

“No Deal” Zimbabwe

Tom Benyon OBE



Canterbury to Oxford — Summer 2019

Reg Charity No 1112949



Dear Reader

British journalist Rod Liddle once asked former Rhodesian prime minister Ian Smith what he thought would happen if Mugabe became leader of Zimbabwe.

“He will be there for 30 years and murder or imprison all his opponents,” Smith replied. In an age where forecasts are usually awry, Smith’s was spot on.

People ask why nothing has changed for the better in Zimbabwe now that Mugabe is gone? The reason is simple. Mugabe’s cronies – responsible for the murders, chronic mismanagement and state theft that took place under their leader’s watch – are still in power. If they concede an election, they know they could end up facing charges of genocide.

Today, there are about 3,000 people running the country. They have enriched themselves at the expense of the people who now look to ZANE for their survival. Chronic inflation is back as Zimbabwe’s economic crisis deepens. Many basic foods have become rare luxuries: most people have long since stopped buying milk, cheese, yoghurt, meat and fruit.

ZANE cares for pensioners, including veterans and their widows, who are facing water shortages, major food shortages, 18-hour daily electricity cuts and relentless fuel queues.

Life in Zimbabwe towards the end of 2019 has never been bleaker. That is why Jane and I, together with our dog, Moses, walked from Canterbury to Oxford. We walked to advertise the plight of those who have no one other than ZANE to turn to. We walked because your kindness enables ZANE’s loyal workers to provide aid, love and comfort to those who need it most. We walked because the people supported by ZANE and your generosity need our help.

I hope you enjoy reading this walk commentary, which for the first time includes Jane’s contribution.

If you have already sponsored us, thank you. Your donation is already assisting those who need it most. If you haven’t, please do so.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Benyon". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. Below the signature is a horizontal line.

Tom Benyon OBE

PS: Please note that the publication and distribution costs of this booklet are covered many times over by supporter sponsorship.

Where appropriate, the names of walkers and hosts have been changed to protect confidentiality.



Canterbury to Oxford 28 August to 11 September

START	Canterbury Cathedral	Thu 5 Sept	Wotton, Dorking
Date	Finish Points	Fri 6 Sept	Guildford Cathedral
Wed 28 Aug	Wye, Ashford	Sat 7 Sept	Mytchett, Camberley
Thu 29 Aug	Bethersden, Ashford	Sun 8 Sept	Barkham, Reading
Fri 30 Aug	Sissinghurst, Cranbrook	Mon 9 Sept	Chazey Heath, Reading
Sat 31 Aug	Hook Green, Royal Tunbridge Wells	Tue 10 Sept	Brightwell-cum-Sotwell, Wallingford
Sun 1 Sept	Groombridge	Wed 11 Sept	Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford
Mon 2 Sept	Gatwick, East Grinstead		
Tue 3 Sept	Charlwood, Horley		
Wed 4 Sept	DAY OFF		

FINISH

On completion of this walk, Tom and Jane have walked over 2,550 miles for the frail, destitute and helpless in Zimbabwe.

“No Deal” Zimbabwe

A quick check list: toenails trimmed, new(ish) hips in place, one half-new knee doing its job, a steroid injection to prevent pain in my antique-road-show back, creamed feet and plenty of “Compeed” to avoid blisters.

I have new sunglasses, assorted hats, Leki walking sticks – and the best boots ever invented, made by Meindl. This pair has lasted two ZANE walks already. Of course, they are manufactured in Germany – they’re so well made, I wonder how on earth Germany lost the war?

Great Aunt Daisy used to say, “I can’t afford to buy anything but the best”. Of course, she was right, for all my cheaper boots were more or less rubbish. As the great Bernard Levin used to say, “Write, ‘There’s no such thing as a bargain’ on your mirror each day and remember it.” He would have got on well with Daisy.

Small World

I discussed ZANE’s walks with Rory Stewart recently when he was the Secretary of State for DfID (for about a month). He’s an excellent chap and has agreed to walk for ZANE when he is not plotting to bring down “No deal Brexit”. All I have to do is pop up to Penrith sometime. I told him I was sure ZANE supporters will understand my starting the ZANE walk from Canterbury to Oxford from Penrith – for it’s a small world these days, and

what’s a few hundred miles among friends? All it takes is imagination!

What’s It All About?

Why are we walking yet again? Well, talk about a cliff edge – because Zimbabwe has been thrown right off it.

Long-standing ZANE supporters will know that each year I claim that conditions in Zimbabwe couldn’t get any worse – and each year, they do get worse. We walk to remind everyone that Zimbabwe is in a terminal state caused by gross incompetence and corruption. Its government is run by about 3,000 rich people, who really couldn’t care if the rest of the people starve. For many years, the government has simply not paid its debts so it’s hardly surprising that the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the EU and so on refuse to bail them out.

For so many of the poor, ZANE is their only hope of survival. The Mafia government has turned the bread basket of Africa into a racist beggar’s bowl. There is no healthcare and no NHS; and unemployment is at 95 per cent while inflation is currently at 500 per cent. The bulk of the young, strong and well-educated have fled to Australia and the UK, leaving the less able and old behind.

So we walk. Looking after the poor is what ZANE is about.

Please Understand...

... that many of my blog items are written late in the evening when I am tired. I am centre-right in my views, and if you don't agree with me then that's fine – but do go on reading! I try not to make party political points but sometimes I can't resist the odd comment. Please take note, though: I have been as critical of the Conservatives in recent years as of any other party! As Boris recently said, "What a mess!" Whatever you may think of him, that was an understatement.

Please also remember that the views contained in this commentary are mine, and mine alone. They don't represent the views of any of those who work for ZANE or the trustees' body. Can I also make the point that the printed version of this commentary is not an indulgence on my part, but generates far more revenue than the cost of printing and dispatch.

And last but not least, if you have already sponsored us, thank you. And if not, please do so!

If my views offend, let's
discuss, not storm off...



28 August, Day 1: Canterbury to Wye

Here We Go Again

We set off from Canterbury Cathedral. Present were my wife, Jane; my eldest daughter, the Revd Clare Hayns (chaplain of Christ Church, Oxford) and her son Daniel; Alannah Jeune, a PhD student from New Zealand; the Revd Jonathan Aitken with some of his family; and ZANE trustee Georgie Knaggs with her son Ed.

Alannah is an accomplished trumpet player and played a fine voluntary to see us on our way. Then chaos ensued as teething problems with the new handheld GPS meant that we set off four miles in the wrong direction. Boom! Who was the guilty party, who was to blame?

We crawled back to the centre and

started all over again. Jonathan Aitken and daughter Alexandria were kind – but then what could they do? I am sure they were privately wondering how on earth we have managed to walk over 2,000 miles around the UK whilst remaining sane and together!

Tom's Big Five

Blog readers will recall that the only topics I ever discuss are sex, politics, religion, money and death. As you know, these happy subjects have focused my attention for years. You may think this is a shade limited – but can I remind you it's a little more adventurous than the poet Yeats, whose conversation was limited only to sex and death.



However, I am pleased to announce I've added some further subjects to my repertoire. These interest me because they have been banned as topics that are "too hot to handle" by various book publishers – who despite wanting to make a living also desire a quiet life! These subjects (my thanks to author Lionel Shriver) are gender, race, immigration, disability, social class, obesity and Islam.

All are banned. But not here! I will, of course, try to cover them as vigorously as possible in this blog. So let's get stuck in!

Bilking

It's good to have dear Markus driving for us again. I am reminded that a week after the end of his first stint as driver, the police called in at my Oxford home.

"You have been accused of 'bilking' Sir."

"Really, gosh! What on earth is bilking?"

The cop told me that bilking is driving off without paying for petrol. Amazed, I searched my diary and learned that the alleged offence occurred on the first day of the walk, and Markus' first-ever day in the UK.

I explained to the policeman about the walk and how I expected the driver to pay the petrol bills. So clearly I had not explained this properly to Markus.

"Where does he live?"

"Bulawayo!"

That was the end of the case. But I sometimes wonder if my mugshot is still being paraded as a "bilker" in

garages along the south coast?

Have a Great Day!

"Have a marvellous evening," the garage lady enthused. As I staggered away, I unpacked exactly what she had said.

It was midnight, a Sunday in freezing and sleeting February, and there I was, an old man from central casting playing King Lear. I was unshaven, limping from an ingrowing toenail, and my hair, such as it is these days, was awry. I was sporting an old pyjama top and my tattered gardening trousers.

Our dog had escaped into the woods with another hound and Jane and I were convinced he was savaging sheep. So come midnight, I was touring the area and yelling his name at the uncaring stars when I realised the car was running out of diesel.

What sort of marvellous evening did the good lady think I was about to have? A musical soiree, perhaps? A visit to one of my local mistresses? Or maybe she thought I was about to go clubbing?

Is there any end to the daftness and insincerity of the blandishments of complete strangers these days?

"Your call is important to us," really means that they couldn't give a stuff. "Sadly we can't give you a refund," means there is nothing sad about it – much like, "We regret the inconvenience to the public, but we have no alternative but to take strike action!"



Or what about that old chestnut, “Sorry to keep you waiting, but we are experiencing an unusually high volume of calls at the present time”? Of course, this means the company is deliberately understaffed and you are going to have to hang on or piss off. Meanwhile, “You will receive care in the community” translates as, “You’re on your own, my friend” while “I hear you!” actually means, “I have long since stopped listening!”

In many restaurants and shops, the staff still end conversations by saying, “No worries”, whatever that might mean, or “Have a nice dayee!” I find it’s best to answer, “Sorry, but I’ve made other plans.” Or when I’m told to “take care”, I try offering some sensible advice: “No, just take a risk!”

Lost and Found

Readers beware: if you hold me in high regard, please stop reading!

Before each jumbo walk, I have an MOT to see if anything is likely to fall off on the journey. So it was off to the Churchill Hospital in Oxford.

It was a lovely day to think about the meaning of life and the generosity of ZANE supporters. In a trance, I shunted the car into a space only to find that the Churchill car parks are apparently the only ones in Oxford that don’t accept card payments!

Cursing, I headed off to the nearest cashpoint, then back to the car park. I fed the meter and staggered towards a hospital door. Directions came from a passing male nurse who was clearly suffering from ghastly halitosis: he shuffled up close and muttered, “Up three flights of stairs, down three corridors, turn left, then right, back down another flight of stairs, up another flight, then second door on the right.” By this time, his breath was undoing my tie.

If Bojo is serious about funding the NHS – now the only god the public cares about (the NHS, not Bojo) – he might consider spending cash on having the walls painted. Then what about renewing the chipped and clapped-out linoleum?

At last, I was in the right place. Competent and friendly nurses X-rayed my right knee – the only remaining joint still 100 per cent Tom Benyon.

Then it was back to the reception: “Please, where’s the car park?”

“Which one? There are six!”

Pride prevented me from saying, “Sorry, I’m a total fool... in which one did I leave the car?” How could they know!

They gave me a map that looked like the London Underground and I tottered round all the car parks looking for my tatty, black car. All the parks seemed to be crowded with tatty, black cars.

It took me 40 minutes: there it was, lurking in the fourth park.

Each time I muddle over where on earth I’ve left my car, I promise that next time I will take careful note of its precise position. I swear to be practical and stop thinking beautiful thoughts. But my poetic nature wins through each time.



29 August, Day 2: Wye to Bethersden

Staying Alive

Today we were blessed with low humidity and clear skies: it's been one of those peerless days when you're conscious that it's great to be alive.

The late Sir James Goldsmith once said that if you're over 65 and you wake up without hurting somewhere, it means you're dead! That said, resolutely walking through my aches and pains validates my pet theory that by keeping going, they fade.

I can't help wondering if, as we age, our natural resistance to life's ghastlies – cancer, tumours and the rest of the feast of life's horrors – grows thinner, leaving us ever more vulnerable as time marches on?

On the other hand, there's not a thing to be done about it, Tom – so stop being so morbid! One day, you will shuffle off this mortal coil and that will be that. It's not "if" but "when".

...If you can't trust the person who pledged fidelity to you... why should the public?...



What on earth does it matter, anyway? I have spent a full life surrounded by loving family and friends with the three vital blessings of a rich life fulfilled: a battle to fight, a maiden to woo and a cause bigger than myself to live for. It is not everyone that can say that. I am a fortunate man.

Eton Mess

I remember the occasion clearly... it was just after Edwina Currie shamelessly announced that she'd once had a run-in with John Major. Our party was seated for lunch when barrister Ann Mallalieu, a Labour peer – and in her loudest upper-crust voice too – announced that anyone who was unfaithful to his wife couldn't be trusted in public life. "If you have lied to the person you know intimately and who trusts you, and to whom you have solemnly pledged fidelity in front of witnesses," she proclaimed, "then why should members of the public, whom you have never met, believe a single word you say?"

The room temperature crashed to at least zero. Ann's then husband – notoriously as faithful as a tomcat – blushed a deep vermillion and weakly grinned. Or perhaps it was an attack of indigestion. Many guests stared fixedly at their shoes and wished they were in Acapulco, wherever that may be.

Well, however unfashionable this attitude may be today, perhaps Ann had a point worth addressing?

Of course, nowadays – since, I suppose, the Clinton saga – we are supposed to have become more "liberal", whatever that may mean. Well, we may be more liberal, but does this detract from the validity of Ann's point? And since Boris now occupies centre stage, perhaps we should address it. Is it good enough to say that as Nelson, Wellington, Palmerston,

...Trust me everyone...



Lloyd George and JFK were all at it like stoats in a sack, there's no question to answer?

Of course, it's not true that all politicians are as randy as Weinstein on steroids. But does the fact that Boris is a serial fornicator matter? His second marriage has been cast onto the tip, and there's been many a glancing blow as he's charged along. He's now onto the third "permanent" lady in his life. Of course, he's a superb writer and speechifier, and he was a competent mayor of London... but do you honestly believe him? Do his colourful infidelities affect your view of him as prime minister?

My view is that it probably doesn't matter, but I'd rather not know about it.

Odd Couple

We were in a greasy spoon cafe on London's South Circular and they were sitting in a far corner. They were probably in their twenties. Both were rather overweight. She had a spotty, misshapen moon face that, if you were a painter, you would want to scrub out and start again. Her body was shaped like a Swiss roll – you had to study hard to identify even a gesture of a waist. Her hair was purple with black roots, her eyes behind thick glasses a watery blue. The teeth were Himalayan crooked.

As for the woman's companion, he had a thick neck and a shaved head. A beer belly hung over his jeans, and his hands and wrists were heavily tattooed.

If either had been alone, my instinct would have been to feel sorry for them. But one thing changed all that, a powerful transforming thing. They were clearly in love. Not just the "keen on", "going out" or "seeing each other" type of love, but the real McCoy! They swooned together, clearly fascinated by one another, and were totally oblivious to me – or anyone else.



For the hour I sat there, they traded with each other using their eyes more than words. There was a tenderness that excluded all of us as they created their own special world. They were a couple who, in the face of all the aridity and disenchantment we suffer daily in our cynical old lives, were proving that love is as perennial as the grass. This made them beautiful. They were short-changed on physical allure certainly, but their love made them just a little lower than the angels.

Of course, they were certainly unaware that behind my map I was lifting my stained coffee cup to my lips and toasting them.

Donkeys and Cats

I read that a charity supporting donkeys generates £34m per year, and another supporting cats raises £45m per year! Per year!

I like both donkeys and cats, but this is surely extraordinary. Our partner, RCEL – who look after 8,000 starving veterans across the Commonwealth who have served the Crown – find it a

struggle to generate any material cash from the public. So what's going on?

I guess there are millions of lonely people out there: people who have been bruised in love, and rejected in family and work relationships to the degree they have been reduced to meeting their emotional needs through animals. Hence, when they die, leaving their fortunes to charities that care for cats and donkeys seems obvious: they are the only living things that have never betrayed them. Probably true – and very, very sad.



Island Story

A beautiful walk to Sissinghurst took us miles through Hemsted Wood, where, dappled and mysterious, you would expect to see Robin Hood fighting with the Sheriff of Nottingham at any time. Then we came to “Rogers Wood”, where the missing apostrophe jars with me.

A Borders Love Affair

*Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue
remembered hills
What spires, what farms
are those?*

*That is the land of lost content,
I see it shining plain,
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.*

AE Housman’s “A Shropshire Lad” sums up a love affair for me.

The Germans have a word for what I feel: *sensucht*. It’s an emotion with transcendent qualities. Most people will recall a place where they were truly happy, a place where they felt secure and contented. For me it’s the Scottish Borders, a place where time stands still. Listen to just a couple of place names from there – “Eildon Hills”, “Easter Softlaw” – and you can see why.

I never lived there – although my Jane was brought up near Kelso – but I have always felt at home there.

It was the home of Pam and Humphrey Scott Plummer, Jane’s parents. The Scott Plummer family still live there. Pam and Humphrey were a warm and loving couple, and they welcomed me into their Borders life and home with trust and great kindness a lifetime ago.

They were a core part of an old established farming community. The key word here is “community”. It’s a world of farming and cattle auctions, where hunting is understood and loved: a place of fishing and shooting, horse and dog shows, and of gardening, quiet country pursuits and simple enjoyments that have been the enduring melody of the Borders for generations. *Horse and Hound* is read and savoured just as much as *The Spectator*. Some people there are probably prodigiously rich, others make do with little – but no one really cares. If you fit in, you are accepted. It’s no surprise that so many of the young leave the Madding Crowd of the south and return home to a cleaner and more peaceful way of life.

The word “gentlefolk” sums up Pam and Humphrey. I mourn their passing to this day.

Scots Free?

I hear that Ruth Davidson has resigned from the leadership of the Conservative party in Scotland. Sad,

it's yet another example of the gulf between mothers and fathers. In my experience, many women's priorities change when they get "mumsie", but I know of no example of a man putting his career on hold because his wife has had a baby! I know, of course, that fathers play a more substantial role today with their children and that is a good thing. I also know that men can demand paternity leave to help look after their newborn. But I am sure that men who run their own businesses can't possibly afford such a luxury, so paternity leave is pretty much limited to those working in the public service and charities.

Hate Crime

I served as a lance corporal stationed in Fort George with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders and, as a privately educated Englishman, I know something about the visceral loathing – "Hey Jimmy, are you looking at me?!" – of many Scots towards the English. But I managed to survive well enough.

So, I think I know why the SNP are keen to keep Scotland tied to the European Union, where they will suffer material democratic consequences, and yet want to sever the ties with England and wreck our ancient and very successful union. Why? It makes no sense until you recognise the history of Bannockburn, Cromwell, Culloden and all the rest.

I think the SNP and their supporters actually hate the English. Otherwise, why do they want to wreck the Union? Maybe they are guilty of a crime?

Slanted View

"British history shows what a disgraceful people we are", she wittered with the finality of a 19-year-old. "Our past is full of vicious, selfish wars ... then there is the story of slavery. We should hang our heads in shame!"

She had that look so much favoured by the left, by those squatting on Corbyn's moral high ground: the look that says, "Don't even dare to disagree with me, or you'll soon find out you're beneath contempt and not even worth arguing with!"

So, dear ZANE reader, I shut up. After all, she was only an elderly child and I suppose if you can't blither lefty nonsense when you're that age, when can you?

She thought the British empire was a wicked conspiracy against the world's most vulnerable people and that we mercilessly pillaged and exploited at will – instead of a mix of good and not so good, which is usually the case in all human endeavour. Of course, we made dreadful mistakes, but she was unaware that we also built hospitals, railways, schools and universities – the infrastructure the colonies needed to develop. She wasn't aware we built an admirable civil service and police forces; that we taught aspirations of freedom, justice and human dignity; or that we introduced humanitarian ideals from the likes of Livingstone and the basic values of honesty, democracy and the rule of law.



All she seemed to know about were the errors. She went to a leading public school for at least eight years and I couldn't help wondering what exactly her parents thought they had bought with their money. For example, she had no historic perspective or real knowledge of the history of slavery or the role of our churches. She hardly knew who Wilberforce was or what he did. She had dimly heard of Churchill and only vaguely knew what the last two world wars were about. Nor did she have any appreciation of how ignorant she really was. Who had "taught" her and what did they think they were teaching? I suppose her excuse might be, "I forgot to ask" or "I

didn't 'do' history". But all this is general knowledge: everyone should know the basic facts about our island story, it should be rooted in our DNA! If I were her parents, I would be asking for my money back.

I am proud of the empire Britain built and what our forebears managed to achieve. Our children, the future youthful ambassadors for the UK, should raise their heads from Twitter and Facebook, and gently remind their friends in other countries of the truth about British history. Then they can play their vital part in building a diverse, tolerant and dynamic country that, once again, can be the envy of the world.

Dead Funny

Baroness Park, a former principal of Oxford's Somerville College, told the story of an octogenarian baroness holding forth in a House of Lords tearoom.

"The trouble of being my age is that all the men I have slept with are now dead," the formidable woman declared.

There was stony silence and then a shaky hand was raised by an old man at the end of the table. "Hang on! What about me?" he asked.

The baroness reached for her glasses and stared at him before announcing, "Sorry, I thought you were dead."

Dog's Gratitude

Another early start with Cromwell's prayer on my mind: Please God, this day remember me, even if I forget thee ...

I'm afraid it's a prayer I have to say rather often these days!

Intolerance

It's bleakly depressing how divided and intolerant our churches can be. For example, some vicars are against vestments; they bridle at the sight of gowns and processions, or choir members in bibs and tuckers – and claim that all this is unbiblical and divides them from the people. That may be true to some degree. However, what about those parishioners who dislike the sight of vicars dressed in jeans, jerseys and T-shirts looking like shelf stackers at Aldi? Some churchgoers dislike praise songs and tambourines; others seem to loathe plainsong and anthems. A balance has to be struck.

I dislike this intolerance: why on earth does it matter provided Christ is at the centre? Some people want to go to cathedral-style services and be taken out of themselves so they can sit at the back and listen, think and pray in their own time and solitude. They may dislike being sandbagged by displays of enthusiasm and Alpha courses, or the sense of being "got at". Other worshippers want exactly this!

I recall the late Michael Mayne, Dean of Westminster, saying that he thought services should appeal to all the senses. There should be drama, a pleasing use of space, beautiful music, the sight of lovely vestments, soaring choir voices and the scent of incense to create a sense of awe. He told me how he loathed the scruffiness and informality that plague other churches so that they too closely represent the secular world.

When all's said and done, we are all different – and it's important we remember this!

Good Grief

We read that a precocious Swedish child called Greta Thunberg has made a speech berating politicians for failing to "even mention" climate change. This child encouraged a vast number of kids in the UK to take a day off school and bleat the same nonsense to us all.

The result was that teachers had to "catch up" the children who were absent – the whole exercise was a total nuisance. In spite of this, the head teacher's union (NAHT) apparently gave this nonsense their blessing by announcing, "A day of activity like this could be an important life experience."

Was this wise? It wasn't just a single day of activity, it was one of many planned by the organisers. What will happen when this crowd of spotty

adolescents all start to campaign for other issues, for example to lower the age of voting to, say, 16? No one wants to discourage the little darlings. Well I do for starters.

Thunberg's message is always the same: "Adults are doing nothing to combat climate change." She is not saying they are not doing enough, she claims they are not doing anything. This is a wild exaggeration. This child must have been brought up on planet ZARB. What she is parroting is false. Every nation in the world signed up for the Kyoto Protocol in 1997, and 174 states signed the Paris Agreement in 2016. As a result, numerous government initiatives have been taken to reduce emissions including the Climate Change Levy in the UK, which increased in April. And in Oxford – where I live – they seem to talk of little else.

It's manifestly obvious that the mass of blinkered children are being fed "fake news" by this infant activist. Shouldn't NAHT be encouraging members to teach children the difference between exaggeration and real news?

If teenage tots have time to spare, they might pick up litter or read some improving literature. They might also learn that they would do us all a favour simply by shutting up. The Victorian command that children should be "seen and not heard" wasn't altogether without merit.

The fact that so many people have been taken in by Thunberg makes me want to raise the voting age to 21.

Biting the Hand ...

Some time ago, when I was at a party at a country club, I heard a splash and saw an elderly Second World War veteran I knew leap into the water fully clothed. At first I thought he was drunk until I saw that he had a little boy in his arms. The lad had been drowning quietly just outside his depth until someone had shouted for help: this old boy was the speediest person to act.

I recall two things about the incident. One was the veteran's attitude: "No fuss; anyone could have done it!" to those who sought to congratulate him on his action. That was absolutely in character. The second thing was the glare of undiluted rage and hatred from the little boy's father who should have been paying attention and who had instead been boozing and joking with his friends. That look says a lot about human nature.

One major sadness apparent in the Brexit "negotiations" is the appalling way in which we have been treated by the EU imperial class.

Their cynicism was exposed in the BBC fly-on-the-wall documentary *Brexit: Behind Closed Doors* in which we hear the private conversations between the EU negotiators as they mock our UK team.

Guy Verhofstadt and Michel Barnier drink a celebratory toast and say gleefully: "They're stuck! They're going nowhere ... we got rid of them. We kicked them out. We finally turned them into a colony and that was our plan from the first moment."

Sad when you come to reflect that if it hadn't been for our courageous actions in 1940, all EU members would have been German colonies.

The only tangible thanks for our immense service is the present of an annual Christmas tree from Norway. And Norway isn't even a member of the EU!

It was not until I saw a Spanish proverb that I understood: "Why do you dislike me so much? What favours have I ever done you!"

It's best summed up by former US president Harry S. Truman: "You want a friend in Washington? Get a dog."

1 September, Day 5: Hook Green to Groombridge

The Way of All Flesh

Another matchless day: fast walking through fields of hops and vines carried us swiftly towards Tunbridge Wells. The only hazards were long, slow hills that seemed never to stop but gently wound towards an unforgiving sky. All we could do was plod, one foot at a time, gently cursing as we went.

I have travelled right around the world, and I can honestly say that nowhere is more beautiful than Britain between May and October. Yet in five days of walking, we have barely seen another soul. Of course, there are a few people taking their dogs out for a poo, but we have seen no real walkers. And please note that we are not in the industrial midlands or the centre

of Scunthorpe – we are wandering through Arcadia, the most beautiful countryside that God ever made, anywhere.

I see Matthew Parris is all set to walk in the Hindu Kush in Pakistan. Why are you bothering, Matthew, when this deserted paradise is not more than an hour from London and begging to be enjoyed?

A Long Game

In 2005, former prime minister Ted Heath was buried in Salisbury Cathedral. In 1997, former minister Enoch Powell was buried in his brigadier's uniform in a Warwick cemetery.

They were both Conservative politicians and implacable opponents.

In 1968, Enoch Powell lost his ministerial career having been sacked by Ted Heath for making an allegedly inflammatory “rivers of blood” speech about immigration.

Some six years later, mainly on grounds of sovereignty, Powell announced his refusal to contest his Wolverhampton seat for the Tories because Heath was applying for membership of what is now the EU. Not only that, in the November 1974 general election, Powell recommended that Conservative supporters should vote Labour because of that party’s implacable opposition to EU membership.

I contested the 1974 election for the Conservative cause against prime minister Harold Wilson, and I can vividly recall the vast row Powell’s actions caused at the time.

Then Powell tirelessly campaigned against the membership referendum called in 1975 by the wily Wilson and he continued to protest after the result was known. He forecast that one day the UK would come to its senses and we would depart.

It has looked ever since as if Heath won hands down and Powell’s failed campaigns against EU membership would become a mere historical footnote.

We may leave the EU. If that happens, Heath’s life’s work, so carefully planned and built, will have turned to

ash; and what Powell fervently hoped for will have come to pass.

Politics can be a long game.

Altered Reality

I have a friend, David, whose marriage has failed brutally. He found himself out of the door with his luggage and a divorce petition in his hand. He couldn’t see it coming and he was shattered. He was too close to the emotional hiatus and unable to see straight.

Of course, the initial casualty was his pride and confidence, which sank to an all-time low. Then he found to his astonishment that he was the target of considerable abuse from his erstwhile wife, Sarah, and her large family – who had apparently disliked him from the outset. He heard he had been labelled a bully and all sorts of unpleasant criticism followed.

The family convinced themselves they were rescuing poor, vulnerable Sarah from the death of a thousand miseries. When I had a drink with David, he was wondering if the criticisms were true.

Of course, he had made all sorts of mistakes – we all do. But I know him to be a loving and kindly man who had been doing his best to be a good husband. I had watched him tenderly nurse his first wife through her terminal illness. So he was no marital bully or adulterer.

I tried to give David an insight into relationships, for I have had several

friends whose marriages have gone the way of all flesh. In each case, there was roughly the same pattern. As an example, one of my Welsh friends, Hugh, married a saintly woman, Mary, in high society. After 20 or so years and three children, she met someone else and wanted to be free. She knew herself to be a good, faithful and decent woman and so in order to retain this good opinion of herself she had to alter reality.

The only way Mary could do this was in her mind – and she harangued anyone who would listen that Hugh was an insensitive and unloving man. He was a total shit, she 100 per cent innocent – and the more contumely she was able to cast on him, the better she felt about what she had done. To live up to the myth, she refused to speak to him and when they met at weddings or funerals, she avoided him like the plague. A year ago, their 50-year-old son died from cancer – even after that, Mary refused to console poor Hugh or allow any sharing of grief.

Altering reality by one spouse to blame the other – in order to justify their errant behaviour – happens time and time again.

So, Mary managed to convince herself that she is a kind, loving and upright person, and she conveniently “forgot” all of Hugh’s many excellent qualities. He has been cast in the role of bullying, sponging rotter. And her family was always there, criticising

him behind his back, and always suspicious of his motives in marrying well-to-do Mary.

But there is Hugh, an ordinary, kindly man, and none of the nasty things Mary has said about him is true.

Amazing Grace

After hearing this sorry tale, David asked me what he should do about his own situation. I told him he had to forgive Sarah and her abusive family. Otherwise he would destroy himself, for bitterness corrodes the soul.

Then he must rely on GRACE.

When Jonathan Aitken was found guilty of perjury, the world media became hysterical in its condemnation. He was facing bankruptcy and jail, his career was over, and then his family collapsed. Jonathan sought the counsel of a priest, Fr Gerard Hughes. After Jonathan had poured out his ghastly tale of woe, Hughes asked him, “Have you thought of thanking God for your problems?”

Jonathan was outraged and initially thought he was being mocked; but after a time, he realised this was golden wisdom. We all have to redeem the things that go wrong in our lives. Churchill said that his father told him when he was a child that “a man who can’t take a knock-down blow isn’t worth a damn.” He claimed it was “quite a healthy process”. I have to agree.

So David must pick himself up, dust himself down and start all over again. There is no other way. And who knows what the future may hold, especially as a wounded healer?

Out in the Cold

Years ago, when I contested Wood Green in London for the Conservative cause, I was speaking at a meeting and boasting about all I could do if I was elected as MP.

I concluded by saying that a new Conservative administration would work wonders by stopping the Cold War.

A constituent then stuck up her hand to ask whether I could stop people urinating in her lift as it was starting to smell?

“On reflection,” I replied, “I don’t think I can.”

“Well,” said the woman, “if you can’t stop people pissing in the lift, how can you expect me to believe you can stop the Cold War?”

I lost that seat by a mile.

Khrushchev demands people
stop pissing in the lift
at the UN



Tsunami

We powered along ancient rail tracks into East Grinstead with General Jane leading the way. I have long since discovered that the simplest way for me to walk in harmony with Jane is to do exactly as she instructs. There is little point in arguing with High Command, especially when she has the map.

As for Jane, she has learned from years of practice to give me short thrift whenever necessary. “Do stop arguing and complaining,” she yells if she spots so much as a glimmer of backsliding.

Jane’s most irritating phrase (usually uttered after I have spent hours plodding up a vast hill) is, “Oh bugga!” This may be interpreted as, “We’ll have to back track half a mile as the sat nav’s gone haywire” (either that or she’s misread the map). There is no point in complaining: I have to grapple to the next turning and bear it with as good a grace as I can muster.

In an earlier century, General Jane would have found fame by leading a group of distressed orphans over winding, snowy tracks in the Himalayas to save them from a fate worse than death. She is a truly courageous, wonderful, intrepid and immensely kind woman, and I am profoundly fortunate to have her in my life.

Where Am I?

I’m at a stage of the walk where I’ve slept in so many houses that when I wake up, I have no idea where on earth I am. I tell my hosts that if they find me wandering round their bedroom at 3am, not to worry: I am just trying to find a loo!

Un-PC

I wrote a bit in my last blog about the problem of immigration and I got quite a postbag, as was bound to happen. People are always edgy about discussing this issue because they don’t want to be thought of as “politically incorrect”. I tell those worrying about my imminent arrest from the thought police that I am old and more or less harmless, and so I need counselling rather than Belmarsh. Counselling seems to be all the rage these days, so why not give it a go?

The Donald Effect

But I digress ... so here goes. Good old Donald generates truly ghastly publicity, but occasionally he raises issues that no one else dares discuss. He threatens to close US borders and call in the military to stop tens of thousands of illegal Mexican chancers and would-be-asylum seekers from crossing the Mexican/US border to settle illegally in the US. He did this in the sure knowledge that he was bound

to offend every liberal do-gooder and virtue signaller in the world all over again.

The image of millions of tearful women holding screaming babies and insisting they can never return to their ghastly homeland is a vision of the future.

Trump tries to excuse his rhetoric by proclaiming these immigrants are “bad” people but of course he misses the point. There are bound to be some rotten apples amongst the immigrant throng, but the point is they are not “bad” people: they are just “people”. Which one of us, if broke, unemployed and living in chaotic and violent conditions, would not try to move our family over the border to a dreamland of milk and honey?



These would-be immigrants want to raise their families in better homes and seek the chance of a decent job. They want to create a better life somewhere else. Of course, they all want to come and live where we live – if the tables were turned, wouldn't we?

They are all deserving folk who in the lottery of life have had the misfortune to be born, for example, in a rat-infested slum in Zimbabwe or some other poor African state. Or they come from Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala or El Salvador. These places suffer from high crime, and heroic levels of corruption and instability. Life for their inhabitants can be nasty, brutish and short.

In TV interviews, we see tearful families proclaiming they have travelled vast distances, fought through dreadful dangers, and suffered exploitation, robbery and rape. They are often well-educated, quietly spoken and worthy. All they want is a safe haven in which they can work hard and be good citizens. These interviews are often introduced by an indignant Jon Snow with some poor foreign office minister cowering and stammering uselessly in the background. Each immigrant has



a sad and deserving story to tell, and our implacable government, clutching its quotas, always sounds like a cold-hearted bastard.

In each case, I say to myself, “This poor sod could be me!”

Facing Facts

If the test for entry to the UK was whether a person was a worthy human being, or came from a worse place than here, then it’s a wrap, discussion over. We are nice people and so we have to let them in. All of them. Don’t we?

But the “right” conversation is practically impossible.

Europe sits next to Africa – and Africa is forecast to have the world’s greatest population explosion, with an extra 1.3 billion people living there by 2050. The

continent is prone to drought, climate change, often terrible governance and seemingly never-ending wars. But most Africans have mobile phones so they can see what the likes of leafy Basingstoke, Guildford and Edinburgh are like. However, they are there, and we are here – and of course they can’t all come, can they?

We face a vast problem. I reckon that the throngs of immigrants we have seen since 2015 are just the first lapping of the waves, for the tsunami is yet to come. You see, organised assaults of people storming borders simultaneously have had astonishing success.

So when the wised-up hopefuls all hit the Med in a Dunkirk flotilla of boats, all setting off on the same afternoon

with synchronised watches, what will we do? This is bound to happen, and soon. Just picture it. A tide of tens of thousands of decent people, all weeping and waving their hands, all in need of food, clean water and peace, all holding crying babies, and all coming over here in a vast flotilla.

This will, I forecast, constitute a potent form of moral blackmail. Will navies be able to use force to turn them back? As they say in Northumberland, Gerraway! Can you really see liberal societies tolerating the sight of soldiers and police shooting at boatloads of unarmed women and children? Of course not.

If we continue to face the issue of immigration as a matter of kindness and sympathy rather than crude self-interest, then almost anyone can get in.

Over the next few decades, we are bound to be facing immigration pressures, the like of which we have never seen before. How many more “good” people do you want living in your town or village?

So, chaos or a hard heart? It’s one hell of a choice.

Either way, the left-wing media and Jon Snow and chums are bound to love it.

3 September, Day 7: East Grinstead to Charlwood

Is the Lady a Tramp?

We passed hundreds of villas, many sporting new cars surely worth at least £60k. It amazes me that people can be persuaded to spend that sort of money on a car that is destined to depreciate by thousands each year. It’s all about vanity, of course. Long ago, an MP told me, “The only sort of vehicle I approve of is a car crusher.” I agree!

The houses remind me of the great old Lord Rothschild, who once penned a book on gardens. To show how in touch he was with the aspirations of the ordinary citizen, he recommended, “All Englishmen, no matter how mean

their estate, should sport at least two acres of wild woodlands in their gardens.”

Today’s walk was a mix of scrubby fields leading towards a vast long-stay Gatwick car park. We fought to be heard above the roar of the M23, a ghastly train line and the shrieking planes that zoomed above every 20 seconds or so. We crossed a bridge spanning the motorway and soon found ourselves like a couple of tiny ants dwarfed between the vast Southern and Northern terminals. Who could possibly want to live here?

Foreign Land

They say the past is a foreign country and they do things differently there. Nowhere is this truer than in the matter of men's manners towards women!

I was taught as a child that if walking with a lady, I should always walk on the street side to protect her from the mud thrown by passing cars. We were obliged to open doors to allow ladies to pass first and to stand up if one entered a room. I was instructed to offer a hand to help a lady out of a car (but not kiss her if she was wearing a hat), and offer up my seat on public transport to any damsel in need. And I was taught never to utter obscenities or tell foul jokes in the presence of the fairer sex.

But today, all the above is regarded as a ludicrous waste of time by the young. And perhaps they have a point? Why allow a lady to go through a door first when she may be after your job?

The ZANE Lady

In my last blog, I produced a checklist for men to reassure them that they are gentlemen. Now here are 20 rules to guide women in the complicated area of what makes a ZANE lady...

- 1: She doesn't take offence easily.
- 2: She happily carries her own luggage but accepts a man's offer to carry it gracefully.
- 3: She fends off unwanted passion with grace and ease.



- 4: She accepts compliments, even from a silly old fool.
- 5: She knows that a single, explosive swearword beats a torrent of obscenity.
- 6: She can change a tyre (but is very grateful when a man does it).
- 7: She accepts that not everyone wants a cat pawing at them.
- 8: She will drape an elegant shawl to cover herself while breastfeeding.
- 9: She wears clothes tight enough to show she is a woman but loose enough to show she is a lady.
- 10: She will dress unobtrusively at funerals.
- 11: She can hold a drink or two without falling over.
- 12: She never talks about house prices.
- 13: She never applies make-up on a crowded train.
- 14: She tells adult godchildren how well they are doing, even if their lives are a total train crash.
- 15: She will give a 100-watt smile to a nervous teenage boy to make his day.
- 16: She would never kiss and tell like the disgraceful Edwina Currie.
- 17: She always takes off her stiletto heels to spare the parquet floors of others.
- 18: She will pay a restaurant bill without making it obvious.

19: She knows when to stop talking, and when she is about to leave a house, she will not change the subject.

20: She is kind to nervous men who read lists on how to be a gentleman.

Lefty = Lovely

Why does being “left-wing” supposedly indicate that you are a “good” person, while being “right-wing” has come to mean that you are “morally inferior”? It’s sheer nonsense. Where did this rubbish come from?

My children’s friends occasionally virtue-signal about the iniquities of “right-wing” Tories on the presumption that their listeners will shudder in preening horror. But then my fiercely supportive children respond that their father was once a Tory MP – and tell their friends that before blethering on about “extreme right-wing Tories”, perhaps they should state when they last set up a food bank or a charity for the poor in Africa?

But, of course, being left-wing has a positive gloss to it. We magic up in our mind’s eye kind folk who are principled, well-meaning champions of social justice – people who care about others.

As for being “right-wing”, that means you are a swivel-eyed supporter of cutting taxes to the bone for the idle rich; you believe in cutting benefits to the needy; and of course, you would cook your granny for tea if there was something in her will for you.

Who am I ?!!



Of course, the description “extreme right wing” really means you are a supporter of Hitler. The proof of this is that Labour politicians wallow in the label “left-wing” as a badge of honour. I cannot recall a single politician proudly proclaiming on television that he or she is right-wing. Nigel Farage is labelled extreme right-wing by his detractors as it’s a semi-polite way of calling him a look-alike Trump bigot and racist.

Of course, Farage doesn’t call himself right-wing because he knows fine well it’s a pejorative term.

All those ERG (European research group) MPs are habitually called “extreme right-wing” because they actually think the result of the 2016 referendum should be honoured, that we must leave the EU. By lefty implication, roughly half the population is extreme right-wing. In reality, I reckon that most extremists are on the left.

This whole business started because the left weaponised the conversation, and the media (BBC and Channel 4) have absorbed it too. They can assault their enemies with this nonsense from what they perceive to be the highest point of the moral high ground. As a result, at least half the population have no idea what to call themselves.

Name Calling

If you, dear ZANE supporter, believe in an efficient state; one that is well-defended and with a well-balanced budget, one that has generous provision for the genuine poor, and one that has controlled immigration and well-defined law and order – then here’s betting you have no idea what on earth to call yourself.

I am fed up with name-calling. The left is full of “proto fascists” and the “right” is a dungeon to which the left consign people they do not like – but it’s not a place where any of us want to be.

We need a new political language. What do ZANE supporters suggest? I am a socially liberal and economically inclined Conservative, so where do I sit on the spectrum? I have always thought I was a libertarian, in that I have always thought we should be allowed to do whatever we like as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone – so where does all this name-calling leave me?

Nanny State

We're thankful for a day off. It isn't too hard walking 12 miles in a day. The complication and frustrations arise from finding our way across blocked paths and tracks that haven't been used for years. And then there are the sudden, unexpected and poorly signposted forking paths – leaving us with no idea of which way to go.

Some years ago, an intrepid lady walked from Edinburgh to London as the crow flies. She charged across

motorways and through factories, and swam straight across rivers. She remained undeterred by private houses, slamming through French doors and out of kitchens while families sat at lunch! Amazingly, she lived to tell her tale. I rather envy her but I reckon my English reserve would betray me when faced with having to carve straight through the law courts still in session.

Calling on Churchill

We visited Chartwell, Churchill's country home. I wonder what he would have made of Brexit?

What a mess! His grandson, Sir Nicholas Soames, thinks Churchill would have been a Remainer. I am not convinced. His love of the Commonwealth and the USA persuade me that even if he thought such a union right for Germany, France and the rest of the EU members, he would have refused continued membership for the UK if it meant us being subordinate to a super state run from Brussels.

carry on, don't
mind me.



The main difficulty is that Parliament knows what it doesn't want but cannot agree on what it does want. We can't stay and we daren't leave. But unless we do leave, we run the real risk of making international fools of ourselves on an even grander scale than we already have. I reckon not even Churchill would have known what to do without a majority.

Street Food

It's sad that the introduction of a dizzying number of childish rules and regulations is now the only way in which anti-social behaviour can be reduced in the UK. If people were taught to behave with reasonable consideration for others, these rules would not need to clog up our lives. But our culture of self-control and restraint has been so comprehensively eroded by social change since 1945 that there's little point in appealing to people's better nature: it no longer exists.

Of course, I am generalising: there are many decent people around still, but you have to work a bit harder to find them than hitherto.

Where to begin? Let's start with the small stuff. When I was a boy, I was taught it was simply unacceptable to eat in a public place. Today, many people seem unable to move more than a few yards without eating something. If you examine street litter, you will find that the majority of it derives from people eating anytime and anywhere. As a consequence, our streets, lanes,



fields and parks are filthy, probably the worst in Europe, simply because people choose to use them as a stable.

You may think this is a trivial observation, but it's all about self-expression: there are no accepted rules or manners anymore to control society. It would seem that a vast number of young people have never eaten round a table regularly at home with other people, but choose instead to graze, eating when they feel like it and where they want to. In other words, they have never learned to curb their appetite for the sake of the convenience or the happiness of others. They would regard the idea of no eating on the street as an offence against human rights. If you are hungry, so their drivel goes, why not eat at once wherever you may be?

The Mood of the Moment

How has this come about? For starters, unbridled self-expression and the comprehensive destruction of the family. Today, many people hook

up and then they stagger off sated, irrespective of the wellbeing of any children they may have sired or society as a whole. The mood of the moment is all that matters.

Self-expression is regarded as an intrinsic good in itself. And because the state has made it financially possible for people to behave selfishly, it appears no longer to remember the crucial importance of the family to the welfare of children.

And instead of preaching the Ten Commandments, “Love your neighbour as yourself” or self-control, some (of course, not all) church leaders content themselves by banging

on about Brexit, food banks and why doesn't the government pour even more money into social security? The result of this catastrophic moral neglect can be seen in the rivers of misery that ooze daily through our divorce courts.

Anti-social behaviour is one of the fields in which Britain leads the world. Bad behaviour is today as much of a UK hallmark as fraud is in Nigeria. It's no longer a tiny minority who offend by their violence, intimidation and degrading vulgarity, there is a substantial number – and this is a disgrace. Many of our younger fellow citizens do not “socialise” when they

get together. They seem unable to enjoy themselves without getting screamingly drunk, vomiting in the street or creating an atmosphere of dark menace. British holidaymakers compete in their vulgarity, our football crowds are a disgrace, and our city centres at night resemble Gin Lane, glinting with knives and the dark glasses of drug dealers.

In the eighteenth century, philosopher Edmund Burke wrote, “Men [I am sure he would have included women as well, but PC wasn't around then] are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains upon their own appetites ... Society cannot exist unless a controlling



power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free ...”

So now the state finds itself in the position of having to repress the very behaviour that has resulted from generations of woeful neglect. The fact we have lost control of ourselves is one of the reasons governments of all stripes feel obliged to pass vast numbers of nannyish rules designed to repress our grossness because we cannot be relied upon to control ourselves. Our loss of self-discipline has led directly to a need for state repression.

The question for our children is how can we return to self-regulation?

Some Light (Tax) Relief

The Inland Revenue recently returned a Norfolk-based man’s tax return to him after he apparently answered one of the questions incorrectly.

In response to the question, “Do you have anyone dependent on you?” he replied:

“2.1 million illegal immigrants, 1.1 million crackheads, 4.4 million unemployable scroungers, 700,000 criminals in 85 prisons, 650 idiots in Parliament, plus the bits of the European Commission we have been unable to leave behind.”

The Inland Revenue stated that his response was unacceptable.

“Who did I miss out!” the man responded.

5 September, Day 9: Charlwood to Wotton

Save the Last Dance for Me!

We walked at speed for around seven miles through Far from the Madding Crowd woodland, quiet and peaceful. To our surprise, no small birds were singing. Some of the woodland was awash with baby pheasants, though, much to the torment of Moses who very much wanted to kill them all!

The first two or three days of walking are always hard work as we sweat off months of lazy living and can literally

feel our old muscles starting to harden. After that, we get into the easy swing of things and the rhythms start to make walking relatively easy.

No one walked with us today and it felt like a kind of pilgrimage.

Weird World

Last week, I got an email from an event organiser that set me thinking. “I’ve been asked if you have any food

allergies,” she blethered, “and what’s your personal pronoun of choice?”

Without much reflection, I replied, “I’m still identifying as a man, but I’ll keep you posted.” When I mentioned this to a friend who knows about this sort of thing, he warned me, “Seriously, don’t make jokes about binary stuff even if you think it’s totally potty.”

Sure enough, the good old NHS is now asking patients over 16 if they are straight, gay or other. This information is being asked, apparently, to ensure that no patients are discriminated against. I wonder if doctors didn’t ask the question in the first place and relied upon that rare commodity, common sense, how could they discriminate anyway? But what do I know?

There’s not you, me, us
anymore, there’s just ...
them



And it all costs taxpayer money, even though transgender people only account for a teeny-weeny proportion of our population.

The Conservatives – who in my view should know better – are leading this nonsense. They are bringing forward proposals to allow adults to change their birth certificates at will.

It is clear that gutless politicians are pandering to these lobby groups, even paying vast sums to support “fetish workshops” and a “transgender changing room” at a recent event in Manchester. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Foundation is the “charity” driving this new policy with £730k they’ve just winkled from various local authorities. Nice to know how well your money is being spent, isn’t it?

LGBT has a warped ideology, claiming that the established truths of biological science are “lies”. As our political leaders are terrified of being called “transphobic”, they are allowing this sort of nonsense to flourish. After all, it’s easy to be politically correct with someone else’s money.

The headmistress of James Allen’s Girls’ School in London now refers to her students as “them” in case she upsets those who are considering a sex change. What a strange world we live in.

The Big Moments

Life's "firsts" are landmarks. Celebrated in TS Eliot's poem "The Journey of the Magi", the three kings attend the birth of Christ and realise that this shattering first changes everything.

Of course, our firsts are on a far smaller scale, but they punctuate our lives and it takes time to see them in focus. We remember what matters to us, so the firsts etched into our memories often represent life-changing events. The first time we meet someone we come to love; the day we are awarded a degree; the day we are commissioned as an officer, or get a real job; the day we marry, make love, hear fantastic music; or the day we get elected – or fail to get elected! Then there is the star-spangled day our first child is born and held joyfully in our arms; our children's first words and tottering steps; and their first day at school.

All these moments are stored away in the file marked "life's happy events". The key is to bank plenty of happy "firsts": that way, when the sweet bird of youth has finally stopped flapping, we will have enough good memories to sustain us as we totter through the foothills of senility towards the summit.

Final Fix

Do we even notice, much less remember, the "last" events? The problem, of course, is that we do not



always know it's a "last" at the time, and it all gets lost in the fog we call memory. And of course, there are no warning bells to ring out at these moments of great significance.

Some last events are obvious: the last time we leave a beloved house, or a last day at work. And I suppose alcoholics – and smokers – note with agonised concentration the date of a final fix.

But sometimes it takes decades to really appreciate that a last has occurred. Was I actually aware when I had changed a nappy for the last time or read a final bedtime story to my children? Did I realise the last time I tucked them up in bed and said a brief prayer over their heads that another milestone had passed?

Then there comes the time when we realise the extraordinary fact that we

now need our children's time and love rather more than they need ours, as they become preoccupied with their own families.

End Game

What about the death of relatives or friends? When I visited my terminally ill mother, we both knew this would almost certainly be the last time we saw each other. Yet neither of us – locked in polite English denial – acknowledged the fact.

And then there are the times when Jane and I have mercy-killed various horses and dogs. Readers of my blogs will know just how painful such events have been, each one a kind of murder.

With advancing age comes an acceptance of death by a thousand

lasts, faint signs that morph into an immovable tattoo: the acceptance of mortality. Before the age of 40, we convince ourselves that death is for those poor sods that have somehow lost life's game. Then after 40, its time to "grow up", and by 70, we realise the days of wine and roses are over and it's time to get serious as we face an unavoidable end game. We idly note the ages of those in obituary notices, and ponder coffins and graveyards at funerals.

We just can't get away from these inexorable damn lasts. Jane and I hunted for over 30 years. We loved the sport. Recently I discovered my old hunting boots covered in dust in the corner of the attic. They remain beautiful, the inside leather worn

down from the friction caused by a thousand hedges. They symbolise great fun, teamwork as well as hunting.

But after 30 years, my hunting gene seeped away. To some extent, this was caused by the death of my last golden hunter, Spinaker. But there was also the friend who crashed a fence and was driven headfirst into the ground like a dart. His horse fell on him and broke his neck at the very top, so all he could move was his chin and eyes. When we visited, he was drinking lunch through a straw – and I swear this is true – watching a euthanasia debate on the telly. A single tear ran slowly down his cheek.

...Oh, and he wanted be be buried
wearing his hunting boots



They say the doctors take those who are crippled below the waist to see those who have lost mobility from the neck down, so they can see how relatively well off they are. It begs the question: to whom do those with broken necks get taken to see?

I stopped hunting. But I can't actually recall the last meet, or the last team chase. And child that I am, I can't quite face up to the fact that a last has even occurred. The chance I will hunt again is more or less zero but it's painful facing that reality.

Jane is far more ruthless than I am. When I hit the sod, my clothes will be at the charity shop before I am cold. Nevertheless, I can't quite face flogging my beloved boots, hunting coats and all the rest so another bugger can have fun wearing them. Dog in the manger? Me? Never!

Last Orders

Then, of course, the sex thing tries to rear its head (if you'll forgive the pun). I think of the time the great Denis Healey admitted to his wife, Edna, "The bird won't fly from the nest!" The late Alan Clark (who had considerable form) wrote in his diary, "The first time you are impotent does not immediately follow the last time you have sexual intercourse ... The last time you don't know because there is always hope, until much later."

A friend in his sixties – a cricketing fan – told me that he had "drawn stumps", presumably for the last time.

my flag, it seems, is
at half mast



You know when friends have called it a day because they're fat. The seventh commandment is now a joke: what's the bloody point of being thin?

So a few nights ago, on one of my numerous loo visits, I caught sight of my pale, whiskery body in the mirror. Then I wondered at what point in the future I would need to face the fact that a last has occurred: that my dead parrot was only good for facilitating drainage?

I'm sure the reason these "lasts" carry such emotional weight is that they are inexorable steps towards the greatest last of all: the black door, closely guarded by a dismal sod dressed in black and swinging his scythe.

Of course, lovers of God hope that Corrie ten Boom was right when she wrote, "Death is the old family servant who opens the door into the father's home."

What fun life can be!
"Last" drink anyone?

The New Me

Another switchback walk, mainly over styles through National Trust woodland and skirting the railway line towards Gomshall. Then we walked through Sheer, passing numerous red stone “pillboxes” from the Second World War. Apparently used by the likes of Captain Mainwaring of *Dad’s Army*, they were hastily designed in 1940 to frighten away invading Germans.

The views were magnificent. Later we passed through the outskirts of Guildford from where we crawled ever upwards towards the magnificent cathedral, nestling as if to address God on an equal footing, with both hiding in the clouds.

Time for a Change

I can’t go on like this – I’ve pressed my personal reset button. For many years, I’ve been seriously disadvantaged by the fact that I’m essentially boring: a white, married, heterosexual male. I’m privately educated, a former Guards officer and a former Conservative MP. To make matters worse, I’ve been married to the same woman for half a century and I’m the father of four happily married children.

So far, no one in the family has been sentenced to jail and I’m known to be something of a Bible basher. So in terms of identity politics, I’m the invisible man on the train, a dinosaur, a man of no special interest to anyone:

... I said I’m dreading
my 40th



too old to work yet
too young to die. My
opinions will never be
sought by the media, nor
will I ever be targeted
by political pollsters. If
I was ever caught doing
something illegal, I'd be
unable to pull the race
card. No political party
will want to add me to
their lists for virtue-
signalling purposes and
to prove how multi-
racial and inclusive of
minorities they are.

Minus 20

So now I'm embracing
radical change. It's been
growing on me for years. To be honest,
it's been a vast struggle for I've felt
very young inside myself all of this
time. And I feel far friskier than others
in their mid-seventies too, so there!

Of course, I am not alone in coming
out of my age closet. Dutchman Emile
Ratelband, 69, claims to feel like a
young god of 49. The doctors agree he
has the constitution of a much younger
guy, so Ratelband has been trawling
through the Dutch courts to change his
legal birthdate from 1949 to 1969.

Ratelband claims that a man who
identifies as a woman can claim a new
birth certificate stating he is now a
she. So why on earth can't he wipe 20
years off his life to enable him to get a
better job and be able to chase women
on Tinder – who regard all over-55s as
more or less dead?

I did once have an
overdue library book!



So, for me, it's "farewell 1942", hello
"brave new 1962". Whee, I feel better
already.

All or Nothing

But hang on. Now I'm thinking
why not go the whole hog? Today's
accepted consensus is that biological
sex is not real but merely a social
construct. This reasoning has
swept through liberal US university
campuses into the political
mainstream and is now accepted
wisdom in the UK too. Let me be
clear: activists demand that anyone
who says she is a woman is entitled
to a document stating she was born
biologically female even if everyone
else knows she is a man and he (or
she) has a willy (sorry about that).

Of course, I agree. So I'm now a
woman and available to be chased by
men on Tinder. And, if you can change

your age and gender, why not your race? In the US, a white woman called Rachel Dolezal claims to be black and says she has suffered racial injustice. I can identify with this for I have felt black inside myself for years. Someone called Anthony Lennon – who was apparently mixed race – has popped a Nigerian middle name “Ekundayo” into his full name in order to convince people he is black. I propose to copy this excellent idea.

I’m now Karen “Gorgeous Nahindicere” Benyon, aged 55. Don’t dare mock! I’m a black female and I’m still young. I love poetry, dancing, music and women’s clothes. I’m close

to my emotions – I laugh a lot and I cry easily. And I am choosing to be bisexual, which is great news as it doubles my chances of a date on a Saturday night.

Oh, incidentally I am likely to be selected to run for the mayoralty of London by the Green party anytime soon. I’m told I will be a shoo-in.

I’ve yet to break this happy news to Jane and the family – never mind Moses the dog. However, I’m sure the poor dears will be delighted to welcome their new Auntie Gorgeous into the family right away. What fun we’re going to have.



Kiss Off!

We made great progress as we fought our way along unbeaten paths smothered with nettles and brambles, a symbol of shame for the local authority. There were no other walkers. The afternoon's walking took us along the Wey river, peaceful and lovely, with Moses swimming for sticks.

Then we skirted Aldershot and walked close to RMA Sandhurst where I recently attended an anniversary of my passing-out parade. On that occasion there were 200 wrinkled old men like me watching the sovereign's parade, all hoping with some desperation that we would make it through the two hours without having a pee.

Heroes

Let me raise a glass to just some of the people whose support makes ZANE the wonderful charity it is:

Kate Hoey MP – a loyal ZANE supporter and a Labour MP, Kate has bravely voted in the national interest and not just to please Momentum. She has chaired ZANE meetings and is a tough, delightful lady. I wish there were more like her.

Tim Glass – a former CEO of the John Ellerman Foundation, Tim gives ZANE first-class advice just because he is an excellent friend of our charity.

Markus Isselbacher – an excellent driver and a very nice man, Markus has bravely taken on the driving for four ZANE walks.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind – former foreign secretary Malcolm Rifkind always does all he can to help ZANE.

Clendon Daukes – a good friend of ZANE, Clendon always tell me exactly what he thinks.

Jane Broadley – the wife of ZANE's chairman, Jane is hugely encouraging and always supportive.

Christopher Warren, Nigel Dransfield, Lance Gill, Tim Burt and Marie Gordon-Roe – the RCEL team must be thanked for all their tireless work for ZANE.

Tom Benyon's Men's Group (they know who they are) – these are the friends who keep me on the straight and narrow!

Consider Yourself Kissed

I don't like kissing virtual strangers. I know it's the thing to do nowadays, but I have long since worked out the difference between fake intimacy and the real thing. Vicars, politicians and salesmen are adept at manufacturing the essential fake warmth and affection for people they have never really met properly as it's a part of the business routine. I did it myself as a



political hack and I wasn't proud of my behaviour: in short, I have a distaste for professional affection.

I have to admit I quite liked Jean Claude Juncker kissing the air above Theresa May's wrist, which I found strangely gallant. But I'm English, not continental, and I prefer a smile and a simple, "How nice to see/meet you." The point is if I am going to kiss people I don't care about, what, in decency, am I to do to those I do care for? Grab, and then roundly fondle them?

So, I only kiss people who are intimates – family or close friends, not strangers. I envy the royals for the self-protection system they have long perfected. Princess Anne shoves out an imperious white-gloved hand; the queen is bowed or curtsied to, as are other members of the royal family. That's it, unless you know them, in which case you can kiss, curtesy, bow, hug, in that order – but that routine is reserved for pals only. If you aren't a pal, try it on at your peril.

I understand all this faux social

snogging started when Cilla Black began to kiss total strangers on the TV programme *Blind Date*; then it became mandatory for all hosts on all chat shows to kiss the entire contents of the studio sofa. After that, it ramped up even further when the Duke of Kent kissed the ladies' Wimbledon tennis champion. The kissing game started to inflate from there and so here we are.

I've heard that now there is a posh new custom of saying to people, "CYK": "Consider yourself kissed". I rather like that. Friendly, without exposing yourself to flu germs.

Mwah Mwah anyone?

Rotten Referenda

Binary referendum results imposed on a parliamentary democracy have the same result as pouring diesel into a petrol engine: the system seizes solid. This is partly why Brexit has created such a fractious atmosphere and why referenda are a truly rotten idea. But this is where we are and it would seem that whatever happens next, the country will remain divided.

Parliament is deeply unrepresentative of the views of the people. The referendum result reflected 52 per cent Brexiteers and 48 per cent Remainers, yet our “first past the post” democracy has produced a mix of six Remainers to one Brexiteer in Parliament. Hence the log jam.

There’s a vast tranche of voters in the UK whose views remain unrepresented in Parliament and the media. The old soldiers, for example, whose views I summarised in my last blog, *A Land Fit for Heroes*, are often considered bigoted fascists. As are those who, even if they aren’t so old, want a nation state and to live in their own communities, and who believe we are still a Christian country. And there are voters who worry their faith is being eroded by secularism and are concerned about the illiberal aspects of Islam, and who complain that no one asked if they wanted to live in a multi-racial society. They are, of course, ignored and labelled racist.

Writing on the Wall

But Parliament ignores these voters at its peril, for 70–80 per cent of voters are demanding that immigration be constrained, and a good 40 per cent want to see it stopped altogether. More than 50 per cent don’t think immigration has been beneficial to this country.

MPs ignore voters who doubt the wisdom of gay adoption (even if such voters are not in any way “homophobic”). They disregard voters who are shocked when their children are taught the normality of

transgenderism at junior school, and voters who believe marriage is for the long term. They ignore voters who yearn to do the “right thing” and those who worry about the passing of free speech.

How do I know this? Social research surveys and opinion polls tell us so.

By last February (2019), of the nine parties that are represented in the House of Commons, eight signed up to the full “liberal” agenda (the exception being the 10 MPs of the DUP). So out of 10 parties in the Commons, nine are liberal, even if one of them is labelled “Conservative”. It’s the Conservatives who cannot be bothered to control immigration and it’s the Conservatives who insist that six-year-old school children are taught about same-sex relationships and transgenderism. And Conservative MPs, by a majority, are disdainful of the nation state and voted Remain.

It seems, too, that the people in our universities, almost all government quangos, the arts quangos, the teaching profession and the media all have the same mindset. And, of course, that goes for Church of England bishops too.

And because these people all think the same way, they don’t think we suffer from political bias in the ruling elite: these views are deemed to be right!

The two main parties should have seen the warning signs. In the Euro elections, they only secured a quarter of the vote between them.

It won’t end happily.

Death of a Despot

I was told it was bad manners to wish anyone dead, but perfectly acceptable to read obituary notices with pleasure. It is in this spirit I come to the news of Mugabe's death.

He had a choice: either to rule like Nelson Mandela or turn into a tin-pot crook like so many of his colleagues. He chose the latter. When measured against Hitler and Stalin, he was a small, bad man, but bad enough to massacre 20,000 civilians and steal everything not actually nailed to the ground. A charismatic little sod who turned his beautiful country into a racist ruin and left nothing of material value in his passing.

The 1983 tragedy of the massacre of 20,000 people around Bulawayo – said to be a material underestimate – by Mugabe's hired thugs, was more or less hidden at the time. Apparently, the Thatcher Government was so relieved to be shot of Zimbabwe that they asked few questions and were fobbed off with non-answers. I am sure, however, that the fact that the massacre was black people killing black people was a factor. We just didn't care enough. If, however, it had been blacks killing whites, or worse still, whites killing blacks, the world would have taken real notice, and the perpetrators hunted down and tried at The Hague on grounds of crimes against humanity.

If there is any justice, I presume Uncle Bob is having a difficult time with the recording angel.

Revisiting a Referendum

Those not totally numbed to distraction over Brexit might care to look at a 1975 YouTube Oxford University debate. The late Labour minister Peter Shore is speaking ahead of the 1975 referendum and the points he brilliantly makes are as pertinent today as they were then. Ted Heath lolls looking bored in the audience. The great Barbara Castle and Jeremy Thorpe are also listening.

The Beautiful Game

Football is being ruined by hideous violence, cheating, corruption and racism.

Why not make the fans pay in hard cash for the ghastly conduct of a few? Why not make the clubs and players pay the full price of policing these matches? It's not as if they are short of money. If the Serbian Under 21 fans behave as racist criminals, why not force such matches to be played behind closed doors without paying crowds? If banana skins and glass are hurled onto pitches, why not simply stop the game, find the perpetrators and hand them over to the police? If a match is disrupted, so what?

At the first sign of trouble, why not take the players off? Practise zero tolerance? Boom! Fans would soon learn to police their own events once they learnt that a few loonies were destroying the game and costing them a load of money. Why don't the clubs buy their own monitors and start behaving like grown-ups? The police should treat obscene chants in the same way that such chants would be treated if heard on the streets, and prosecute the perpetrators. Tribalism trumps moral perspective and the idiotic claims that bad behaviour is always the other side's fault are plain childish.

Segregation of crowds encourages abuse and riots. If fans were mixed as they are at rugby matches they might begin to appreciate good football being

played by both sides. When did you last see a riot at a rugby match?

Why should taxpayers pay good money to clear up this mess? Of course, it's all about money and you know what God thinks about money when you see the sort of people he gives it to. Once the players started to be paid obscene salaries, the vital link between them and ordinary supporters was sundered and any sense of duty and responsibility was broken. Players and managers are now planets apart and the honour of being a role model long since dissipated. Professional footballers simply don't have to think of anyone other than themselves and their weird tattoos and haircuts. So they don't.

The beautiful game is now a raddled old bag: she needs a facelift.



No, tell me about
bad Joe, not good Joe!!



The Dark Side

One of my chums who knows about the darker side of life told me a great truth: that it's far more interesting to say scandalous things about people than nice.

If you wonder whether this is true or not, just consider this example. If I tell you I've just had a meeting with Jim Johnson, a dear friend who is kind, thoughtful, gentle, loved by all, and faithful to his wife his whole life long, just tell me you won't yawn with boredom and find a quick opportunity to walk away. (I simply won't believe you!)

On the other hand, if I tell you that I've just had a meeting with Jim, the

one with the drunken past who is probably a crook and a legendary serial adulterer – and in great trouble – I bet you'll curl your lip with pleasure and beg for more.

Go on – admit it!

April Fool

Years ago, I rang a friend and told him that his greatest pal had just been raided by the fraud squad.

"Great news," he said, "That'll teach the sanctimonious sod!"

I then pointed out that it was 1 April.

"Oh ... please, please don't tell him what I just said!"

Reader, what do you think I did?

The Price of Treachery

We arrived knackered at Mapledurham at the end of a long and fractious day – a long way from Wokingham!

Much of the walk was along cambered roads on the edge of Reading. Anyone who walks seriously will attest to how uncomfortable a material camber can be over even short distances. Vast roaring lorries and dozens of mean little whining cars all created a light smog, while our feet kicked up the spoor from thousands of students from the local poly: cigarette packets, condoms, coke cans and literally a carpet of fast-food cardboard junk.

When I sought a bottle of fresh pressed orange from a store, I was told they only had bottled “juice”, all highly coloured and smothered in sugar. Two vast, tattooed ladies with mauve hair purchased a stack of crisps, chocolate biscuits and lottery tickets and staggered out of the shop, pecking at their snacks as they went.

Then we passed from the wasteland into newly mown fields; if we had felt more energetic, we would have done a jig for joy.

Being Nice

My great Aunt Daisy used to tell me, “When you can’t say anything nice about someone, Tom, best say nothing at all.”

How wise. But even the kind-hearted Daisy might have been moved to say something about the way our fellow countrymen and women look today.

We’re an irredeemably scruffy lot. It’s extraordinary why men think looking unshaven is sexy. The hunky, grizzled “look” may suit film stars but when you are over 50, and wedged into ill-fitting jeans with a jutting beer belly, a spotty face and a red nose, you don’t look like Brad Pitt, you look like a three-flush floater.

By far the most stressful sight I’ve seen was while strolling along a beach on the Isle of Wight a few years back. There stood a weightlifter, naked apart from a thong and looking like a brown condom stuffed with conkers.

The Price of Treachery

What a soft and foolish nation we have become. I wonder for our national sanity when I read comments by the likes of Douglas Murray (you must read his excellent *The Strange Death of Europe*) about Jihadi Jack and Shamima Begum of ISIS fame being allowed back into the UK after they fought on the side of those who killed and tortured many of our people.

We appear to be losing our wits! We don’t have to guess what would happen if Jihadi Jack (really Jack Letts from Oxford), and others returned to the UK to face trial ...



Just see what happened when Canadian Omah Khadr arrived back in Canada after he'd spent years fighting with ISIS and allegedly murdered a US sergeant. All the Khadr family are ISIS fighters: Omah's dad was killed, and another son wounded.

Omah's mother made her position clear: of course there was no family remorse or apologies: all she wanted was "our rights as Canadian citizens".

Away Game

The Khadr family prove that it doesn't matter whether you fight for the "home" or "away" team in these twenty-first-century wars: if the away team fails, you get better treatment than if you had played for the home side. Rather better in fact.

Thanks to an army of pro bono lawyers, a couple of years ago Omah was awarded \$10m damages for having been imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay – this despite the

fact that he had fought against his own country. That's far more cash than any American, Canadian or British widow could expect to receive for the loss of a husband.

Multi-millionaire Omah was interviewed on a Montreal TV show and greeted by a standing ovation. He was gently interviewed about his "journey", telling viewers of how he had "suffered PTSD". He claimed to have been in "an unfortunate place, in difficult circumstances". A fellow guest said, "I'm filled with admiration for your fortitude" and Omah was asked, "How can you be so mentally strong?"

Now the issue of killers returning home is erupting in the UK. Thankfully passports are being refused to those who want to come back as if nothing untoward had happened. But of course, they all have a case, championed by lawyers and an army of supporters.

No one ever says “sorry”. Jihadi Jack’s ghastly father admits, “My armchair revolutionary ‘shite’ (his words, not mine) may have influenced my son”. His son is said to be a “victim”.

And during the Shamima Begum case, I remained unmoved by the arguments that somehow “we are all to blame” for her joining ISIS. This is our dilemma. We know roughly what to do when these people are in a foreign field; with luck, we can take them out with a drone. But we have no idea what to do if the Shamimas and Jacks return!

I can just imagine it. A softball interview on the *Today* programme would be followed by a TV special. Then after some sympathetic profile pieces, a legal case for mistreatment would be funded pro bono. Soon studio audiences would be applauding Shamima’s and Jack’s bravery. We just can’t help ourselves, can we?

No matter that these traitors are undermining the integrity of our country and making a mockery of our defences, we just can’t help giving everyone – whatever atrocities they have committed, whatever side they have fought on, and no matter how many people they have killed – the benefit of every doubt. We seldom bother to learn the names of their victims, do we, or pause to wonder how the victims’ families are surviving amidst the wholesale destruction of their lives.

I say banish such traitors from the UK forever! They can float stateless across the world like the *Flying Dutchman* for all I care – for we will only embarrass ourselves if they are allowed to return here.

It's not fair, no one will have me...
all I did was murder innocent people...



Strange Death

I clambered into a thicket in the deepest of woods to, ahem, repair myself. When I emerged, I discovered that Jane had gone, vanished, vamoosed into thin air. I shouted to no avail and then discovered that, as usual, I had no idea where I was. Not a clue. There were several tracks all heading off in different directions, so what was I to do?

Those ZANE supporters who have missed earlier blogs may not know that my sense of direction is not my finest quality. I would make a useless taxi driver or field master of a hunt! Once when wooing a girl, I drove from Penrith to London; 20 miles from London, I went round a roundabout and drove more or less all the way back to Penrith. The girl dumped me, and who can blame her? When I was in the army, I was known as “Backbearing Benyon”. My guardsmen followed me not because they thought I knew where I was going but out of curiosity to see where we would end up!

Anyway, I was lost and the thought crossed my mind, how would I survive? Were my Bear Grylls skills up to scratch? How long could I stay alive? I was all right for water, but could I eat? Were those mushrooms halfway up that tree edible? Were those lice under that log crammed full of vitamins?

I wandered about like King Lear in the mad scene until suddenly Moses

appeared and darted off and there was Jane grinning like an owl. What a relief!

Here, Blair and Everywhere

I keep seeing Tony Blair leering on the telly and I have to admit I find him increasingly irritating. He is, in my view, to a marked degree responsible for the Brexit catastrophe.

When Blair was in power, his Minister of State in the Home Office, Barbara Roche, decided to leave the immigration door wide open: in six brief years, she allowed nearly two million people into the UK. Such an experiment has never been implemented before, anywhere. Roche introduced far too many people into our country, far too fast. She did not ask anyone, she just did it. I think the then Home Secretary, Jack Straw, was preoccupied with the Iraq war at the time.

Anyway, Blair’s lack of grip on his minister placed a great burden on house prices, on the health service and on schools. And, to the anger of many communities, Roche changed their nature irreversibly; if anyone complained, she labelled them “racist”.

This disaster took place on Blair’s watch, and the resultant fear and anger about immigration numbers generated a great many Brexit votes.

And it was Blair who allowed the MPs’ expenses regime to flourish so

that, when the row became public, the voters believed – with some justification – that there was one tax system for MPs and another for their constituents.

So he has quite a lot to answer for, doesn't he?

Losing Our Religion

Parents who happen to be my closest friends were visiting a Church of England school to assess whether or not it was suitable for their children.

The headmistress jabbered on about the school's virtues: "Oh, so hard working, what wonderful exam results, if I do say so myself, very good discipline, da de da de dum..."

And then my friend asked, "What about religious education or chapel perhaps?"

"Oh no, you will be pleased to learn we are a strictly secular school."

"Oh that's a pity," said my friend sweetly. "You see I'm a vicar!"

The headmistress appeared to melt to glue. "Well, perhaps I misspoke," she spluttered, and then laughed wildly. "Of course, we do have occasional prayers and talks ..." She trailed off and there was an embarrassed silence.

It's fascinating. Here is a CoE school and the head teacher thinks that boasting about how the school is wholly secular makes a strong selling point!

There have been many wonderful things introduced these past hundred years, from the NHS to the Internet, but we have lost the plot when it comes to our religious culture. Muslims, in the main, haven't forgotten their faith, but we are in the process of forgetting ours.

However faithless and unbelieving my classmates and I may have been at school – and sad to say, we were a godless lot – at least we were taught the basics about our Christian/Judeo inheritance. We roared the hymns so



often, we knew them by heart, and of course we knew our way around Cranmer's prayer book and the King James Bible.

But nowadays in school, Gospel teaching has about the same status as the tooth fairy. The reason is, of course, that many teachers are plumb ignorant.

Doubtless, this idiot headmistress was all in favour of the "fruits of the spirit" – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness and self-control – but she wouldn't have had a clue about where these virtues come from or who inspired them! People like her are living off the capital of the Christian faith. They want the king without the cross. God willing, our friends' children will find another school with someone sensible in charge.

Gonorrhea with the Wind

Years ago, I was chairman of a Midlands health authority board, appointed by the great Ken Clarke, who was the then Health Secretary. It was in the early 1990s, when the health service was told that the local authorities had to be run like businesses.

Anyway, I did my best with the Byzantine finances but no one really knew who was in charge: the local board or the National Health Authority.

Towards the end of my term, a new building was planned. No one was quite sure what it would be used for but we were all told that it would be a great asset.

Then I was asked if I would be happy to have the building named after me? I was amazed because I didn't like the woman who asked me – and I was pretty darn sure she didn't like me either.

But what an honour! Coo! Shucks! Well, I never did! But then I remembered *Round the Horne* starring Kenneth Horne, who "prefers to remain anonymous", and something about the woman's sly, little smile made me hang back.

Just as well because I discovered it was to be a VD clinic.

Grandad, have you ever
had a building named
after you?



Have Faith

We completed the last 13 miles at some speed, passing through the outskirts of Oxford via Wallingford. Then it was on to Christ Church via the Iffley Road to be met by a warm, welcoming group. Dear Alannah, who helped send us on our way from Canterbury (it seemed like a lifetime ago), was there to welcome us back with a spirited trumpet voluntary.

Grace

What I dislike are books on faith that imply that the author has it all worked out, and if the book is read then all doubts will flee (and if they don't, well, there must be something wrong with the reader!) I also worry that a number of vicars don't preach well and so people remain frustrated and unfed, their basic questions unanswered.

Let's face it: in the twenty-first century, talk of the virgin birth, miracles and a dead man rising make for an improbable story. And dear old Dawkins and the late Christopher Hitchens haven't helped matters.

I am comforted that it was not the devout and morally successful who understood Jesus, and who were loved by him. It was the desperate and the defeated, those who felt they had let themselves down, and the profoundly disappointed.

Paul Tillich, a German exile from NAZI Germany wrote this:

"Do we know what it means to be struck by grace? It does not mean we suddenly believe that God exists or that Jesus is the Saviour, or that the Bible contains the truth... Grace strikes us when we are in great pain and restlessness. It strikes us when we walk through the dark valley of a meaningless and empty life. It strikes us when we feel that our separation is deeper than usual... it strikes us when our disgust for our own being, our indifference, our weakness, our hostility, and our lack of direction and composure have become intolerable to us. It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage."

Reasons to Believe

For me, this seems to capture the upside-down message of Jesus. So why do I believe?

Years ago, I knew the great Chuck Colson of Nixon infamy and Watergate, and then jail and Prison Fellowship. He was a thug, no mistake – as was St Paul. And so was my friend Jonathan Aitken and so was I! But God uses us in our weakness.

In the book *Born Again*, Colson wrote that in the Watergate scandal in June 1972, seven men – the

Watergate Seven – conspired to lie to the world that Nixon did not know about the break-in to the Democratic National Committee (Erlichman, Mitchell, Mardian, Colson, Haldeman, Parkinson and Strachan).

It took just one week for the conspiracy to fall apart; one by one, the seven could no longer bear the deception, and so they went to the special prosecutor to admit they had lied.

Colson concluded from his own experience that Jesus' disciples simply couldn't have conspired to lie to the Roman authorities about the resurrection, when the penalty for that lie was crucifixion. Why would they do such a thing? To die for a lie is completely contrary to human nature, so Colson concluded that the disciples had to be telling the truth. Jesus did rise from the dead: they saw him and they were prepared to die for that truth.

I have always thought that totally convincing and it's the reason I began to believe in the miracle of the resurrection.

And then US bestselling author David Foster Wallace wrote this:

"Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for choosing some sort of god ... to worship ... is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive. If you worship money

and things ... then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your own body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally bury you ... Worship power, and you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever-more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, and you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They are default settings."

Last, the writer Solzhenitsyn spent much of his time, after his incarceration in the Gulag, trying to understand how some 60 million Soviets had simply "vanished". And



this was in my lifetime too! Sixty million people, many just slaughtered, many starved to death – and all killed in truly ghastly circumstances.

In God's name, why? Because, he concluded, people had tried to live without God.

So people should belt up with their worries/doubts/fears and so on, and stop moaning on about why does God allow suffering and all the rest of it. Because this is nothing new. It's been talked about for thousands of years.

Just get on with believing – what alternative is there? – and save your witterings for the recording angel!

The POSH Test

I wonder just how “posh” ZANE supporters are?

Just in case you didn't know, the word “posh” comes from our colonial past. It derives from whether liner passengers to India could afford “Port Out, Starboard Home” tickets (a posh ticket) – so they could buy shade from the sun.

Now I have been told that posh people are defined by how they pronounce the word “shower”. If it rhymes with “flower” they are certainly not posh. If they pronounce it “shar” (to rhyme with “far”), they are totally and irredeemably posh.

Our Thanks

We have completed 162 miles – much of the way through God's own countryside – and returned safely. Jane and I were conscious that 80



years ago, the sky was a battleground: we were reminded of this by enthusiasts in Spitfires performing aerobatics. The weather was kind to us, perfect in fact. We were welcomed by loyal ZANE supporters, people who comprise the backbone of the UK: kindly, hospitable and generous to a fault. We choose not to highlight their names, which might have caused embarrassment, but they know who they are. Thank you, each and every one of you. It's a privilege to have you in our lives.

Markus, our driver and doughty assistant from Bulawayo, is a great ZANE friend. He's a careful driver and a patient man, blessed by an overarching good nature. Markus never takes offence: this last is a necessary quality when dealing with

flawed individuals such as Jane and me, especially so when we are tired, thirsty, demanding and fractious.

General Jane was, as ever, commanding and indomitable, an inspiration to all who know her. Her map-reading skills are astonishing, as are her leadership qualities.

The walk could not have proceeded without Sue Carter's care and patience.

And last, our thanks to you, our generous supporters, for your financial

support and warm messages of encouragement. We are grateful to the many who came to walk with us.

Tom Benyon

PS: My daughter, Clare, tells me that her Italian friend, Luca, is most concerned about Brexit and the wider political situation in the UK.

I ask you! When the Italians express worry about the political state we are in, we really are in a mess!



The views expressed are those of Tom Benyon and not the charity, ZANE.

Cartoons by Tony Husband

All these years of walking with Tom for ZANE, and I've been letting him do all the blogging! I thought I'd have a go myself this time – so here's my account of the walk from Canterbury to Oxford. (Unlike my husband, though, I won't veer off in weird and wonderful directions: this is a straightforward account of the route we took, and the things we encountered along the way.)

Walk from Canterbury to Oxford

by Jane Benyon

Day 1

We arrived last night after the usual nightmare journey down the M25. There had been a major smash on the westbound carriageway, blocking the road completely and leaving a tailback for miles. A happy way to end the holiday for many!

The night was spent in the pretty village of Wye where we would walk to today. On arrival at Canterbury Cathedral, we were met by friends and family who had come to walk with us, including our daughter Clare, grandson Daniel and Clare's friend Alannah. Sadly the cathedral is covered with scaffolding and the courtyard is a building site, but there was time for a quick look inside before Alannah sent us on our way with a trumpet voluntary. She is a fine musician!

Sadly our old Google Sat Nav – which I fondly

called Fred and which had directed us over nine walks – is now obsolete, so I have been issued a new one by my son-in-law John, who designs all the walks. He assured me it was easy to use and it did seem to be so when I tried it out in Bladon. However, setting off in the confined space of central Canterbury was another story. After one hour, we realised we were going diametrically in the wrong direction along a busy A road, so we had to return to the start



and begin all over again! This time, we were rightly on a lovely route passing along the beautiful Stour Valley to Chatham for lunch, where one of our friends left to catch a train back to London.

The rest of the party then continued on to Wye, arriving later than planned due to our unfortunate start. I think (well, hope) I have now worked out how to use the Sat Nav, which I will call "Fred 2". There was time for a quick cup of tea before our family and others caught the train back to London and Canterbury.

Day 2

We had an easy start today. There were no visiting walkers so we were on our own. This tends to speed things up – talking while walking and navigating slows us down! It was a glorious morning: blue skies with scudding white clouds, a gentle breeze, and far less muggy than over the past few days.

Leaving the Stour valley, we joined the North Downs Way and passed through the attractive village of Boughton Lees with its large village green and cricket pitch. Then we followed the busy A251, luckily along a footpath, to the edge of Ashford. Here we saw very imposing gates with a royal coat of arms but seemingly leading nowhere. We rang the bell of the gatehouse and were told by a charming young girl that it dates back to the sixteenth century. Now a hotel, the house was once occupied by

one of Queen Victoria's sons – though the girl didn't know which one.

After feasting on moules and chips at a very good pub, we continued along pleasant lanes and tracks, crossing the M20 on our way. We had to cross three different mainline railways – which explains why Kent is such a popular commuting county for London (despite the reports of train delays and stoppages in this part of the world). We arrived at our destination in Bethersden feeling good, but more than ready for that welcome cup of tea and a bath!



Day 3

Another sunny morning with a light breeze: we made good progress along narrow lanes before turning off into a large farmyard with a number of stables. After wandering around in

some confusion, we eventually met the owner who showed us the way through. She was a hunting lady as well as a big sheep farmer and her husband was away at market selling lambs. We passed through large fields with sheep everywhere – it was good to see such a large farm of stock for a change.

As we made our way down the side of a wood, a large dog fox appeared – much to the intense excitement of Moses. Not that the fox had much to worry about! At lunch we met up with another supporter who joined us for the first half of the afternoon. After initially negotiating a horribly

busy road, our path took us through untouched meadows. The deep, thick grass was full of wild flowers, even this late in the summer. What a wonderful sight it must have been two months ago. Deep into a large wood, our companion left us, as she wanted to photograph some of the things she had seen along the way. She promised to ring to tell us she had got back safely.

We were now in a large deciduous forest, such a change from endless evergreen firs and so on. I have learnt that this area has the highest number of deciduous forests and woodland in the country. Then it was back on to another terrifying B road. The traffic



was horrendous, all going much too fast for the terrain and the poor camber on the road. It was positively dangerous, and we eventually called our driver, Markus, to pick us up one mile from our destination in Sissinghurst. Our host for the night told us that five years ago there would have been hardly any traffic on that stretch – sadly it is now a rat run.

Day 4

After a wonderful overnight stay in another lovely old farmhouse, we arrived back in Sissinghurst to meet up with two ZANE supporters for the day's walking. One had a golden Labrador, which Moses made great friends with. The dogs exhausted each other in a field by rushing around

madly. Our companions both had maps, which filled me with trepidation as I have suffered in the past from well-meaning people taking us in the wrong direction. However, both men were local and really did know their way around the busy roads, so I was relieved.

It was another glorious morning, and our route could not have been more pleasant with wide footpaths meandering through wonderful countryside. No more struggles through bramble-strewn paths! We eventually passed through Angley Wood, a large forested area of mixed trees. I do love walking in woods. Then we found ourselves on a shooting estate with thousands of young pheasants running around everywhere. The dogs went wild with excitement, chasing the birds hither and thither before we got them under control.

I must say it's difficult to see the sport in bringing in this number of pheasants just to shoot them.

Oh well, I suppose it's hugely lucrative for the landowner!

We stopped for lunch in Goudhurst, in an excellent pub run by an Italian. We were told that the hop pickers from the East End of London used to arrive by train here and then stay the night in the simple cabins we spied in a field, before being sent



to the farms round about. This was big business up until the 1970s, and then the brewers discovered it was cheaper to import hops from Poland. There are now hardly any hop farms left and most of the oast houses have been turned into private dwellings. We did pass some fields of hops, but they were owned by the National Trust. It's sad to see how yet another way of life in the country is fast disappearing.

The afternoon's walking brought more country lanes and footpaths, and apart from one mistake – finding ourselves on the wrong side of a boundary fence and having to climb over a rickety wire fence on to the right path – our journey to Hook Green was uneventful. Tonight we are staying with one of our walking companions.

Day 5

After an evening of immense fun – the discussion mainly being on the topic of Brexit, where we found we were coming from different viewpoints – we had an excellent night's sleep and woke up feeling refreshed.

We met up with our other walking companion of yesterday (with his map, bless him). It's been another



gorgeous day and the countryside was stunningly beautiful. It's such a privilege to be experiencing it in these incredibly peaceful surroundings. We passed through more woodland broken up by little hidden valleys, many of them holding converted oast houses and related buildings. We spoke to one of the owners who admitted things were pretty tough in winter and that the towers did make the houses very cold in winter and hot in the summer. But he seemed pretty contented with his lot for all that.

After such a peaceful morning, it was quite a shock to reach Tunbridge Wells with its horrendous traffic jams, even on a Sunday. We ate a rather mediocre lunch in a Sainsburys cafe before walking along the common, a highly wooded area that appears to run through the centre of the town. It must be a joy for the town's dog owners and joggers. Our route took us

through another deeply wooded area, bordering a stream and a single-track railway line with a steam train run as a local attraction. There were some huge rock formations alongside the path – great slabs of rock, one on top of the other, rather like you find in various parts of Zimbabwe. A very unexpected sight! We continued through more ancient and untouched woodland to our destination at Groombridge. For a second, I thought the sign read “Gloombridge” – possibly an apt name for this not very inspiring-looking village!

We returned to Tunbridge Wells for the night. Our hosts live in one of a row of 20 late-Georgian houses built to accommodate those who came to the Pantiles to take the waters, which were believed to have medicinal qualities and put Tunbridge Wells on the map at the time.

Day 6

Another walker joined us today with his elderly Labrador. Unfortunately Moses seemed to have injured his foot while going for a pee in our host’s garden, so he was feeling rather sorry for himself – although I couldn’t find any obvious injury.

We spent most of the morning walking along a disused railway line, which made progress easy. It was very shaded though, and we rather wished we were basking in the morning’s glorious sunshine. Eventually, the railway was left behind and we found

ourselves in undulating pastureland – we had now passed from Kent into East Sussex. After lunch, Moses was left in the car to nurse his sore paw. It was just as well, as walking through East Grinstead was mainly on hard pavements. We reached our destination at the far side of the town earlier than usual with plenty of time to unwind in the beautiful home of our hosts.



Day 7

Thankfully, Moses appeared to have recovered from his injury this morning.

The day started peacefully enough in pretty countryside, but we gradually became aware of the constant noise of the air traffic around Gatwick airport. By the middle of the day, our ears were constantly being blasted by the roar of aeroplanes, trains and the M23 as we manoeuvred our way round the



airport. A very confusing exercise and we almost found ourselves entering Terminal 2! We must have looked a strange sight with our high-viz jackets, walking sticks and a small, black dog. What a relief to gradually leave it all behind and get back on to the Sussex border path.

Tonight we are staying 30 miles away, back near Tunbridge Wells. It always seems amazing to travel back along your route in a car and see how far you have walked!

Day 8

It was our day off today, thank goodness. We decided to visit Chartwell, Winston Churchill's family home.

We had a lovely relaxing time and thoroughly enjoyed our day.

I particularly enjoyed the garden, which had been beautifully laid out by Lady Churchill and restored by the National Trust. The house was interesting, particularly the memorabilia. It's not a pretty house, but quite intimate and welcoming.

Day 9

We were late arriving at our starting point today as we had miscalculated the time it would take to get there. However, there were no fellow walkers to join us and the route along bridleways and tracks was straightforward. The only excitement came when we found ourselves on another shooting estate amidst a sea of pheasants and Moses shot off. Barely a minute later, he appeared looking extremely pleased with himself and



for at least two and a half hours, which gives you an idea of its size. Eventually, we moved on to the Wootton Estate, past a spectacular waterfall and fishing lakes below.

We were pleased with ourselves, arriving at our destination at 4.30pm despite our late start.

proudly carrying a dead cock pheasant – which he deposited at my feet as his mother, a working spaniel, would have done! It was quickly disposed of into the bushes and Moses was put on his lead, much to his displeasure.

A quick pub lunch followed and we were off again. We spent most of the rest of the day in a huge forest, a large part of it being owned by the National Trust. Once again, the trees were mainly deciduous but where the National Trust has taken over, there were a large number of stunning evergreens, such as Scots Pines, Wellingtonias and what I think must be Canadian Redwoods. After quite a climb up to the ridge of the forest, we enjoyed a spectacular view looking north east. We then had the long hike back down the other side. We must have been walking in the forest

Day 10

Today we were joined by our son-in-law John. He designed our route from Canterbury, so I felt very relaxed with far less responsibility as we made our way to Guildford. Actually, it was a very easy route as we spent most of the day on the North Downs walking along a well-marked path. It was mainly through woodland, again owned by the National Trust. We were interested to see a large number of Second World War pillboxes arranged along a ridge facing south. This was part of the country's defences in case of an invasion. Thank God they were never needed!

At lunchtime, we were pleased to leave the confines of the woods and be greeted by wonderful views over the Surrey countryside. Our finishing



point today was Guildford Cathedral, which I assumed was somewhere in the centre of the city but turned out to be right on the other side and up a very steep hill. Started in 1938 and not finished until the 1960s, the cathedral is a rather forbidding-looking building on the outside. The inside, however, is very beautiful and altogether a lovely space. We attended said evensong. Unfortunately the choir was still on holiday.

Day 11

We departed from Guildford Cathedral this morning, luckily travelling downhill this time, and had soon left the suburban streets behind. Some of the country lanes were less negotiable than on previous days and we had

to scramble through nettles and brambles. Tom sustained a nasty cut on his mouth.

Today was the day that the blackberries had ripened to their sweetest. Up until now, it has been hit and miss as to whether the ripe-looking ones would be sweet. We grazed on them happily. I remember having a pony that loved eating blackberries and would suck them off the bushes, rather like an elephant picking up food.

We came to another field festooned with electric tape to keep in ponies and were greeted by a notice reading, "Beware of the donkey, it hates dogs". Moses was ignored by the said donkey! At our lunch stop, a surprise visit from good friends – who live close by – lifted our spirits. The afternoon was



very pleasant, walking along the river Wey on the outskirts of Aldershot. Moses had fun swimming for sticks, although it was rather a wet dog that clambered into the car at the end of the day.

Day 12

Today we walked with Matthew, who joined us earlier in the walk. We are staying with him tonight.

We started off on a pleasant track before joining the road through Frimley, which is where Matthew lives. Luckily for us, once we had gone under the M3, he took us away from the road and along the river path full of Sunday walkers and their dogs.

Moses was delighted at the chance of frequent swims.

Matthew left us at Sandhurst Village, where we ate a mediocre lunch. We spent most of the rest of the afternoon walking up the busy A321, which luckily had a pavement all the way but was extremely noisy with the din of passing cars. I suppose the only saving grace was that it was Sunday, so there were no lorries. I amused myself by trying to guess why people name their houses the way they do, especially the grand ones behind electric fences.

After two hours of constant noise, it was a relief to spend the last 20 minutes walking round a golf course and then on to the outskirts of Wokingham.

Day 13

Today we had to resign ourselves to trudging along busy roads in urban areas. It's on days like this that our island feels overcrowded – unlike the many days that we have spent in beautiful countryside with barely a soul around.

Between Wokingham and the outskirts of Reading, we found ourselves walking along a very busy road without a pavement. Our rule is not to risk this but we couldn't reach Markus on the phone to get him to pick us up. So we flagged down three men in a battered work van and asked if they could drive us down to where the road's footpath resumed. They kindly agreed and we piled into the back of the van, sitting amongst



the sawdust and nails. Luckily it was empty. They dropped us off at a school a couple of miles down the road and wished us luck.



Day 14

We covered 14 miles today, our longest day of walking so far.

We were keen to get an early start, despite having to travel 15 miles during the rush hour. Luckily, we found a route without having to go back into Reading and arrived on the dot of 9am. We were met by a fellow walker who knew our route, and who in fact had helped John to slightly amend it so as to avoid dangerous roads.

Then there was more trudging along mean streets, past failing shops and kebab houses, and the University of Reading. The streets were festooned with litter and we were feeling thoroughly fed up! After crossing the river, we reached the nice pub that Markus had found for lunch and our equilibrium was restored. I think we were getting tired, not helped by breathing in car fumes.

The afternoon's walk was quite short, the last stretch taking us alongside a golf course where the peace was tangible after the incessant noise of traffic.



We were now in Oxfordshire and on the home stretch. There was more forestry, though this time I noticed it was more commercially managed woodland, with piles of timber on the sides of the tracks and the sounds of trees being felled in the distance. A number of riders as well as the usual dog walkers passed us. We had to keep our wits about us, as the paths were numerous!

We stopped for lunch in an old pub in a charming setting on the banks of the Thames. The pub has been turned into an Italian restaurant by a young Anglo-Italian, and the food was excellent. We spent most of the afternoon walking along the Thames path, admiring the large opulent houses on the other side with their sweeping lawns and manicured gardens. Many of them had motor cruisers moored on their jetty. It was fun to speculate on the cost of some of this real estate!

Eventually, we arrived at the old bridge leading to Wallingford and climbed its steep steps. Then it was back to the noisy traffic after the peace of the river. I imagined we were very nearly at our destination at the end of the next village of Brightwell-cum-Sotwell. However, our travelling companion pointed out that it was a very long village – and it certainly was! The streets seemed to go on forever, especially noticeable when you are tired. Only after we had passed the second parish church did I realise that Brightwell-cum-Sotwell is in fact two villages that have been amalgamated, hence the name.

It was 6.30pm when we finally arrived. A very long day of walking, since 9am!

Day 15

Our final day with the end in sight! We had intended to sleep at home on the penultimate night but realised we might get caught up in Oxford's rush-hour traffic, so we booked into a local hotel so as to set off in time. Another long day's walking lay ahead of us.

We were now travelling due north, having left the Thames to our east. The countryside had changed again, with very flat farmland and miles of stubble fields. For the first time, we saw a hint of autumn colours in the hedgerows. The grass has turned brown since we started our journey – there has been no noticeable rain, so we've been very lucky.

The only hill we climbed was up to the Wittenham Clumps, some impressive earthworks that were obviously built because of their strategic position in the flat lands around them. I remember happy days tobogganing there with our grandchildren some years ago. Then it was on through Long Wittenham to the edge of Nuneham Courtenay, and through the grounds of Nuneham Courtenay Manor – which is apparently a Global Spiritual Retreat Centre, whatever that is.

More fields, recently ploughed, had to be crossed before we reached the outskirts of Oxford at the Kassam Stadium. We then got lost inside the



shopping area with its high fences that separated us from the walkway on the other side where we should have been. In desperation, we tried to cross a slightly lower fence but were saved mid-climb by a lady who told us there was a gap in the fence at the bottom! I seriously thought Tom might have injured himself badly, but retracing our steps did not seem to be an option at the time.

Then it was on through rubbish-strewn walkways between Littlemore and Blackbird Leys, across the bypass, and on to the Iffley Road and the home stretch.

We finally arrived at the gates of Christ Church to the wonderful sound of Alannah playing her trumpet, as she had done 15 days ago on the steps of Canterbury Cathedral. That felt like a lifetime ago!





ZANE does fantastic work looking after vulnerable people in Zimbabwe and showing servicemen and women that they are not forgotten. They are professional, passionate and scrupulous about how the money is spent.

HMA Melanie Robinson

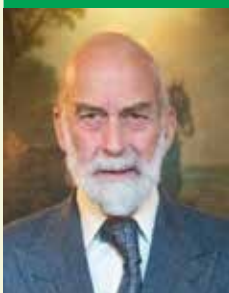
UK Ambassador to Zimbabwe
Former Executive Director
of the World Bank



I have seen a little bit of ZANE's work on the ground and from what I have seen it is very, very impressive . . . ZANE is one of those lovely organisations that make a little bit of money go a long, long way. ZANE is a good cause and the money is properly and well spent.

John Simpson CBE

World Affairs Editor of the BBC



I have supported ZANE for many years as they do excellent work amongst the vulnerable in Zimbabwe.

**HRH Prince Michael
of Kent GCVO**



I am deeply impressed with the work of ZANE; one of those charities that make a little money go a long way.

Baroness Royall of Blaisdon

Former Labour leader of
the House of Lords

You can make a donation by phone 020 7060 6643 or online www.zane.uk.com

Title	Initials	Surname
-------	----------	---------

Address _____

Postcode	Tel	Email
----------	-----	-------



If you are new to ZANE, please tick if you are happy to receive our updates by post ☐ by email ☐

3251019

Please complete this form and send it to: ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY

Preferred use of gift: Trustees' Discretion ☐, Pensioner Work ☐, Impoverished Communities ☐

If a specified project is fully funded, donations will be used where most needed.

Please tick the box below and make this gift and any donations made in the future, or made in the past 4 years, worth 25% more with Gift Aid. Gift Aid is reclaimed by ZANE from the tax you pay for the current tax year.

Your address is needed to identify you as a current UK taxpayer.

☐ I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or Capital Gains tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all of my donations in that tax year, it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

[illegible]

Please notify ZANE if you

- Want to cancel this declaration • Change your name or home address • No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains. Please consider leaving a gift to ZANE in your will. Tick here for further information ☐

I would like to make a regular gift via Direct Debit of £ every month OR £ quarterly
OR £ annually. Please debit the above amount from my account on or around the
(tick as appropriate) 1st ☐ or 15th ☐ of (month)

ZANE:
Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Instruction to your bank or
building society to pay by Direct Debit



Please fill in the form and send to: ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY.

Name and full postal address of your bank or building society

To: The Manager	Bank/building society
-----------------	-----------------------

Address

Postcode

Name(s) of account holder(s)

Branch sort code

Bank/building society account number

Service user number

8	3	9	9	7	5
---	---	---	---	---	---

Reference

Instruction to your bank or building society

Please pay ZANE Direct Debits from the account detailed in this Instruction subject to the safeguards assured by the Direct Debit Guarantee. I understand that this Instruction may remain with ZANE and, if so, details will be passed electronically to my bank/building society.

Signature(s)

Oyster

Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

DD15

DONATE BY CHEQUE OR CARD

I enclose a cheque for £

cheque payable to "ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency" or please debit my Debit/Credit Card for £

Mastercard	Visa	Amex	CAF	Debit	Name on Card
------------	------	------	-----	-------	--------------

[illegible]

Start date	Expiry date	Issue No	Security Code
------------	-------------	----------	---------------

To donate by post, please fill in the form overleaf

Please detach form and post in an envelope to:

ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY England

RESPECTING YOUR DATA

Like any charity, we could not do our important work without being able to communicate with valued supporters like you. ZANE will never sell your details to any third party. You can find more information about how we use and look after your data and your rights, including what to do if you want to hear from us less or stop hearing from us, in our Privacy Policy. You can obtain a copy of this on our website (www.zane-zimbabweanationalemergency.com/policies.asp) or by:

- calling 020 7060 6643
- emailing info@zane.uk.com
- writing to us at ZANE, PO Box 451, Witney OX28 9FY.

Reasons to support ZANE

1. **ZANE** provides aid, comfort and support to 1,800 impoverished pensioners with nowhere else to turn. Only those genuinely in need of assistance receive it.
2. Donors can choose which area of **ZANE's** work they wish to support.
3. **ZANE** was the Telegraph Group Overseas Charity of the year.
4. **ZANE** is looking after 615 aged and frail veterans and their widows. These people fought for the Crown in the Second World War, Malaya, Korea and Aden. Despite their loyal service to the UK, the overwhelming majority are living with insufficient food and limited healthcare.
5. **ZANE** runs education programmes in the high-density areas assisting women and children living in extreme poverty.
6. **ZANE** funded the first clubfoot correction programme in Zimbabwe. Eleven treatment centres have been established and over 3,550 children have received treatment to date.
7. **ZANE** funds the provision of prosthetic limbs for victims of landmine explosions and treatment for people with hearing loss.
8. **ZANE's** funds are subject to rigorous audit and **ZANE** is proud that since its foundation it has never lost money to collapsed banks, middlemen or corruption.
9. An independent consultancy reviewed **ZANE** and the report stated:
"The charity thrives on its responsiveness, flexibility and lack of bureaucracy. Operationally, ZANE is frugal, focused and effective in delivering aid to the needy."

If you want to save a life then please support ZANE



Zimbabwe A National Emergency

You can make a donation by phone or online
020 7060 6643 www.zane.uk.com

Reg Charity No 1112949