

England
15 November – 1 December 2019

15 Nov 2019 - Friday
Dallas

It felt like we had forever to get prepared for the trip, and then all of a sudden, we had 5 more minutes and needed 15!

Cliff drove us to the station again so we could catch the light rail to the airport. It takes a while (about 1 ½ hours) but you cannot beat the price (\$4.50 for us both).

Had wine, pot stickers and pizza at Crue, conveniently located directly across from our departure gate while we waited for our 5:00 departure.

Flew American Airlines this time: cashed in frequent flyer miles so paid next to nothing for the flight. Had good exit row seats (just the two of us) with lots of leg room. Unlike our last several flights on American we actually sat in the seats we booked!

Had a couple of oddities on this flight... one call for a doctor, and one passenger who spent 20 – 30 minutes in the toilet (which was right in front of our seats) on two occasions. The first time figured he was dead or sick – I actually felt compelled to flag a flight attendant down to say something, but as we were talking, we heard a flush and decided that he was OK. He did emerge a few minutes later. Managed to sleep for a few hours – helped in no small part by the excellent (and free) red wine we were served.

16 Nov 2019 – Saturday
England

At Heathrow we had to deplane using stairs, and then took a bus to the terminal. There was a huge line of people going through passport control (which was entirely automated: only had people to handle the problems).

Took the train from the airport to Paddington Station. Decided to take the tube to Kings Cross. Tried to use our old Oyster cards but they had been cancelled so had to buy new ones. Had great difficulty paying: the machine would not accept our credit cards, so we ended up paying cash but even that was problematic. We later discovered that the Pounds we had left over from our Belfast trip last month were different than English Pound notes, so that was probably the cause of the cash problems.

Were confounded by several tube line closures, and had to take a circuitous route, but finally arrived. Bought tickets for Hull, had a sandwich at the station, then waited for a long time due to several delays in the departure of our train.

It takes about 3 ½ hours to get to Hull. As we went North the sun appeared and it turned out to be a lovely looking (from the comfort of our train car) day. The scenery is, as always, fascinating to watch (when we weren't napping!). Mainly farmland and small towns.

Hull

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Arrived about 20 minutes late (not that we cared!). Discovered that we were not booked in the same hotel we stayed at last time (the Holiday Inn Marina). Instead we are in the Holiday Inn Express which is right across the street from the train station. The city seems more built-up and has more people than the last time we were her.

Checked in, had a drink at the hotel bar, found the Italian restaurant at the harbor we remembered from our last visit on the map and decided to go there for dinner.

We had both napped off and on during the train trip up here and felt relatively refreshed.

The area around the harbor is surrounded by construction and appeared to be well off the tourist route so we were glad that we were not staying there again.

The restaurant has apparently changed hands a lot since we were last there but looked much the same and still offered great food at a reasonable price, and they are now offering dry aged beef steaks. We may be back tomorrow if we don't find someplace better.

Walked back to the hotel, had one last drink at the bar and (finally) crashed about 8:00 pm.

17 Nov 2019 – Sunday

Hull

Slept late – Kathleen got up (before me) at 9:00.

There apparently are a lot of people staying at this hotel – the (free) breakfast area was packed. Saw many people yumming up the beans (yuk!).

Went to the train station first to buy tickets to Liverpool and Rye. Learned a lot from the ticket agent about how to purchase tickets. Apparently, there are very many websites that sell train tickets online, but not all of them are a bargain. He recommended that we wait until we get to Liverpool to buy the tickets to Rye.

We really hadn't seen much of the old town on our previous visit (ironically, Facebook reminded me that we were here exactly 5 years ago!), having been more focused on the immigrants (trans-migrants, more correctly) point of view. Decided to spend time in the old town and headed for the Minster.

The weather was cool and overcast but not unpleasant as we walked through the pedestrian-only area of town. We passed lots of pubs but saw few restaurants.

The minster was interesting. Beautiful, of course, and in need of renovation on the exterior. Inside we noticed the relative absence of traditional pews (there were three rows against the wall) and the use of normal chairs that could be easily reconfigured. They were set up around the baptismal font, apparently ready for a baptism, when we were there. The also had a cafeteria in operation, and I noticed a play area for children. It gave the impression of a multi-purpose building being utilized as needed rather than a "church".

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Walked further north to the museum district. Most were closed, but the Museum of Transport was open (and free) so we popped in. Saw a nice collection of cars, motorcycles, bicycles and trains – well worth an hour's time.

Went on the nearby Wilberforce house which was also open. We had been there on our last visit but were short on time so did not see it all. Kathleen wanted to see the Plantation Life exhibit on the 2nd floor. Glad we did – learned a lot.

We hadn't had any lunch and decided a beer or two and a bag of chips would hold us until it was time for dinner, so we stopped off at a local pub. Once again, we were reminded not to judge such places from the outside. It didn't appear to be much of anything from the sidewalk, but found it to be large, interesting and full of people on the inside. We enjoyed a couple of hand-pulled local beers (and some chips) and enjoyed some discrete people-watching.

Thus refreshed we walked down to the harbor in the growing darkness and admired the harbor near the statue erected to commemorate the trans-migrants who had passed through on their way to somewhere else.

It was early for dinner, but we had decided to eat at the same restaurant as last night and did not feel like walking to the hotel and back again so decided to stop in at the Holiday Inn where we had stayed last time to have a few drinks to kill some time. It seemed almost vacant and we were again grateful that we hadn't booked it for this trip.

Dinner did not disappoint us... We ordered the dry-aged Sirloin with some pasta on the side. Once Kathleen got over the trauma of mistaking a large piece of fat for fish, we both thoroughly enjoyed the meal, which we capped off with a serving of chocolate ice cream.

18 Nov 2019 – Monday
Hull

A somewhat early travel day – have a 10:40 train to catch. Hadn't unpacked much so packing up wasn't much of an effort.

There were only about 10 people at breakfast – quite a contrast to yesterday.

Walked over to the train station after breakfast to try to get some better pictures of the immigrant building. It turned out to be a cool but brilliantly sunny day which helped with the pictures. Got onto the old platform (just ignored the "Don't Go There" signs) and got some good pictures from there as well. Had coffee in the Railway Hotel – part of the station, but we had completely overlooked it until this morning. It looks like a nice, old hotel We will consider it if we ever do return.

Collected our luggage and checked out from the hotel (booked with frequent stayer points – not charge!) and boarded our train for the first leg of our journey. We will change trains at Huddersfield. Its been fun to be on some longer train trips again. I had forgotten how much we enjoyed them.

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I especially wanted to do this leg to get some feel for what it might have been like for my ancestors and the millions of others for whom this was their only view of England as they passed through on their way to their new homes across the ocean.

Liverpool

Arrived about 20 minutes late: our layover at Huddersfield kept getting extended. We ended up waiting 40 – 45 minutes instead of the scheduled 20 minutes.

Bought our tickets to Rye when we arrived. We had already decided to take a cab to the hotel, which we did. Good thing too – it was a long way, and I'm not sure we would have found our hotel on our own. It was after 2:00 by the time we got checked in, so we went to the restaurant next door and had fish and chips. We were both hungry, and it was very good!

Jumped on the "Hop On/Hop Off" bus (the last departure of the day) and got a good tour of the city. Walked around the Albert docks area afterwards, took a ton of pictures. The buildings and Christmas lights were reflecting off of the still water – made for good pictures.

It was cold – settled into the Pump House pub to warm up, have a beer and plan tomorrow (our anniversary). Should be a fun day.

Decided we were not hungry enough (after our fish and chips lunch) for a full dinner so walked to a nearby Tesco Express and bought cheese, salami, crackers, cookies and wine. Camped out in the large lobby of our Holiday Inn Express (we did buy a glass of wine so we had some wine glasses) and sat there munching on our snacks and drinking our wine until 8:30 when we went back up to our room for the evening.

Discovered a major flaw in the Holiday Inn Express model – no plugs near the bed! We have to put our iDevices on the desk to charge. At least this one has built-in USB ports: the one in Hull – which had just been remodeled – did not.

19 Nov 2019 – Tuesday
Liverpool

Our hotel (Holiday Inn Express) is located in the old Albert Dock building – a massive, iron and brick structure built in the mid-1800's. It apparently was threatened by destruction but was eventually saved and has been renovated into hotels, restaurants, stores and museums. It would have been a shame if it had been torn down because it is magnificent. The rooms and hallways in the hotel are quite large. Breakfast is identical to every other Holiday Inn Express we have stayed in while in Ireland and England. Good, but we are both getting a little bored with it.

Started the day off exchanging anniversary cards. Hard to believe how the years have flown by. Walked to the nearby Maritime Museum which had a variety of exhibits including one floor dedicated to immigration. Stopped in the archives and got information on the docks used by the shipping companies in 1903 (they all mostly used the same one). According to the archivist we talked to the Allen Line ships departed from the present-day Cruise Terminal dock near the Princess Dock (the Landing Stage). He said

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that the train would have arrived at the Riverside Terminal nearby. He said that there is no remaining sign of the terminal and little information available about it.

We also saw exhibits about the Titanic (the White Star Line had its headquarters in Liverpool), the Lusitania and both world wars.

Walked over to catch the 1:00 Mercy River Ferry tour. We were happy to be sitting inside – it was cool but far better than being outside on this cold and blustery day. No rain though!

Then walked up to the Western Approaches WWII Museum dealing with the management of the Western Approach during WWII (the Battle of the Atlantic). It was largely set up as it was left at the end of the war. It reminded us both of Bletchley Park and the War Rooms in London. It's a bit rough now but will probably improve and evolve over time. It was very interesting!

Got brave and went into the Pig & Whistle pub across the street for a beer. Kind of rough inside, and cold: they were having problems with their furnace. Sat in the back room alone except for the large radiant heater they turned on for us and a steady stream of people going and coming and going to the upper floor carrying pillows ???

Tried to settle on someplace for dinner but nothing we read about online looked good. Ended up walking – did manage to see some of the bars the Beatles played in – before deciding on an Italian restaurant (Gino's on Castle Street) that turned out to be a good choice. Kathleen's lasagna was really good, and the pepper sauce that came with my ribeye was delicious too.

Stopped off at the restaurant near the hotel (where we had lunch yesterday) for a nightcap, then back to the hotel.

20 Nov 2019 – Wednesday
Liverpool

Another cool, overcast, breezy day greeted us when we woke up. We had planned to take a cab to the station to catch our 10:40 train to Rye but decided over breakfast to walk the mile to the Lime Street station instead.

The ticket agent who sold us the tickets on Monday was quite helpful. Got us a really good fare (61 pounds each) and gave us instructions on how to get between stations in London.

London

Arrived at Euston and began what should have been a 15-minute walk to St. Pancras. The way was well marked – at first. We missed a turn somehow. When we finally checked on location using the phone, we were 17 minutes away! Got back on the path and began to race to catch our train.

Once at the station we had a hard time finding our platform (we weren't sure of our train's final destination). Then we had trouble getting through the ticket barrier (we had 2 tickets – it didn't want the one the train conductors had been examining – it wanted the other one). I got through and up to the eminently departing train first. When I looked back Kathleen was still at the ticket barrier.

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She finally got through and ran (along with another woman who started out ahead of her), getting onto the train (after catching up with the other woman!) moments before the doors closed and the train departed.

We had about 20 minutes to collect ourselves before changing trains at Ashford International and catching a local train an additional 20 minutes or so to Rye.

Rye

Rye is a small town, hillier than we remembered from our previous visit, but we soon found our hotel (the Rye Lodge) and were soon in our large and comfortable room.

Studied the map the hotel provided and considered their recommendations for dinner before walking down to the store to pick up some wine to have in the room. Checked out restaurants along the way – they were all closed! Dropped the wine off in our room and walked down along the river below our hotel for a while.

Next, we walked to the Wine bar we discovered on our way to the store. Had some excellent wine (and nuts!) and learned from our hostess that the restaurants all closed in the afternoon and opened in the evening beginning around 5:30. Googled the steakhouse and saw that it opened at 6:00 so just relaxed, enjoyed the wine and the jazz being played.

Dinner was.... Kind of disappointing. Our steaks were more like steaks we have had on previous trips: kind of tough with not a lot of flavor. The fries were good though.

Returned to our lovely room through the increasingly cool and windy evening and called it a day.

21 Nov 2019 – Thursday

Rye

After breakfast we walked down to the river Rother and followed a path along side away from town for a while. Turned around when we reached the railroad tracks. Apparently, the river gets quite a tidal surge (Rye is about 3 miles away from the ocean) and the river appeared to be quite low. There are a lot of boats (many fishing boats) sitting in the mud.

Walked back around to the south end of town and began meandering the streets, stopping in at some of the many shops we encountered. This town apparently thrives on pubs, restaurants, antique shops and stores of various kinds. The streets are narrow, twisty and hilly. It was difficult to get across the street at times – we wondered what traffic must be like in the summer.

We stopped in at the train station to buy tickets for tomorrow's trip to Canterbury, but the agent was at lunch. Looked at the ticket machine and decided there wasn't much incentive to buy in advance: it is a short trip that doesn't cost much. There is a train every hour.

Ate lunch at the restaurant we ate at on our last visit – had salmon cakes served with boiled potatoes and a rare (for England) green salad!

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Decided that a slow, rainy, cold day such as we were experiencing would benefit greatly from a massage, so we booked us both for a 1-hour treat at 2:45 at the Rye Retreat near the train station. Retreated to our hotel to read and relax.

The massage was good – had hot oil! It was a large salon – lots of places to get hair and nails done with a large spa in the basement. 130 pounds for us both.

Afterwards we walked around and shopped some more. I bought some Beatles socks as a gift for Jean. Turns out that Paul McCartney has a house nearby – his four children went to school in Rye.

Ended up back at the wine bar before dinner, which was at the Thai place near the hotel. The predicted rain started up while we walked the short distance to the restaurant.

Much to our dismay every table was reserved, but the staff (two women) did some quick rearrangement and squeezed us in. We had arrived shortly before 7:00, and after we were seated the people poured in and the place was soon full. The meal was delicious!

They were putting up the Christmas lights when we arrived on Wednesday, and they were all illuminated today. They really make the town look festive.

22 Nov 2019 – Friday
Rye

Since the trip to Canterbury is short (and we cannot check in until 3:00) we elected to spend some more time in Rye. We checked out but left our bags at the hotel. Walked north of town, up a hill and found the site of the Rye Union House, an old workhouse. It was next to the Rye cemetery where many of those who died while working at the workhouse were buried in unmarked graves.

The cemetery was right next to the workhouse and was full of old tombstones. Left at the back of the cemetery and followed a walking path through a sheep pasture back into town.

Kathleen bought a wooden duck for Mary, then we collected our bags, walked to the station and caught the 11:47 train to Canterbury.

Canterbury

It was a short ride to Ashford International where we had a 20-minute wait before another 20-minute train ride to Canterbury. Bought our tickets to London (cheap! 10 pounds each, and direct to Victoria Station).

The town is quaint and beautiful and (today) full of graduating college students. Apparently, graduations will be going on all day and into the evening at the Cathedral.

Our hotel is right on the cathedral grounds. We even got a special pass to use if we get locked out when the gates close at 9:30 pm. The room is small (double bed) but functional.

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Had big lunch (at a bar that closed at 3:00 for a private graduation party), then walked around the city – a lot. Ended up at a pub, decided dinner was out of the question so just had a beer. Found a Target-like store sold munchies, picked some up and returned to our room.

We had ordered wine as part of our lodging and they delivered – not great but nice to have (I swear my Merlot bottle was in a re-used screw top bottle!). Kathleen created a video while I updated my website with information I had discovered about my ancestors who trans-migrated via Liverpool.

Later we transferred to the library to take advantage of their more comfortable chairs.

23 Nov 2019 – Saturday
Canterbury

Our room was warm, and I couldn't figure out how to adjust the temperature, but at least we could open the windows, so we were able to cool it off enough to sleep comfortably in our small (twin) bed. It was very quiet.

The breakfast room was full of people and offered a nice selection of eggs and salmon. Nice to not have scrambled eggs for change!

Started off at the nearby cathedral. Staying here certainly is convenient. It is on the cathedral grounds which (with the exception of graduation day) is a place you need to pay to enter, so it is a bit removed from the crowd of tourists visiting the rest of the city.

Although the forecast called for clouds the sun broke out, so it was a beautiful morning. Walked around the outside of the cathedral first. Found a few vantage points where the scaffolding was not visible and got a few good pictures.

The cathedral looks big from the outside and even bigger from the inside. It has several levels and seems to go on forever. Even with the scaffolding (there is some inside as well) it is a beautiful structure.

Walked next to experience the Canterbury Tales, a somewhat kitchey but still informative introduction to the author (Chaucer) and the story. In a town that appears to be short of museums and other tourist attractions it was a good choice.

Had a lighter lunch (scones for Kathleen, soup for me) and watched the rain move in. Made dinner reservations at the Weavers, bought a book for 2 pounds at Oxfam and returned to our room to avoid the light but persistent rain and to rest a bit.

It was nice to relax – we both read, and I slept for a while. But we were ready for a nice dinner: ready, and disappointed.

Service was slow. They had several featured steaks – most were unavailable. Our first choice of wine was unavailable, and our second choice (a Chianti) was really acidic. Not our best meal.

Met a woman struggling to get her suitcase into the cathedral grounds when we returned. She asked us for directions to the cathedral hotel, so we walked the short distance with her. She had just arrived from

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Moscow (only a 3-hour flight) to visit her daughter, who was 14 and who has been attending school here for 2 years.

24 Nov 2019 – Sunday
Canterbury

Another cloudy morning, although the weather apps claim it will get less cloudy and warmer. We'll see about that....

The breakfast room was busy again this morning. At least 50 people there while we were eating (the room could handle another 20 or so).

Kathleen has us booked for a 11:00 walking tour of the city. We decided we had enough time to walk East of the central city area to see the St. Augustina Abby site. Although it is mainly just runes now there was a lot to hear on the audio guide they provided (part of our 8 pound admission fee) so we only got around part of the site before it was time to head back to catch our tour. Glad we went through... amazing how much archeologists and historians can learn from a bunch of old building foundations (the area had apparently become quite overgrown).

Our tour met at the entrance to the cathedral grounds and was really interesting. It brought a whole new level of meaning to the streets we have been walking and the buildings we have been admiring. And it explained the origins of the terms "Eaves Dropping" and "Spinster", whether the stories were true or not.

Had lunch, then walked around and window shopped in the light mist and cooler temperature (so much for the forecast!). Found the more commercial part of town that had sidewalk booths set up and selling all kinds of clothes, gifts and food – very festive and enjoyable.

Kathleen really wanted to hear the choir in the cathedral so she went to enjoy the 3:00 evensong and I came back to the hotel – can't beat the convenience of this location!

25 Nov 2019 – Monday
Canterbury

Another cloudy, cool day with rain forecast all day. Hope to see a day or two of sunshine in London!

Have a 11:00 am train so took some time for one more walk around town in search of a plastic knife so Kathleen can enjoy some jam ("borrowed" from our hotel at breakfast) with a Texas-sized scone left over from our Saturday lunch on the train to London. Settled for a wooded stir stick from McDonalds. Shopped a bit on the way: Kathleen bought a book for Mary.

Checked out and walked back to the train station (no rain yet!) only to discover that our direct train to Victoria Station had been cancelled. We will now go back through Ashford International and catch a train to London from there. All trains were delayed (due to "engineering work not completed on schedule") but eventually caught one at 12:33 – lots of stops on the way, but the last one will be Victoria Station.

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London

After all our talk about taking a cab we decided to take the underground to the hotel. Stopped at the Underground Store in Victoria station to add some money to our Oyster cards. For some reason my card was "Invalid" and I had to buy another one. Kathleen's worked without a problem.

Checked in at Dolphin Square – our room is way in the back. Should be quite though. We went out to buy some wine and a few snacks and came back to plot out our itinerary for the rest of the trip. Having made our "wish list" of things we wanted to see and do a few days ago really helped. We have a fun week ahead of us.

Decided to try a local restaurant and found O'Sole Mio right on Belgrave road. It was fabulous, and popular. Shortly after we were seated (we arrived about 7:00) people began to pour in. We were really lucky to have gotten a table. Kathleen's cannelloni and my steak were both delicious!

26 Nov 2019 – Tuesday

London

Breakfast was a little disappointing... lackluster service, slow to refill my coffee, omelet I ordered was overcooked and the filling was all lumped in the center. Fried eggs tomorrow!

First up for today was St. Paul's Cathedral. Initially the big attraction for me was going up in the dome, but we both quickly realized that we had never really visited the cathedral before. We later remembered visiting when it was really crowded and only having spent a short time there. So, we both really enjoyed the experience. The audio guide provided a lot of information.

Kathleen decided to join me in the climb to the dome, which they say has 528 steps. I lost count but believe them. It was a bit of an effort, but the views were magnificent. Enjoyed lunch (and resting) in the cafeteria in the crypt afterwards.

Walked next to tour the HMS Belfast. It was warm (in the 50's) with intermittent rain showers, but not enough rain to get in our way. We both enjoyed visiting the ship, aided again by a good audio guide, even though it involved going up and down a lot of ladders. We were both amazed at the complexity involved in running a ship like this.

Took the tube over to Victoria station and found a fun-looking Italian restaurant nearby to relax and enjoy a leisurely dinner before walking the short distance to the Victoria Palace Theatre for the performance of Hamilton. Were blown away by the quality of the performance in the first act and disappointed (but only by the plot) in the second act.

Elected to walk back to the hotel, enjoying the mild temperature and the lack of rain.

27 Nov 2019 – Wednesday

London

Our hotel restaurant needs to hire an egg-chef... I had to use a knife to cut my fried eggs.

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After *that* ordeal we went to Westminster pier to get tickets for a boat ride initially planned for this afternoon, but the sun was unexpectedly out so we seized the moment and took a ride to Greenwich and back. It was nice enough on the way there to sit outside, but it got cooler and started to rain after we arrived, so we sat inside on the way back. They were shorthanded so the snack bar was not open. Too bad – I would have enjoyed a cup of coffee!

Made our way through the rain to the Imperial War Museum. Started out with lunch (pizza with a salad for both of us) at their cafeteria. The museum has been completely upgraded since our last visit. We both really enjoyed (and learned a lot) in the WWI exhibit, but we spent the most time in their excellent Holocaust exhibit. What made it unique were the many pictures and videos of interviews with survivors and others with first-hand experiences. They had to chase us out when they closed at 6:00 pm.

We had 7:00 reservations at the Goya restaurant near our hotel and arrived at 6:50. Got a nice table and a great meal. Skipped the tapas – I had steak and Kathleen had dover sole. Both came with green beans, carrots, boiled and roasted potatoes. We may go back there!

28 Nov 2019 – Thursday - Thanksgiving
London

Decided to give the egg chef one more chance and ordered scrambled eggs with toast. Got scrambled eggs *on* toast (go figure). But at least they weren't hard!

I decided that the massages available here at the hotel were a little too fru-fru for me, so I decided to book one just for Kathleen. Good thing we did – she got the last available appointment (at 4:30). I found a Thai place not too far from the hotel – Thai Studio Pimlico, 37 Churton Street – 90 minutes for 75 pounds – at 2:00.

Walked to Harrods in the cool, cloudy but dry (no rain) morning. It took about 30 minutes but if felt good. Bought a Christmas runner and six placemats and 3 ornaments (two Germans for us and a Nutcracker character for Mary) and did a bit more shopping before going down to the food hall for lunch.

They have changes things there a lot... you now need to check in with a hostess to get seated. It seems to have really reduced the number of people, and hence the circus-like atmosphere, that we have encountered in the past. It is really a nice, relaxing experience now. We chose the Grill and had a Caesar salad with some sour dough rosemary bread – good, and just enough to preserve our appetites for dinner tonight.

We processed our VAT refund (still need to finish at the airport) and then I left Kathleen to continue shopping while I dropped our purchases off at the hotel and went back out for my massage, which was thoroughly relaxing and enjoyable.

Met Kathleen back at the hotel before she went down for her 4:30 appointment. It gave me time to take a shower and rinse myself off.

A few thoughts on hotels in England....

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- They have not caught on to the need for electrical outlets near the bed. It has been a real challenge to find outlets to charge up our phones.
- They also don't seem to think that that towel or clothes hooks are anything that they need to provide for their guests. This is especially puzzling in the bathroom. Our room here at Dolphin Square at least has a heated towel rack, although we have not been able to figure out how to turn it on.
- They also don't make it easy to regulate the temperature. We have been opening windows every place that will allow us to do so to cool in down enough to be comfortable (somewhat.... I'm in a T-shirt right now and I am quite warm).

The London underground is still magnificently effective – a quick, easy way to zip from here to there with minimal effort (or time). We seldom had to wait more than 1 or 2 minutes for a train.

Our long-anticipated, booked months in advance Thanksgiving Dinner was almost a disaster... We took the #24 bus and encountered near-gridlocked traffic going through Parliament Square. The walk from Trafalgar to the restaurant took longer than expected. When we finally arrived at Simpsons On the Strand at the Savoy hotel they had no record of our reservation. When Kathleen showed them her confirmation, they pointed out that she had booked dinner at the Savoy Grill instead

Luckily it was nearby, and good. Oddly enough, they also offered a "Traditional" Thanksgiving dinner, which Kathleen had booked for herself when she made the reservation. I went for the ribeye.

The service was outstanding, as was the food, and especially the wine, a Pomerol selected with the help of the sommelier, who put on a very elaborate show as he opened and decanted it for us. Kathleen had told them it was our anniversary, so they gave us some delicious sweets at the end of the meal (we were really happy we had skipped ordering deserts as were both really full).

Kathleen wanted a Benedictine after dinner so went to the hotel bar, where they served us more snacks and we listened to the almost good jazz singer perform with a live band. That gave me a chance to realize that I had dropped my reading glasses and the time to retrace my steps back to the restaurant who had them for me at the hostess desk.

Took the bus back to the hotel... there was flash mob of Santa's at Trafalgar Square – hundreds of them singing Christmas carols while we were waiting for the bus.

29 Nov 2019 – Friday
London

Woke up to a beautiful blue, cloudless sky for the first time on this trip. It cooled off overnight – 39 degrees now, but it should go up to 45 before cooling off to 35 again later in the afternoon.

Took the tube up towards Camden Market (Warwick Avenue on the Bakerloo line) to catch a barge ride on the Regent canal. Arrived early so had time to walk around first. The area along the canal near Paddington Station looked like it might be a fun area to stay the next time we visit London.

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The boat ride lasted about 50 minutes and was informative and enjoyable (we really liked the lap blankets they provided – it was cold!). Arrived right in the heart of the Camden Market. Didn't buy much, although we enjoyed looking and had lunch there.

Took the bus back towards the heart of town. Got "diverted" on the way. Didn't realize why until we got off to walk and ran into a demonstration... Seemed to be for the Green Party/support for the need to act on Global Warming. We were impressed by the number of police and the way that they directed/protected the marchers.

We later heard that there had been a stabbing/shooting at London Bridge at about the same time... busy day for the London Police!

Went into the National Portrait Gallery at Trafalgar Square to use the bathrooms but decided to take a quick tour as long as we were there. It is a great way to get an overview of British history.

Stopped at a pub on the way to Convent Gardens to rest our weary backs and water down the days dust. Then moved on to do more shopping (but buying nothing).

Had lots of time until our 7:30 concert at St Martin of the Fields so pulled into a bar/restaurant at the north end of the shopping area. Got a (relatively) private and quiet table in the bar and enjoyed talking and watching the many people around us (inside and outside) over a bottle of wine.

Decided to reprise our Bella Italia experience at Leister Square but found that two of the three locations had closed. Just beat the crowd into the remaining locations and got another good table – in the corner and not crammed in with everybody else.

Managed to sit just a little longer than we should have and had to hustle to get to the church on time for the concert. It was Vivaldi (the Four Seasons) again (after the intermissions). Sounded good to me (but what do I know?), and our seats (a box in the balcony with real chairs and cushions) were enjoyable.

Our friendly #24 bus brought us back to the hotel after 10:00. A long but enjoyable day!

30 Nov 2019 – Saturday
London

Last full day!

Walked up to Leister Square to get some tickets to a play later this afternoon (hopefully) or evening. Got there about 10:15 and had a bit of a line, which gave us time to finalize our choices. We got our first choice: Noise Off at 2:30.

Headed down to the Borough Market and enjoyed walking around and admiring the variety of food available. It has changed since our last visit – more food ready to eat and less food to take home and cook. Definitely catering to the tourists and those who want to buy something ready to eat.

In spite of all of the choices available nothing looked good to either of us, so we headed towards the theatre and found a good restaurant nearby. It was on the 2nd floor – not yet busy when we arrived, but

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it became increasingly crowded as we waited for and ate our meal (BLT for me, hamburger for Kathleen).

The service was slow so by the time we finished and paid it was time to head to the theatre. The Garrick theatre was a nice, small place and the comedy was witty and enjoyable.

Took the bus back to the hotel to pack – also called and made a reservation for 7:30 at O'Sole Mio.

Walked back up to the restaurant for our last dinner and really enjoyed it. We had a table near the window, the Cannelloni and Spaghetti Lobster were well prepared, the 1 ½ bottles of wine were eminently drinkable, and the desert was just the perfect end to a great meal and a great vacation.

1 Dec 2019 – Sunday
London

Up earlier than usual for the trip home. Decided to take the tube to the airport so took the Victoria line to Green Castle and picked up the Piccadilly line to Heathrow (terminal 3), which took about an hour.

Started to collect the VAT but decided that the wait in line was not worth the \$15 or 20 we had coming back so skipped it.

Had 40 pounds cash left over and tried to change it but the agent pointed out that they would charge us 5 pounds to convert it and suggested we spend it in the terminal instead. So we bought a bottle of Spanish wine for Cliff to thank him for the rides to and from the light rail station.

Had a short delay in boarding, which was good for us because gate 42 was at the very end of the terminal and we were running a little late.

We are sitting apart, but least we both have aisle seats. Mine was just behind the 2-seat section near the emergency exit so I had lots of leg room. Kathleen did not have anybody sitting next to her in the middle seat so we both had some good luck with our seats.

The airplane was a Boeing 777-300.

We landed at DFW early (shortly after 3:00 pm) but had to wait for our gate to free up. We both are Trusted Travelers, so immigration was a snap. There was the usual wait for our bags, then we had to catch a shuttle over to terminal A to catch the light rail back home. They were doing maintenance work on the tracks downtown, so we had to get off the train at Victory Station and take a bus to the Pearl Street station where we got our blue line train to White Rock station. It was after 6:00 before we finally arrived there and met up with Cliff for the ride home.