

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 , unbonding 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ 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 $\frac{1}{2}$ 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 Palestinian 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 Shalazar 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,



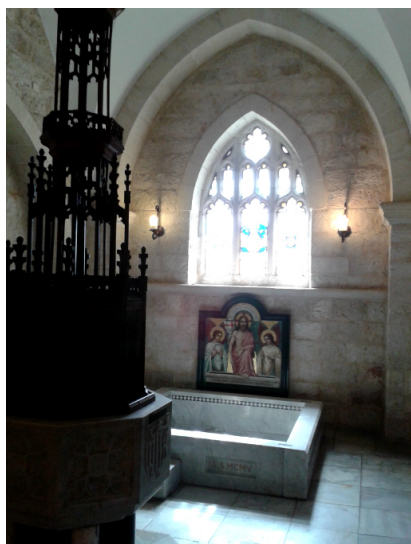
the Dean, assisted by Saleem the Deacon and Justin Cheng (seminary student at St. George's College from Vancouver).

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 Scopus 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 cobbler's 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 Jacob 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 Uzbekistan (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 scatological.

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 Sisyphus 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 chains 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.

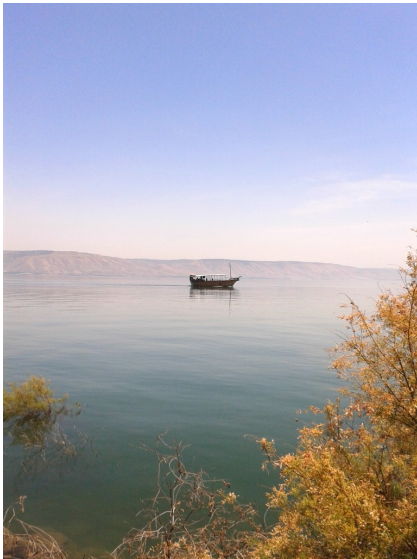
Eran's wife and family are charming and informative – I learn the reason why my neighbour on the aeroplane was invading my space ! It turns out that Hasidic Jews dislike women and his neighbour in the aisle seat was a woman – honestly, how ridiculous is that?

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 \$2.99 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 Uzbek 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 Uzbeki 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 \$150 – 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 \$350 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 as 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 Uzbeki 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 rigmarole – 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.