasses' adorning the side walls. Not a nice curator … "Fuck, fuck", were his eloquent parting words. Honestly, everyone everywhere ignores the 'no



photo’ signs.

Next on the itinerary is the €12 Opa SI Pass to the sites around the zebra-striped Duomo. It’s first into the Museo dell’Opera har by the ticket office – full of Madonna & Child pictures by amongst others Duccio, Martini, Lorenzetti and della Francesca. Up to the scary Panorama del Facciatone – heights are not my thing.

Tour the Battistero and the Cripta before entering the main church with its famous floor and Pisano’s massive detailed pulpit – any preacher ascending there must feel important. In the side chapel, the Libreria Piccolomini are Pinturicchio’s frescoes … attempt a panorama photo of one wall.

Back to my lovely hotel on the Pian de Mantellini for a rest before venturing out again for some more sightseeing. Am recommended Santa Maria dei Servi for its views of Siena which do not disappoint. Forgot to mention that after the Duomo I



crossed the Piazza, paid another €8 and entered the voluminous vaults of the extraordinary Santa Maria della Scala. Originally, from about 1250, it served as a hospital for travellers and pilgrims – now it houses a mix of modern art, chapels, the archaeological museum & historical sections. It’s all a bit dark and spooky as you descend in twists and turns through poorly lit corridors passing Roman funerary urns and sarcophagi. Quite a relief to reach the open air again.

Up from the Porta Romana area, brief look into the Chiesa

Santo Spirito and contemplate a purchase in a jewellery shop … it's a nice design (as if a man can discern such) of silver banding with sparkly bits encased in a Greek key-style setting. The ring isn't cheap … would this help to cement a frayed relationship ? It turns out that the glistery stones are not diamonds which would raise the price ten-fold. Anticipating : "Zircons; I spit on them !", I decide against. Instead I am stocking up on Siena's panfortes in different sizes and flavours – this used to be food for weary pilgrims & makes nice gifts.
Another €8 expended for entry into The Museo Civico underneath the soaring Torre del Mangia (I won't be climbing up there) – it is money well spent here in the city's Palazzo Publico. The two lower floors are given over to an uninspiring modern exhibition of 'mechanical fishes' … all very samey. But upstairs are rooms from all centuries, yet more Madonna & Childs (slight fatigue setting in with these !) until one reaches the Sala del Mappamundo. Lorenzetti's circular map now faded but Simone Martini's Maestă is here and the terrific Equestrian Portrait of Guidoriccio da Fagliano probably by Martini but art historians are still bickering over its attribution & so it may be by Duccio, Lorenzetti or even Filippucio (who he ?, Ed.). Then in the next room, equally astonishing, are Lorenzetti's famous allegories of Good and Bad Government – wonderful stuff. Elsewhere in the building among the 'treasures' is another lovely gold tree and leaves done by Bernini.

Central Siena is built on a Y-shaped convocation of ridges and the afternoon tour continues up the ridge to the north-west – Via Bianchi di Sopra contains smart but expensive shops but leads via the Piazza G.Matteotti (home to the main post office) to the dominating presence of San Domenico where a service is just ending. Built from 1226, it was here that St. Catherine received the stigmata and performed several of her miracles. Rather gruesomely her head is preserved behind glass in a side chapel. She died in Rome in 1380, only 33 years old

– was it in ghastly circumstances ? Recently she has been made co-Patron Saint of Italy with Francis di Bernardone.

Her Basilica has rather a nice shop where I spend time browsing and buying a few postcards. More shopping opportunities arise on the Via della Sapienza. My Gucci lookalikes, cobbled together over the past few years, are getting a little tired and old (like their owner). There is a smart pair of elegant black shoes, albeit sans buckle, going for €79 but I just baulk at the price and do not purchase. But Italians make wonderful shoes, eh ?

Saunter back to my hotel, passing the still closed painting & calligraphy shop – wash and brush up and, tempting though it is to return to the nearby pizzeria, instead I head (on receptionist's suggestion) to the Cice Restaurant on the Via San Pietro. Busy, partly with fellow hotel guests; an excellent mozzarella & tomato salad + basil & do-it-yourself olive oil/balsamic vinegar/salt & pepper. Secondi platti of pork with apples and prunes is but fair – washed down with a bottle of still water. The restaurant is close to the Pinacoteca Nazionale, just about the only major site I have not visited in Siena … but perhaps it's chock-a-block with Madonna & Childs ?!

Saturday 1st November 2014

I have arranged by email to arrive at Dave & Sascha's near Ortobello at lunchtime. Early start allows some diary writing before breakfast and departure south-westwards – I have spotted in the guidebooks a couple of suitable staging posts to visit en route. Nice windy road through Rosia to the ruined L'Abbazia di San Galgano and its special church on the hill, L'Eremo di Montesiepi where the warrior who found God plunged his sword into rock in the 1170s and where it remains embedded.

Onwards to the town of Massa Marittima passing men in day-glo

parkas parked up for a spot of hunting – pity the poor birds of Italy these days not to mention the sangliers/wild boars. ‘Owt that moves above the grass is fair game here. Quick tour of this hill-top town with its steep streets – up past Chiesa San Francesco to the Sant’Agostino church & cloisters then down the Via Moncini to the beautiful medieval splendour of the Duomo and Piazza Garibaldi in the lower Cittă Vecchia. Dedicated to San Cerbone, Patron Saint of Massa.

To the coast and left on the dual-carriageway to the Albinia/Argentario exit and arrive at the Hart’s house at about 1.30p.m.. My large box of PG Tips is appreciated – Annabel and Odile, their eldest and youngest daughters usher me and the motor through the narrow gates. The gas has been cut off because Dave hasn’t paid the bill so there is no hot water but what hey, there is an open fire on which we can boil saucepans of the over-chlorinated water.

Lovely al fresco lunch before a walk up and down the nearby beach (which disappeared for several years due to rising sea levels but is now returning) to an ice-cream café. Lots of sword-fighting with the girls with bamboo and other sticks washed up. Night falls sharpish at 5p.m. but at least we have electricity.

We are joined by an old school-friend of ‘Annie’s’ on a sleepover & all pile into the extra long Mercedes estate that they have recently bought for £2,500 – similar year and dashboard display as my own vehicle back home.

There is a local produce festival going on in Orbetello – wine tasting (the best was a sweet white made from the usually average Vermentino grape from the Tenute Perini vineyard – but it’s €28 for a small thin bottle) and then a chaotic queuing system for a good supper in a large tent. Plates of meat or cheese or the local vegetable soup.

We notice a rabble of out-of-control children ‘playing’ at one

side of the tent. They overturn benches noisily and eventually parents appear to collect them – but they have no ‘boundaries’, no rules these Italian children & can do no wrong in their parents’ eyes. I suspect this transmutes into their adult behaviour, their arrogant driving techniques and their inability/lack of desire to pay income tax. Muse upon that, my attempt at amateur social psychology.
Excellent sleep in the all white room – the copious slugs of white wine may have helped.

Sunday 2nd November 2014

Bit of boy scout work gets the fire going in the morning – matches, cardboard and fir-cones (as we are surrounded by umbrella pine forest here). Attempt to influence Dave’s musical appreciation as he’s stuck in Little Feat & similar mode. Introduce him to Arcade Fire, Elbow and Editors – he says he knows Enya (mind you, she’s been a bit quiet of late). We compose a joint postcard to Hutchy, my step-sister who, with her husband David, has a house nearby and a flat in Rome.

I drive Dave in to Porto San Stefano where we enjoy gin & tonics at the Café Julia on the front. Then back for a barbecued beef lunch with roasted potatoes and courgettes. Eschew any further alcohol before heading northwards at about 3p.m. aiming for Lucca in daylight. The Via Aurelia road surface is poor until fairly close to Pisa where it meets the motorway. It’s dark when I reach the outskirts of Lucca – park a shortish distance outside the city walls, sort out a smaller overnight bag and head through the Santa Anna/Porta Victor Emanuele gate and up his road to the centre of town. Find my chosen hotel fairly easily, the Piccolo Hotel Puccini in Via di Poggia just 100 yards from the superb front of the Chiesa San Michele. A little scruffy, the hotel not the church, but more than



adequate for one night at £60 right in the middle of Lucca.

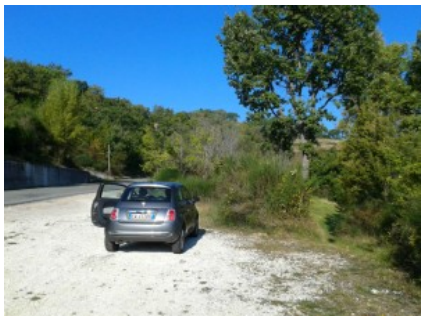
Out for a wander in the streets swarming with the remnants of their weekend's Goth Festival – there's all sorts here, Italian youth dressed ghoulishly, marquees devoted to the dark arts, odd cartoon characters, Star Wars tents, bizarre Comedia dell'Arte stuff and the streets are litter-strewn. I walk for miles, some on the city walls, down to the Porta Elisa after viewing the Duomo and back towards the centre past the Chiesa San Francesco. Lucca's street pattern is even more confusing than Siena's and it is hard to relocate the Piazza San Michele – I suppose the two main arteries are the Via Fillungo and the Via del Fossa which follows the Roman 'fossa' or ditch, probably still acting as a city sewer. Catching my eye were the Chiesa Santa Maria Forisportam, a frescoed arch nearby on the Via Santa Croce and nearer San Michele, the zebra-style facade of the Chiesa di San Cristoforo.

Eventually sit down for supper on the terrace of Ale's Bar at Piazza XX Septembre – generous portion of insalata mista, then an excellent plate of hot fusilli with pesto + a glass of white … €20.

Monday 3rd November 2014

Need to be at Pisa Airport 9ish so do an early walk down the Via Fillungo to the Piazza Antifeatro which features on most Luccan postcards. The dustbin-men have done an excellent job throughout the night and Lucca is pretty much back to her prettiest. Precious little activity at 7a.m. but the Piazza, built in medieval times over the old Roman arena is worth seeing as is the third of Lucca's trio of outstanding churches, the Chiesa San Frediano.

Back for a rather poor breakfast 'tray', pay the bill and walk



back to the car. Fill up with petrol very close to the airport & return the little grey Fiat 500 with 1,141 extra kilometres on its clock. This is achieved with minimum fuss but still without a vehicle check. Then walk over to the terminal. Even though it's a small airport it's all a bit haphazard and chaotic but soon enough, I guess, I am all checked in and busy duty-free shopping. A bottle of Mexican tequila for Stuart, my blogsite guru … a few packs of cigarettes for my daughters – a long wait on the tarmac for no obvious reason.

Back at Gatwick by lunchtime (in pouring rain) and home within an hour or so. Snappy Snaps is conveniently located at Clapham Junction who efficiently process my phone photos onto 'hard copy'.
Ciao, grazie, Italia.

Jamie's Israel Diary May 2013

Monday 20th May

Early start to attend to various DIY projects ongoing yet unfinished -e.g. garden trellis work , unibonding the wobbly kitchen floor and completing the ' boxing in ' of the understairs loo's basin pipework with rather splendid brass handle. This has been one of my most satisfying bodge efforts … lots of enterprising recycling of scavenged items ; plastic bin lids forming the top and bottom quadrants, solid wood isosceles triangles left and right with a concertina-like central slatting system that allows access to the valves inside should this ever be required – little pieces of MDF

complete the top band adjoining the plastic. All sanded before coats of terracotta colour on the walls, white on the banding and good old magnolia underneath to compliment / soften the terracotta. Quel carpentier ne pensez-vous ?!

Made time too for letters to Plowden and Smith (local restoration experts) explaining £300 + the dreaded VAT was over the top for renovating two little 18th century (or early 19th) leather and glass-hinged portraits of relatives – one a Henry Thompson, the other unnamed. I shall collect these next week, along with volume 1 of the Punch collection with which they could not help. Letter to brother-in-law Mickey too, enclosing 65th Birthday card + the signed letter to Bettina Altmann of Pinzgauer Haus re the Rauris AGM (our shared flat in Austria) ; the minutes of which Mickey was going to deal with.

Early constitutional walk results in yet another scavenged item – metal base for a plant pot which may prove useful but the lovely new Senetta plant didn't fit inside, so remains in an old bucket. Last water of plants and make some more progress transferring names to the new address book.

7.31a.m. leave for Luton via Shank's pony to Earlsfield station, commuter train to Waterloo then more walking to the new station on Blackfriars Bridge (15 minutes or so from Waterloo) then very fast and very punctual train whisks us up to Luton Parkway. £2.60, I think , Earlsfield to Waterloo then it's £26 open return from Blackfriars to Luton Airport , an unsuitable bendy bus completing the journey. Air fare £442 return including one 20kg bag.

Disappointed by Luton Airport facilities – poor signage, shambolic security – 3 wheelchair users were unable to go through the bleeping portals. They were then all frisked and manhandled as if 3 English ladies in wheelchairs were Islamic terrorists of which reputedly there are many in this area. My silver cross didn't get a reaction from the metal detectors

but I had removed my watch. Compose text to Georgiana, attaching picture of my improving garden – turns out she was flying to Italy later from the same airport.

Flight is called well in advance of estimated departure but boarding gate has no seating at all for the 100+ passengers who are obliged to wait 30 minutes plus. Not good.

Just short of 4 ½ hours later we land at Tel Aviv – just a word about some of my fellow passengers. Many Hasidic Orthodox Jews with British passports – their hats overcrowding the on-board lockers thus forcing others to check in their hand baggage. The one next to me spent the whole 4 ½ hours tweaking the unusual hair arrangement around his ears and constantly leaning over part of my seat – space invasion ! They seem oblivious to the presence of others and seem to plough their own furrow. Rather rudely I thought. Chosen race? Je le doute.

Tel Aviv passport entry sticky – unfriendly female demanding to know if I was meeting anyone in Israel. When I explained that I planned to visit Jack she demanded how I knew him (Rauris renter) and showed no concern or knowledge of Motor Neurone Disease of which he is dying. " It's not good, you die", I said.

Avis car hire (only £97 for 6 days) somewhat slow and then a pretty useless Palestinaian does the final checks on my Toyota Aygo not the Hyundai i10 that had been promised. Rather ropy vehicle which struggled all the way uphill to Jerusalem – although good blasts of Arcade Fire and Elbow soothed the ride. Israeli drivers dangerous ! Little care for other road users.

Wow , has Jerusalem changed since my last visit 16+ years ago. So many new settlements, buildings, roads, tunnels – once again very poor signposting. A few wrong turns and difficulties trying to rely on my memory but eventually at

about 8.20p.m. Israeli time I arrive at the gates of St George's College and park there – close enough to the Guest House.

Am shown my ok but basic room, No. 26 upstairs – a quick wash and brush up and out to the recommended street of restaurants (Shimon Alzidiq St) – their 2 suggestions don't seem that brilliant so I select The Shalizar and enjoy an excellent iced tea plus chicken / mushrooms / cream sauce with rice, potato and salad for 70 shekels i.e. £12 or so – give nice waiter 10% tip which pleases him. Lovely courtyard and a warm evening – it had been 25°C when we landed at 6p.m. Had dropped in at the American Colony Hotel en route for a quick chat with the shop owner whom I remember from my 1992 visit. He berates Tony Blair, giving him nul points – "greedy man ", gets a $1.5 million salary for doing fuck all as ' peace envoy ' to the Middle East – at least he no longer gets a free flat at the American Colony where incidentally my parents had a flat during WW2 and now has some place near the Ambassador Hotel. He was at St John's College when I was at Christ Church but I don't think our paths crossed.

Lovely soft bed so good sleep.

Tuesday 21st May

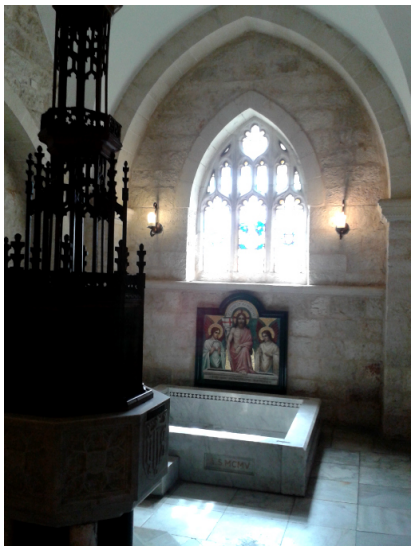
Up for the 8a.m. Eucharist in St. George's Cathedral – there are just the 4 of us present. Service taken by Hosam Naoum,



the Dean, assisted by Saleem the Deacon and Justin Cheng (seminary student at St. George's College from Vancouver). The latter two have slight difficulty pronouncing their readings. Initial talk is about St. Helena , Emperor Constantine's mother who founded the Church on Mount Scopius and the original Church of the Holy Sepulchre . I find a tear coursing down my cheek when someone mentions outcasts and the oppressed. Very special in the side chapel with embroidered hassocks from around the globe. Being unconfirmed I generally won't take the bread and wine (unless it's an extraordinary church with a vicar I know and trust e.g. perhaps a service at St Peter and Paul, the Springfield Church SW17) or even accept a blessing. But this time I take a blessing from the Dean as it seems right to do so.

We chat afterwards and at breakfast in the Guest House – poor coffee from a machine but nice soft pitta-type white bread , huevos revueltos and cold meats / cheeses etc.

Back into the Cathedral which has been spruced up since my last visit – delightful chapel on opposite side to the morning service with baptismal pool – bright with fine windows and a hexagonally based stone / wood pyramid structure, maybe over a font.



Pay for 3 postcards, take a few pictures – 2 of the Keith-Roach memorials in the cloister outside (relatives of Steve and Wendy K-R).

Pack my case, ready to leave late in the afternoon – compose a few emails. Isn't the world-wide access to the internet just amazing ? – makes conducting one's life so easy from anywhere. First stop is one of my favourite places … The Garden Tomb, which I discover much improved, quieter, now screened from the Arab bus station. The garden so well kept by an army of kind but paid volunteers. Truly the site of His crucifixion and entombment. This place buzzes with bus loads of Zimbabweans followed later by Nigerians, Indians and West Indians all on guided tours taking their turns to enter His tomb now adorned with a new red cross … ' I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the End ' says the plaque.



The adjoining shop is still superb – maybe they should replace Nicky Gumbel's books with those of the erudite A.N Wilson. All those Nickys were at Eton with me but has the Alpha course run its course ? I was so disappointed the other day when visiting St Mark's Battersea – a disgraceful ' healing ' (my arse) service conducted by a money-grabbing fat Canadian ' vicar ' who was unaware that that Thursday was

Ascension Day and was more interested in his ‘ it’s only £5 Jive Night ‘ on the Wednesday ! People using their mobile phones during the ‘ service ‘ too ! Such a shame because that church was derelict in the mid-seventies and became a good place.

Sorry about the rant … back to the Garden Tomb shop which as ever was a veritable mine of maps, books, notebooks, cards and a free pencil (HB) which I am using now from the nice lady at the till. Met a lovely Dutch couple doing good work near Rachel’s Tomb outside Bethlehem and will try to visit them later in the week – House of Hope and Jemima House for L’Arche type children.

Drop shopping back at the hostel and head towards Jaffa Gate, deciding against negotiating my way through New or Damascus Gates. Smart tram follows the Old City wall now – borders of rosemary and lavender help me on my way to the Christ Church area just inside Jaffa Gate with its astonishing connection to my mother, who was PA / secretary to the Chief of Police, Jerusalem during the British Mandate and whose handwritten note cards I had spotted on an earlier visit explaining the exhibits housed here. This is the Michael Solomon Alexander Museum, the first Jewish convert to become Bishop of Jerusalem at Christ Church. Rather over-rated cafe but it has a popular guest house – the museum curator, a youngish Australian who has lived in Bibury (Cotswolds) shows me the reworked museum but Mum’s notelets are few with most being stored in the closed archive room to which I shall return when access is available. Fantastic wooden model of the Old City is the prize item here, created by a Jewish convert to Christianity whose name escapes me at present. J.M.Tenz it is.

Christ Church itself is closed until 1p.m. for a private group so I return there later for pictures of its fine wooden altar.



Purchase great giant post cards from a French shop close to Jaffa Gate and get money, 600 shekels on my MasterCard from a moneychanger at the top of the Via Dolorosa.

Walk down St Mark's Road, avoiding the Armenian Quarter this time and down to the Jewish Section. Man gets cross with me for not taking his guiding service (which would have been for all of 120 yards to the Herodian Quarter) where I spotted the Wohl museum i.e. Vole, who will receive a text ! That's my good mate, Mark Samuelson aka Vole.

Spend rather an abortive half hour looking for (a) The Holy Sepulchre Church (which always seems hard to find) and (b) a pencil sharpener and rubber because mine seem to have gone AWOL. Eventually discover the one and only stationery shop in the Old City is closed today ! Make a few purchases nearby and then back to Christ Church.

Where to now ? Quick lunch in the nice courtyard – I am finding food in Israel is pricey, worse than England which is surprising n'est-ce pas ?

Cross the main Highway 1 to a new modern shop precinct heading for Ben Yehuda and Jaffa Streets, ostensibly seeking a marvellous shop that I enjoyed back in 1992 but of course that's a long time in politics, or shop-keeping for that matter.

Nevertheless, I am wandering around at the bottom of the Jewish quarter when I spot a pair of dashing red shoelaces with gold flecks in a small pile on the pavement. Select them

and head down a small corridor to the shop keeper who turns out to be an old Bukhari (Iranian ?) Jew who runs a small cobblers there – 5 shekels … I only have a 50 note so he accepts 3.50 plus a bit, plus 1/3 of a pack of English Polo mints as exchange ! Delightful man and we converse in an odd combination of Arabic, Farsi, Dari, English, Yiddish and God knows what else. I explain about my amateur cobbling ' skills ' – I happen to be sadly proud of my posh black shoes, £10 from a charity shop, which used to have home-made tassels (constructed from old wallets) and now have small gold buckles (£3 from an old pair of ladies shoes) fastened on with bits of an old belt. Anyroads, that's £13 for shoes that look like £400 Guccis ! I shall return to Mr Shoemaker Jacov to show him my Schumacher efforts – Small is indeed Beautiful. He may offer to tidy them up a tad and perhaps I could commission a new pair from him to post to England – a thought.

Find some modern sharpeners and rubbers nearby – then a nice silk purse from an old people's charity shop then it's back to St George's – one last visit to the American Colony to start the bargaining process (which I find so tedious and time consuming in many countries) on their shop's gorgeous bedspreads and bags from Uzbekhistan (goodness me) made from tri-banded linen with silk embroidery – $600 opening price ! Soon cut to $300 for a large bedspread but I may work on the excellent bags which he started at $200 !

Leaving Jerusalem at 5p.m. wasn't perhaps the ideal time as it's unbelievably slow past Lion Gate and up the Mount of Olives past Lazarus' house in Bethany heading for Jericho and the Jordan Valley. Progress abruptly halted when I encounter the new (well, newish) Security Fence, heavily graffiti covered which blocks the Jericho road. Fortunately, a kind man gives me directions up and down steep side streets in Palestinian territory – give him a brief lift and then, perhaps the strongest surge of the day greets me as I descend towards the big new road avoiding dissident youth …

A young crippled boy struggles up the pavement on the left hand side – looks at me, his legs not working very well but our eyes meet for some seconds and it feels very strong and very good. Thank you Lord.

Israeli bad driving continues all the way to Galilee – tail-gating, poor overtaking and pulling out without looking just some of my complaints. Jordan on the East bank appears more populated than the Israeli side. Very warm, over 30°C down here , over 400 metres below sea-level. Stop for an iced tea, chocolate cake with squirty cream and ice cream which costs me 44 shekels at a ' Cafe Cafe ' – very good but that must be more than Starbucks UK … divide by 5.25 or so for Sterling.

Somewhere round Ein Gedi on a tiring 3+ hour drive north there is an Israeli Defence Force checkpoint where I am treated very brusquely by a young woman for not having my passport for her to examine immediately to hand. " You have been rude and short with me " – I am obliged to pull over to search for documents amongst my belongings in the back of the car – arms wave with guns – " Move over there" etc.. The shoddy rudeness continues until I finally find my passport. " Who do you think I am ? " – Honestly, they are paranoid at times. My car is covered in Avis stickers and I speak the Queen's English – am I a likely Palestinian trouble-maker ?

Aygo and I take the easterly route around Lake Galilee and just after 8.15p.m. we arrive at the Vered Ha-Galil ranch – Peter Gabriel's wondrous ' Solsbury Hill ' brings us up the final slopes to Jesus' teaching patch. His outdoor classroom and his home were close by here.

Am shown where to find my room, No 2 – all one could want in an hotel room. Quick shower and brush up – back to Nofar in reception and sitting room for emails, soup / bread / cake and fruit all provided free of charge. Rates very reasonable for such a special place $118 first night, $71 subsequent nights half-board with a pool and horses on tap. Total cost $354 for

3 nights including extras. Go out for an evening exploration – they have chalets / cabins / houses on both sides of the road. Fantastic views of Lake Galilee – the glittering, shimmering lights of Tiberias some 20km away. Moonlight helps – wonderful little plots of land here for extra development maybe. Around property No.16 I pick up 2 types of small rock – pumice types, and I find a small bit of marble near my own room. More souvenirs to add to the day's tally – I think I have some 7-10 kilos of spare luggage capacity for the return flight.

Another good day – downers were the angry Jew who I suggested should work out of a hotel rather than hanging around near the Cardo and of course, the unpleasant Israeli girl soldier.

Forgot to say my little blue rucksack with white stripes – can't recall where I sourced it – has been misbehaving a little. My nice blue V5 pilot pen fell out of its cap on night one and it's been colouring my fingers blue. Also forgot to say that before leaving London I did some of my repair sewing to its lower strap area. Quite successfully may I say !

Not a great seemster, shoe repairer, cobbler or carpenter but at least I try.

Wednesday 22nd May

For some reason, (perhaps too much coffee the previous evening), not the greatest night's sleep although the news of the Oklahoma tornado was galling and dominating Sky News but I did make further inroads into A. N. Wilson's insightful book, ' Jesus '.

Before breakfast I wandered round the neighbouring village of Korazim in the forlorn hope of finding a shop open to replenish the milk provided by Ha-Galil. Rather a dull dormitory village with unexciting architecture.

On returning I spotted some marmot types with meerkat tendencies amongst the rocks and took their photo. Not sure who they are . ‘ Rock bunnies ‘ in Hebrew apparently ; or some less romantic English synonym. Because the guest house is renovating its celebrated dining area , breakfast gets served up near the stables. Poor coffee again, odd little bits of fish and cheese but excellent squeeze-it-yourself grapefruit and orange juice and hot ‘ wokked ‘ eggs and tomatoes. The girl on duty seems disinterested but it’s mostly a help yourself affair.

Explore a bit more of the Ha-Galil property and then down the road to the large Catholic church which dominates the Mount of the Beatitudes – splendid spot where He preached about the meek inheriting the earth and “blessed are you when men shall revile you and persecute you in my name’s sake. Blessed are those who hunger and search after righteousness for they shall see God ”. Powerful stuff then and now. Many Catholics inside and pictures of Popes but I concentrate on the garden outside and don’t tarry long.

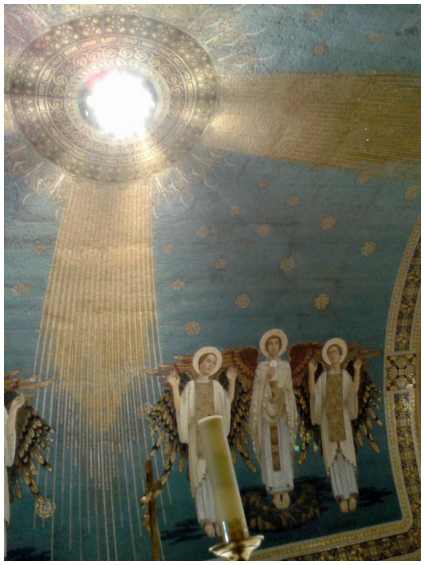
The churches round Capernaum are not open so I visit the newly discovered 2000 year old fishing boat preserved in a swanky museum at Ginnosar. Maybe Jesus had a hand in its making.

On through Tiberias supposedly seeking a little electrical shop because my CD player seems kaput and I’ve left my Samsung phone charger in England – there’s always something that gets left behind isn’t there ? No joy ; so I head for one of my favourite places, Mount Tavor , aware that it closes for lunch at 11.45a.m. Rather difficult progress but eventually start the hairpin ascent competing with minibuses descending.

Once up there, wow – I don’t recall spending much time inside the 1924 Barluzzi Church of the Ascension before but it is truly magical.



Wondrous windows, mosaic murals – 2 side chapels to Elijah and Moses have superb ceilings and I take many good photographs with the telephone – ain't technology awesome!



Interesting chat with an Ecuadorian monk about the lack of bananas in Jesus' time – Israel now grows millions of them. Then encounter group from Chennai, India admiring the view of Nazareth.

Decide Nazareth may be the solution to my electrical needs so head that way. Israeli signposting is not good. Didn't realise that Cana (water into wine miracle) is actually a suburb of Nazareth so that is a result. Park up on busy high street and lo and behold I am right by a charming girl in a shop which has the perfect purple gizmo for charging up my particular Samsung. She advises of another nearby shop which may help my CD player but strangely when I try and explain what's up with the little Goodman's it works perfectly. Perhaps Joan Osborne's ' One of Us ' wasn't the perfect choice for a veiled Muslim lady but there we go.

Head slightly uphill towards the 2 Cana churches – one is shut but the nicer Greek one is open and that's meant to be where the miracle happened. It might help some of my female friends if wine could be turned into water at times !



Good Greek shop across the road has the lowest prices of the many souvenir shops – when in Cana, you have to buy wine don't you, so I get 4 small bottles of sweet red and one of those tacky Holy Water / oil / stones and spices combos – all for a total of $10 or 35 shekels. Happy with that and plan to give one of them to Southwark Cathedral for their chalice and patten Eucharist services. Wine from Cana has a certain ring to it doesn't it ?

Start the journey back to Upper Galilee – spot food superstore outside Tiberias but once again thwarted by no signs. Manage to find another supermarket though and buy milk, juice and good lemon ice tea, surprisingly the brand is a Coca Cola venture / franchise called Foze.

Back to Ha-Galil and my lovely room overlooking the Upper Jordan valley. Shower etc. then out to investigate nearby town, Rosh Pinna. Fairly modern shopping malls but all high priced goods. Only bargains seem to be the McDonalds ice cream cone – have 2 of those and an excellent hamburger place nearby doing burgers for 10 shekels run very efficiently by a young Arab Christian convert – we had language difficulties but a nice Israeli girl assists and tells me of Kosher dietary laws which must make life difficult i.e. no dairy with beef …

stroganoff or chicken in cream / mushrooms thus off the menu.

Back to base for more diary writing and reading – interestingly A.N. Wilson, who I think read Theology at Oxford and has lost / regained his faith, discovered that Christ was particularly averse to anything scatalogical. Anything tainted by shit was deemed unclean – stuff going in good, stuff coming out bad ! Anal sex must have horrified him – buggers shall not prosper. Sadly it seems rife these days – what on earth do women get out of such practices let alone the men.

My room included a DVD / CD player which once operational (help needed) was a boon. Mozart, Mumford, Genesis, Enya – I've always had Peter Gabriel's ' Solsbury Hill ' as my number one favourite track ever and on a late evening walk at the edge of the property (included in my drive earlier but I like to walk routes too) it struck with resonance as I was going through the words in my head … Coming down this lane ' I could see the city lights ' of Tiberias. At the end of the lane stands the largest Spina Christi tree in all Galilee, marked with a nameplate – Zizyphus Tree – (remember Sisiphus in the Greek myth rolling that stone relentlessly up that hill poor fellow) . I shivered spine-chillingly as a bird clattered out of the upper left branches of this tree in the moonlight … ' eagle (or is it evil ?) flew out of the night ' . Perhaps one of the snake-eating eagles that inhabit these parts… Huelvas ? in Aramaic.

Spooky it was – this tree has soft leaves but spiny spiky twigs.

Then oddly it came to me later just exactly what the lyrics of my second favourite track ever were all about. That's ' Carpet Crawler ' from Genesis – suffice to say that ants and flooring are involved.

One of my first quasi-spiritual moments happened in early

1980 when it seemed to me that Tchaikovsky's ' Nutcracker Suite ' was mirroring my movements. I remember telling my GP, Michael Gormley about this, but it's hard not to dismiss such ' auditory hallucinations ' as those of a ' nutter ' eh ? Well, readers – these things are part and parcel of my life. Disturbing at times, illuminating at others when some lyric echoes one's thought patterns and sometimes just astonishing and magical, for instance when you play some Enya and all the flora and fauna move to her music.

Where was I ? Oh yes, walking back to my room for my second and last night there before being moved elsewhere on the estate. Have booked an hour's riding from 10a.m. next morning – on one of their 35 well cared-for horses.

Incidentally my bag is more black / grey with white stripes rather than blue. Improvising with shampoo / conditioner and a rubbish bin I wash and rinse said bag and it dries in the early morning sun of the next day …

* Had telephoned Jack Shuldlenfrei earlier in the evening and arranged to visit him in Raanana at Friday tea-time. " You are not to die before I arrive, ok ?! " Got his address – lives near the Open University headquarters.

Thursday 23rd May

Up at 5.30a.m. aiming to leave at 6a.m. to walk down to Tabgha which had closed its doors at 10a.m. the previous day thus denying my access. What do they say? "Early to bed, early to rise makes you healthy, wealthy and wise"- well at least two of those adjectives wouldn't go amiss would they?! You choose. Never boast but if I could have the first and the last I would appreciate that. Born with a silver spoon in my mouth at Guy's Hospital hard by the Shard, raised on a farm in Gloucestershire enjoying the best education money could buy … Gratia parentis. Village school (set up by Dad) in Bourton-on-the-Hill, Cothill House prep school, Eton College then

Christ Church, Oxford. You cannot be dealt higher cards.

Down the main road, enjoying the roadside verges verdant with weeds and the occasional bits of detritus thrown from car windows. Lovely teasel type blue headed bristly things – a little thorn bush known as “hedgehog”. Pick one.

Left at the Italian intersection – the Vatican owns and maintains many acres in these hills. Then down a track/footpath past two angry dogs, fortunately restrained by chairs but their barks do set the spine tingling so I arm myself with a handy piece of hosepipe, “just in cases ”- as Ms Munoz says in that delightful Richard Curtis film ‘Love Actually’ when she admits learning some English in case that Hugh Grant fellow returns.

Tabgha in sight now after 1 hour 10 minutes or so of downhill strolling – or HEBTAPEGAI=HEPTAPEGON=ET-TAPEGA to give it its full derivations from the Greek. ‘Eremos’ it was called way back – ‘The Solitude’, visited by St Jerome, St Paul and St Sebastian. *(I have subsequently learnt that my mother, in addition to her wartime duties in Jerusalem, Cairo and Ankara, single-handedly ran the Rest and Rehabilitation Centre for Allied officers fighting in the Middle-Eastern theatre, here at Tabgha – coincidences, eh ?).*



Just above the two churches I encounter a little spinny of 6 or 7 Spina Christi trees some surrounding, almost suffocating, large hewn stones, one of which bears a remarkable effigy of Jesus’ face whilst others have crosses and inscriptions- a somewhat rubbish strewn area so I clear up a little after taking a few more pictures. Not sure what this area

represents but it is a powerful site 100’ above the lake shore.



Have to clamber under railings to reach the road – left for St Peter’s Church, right for the Loaves and Fishes church administered by a German Franciscan mission, St Peter’s under Italian control.



I go left and am the first visitor inside this Mensa Christi edifice with its open rock altar where He said, “You are Petros (Peter) and on this Rock I found my church”. His only ‘joke’ apparently but that I doubt.

The place has changed since my last time here back in 1992 – new stained glass windows, the rock is festooned with paper; entreaties for pilgrims I guess and it seems not as clean and tidy as it should be. Take a couple of photos, the last one by part closing the heavy metal doors and move to the lake shore. Clear, clean water here.

Meet the church cleaner, a Palestinian man from Ramallah or was it Nablus who was plucking the odd bit of litter into his

big white sack. Help him awhile while a small service is being conducted in Italian nearby. We get chatting – he's converted to become a Christian and I explain my slight disappointment about the general state of the church interior and show him what I mean. We talk of personal things and I show him pictures on my phone of my children and others taken the previous day up on Mount Tabor/Tavor of which I am not proud but pleased with.

John Paul II had been here with an area obviously specially built for him and the early pilgrims seem to be all Italians as the buses start arriving.

Next, I tour the lovelier but perhaps less inspiring adjoining church. The mosaics here are just superb and I'm a big fan of the loaves and fishes motif, always seeking it out for souvenirs. Boo, the shop is shut – shame but I spend much time enjoying the different bird, plant and building designs so beautifully restored and maintained. Germanic efficiency in charge here.

8.40am now so it's back up to the main Tiberias – Quiryat Shemona highway. Thumb goes out for a possible hitched ride up the hill but a 53 bus rescues me and for 6 shekels 20 cents transports me in minutes back to the Almagor Junction.

Once again a good breakfast, then get ready for my 10 o'clock ride. 150 shekels or £30 for an hour's ride with tuition from Souf who has spent time in Texas thus sports a Stetson type hat while our little group – self, Eran and his family, up for the day from Tel Aviv all wear standard issue hard riding hats. I do later confide in Souf that perhaps he should consider wearing more protection for his head – maybe I am more conscious than most of the dangers, what with sister Carole and her fractured skull and of course the tragedy of Mary Rose Howard nee Chichester in early January 1980 on frosty ground near Hullavington of whom I was so desperately fond.

Her death precipitated my first visit to the Priory on the evening of her funeral – I was distraught and in another world but on the whole was well cared for therein.

Our ride takes us past that large Spina Christi tree again – my steed one Chico, a brown gelding who gets off to a grudging start but improves thereafter.

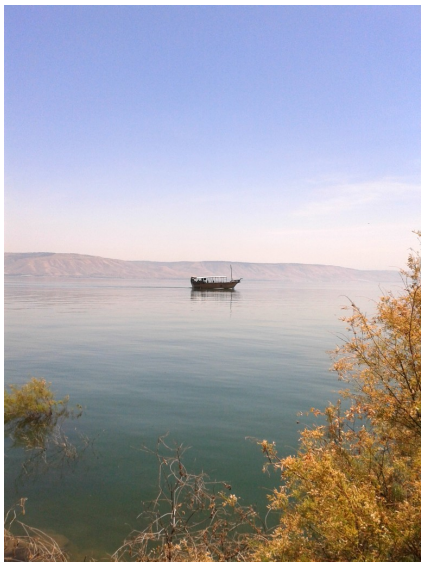
Eran's wife and family are charming and informative – I learn the reason why my neighbour on the aeroplane was invading my space ! It turns out that Hasidic Jews dislike women and his neighbour in the aisle seat was a woman – honestly, how ridiculous is that?

We decide that Orthodox Jews and Islamic fundamentalists should be dispatched to some country (in Africa maybe) to fight it out amongst themselves while I make the suggestion that the British should once again take charge here in Israel.

We see buzzards and the snake-eating eagle as our horses pick their way carefully through the narrow paths among the limestone and basalt boulders. Manage a bit of sitting and rising trot but cantering is off the menu. Great fun – Eran's 17 year old son is soon off to be a summer camp worker in the USA and their daughter is a top gymnast. They email the photo of Chico and I at once to my address and I shall respond soonest.

Not as sore as I anticipated I drive to the south again to check out Capernaum. Stop for an unpleasant loo stop on the shore where someone has shat on the floor necessitating much remedial work on the Slazenger trainer in the gravel, grass, water and mud. Getting warm now – glorious weather every day I must say by the way hey hey!

Unexciting Roman ruins but Simon Peter's house was here by the



shore- compose text to daughter Pippa in a shady spot. Quick purchase of placemat featuring sites of Galilee and a strawberry lolly then back via Ammun, a much more open village than its neighbouring Almagor where I discover a fine mini- supermarket which sells everything I need….. milk, juice, iced tea, razors, a tub of coleslaw and some bread for supper. So much nearer than the shopping at Rosh Pinna.

Pool open from 4-7pm today so slaver myself in a factor 10 and 20 combo for about an hour and a half with lots of toddlers and children also enjoying the good facilities – basic but fine.

More emailing in the office and attempt to book room at St. George's, Jerusalem again for my last 2 nights but aaaagh……they are fully booked. I shall try the St. Andrew's Guest House attached to the Scottish church tomorrow to see if they have a room. Similar prices I believe.

My new room, Chalet 13 is larger but actually not so nice as Room 2 – there's a massive Jacuzzi which I shall not use and I can't get the TV to function but as it faces the lake the view is magnificent.

Rig up my little Walkman with its clever new speaker from Maplins Wimbledon and get on with a bit of writing.

There are two or three empty plots here on the south side of the Ha-Galil grounds and I have made an appointment to discuss possible investment with Yaara, the lady owner – just a thought really and foreign property ownership is a right pain but we shall see what she might suggest. The views on this side are just spectacular and there are one or two better designed houses which perhaps could be copied.

Later on, underneath House No 16. the fence below the car park is quivering for no reason and it's plastic tape too. Quieten it down with some judicious handiwork – not sure what was happening there. There was no wind.

Friday 24th May

Clean my comb with a 'hedgehog' plucked from the ground close to the Catholic Seminary (next door property – ugly architecture but well looked after) but an old toothbrush proves more adept at the job.

Not sure what this day will bring before I head towards Haifa, then Route 4 down to Raanana in time for tea. My only commitment is the 10a.m. meeting with Yaara.

Maybe I shall visit Magdala which on the map sits between Nirvana and Hawaii. Guess who lived there – you got it ! The village has another name, Migdal and is quite some way inland from the lake I discover – it seems Mary's birthplace was in the lower reaches of the village. Motor across to Nirvana – one has to visit a place called Nirvana, surely. Park just outside some rusty guarded gates by a skip (not scavenging this time !). "I'll be 10 minutes", I gesture to the guardian and enter a rather scrubby piece of campground but at least it's right by the lake which is clean here. Rinse my plimsolls in the shallows and then a brief chat to a young Russian immigrant who is fishing, by rod and line nearby – no catches yet but it is early.

Back up the Galilean foothills to Vered Ha-Galil and after another good breakfast Yaara and I dance tentatively around the thorny issues of property ownership in Israel and what we might both gain by an investment from myself. It soon transpires that I have grossly underestimated the value of property hereabouts. A small house/bungalow in next door Korazim for example would cost over £1 million whereas my thinking was nearer £200,000. So … idea shelved, although

kindly she shows me round her own house which could make a fine home but sans view. She plans a family group of houses in Position A on the south-western corner of the estate. Maybe maybe in 4 or 5 years the plan could be revisited – although up here each house must be one storey and have a concrete security bunker below of case of attack. Rockets from Lebanon have been known to fly over Korazim. Another drawback may be that the Israeli State owns all land and there is no English-style freehold.

Pack my bags- sunbathe and swim (not getting my hair wet of course !) and then it's off towards Raanana and Jerusalem.

Good road to Afula where I stop at a shopping mall – slight addiction, Jamie, to these malls. This one has a spectacular stationery shop where I replace my lost blue V5 Pilot and add a pair of their silver and gold ones which I'm not sure you can get any more in the U.K. 3 cheap rolls of Sellotape too for good measure.

Supermarket provides my lunch – chocolate milk and a pack of S2.99 choccy mocca wafer biscuits – get one extra pack for Jack. It's a long drive down towards Tel Aviv and I stop for a quick kip, well 40 winks at Sh'ar Hafer. Call Jack on my mobile to say I'm just up Route 4 and will be there in half an hour. It's actually about an hour later that I arrive at their anonymous block near the Open University buildings – got hopelessly lost amongst masses of new roads and building sites. This country is expanding so fast. Call Jack again and he guides me in with difficulty.

Great welcome from Jack and June who have rented the Rauris, Austrian apartment I co-own with a brother-in-law for chunks of two summers and who met sister Kitten and I in Regent's Park one summer. There you go , one summer, two summers – three bags full sir.

Jack has ALS or Motor Neurone Disease – a mystery illness

still. Over delicious home-made cake and Sainsbury's Red Label Tea (THERE IS A GOD! My favourite brand …) we put the world to rights. His blog is now read by 1500 people every week as he gets weaker. He looks well facially but his movement is strained and they will soon have to move from their lovely apartment to more suitable accommodation nearer Tel Aviv.

I bore them both by getting them to read this diary blog so far and showing them many photographs and all my souvenir purchases are strewn over their floor. Managed to make a joke saying Islam is like Facebook because you can't disengage from either! He tells me a joke about Moses and God discussing meat and dairy mixing issues but to be honest, I don't quite get it cos I'm goy (= Gentile, for those not in the know) . *(Jack finally succumbed to his illness in summer 2014).*

Gather my stuff and depart – no room booked because both St. George's and St. Andrew's (Scottish church) Guest Houses have said they are full. But fortunately when I arrive at St. George's, Room 36 has become available and it is ample. Wash and brush up because it's been a hot and sticky day – up to 90°F Jack said.

Quite late, 9.30pm for supper – once again down (or is it up?) to the excellent Shalizar. Am greeted like a long lost friend – given 'on the house' plates and plates of meze, beautifully prepared. Order iced tea with 'taleh' (ice in Arabic) and my usual chicken in cream and mushrooms. Perhaps my recommendation of their restaurant to the St. George's team at reception had brought them extra custom but anyway they were charm personified and without them realising, I departed leaving them a S100 note which to be fair, was the value of the food they had provided.

Bottle of water for S5 on the way back to my resting place from a Palestinian shack shop. It makes such a difference if you try and learn a few words in a country's language …

‘pench’ or ‘panch’ is 5 in Arabic.. Shukran is thank you – I must make more effort.

Can’t get this television to work either, so I am still in the dark about this ghastly news about the beheaded British soldier by 2 Nigerian Islam converts who then addressed a crowd (?) of cheerers (?) with their bloodstained hands? Is this really true ?

Here’s me, fresh from Galilee where Jesus addressed crowds with words of love – Pull your socks up Cameron or I’ll fine you for ‘socking in the street’, put you on Tardy Book and give you 3 Georgics to copy. (Only pompous Old Etonians, such as I , will probably understand the above references !)

Jack was saying that the Orthodox Jews are having 7 or 8 children and outstripping the locals – we seem to have similar issues with our indigenous population in England. Nice white couples are having 1.2 issues per marriage and many of these wrong’uns who crowd our cities now, many, if not most, with warped minds are breeding faster – call me a racist if you wish – I am not going to deny that I sometimes lose my rag racially for instance when observing the driving tactics of our black ‘brothers’ and their ‘distraites’ sisters. But there again, these Israeli Jehus take the biscuit theretoward ! Am I being racist or just honest? Honest I hope.

“To bed” said Zebedee in the Magic Roundabout, and so to bed I must go. It’s Shabbat tomorrow so things will be quiet apart from within the Old City walls which will teem with tourists and local Arabs/Palestinians.

I’ve just realised that I completely forgot to mention yet another visit to lovely Tagbha – this time on my return from the lakeshore in the morning.

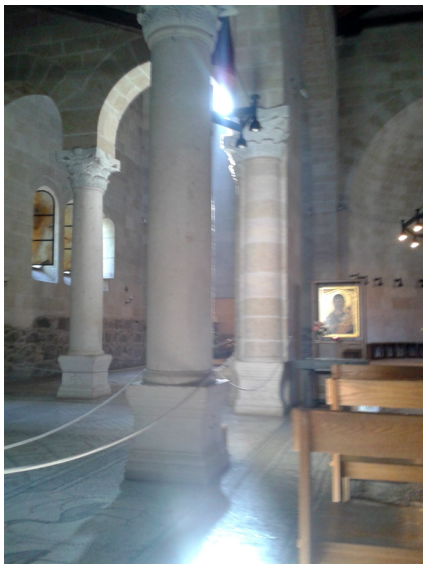


Twenty years ago, much as I loved the Loaves and Fishes church, it just seemed that the next door church, the Deification of Peter with its Tabula Christi, that chunk of rock on which you could then sit … it just seemed so special that I preferred it to the one next door.

However, because of all the paraphernalia now inside, the less attractive stained glass windows and the slightly tainted feel to its inherent cleanliness – I've gone off it a tad and have transferred my allegiance to the Church of the Multiplication of the Loaves and Fishes.

This time the shop is open, staffed by volunteers, a nice American guy tots up my pile of goodies – bag, medium T-shirt, a little espresso cup, a biro and a rather special silver cross that has touched the mosaic which tourists can do no more. Tant pis.

I stand on the left hand side as the sun streams in and a small service is taking place. Adieu, nos vemos, Amen.



Saturday 25th May

Up with the larks for a stroll round the Cathedral precinct.

Am amazed by the acreage here but perhaps over the years since 1897 (when the land was acquired for £3,300) it has shrunk a bit. I did notice a car park just behind the St. George's College section that is absolutely the perfect site for a cricket pitch. One could use the rather fine rooms at the back there for the pavilion. Early in the morning the car park was virtually empty but it was busy when I passed by in the evening. Nevertheless, could one make the car park owners an offer to buy back that patch of ground. Over to you David Higgins (he's my cricket captain and opening partner in the Bounders squad) who often has more money than sense. I can see the dedication plaque now !

We are always looking for new countries to beat a cricket – we've dispatched Holland and Estonia but have come up short against the likes of Latvia, the Cayman Islands and Hungary! I'm sure we would thrash Israel – although I wouldn't want to take them on in a war.

So come on Dave, get your wallet out.

The gardens here are very well maintained with excellent markers indicating Latin names, English names and explanations of each shrub, tree or plant. I learned much about Rue, White Broom, Cypresses, Mastic (pistachio) and the Tamarisk to name just a few.

It has so many lovely sections, many paid for by benefactors – one or two areas need some attention but that's a minor quibble. Near the gates which open opposite the Courthouse, there is a children's play park – it was a bit rubbish-strewn and the loo there is not at its peak, so I gave a little of my time to clear up a bit. I think it helps if you leave a place slightly tidier than how you found it.

Sort out my souvenirs somewhat – then a bit of 40 winks before pitching up for breakfast at just after 7a.m. Very good as ever – juice, eggs and tomatoes, bread and honey.

Drop a bag of laundry to be done at reception, do a bit of writing in the garden courtyard there and check my emails again.

First stop is the American Colony shop where I am given cardamom coffee – not as tasty as India's 'Special Tea' made with the pods but a friendly gesture. The awkward rigmarole of bargaining begins again for his fine Uzbech cloths. It would appear I'm not going to get much change out of £100 but still have many hours to broker a deal. I do not enjoy haggling- such a waste of precious time.

Back past St. George's and down to the Garden Tomb. Crowds from the Philippines this time taking their turn to enter the tomb and being guided round the site by those volunteers who do a marvellous job.

Back into my favourite Jerusalem shop – 3 more bookmarks and yet another map of the city that I do not have until now. Am allowed to use their telephone and I reach Tineke T'lam (or tLam) at her Jemima House for handicapped children. We arrange to meet at about 2.30pm.

This gives me time for some more moseying around in the old city. Entering via Damascus Gate- best to keep your eyes looking down to avoid too much "Hey Mister" and "Come look my shop" etc. Soon encounter a poster for the jolly good range of iced teas from Fuze – I am hoping to help a godson with a business venture, so I take a picture. Up a side street to the left where there is a bakery. Man outside chats to me about organic flour, sesame or sunflower oil and says this place has been going for years. Seems quite surprised to meet a British baker who churned out some 500,000 croissants in his twelve year stint as a lazy baker! Still not very good at cakes but have recently found a fine recipe for Coca Cola chocolate cake which seems to work well enough.

Up the Via Dolorosa, avoiding the 'stations of the Cross'

pilgrims who clutter this road – my eyes catch a carpet store on the right hand side who has a small selection of those Uzbechi textiles and thicker, heavier Kashmiri carpets. Charming Palestinian, who is off on holiday to Greece later in the afternoon sells me a wonderful piece of cloth for S150 – way below the prices asked by the guy at the American Colony. He is also keen that I purchase a Kashmiri runner which he offers me for S350 if I can return before 5pm having thought about it. Weight on the plane may be an issue here + over-carpeting not to mention overspending !

Stationery shop on Christian Quarter Street is open but with very limited stock and nothing suitable.

On up to Christ Church – where rather nice music is emanating from this Hebrew/Christian i.e Judeo-Christian church which occupies the highest spot in the Old City I think. I am shown to a seat back middle right and there follows some moving moments. Personal statements are being made, one comes from a man called Elijah who has walked to Jerusalem from Potsdam in Germany via 24 different concentration camps because he wanted to enunciate his personal grief on behalf of his nation. A remarkable giant of a man, some 2 metres plus tall , staying at the Franciscan Guest House just inside New Gate.

I become aware of a girl, standing in pole position in a church i.e. on the aisle seat front left. Quite skinny and appears to be having trouble with her legs – why, I don't know but the back of my calves stiffen up and I have to do a bit of self-massage. Anyway, she seems very happy with the world. More anon.

Most of the congregation are plugged in to headphone sets translating the Hebrew sections of the service but I have eschewed these. We sit through what seems a dull talk from the main vicar but of course it may have been riveting had I known what it was about!

You get the drift that services here go on a bit but there are a massive number of people with quite a lot of arm gesticulation and groaning. Clearly a 'charismatic' church and it's not over the top with the evangelicalism (long word!). The piano playing and accompanying singing are truly outstanding – I tell her afterwards that she reminded me of Enya of whom she had not heard. The sun shines bright on her has she plays.

After the service ends I tarry awhile to have a brief chat of congratulations with Elijah who is a popular figure, rightly surrounded by admirers keen to talk to him. Then I discover more about the little teenage girl who is called Vora, from the Ukraine, although the lady who I thought must be her mother or a friend sitting next to her said no-one knew where she had appeared from – she apparently announced herself as a Sister of Jesus. I shake her hand and say, "Hello, I'm Jamie", telling the other lady that I think she's in a better space than when she arrived. "She's so happy – she is indeed in a good place", says her neighbour also from Eastern Europe.

Frustratingly, the museum remains closed, so I am not getting very far tracking down Mum's handiwork.

Back down to near Damascus Gate and catch the Arab bus to Beit Jala for S7.20 – it disgorges us all at the Bethlehem crossroads. Try to pacify an angry young Palestinian lad who seems intelligent but wants to kill all the Jews. "That's not how it works," I say. " You have lived together for thousands of years – you have to get on!"

Struggle with directions to Jemima House- everyone giving contrary advice- "it's past the stadium, then bear right" … there was no stadium and anyway, it was on the left. I had walked quite a way up hill on the road that the bus had come down – the Via Maria. Eventually, I'm so frustrated and concerned I am late for the 2.30 agreed time – spot a taxi parked up on a side road, the owner's charming wife says when

I knock on their door that of course he will take me to Jemima House. S15 later I am near my destination but he drops me quite a way below on the main road.

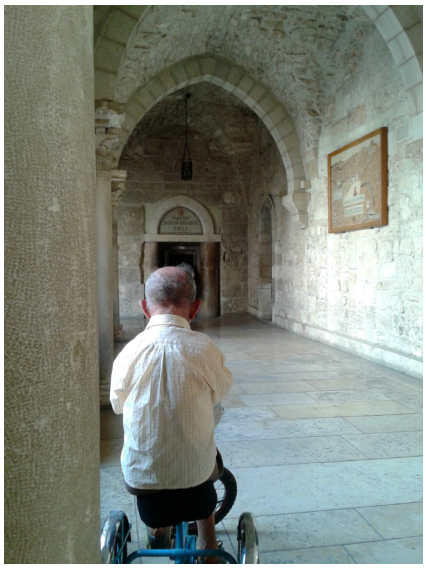
Tineke Tlam is not there but with a bit of toing and froing on the telephones we reach her and she's on her way while I am given a frothy coffee by one of the Dutch staff.

I'm no Jean Vanier (the wonderful founder of the L'Arche communities who I first met at a Guild of Health seminar back in 1995 and who signed my copy of his fantastic book 'The Broken Body') but I did my best, meeting several floors of children with twisted little bodies, bent limbs , hands and feet – my largesse involved Polo mints sourced at Tiger, Southside, Wandsworth … one of my favourite stores, a mini Danish IKEA type, and they went down well. Others below were not so mobile and some didn't have long to live you could tell – spent most time with a prostrate pony-tailed girl who could not move poor angel and I'm not sure if I made any contact or impression upon her.

Tineke then showed me the school area and the 'workshop' where olive tree root waste was compressed into fire briquettes. Then briefly we walked up to her house from where husband Peter kindly drove me in his rickety van up to his charity, the House of Hope in lower Bethlehem – where he and those more able of the handicapped youngsters carve out masses of olive wood souvenirs. I buy one and he then drops me back at the Beit Jala/Bethlehem crossroads and points me uphill towards Manger Square – the Nativity churches and birthplace of Jesus Christ.

It's all a bit dirty and scruffy here really with not very enticing stuff for sale. Further than I remember but arrive at the tiny door of the Church of the Nativity – go left into the Catholic courtyard where I encounter a little fella on a motorised tricycle who is begging with a written card and is doing astonishingly well … must be raking in up to S500 a day.

Very well positioned was Miguel and I took his photo from behind. Smart shirt too, Miguel.



There was a small service going on in the left hand chapel of the Catholic church section of this polytheistic place – rather gloomy, the main transept was more attractive but I was depressed by the massive iron gates, locked, separating the left footers from the right footers through which pilgrims were peering.

Brief look at the Greek run or is it Syrian? section over the alleged spot – probably not, actually. Try to exit stage right up some steps but am thwarted by a shouting hatted holy man (yeah) who was operating a rope/basket arrangement bringing goods up to his second floor window who shouted at me to go away in no uncertain terms.

Out into the light again and take a different route to the right – down to the bottom of Bethlehem again aiming to get the same 21 bus back to Jerusalem.

But when in Rome, as they say … so I thought, why not? Let's walk back to Jerusalem … it's not that far on the map. Enjoy a caramel type ice-cream tub and then something extraordinary happens close to David's Caves.

A guy and two girls are walking on my side of the pavement – she catches my eye, this first girl because she is very

attractive, long dark hair and fine décolletage encased in a white top. Has this happened to anyone before? But anyway she walks straight into me, chest to chest, bang – and moves on without saying a word. I say to her companion, as though I'd done something wrong … "it was her, she walked straight into me." It was my T shirt wot done it apparently – it reads in Hebrew, The Golden Dove. Her friend had a large gold watch. I've had that T shirt over twenty years and it's had some of Jamie's remedial sewing work done on it but I like it.

The journey back to Jerusalem, 12 or 13 miles I suppose, is made harder by the presence of the security 'fence' – slats of tall graffiti-covered concrete. Am shooed away from the road crossing and detour round to the pedestrian one, a strange system of ramps, caging, albeit with some plastic hanging baskets for light relief and X-ray machines. So it's belts, bags and watches off – showing of passports etc. Nice Palestinian explains to me that this routine can take 2 hours in the morning because of the queues. I say, "I'll see what I can do" – it's just not right to make half your population suffer just because you are the stronger half , Israel. Are you listening Netanyahu?

Tale a picture, with his permission, of a Bedouin grazing his goats on the outskirts of town, surreal, just behind a petrol station! Continue on the Hebron road, encountering black faces for pretty much the first time on this travel – which sets me musing on some of the idiosyncrasies of this country. Very few blacks, I've seen perhaps 2 , very few bicycles – maybe 15 of those in total – 11 joggers – contrast indeed with the streets of London now swarming with aggressive examples of all of the above and not enough polite ones !

I can't go back to my usual supper destination because they would be too kind to me , so I try the nearby Hotel Legacy which serves me a very good iced coffee and OK chicken, but service is poor. Both TV and Walkman not responding to my

entreaties – so I start organising my stuff for tomorrow's departure and delve into the story of the Prophet Job whose tale of woe and triumph Tineke had explained to me.

You see, Jemina House is named after the eldest of Job's three girls and two boys of his second marriage. There was Jemima (they pronounce it Jemeema), then Keziah or Cassia I guess we would say and then little Keruhappuel. So the individual houses in Beit Jala are Jemima, Cassia but they changed the name of the third to something easier to trip off the tongue.

Anyway, I read in the Gideon's type bible in my bedside drawer the last few chapters of Job and was thrilled to learn that after all his difficult times the boy got lucky, lived to the age of 140 – had the 3 prettiest girls in the land and had a great time in the latter part of his life.

My God, can I say it's been fine but it hasn't been the easiest last 20 years financially or emotionally. So here's hoping for a bit of Job's lot … . Actually, no, don't worry. It's OK. Let it be as it is.

Sunday 26th May

My elder daughter's 25th birthday and of course I forget to text her until about 5p.m. but I had sorted out card and presents before heading off on holiday.

At 4a.m. the mosque down the road starts up its amplified 'muezzin' call from atop the minaret. I wonder how many people actually show up for early prayers because Jerusalem doesn't seem to wake up until at least 9.30am whether it's Arabs or Israelis. So why the cacophony at 4a.m. ?

Finish packing, well nearly anyway. Great breakfast again – fresh tea or juice this time and a more Arab feel to the meal as a nice change. Still enjoy my soft white pitta, lots of butter and runny honey! Out to the American Colony after a circumambulation of the Cathedral site which must be nearly a

mile and may have been more in the late 19th century – Boss's son only on duty ; explain I've bought embroidered cloth elsewhere – not bothered really; I'm sure they do very well from richer folk than me.

Up to the Ben Yehuda, Shamai and Jaffa Roads area – for second visit to Jacov the shoemaker where I buy 3 more pairs of shoelaces (price going up each time!) and he is impressed with the repairs to my posh black shoes – we are helped by a fellow Bukhari who translates my ramblings.

Before seeing Jacov I attend the 9.30a.m.service up at Christ Church again – chat outside before to nice New Zealand couple who are setting up the after service coffee in front of the Alexander museum. We discuss cricket, sheep and so on – they are from Nelson originally, at the south of the North Island if I've got that right or is it at the north of the South Island ?

Church teeming with people once again. Am pointed to spare seat up rear front but on the left hand side – couple of youngish guys either side of me, the one on the left trying to keep his 5 year old amused. Initial introduction from chubby vicar is amusing, threatening us with 4 or 5 hour service. This is followed by good talk from the Deacon Aaron Eimi (the Australian manager of the museum with the Cotswold connection) which tails off a touch towards its end.

By now the young lad on our left is seriously bored (join the gang) – in my pocket I have a tiny 'flicker' book that came inside the CD of Arcade Fire's excellent 'Neon Bible' – this I had set aside perhaps to give to skinny Vora but she is not here today. So I hand it to the bloke on my left and say it's a present for his son. Gadzooks, 'it's a hit, a palpable hit' (quote from Hamlet….. well, we did do a version of the play at school) and he is quietened before being allowed to go to the Sunday School.

Our service continues, it's the all-English version but I gather 2 hours long is commonplace. I couldn't stick it that long and I'm due down at the Anglican 11a.m. family communion – this is way out of order, the amount of churchgoing I am doing at present! But it is Trinity Sunday and everyone is having difficulty explaining the Father, Son and Holy Ghost concept.

I'm not going to start so there! Suffice to say Monty Python are probably nearer the mark than the Pope! Or Justin Welby for that matter, who was 2 years younger than me at Eton. He might remember my name I guess , one tended to look up to the older boys.

So at 10.40am just over half way through their long service I have to sneak away down to St George's – I write an A5 note explaining the provenance of the little 1½ " square booklet to my neighbour and put my name and address at its foot.

It's an up down up down sort of day – quick change into smarter shirt, trousers and shoes for the Church of England. Sadly, a much smaller congregation but Praise the Lord a much shorter service too, clocking in at one hour. Saleem and sidekick Justin Cheng are in charge with the readings and I think their pronunciation was clearer than on the Tuesday morning.

Hymns a bit unknown which is always a bit of a downer but guest vicar Grant does a pretty good job with his own composition on the guitar … heavens, a guitar in a Cathedral whatever next ? Grant obviously does good Human Rights work with the Amos Trust and certainly one verse of his song sang sweetly and made me catch my breath.

I scuttle away before the bread and wine – although I am a fan of that 'snap' noise when the wafer is cracked in two. Not sure about this Pauline invention as the way to remember Him, and Christ's early followers are on my side I think.

Body and blood of Christ etc.. The jury is still out ; the Jewry are probably out as well.

I have to leave because there's a 12 noon deadline for room evacuation. Which of course I overstay but only by 10 minutes or so. Bundle all my stuff into the back of the Aygo and it's back into default dress code for my last hours in Israel – T shirt, trainers and trousers : there's a trinity for you people.



Up again to mid-town where I visit a silver shop spotted earlier and buy a wonderful small cup in Shevach Yemenite ware, sterling silver – so intricate and there's only one 71 year old still able to produce this exquisite work. So my S285 I consider a splendid investment for my children and their children's children. That, together with the Uzbechi embroidery are my prize purchases.



Back across to Jaffa gate full of the joys of spring for one last attempt at the archives in the Alexander Museum. S7 entry (payable in the understaffed cafe below) and once

again a bit of a ‘wild goose chase’ for Mum’s cards. But thrilling to see M. Tenz’s astonishing model again and a good chat with the Venezuelan curator on duty. He encourages me to send an email to the Deacon seeing what he can do to help. I learn that Hugo Chavez’s acolytes are believed to have ‘put away’ some 19,000 political opponents. Tell him to recommend St George’s as an alternative guest house when theirs is full and also tell him about the Shalizar restaurant and its whereabouts.

Down to St George’s for the last time – collect my thoughts, one last check of the emails and then set off towards Ben Gurion airport. Pleased with early progress….. past the American Colony, turn left, left again then right onto the big road west. Quite complicated these days because of underpasses and tram tracks and so on. I tell you it is so easy to lose your bearings in Jerusalem – what a maze it is, confusion can reign and I pride myself on my orientation skills. But boy, do they go away in these streets and lanes.

With hire cars you have to fill the tank before you return it so I stop at a petrol station and while I shop for an iced tea and biscuits the car is filled up with 95 octane – not self-service here. And guess what! The cost in cash is S153 – one of the very few numbers mentioned in the New Testament. The number of fish / ichthoi landed at Ginnosar or thereabouts by His anxious disciples.

These Israeli roads and highways need some better lane engineering- 3 lanes merge into 2 with no warning , you can easily find yourself in the wrong lane and miss your turning. Lane discipline is non-existent, indication rare and people pull out of side-roads willy-nilly.

Signage to the car hire dropping area near Terminal 3 is of course lousy but I eventually pull up at the Avis zone thinking time is a bit tight now to catch my flight. Because of their security issues you are obliged to arrive some 3

hours before your flight and for some reason I am thinking Easyjet goes at about 6p.m. (when in fact it's due to leave at 8.20pm).

A rather slow Brazilian Jew goes through his check list of mileage, any scratches etc, paperwork, paperwork and reports his findings to the men in the hut/portakabin who demand and extra US$29 Airport tax from me. He then drives me slowly to Terminal 1 from where, apparently, the Easyjet to Luton will leave – but the doors to 'International Departures' are firmly closed and a bossy Israeli woman directs me firmly onto a crowded transit bus which will take us all to Terminal 3.

On arrival there it is once again a mess of poor signposting but eventually I discover that Easyjet does indeed go from Terminal 1 and I am in the wrong place ! This is very frustrating.

So, back to Terminal 1 on another transit bus and the place seems pretty deserted. At this stage, after someone says, "you have missed the plane ! " I finally find out I am actually early and won't be able to check in for another hour or so.

Do a bit of suitcase re-organisation to make sure the bag in the hold isn't over the 20kg allowance and then get moved on by security (bossy woman again). Sit by the cafe , extortionate prices here. Am joined by nice Dutch guy who has been on a conference jaunt with his employers, Paypal , and has got rather sunburnt walking around Jaffa old town. Give him some Rescue Gel to rub into his bald patch and we chat about Paypal's fees and other stuff.

The security rigramole – which so pissed me off on previous visits starts badly with a very curt, tall skinny blonde who I tick off for her rude manner and lack of the small but magic word 'please'. Not hard really is it?

At least this time I am not asked if I have made any friends

on my travels – one of the main joys of the independent traveller but one which used to worry the paranoid Israelis. In fact, in relatively short order with less hassle than before my bag is checked in – others are less lucky and taken away for more questioning but soon all passengers are herded into a bland room with no facilities. It is then we discover that the plane is not here and off we go again by bus back to Terminal 3.

This is fun isn't it ? – what on earth is this all about ? Well – Terminal 3 is fine – the usual mix of shopping outlets, cafes and loos … although it did take me a long time to find a cubicle which had any loo paper in it.

At Steimatzky's I think I've got a reasonable deal for my remaining 17 shekels in coins but it turns out their prices were in dollars so instead it's an iced tea again and a chocolate bar.

Fine view of the coast of Israel as we ascend – I'm not very good at these long flights and get rather itchy and bothered. Take shoes off – time goes very slowly. Food on board isn't bad if you choose well – they source good snacks, but there were no hot drinks because something was wrong with the internal plane water supply.

Nearly 5 hours later we land at the ghastly Luton Airport – we await two sets of steps for 20 minutes I promise you – weren't they expecting any planes here ? Naturally idiots stand the whole time in the aisle. Talking of which – throughout the flight those Orthodox Hasidic Jews had behaved abominably once again. Luckily this time there were only about 20 of them but honestly, it's the men who are tiresome. They stand in the aisles chatting away (about God knows what) leaning on other people's seats, blocking the poor steward's trolleys and partially blocking stewardesses' trolleys. What a nightmare they are – so selfish. I berate one of them who impedes my passage to the loo at the back – a weak sorry and

I say, “Are you really sorry” with one of my scarier stares!

They get my goat this particular sect.

Long long delay while the pathetic Luton staff unload our bags onto the carousel – compare and contrast with the wonderful super-efficient style at Salzburg airport – one of my favourites; nope, my favourite !

There are no chairs anywhere once again and of course big queues at passport control … the non-EU citizens getting a better deal than us Brits. Remind me never to fly again from Luton.

Long wait again at the Luton Parkway station for a train to Blackfriars – say adieu to my Dutch friend and struggle with a lack of night buses back to Earlsfield … by which time it is 4a.m. the following morning and I’m a bit sore and weary. But it’s always nice to be home isn’t it ? House seems fine.

Lehitra’ot Israel

See yer.

Israel diary December 1995

Thursday 7th December 1995 & Friday 8th December

The day started before 5a.m. but that’s another story of packing/sorting and so on. Tikka was picked up by Carole, Grace & Jessica at lunchtime and I escaped from Consumer Forum at 1.30’ish only to return a minute later having forgotten my blue jacket … typical.

He's off – lugging the Argos backpack & the Israeli cloth bag (courtesy of Arab run shop at the American Colony Hotel, Jerusalem; bartered for on last visit in January '92). Both these are loaded to the gunnels with probably superfluous paraphernalia. A quick wave to Julia Delavitch on passing St. Mary's and down to Baron's Court tube for the District service to Victoria, £1.70 single.

Trouble with the signalling at Earl's Court means overhearing driver/controller radio conversations (I was in front coach) … "you can't go yet, I've got trains everywhere !" etc.. Amused by LT incompetence or was it just bad luck … anyway, it took quite a while to reach Victoria.

£16.50 return bought for Gatwick Express which a good fast ride (30 mins +). Long haul over to the North Terminal on funkyish monorail number where I have plenty of time to kill before official check-in time of 3.55p.m.. Buy a Toblerone (honey for the chapping lips) & a Cadbury's choccy bar of some description. Very bare Terminal – have to smoke outside mostly. Chat to Body Shop lady who has packed away the sun creams but gives me leaflet & advises me that things are cheaper 'airside'.

Check in ok – Argos has to go to 'special' rollers as he's deemed awkward – weighs 10.6 or 10.9 kilos as weighing digitally seems difficult. Through Customs (no bleeps) & marginal improvement in excitement quotient – use the 2 hours + to reasonable avail … cheese omelette & microwaved potato (erk) saved by Anchor butterlettes, espresso coffee from Costas from a Roman from Pyramida ? Variety of people – use a loo I'm not supposed to as they were re-plumbing but there was no sign to say so.

Fine metal /water (turned off … drought ?!) sculpture centred round spiral up/down walkway which kids & grown-ups would both like. Pop 57p into its childrens' blind box.

Shopping garnered one medium placcy bottle of cocoa lotion (after sun) & orangey flavour lip salve after much use of tester bottles in Body Shop. (£4.50). Highlight was Past Times shop (recently accessed via mail order for marbles wooden box & Lindisfarne notepaper) where tempted by many things but limit myself to one ruler (wooden) 84p with Kings & Queens of England and a smashing little copy of the Book of Kells (£3.50).

Man next to me does a 'spillikins' with dodgy displays. Charming salesgirl.

200 white Silk Cut – no films, too dear. Check out Clinique, made in U.S.A. also too dear – late purchase before the long travellate to gate 48 was an amazing Waterstone's 1996 Diary designed by Shiel & Cohen … v.pleased with that £4.95 … hope to get several more as Christmas presents. Ta to Terry Jones M.P. !

Last fag for 5½ hours & board 757 of Air 2000. Sit next to 2 Josephs, returning from stay in Hendon – one no English other President of Haifa food export co. … good company … teaches me todaraba = thank you, bevakasha = please, éfó = where is, anim mehapez = I am looking for, mă schlomhă =how are you ?, ok = ok, yes = ken, no = lō, maybe = ōnlai, hot = χαμ = ham with a gutteral h, ani rayev = I'm hungry, and quite amusingly ani nŏtsori = I am a Christian … no, I am not sorry I'm a Christian ! Joseph & I discuss Israeli politics & people.

Air 2000 … lady pilot did fine, food very average (only kosher … i.e. poor margarine, so so chicken liver pâté, niceish apple pie thing). Stewardesses had no idea that Jews like to congregate in groups of 8 to 10 to pray which they did mi-plane mid-flight – I thought that pretty ignorant considering 90% of my fellow passengers were Jewish & the plane tos and fros to and from Tel Aviv daily.

Landed 2a.m. local time – customs no sweat but baggage rondavel took its time due to lack of transporters. Pleasing bronze of David Ben Gurion whose eyes appeared to follow me around the hall & gaze upon spot where some unfortunate terrorist was gunned to blazes (plaque marks the spot at carousel 4).

2 cigarettes later – I had survived the dearth – expensive hot chocolate in the 24 hour café. Maybe I'll take a bus into town & walk slow to new Egged bus station he thinks. But no buses at this time of morn & taxis too costly. Re-meet the Josephs outside & then decide to pack cloth bag at bottom of rucksack & start walking. What's 15 kilometres on a cool night ?

The moon is nearly full, the going relatively easy alongside the speeding motorway and some somewhat putrid aquafers on my right hand side. It takes ages to clear the airport & its runway – aren't they huge. Begin to flag, feet sore – me black boots need sheepskin liners. At the Yehuda interchange, about half way to Jaffa / Yafo where I had decided to head for, having missed a visit 4 years back & it being close to the bus station, I drop anchor & thumb comes out.

Lorry passes but 2nd vehicle stops. Wow ! Nice young guy who's just been to Heathrow, seen his girlfriend & returned after a night at Stansted Airport – on his way to work at 4.50a.m. for El Al Arkia security takes me out of his way close to the centre of Jaffa. Thank you.

Plod towards goal of St. Peter's church spotted earlier on map. Am led up to museum, outside which is splendid animal trough in old stone and on museum entrance wall a stone relief gives joy to the eye. Through enchanting scrub garden, on up to crown of hill where stands a memorial arch in codestone (? / cool to touch) symbolising Jacob's Dream.

I am moved.

This is a powerful site – a plaque tells me that during the British Palestine mandate they made soap here !

Path leads down to the left and round to the right where an old fig tree I circle. Who lies here ? Down a bit and left down a cobbled alley, past a Daniel type den and round to oversee the old port where the reef divides. Tel Aviv gleams north of me; back up right past door of church and stand again by its Italianate tower of fine design but I don't desire to enter.

I descend inspired but tired towards old Tel Aviv passing unsavoury early bakery & decent furniture shops – stop for honey bread at an Arab bakehouse – ace. Directions needed for the station … Kaminsky ? Reach destination at 6.10a.m.. Extraordinary place, buses on 5 floors, escalators out of order, freshen up in loo & purchase one way ticket to Eilat for £10. Bus due to leave from last gate at 6.30a.m.. Phew, slump dog exhausted onto metal bench which gives way & bump my head. Been up for 23 hours now & done enough for one day – conk out on 2nd row bus seat & am promptly woken by Israeli woman wanting her ticketed seat !

Snatch the odd 20 minutes kip en route south, stopping briefly at Beer'Sheva (good egg & cucumber baguette & peach nectar) where man I recognise from last time still seeking foreign bank notes & coins for his collection. Shall try to get his address because I have several that he would enjoy & that I don't honestly need.

Last stop is deep in the Negev, way past Dimona where a South African pair join the mostly male & female Israeli army khaki bus customers. We talk & join in respectful criticism of Israeli attitudes to tourists – worse in Tel Aviv & amongst El Al staff apparently. Bus driver did a professional job only spoiled by his missus constantly yakking away for the entire 5 hour ride & one must say by the indifference of the passengers. Surprised by the growth of towns &

horti/agriculture since 1992 – what fertile earth is here.

Noon Friday – back in Eilat, busier than before, more tourists, more hotels but fun & warm. After trying a few places, eventually settle at the inviting & reasonably priced Marina Club Hotel and am allocated Room 218, overlooking palms & pool – just right. Time once more to shave/wash/brush up & unpack :- 5 nights are anticipated …

Grease up, Ambre Solaire 10 remnants squeezed at Earlsfield (home) into Sainsbury's Factor 2 bottle. Catch the last day's rays before heading into town for a mosey around old & new haunts. Many new shops & less greenery than before. Excellent doughnut & Danish pastry at 'The Family Bakery', an even better guava milk-shake in a bottle from an English run deli up the hill, cheap tape shop doesn't have Genesis 'We Can't Dance'. See new public swimming pools shortly to open which look good – I hope City authorities will retain as much green space as possible but concrete threatens this fine town. Wonderful enclave close to Eilat Music Academy blooming with bougainvillea, impatiens perennials and birds.

Back down to the hotel zone – stop at Neptune Hotel to buy this notebook & then at cramped shop where I fall temporarily in love (again) with the salesgirl & buy a baguette, some good aubergine/onion tub pâté and a fair banana milk-shake in a carton. Succumb to a £2 box of Dead Sea Mineral Soap which was asking to be bought or was it my imagination ? Vow to return to this cornucopia of interest … or is it just for the girl !

Unwind at base camp – assemble my 2 prong plug & Enya thrills the air, quelle chanteuse.

Still hungry so dress up a bit and cross the bridge – Ben & Jerry's ice cream parlour looks under-stocked and is expensive. At 7p.m. am shown to unreserved seat close to the door of the Tandoori on King's Wharf … the scene 3.9 years ago

of the best meal I ate in Israel. For once a restaurant has managed to retain its quality – saladdy starter with lemon, 2 veg samosas, a tray of condiments, a butter nãn, sag paner washed down with 2 sweet lassis … oh for sweet lassis ! Practice few words of Hindi with staff – one sari lady who spoke excellent Hebrew, Nepali type from Dehra Dun keen on cricket and man from Bombay who had attended sister Christian school to that run on Mount Abu. 40 shekels (£8) well spent.

2 Natrasleeps (hop & valerian) just in case.

Perchance to dream.

Saturday 9th December The Sabbath

Awake before the sparrows & time to ponder before breakfast. Magnificent dawn over Jordan mountains east of Aqaba – play more Enya (the previous evening I had cried listening to 'Hope has a Place' rack 2 Side 2 on The Memory of Trees, her best album to date ? The song evoked memories of Cothill prep school where aged 7 I had first read the account of Christ's crucifixion with a torch under the bedclothes and cried with pity for him). Brief spurts of the Living Years, Mike & the Mechanics and of course Horovitz playing Moz.

Descend for food & coffee I hope … slight wait because doors don't open till 7.30a.m. not 7a.m. as advertised. Fair nosh, smoked swordfish & soused herring, oat & raisin muesli & yoghurt, roll & butter. Coffee in thermos is weak, but perked up with powder from jars. Jewish party join & feast away.

Still too cold to write, but discover am able to use restaurant's hot water to make my own coffee. You see I had brought a jar of Sainsbury's freeze dried Gold with me luggage – thankfully.

Before the day heats up I walk east where new development is apace – pass the new Dan, through the Herod complex being started by the Canadians to a beautiful grass surrounded lagoon. Few people around.

Vanity time – careful with those sensitive areas of my pale skin. Observe life round the pool till 2p.m. or so, doing front & briefly back … it is the Sabbath after all. When I think I am sufficiently toasted decide to wander uptown.

Little did I realise this was to be an 8 km trek. Little temptation as Sabbath shops generally not open till 6.30p.m. or later. Head for the hospital with the intention of perhaps seeking out the psychy wards – 3 women at reception say no not here … none have even heard of schizophrenia or mania. Well, well … I know from having seen a documentary that there is a mental hospital in Jerusalem but maybe Eilat is strife free !

Amazing variety of birds, flowers and shrubs ease my path north-eastwards following contour of foothill. Sensible mix of high-rise and low, again not enough good green space for the kids. Eventually arrive at corner of Eilat dominated by vast unsightly block where 6+ buses from Nazareth are parked. What goes on there heaven only knows.

Head up towards the hills on crunchy brown volcanic rock and scree to mini oilometers and sign saying this is start of Eilat ↔ Ashkelon pipeline. Consider awhile & wonder what effect this could have on Egypt/Israel relations because surely a route to the Mediterranean avoiding the Suez Canal for that precious oil is going to cause political ructions ?

Across scrubland & thorn to an undeveloped valley where stands atop a mound a wooden ark like construction with seating and one of those water fountains which can only dribble & squirt pathetically. Close by is a beautifully made wood slatted wobbly bridge over a small dene/valley. Decide this should

become the site of Eilat's first ? Christian church & dedicate the ground, musing that it should be called St. Charlotte's church after my fille mignonne ! One can dream can't one.

Hairpin gently down to civilisation & discover my chosen consecration is at the end of Jerusalem Street. How apt. Yellow Submarine plays in my head.

Sun moving down now – wander downtown, via bus station to enquire about perhaps going to Jordan/Petra but buses only go to border.

Brief look into deli near hotel but there is a different girl on duty … tant pis. Nice hot bath to degrease & oh I nearly forgot, by the airport terminal there had been a commotion of sparrows in a palm tree just as one nun (from St .Catherine's Monastery in Sinai ?) walked to check in . I felt the flutter, reminding me of 1980 at Heathrow when seeing my friend Gail Bishop off to Africa to roam. Then a group of was it 5 nuns had seemed to flutter like doves around me as she walked towards the departure gate.

Play more Enya in my room and the birds and trees outside my window seem to play in time. Take 2 expresso coffees in the lobby (Israeli brand – Teka – good) whilst diary scribbling. At 7.30p.m., put 2 pairs of socks onto my mending blisters & walk townwards again. Baguette (ham & cheese mit mustard & mayo from 2 surly Swedes) – spot of shopping this time, secure Shepherd Moons (Enya), We Can't Dance (at last !), Revolver (later) – buy presents for the girls in the Shalom Center. Bright lights beckon to another centre which disappoints.

To bed 10.30/11p.m.

Sunday 10th December

Wake at 5a.m. sharp. Dawn chorus. Update diary. Make coffee

with warmish bath tap. 7.30a.m., time to break this fast. Day beckons warm … you're on holiday, Jamie … let's get this broken body browner !

Similar fare to previous day but eat less – last pot of apricot jam. Settle on patio to pen postcards to my girls … my brain's not functioning … before that I had gone for morning walk down to beach, left towards Jordan over different bridge, walked tother side of lagoon (musing that this should become Eilat's first golf course) – the soil here is a superfriable loam that clings to my trainers a bit. Accompanied by a fine selection of wildlife such as seagulls, heron, sparrows, wagtails dabbing the way, indiscriminate beauties particularly human friendly dart around me, cormorants from the lagoon, black fishes wiggling up the salty creek, a sandpiper – up to fish farm complex then left back to hotel spotting large limo with rich Arabs in the back.

… one more Sainsbury's Gold Choice & restaurant 'pani gurm' (hot water) from my Gujerat waiter mate & on with the postcards … One to Pip & Charlotte, one a thank you for last Sunday's lunch chez my doc & wife, 2 side letter to G started inside cos heat beginning to overcome.

Pause scripting for a lazy mo flattish on my back by the pool – less grockles as it's changeover day. Ponder my vanity. Who on earth is going to notice if my body is brown & anyway it's winter in the U.K. so is this exercise (or lack of it) pointless ? Yes. Take new Olympus OM1 (£169 extravagance last month in Acton) & head for the hills for a brisk hour plus, this time on south side of town to suitable mound for 3x panorama picture of Eilat with Aqaba in the distance. Head down left passing new road bridge over the wadi which I join taking me down to port area & back to base camp.

1.40p.m. – finish letter & contemplate one to Enya. Her music speaks to God – do I let her know ? She must know

already.

Sun begins to hide obscured by clouds so I cruise again. Banks will open at 4p.m. I'm told, shops at 5p.m.. To town past one established older house in what remains of park area where guarded by ass, pony, geese, cockerel and barky dog – place for the children's zoo à la Battersea Park ?

Efficient service upstairs at Bank Leumi gets me £50 (250 shekels) on my Diners Club card but the people downstairs will have to Q for ages – they need more banks here to serve the swelling numbers.

Candles & chewing gum (lemon) from Shekem Dept. Store – the lemon continues my experiment of bleaching my yellowy brown teeth. I had earlier bought a lemon for 30 cents from my favourite shop lady, chewed, bitten & sucked en route uphill. Will it work ? Is the pain worth the gain ?

Enquire about Eilat's export of mail at travel agency – he tells me it goes via Tel Aviv & can take a long time.. That needs attention doesn't it, as at least twice a week planes go to Britain ?

Bath at hotel – make decision to leave Eilat & pay bill. To Petra ? Rose Red City of Jordan ? Peut-être. Conceive 'wicked' plan to to cheat Israeli postal service by stamping my mail with U.K. stamps & passing them to Brits flying home on the morrow but two local hotels seem bereft of Brits. Plan B goes into action & I return to nice Essex man at agency who kindly takes them.

Rap awhile re Petra (difficult to get to – too difficult as yet), Assad of Syria who has just murdered 15,000 of his own people (?) & Saddam Hussein who has sneakily gained foothold in Lebanon (?). This conversation at another travel agent, lady ex-U.K. run.

Return to my deli but my bird has flown … Still, purchase one

more tub of aubergine pãté, 2 pitta type roundels & a doughnut. Eat my supper on a grassy mound before the wind & palms motion me towards the Royal Beach Hotel.

This is some palace – the swankiest hotel I have ever set foot in … automatic doors everywhere, even sensored taps in the loo. Marble halls, vast carpets, comfortable chairs, elegance – surreal, a roving clarinettist – beautiful pools, warm. Treat myself to a 6.50 (not overpriced) lemon pressée in one of the myriad of bars & lounges. Drink outside in splendour, noticing earthquake damage to 2 crucial lines – their pillars ain't strong or don't have the girth to cope with such weight of rooms above. Fearful for the safety of this delightful dream-like domain I express concern to the concierge who is diffident. "Only superficial damage, all will be completed next week ". I reply, "You've only cemented over the cracks. It's not enough, you need wider (stretch out arms) pillars. Another quake ?" (frown). Reception finally tells me it's $212 a night here but it's probably worth it.

Emerge from trance & return to sleep 9.30/10p.m.

Monday 11th December

Well, I thought it was Monday when I woke refreshed, but guess what, I had read my watch upside down & instead of it being 4.50a.m. it turned out soon after that it had in fact been 11.20p.m.. By the time I realised, I'd washed down a couple of coffees using the hot bath water & smoked a couple of white Silk Cut so it was too late to sleep again.

Might as well set off earlier than planned methinks. So, after some diary scribbling it was pack the rucksack, more carefully this time as a longer trudge is likely – quietly exit the hotel, leaving room key at night reception at 2a.m.. Some late stragglers are returning to rooms after

discothèqueing; for some the day is ending for me it's just beginning.

Walk some distance to the edge of town to the last neon streetlight where I park up. Thumb out a few times, car & timber transporters pass in pairs but the few vehicles are mostly the busy bee concrete mixers heading up to the cement works. Get bored after ¾ hour & decide to walk to army post near only Jordan crossing 2 km or so up the road.

Nice night, nice to be on the road again. Reach the post at 3.30a.m. or so. The two men there are kind – one divorced with 2 kids, one has seen 30 years service. Give me tea & biscuit & we chat about army matters. A few vans, a car & some lorries pass but thumb fails.

Then at 3.50a.m. Bingo – lady in Subaru stops for me. She's going to Jerusalem too, hallelujah. Radio crackles, tense driving, cold air rushes through car. Her reason for trip is sad – her young & only sister, 22, has been knocked from motorbike & died in Jerusalem hospital.

We are speaking in French because she's Tunisian, though 30 years in Eilat – at 3.30a.m. that morning she tells me there had been another quake shake, she on 2nd floor & frightened, 5 on the Richter scale. The second in a month in Eilat but perhaps another 'small earthquake in X, not many dead news story'. First quake in November … one man died from a heart attack.

Negev desert goes on & on. Brief pee & fag stop for us at gas station, closed, & a thermos cup of lemon tea sans sugar.

Pass phosphate factory near Sodom, pass Ein Gedi, Masada, Qumran. Arab radio only – song lyrics remind me of my failures in life. Nod off from time to time. Road surface awful at south end of Dead Sea, which turquoise & tranquil.

This is the scene of 40 days 40 nights torment for Jesus.

Bypass Jericho, up hill after hill towards our goal.

Sight Russian (?) tower atop of Jerusalem & heart begins to lift. Bedouins encamp in valleys either side of road. Past police checkpoint … it's raining now. My friend, it's tu not vous by now, must spend the next 8/10 days welcoming her sister's friends & relatives at her place in Ramot, so despite my mild protestations she drops me at a Ramot bus stop. Give her a pack of Silk Cut – gentile she is.

Rush hour – bus 34 takes me for 3.30 shekels to near Egged bus station, the guide book says this is at top of Jaffa Road. Directions fail me (this is a regular occurrence in Israel) & I circle aimlessly seeking downtown. Arrive 25 mins later close to where I had started – Arab doughnut seller then directs me in totally opposite to true course the c*** !

Finally, English Jewess puts me on track & I descend Jaffa Road. Familiar landmarks begin to jog memory & after a couple more mistakes I arrive at my choice The American Colony Hotel & its annexe.

Shock horror … the £25 rooms have been recently spruced & now cost $120 but I need the sanctuary & Room 43 is prepared while I wander for an hour. Up to St. George's Cathedral – rosemary outside, rub hands, chapel on right St. Michael's where I pray, the organist practices, walk around the church & exit. It feels a little cold, not so happy as 4 years back.

Check out possible alternative room in attached pilgrim's guesthouse but it's stark & $40 +. YMCA is yet starker & dearer. Back to annexe for a siesta.

Wake & can you believe this, time goes topsy turvy again due to my upside down vision ! Assume it's 6.30p.m. only to discover some time later it must have been just after noon ! Gordon Bennett. Bath & change, out of garden gate for sightseeing in local vicinity.

Ace deli sells me for 10 sh. 2 pittas, a plate of mixed hummus & aubergine + a tub of cream cheese & chilli. Wander into grounds of villa, discovering it is the HQ of Jerusalem's Palestinian Supremo.

School is finishing, round & down to the Garden Tomb. Warm welcome, please come to the shop.

Gentle rain, pause. My spirits soar, that rushing internal Heaven sent exultation as I gaze upon this place where He Arose

A basket of rosemary sprigs, thanks, & enter the good shop, well run well stocked. Busy with custom getting busier as the tour people enter, keen to buy buy. Myself I buy a postcard for Consumer Forum folk and a map.

The party of tourists are I learn Singaporean – we brush shoulders as we move around the store. Good people. Heavier rain in the garden; have to close the door twice … perhaps they were born in barns !

Walk further around this 'Christian' sector of town, browse in stationery shops, gift shops, shoe shops. Sun is warm now – last port of call is the Meridian Hotel close to the Am Col.. Charming, sun facing, looks fine – agree to check in tomorrow, 'anytime' he says, $45 b&b. Had given 5 sh. to lady beggar, felt she needed it.

Snooze once more in comfort. Up 6ish, out again into old walled city through Damascus Gate –

Help small lad up steps with his trolley of bits. Thinking I am bound for Jaffa Gate area I walk purposely keeping right – blow me down with a feather, 10 minutes later I emerge outside the walls again, but it's the Damascus Gate once more ! Is this place confusing or what !?

Stick to past knowledge & walk round corner to Jaffa Gate,

left into St. James' alley & down to Jewish quarter. Not a lot going on at this time of evening, window shop & eat falafel pitta & veg from Filipino shop. Head back to hotel, losing way briefly in the old city.

Encounter Australian couple looking for a supper – try a couple of options & then walk with them to Am. Col. Where they will snack. Pleasant, only been in Jerusalem for an hour – no doubt will see them again as they are staying in St. George's.

Consult my maps & Lonely Planet guidebook in vague attempt to think where to go in following days. Drop 2 aspirin (limbs ache a touch !) & 1 Natrasleep & retire at 9.30p.m.. Read the lovely little Book of Kells got at Gatwick.

Tuesday 12th December

Up just before the muezzin calls, 5ish. More tap coffee, more cigarettes, more diary writing. Postcards to my father and to CF.

Stomach is loose this morning … surmise the cause was the falafel pocket the previous evening. Rectify (well, there's an apt word !) matters by breakfasting on 2 types of wholemeal bread, bran flakes & oat muesli with yoghurt. Cannot finish the pot of awful coffee – last time their coffee had been excellent.

Settle my night's bill. UN Major is collected by his batman. Much business goes on in this hotel. 7.40a.m. up to St. George's Cathedral with the morning eucharist on my mind but discover it had been at 7a.m.. Wander around the gardens round the back, photo of tower. Into Dean's garden – all nicely tended & plants clearly labelled some with their Biblical connotations. Saffron, bay, rosemary, narcissi, wormwood, roses, geraniums amongst many others.

On leaving pass special room, newer stained glass just visible, surrounded by throne-like chairs – maybe convocations of bishops chinwag here.

Wander some more – briefly into Old City through Damascus Gate but little action early in morning & retreat. Ask about buses to Ein Kerem where John the Baptist was born & bred – Arab bus station beneath Golgotha (a closed Muslim cemetery) doesn't go there but one opposite Garden Tomb alleyway does … No. 27 is needed.

Pack in hotel – male cleaner lets me pinch 2 little blue soap boxes. Photo from annexe roof. Lug stuff short distance & check in at the Meridian Hotel – room seems fine if view is not too hot. Deposit clothes to be laundered at reception – separated into hot & cold washes.

Hotel lift is made by Nechushtan-Schindler. Schindler's Lift …say that with a lisp and what do you get ? A fine book and a fair film.

Wander down different way towards Post Office & encounter wasteland opposite olive tree park where on previous visit I had experienced a sudden rush of wind. Saunter awhile seeking guidance then realise I am being watched by young man. Move across to olive park full of fallen Roman statue/column bits & sit on bench trying to appear normal. I have infringed on the 'gay' (good as you it stands for) encounter zone. Take one photo, and leave quietly.

P.O. comes up trumps – express PC to CF & normal airmail to Dad. Board my 43 which speeds past Yad Vashem & drops us all outside major hospital above Ein Kerem. There is no real path to E.K. but take photo of the village sitting at head of the valley. My destination today is Emmaus, or Ladrun as it's now called – they say Barabbas or the other unfortunate lived there. Ladron is Spanish for robber, hence Ladrun I guess.

On my road map of Israel E.K. → Ladrun looked 15km as the crow flies. 11a.m. now, should be there by 2.30p.m. at the latest … how wrong can one be. Path through woods of pine – give directions back to Ein Kerem to lost lady motorist. 2 mountjack deer bounce away ahead of me. Going is a little tricky but find road heading my way & follow that for many miles. Join a railway track briefly then from the map it appears I must cross to next valley north to keep in right direction. Track divides & I head uphill (mountain goat style) through thorn, ouch, rock & thicket. Gain top & decent path leads along ridge but suddenly ends. Have to descend via pipeline, fall once … this needs care. After 1 hour I am back almost where I started from – my map unpreparedness, my ignorance, my stupidity.

Frustration follows, rain falls & I walk dejected for yet more miles. Hungry & thirsty but no respite here. Take off shoes & socks to cross slippery river bed, foaming with detergent. Each turn of the valley I hope the plain will be in sight. At last passing a quarry Bet Shemesh is seen on left – it's nearly dark now. 6 hours walking & for what. Say shalom to man with rickety legs – my first words to a soul since just beneath the hospital. A lonely route. Decide enough is enough – back to Jerusalem ?

Bus stops – not going to J., going to Tel Aviv. O.K. Ladrun I say. 9 shekels 80 he decides, seems a bit steep, Ladrun on the map looks nearby. Bus dumps me in Ramlah … Ladrun he says, here. Consult map … only Lod seperates me from Tel Aviv airport ! I'm miles from Ladrun. It's chucking it down now – I tried to get there & failed. Knackered I get the bus back to J. & bus 27 to St. George's. 7.45p.m. now, bath & out for snack supper twice. Good lamb kebab, yoghurt drinks. Try to get orangina from Coca Cola vending machine – 3 shekels in, nothing out. Nothing to do with me says or gestures the patron. He bangs it, I kick it hard – still nada.

Bed very comfortable – superb sheets

I felt small today

Why try & do what Jesus did

Just be yourself, Jamie

Wednesday 13th December

Muezzin wakes me 5.05a.m.

Church bells 6.45a.m. – Eucharist ? 3 celebrants + one v.late arrival, 1 vicar. Suffer coughing attack half way through gloomy dirge-like service but return improved … decide against bread & wine but take the blessing. Disinterested vicar, little joy.

Breakfast … slightly better coffee. Nice warm milk, bran flakes & corn, Lebanese yoghurt, scrambled egg on white toast. Discover goodbye in Arabic = marcellam. Bound to forget this !

Pick up free booklet @ reception The Holy Places Today by M.Basilea Schlink – looks good. Bookmark inside reads :

Believe that

God only humbles

and tests you in

A message

suffering so as

for my

to show

yesterdays

you all the
todays and

more good- tomorrows

ness in the

This assurance end

will enable you

to overcome

in suffering

MB

First port of call is good little stationers nearby for 3 foot ruler. Select the straightest from choice of 5. Damage … 9 shekels (£1.80, v. reasonable). Next to Am. Col. Shop for camera strap, explain didn't get back till late yesterday, boss can't find where his son may have put the embroidered ropes – promise to return p.m..

Drop ruler back in room & off for intended day of Christmas shopping … after all I clocked up a lot of mileage the previous day & calves, feet & knees are in need of soothing. Replaster water blister on toe.

Coffee, coffee brain says (Sainsbury's now all used) – excellent Turkish + cardamom in glass after it settles near Damascus Gate. Drizzle continues. Up towards Jaffa Gate where at summit veg vendor has dropped most of her turnips (?) over the road. Cars & lorries squash them mercilessly. Pick up a couple for her, rain should clean them. Her son stands by, twiddling his thumbs.

9a.m. now – Tourist Info Centre just inside Old City – woman on phone, pick up map of OC courtesy of H.Stern the

jewellers. Big arrow You are here – good that is. Browse in Christ Church shop opposite David's Tower where Allenby quelled the rival passions. City starting to awaken. Rothschild Craft Centre not open till 9.30a.m. so descend to Jewish quarter.

Examine T-shirt collection & other wares. Buy chi (χ) plate and end of line white (well off-white cos it's been on display for ages) dove number XXL. Good lady owner takes my Nat West cheque for £11. Her husband directs me to best coffee shop in area, The Quarter Café – strong black with milk. Enya on the musak system ! Take 2 x panorama of good view of Golden Temple & Mount of Olives.

Around & about a bit, back & down to Wailing Wall. Refused entry at bottom left corner & given short shrift by Jewish orthodoxy. Tell geezer he's very welcome in a Christian place, more jabbering at me so "up yours", I rudely say – apologies sir. Find correct tunnel & am straight away in Arab section of town. 2 Colombians are struggling with bartering system – help out as best I can in Castellano (pure Spanish). Owner pleased, or is he just after my business ? Coffee offered … sucker me parts with 30 sh. for v.nice box … business terrible he & his opposite shopkeeper tell me … not surprising if you hassle Europeans, they don't like it I try to explain. Sucker punched again into buying 3 hand painted Armenian plates (3 colours variations on the Tabgha mosaic), but get baksheesh square tile. Another 30sh. spent I think, it's hard to recall some of these protracted negotiations. Part on good terms. Sales patter continues as one leaves.

Left into Via Dolorosa by Simon of Cyrene corner. Head down & slow walk seems to avoid much of the Arab sales pitch. On left is wonderful little chapel of the Little Sisters of Jesus. Quiet prayer & then photo. Discover branch exists in U.K., one in W.10 one in Hackney take down addresses & phone numbers. I like the name and I liked the place, although felt a touch queezy about the lower chapel which merited a

quick in & out. Pope in 1964 was here, says plaque. Nice, very nice French prayer sheet also taken.

Shop for the blind has ace brushes but too cumbersome for air travel so buy 36 wooden clothes pegs – find out later, made in China, but assume packaging done by the blind. Continue up Dolorosa, eyeing goodies for perhaps later purchase. Reach Jaffa square again. Down St. James' once more – pee stop in Rothschild Centre, exhibiting fine art & jewellery etc.. Sigh their book & comment 'beautiful handiwork'.

5 shekels for a suitable camera strap without much hassle then I'm out of local currency so it's Bank Leumi time. Problems with their telephone so I try other bank (Mizrahi) but they close for lunch so it's back repentantly to Leumi where after longish wait (Bedouin has even longer wait than me … maybe they are not quite sure who he is but he looks very honest to me & a fine fellow) my 250 shekels (£50) arrives.

Fine soft red cotton shirt – 30sh. 'no messing around here', unable therefore to bargain cos it was a bit dirty !

Family concern down Dolorosa again, good man has an 'everything for 3 shekel section' & interesting bric-a-brac. Come out with beautiful belt made by his niece/cousin ?, a battered but bonito cigarette tray holder thingy & two spare pawns, both intended for Consumer Forum. The chess set there is always missing pawns for some reason !

Map of Jerusalem bought nearby plus loaves & fishes XL T-shirt blue (25sh.) then towards Damascus Gate (bag is getting heavier & heavier) – 2 tubs of cinnamon, 1 of ground cardamom (9sh.). Barrel box (70sh.) including free tea with sage (pas mal) – Islam/Jew/Christian discussion + chat to Head of Commerce (VIP) in Arab areas. Cat Stevens apparently now numero uno in esteem … mention incident involving Georgie Chichester (now Leyland) when he sad & asked her to enter his Rolls Royce late one night … suspect this tale put the cat (!)

amongst the pigeons as good Muslims are not supposed to this style of thing. However, nobody's perfect, not by a long chalk. Shop owner is personal friend of Yussuf/Cat. Please to learn good Islam dead ringer for good Christianity – interpretations of Bible & Koran etc. often muddy the still waters that He provides.

Last purchases in the Old City were a pack of 4 knickers for me (10sh.), 2 mini tiger balms & 2 brilliant hessian Christmas stockings for the 2 girls, & 3 lemons outside for 1 sh., plus a 1 sh. roll. + 1 jar coffee (11 shekels) + 2 packs of Dunhill = 18 shekels.

Oh, the hazards of diary writing the following morn. I omitted 2 events of importance.

First I encountered on the Via Dolorosa, clattering down with his metal walking frame, a middle-aged man to whom I gave a 10 shekel note, in to his hat. Turns out he's, 5 years ago, been touched by a 30,000 volt electricity cable which shored off his scalp, fried his skin, chopped off half one foot & twisted his body. Coping OK but I tell him, as he can't afford the Israeli medical help available, to go & ask at Rothschild's Craft Centre for the dosh to get him to U>K> to have a metal plate fixed above his exposed brain. Tell him that in U.K., psychiatrists zap people too ! Too bloody much if you ask me ! He's incredibly lucky to be alive & I wish him everything he needs.

Event 2 was pleasant sojourn, coffee. photo in church at Christ Church above Immanuel opposite David's Tower & already mentioned. Here, on the exhibits of earlier this century & before displayed, on portrait of Michael Solomon Alexander there is a sticker saying who this is which looks to me done in my mother's handwriting. Kevin is the man to ask I'm told by Argentinian lady but Kevin don't know (he's Australian) but will try to find out for me & leave message at reception. Ta, Kev. Mum was here during the war you see.

So back to Christmas shopping. After 4p.m. I head, after unloading first batch, through Hassidic section of the new town to Jaffa Street chewing on one lemon ! Am looking for cufflinks, selfishly for me, which proves a complete no-no. Serves me right.

No Mozart tapes anywhere, fair coffee & heavyweight bagel on George V Street. Batiques, silk cushion covers look not bad – may return. A few stocking fillas amuse so I get them … 13.50 shekels. Fine store at bottom of Ben Yehuda Street yields loads of Christmas presents for family members & friends.

Goodness gracious it's 8.20p.m. now – head hotelwards, naturally get lost again trying to be too clever … these streets honestly, where's my sense of direction gone. Supper en route, caramel milk (bueno), some pastries in Jewish zone & a slice of pizza.

Bed, exhausted, after bath 9.45p.m.

A good day

Merci Dieu

Tu es vachement chouette à moi

Merci encore

Je t'adore.

Thursday 14th December

Up early to scribe away, tap water is cold so coffee pretty disgusting.

What to do today la di da ?! All my washing was returned on my return to hotel the previous evening – beautifully done, all for 56sh. which I still owe Out at 5.45a.m. – clear

skies. Down to Arab Bus Station, not a lot moving at this time of day. No coffee shops open. Board first bus to Bethlehem, the 6.05 a.m., which arrives at 6.30a.m. Am the only passenger by the time we reach B. Up hill to central square. Israeli army still in their pen but less frantic than 4 years ago. Ask one of them where I might get a coffee ? He shrugs, bemused & gestures me to north end of square. Aha, settle in café to enjoy a coffee/cardamom & secure a can of 'Pip's Cola' for her stocking.

To the Church of the Nativity at bottom end of square – am first (?) grockle to enter through low small door that day. Drawn to far right corner where flowers, pictures & a crib lie above portal leading down to grotto from where emanates chanting of robed man. Fire extinguisher in left corner.

Ground floor level to immediate left of Mother & Child icon/painting and right hand column of grotto's stone door frame steal my attention. 2 or was it 3 photos in the candle light before one of my throat spasms hits me again – coughing sporadically I seek the outside air in adjacent courtyard cloister into whose flower beds of impatiens (?) I retch and spit thrice.

Some Italian nuns, "buon giorno" one says, are scurrying to their service at St. Katherine's which lies alongside the Church of the Nativity. One more photo as my composure returns. Bright sun greets me on return to main square.

Short morning stroll around the back streets following children on their way to school & then back to bus stop. Return journey to Jerusalem marred by over-efficious young soldier who checks virtually every car, demands I.D. papers from nearly all our bus people. Somewhat rudely I thrust my maroon passport in his direction, "British", I say, muttering about how unnecessary all this over zealous check-point Charlie stuff is.

Road to J. Jamming up so driver takes good short cut which lands us at base of Zion Hill..

Get out here & discover by Alexander Café a mini museum explaining the 3 man operated (by hand) cable car system which crosses the valley to the Old City. Devised in 1948 or earlier by brilliant engineer whose name escapes me – URIEL that was it !, manned by the British during the mandate to restock the western Jewish sections of town. Kept a total secret, the cable wire being lowered to valley floor during the day, and not revealed until 1972. Mossad must be clever.

Walk up Zion through lovely gardens past King David's Hotel being done up, past the dreadful design of the imposing YWCA and head for breakfast. 9.25a.m. am past official time but kindly given all I need. One hour's kip. 10.40a.m. catch the 27 to Jaffa Road & descend to look for bank to get dollars cash & travel agent to reconfirm my flight home.

Score on the former at main Israel Discount Bank but it turns out that agent I seek is at 108 Ben Yehuda in Tel Aviv not Jerusalem / Good bloke at IDB branch had helped me here. Turns out there is a BY Street in every town. BY invented Hebrew language in 1920's.

Walk all the way up to Central Bus Station, central is hardly the word ! Stock up with caramel/mocca milk, an egg salad baguette, Israeli strawberry chocolate bar & a ½ litre mineral water, Neviot. Am now ready, I hope, for an afternoon's stroll from Bet Shemesh to Ladrun.

Get off bus one stop too soon which adds a kilometre or so. Down to where the last trek had ended then across country Ladrun bound.

Suffice to say that some 5 hours later, through thicket, groves of olive, peach & orange, along paths tracks and road, through villages new & old, with sparrows, falcons,

wagtails, pipers and a kingfisher eyeing right then left then right again, threatened by a Rottweiler (wooden stick came in handy but wasn't needed), I ultimately reached my destination. Yet again I had taken the great circle route. Oh for a 1" Ordnance Survey map !

Under the Tel Aviv ↔ Jerusalem motorway to Mehlaf Latrun & the ruined Church of the Beatitudes.

Overgrown park/garden on north side holds more magic. 2 photos in the virtual darkness. Time to return. Thumb out for 35 minute in cold weather. Hebrew only man in smart car drops me at Nevaresset Junction. Toda (thanks). Espy 'one of my favourite things' (Julie Andrews) – a shopping centre ! Quick wash & brush up of self & mud clodded shoes after an expensive expresso. Prices here are quite a bit higher than in Jerusalem but enjoy my sojourn in more stylish surroundings. Visit to large Co-op yields mini sacks of chocolate shekels, a cheap pan scrubber & yetanother doughnut !

Bus back to J. Also goes via the great circle route through smart suburbs. Then the old 27 back to base camp.

13 shekels for my supper of 2 white rolls (not enough wholemeal bred in the diet here), one tub of aubergine pâté, one tub of red cabbage salad, one low-fat honey yoghurt and a can of the marvellous Mitzli peach nectar. Now that's what I call value, although my guts could use more roughage.

Wash hair. A pretty good day all in all. At last I had completed my Ein Kerem to Emmaus walk. Tiring at times but worth it I wonder ?

The deed's been done anyroads ! To sleep 9.30p.m…

Friday 15th December

Early start again – it's really my best time for writing I feel. More luke warm tap coffee … this Maxwell House stuff, made in Germany, is pretty disgusting and doesn't dissolve properly. Sugar seems unnecessary, and Israel only has white sugar anyway.

Friday is the Moslem Sabbath so I should perhaps concentrate the day's activities in the Jewish areas ? Down to Post Office, up & right, then left down through Jaffa Gate. Things are quiet this early. Compose what I hope will be nice photo of moon, cypress trees & Moslem symbol on top of tower in main Jewish square. Nowhere open for coffee.

At length walk up Via Dolorosa – shot of donkey ascending. Had seen a few sheep earlier being herded around these narrow alleys – imagine that in Soho say ! A variety of motorised transport is able to negotiate these twisting, stepped & paved little streets. The best is a mini tractor pulling a trailer, made by Holder I think.

Near Damascus Gate I finally get my cup of coffee Arabische – a tad expensive here but pleasant. Pass the lady street vendors with their vegetables & fruit –

Maybe there's more action up in New Jerusalem. 9a.m. now. Pee stop in café beneath the Hapoalim Bank Tower but their water isn't hot yet. Corner shop hasn't got change for a 20 note for a 9.50 shekel pack of blue Dunhill Lights but seems to be dealing in $100 dollar bills for another customer ! I window shop awhile around this excellent shopping zone.

These few streets of 2 storey houses were built 140 years ago – the first Jewish settlement outside the Old City. Brave pioneers into Palestinian territory. They now house a nice mix of shops, restaurants, cafés etc. … a bit like London's Covent Garden. Some wonderful goods meet my eyes.

Cigarette seller at last can give me change. Then I discover the Café de Colombia (best in the world I reckon) but it

transpires they import the ever present Italian Sanfreddo variety. Nevertheless, 3 pretty waitresses (one particularly so !) please me & a large glass of frothy white coffee tastes good.

Shopping time. More Christmas presents secured at French run place who has spectacular selection of 'ethnic imports' – from Peru, Ecuador, Kenya & Indonesia to name but four. Buy 2 beautiful mobiles, painted wooden animals & a bird letter opener, all for 200 shekels on Diners Club card. One more painted wooden bird from another shop & wondrous Indian ? embroidered sash for 37sh.. It's worth so many times that. Weeks of work must have gone into such fine needlework some years ago. A glossy modern fridge magnet from Alexander's up Ben Yehuda then I'm seeking a canvas/cloth bag because all these things aren't going to fit in the Argos rucksack !

Breakfast had been a wholemeal bagel – one bakery in town only doing them it seems. Down for a deli lunch in the Old City going via Christ Church for another pee & to see if Kevin had left me any note … non, not yet. Hot sun & fun in the central Jewish square as I snack on hummus & small white plaited loaf – v. good. Shop below looks brilliant but my eyes were bigger than my wallet as usual & I exit with a good bag (60 sh. on Diners) perfect for its intended role.

Everything closing now (1p.m.) for siesta. Refused entry to Dome of the Rock sector cos it's Moslems only today. Explain to guard that he would be very welcome any day of the week in a Christian church. Allowed to take photo though.

Had earlier revisited Israel Discount Bank at op of BY Street where Mark, busy as a bee as ever, had efficiently helped me get 250 shekels more.

Masses of Moslem ladies leaving their holy worship as the Arab quarters come to life. Round the back streets, photo of fine gateway – later turned away from Dome zone despite it now

being emptier.

Path leads me towards Lion's Gate. 3 shekel entry into the Bethesda Pools & adjacent St. Ann's Church & gardens. Here Jesus healed a very sick man, "take up your bed and walk". Two crosses, well 8 actually, 4 on each stone pillar base mark the spot. 2 photos.

Out of Lion's Gate – men at entrance of Moslem cemetery on right would like 5 shekels if I want to walk therein. Politely decline & reverse direction up the Stork Walk, left past the Rockefeller Museum then right back to hotel – small siesta is the intention. ½ hour's rest, settle up my account in dollars & shekels, try to telephone to reconfirm my flight but no reply on the 3 Tel Aviv numbers at 5p.m.. 5.10p.m. into Garden Tomb. Peace. Chat to volunteer from Guildford. 2 photos. Leave quiet & happy.

Wander up to new town again but precious little happening – where does everyone go on a Friday night ? Yukky egg mayonnaise roll before back to St. George's Bazaar (opposite Cathedral) to buy a 30 sh. lovely silver spoon then to the best deli in town. Tonight it's a mango nectar, a schnitzel/potato/mayo pitta sandwich grilled on both sides, a bread triangle filled with spinach (?) & herbs dunked into a tub of cream cheese/cucumber/chilli & other vegetables. How's that for 12 shekels ? Israel can be expensive but if you root around bargains abound !

Bed, believe it or not, at about 8.15p.m.

Saturday 16th December

My last full day, I trust, in Israel. Check in time is 11.55p.m., 3 hours before take off again, but despite trying all three numbers of Issta in Tel Aviv yesterday evening many times there was no answer. Hence not a confirmed booking … fingers crossed.

Out at 5.45a.m.. Secure a pack of Rothmans Lights (better than Dunhill Lights, milder) and a good coffee opposite Damascus Gate. Streets are very quiet indeed – Jewish Sabbath but another holy day for Moslems it transpires later.

At the Arab bus station directly underneath Golgotha seek out a No.36 to Bethany. Too early it seems, so I walk. Down past Garden of Gethsemane, uphill round the Mount of Olives, graves to the left graves to the right, gently descending as the road twists and turns. Schoolchildren in danger as there is little pavement.

Eventually after some 4 miles a Greek (?) church on the right beckons. Try door, closed. Walk around their olive grove & take photo or view back towards Jerusalem. The dry desert hills of Judea lie to the north east. Back up to church gates – knock twice, answered by old lady gardener who gestures it is not open.

These Greeks only open their churches to 'tourists' one day a year in April. Closed shop Christianity.

Head back & soon discover what I'd inadvertently missed on the descent. Lazarus' tomb & attached Pope John Paul V1's Franciscan Church. Up the hill to back of church, rubbish strewn everywhere. A couple of tourist trade stalls but opposite church entrance is site I had hoped to see. Declaring itself to be the 'oldest house in Bethany', it is the little home of Mary, Martha and their brother Lazarus now neatly kept by Mr Rabah Elyan who seats me down, proffers a weak Turkish coffee from his thermos, a second cup of instant after the house tour. A well, out of service now, dominates the ground floor, upstairs in a round room, seating with hubbly bubbly pipes & carpets for decoration, he holds services for Moslems & Christians. Terrible sob story about how hard his life is, 170 shekels in debt to the electricity company, mother dying of a heart problem (?) "2 aspirin", I advise, Moslems trying to buy the house & turn it into a gift

shop, roof leaking, put in prison by the Israelis, no money for school fees etc etc..

Begins to grate after 10 minutes or so. How much to believe ? Offer to help as best I can – it would indeed be a crying shame if this important site, the home of Jesus' best friends & scene of the raising of Lazarus from the dead, were to disintegrate.

In need of peace I go down into the airy, pleasantly glass domed with doves, well furbished church after taking photo inside. His friends' dining area. Cigarette in the garden out front pondering all the while my course of action.

The man seemed genuine, had given me a cigarette, a glass of coffee (returned) – I handed him 50 shekels (half of my remaining shekels near enough) – "for your mother", I say. Pray to Allah for her. Back towards Jerusalem, some way up the hill I discover my remaining Dunhills and lighter are missing. Had I left them in the garden ? Is it worth returning ? A niggling doubt remains but I strongly suspect this man has a little pick-pocketing habit. My jacket pocket is an easy target.

Forgiveness is offered if my thought is right but to steal, however meagre the item is wrong, & a lesson must be learnt.

God sees all.

Further up the hill a flurry of sparrows draws my attention to a house. Chickens are penned in the nearby shop and merit a photo. Trudge back to the Old City and enter at Lion Gate.

10.30a.m. now, have to vacate my room by 12 noon.

Get cross with Moslems at the cemetery gate, how dare they charge 5 shekels to enter if one ain't a Moslem ? Get cross again as access denied to Golden Dome of the Temple precinct (yet again. I had tried before setting off to Bethany).

Gates closed everywhere, one 'tourist gate' exists somewhere but I'm not sure I've found it yet … it seemed easier 4 years ago.

Small lecture ensues on how Moslems are welcome in Christian churches, are we not equal ? The whole square kilometre was closed off all yesterday for Islam + much of today I learnt from some Dutchmen. Yet this site is special for Jews & Christians too, why not let us roam your square at will – ok we'll give you your personal time in your mosques but please let us in at those gates. We mean no harm.

They have much to learn.

Discover new streets, alleys and tunnels in this maze of a city. Pleasant time in the Ethiopian monastery, tiny cells for the monks & a good man to show me round. Photo.

Greek sector very much doom & gloom (likewise the Armenian quarter walked through yesterday) but enlivened near Jaffa Gate by throngs of happy children.

After an Arab honey roll on up to Christ Church once more for a make-it-yourself 2 shekel coffee & friendly souls. No sign of Kevin or any note for me. Walk back to hotel who say kindly, don't rush, room's ok till 3p.m.. Half hour rest then neatly pack up all my belongings and gifts.

Several hours to dispose of before it's time to leave. Garden Tomb not open till 2.30p.m. so enter Damascus Gate once more. This time it's thronged with \Saturday afternoon Arab shoppers & a struggle to walk with thousands of people + cars too large for these widthless streets.

Jewish quarter still dead quiet. More rounding and abouting – revisit shop to but 2nd aerial view map of Jerusalem OC then revisit marble box shop to explain to the owner & his VIP friend that the acre of Garden Tomb garden is forever freehold British, protected by an Ottoman 'Furman' … solid Islamic Law

& not on a lease as he had inferred. Part on good company. Tourist Information Office closed ! … all day Saturday. Not very helpful, eh ?

Shop in Christ Church shop by their gate, one more map to frame & a lovely little book on new visions of Jesus. 10 shekels the two.

One more cup of coffee, enjoyed in warm sunshine outside. Into & around the church. Pray in sunshine corner at left of altar rail, past the piano & outside again. Meet Kevin who has yet to have any news but I leave my address.

Down the steps & ramps again, out at Damascus once more & to just about my favourite place here, the Garden Tomb. Long chat with the lady keeper of the gate as many Romanians enter (they are used by the Israelis as the British used the Irish … nigh slave labour), some Russians, some Australians. Long chat just outside with German Jewish émigré to Kenya who knew my mate Chris Nevill … holocaust memories of Einstein, gold even amongst the Germans … Schindler and many others who suffered for their humanity.

Long time spent in the tasteful gardens … move this way and that. Photo of Skull/Golgotha hill – to Large & Small Chapels. Good guardians here. Quick visit inside tomb, no sonic booms this time as I exit His temporary sepulchre (as there had been on my last visit).

Cocoa the cat moves out & in – back inside to the warmth of the shop. Say my adieus.

Venture back to Ben Yehuda zone … the miles I clock up on foot … only cafés are open. Locate the Menora candlestick (old) that I had my eyes on. 420 shekels less 20 % vat & so on. Tant pis, the jewellers is closed all day Saturday.

Decide not to wait till 6p.m. when things may open & it’s back to St. George’s after a talk with Abraham at the Bazaar shop.

Quick tour of the Cathedral (closing up time !) & the Guest House (ground floor rooms look very nice).

Back to Meridian Hotel to book a taxi to Ben Gurion as there are no city buses today. It's going to come at 9.45p.m.. Back to the deli this time for cherry yoghurt, tub of not quite so good aubergine pâté & 2 pittas. 5 shekels only.

Eat my supper in a quiet corner of the American Colony garden with a cat for company. Marcellams & inch'allah to the hotel shopkeeper.

2 good coffees & a few more cigarettes in the Meridian lobby awaiting my 30 shekel ride to the airport.

Ford Transit van arrives, converted for seating. Dump kit in back & leap in. We pick up 2 further passengers in poorer Jewish quarter – one young guy going back to U.S.A. with enormous suitcase after just 2 weeks stay. Second pick up (hard to find) is very large lady who has ¼ of a ton of luggage which is rammed into any space available squashing everyone else's stuff. She herself squashes next to me on back pew, coughing & sneezing all the way past Ladrun to the airport.

Check in area is busy busy so I sojourn outside – large lady with large luggage is bemused, wants El Al. I help load her bags onto a trolley & off she toddles.

Time to kill is spent part outside, rain now, part in emptier arrivals hall where hippy is taking inordinate length of time to read each page of a Carlos Castenada book. Maybe he has swallowed his remaining stash of 'Red Leb' … it certainly looks that way.

11.30p.m., off to check in my Argos. Queue some time for the security check before check in. Here we go again. 4 years ago each item of my belongings had been minutely examined, the most intensive search I had ever encountered in all my

world travel which I hazard a guess is amongst the widest.

The same questions, the same training for these girls. Where have you arrived from ? Where did you go in Israel ? When did you book your ticket ? The list goes on and on … receipts are checked … more questions. Has anyone given you anything ? Have you at any time left your luggage anywhere ? This last question proves my undoing temporarily. Shock horror, I mention the word Arab ! Yes, I left my bags in the hotel during the afternoon in the security/customer service room by reception. First lady hands me over to second more trained lady.

Entire first 15 minutes of questions are repeated word for word, intonation for intonation. I'm starting to get bored of this. She has severe trouble understanding why this man can travel independently – no tours, no packages, no hotel reservations.

The last hurdle is an extraordinary question. Have you made any friends during your stay, has anyone invite you to their home ? One of the joys of travel is now reduced to to a perceived threat to the Jewish nation. But I pass this final frontier – Eton/Christ Church smarm finally disarms her & a faint smile opens a crack in her door. Yellow/black pass stickers are applied all over my now scattered bits.

Oh Israel – such paranoia … this is an English flight on an English plane. Don't be so scared. Are there no sensors/detectors which could do this job for you … spotting your feared weapons or little packs of Semtex ? Surely yeah.

The path at last begins to clear, although a mass of trolleys make movement difficult. Bag checked in … rucksacks to a different conveyor belt once more. Upstairs through the buzzless (that's rare) portal & slump pretty knackered in the glitzy duty free area. Phew.

My remaining few shekels are spent on 2 Disney puzzle jigsaws

– till operator gives me them for 11.70 rather than the true cost of 12sh. Toda. He knows where Enya lives; most northerly point in all Ireland but is listening to the Pogues on his music machine.

Carton of Silk Cut, ½ bottle of cheap Israeli red wine & pack of mineral mud soap from Duty Free. My new bag strap snaps … mind you it was quite heavy by now.

Board the 757, reassuring Rolls Royce engines. Lift off 3.10a.m. local time, it's Sunday. Two ladies on my left keep themselves to themselves.

Better flight & food this way. Nod off from time to time.

6a.m. UK time touchdown at Gatwick.

Meet 2 travellers in waiting area who have been in Dubai. She had been stared at relentlessly – some Arabs so rarely see an inch of flesh.

Bag pick up goes fine, cruise through green zone, one is allowed £126 of gifts & I'm below that easily methinks.

Rather nasty 65p expresso … none of the cash dispensers will take a Nat West card & I've got £3.35 cash left. Trouble with computer signs on the train platform leads me & the 2 lovely ladies who had been next to me on the plane to board a Thameslink number causing us to change at East Croydon.

One gives me the Romanian recipe for the aubergine pâté & I try to advise what would be nice for their week in London & environs. Suggest Southwark, Covent Garden & St. Albans, maybe Oxford.

First train has 4 nicely done hand drawn pictures, 2 at each end of carriage. I sit on seat in line between one of St. Mary's Battersea, the Wren church where I was married and at the far end is one of St. Alban's Cathedral.

Exit at Clapham Junction, buy travelcard, 5p left now. Longish wait on a Sunday morning for the 270 down Garratt Lane.

Gulls, crows, pigeons & sparrows enliven the cold. A heron passes high.

Door to Atheldene is stiffer than usual but yields to a shoulder.

9a.m. now … answermachine is flashing, 5 calls this week, bills & more pleasant mail pile the doormat. Spend some time arranging montage of my shopping & take photo number 36.

Thank you Lord for lovely holiday – hard grind at times but more than a million moments of utmost revelation.

I will stay with you if you stay with me

I will follow you forever

Follow me, bevakasha

It's your show

Vidame

J x

The End

Copy of Diary 1980

This really follows on from the end of the letter to Bernard Levin, the last section of which tells the story of the

previous days :-

Wanda tells me the way to Lymington from Bristol – Bath / Warminster / Salisbury. The sun is hot that day and I am crying tears of happiness because God had brought me home some 800 miles, through the French train strike and Paris, all the way to be at Mary Rose's side when her soul ascended into heaven. And he had shown me at that final gate at Frenchay Hospital that men often have clouded, faithless and unloving personalities.

So me and Morris trundle off through Bristol, through that beautiful city of Bath to Warminster. Nature called in Warminster i.e. j'ai du piser un coup & I found a little cafe on the High Street – there was a nice old lady behind the counter and a poacher too ; then a country yokel came in and came up to the bar where I was. On glancing down at his jacket pocket I said to him, " Do you realise that you are carrying exactly the same things in your pocket as I am ? ". We were too … one of those digital clock/calculators re-covered in cloth material, the same silver felt tip pen, Silk Cut, matches etc. He works on Lord Bath's estate & has a beautiful silver cross too which I lack at the moment but my body is my cross. Well, yet again, Morris wont start so he helps me give her the customary push and we're off again … " See you on the Judgement Day ", I shout to the farm-worker.

Morris then sets me off on the road to Salisbury, all along the chalk escarpment, past the White Horse, past stone age settlements, tumuli etc.. Salisbury Cathedral (I still haven't been inside) was looking miraculous as we climbed the hill heading out to Southampton. Across Salisbury Plain, with those rather worrying signs saying – BEWARE TANKS CROSSING – I prefer cows myself! Then via Cadnam to Beaulieu where most of the Chichester family were clearing out a copse at a ruined cottage on the river & having a bit of a picnic . I help for 3

hours or so, cutting, stacking, burning etc. And by no means do I tell everyone there about my week's mission as it could easily upset people. God tells me what to say and when to say it.

So at about 6p.m. I return towards London, stopping off to see Sir John Chichester who was looking after the house and taking the incessant cliched telephone calls. Well. they're not all clichéd but many are. Sir John understands & even Susannah, their 10 year old whippet, she knows. I give 2 hitchhikers a ride from Brockenhurst to Chandler's Ford and the Morris reaches London in good shape in time for supper chez nous at Altenburg Gardens.

Then I go to bed, mission accomplished – & sleep like one of those logs !

Copy of Diary 1980 (continued)

Monday 21st January 1980

I telephone Carole, my middle sister, my muddled sister, to tell her the sad news – " Did she commit suicide ? ", says Carole …

" Give me Andrew", I said, restraining my pent up anger. He understands and doesn't act.

I return my salopettes to Alpine Sports – the queue-barger woman. Then have a long rap with Tom Bovingdon up in Harrod's Olympic Way about golf nets, people and ancient ledgers.

To Basil Street … Doc 15 minutes late. Supertramp 'Child of Vision' playing as we near Guy's Hospital (my birthplace 13.7.1954) Keat's House – for my homeopathic appointment with Anthony Fry. He's ½ hour late as well. Prescribes Lithium Carbonate, " Slow down kid !" . Say goodbye to Michael (Doc) and hop into Buttercup. I am intoduced to to Revelations 14 – the references to the Lamb, Syon (Zion) Hill etc.. Amanda Fitzalan-Howard comes for tea – fresh baked bread and chai. Colour selections – has to dash off to see her knitters. Take loaf of bread to Bishop's.

9.30p.m. arrive at Gail Bishop's house on Leatherhead Golf Course – snacks from the kitchen. Gail understands and so does her pitiable sister but the new boyfriend refuses to open up – & was a a right Bolshevic. Morris stalled 200 yards up the road. A fine household of people.

Back to town at about 2a.m. …

Tuesday 22nd January 1980

4.30a.m. or so Morris and I set off towards Heathrow, but needing gas, we stop at the garage on North End Road at Baron's Court & guess what, she doesn't want to leave. Not even when 2 Frenchmen give her a push – " Prend élan ", they say to me on leaving. Bizarre mais la verité. So I shove Morris round the corner & leave her for the day outside M.Cornelle's flat which was probably one of the safest spots.

Then it's autostop to H'row – one man stops but he's not going far. Bless him anyway. Then a taxi takes me to Terminal 1 for £6-50 – quick breakfast served out by some rather ignorant Indian ladies, then at 6.40a.m. British Airways set off to Paris – headphones on amongst a pleasant mix of people. Manage to get hold of the death announcements in the Times/Telegraph when I'm 25,000′ up. Arrive at the appalling Charles de Gaulle – how does anyone manage to find their way

around that tubular monstronsity ? 30 mins wait at the bank – papier, papier, toujours papier !

Then bus into Gare de L'Est – meeting a friend en route to whom I give the threepenny bit. Arrive chez Didier at roughly 11a.m. – il attend le plombier. Post letters to Chris Sandford and Wanda re Revelations 14. Speak to Marie on phone twice – pauvre petite – tired at first then having to work on the 'Corail'. Didier and I clean up the flat – take chai – then kip for 2 hours. 100 francs for Didier, sending package. Then out to Samaritaine for 3 frisbees, dried fruits, olive oil, Greek wine, M.C.Escher book for Sue (Gernaey), stickers, peppercorns, taramasalata.

Remarkable quartier environ de l'église ST. ÉSTEPHE – blending of Forum Les Halles and the counterculture cobbles. Back to Didier – ring Cha & then Jill Frederick's sister. Then metro with Colombian sack & hessian sack full of gifts – musicians abounding underground. Arrive at Les Invalides virtually broke to take bus to Orly – an almost deserted airport nowadays. Catch Kuwaiti Airways flight back to H'row, one of the most enjoyable flights I have ever taken – then back by tube to Baron's Court. Spoke to guy called Chris Parfitt who had just returned from India. Yet another believer. Morris starts first time !

Sue and Patrick's drinks party – then off to Kim and Françine for supper and so to bed.

Whatalong day.

Wednesday 23rd January 1980

Morris heads off to score & discovers she can't do much about traffic jams in the Queenstown Road. Meet Robin, Charlotte, Sarah & baby Adam – then another old Morris drives me back to WKP 795. I decide to give her a rest outside Raven Records.

Addison Lee take me to Anthony Fry at Guy's (what a dull driver … I had to resort to my headphones to avoid listening to him !). Anthony is 20 mins late (Doctor's prerogative) but I practice a little Dari in the waiting room.

Then walking over London Bridge, past Greig Fester. New patisserie on Gracechurch St., talking politics. Down Central Line to Holborn / change to Piccadilly & arrive at Knightsbridge. Then walk to Albert Bridge & find taxi after Diners' Clubbing another (No.3) Sony 121 + headphones. Collect Morris from Raven Records.

Telephone Maggie Lapiner, tracing hr to Perivale. She tells me she's just starting in a pub, the 'Seagull', between Southall & Greenford. So I storm up there; Maggie looking lovelier than ever, play the juke-box, have our halves of Guinness and smoke a few fags. Then off homeward bound, Morris really firing on all cylinders ! Set off on a search for Benhams (unable to find), Bennett's … " not in gym shoes, sir ", la di da di da di da. So up to Françoise, which looks as though a bomb hit it. Then on to Fingal's (Fulham Road), closing but waitress recommends Sloan's. That was closing too as was the Hard Rock – what a sleepy city we live in.

So it's back to Altenburg for scrambled eggs on toast.

AND

SO

TO

BED

where the festivities continue – superbon

extra.

Thursday 24th January 1980

Maggie sleeps on, bless her heart. Then off we go for another day in the life of. First stop Nat West Pont St. at 10.15a.m. but the new manager is unobtainable. My old friend Mr Mycock has retired – he wouldn't have bounced a cheque for £250. Troubles with the Technocrats. And so on down to Heathrow with Maggie, my gorgeous friend. Morris stops at the wrong terminal. Object find Gail. Friends help & Gail is paged from the departure lounge.

Maggie and I were standing at the iron gates in front of the departure channel when, from nowhere it seemed, six sisters or nuns were buzzing around us, like little hummingbirds. A most beautiful moment it was, then Gail appears through the doors to receive her gift – the Sony & phones, 3 cassettes, 2 candles and a card saying ' Go as you are ' – all wrapped in a sheet of the Times in a Raven Records bag ! We buy some more Duracells, then Gail has to go … to Moscow then Kenya.

I introduce Maggie to my friends up at the coffee shop & we eat some lunch. Then it's bye bye – me going to Sunningdale, Maggie back to Perivale. Hand over my sneakers to the Pro's Shop and play 13 holes with Peter Breeden – he 2 over par, me a bit ropy but not too bad. Then set off for my 4p.m. appointment at Allen & Overy (Solicitors) – I'm ½ hour late cos Morris stopped on a roundabout by the ' Compleat Angler Hotel ' – fine black guy helps me out & we tow start her … give him £2 for his trouble.

Ted Molt says hello in Knightsbridge (he used to have Morris convertible). Reach A&O – Sir Godfrey Morley, Colin Welsh, Derek Sloan. £360 cheque from mum's estate. Derek stays to hear the week's events and hands over Mange 2's company memorandi. Mange 2 is born ! Glowing orange fire-ball sun over Buckingham Palace as I was driving back down the Mall.

Supper chez Franny & one non-believer. Nick Porritt, Losely man, Charlie. Mark Fielden calls. Depart at midnight …

Friday 25th January 1980 **VISIONS**

3a.m.

The Spire on the Hill

(St. Marks)

Doves †
Courage

The White Cat

The Song

Solsbury Hill

Peter Gabriel

Bath … laughing about the Game, the Great Game

Sunday 24th February 1980

5’ish to Syon Park with Sue Gernaey & Rufus (dog). The whole tour from Harry Percy. Syon ↔ St.Paul’s. Obelisk & gifts.

Monday 25th February 1980

Window cleaner. Mr Unigate & suit. Mr Halsey, news of Mycock. ” Never cut out to be a bank manager ” … ” Well, none of us are really “. Harrods Book Dept.. Julian & Georgie for tea. London Window Co. and Sotheby’s talk. Jehovah’s Witnesses. Doc Michael, house supper for 6 and laughter. Toast … absent friends.

Tuesday 26th February 1980

‘ Living by numbers … does it all add up to you ? ‘ Calmate,

Sue. Message re Gail dizzy, call Jamie at Dixons on Capital Radio. Gasmen bring the wrong clock. Take fishcakes to Jayne Phillips, Majid Saud, Dr. Kelly & Harry P. at Priory + mushroom. Morris no go. By bus past Northumberland Arms to Altenburg. Walk to Clapham Common bandstand – clock configuration. Letters from Kitty & Jayne – former with silver cross & chain. The present †. Tea-time re Dr. Flood, talking of AJPS. Amanda brings her creations (jerseys). 7.15p.m. to Sue & her telephone – Rufus returns.

New Genesis album in 10 days. New single … ” Turn it on again “.

Wednesday 27th February 1980

Up with the birds and dustmen. Thinking of Lady Mary Rose Williams (mum’s best friend) and Mr McNair-Wilson (Lymington M.P.) and connections thereto. Lady at the crossroads … ” I’ve seen you here before “. Touch cures nausea – ta Sue P. Rang Gran – she saw eclipse in Kenya. Outing to Graham Millar (trustee) – the evil Bolingbroke story & Mr Inglis at Touche Ross – back via Sainsbury’s with nausea continuing. To bed at 1p.m., Jayne rings with news of Harry at 2.30p.m.. Poisonous pesticides killed the peregrines.

More nausea – calls to Desmond Kelly & Harry.

Thursday 28th February 1980

Dizziness