Common Sense

Tom and Jane Benyon

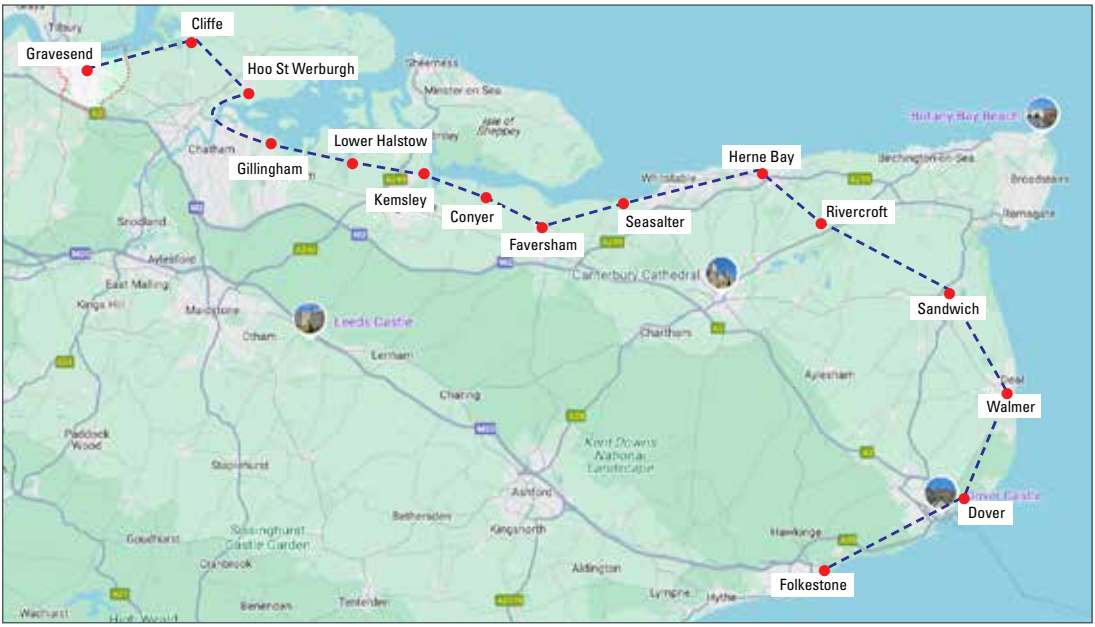
ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Reg Charity No 1112949

ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency

Still walking for Zimbabwe's destitute pensioners

ZANE Walk 2025 1 – 15 September



	Day	Date	Start Point
1	Mon	1-Sept	Gravesend
2	Tue	2-Sept	Cliffe, Rochester
3	Wed	3-Sept	Hoo St Werburgh
4	Thu	4-Sept	Fort Apache, Gillingham
5	Fri	5-Sept	Lower Halstow
6	Sat	6-Sept	near Kemsley
7	Sun	7-Sept	REST DAY
8	Mon	8-Sept	Conyer

	Day	Date	Start Point
9	Tue	9-Sept	Faversham
10	Wed	10-Sept	Seasalter
11	Thu	11-Sept	Herne Bay
12	Fri	12-Sept	Rivercroft, Upstreet
13	Sat	13-Sept	Sandwich
14	Sun	14-Sept	Walmer
15	Mon	15-Sept	Dover
		End	Folkestone

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

Rt Hon the Baroness Royall of Blaisdon

Principal of Somerville College, Oxford
Former Labour leader of the House of Lords

Cartoons by Lee Fearnley, design by Tom van Aurich

Dear Reader

"I was poor and you took me in..." *(Matthew 25:35)*

It's a pleasure to share here our walk commentary, *Common Sense*.

Since ZANE's founding in 2003, we have been privileged to support around 10,000 of Zimbabwe's most vulnerable pensioners, providing not only financial help but also food and healthcare.

In many cases, we discovered that the children of pensioners had emigrated to find work. Often, these pensioners were too proud to admit to their families that – through no fault of their own – their pensions and savings had been wiped out by repeated bouts of hyper-inflation, leaving them facing destitution.

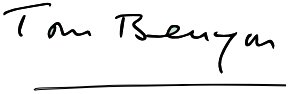
This is where ZANE plays a proud role – though we couldn't achieve what we do without your generosity. Supporters are just as much a part of the ZANE family as our dedicated workers.

Pensioners Betty and Sylvie told us: "Finding we were destitute was a bitter blow. ZANE's work is lifesaving – please thank ZANE supporters for their generosity."

We hope you enjoy reading this commentary. Please be aware that the views expressed are ours alone – and that this booklet raises far more in donations than the cost of its production.

Thank you.

Tom and Jane Benyon (and Moses)



Contents

The Centre Cannot Hold

31 August – The Day Before

I reckon the reason ZANE supporters give so generously is because when they read the walk solicitation over breakfast, they think, "For goodness' sake, not again. Surely, they're too darn decrepit to be doing another walk! I suppose we'd better sponsor them – next year, they're bound to be dead… Now, where's the cheque book?"

So, lo and behold, here we are once more – asking you, please, to sponsor us again…

Cicero Says…

In 44 BC, the great Roman orator Cicero wrote an essay called "On Old Age" to reassure his chum Atticus that retirement and getting older were nothing to fear. He praised exercise, gardening, lively conversation, friendship and a good diet. Thanks Cicero – we tick all those boxes.

Two thousand years on, those over 70 are in better shape than ever before. A recent International Monetary Fund report, analysing data from 41 countries, found that a widespread healthier approach to ageing means that the seventies and eighties are the new fifties and sixties. "We are getting smarter and staying smarter for longer."

Sir Muir Gray, Professor of Primary Care at Oxford and a longstanding advisor on healthy ageing, is unequivocal: "Seventy need not be old, and ageing should not cause many problems until your nineties."

So here we go – boots checked, sticks cleaned, macs oiled and water bottles filled – let's hope he's right!

Reins and Rules

Dennis Silk, a great warden (headmaster) at Radley College, used to tell parents that if they and the school stood united on matters of discipline, many problems would simply dissolve and the boys would flourish. But times have changed – and many of today's parents don't have a clue what's truly best for their children. Some even try to be their "friends" – how daft and damaging is that?

Years ago, Jane and I were involved in the management of Whaddon Chase Pony Club. Such clubs are hugely popular havens of innocent fun, mopping up the energy – and hormones – of mostly country-based, adolescent children. Meanwhile, their parents can enjoy peace of mind, knowing their kids are safe, healthy and happily engaged.

For one action-packed week in the summer holidays, the schedule was filled with pony trials, races, events, competitions and parties. Our children loved every minute and the bonds they formed with fellow campers were so strong that many of those friendships have lasted to this day.

Of course, there were sensible rules – the young need that. We maintained tough parental control: no smoking, no drinking, no sex and no drugs – ever. If that last rule was broken, the culprits were summarily expelled. Parents hoped for the best and it all worked fine.

So, what's this got to do with Dennis Silk's speech to parents? One parent, Henry Dupree (not his real name), was father to two of the campers. His background was impeccable: Winchester; Magdalen, Oxford; and a former cavalry officer. In those days, he was a prosperous banker. Charming, with a pink-cheeked aura of entitlement, he wore tailored waisted suits and a gold chain. A mine of mildly dirty stories, he was "Plum Bum" to his friends. You know the type.

Of course, a few kids nicked wine from their parents for illicit parties, and some smoked fags behind the stables. Snogging in the hay happened, of course – if not then, for goodness' sake when? But the point is, the children mostly respected the rules.

But then I saw Plum Bum actually giving his daughters wine and gin to smuggle in, thereby undermining the authority of the responsible adults. He was "ho, ho, ho" about the sex stuff as well. When I politely

challenged him, he looked at me as if I was a pompous ass. I can still hear the drawl:

"Come on, Tom, don't be stuffy. Times are changing, they're only young once." All the clichés followed – something about "wild oats" and so on.

I was furious. He had learned nothing from his privileged background and simply couldn't grasp that by ignoring the rules, he was inviting chaos.

Years later, at a dinner, Henry told me quietly, "I have two grandchildren… both illegitimate. I must say, I don't like it."

I said nothing – for what was there to say? He was a nice guy but stupid… I suppose he meant well.

Bacchanalian Chaos

Let's fast-forward to July 2025, when press reports revealed that up to 500 teenagers – many attending expensive schools and some as young as 14 – took part in a drug-fuelled sex party on Polzeath Beach, the so-called Riviera of Cornwall.

They ripped up young trees for firewood and tore benches worth thousands from their moorings to burn. At dawn, rangers discovered a scene of devastation. The sand was littered with broken glass, excrement, smashed bottles, cigarettes, vapes and girls' underwear. Scattered among the debris were unconscious teenagers who had been using marijuana, cocaine and ketamine.

A local resident said, "There are drugs on the beach. There are teenagers often drunk on alcohol supplied by parents. They drop their young children here at night, in the dark, and leave them with hundreds of older teenagers with no adults present. I cannot understand it."

Why do the likes of Plum Bum and the parents of the children on Polzeath Beach allow such degenerate chaos? Are they stupid, negligent or just hopelessly naive? Do they simply fail to understand what a duty of care to their children entails? Or worse, do they even know what a duty of care is?

But it's not just moronic "posh" parents – children are being abandoned across the adult world. The police have all but given up enforcing laws against illegal drugs, thereby effectively decriminalising them – and in doing so, they are enabling more children to use them, causing enormous damage to their bodies and brains. And children are being prematurely sexualised. Instead of being protected by adults in a position of authority and trust, they are losing their precious innocence – exposed to debauchery, and in some cases, gross abuse.

Plum Bum might protest that what happened in Cornwall was extreme. But as soon as he and his kind encouraged children to break the rules and defy authority, the seedy Bacchanalian events on Polzeath Beach became an inevitable outcome.

A culture endures through its children. Parents instil in them the values of the society they inherit so that they, in turn, can pass those values on to future generations. Without this, things fall apart – and the centre cannot hold.

Plum Bum may be dead now, but his legacy marches on.

Disclaimer

I hope you enjoy this commentary on politics, death, religion, sex and money – the issues that really matter. Please note that the views expressed are entirely my own and do not reflect those of ZANE or anyone who works for the charity. You may not agree with them, but I hope you'll keep reading…

The Art of Saying Goodbye

1 September – Day 1: Gravesend to Rochester

We had a staccato start in Gravesend, winding our way out of the town. Heavy showers were punctuated by an African sun, so we dried quickly enough.

The Thames Estuary stretched for miles. Once bustling with ships, it's now a melancholy graveyard of vessels. As we walked along, it was easy to imagine Turner's tragic ship in *The Fighting Temeraire* being towed to the breaker's yard by a smoke-belching tug.

Beyond the shore, we crossed acres of lumpy tundra. Next week, we were told, it will serve as a rifle range for the London Met – though we won't be hanging around!

I reflected on the joy last weekend, when all 21 members of the Benyon, Hayns and Sinclair families came together – first at our Bladon home, and then at daughter Clare's ancient rectory in Iffley, Oxford. Family is so precious. It was a party of talk, laughter, games – even prayer – and huge fun. What a privilege they all wanted to come.

So Long, Dear Friend

It would be remiss of me not to pay a tribute to cartoonist Tony Husband, who died on Westminster Bridge in late 2023. Tony enhanced ZANE's work with great skill and was a pleasure to work with. He was at the

top of his profession, and we were lucky he agreed to work with us. He will be much missed. RIP.

We are fortunate to welcome the excellent Lee Fearnley as our new cartoonist.

The Road of Relinquishment

When our beloved daughter Clare left her role as Chaplain at Christ Church, I commented to a friend that one of the things I missed was the occasional parking spot in the heart of Oxford.

"Of course," he responded. "Life's a series of getting things, then having to give them up!"

That observation triggered a memory from half a lifetime ago when I read *The Road Less Travelled*. The author, US psychiatrist Scott Peck, wrote about several things we must relinquish as we grow older. For starters, the follies of youth; and then, if we marry and truly grasp the soul-searing vows (not mere promises), we must give up much of our former independence. If we are granted children, we inevitably lose much of our social freedom, and because the ball of life bounces forwards, we must then let go of our children as they grow, forge their own paths, build relationships and love others. As we age, our looks – such as they ever were – wither with the passing years, and our sporting abilities abandon us. If I were to collapse whilst skiing now, I'd be unable to rise unaided – beached like a porpoise!

My shooting friends tell me that if balance falters, that's it (on grounds of safety), while some of my golfing friends, pinched with arthritis, have had to give up the game altogether. We watch aghast as our work – surely, we were indispensable? – is taken up by the young and

our "legacy" – if we ever had one – is shredded (just read Shelley's "Ozymandias"). Speechless, we look on as debilitating illness or death fells our beloved friends and family, and finally, we begin to lose our health – and then life itself.

And oh yes, I nearly forgot. Our society is marinated in sex, and for much of my life, I've felt as though I were handcuffed to a gibbering lunatic. Now the benign God has cast him into a deep cellar, from where, now and then, I still hear the echoes of his obscene yelling. But the days of early to bed and up with the cock are long gone. I'm resigned to the fact (relieved, even?) that the days of wine and roses are more or less over.

Life's mighty tough and the adventure is best summed up by Churchill (you can see the quote in ZANE's last Christmas poetry book, page 6): "The journey has been well worth making – once."

The Great Escape

Some years ago, Jane and I moved from a much-loved house to a smaller one outside Oxford. We gave away many of our possessions – this reflects how we've changed as people. It's not just that the children have left home, our outlook has changed too. What we want today differs from what we wanted in the early days of our marriage. Gone is the insistent need to be successful, make a fortune or be endlessly social. Now, less burdened by anxieties and responsibilities, we think of what makes us happy – relationships rather than grabbing things and parading status – and we buy less stuff. The idea of splashing out on a new car to demonstrate our standing in society is risible (heck, it always was daft).

Our ability to ride horses has gone with the wind. And although I miss it keenly – though not the bills! – the fact that hunting, even trail hunting, is now illegal (a mean-spirited absurdity) has made the choice rather easier. Perhaps visiting many of our paraplegic friends – and two tetraplegic ones, both now thankfully dead – helped us finally hang up our saddles and dispose of our vast collection of hunting gear. It was the right thing to do, but the loss was still gutting.

Today, we busy ourselves with small, unimportant day-to-day things – family matters – but we try to do them well.

Will our children really want my father's pre-war diaries, his old papers and newspaper clippings from India, his silver pots and ash trays, and his lamp too dim to read by? It's a ridiculous trip down memory lane, led astray by nostalgia and without purpose. And what will our children do with my army commission, or the certificate showing I passed an exam in theology? Or that piece of paper proving I jumped from an aeroplane 40 years ago?

Are all these things some sort of defence against meaninglessness, proof to convince someone – who? – that Jane and I and our parents had

a past? These scraps are a museum of our former lives, only dimly relevant to Jane and me – and wholly valueless to anyone else.

We fill our lives with briefly fashionable possessions and then oppress ourselves by clinging to them far longer than necessary. Then we burden our children with the miserable task of disposing of them.

Best deal with the clutter now. Brace yourself – what's the address of the nearest tip?

A Little About Me

2 September – Day 2: Rochester to Hoo St Werburgh

The morning started sunny and bright. Birds chirped, we were feeling great and the walk was going well – all was right with the world.

We'd asked our walk planners for three simple things: no hills, no plough, and please, no frightening roads… Then, bingo! Was that a hill? Surely not. But yes, it darn well was – and quite the longest we've staggered up in years!

Next came a series of narrow, winding roads – what to do? All it would take was some genial half-wit to half-glance at their messages as they zoomed past, and it would be good night, sweet Prince for us. Then we passed through a gate, and much swearing followed as we trudged through miles of bloody plough! The triple whammy – grrr!

However, the rest of the walk went smoothly – and I was in a forgiving mood.

Twenty (Plus) Questions

1. What is your idea of earthly happiness?

To love and be loved.

2. What are your main faults?

Those that dictate my most urgent material needs.

3. Who are your heroes of fiction?

Horatio Hornblower; Flashman; Jeeves; Jean Valjean *(Les Misérables)*; the King's General (in du Maurier's novel); Bathsheba Everdene; Richard Sharpe (particularly at Waterloo); Blaise Meredith (the priest in Morris West's *The Devil's Advocate*).

4. Who are your heroes of history?

First Division: General Sir Harry Smith and his wife Juana María de Los Dolores de León Smith (Peninsular War – Google them); Thomas Paine; Socrates; Lord Cochrane; Stonewall Jackson; Ulysses S Grant (commanding general and US president); Lawrence of Arabia; Rev John Newton (former slaver, who wrote "Amazing Grace"); Blaise Pascal; William Wallace; Joan of Arc; Norman Tebbit.

Second Division: John Masters DSO, OBE (soldier and novelist); George MacDonald Fraser OBE (soldier and author of *Flashman* amongst others); Frederic Manning (soldier and author of *The Middle Parts of Fortune*).

5. Which people have influenced you most (other than parents)?

Nancy Walters; Kwaku Boateng; Prebendary John Collins; Canon David MacInnes; James Pringle.

6. Who are your favourite painters?

Caravaggio; Lucian Freud; Turner.

7. What are your most valued qualities in men and women?

Sense of humour; courage, moral and physical; sense of the absurd; kindness towards others in trouble.

8. What are you most proud of?

A long and loving marriage; being promoted from Private to Lance Corporal in the Cameron Highlanders; passing out of RMA Sandhurst; leading the revolt at Lloyd's of London; the horse Jane and I bred (Prince Panache) winning the Rolex Kentucky Three-Day Event – one of the most prestigious events in the sport of eventing; establishing ZANE and a medical programme for veterans and pensioners; the happy marriages of our children; all our 11 grandchildren; the ordination of three of our children; the establishment of Jane's Community Emergency Foodbank (CEF); our many cherished friends.

9. Who would you most like to have dinner with?

Saint Peter; Oscar Wilde; Cicero; Prometheus; Robert Burns; Oskar Schindler; Anne Boleyn; Lord Cochrane; Thomas Paine; Bill Clinton; Enoch Powell and Tony Benn (who were friends with each other).

10. What are your most valued qualities in friends?

Their continued existence – and their continued affection towards me.

11. What are your greatest fears?

Mental incapacity affecting both Jane and me; loss of love from family; loss of sense of humour.

12. Which public figures do you most dislike?

Tony Blair; Robert Maxwell; Nicola Sturgeon; Ted Heath; Ed Miliband; Vladimir Putin; Eamon de Valera.

13. Which public figures do you most admire?

Oliver Cromwell; Golda Meir; Alexei Navalny; Volodymyr Zelensky; Vera Brittain; Lord Denning; Cardinal Basil Hume; Gordon Wilson (Irish draper who publicly forgave the IRA for killing his daughter); Second World War fighter pilots and naval Arctic convoy commanders; men who gave up their lifeboat seats to women and children on the *Titanic*; Father Maximilian Kolbe (priest at Auschwitz who sacrificed his life for another prisoner); Chidiock Tichborne (who wrote a famous poem before his execution); First World War poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon; Jane Austen; Kate Muir.

14. Who are your favourite poets?

ASJ Tessimond; Francis Thompson; Wilfred Owen; Robert Frost; Edna St. Vincent Millay; Wendy Cope; WH Auden; WB Yeats; TS Eliot.

15. What is your favourite poem?

"Stop all the Clocks" by WH Auden. The poems that make me cry (I have no real idea why) are "Uxbridge Road" by Evelyn Underhill, and "After Apple-Picking" and "The Death of the Hired Man" by Robert Frost.

16. What are your favourite books?

The Pensées by Pascal; *A History of Napoleon's Italian Campaign*; *The Stars Look Down* by AJ Cronin; *The Loving Spirit* by Daphne du Maurier (in fact anything by her); *White Fang* by Jack London; *The Story of the Treasure Seekers* by E Nesbit.

17. What book are you presently reading?

Like the Roman: The Life of Enoch Powell by Simon Heffer.

18. What book are you ashamed not to have read?

The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot.

19. What are your favourite plays?

Death of a Salesman by Arthur Miller; *An Inspector Calls* by JB Priestley; *The Winslow Boy* and *The Browning Version* by Terence Rattigan.

20. What are your favourite films?

The Magnificent Seven; Cinema Paradiso; Jean de Florette and its sequel *Manon des Sources; Il Postino; Love Story; Schindler's List; The Night Porter; Blow-Up; The Cruel Sea; Brief Encounter; A Man for All Seasons.*

21. What is the last film that made you cry?

Love Story.

22. What is your favourite TV box set?

Brideshead Revisited by Evelyn Waugh and adapted by John Mortimer.

23. What are your favourite pieces of music?

"Rigoletto" by Verdi and anything by Schubert, while Rachmaninoff's "Third Piano Concerto" is the music that most cheers me up. At the gym, I listen to Dusty Springfield's top hits, ABBA and Elton John.

24. What instrument do you wish you could play?

The piano.

25. If you could own one picture, what would it be?

The Penitent Peter by Guercino (hanging in the Scottish Academy).

26. What are your favourite names?

For women: Cressida; Antonia; Clementine; Cassandra.

For men: Oliver; Joseph; David; Raphael.

27. What gifts do you not possess?

Languages; an eye for a ball.

28. Where do you feel happiest?

In bed with Jane.

29. How would you like to die?

In control of my senses and surrounded by those who love me.

Bring It On!

3 September –
Day 3: Hoo St Werburgh to Fort Apache, Gillingham

All the rain that failed to fall during the summer blew over us in a series of gales. A narrow path took us along the banks where the Medway flows into the Thames, and both rivers meet the mud. The rain acted like a layer of Vaseline on the cobbles, so it was slow and tedious going.

The ancient city of Rochester is beautiful, but the local authority should be ashamed that the roads are smothered in beer cans and litter – it needs a good scrubbing! We walked through Gillingham, where we discovered a suburban street lined with Lebanese, Turkish and Nigerian shops – and full of what Starmer calls "strangers". Jane and I rather liked it.

Sad that so many shops are shut and there are so many nail bars and casinos. The late cabinet minister Tessa Jowell (under Blair) had to admit that loosening the "gaming" laws was a catastrophe. It's shameful that the UK has become a world gambling centre with vast quantities of social security cash wickedly sucked from the pockets of those least able to pay.

One day, our blinkers will fall away, and we'll see that we really cannot go on allowing ghastly cars to choke our roads. The only vehicle I admire is a car crusher.

The Past is a Foreign Country

If I call for an end to asylum, am I immediately condemned as a far-right bigot? If so, too bad. Bring it on!

We can no longer afford to allow absolutely anybody claiming persecution to enter the UK. Why are we granting all foreigners, often with manufactured sob stories, access to our expensive judicial, welfare and healthcare systems? These people have never contributed tuppence – and may never do so. For the developing world, the offer of such refuge is irresistible. For us, the poor sodding taxpayers, it's simply ruinous.

Years ago, it was a wonderful idea that anyone facing persecution could find a safe haven. But that was then, and this is now – the past is a foreign country, and they do things differently there. Today, the system is riddled with corruption and has become a playbook for dodgy lawyers. All too often, those claiming "credible fear" of political persecution are economic

migrants coached by smugglers or half-witted aid workers on what to tell the authorities to game the rules. As a result, we see mosques full of Muslims who've ostensibly converted to Christianity; platoons of young men from socially conservative countries claiming to be gay; and boatloads of heavily bearded men presenting themselves as teenagers.

Why do we remain committed to this farce? Why should the UK abdicate control over its borders? We see the effects of this in the courts. A Gazan family of six gained entry using rules designed to shelter Ukrainians. A Pakistani man imprisoned for rape was allowed to remain in the UK because deportation would be "hard on his children" – whom he's forbidden to see without supervision since he's a paedophile. A Nigerian woman, denied asylum nine times in a row, eventually won her case. Fancy! Nine attempts, all at our expense! How much did that nonsense cost?

Today, migrants in Scunthorpe email their chums in war-torn Congo about the lovely free hotel they're living in courtesy of the Home Office. Can we really be surprised that people use small boats to get here? After this daft system is scrapped, we can

choose who is invited to live here. But perhaps countries like the UK – which saw its foreign-born population rise from nearly zero to 20 per cent in 20 years – could be seen as having already done their part? Droves of poorly educated and low-skilled arrivals are diluting social cohesion, increasing criminality, depressing GDP per capita and costing UK taxpayers hundreds of thousands of pounds each over their lifetimes.

The government wants to be seen as nice and generous. Well, why can't it be nice and generous to those of us who already live here – and who are obliged to pay the bills?

Thumb in Bum, Mind in Neutral

I never cease to wonder why so many people go to church. Since you ask, what do I mean?

Recently, at a local church, I heard a truly remarkable sermon. It was a summary of the reasons why we should believe in the resurrection – a key issue, of course, for if the resurrection didn't occur, our faith collapses into candy floss thinking. The preacher was excellent, blending stories and humour – one of those rare speakers you absolutely must listen to. As ZANE supporters are aware, most preachers are dire, banging on about climate change, the dreadful State of Israel, slavery or some such tosh. So, last Sunday was an electric occasion, powerful and relevant.

Afterwards, the congregation met for coffee and not a single person commented – not one. This must be heartbreaking for vicars. Preach your heart out, and week after week, all you get are blank, bovine faces staring back at you – without even the faintest glimmer of comprehension or interest!

I think that if Jesus appeared in person and gave the original rendering of the Sermon on the Mount, people would still just sit there wondering what's for lunch.

First-World Whinging

4 September –
Day 4: Fort Apache, Gillingham to Lower Halstow

We left Gillingham and ended up in the village of Upchurch. The weather was a mix of violent rain and blue skies, but it was a good walk. We had lunch at The Crown, tended by the delightful Cheryl – who had a megawatt smile and a bubbling personality to match.

Compassion Conundrum

"Compassionate" is an overworked word. There is no such thing as a compassionate politician when he or she is performing a public role. Anyone can be compassionate when they're spraying around other people's money!

Let me explain further. The Good Samaritan was being compassionate when he assisted the traveller beaten by robbers, for that was his private initiative, born out of the goodness of his heart. However, if Caesar had decreed that the Samaritan should help the traveller, and paid him to do so, then the man would merely have been doing his job. It's not Farage's role – nor that of any politician – to be "compassionate". Their job is to win votes and get elected.

Bishops would be wise to steer clear of emotive topics, for they are vastly complex. For example, what an immigrant finds compassionate – for instance, being provided with a house – may well infuriate the UK taxpayer, who not only picks up the bill but also discovers there are now too few houses for their family.

It's a question that demands an answer – do politicians assist immigrants first, or the UK voters who put them in office?

It's politicians, not bishops, who must grapple with this dilemma.

Counting Our Blessings

Dear ZANE supporter, aren't we a lucky lot? Yes, I know all about the cost of living, the awfulness of the present government, illegal immigrants, the difficulties facing the wife and kids, and our inability to get an Uber on a rainy day.

But we must count our blessings… Look around, and you'll see some of the luckiest people in the world, living their best lives in a stable country. Immigrants stream into the UK because they reckon it's the place to be. Few of us lack food, healthcare or housing, and none of our young have

been corralled into uniform and sent off to war to kill strangers – like our grandparents were.

Most of us have enough money, and can go where we like, when we like. We can take nice holidays, have access to lifesaving medicines and live in pleasant enough places. Our courts are fair, and we have freedom of speech – and where this is in question, we can campaign without fear of imprisonment. Our political system is not corrupt, and our police do not shoot first and ask questions second or torture us. The rubbish is collected, and houses are being built.

Lighten Up

I visited my grandfather's grave the other day – he died of a ruptured appendix in 1893. That night, I dreamt he asked me, "How's life today?"

I told him we haven't had a world war in my lifetime – and about the relief of poverty, our present social services, universal pensions, the NHS and much more.

The old ghost sighed. "What lucky sods you all are, Tom!" he said quietly. "I doubt that anyone has ever had it as good as you do. How happy everyone must be!"

I laughed until tears poured down my face. "Happy? People do nothing but complain. They read the papers, watch TV and look at social media – and they find themselves submerged in a bog of misery, victimhood and "Oooh, isn't it all awful!"

Dear friends. Lighten up, look around and have a laugh. Get a sense of proportion, read some history books and remember our bloody past. Be thankful you're living in 2025 with up-to-date dentistry and hip replacement surgery.

Nothing matters very much, and most things don't matter at all. I've learned not to worry about things when I can't affect the outcome. Nothing I can do will make the slightest difference to Israel, Netanyahu, Trump or even Starmer (until the next election, that is).

I expect the same applies to you, but take a moment to reflect on your life over the past year and take a view of the outlook for the coming one. (Of course, I know some of you are facing real tragedy, and I send you a bear hug of sympathy.)

Delete Facebook and use both the *Telegraph* and the *Guardian* as cat litter. Deal?

Overhyped and Overrated

The late Barry Humphries listed his most overrated things, and I have to say I agree with most of them – and have added a few more!

In no particular order: Starbucks, French onion soup, Bob Dylan, Niagara Falls, the film *Citizen Kane*, the Caribbean, all the novels of Virginia Woolf and Patrick O'Brian, Pilates, lobster, *Lord of the Rings*, most modern art, nearly all sculpture, nearly all modern poetry, Sir Ed Davey, the TV programme *Mock the Week*, Annabelle's, Meghan Markle, Las Vegas and all devolved parliaments.

The Right to be Wrong

5 September –
Day 5: Lower Halstow to Somewhere Near Kemsley

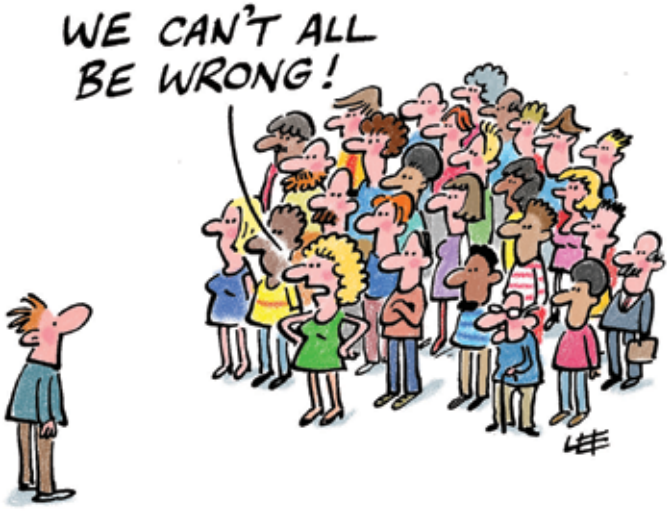
We walked for a long time under a hot sun. As the day wore on, I couldn't help wondering if there is a bush or hedge in Kent that isn't nursing a rotting fast-food container or an old beer can – all to the shame of the local authority.

Unfiltered Thoughts

ZANE supporters congratulate me on my "bravery" in writing about subjects they have been bullied into thinking are somehow "off limits".

A new consensus appears to have emerged: truth is no longer a process of collective discovery, but an orthodoxy known to only a few enlightened people whose job it is to inform everyone else. A few examples: "Trump is a unique danger to the world"; "out of the EU, the UK is bound to fail"; and "Israel is always in the wrong".

Over a long life, I've concluded that just because an opinion is widely held is no evidence whatsoever that it is not utterly absurd – in fact, in view of the silliness of most of mankind, a widespread belief is more likely to be foolish than sensible. To quote Ibsen, "The majority is always wrong."



We should all be allowed to express our opinions on anything we like – so let me parade a few:

Former US Marine G Michael Hopf wrote, "Hard times create strong men, strong men create good times, good times create weak men, and weak men create hard times." Do you agree? In England, "mentally challenged" people are required to signal their disability by wearing a baseball cap back to front. What do you think of that? And the world is egg-shaped (it is slightly, so there!)

And now to the more contentious:

– Hunting foxes is huge and harmless fun, and the ban was a mean-spirited abomination to pay back the Tories for the closing of the coal mines. The new laws led to the collapse of valuable countryside communities, and many good people had their lives devastated. Certainly, the ban was not for the benefit of foxes, who are today shot or often cruelly wounded or poisoned.

– New cars are a scam.

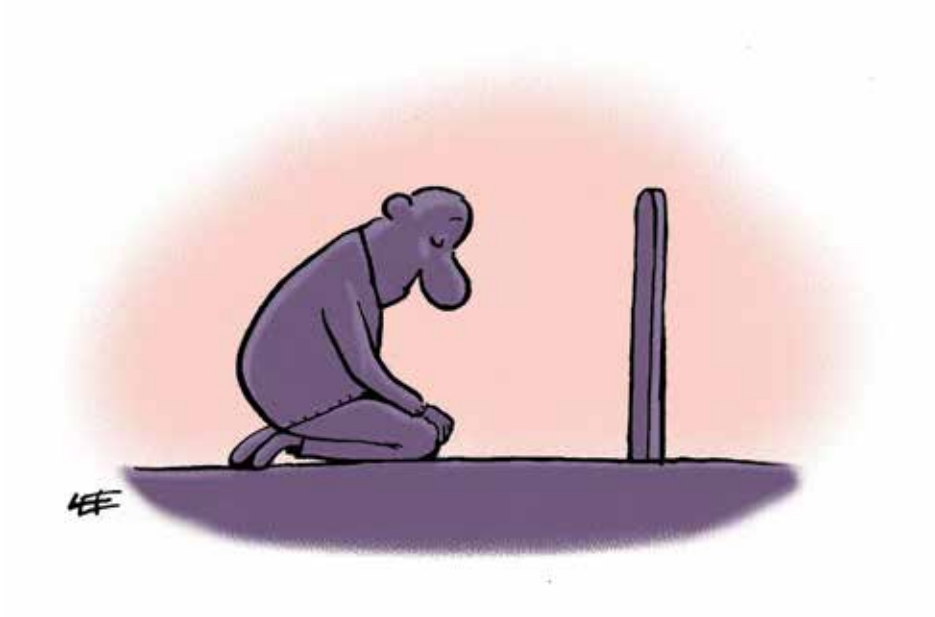
– England should be applauded for abolishing slavery.

– Labour will soon run out of other people's money.

– Flanders and Swann understated things when they sang, "The English, the English, the English are best. I wouldn't give tuppence for all of the rest."

If you don't agree with some (or any) of these views – which is your right – then perhaps they may persuade you to re-evaluate your own. What's shocking, at least in the Anglosphere, is the shutting down of our ability to say anything that does not agree with the received opinion of the Blob (the people at – among others – the BBC, the *Guardian*, the *New York Times*, the *Financial Times*, CNN, Oxbridge and Harvard).

I quote the late, great Christopher Hitchens: "My own opinion is enough for me, and I claim the right to have it defended against any consensus, any majority, anywhere, any place, any time. And anyone who disagrees with this can pick a number, get in line and kiss my ass."



Ol' Man River

Some of our beloved friends are gravely ill, perhaps dying. We try to send messages that are a comfort and not mere clichés – but when the world suddenly turns upside down on a sixpence, the shock can be profound. Yet the roaring world hardly notices, and like Ol' Man River, it just keeps rolling along.

I read a heartfelt comment on a memorial sheet, "To the world he was just a man; to me he was the world."

Then we read of the preoccupation that others feel when someone they don't know well suffers or dies.

In his poem "Musée des Beaux Arts", WH Auden writes of Icarus after his wax wings melt:

"…and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen

Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,

Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on."

Then comes grief. In the TV series *The Crown*, Prince Philip speaks of the loss of his sister in a plane crash: "I learned then what grief was. True grief. How it moves in the body, how it inhabits it. How it becomes part of your skin, your cells. And it makes a home there, a permanent home, but you learn to live with it… And you will be happy again but never in the same way as before. That's the point – to keep finding new ways."

The Best Things in Life

Still, amid the indifferent rhythm of the world, there are plenty of moments that pierce the grey. Here's a personal list:

- The scan that says "clear".
- Winter sunshine through a lifting mist.
- Sitting next to a log fire, listening to the teeming rain outside.
- Doing anything with the family.
- Watching Jane asleep.
- Kariba the cat waking me up by headbutting.
- Listening to the massed pipes and drums of the Highland Brigade.
- Attending a play where our grandchildren are performing.
- Watching our children taking church services.
- A meal with friends.
- Most Shakespeare plays at Stratford.
- A dozen oysters, Worcester sauce and lemon.
- The smell of wet dogs and horses.
- The poems of, WH Auden, WB Yeats, Edna St Vincent Millay, TS Eliot and a few others.
- Verdi operas.
- The ballet *Giselle*.
- Reading the *Spectator*.
- Realising how lucky we are.

Diary of a Disgruntled Cat

6 September – Day 6: Near Kemsley to Conyer

Today our guest walker was an eminent judge who, in his early youth, had served in the British South Africa Police in Rhodesia. We spent a happy time talking about the old days.

We thought the walk might be too much for him, but we were plain wrong. At the day's end, we fought our way through at least half a mile of rotting rubbish crowned by a sinking dead rat. What squalid creatures humankind can be.

Moggy Memories

Once again, Kariba the moggy has spoken…

You keep feeding me new types of cat food without even checking if I like them. Well, here's the feedback.

Whiskas with chicken? It's okay… occasionally – but please, not every darn day!

Sifilaccetti Succulent Grill – what a daft name for cat food! Also, I see the packaging the muck comes in carries a picture of a peculiar looking cat – where on earth is it from? I presume its weird colouring is meant to reflect our inclusive society, foisted upon us cats without so much as a miaow of consent! Please don't think I'm racist, but foreign cats are routinely smuggled into the UK in people's handbags, and most are feral. All they want to do is fight, steal and spray on the curtains!

But, back to food. I prefer Purina Gourmet, except it's got a picture of a white cat on the front – its either a ghost or its hair's been dyed. Dead common! I'll bet its name is Sharlene or something equally naff.

Everyone says I'm ancient for a moggy, but because of excellent vet care, 17 is the new 10 – so there's plenty of life in old Kariba yet. However, without being too explicit, I can't get any tomcat to even glance at me – despite me having some catty tricks that would make their whiskas stand on end! Typical tomcats, they're too focused on chasing pussy crumpet.

So, it's back to memory lane and all the positions in the "Catty Sutra" I used to enjoy. Those were the days!

Oh yes, please do keep your children's sodding dogs under control. Suffice to say, they're still more "poo" than "cocker". I know I said this last year, but your thoughtless children have bought yet another one, so the insult needs repeating.

Yours truly,

Kariba

Doctor's Orders

Reported in the *Daily Mail* is the story of Lady Dworkin, who, after experiencing difficulties conceiving, underwent a course of IVF treatment.

She wanted confirmation of the best time to have sexual intercourse, so she rang the clinic to ask, "Is it better first thing in the morning or last thing at night?"

"I think both are best – in the early morning and last thing at night," came the reply.

"Oh, thanks," answered the good lady. "And please, for my records, which doctor are you?"

There was a slight hesitation. "I'm not a doctor, I'm the decorator."

London Calling

However useless – or not – Sadiq Khan may be, the city he oversees remains a pre-eminent global powerhouse. Where else can compete?

All America's cities are on the slide, with New York, Chicago and San Francisco shuddering under record levels of crime and vacant office space. Paris is bedevilled by ethnic ghettos, while other great European cities are provincial when compared to London.

Singapore and Dubai have overbearing governments, Mumbai and Delhi are choked with pollution. The huge Asian cities aren't cosmopolitan enough – all remain insular, have few migrants and are unwelcoming to outsiders.

Okay, it goes without saying there is crime in London, but it has fallen this century. Of course, Brexit was meant to have turned London into a tertiary player. Sorry to argue with Alastair Campbell, but since 2016, finance giants Bloomberg and Citadel have moved in while Google has built a massive new headquarters at King's Cross. Microsoft has announced plans to open a London AI office and Apple has made five floors of the renovated Battersea Power Station its European headquarters.

Ambitious immigrants are attracted to the proximity of world-class universities. In fact, immigration is lifting the performance of London's state schools above the national average.

What explains this success? London's old advantage is its status as a former imperial capital, which has welcomed the world for centuries. As Ford Madox Ford wrote in 1905, "London is the world town."

A Few Observations…

If you can't laugh at yourself, don't worry. Others will do it for you.

Uber liberals think that all "normal" people must agree with them and gasp with outrage when they find out this is not the case – as with Brexit and Trump. Conservatives, on the other hand, are always surprised to find that anyone shares their views – as with Brexit and Trump.

A day-long train journey is always preferable to a one-hour flight.

Io non c'ero, e se c'ero dormivo is a useful Italian saying that means, "I wasn't there, and if I was there, I was sleeping."

Running on Empty

7 September – Day 7: Rest Day

We are now halfway through the walk.

In a couple of weeks, Jane and I will visit Zimbabwe. In many ways, it will be a sad occasion as we will be saying farewell to three loyal and dedicated servants of ZANE who are retiring after 20 years of service.

Many of those whom ZANE workers have been privileged to assist were Second World War veterans and their widows. Most of them have now died, though some 440 pre-independence veterans and widows remain. However, many others have taken their place. Often the children of ZANE's pensioners have emigrated, leaving aged parents behind – too proud to admit their savings have been destroyed by bouts of inflation or that they are utterly desperate. This is where ZANE plays a vital role – but we couldn't do it without our brave team.

So, returning to Zimbabwe will be a bittersweet occasion. But I am hopeful that those who are retiring will never forget what they have achieved or the crucial role they have played in the lives of so many.

Hungry Souls

Google tells me that around one in five young people in the UK are suffering from some form of mental health condition.

The reason for much of this seems obvious. It's not that we're hungry for fame, comfort, wealth or power – these things generate almost as many problems as they solve. The core problem is the lack of meaning – the senselessness and emptiness of so many lives. It is the general neurosis of our time.

Our souls are hungry for meaning – for the sense that the world will be a little bit different for our having passed through it. If we feel we are merely existing rather than living, or that our leisure time has been drained away staring at a screen, then we might just as well never have been here.

The American Declaration of Independence offers everyone the right to pursue happiness. However, because it's a political document rather than a religious one, it doesn't warn of the frustrations involved in trying to exercise that right. You don't become happy by pursuing happiness, but by living a life that

means something. The happiest people I know are not the richest or the most famous. They are those who work at being kind, helpful and reliable – and happiness sneaks into their lives while they are busy doing those things.

Happiness is always a by-product, never a primary goal. It's like a butterfly – the more you pursue it, the faster it flits out of sight. So, stop chasing and busy yourself with productive things – and happiness will sneak up and perch on your shoulder.

Like, Whatever…

I am indebted to Miles Morland for introducing me to some really bad analogies written by American high school students:

- He was as tall as a 6'3" tree.
- She grew on him like she was a colony of E. coli and he was room-temperature Canadian beef.
- The ballerina rose gracefully *en pointe* and extended one slender leg behind her, like a dog at a fire hydrant.
- John and Mary had never met. They were like two hummingbirds who had also never met.
- Her vocabulary was as bad as like, whatever.
- She had a deep throaty laugh – like that sound a dog makes just before it throws up.
- The revelation that his marriage of years had disintegrated because of his wife's infidelity came as a rude shock – like a surcharge at a formerly surcharge-free ATM.

Woozle

8 September – Day 8: Conyer to Faversham

I felt below par at the outset of today's walk. What could it be? Then I wondered if I was becoming dehydrated. It's easy to underestimate the amount of water needed in warm weather when walking long distances.

I redoubled my water intake – and soon felt better.

Making a Difference

As the day wore on, I tallied a rough estimate of the work ZANE has undertaken in Zimbabwe over the past 20 years.

We have always looked after pensioners and veterans, both in care homes and living on their own – now numbering more than 10,000. In addition, 6,600 treatments have been carried out to correct child clubfoot, giving those affected the chance to live normal lives instead of being forced into the shadows.

Thousands more have benefited from our medical aid programme, with many veterans across the Commonwealth now having access to two meals a day. The pop-up classes in the slums of Harare have been a great success, and ZANE has brought relief to sufferers of cholera and political violence. Then, a few years ago, we assisted the embassy in delivering vital medicines during the Covid crisis.

It's quite a story – all due to ZANE's amazing supporters and workers. And it's a cause worth walking for…

Debt and Denial

We assume, as a democracy, that our voters are intelligent – and that this collective wisdom will produce fairer laws than those inflicted on societies by dictators. However, Churchill disagreed, remarking, "The best argument against democracy is a five-minute conversation with the average voter."

I have fought five elections – and even won some of them. Yet when I look back, it isn't the rigours of intellectual debate that come to mind, but rather the story of the Woozle. Do you remember it? Winnie the Pooh was walking in the snow when he noticed tracks behind him. He grew fearful and became convinced he was being stalked by a Woozle. Soon, another set of tracks appeared and then there were two Woozles!

Of course, Christopher Robin spoiled things by pointing out Pooh was walking in circles.

Round and round the government goes – and voters whirl in tandem.

Deep in Hock

When sober, former European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker once quipped, "We all know what to do to balance the nation's books. The problem is that if we do it, we won't get re-elected."

This is why the manifestos at the last election were pure Woozle. We've run out of money and we're deep in hock. Soon we'll be unable to borrow money at any price. Already, our debt interest outstrips spending on defence and education. The lenders are watching.

Recall Greece and its debt crisis – the poorest were hit the hardest. Joblessness and despair soared, while the rich – as they always do – kept on building swimming pools. That's what awaits us here. Instead of levelling with voters and launching a national survival campaign, what do our gutless governments offer voters? A quadruple lock for pensioners, no material cutbacks on ballooning social spending, fuel subsidies, and tax hikes on the wealthiest – who then bugger off out of the country.

The truth is voters don't want reality. Politicians pretend that fairies lurk at the bottom of the garden, that there's such a thing as a bargain and that two and two can make five. Our baby voters demand more services yet lower taxes; more homes but not near them; cheap care homes but no more low-skilled immigration; and new infrastructure but with their rights of veto intact.

As the promises inevitably fail, leaders come and go in quick succession: Cameron, May, Johnson, Truss, Sunak, Starmer – here today and gone tomorrow. Others will follow and they too will fail to deliver. No one dares to explain to voters that the promises were always risible and that by voting for dummies, they have made themselves the authors of their own betrayal.

A poem by Stephen Crane:

"I saw a man pursuing the horizon;
Round and round they sped.
I was disturbed at this;
I accosted the man.
'It is futile,' I said,
'You can never –'
'You lie,' he cried,
And ran on."

Where is today's Christopher Robin? When it all finally unravels, it will be our turn to cry as we flee. And we'll comfort ourselves with the excuse that no one ever warned us about the Woozle.

A Grumble (With Gratitude)

Some things in today's world just get under my skin! Here's a grumble through the ghastly, the baffling and the just plain naff.

Things I Find Naff...

- Men with Windsor knots.
- Calls to utilities that put me on endless hold, tell me my call's important, then play ghastly music as a consolation.
- The question, "Red or white?"
- Comb-overs.
- Halitosis so strong it could be used to club a baby seal (amazingly common).
- Vicars wading into politics during sermons (often on subjects they know tiddly squat about and which have nothing to do with salvation) and saying "er" and "um" relentlessly.
- People telling me about the problems in Zimbabwe, as if they were new to me.
- Short socks.

- Politicians squawking at times of disaster, "Our hearts go out to the victims."
- Being told, "No worries" or "Have a nice day!"
- My call being answered by someone whose accent is so impenetrable I cannot understand a word.
- Piped music in restaurants.
- New cars.
- People who encourage me to "enjoy" when food is served.
- Waiters who interrupt a meal to ask if everything is all right (I'd tell them if it wasn't).
- Face masks.
- T-shirts with slogans.
- Fat men in shorts.
- "Smart casual" as a dress code.
- Tattoos and face piercings.
- Online petitions.
- Walking around with a water bottle.
- "Elf and safety".

Things I Miss

- Petrol attendants.
- Train journeys with dining cars, tables, white cloths, menus and a waiter.
- Cinemas with usherettes selling choc ices in the interval.
- Walking unsearched onto a plane.
- Coal fires.
- Parking for free anywhere.
- Robinson Lemon Barley Water.
- Crisps with small blue packets of salt.

Things I'm Grateful For

- Jet travel.
- Showers (no one had them in 1950s England).
- Frozen peas.
- Kitchen foil.
- Mangos and avocados in UK shops.
- Jeans, shorts and slip-on shoes.
- Modern medicine and dentistry (not the bills for the latter!)
- Interflora.

What's in a Name?

9 September – Day 9: Faversham to Seasalter

We enjoyed a sunny day with a lovely, fresh breeze. Two delightful supporters from Maidstone joined us – a retired journalist and his insightful wife. Both were well read and as sharp as tacks, which made for a lively and far-ranging conversation.

I was reminded of the old aphorism: it's hard to persuade an intelligent person to change their mind, but utterly impossible if they're stupid. All ZANE supporters are, by definition, intelligent. But just in case one has slipped through the net, let me explain: there are certain topics I avoid writing about because they are divisive and toxic. After all, my aim is to entertain, not to irritate. That's why I steer clear of issues like abortion, Brexit, assisted dying and Gaza.

However, as an exception to my rule, I will say something about Gaza…

There's a story about a priest and a rabbi who died and went to heaven. As tradition has it, all holy people are permitted a meeting with God, after which they may ask one question.

"Please tell us, O God," they asked, "will there ever will be a resolution to the Israeli-Palestine conflict?"

"Yes, of course," answered God, "but not in my lifetime."

I was told this story by a Jewish friend – and that's as far as I will go on that matter. But I might add that I've had a couple of experiences in life that I challenge anyone to match. I was once kissed by Yassar Arafat and hugged by Mother Teresa – so beat that if you can! For the record, my encounter with Arafat was fleeting and has no bearing on my views regarding the tragic conflict – which I intend to keep to myself.

The Rogue Behind the Ivy

The liberal consensus welcomes the cancellation of those whose backgrounds fail to fit with contemporary sensibilities. So, Rhodes must fall and Edward Colston's statue was hurled into Bristol Harbour. The CoE now prays about statues of unsuitable luminaries with slavery connections.

No modern liberal can afford to be linked with an institution that commemorates people with a problematic background. However, there is one exception. In a quiet church graveyard on the Welsh border – St Giles', Wrexham – lies the grave of an extraordinary old rogue.

The man in question was born in 1649, three decades after the *Mayflower* arrived in America. As a young man he loathed Puritanism, so he took a job with the East India Company and went to India. As he had no morals or principles, he made a pile of money and ended up as Governor of Madras. He maintained several mistresses and enriched himself through smuggling and every kind of crooked practice. One wheeze was to pass a law requiring every European ship to carry a minimum of 10 slaves for sale. He sold them at a huge mark-up – in 1687 alone, he arranged for 655 to be sent on their way. He met the burgeoning demand for slaves by having children kidnapped – and even had his groom hanged for taking two days off without permission.

Even the East India Company eventually lost patience with him. In 1699, after it was discovered that he had been embezzling company funds to purchase land for himself, he was banished to England. He brought back so much loot it couldn't fit into his two houses, one in London, the other in Wrexham. He became England's first auctioneer so he could flog off the surplus stuff. It took seven auctions to get rid of several hundred snuff boxes, 500 rings, 7,000 paintings and 116 pairs of cufflinks.

This character had some tenuous links to America, and, in a fit of absentmindedness, gave a minute fraction of his wealth to an obscure college in Old Saybrook, Connecticut. The college later asked for more funds, so he sent 417 books and a picture of King George I.

To honour their donor, the college renamed itself after him and hung his portrait in the hall. It shows him being waited on by a Black servant wearing a metal collar.

Despite that, the college – now a university – still bears the name of this whoring, thieving, slave-trading old monster who gave it a few books. So, let's applaud Elihu Yale, whose name graces the university from which Bill Clinton and both George Bushes graduated.

Playing the Long Game

When Pierre Monteux was appointed principal conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra at the age of 86, he insisted on a 25 year contract – with an option to renew at the end!

Dragons Lurk Here

10 September – Day 10: Seasalter to Herne Bay

I once sat on a committee of a London charity, New Horizons, with Lord Longford and John Profumo. Over lunch one day, Longford asked me for my motives. Stumbling for a reply, I said they were mixed. "Can I give you some advice?" he asked. As he was footing the bill, I could hardly refuse.

"We all have mixed motives in everything we do," he said. "May I suggest you just shut up and get on with it?"

Mission Improbable

Why did I start ZANE? What were my motives? Mark Twain once wrote, "There are two important days in our lives: the day we are born and the day we find out why we were born."

Perhaps I was born to start ZANE. My friend Jim Pringle claims that, occasionally, people are "anointed" to some work or other. Some are called to "big" works – for example, William Booth (The Salvation Army), Chuck Colson (Prison Fellowship),

John Stott, Tim Keller and many others. When they die, of course, the work continues under different hands, but it inevitably changes and takes a new shape.

And what about smaller works? Jim reckons I was anointed to start ZANE, and all those who work in the charity have been anointed too – in fact, chosen by God to do the work planned for us to do before the world began (Ephesians 2:10). So, boasting is ludicrous. It's an enormous privilege.

And my motives? Perhaps I should just shut up and get on with it.

Unstoppable Tide

Sex, money and power are addictive – and potentially packed with sin.

When I was young, it was another world. You could only access smutty literature, or the occasional picture of half-dressed women from the likes of *Health and Efficiency* magazine, by chance. Of course, there was Page 3 in *The Sun*, and at a stretch, we could buy harder stuff in Soho and carry it home in a brown paper bag. Such were the days of innocence.

Then came *Playboy*, Hugh Hefner's slippery slope of "one-handed" literature, with an ever-thinner veneer of respectability. They used to call it "adult" pictures. In truth, there's nothing adult about it – it's adolescent. But it's catastrophically destructive all the same.

With, the advent of the internet, the roof caved in, and the floor collapsed. Now, children can gain access to the dystopian world of Sodom and Gomorrah with a single click – and gaze at unlimited quantities of hard-core pornography.

Of course, the pimps try to squeeze subscriptions out of idiot punters,

but much is available for free in eye-watering, gynaecological detail. Apparently, more than half of today's 12-year-olds have been exposed to pornography. And what do they see? Women being routinely humiliated, objectified, dehumanised, assaulted and tortured. The women are real, as is the violence. The suffering is eroticised – and of course, this coarsens viewers and dehumanises participants. Nothing can stem the tide – as King Canute famously showed, some forces simply can't be commanded.

Pornography is addictive and, as the iron laws of unintended consequences kick in, we can see the escalation of male impotence and the inability to maintain "normal" sexual relations. Young women are asked to perform bizarre sexual acts, and sex crimes are rising. It's all vastly damaging with no pluses at all – except to the profiteers.

It has nothing to do with a lack of education. As we recently saw in France, Giselle Pelicot was drugged and raped by a trail of more than 50 men – but what happened to her had nothing to do with ignorance. Some of the men on trial were graduates. They surely all understood that consent is imperative – after all, sex education is compulsory in French schools – yet they charged ahead regardless.

Why? Precisely because the rapists knew exactly what they were doing – that's the point. The driving force behind rape and sexual assault is pornography, which drags (mostly) men into a bottomless swamp of degradation. The Pelicot case amply exposes the mainspring of the porn industry – the monetisation of taboo.

The Unscratchable Itch

Researcher Sean Thomas writes, "The whole, vast, metastasising, $100bn sewer isn't selling sex, rather it's selling transgression. The dopamine hit that drags men (it's nearly always men) back to their laptops time after time is the result of breaking a taboo, and that's why it's transgressive. Once a taboo is normalised, it loses its transgressive power. So, men seek another and another more extreme way to transgress. And so, the spiral can end in rape."

Male sexuality is designed by evolution to be an unscratchable itch, a desperate, unsatisfiable urge. It's like hunger – you aren't meant to wake up one day and think, "Okay, I've had 6,000 meals, so I think I'll stop eating now." Nor do men wake up and think, "I've viewed 500 sex acts – so I'll stop staring now." And the danger here is that when a man starts to explore his more deviant sexual fantasies, he finds himself chasing ever weirder varieties of sex.

And where are the vigilantes policing whether the women involved – and some of them children – have been trafficked? If they can catch Jeffrey Epstein, why can't they catch the hundreds of pimps feeding this disgusting industry?

Beware! We must warn the young, for dragons lurk here. This will, and can, destroy you.

I'm glad I'm not young anymore.

The Great British Giveaway

11 September – Day 11: Herne Bay to Rivercroft

We were blessed with a bright, sunny day and the company of our friends Rob and Margaret, who had travelled from Worcester to join us. During our walk, we discussed the friends we know who are ill or nearing the end of life. I asked Margaret if she knew about the five regrets of the dying?

I'm aware that I listed them three years ago in my commentary, but perhaps supporters would appreciate a reminder. They come from a book called *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying* by Bronnie Ware, a palliative care nurse from Brisbane. Having cared for hundreds of terminally ill patients, she asked some of them if they would mind her summarising their final regrets in a book – and they agreed.

The first regret is the wish they had pursued the work they truly wanted, rather than being pushed into jobs their parents had expected of them. For example, the poet John Betjeman longed to write while his parents wanted him to run a shop! Luckily for us all, John followed his heart.

Next, many had been so driven at work that, by the time they retired, they realised they had never truly made time to enjoy life – and often had few real friends. In addition, because they had worked so hard, they had let their most treasured friendships drift away.

Another regret was that they had never told the people who mattered most that they loved them. Apparently, some men especially find expressing emotion to their sons difficult.

Finally, many wished they had truly appreciated each day. When they woke in the morning, they realised too late that being alive was a privilege – and not just another ordinary day.

Your Money at Work

As you pay your tax bill, consider this.

Your government has given tens of thousands of your dosh to the transgender charity Mermaids. Yet, according to a Charity Commission inquiry last year, Mermaids wrongly claimed that puberty blockers were reversible, and gave chest binders to children as young as 13 – often against their parents' wishes. Even more disturbingly, one of its trustees gave a speech at a conference organised by what the Commission described as a "paedophile support

group". It seems your taxes are supporting depravity – shame on you!

Now to the total waste of your money. The Arts and Humanities Research Council awarded £841,830 to a study titled "The Europe that Gay Porn built" – nice that, isn't it? Then a hefty £759,253 went to "Comics and Race in Latin America", and let's not forget the £123,470 awarded to the initiative "Decolonising South-East Asia Sound Archives". Meanwhile, the Department for Business allocated £200,000 to Shanghai to "foster creativity in Chinese communities" – plus the same again to fund all-female Yue Opera performances for urban viewers on social media.

Oh yes, I almost forgot – we are handing £133 million to deeply corrupt Pakistan, and £33 million to India – a nation that can famously afford its own space programme. And let's not overlook the £13 million going to South Africa – the weather is mighty nice there at this time of the year.

Go on… pay your tax bill and smile. It's only money!

Mind Your Language

And now to political correctness…

The National Farmers' Union has declared the phrase "farmer's wife" to be inappropriate. And the word "sick note" has been cancelled – instead, it's referred to as a "fit note".

You couldn't make it up…

History's Unintended Consequences

12 September – Day 12: Rivercroft to Sandwich

Today, as we staggered along the St Augustine way, we faced miles of unkept grass. It had the texture of sodden green spaghetti, and didn't look as if it had been trodden since the dear saint made his way to Canterbury in the seventh century.

I kept sane – just – by thinking about ZANE's clubfoot work, which although not quite the crown of ZANE's achievements (that honour goes to our pensioner programme), is certainly its orb and sceptre.

The project began around 11 years ago when I managed to persuade my friend Chris Lavy to visit Zimbabwe as our guest. Chris is a remarkable man who has spent much of his career building hospitals in southern Africa. An orthopaedic surgeon, he is a world expert in the correction of clubfoot in children. We formed a partnership and now there are 13 sites around the country. We have completed over 6,600 treatments, giving children whose previous circumstances were dire the chance to jump for joy.

We allow supporters to choose the work they wish to back, and we are immensely grateful for their generosity. To be able to watch children playing football – when only a year ago they were walking on the sides of their feet or on their knees – is a rare privilege.

Twists and Turns

As that halitosis-ridden bastard Adolf Hitler shot himself, he would have been furious to know that the unintended consequences of his ghastly career included the birth of the EU and NATO – and for goodness' sake, the flourishing of the State of Israel.

Before Hitler invaded Russia in 1941, the country was in a state of chaos. Stalin simply had to get his act together, which he did rather well, and Russia has remained rather grimly together ever since. Meanwhile, Hitler's war drained the UK of wealth, leaving it unable to sustain its empire after the conflict ended. What an astounding series of unintended consequences!

(As a side note, the first third of Hitler's life was an abject failure. Then came a time where everything he touched turned to triumph, followed by a last period marked by total disaster. And he died at 56! Sebastian Haffner captures his unique career profile in his short book *The Meaning of Hitler*.)

Brexit Backstory

Did you know that without Paddy Ashdown, Brexit would never have happened? I outraged a Lib Dem table at a fundraiser with this story (with ill-disguised glee)!

In 1997, Paddy Ashdown lobbied the new PM, Tony Blair, to embrace his two passions – proportional representation (PR) and to remain in the EU forever. Blair agreed on staying in the EU, but inevitably disagreed on PR. However, after relentless lobbying from Paddy – and much to the objection of then Home Secretary, Jack Straw – Blair introduced PR in the EU elections.

Nigel Farage had been waiting in the wings. Until then, he'd been the patron saint of lost causes – but now he spotted an opportunity. UKIP took one seat, then two… then three. With each gain, publicity grew – boosting what many saw as the ludicrous idea that Britain might actually leave the EU. David Cameron, realising the Conservative Party was being hollowed out by UKIP, called a referendum in 2016. And the rest, as they say, is history…

This saga is detailed in Jack Straw's *Last Man Standing*, and in Michael Crick's biography, *One Party after Another: The Disruptive Life of Nigel Farage*.

Potatoes and Plagues

Henry VIII's inability to find a competent divorce lawyer led to the founding of the Church of England – fancy that!

Meanwhile, when a shady Genoese adventurer conned the Spanish Crown into financing a voyage to outmanoeuvre the Portuguese, this brought about unintended consequences on a grand scale. Europeans gained new and unknown goods from the Americas – and in return, they received a few things they hadn't bargained for from us.

Without Columbus's sailing trip, there would be no potatoes in Ireland, no baked beans in England, no cassoulet in France, no tomato sauce in Italy, no polenta in Venice and no Ferrero Rocher for stockbrokers. There'd be no turkey for Christmas – or cranberry sauce to go with it – and you certainly couldn't pop out for a curry, because there's no curry without chilli.

Until Columbus arrived, the Americas had no bacon, beef or cheese – and no McDonald's! There were no chickens, so forget Kentucky Fried Chicken. There were no dogs or cats, and they were even rat-free – until these pests emigrated via the ships that followed Columbus. There was no latte because there was no coffee. And no one was getting run over by a

stagecoach, because wheels hadn't been invented there yet – nor had horses been introduced to pull carts.

However, the Americans did have one gift to bestow on us – syphilis – and it did for Lenin, Donizetti, Schubert and Nietzsche. They also gave us tobacco, which killed millions with lung cancer (and ruined many amorous moments through stinky tobacco breath).

We took our revenge by gifting them smallpox, measles, flu, typhus, bubonic plague, diphtheria, whooping cough, chickenpox, yellow fever, scarlet fever and leprosy… and malaria as a treat.

Fair Exchange?

From America, we received the following plants: potatoes, maize, tomatoes, cacao (for chocolate), rubber, tobacco, peanuts, pineapples, cassava, sweet potatoes, vanilla, beans (such as kidney, lima and pinto), squashes, pumpkins, bell peppers, sunflowers, avocados, papayas, cranberries and blueberries.

In return, we gave them wheat, barley, rice, oats, rye, sugarcane, coffee, bananas, citrus fruits, olives, apples, pears, chickpeas, lettuce, onions, garlic, turnips, carrots, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, spinach, beets, radishes and kale.

And what about animals? All we got from America were turkeys. From us, they received cats, dogs, rats, horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens and donkeys.

The Dark Triangle

The American climate was great for growing sugarcane, but harvesting it required a huge workforce. Unfortunately, there weren't enough Aztecs or Incas left standing after our diseases had ravaged their populations – enter the Triangle Trade.

African chiefs sold weaker neighbours in chains to European traders who took them to the Americas as slaves. There, the traders picked up a cargo of sugar, which they took to Boston where the locals turned it into rum. The rum was then shipped back to Africa to trade with the chiefs for another cargo of their neighbours…

So, finger-pointing blame for the slave trade is complex. Without Columbus, there would be no slave trade – at least, between Europe and America.

If you'd been there, what would you have done?

Armchair Assassins

13 September – Day 13: Sandwich to Walmer

Deluged with torrential rain, our walk ground to a sodden halt – but by afternoon, we were on the move again.

Allow me to explain our "pop-up" classes programme. It's transformational work – and it's tragic that we can't expand it across Zimbabwe.

Please close your eyes and imagine what it must be like to be a single mother living in a slum where misogyny and violence rule. You are trapped. Your rapist lives freely down the road, laughing when you pass. The police are useless and there is no affordable healthcare, social services or education. The unemployment rate is 95 per cent, and you live on a dollar a day – if you're lucky. Some women are forced to use their bodies as cash machines just to survive.

I discovered a remarkable project 18 years ago that brings relief to a few of these desperate families, and ZANE has backed it ever since.

The first stage is to slowly rebuild the shattered confidence of a tiny minority of these women, preparing them to become teachers. Once ready, they can teach up to 72 children (aged 6–12) at a time.

The books and teaching materials are stored in six suitcases, hence the "pop-up" name. The kids learn basic numeracy and literacy, song, dance, physical education and Bible study, all aimed at preparing them for mainstream school. Dozens of children have progressed, with many fees covered through ZANE scholarships. The classes provide a safe, secure environment where children can build confidence, feel valued and learn to show love and compassion. For many, the pop-up classes are a rare refuge from their chaotic home lives. Each child enjoys a daily hot meal – often their only one – and they also learn basic farming techniques, growing vegetables to help subsidise their meals.

ZANE is immensely proud of this work, and it's sad we can't roll it out more widely. We pay tribute to those who choose to direct their donations to support our precious pop-up classes programme.

Mindless Mockery

At a recent supper party, a man with a crimson face and tiny eyes began tearing into the reputation of Boris Johnson. We've all heard this sort of thing before. He was clearly

projecting his dissatisfaction with his own failed life onto someone he's never even met.

I couldn't resist joining in for I heartily despise the thoughtless criticism of people in public life. The speakers always imply that if they were in charge, they would do a far better job – which is almost certainly a lie! People in high office deserve our prayers, not wanton abuse.

"Hold on," I replied. "You're a retired circuit judge?" Crimson Face nodded. "And you claim Boris is a useless buffoon?" He nodded again.

"Don't forget he was the lead writer for the *Daily Telegraph*, arguably one of the great newspapers of our time," I reminded him. "I would like to be a lead writer at the DT, but I'm just not good enough. Do you think you are?" Crimson Face's cheeks went a shade darker, and his mouth opened and closed like a carp's.

"Boris was also the editor of the *Spectator,*" I continued. "I'd like to have edited the Speccie, but I'm not good enough. Are you?

"He was then the Conservative Mayor of London – twice. Remember, it's a Labour city. I would like to have been Mayor even once, but I'm simply not good enough. Are you?"

No reply.

Boris was then Foreign Secretary. I'd like to have been Foreign Secretary – imagine all those first-class flights, wonderful meals and grand conferences, with no direct responsibilities. But I wasn't and it's

too late for me now anyway – and I probably wasn't good enough. Are you?"

No reply.

"He followed that by becoming Prime Minister for three years. I'd like to have been PM for even a day. But I doubt I have what it takes. Do you?"

No reply.

"Boris was arguably the most consequential Prime Minister since Thatcher. He campaigned for the "leave" vote, then in 2019, when Parliament was stalemated, he forced us out in compliance with the wishes of the British people expressed in the referendum. You may not agree, but this was mighty consequential.

"It's all in his excellent book *Unleashed*. Have you read it? And whatever you may think, he isn't a useless buffoon!"

A sullen "No".

I made an enemy that evening, but I don't care.

The Speed Trap

Points on your license! A speed awareness course! Complaining about 20 mph?

Look, driving very fast is unpleasant and dangerous. It leads to longer braking distances, higher energy consumption, an increased risk of accidents and fatalities, and the likelihood of receiving speeding points or even losing your licence – not to mention the risk of being mistaken for a reverse-baseball-hatted yob. And yet, the very thing we're usually trying to achieve – a reduction in journey time – is often barely gained.

Take it from me – the faster you go, the less time you save by going say 10 mph faster. Accelerate from 20 to 30 mph and you save 10 minutes for every 10 miles you are travelling. Accelerate from 70 to 80 mph and you save under a minute.

Remember, you heard it from ZANE first.

The Banality of Evil

14 September – Day 14: Walmer to Dover

I once sat next to the crime writer PD James at a dinner. She told me that DNA had ruined her trade and the only safe way to kill anyone these days was to "accidentally" nudge them off the White Cliffs. Suffice to say, I walked them today with special care.

We met Madge and Pamplona on the path – two lively and attractive ladies determined to live life to the full. Then further on, we chatted to two cheerful Canadians, Wendy and Mitch. It's good to meet such friendly people along the way. Overhead, a Spitfire did aerobatics.

ZANE and Veterans

In 2017, I met Major Mugamo in Bulawayo (not his real name, for security reasons). He was dying of untreated prostate cancer and was in great pain. Since 2004, ZANE has represented all the UK services charities in Zimbabwe, distributing millions of pounds on their behalf to veterans and their widows left stranded and destitute.

However, when Rhodesia became independent in 1980, the UK ceased to fully support those who had fought in the colonial regiments. All the veterans received was a meagre payment – barely enough for one meal a day – and no medical support whatsoever. Having served our Crown, they deserved better.

To cut a long story short, I wrote to the then head of our partner military charity, asking if he would co-chair a new pressure group to secure additional funds. Although ZANE agreed to fund Mugamo's operation, we simply didn't have the resources to help the hundreds of others facing destitution. David Richards (now Field Marshal) agreed, as did Sir Malcolm Rifkind, the former Foreign Secretary. We approached DFID and, by chance, bingo! Penny Mordaunt, then at the helm, gave her backing.

To date, over 7,600 veterans and widows across the Commonwealth have received two meals a day. ZANE also secured an additional grant to establish a unique basic medical programme for veterans and pensioners living in Zimbabwe. This has proved to be a huge success.

The Heart of Darkness

We took four of our grandchildren to Auschwitz. As a condition of their coming, they had to be over 18, have seen *Schindler's List*, know at least a little of the history and genuinely want to understand what it was all about.

I was prompted to do this by the late Ken Dodd. This may sound totally weird, for what's a dead comic got to do with Auschwitz?

Dodd – one of the great comics of all time – insisted on live performances. He undertook hundreds each year, convinced that only face-to-face encounters allowed him to truly "connect" with his audiences. He believed film, TV – even Zoom – represented only a shadow of reality, lacking substance. A "spiritual" dimension could only exist when people met in person.

So, to truly understand, we must visit Auschwitz – walk the railway lines, touch the walls where people were shot, stare at the piles of hair, the children's shoes and prams, and see the crematoria – to begin to grasp the full horror of what this obscenity was.

And I wanted our beloved family to see what man is capable of when the wheels of our little lives fall off. Civilisation is but a thin veneer – horror can emerge in a flash and shatter the illusion. If you doubt this, read Danny Finkelstein's *Hitler, Stalin, Mum and Dad* – and see how his family's prosperous and comfortable lives were utterly destroyed in less than a week.

And I wanted them to learn something else. Many people are uneasy with the concept of "sin". Plenty say, "I'm a humanist… I don't believe humans are inherently evil. If people go wrong, it's all down to their upbringing." But if you live long enough – and are honest with yourself – you'll come to see, beyond doubt, that there are things in your own heart that will bite you and shock

you. You'll find yourself saying, "I didn't know I was capable of that."

Eichmann in the Mirror

The problem is, we are all capable of "that". Adolf Eichmann was one of the key administrators of the Holocaust; he was tried in Israel in 1960 and later executed. During his trial, a striking incident occurred. One of the key witnesses, Yehiel De-Nur, broke down in uncontrollable sobs upon seeing Eichmann in the courtroom. Pandemonium followed, and the judge struggled to restore order – it was dramatic. Sometime later, De-Nur was interviewed by Mike Wallace on the TV show *60 Minutes*.

Wallace asked him what had happened? Was he overwhelmed with hatred or by painful memories?

"No," said De-Nur – and what he said next shocked many secular Western viewers. "I was overcome by the realisation that Eichmann was not some demon, but an ordinary human being. I saw that I am capable of doing this… exactly like he."

We can choose to say that the Nazis were sub-human, and that we are not capable of behaving like that – but there are serious problems with such a view. One of the scariest aspects about this chapter in history is not how few architects there were, but how many were complicit across an entire society – a society that, at the time, was producing some of the world's finest scholarship, science and culture. That makes it impossible to write off the period as the work of a few isolated monsters.

The Nazis themselves believed certain groups were *untermensch* – sub-human and beneath them. Do we really want to make the same kind of judgment about them as they did about the Jews, the Roma and the mentally infirm?

Hannah Arendt, writing in the *New Yorker*, claimed that Eichmann was an ordinary man who wanted simply to build a career. She called this the "banality of evil".

I want our grandsons to realise that evil lurks in the hearts of all quite ordinary human beings. Even in the hearts of our Benyon family.

The Price of Political Cowardice

15 September – Day 15: Dover to Folkestone (or not)

This was our last day and the wind was said to be at hurricane levels. We decided that walking near cliffs in such conditions would be foolhardy, so regretfully we called it a day. It's been a great walk.

As I mentioned earlier, we will soon bid a sad farewell to three loyal workers. Allow me to pay tribute to them here – although, for security reasons, I will not use their real names.

Mary has run our extensive food programme with a rod of iron, yet with kindness, humour and warmth – a rare combination. She knows every detail of the care homes we support. Home managers tell us that without this essential work, they could not have survived – and collapse would have spelled catastrophe for thousands of pensioners. She will be greatly missed.

Then there's Yvonne, who more or less founded our "pop-up" classes programme. A deeply committed Christian, her dedication and love for this critical work have been remarkable. It's a miracle she didn't burn out years ago. ZANE has been privileged to work alongside her.

Finally, Hannah has worked in Bulawayo for 20 years, caring for the needs of pensioners with unmatched skill and dedication. She will be deeply missed, both by those she helps and by her colleagues.

Speaking the Unspeakable

For decades, tens of thousands of young girls across the UK were subjected to sexual abuse on an industrial scale – many of them targeted by grooming gangs, often involving men of predominantly Pakistani heritage.

This abuse, horrific in its scale and cruelty, remained largely hidden from public view for years. Why? The craven social workers, the police and the politicians were frit of being labelled as "bigots" or "racist scum" if they made a fuss. So instead of doing the right thing, they chose to suggest the children – some as young as 10 – had brought it upon themselves. File closed, acute misery hidden and injustice embraced.

The politicians inanely thought (if they thought at all) that if you took a farmer from rural Pakistan – where attitudes towards women and the

LGBTQ community can be profoundly conservative – and set him down in a modern British city, then he would adopt liberal, Western values overnight – as if by magic.

This wanton drivel was never included in any of the political parties' manifestos. If anyone complained, they were instantly labelled "racist".

As we can't bring ourselves to deport criminals, the results appear to be irreversible. Did senior politicians really enter politics to be cowards? It's not as if they weren't warned about the consequences, but I suppose there are none so deaf as those who don't want to hear.

Alienation

In a sermon delivered in January 1977 at St Lawrence Jewry, Enoch Powell warned of the long-term political and social consequences of large-scale immigration. He said, "…the prospective size and distribution of our population of New Commonwealth ethnic origin… cannot be otherwise than destructive of this nation… The basis of my conviction is neither genetic nor eugenic; it is not racial, because… I have never arranged my fellow men on a scale of merit according to their origins. The basis is political. It is the belief that self-identification of each part with the whole is the one essential precondition of being a parliamentary nation. And that massive shift in the composition of the population in… cities of England will produce, by the sheer inevitabilities of human nature in society, ever-increasing and more dangerous alienation."

This quote is taken from Simon Heffer's excellent biography of Powell, *Like the Roman*.

Ted Heath dismissed Powell from his role as Shadow Defence Secretary in 1968, following the infamous

"Rivers of Blood" speech. He loathed Powell who was much brighter. For the record, by the age of 23, Powell was a fellow of Trinity Cambridge and later became Professor of Ancient Greek at Sydney University. When war broke out in 1939, he enlisted as a Private and became the only man to rise to the rank of Brigadier within four years. He was fluent in German, Italian and Urdu – and above all, he was a Romantic, deeply devoted to his country.

Heath labelled Powell a "racist", scorning his many crystal-clear warnings about the dangers of mass immigration. Today, we are facing the consequences. Powell, now buried in the Warwick Cemetery – dressed in his full Brigadier's uniform – would likely be deeply saddened, though I suspect not surprised, by the events unfolding around us.

From Failure to Fortune

Most new ventures fail. No one enjoys the experience of going bust – and often, the fear of failure stops people from ever starting at all. Yet for serial entrepreneurs, failure comes with the territory, and disasters are an occupational hazard. What matters most is having the resilience to pick up the pieces and keep going. Henry Ford, for example, went bankrupt twice before his cars went on to transform America.

Thomas Edison faced countless failures before his light bulbs lit up the world. When asked whether his bankruptcies were a source of embarrassment, he replied, "Of course not. Each one was a stepping stone to my ultimate success."

Now consider the story behind the drink 7Up. Allegedly, Charles Leiper Grigg started with a drink he called "One Up" (and you can guess where this is going). Each time a company failed, he burned through more of his savings, his relationships and his friends' support. Eventually, he suffered a nervous breakdown. But with encouragement, he decided to try just once more…

We need a buccaneering spirit to generate growth. Someone should tell Rachel Reeves the good news.

Journey's End

16 September – The Day After

So, we've come to the end of another walk – and, in the main, it's been very enjoyable. Some parts were hard going, as is to be expected – after all, it's almost impossible to forecast the condition of tracks or small roads, let alone the weather.

Double Mindedness

"Purify your hearts, you double-minded". These words from the Bible (James 4:8) are about integrity – and fraud.

The trouble with Rachel Reeves is that the errors in her CV all leaned one way – towards making her achievements seem more impressive than they were. The length of time she'd worked at the Bank of England, and the seniority of her role there, were both inflated. She also claimed to have published an article in *Political Economy* when in fact it was *The European Journal of Political Economy* – a far less prestigious publication. Perhaps, deep down, she suspects she's a fraud.

She isn't alone. A friend elected to Parliament told me that for the first week he wondered how such a fraud – as he knew himself to be – had reached his position. After the second week, he wondered how everyone else had got there!

And it's not just parliamentarians. Early in their illustrious careers, journalists John Simpson and John Humphrys shared an office at the BBC – and whenever the men in grey suits appeared, they'd chorus, "Okay, we know what you are about to say. We'll go quietly." Fortunately, they were mistaken.

Perhaps the knowledge of double-mindedness is one of the reasons for the chronic alcoholism and early deaths of so many supremely talented actors. Richard Burton, Philip Seymour Hoffman and Spencer Tracy – all of whom made a living out of make-believe while trying to fill the emptiness with drink, sex and drugs – spent their last years aghast at the horror of it all.

The Inner Judge

One of the most terrifying scenes in literature can be found in Arthur Miller's play *Death of a Salesman*. Willy Loman is a travelling salesman who knows deep down he's a fraud. His self-pity drives him to regularly cheat on his wife.

He rationalises, as men often do, "I live a hard life, the sexual act means nothing" – and so on. His

only consolation is that his son, Biff, idolises him. But one day Biff turns up unexpectedly in his hotel room and catches him with another woman. It's excruciating.

Willy tries to swagger. "Now look, Biff – one day you'll understand these things." But Biff just stares. Then Willy tries to bully his son and orders him to forget the whole incident.

Biff replies, "You fake, you phony little fake!" Willy falls to his knees, his soul stripped bare of all rationalisations.

When I read this scene, I tremble. Is there a last judgement? Who needs it when we do such a thorough job of judging ourselves?

What wonderful news we're forgiven.

Our Thanks

The walk was made immeasurably easier and more pleasant by our driver and friend, Richard Moyles. His tolerance of us in good times – and in not so good – was truly remarkable. He is a great blessing.

Our thanks also go to those supporters who walked with us and cheered us up – and, of course, we are immensely grateful to those who kindly offered us hospitality along the way.

I am grateful to Miles Morland and others for their inspiration in shaping my commentary.

Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to ZANE supporters whose

generosity continues year after year. One day, Zimbabwe will become prosperous, and ZANE's services may no longer be required. But until then, our work remains vital to so many vulnerable people.

Jane and I express our sincere appreciation to our loyal ZANE workers, both in the UK and across Zimbabwe. Many have devoted decades to serving the poor, often without recognition, and you may never know the names of these remarkable, brave individuals. Without them ZANE could not exist.

I am minded of the final paragraph of George Eliot's *Middlemarch*:

"For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

Impressions of the Walk

With Richard Moyles, our faithful driver

Guest walkers providing welcome company

Some challenging terrain

Nearly there!

Jane's Journal

Gravesend to Folkestone

Day 1

A year has flown by, and here Tom and I are again, walking with our cockapoo, Moses.

This time our route will take us from Gravesend to Folkestone. We're hoping for another flat stretch – though we're feeling quite fit, we're certainly not getting any younger! Unfortunately, I'm nursing a very painful little toe after running it over with a cash-and-carry trolley loaded with tins for the foodbank last week – not the best timing on my part!

On Sunday night, Richard drove us to the old port of Chatham where we're staying in an old, converted warehouse for a few nights. It's the fourth time he's taken on the role of driver, keeping us on the straight and narrow with his constant good humour. This year, he's brought two electronic tracker tags for our rucksacks so he can't lose us!

After a long, hot summer, today was the day the weather broke – and the forecast is for heavy thundery showers all week. Never mind, we are well kitted out with the right clothes, and it is, at least, warm.

Our starting point was Gravesend, a name that sounds inauspicious but, as I discovered, has nothing to do with graves. It comes from the old Saxon phrase *grafs-ham* meaning

"end of a grove", and is recorded in the *Domesday Book* as Gravesham. It rose to prominence in the fourteenth century as the first official ferry crossing to the city of London. Ever since, it has remained an important shipping port on the south bank of the Thames, connecting with Tilbury on the north.

We set off along the Saxon Shore Way, following a winding path between many of the old warehouses – once part of the busy port, now repurposed for various kinds of storage. There were only a few ships anchored on the Tilbury side and the whole area had rather a rundown feel to it.

After leaving the town, we followed an embankment beside mudflats stretching out to the Thames Estuary. To our right lay a fenced-off area marked with warning signs, which we discovered belongs to the Metropolitan Police. It's used as a rifle range on Thursdays and Fridays – fortunately, not today!

Along this four-mile stretch, we came across large groups of Fell pony mares and their foals grazing on the sparse grass. They were friendly and we couldn't help wondering what their story was. We also passed a large Second World War lookout post, sadly strewn with bottles and rubbish – evidently, it's now used by the locals as a party venue.

After walking through a huge and noisy cement and brick factory – one of the area's key industries – we stopped for lunch in the village of Cliffe. When we returned to our route, Moses refused to get out of the car. At 11 years old, he'd clearly decided he'd done enough walking for the day! According to Richard, he snored peacefully in the back of the car while we trudged through thick, muddy fields to the finish.

Day 2

With rain forecast for the middle of the day, we decided to set off early. Returning to yesterday's endpoint, we walked inland, away from the estuary. Our route took us past the imposing medieval stone gatepost of Cooling Castle, dating from the 1380s and built by the Cobham family – the local lords of the manor – to deter French raids. The castle is a ruin, but the gatehouse and some of the outer wall turrets are still standing, and the surrounding moat is visible.

We now caught our first sight of Kent's orchards, walking through a Victoria plum orchard and a large pear orchard – some already harvested, others still waiting to be picked. Large container lorries carrying apples passed us on the narrow roads. Eventually, we climbed our first hill into High Halstow Nature Reserve, a sprawling forested area home to some beautiful ancient oaks. Emerging on the other side slightly lost, we were kindly directed back onto our route by a dog walker, Simon, who wished us well on our journey.

Walking along a well-worn track between harvested fields, I couldn't help but admire how well the Saxon Shore Way is maintained and signposted. But then we reached a signed crossroads pointing to the right – leading straight into an overgrown stretch that looked more like a ditch than a path! This forced us to walk along the edge of a ploughed field with no verge, something Tom hates doing. After negotiating nearly two fields of plough and feeling suitably fed up, we realised the path had reappeared on our right – and after scrambling through an overgrown ditch, we were back on the correct route, thank goodness.

Once we'd crossed the single-track railway line, we met Richard on the main road and headed for lunch at a cafe in Hoo St Werburgh. An Anglo-Saxon princess and abbess, St Werburgh was venerated as the patron saint of the city of Chester. The word *Hoo* was the Saxon word for an outcrop or peninsula.

After lunch, we walked back down to the coast, passing a number of lakes teeming with wildlife. Then we returned to the embankment along the Thames Estuary, following a stretch of rather bleak mudflats back to the outskirts of Hoo St Werburgh. As we approached, we saw a graveyard of disused boats, initially rotting hulks lying in the mud and then a number of seemingly abandoned vessels, lying side by side on dry land. It was all rather sad!

This part of the town was dominated by a maze of warehouses that we had to navigate before reaching our endpoint.

Day 3

This morning's forecast predicted heavy rain and strong winds, particularly around midday. We set off early, well protected in our heavy-duty rain gear.

Our route took us along the shoreline from Hoo St Werburgh. It was certainly wet and windy, though surprisingly warm. This is where the Medway River joins the Thames, and it was full of small, anchored sailing boats – though the weather meant no one was out on the water today. It's obviously a very popular sailing spot, and we saw a number of sailing clubs offering lessons for all levels.

At Lower Upnor Wharf, we passed the imposing figurehead of the recently restored *Arethusa*. She once belonged to HMS *Arethusa*, the last British warship to enter battle under sail. Wandering down a charming, narrow street of old Upnor, I could almost picture the lives of the sailors and their families who lived in this tiny village for generations.

The path led us up a steep hill, passing by Upnor Castle – another Norman fortress overlooking the estuary. Sadly, it's hidden behind high walls as it's privately owned. We continued through Upper Upnor, crossing the busy A289 just before it disappeared into the tunnel beneath

the Medway. Walking past a naval training centre, we were dismayed to see the vast amount of rubbish – bottles, cans, even supermarket trolleys – chucked over the high fence into the bushes. Eventually, we crossed the river via the Rochester Road Bridge.

Rochester is a charming old town, dominated by its castle and cathedral. Last night, we enjoyed a meal at a fish restaurant on the High Street, so it was nice to see the streets in daylight. The old town is full of small shops and eateries, with countless plaques on the house walls detailing interesting historical facts – it must have been a very important city in its heyday. We hoped to explore the cathedral and castle, but unfortunately, there wasn't enough time. As we made our way out through the suburbs, we saw several high-rise buildings – some belonging to the university – in a very poor state. Many were derelict with broken windows and graffiti.

By now, it was time for lunch, and we found ourselves at a Tesco superstore, which luckily had a restaurant. Just as we arrived, the heavens opened, and for a moment we wondered if we could continue our walk. The sun soon reappeared, though, and we were able to press on to Gillingham. This town has a very different feel from Rochester – more ethnically diverse with streets lined with nail bars, tattoo parlours, vaping shops and well-stocked vegetable market stalls.

Our walk concluded back on the estuary, just two miles from our accommodation in Chatham. We were glad to finish, as both our feet – as well as Moses's – were aching after a day spent mainly on pavements!

Day 4

We left Rochester, Gillingham and Chatham behind – towns now seeming to merge into one another. Back on the Medway shoreline, we found ourselves waiting in the car for half an hour as it pelted down with rain – as had been forecast for 9am! When the rain finally eased, we made good progress along the well-maintained Saxon Shore Way. The area is clearly a dog walker's paradise, and we passed many – including one lady managing eight dogs on leads of various sizes.

We have noticed over the past four days that the Kent blackberries are bigger and sweeter than those in Oxfordshire. It then occurred to me that Kent is known as the "Garden of England" and grows more fruit than any other county – so this makes perfect sense. For what it's worth, the crab apples are redder and shinier than I've ever seen before, as are the rose hips, sloes and blackthorn berries. On one path today, we even found ourselves treading on hundreds of little yellow plums that had fallen from the hedgerow. They were wonderfully sweet, so definitely not damsons!

We were now deep in apple orchard country. It was fascinating to see that the apples – and some pears – are no longer grown on traditional trees, but instead trained against long poles, rather like upright cordons. The trees were heavy with fruit, and I wondered if this method made picking easier. The last time we walked through Kent, on our journey from York to Canterbury in 2012, the orchards were still full of standard trees. I asked a farmer whether it looked like a good harvest this year. He said he was hopeful, though picking had not yet begun. From what we could see, the apples looked superb!

Here, the Medway is a maze of creeks and islands, winding in every direction – and the path follows suit. So, although we walked eight miles, we didn't actually travel very far at all! Another downpour came just as we stopped for lunch. It was a toss-up between a picnic in Upchurch churchyard or heading to the pub – and the pub won! We've been incredibly lucky with the timing of the showers, both today and yesterday.

The afternoon walk was especially pretty, taking us through farmland and orchards. We relished the silence – at last, we'd left behind the constant hum of traffic that has accompanied us since the start. We did, however, have one unsettling incident when the path ran alongside a horse establishment. A very large and aggressive Alsatian kept throwing itself at the fence separating us – and although the owner assured us the dog couldn't get over, we weren't entirely convinced!

We found ourselves back at the creek we walked along this morning – though now on the opposite side. It was a little disappointing to see this wide expanse of water at low tide, with all the boats resting on seaweed and mud. Our day ended at Lower Halstow, where, as we circled the village harbour, we passed

three beautifully restored Thames barges with their dark red sails. These vessels once carried cargo up and down the river, bringing goods into London.

Day 5

The sun was shining this morning, with no sign of rain for the rest of the day. It felt good to ditch our wet weather gear and be back in T-shirts.

The walk promised to be an easy one through farmland, and it started well – but things soon went downhill! As soon as we left the road out of the village, we were faced with a newly ploughed field and no defined footpath across it. Farmers have two weeks after ploughing to reinstate the path, but this hadn't yet happened, so we had to make a rather tortuous detour around the edge.

Things deteriorated further. The local authority had been very diligent with signage and the installation of swing gates, but unfortunately, the farmers had ignored the designated routes across their land. The oilseed rape fields, still unharvested, were impossible to cross, and other fields were poor-quality scrub, with paths choked by nettles and brambles. Poor Moses really struggled to make his way through, and I worried about his paws being torn by thorns.

At last, we emerged between two small ponds. One of them was full of fish – probably carp – swimming near the surface, their backs clearly visible. They seemed to be catching flies, though we weren't entirely sure.

We met an elderly chap, working his field with an ancient tractor. He was despondent about the state of the countryside and also frustrated that

the new owner of the neighbouring farm was converting 200 acres into solar panels. I told him he was lucky – around us at Blenheim, there's an application to cover 2,500 acres.

After crossing a busy, narrow road, we were back on the shoreline, and it was a relief to be walking along the embankment again. Moses enjoyed a much-needed swim, even though the water at the edge was very brackish. The embankment was riddled with rabbit holes, and Moses became very excited as he spotted several healthy bunnies hopping around. I'd forgotten just how much damage a large number of rabbits can do – the embankment was badly eroded along the way. Sadly, further on we came across several sick rabbits suffering from myxomatosis, a reminder that the disease is still around.

In the distance, we spotted one of the Thames barges we saw last night, now in full sail – an impressive sight. This entire area is a bird conservation zone, and I was frustrated not to have our binoculars with us. The inland pools were dotted with ducks and geese, while partridges moved through the scrubland above sea level.

We stopped for a picnic lunch in this rather barren countryside and were shocked to see several dead fish in one of the inlets. Richard thought it was likely due to the hot, dry summer depleting the oxygen in the water.

Our walk ended between road bridges, linking the Isle of Sheppey to the mainland.

Day 6

Today, we were joined by our host from last night, Robert. He has lived in the area for most of his life, having been born in the very house he still calls home. He shared riveting memories of hearing German bombers flying up the Thames during the Battle of Britain and of being shown inside an aircraft that had crash-landed nearby – with one soldier killed.

Robert knows the area well and was fascinated by the changing uses of many of the industrial units we passed during the first half of our

walk along the Swale River. Paper was the main industry for many years, with wood imported from Scandinavian countries to be turned into paper locally. While many paper companies have shut down amid falling demand, DS Smith, the largest, remains – focusing primarily on cardboard, a sector that has surged due to its sustainability. The company also manufactures numerous recycled products, as do other factories in the area. It's interesting to see that when one industry fades, another often rises to take its place.

Most of today was spent walking up one side of Milton Creek and down the other. One can easily imagine what a bustling place it must have been in the past, with Thames barges carrying goods to and from London.

We've done many walks over the years, most recently in the south of England. Sadly, we've found this part of Kent to be the worst for litter and fly-tipping. As well as coming across several areas scattered with rubbish, we saw piles of builders' waste dumped at the end of a road – with a large dead rat lying beside it!

Day 7

This was our day off, and we enjoyed a gentle, leisurely day with our hosts in their beautiful house and garden. I went to church, which was literally next door, and was warmly greeted by some of the congregation. It was lovely sitting in the garden in wonderful sunshine, not having to go anywhere. Richard drove home last night for a wedding anniversary party of a friend, and will return this evening.

Day 8

Off we set again, feeling much refreshed and ready to go. Our day off was important, as we were both feeling tired – and I think even Moses appreciated the rest!

Today, we finally left behind the industrial areas of the Thames and the Medway. It's been fascinating learning about the various products produced here, both in the past and in the present, and to see what the future might hold.

We resumed our walk at the bottom of Conyer Creek, which was once bustling with barges transporting bricks from the nearby works and apples and cherries to London. From the eighth century, this land was owned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who kept a palace on Tyndall Street where Henry III often stayed. Later, Henry VIII's fruiterers replaced the worn-out stocks of apples and cherries – originally introduced by the Normans – with new varieties, and the area became renowned for its orchards. Even earlier, the Romans grew vineyards that extended right down to the water's edge of the Swale. Perhaps they will make a return now that English wine is so popular!

We enjoyed a very easy and pleasant walk along the edge of the Swale, following well-maintained embankment paths. Although sometimes referred to as the Swale River, it's not actually a river – just a

stretch of water separating the Isle of Sheppey from the Thames Estuary. In front of us lay Fowley Island, home to oystercatchers, black-headed gulls and other nesting birds. We were delighted to see another Thames barge pass by in full sail – a beautiful sight. After about two and a half hours, we stopped at Harty Ferry, a popular spot for birdwatchers. The ferry, now disused, once carried people across to the Isle of Sheppey. Moses enjoyed a welcome swim here, as the water wasn't too muddy.

Soon after, we turned right into Oare Creek. It was lined with hundreds of small boats, a testament to its popularity for sailing during the season – though it was quiet today on a September Monday. After stopping for lunch at the bottom of the creek, we had to alter the final part of our route – as the planned endpoint was completely inaccessible for Richard to pick us up by car.

The footpath we followed brought us perilously close to a herd of cows and calves – a risky encounter, especially with a dog. Fortunately, we managed to skirt around them safely and reached our destination without incident.

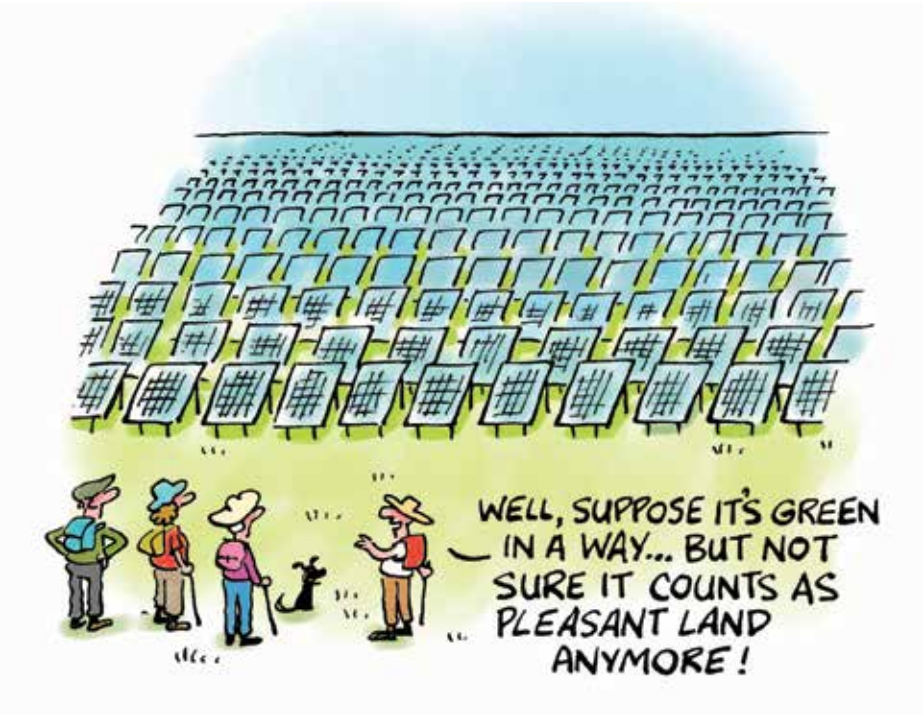
Day 9

Another lovely day was forecast. Today, we were joined by a charming couple from Maidstone, who had left home early to meet us at our hosts' house at 8.45 am. We returned to yesterday's endpoint and followed Faversham Creek to its far end, where we crossed to the other side by the famous local brewery, Shepherd Neame – still a significant industry in the town. Faversham grew in importance during the Middle Ages as a port on what was then a large inlet of the Swale. It was also a town on Watling Street, the crucial route between Canterbury and London.

Faversham first had a charter in Saxon times. Its prosperity grew through shipbuilding and its gunpowder mills, and its oyster beds became famous – the Faversham Oyster Company is said to be the oldest in the world. We walked along Abbey Street, one of the finest old streets in Kent, lined with many medieval houses as well as some impressive eighteenth-century buildings. We then returned to the creek, making our way around Iron Wharf Boatyard. Several larger boats were moored here, and we couldn't help wondering how they managed to sail out of the creek, even at high tide.

We left Faversham behind – one of the area's most charming towns – and made our way back towards the marshes and the raised dyke along the Swale. We were surprised to see a huge solar farm stretching for what must have been three miles in length and at least a mile deep. It had only recently been completed, after facing considerable opposition at the time.

This is a beautiful stretch of the Swale, which eventually opens out at the end of Sheppey into the final



reaches of the Thames Estuary as it flows towards the North Sea. We enjoyed a delicious picnic on the sea wall, thoughtfully brought by Richard – who had walked along a footpath through the middle of the solar farm to meet us.

Our final two and a half miles took us to the edge of Whitstable, the mud along the banks of the Swale gradually giving way to shale and sand. After a while, we stopped at the Old Sportsman Inn, originally a fisherman's house surrounded by huts for tanning sails. During the Napoleonic Wars, local smugglers reportedly met French prisoners of war here and led them through the reed beds to escape to France. After enjoying a welcome drink, we returned to Faversham.

Day 10

Back at the Old Sportsman Inn, we met up with Camilla, who works for ZANE. A Whitstable local, she knows the area well, so I could relax without worrying about reading maps – a real relief. In fact, today's route was easy, as we followed the sea wall through Seasalter and Whitstable, finishing at Herne Bay.

Apparently, in Roman times, the coastline stretched a mile further out. Storms and tides gradually eroded it, and the survival of Whitstable is thanks to its sea walls and sluices – the first built in 1494, then reinforced in 1798 and again in 1806.

We walked through Seasalter, a village named for its flourishing Saxon-era trade exporting salt to France and other countries further

north. Along the way, we passed a number of brightly coloured beach huts, which Camilla told me sell for exorbitant prices of £50–60k.

We passed the rather battered-looking Old Neptune Inn standing on the beach. Pounded by storms and floods over the decades, it has served as an ale house for around 200 years – having previously been a fisherman's cottage. Nearby, the Royal Native Oyster Store once held the famous Whitstable oysters for the London market. Oysters remain a thriving business for the Green family, who own most of the oyster beds in the area.

Continuing into Whitstable, we crossed the Canterbury-Whitstable line, affectionately known as the "Crab and Winkle Line" – in 1830, it became the first railway to operate entirely under steam power. Our route then took us past around 120 smaller beach huts – several of which were for sale – before reaching the inner harbour. Built in 1832, the harbour once imported coal and was linked to the railway. Today, it shelters a small inshore fishing fleet.

Returning to the seafront, we strolled past a number of fine houses before being picked up by Richard. He took us to an excellent fish restaurant, where Tom indulged in half a dozen oysters and I had some excellent prawns. After lunch, we made good progress to Herne Bay, which developed in the nineteenth century as a seaside resort. At the time, it boasted the longest pier in Britain – over a mile long. It was sadly

destroyed by a storm in 1979, leaving the end tower standing alone out at sea, with a smaller section still intact by the beach.

Along the central parade, there were the usual amusement arcades, ice cream parlours and shops selling beach items, as well as a bandstand and an impressive clock tower. The tower commemorates those who died during the Crimean War and, according to the plaque, was the first freestanding clock ever built. There was also a rather fine life-size statue of Amy Johnson, whose plane came down in the sea nearby during the Second World War. She set many solo flying records in her lifetime.

Our walk ended here, and we enjoyed excellent ice creams as a well-earned reward.

Day 11

Back in Whitstable, we continued our walk along the heavily reinforced concrete walkway, which stretches for another two miles beyond the town. Although now mainly used by walkers, runners and cyclists, nearby pictures showed that families once enjoyed it for bathing in the early nineteenth century.

As the shoreline turned south, we saw that the cliffs – composed of sandstone and clay – had eroded badly. The path climbed to the top, after which we walked through pleasant woodland and parkland, much frequented by dog walkers. This brought us to the imposing site of the two towers of St Mary's Church at Reculver. St Mary's is one of the oldest Saxon churches in the country, though sadly only the towers remain.

According to Simon – our host from last night – in 1801, the mother of the local landlord took a dislike to the church and insisted it be moved, with the stones used to build a church in nearby Hillborough. Only the towers remained, later used as a lighthouse. One legacy of the church is the Alexandrine, a spring cabbage introduced by the Romans that still grows around the towers today!

We now moved away from the seashore, passing through the fertile land of East Kent, much of

it reclaimed in medieval times. A series of dykes crisscrossed the area, originally built for drainage and now serving as a haven for birds. It was a beautiful and peaceful landscape. At one point, we followed the side of one of these dykes, with a graceful grey heron gliding alongside. I quickly secured Moses, who would have loved to have joined it in the water!

We passed through a tunnel beneath the main railway line, and came across an intriguing old wooden windmill attached to a recently restored house. The sails had been removed, but it was still possible to see how the top had revolved to catch the wind. After crossing the busy A298, the path led us through a large apple farm, where many varieties were ready for harvest.

We stopped for lunch in the village of Bowden Gate. Here we met up with Bob and Margaret, who hosted us during our walk down the Severn last year in Worcestershire. Bob, a successful farmer, had held his first farming job nearby, so he sweetly came all the way to join us on our walk – and to see the area for the first time since the 1950s.

We enjoyed a happy afternoon, chatting as we walked through well-kept farmland. At one point, we got a little lost in a lovely old wood, but this was soon rectified – and we agreed that the detour had been well worth it.

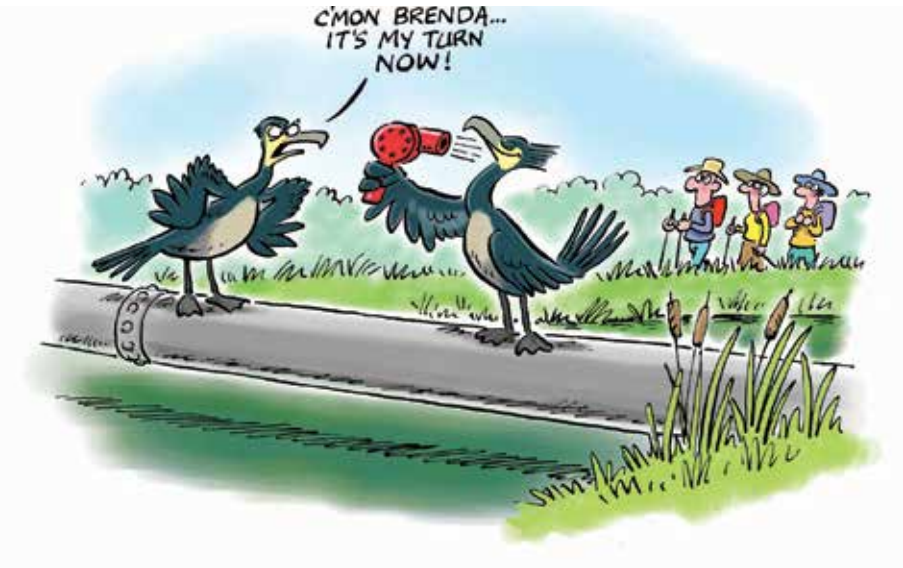
Eventually, we descended some steep steps to cross the Great Stour River, arriving at our endpoint at the Grove Ferry Inn.

Day 12

Margaret joined us again for the first part of our walk. We set off along the Great Stour, where a number of smaller river boats were moored. On the banks of each mooring, the boat owners had built platforms with small huts and sitting areas – rather charming.

Soon, we left the Great Stour and joined St Augustine's Way. In the sixth century, St Augustine was sent from Rome to England to spread Christianity among the Britons, where he became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. After about three-quarters of a mile, we reached the Little Stour River. Here, St Augustine's Way crossed over towards Canterbury, while we turned the opposite way along the riverbank. We hesitated briefly, wondering if we were on the correct side of the river, as it wasn't clear on my Google map – but it proved better to continue where we were.

Along the route, farmers were busy harrowing their fields in preparation for sowing the winter crops. I was intrigued to see that one of the fields had been deeply ploughed – an unusual sight these days. We passed another field that appeared to be a mixture of wildflowers, including sunflowers, flax and salvias, all going to seed. Margaret and I concluded that it was likely being harvested for bird seed – a thriving business nowadays.



Further along, a metal pipe straddled the river, and perched on it were two large black birds with pale breasts and long beaks. They reminded me of cormorants, though usually those are entirely black. The way they sat with the wind behind them suggested they were drying themselves, although cormorants typically do this with wings outstretched. They were completely unperturbed as we passed close by – even when Moses barked. Later, we identified them as cormorants, which apparently develop paler fronts during the breeding season.

We crossed the river at a wooden farm bridge and followed an attractive track lined with very tall, closely planted poplars that sheltered the orchard behind. At Fluck's Gutter – where the Little Stour joins the Great Stour to become the Stour River – we paused for a welcome coffee kindly brought by our friends. Then we said our goodbyes before continuing along the river.

This was a six-mile stretch with no road access, so Tom and I carried our picnic with us. The forecast was not encouraging! We set off reasonably well, though the path was rutted and difficult underfoot, having been churned up by farm vehicles. Along the way, we passed a woman on a quad bike tending her large flock of sheep. A little further on, we came across a sizeable herd of brown cows with their calves. Inevitably, they were standing right on the path, watching us – or more accurately, watching Moses! Much to Tom's consternation, I let Moses off the lead, knowing that he could run faster than us if the cows decided to charge. One cow was particularly inquisitive, but by moving quietly through the herd – and with Moses barking furiously from a safe distance – they eventually gave up before we reached the gate.

Sure enough, rain clouds gathered behind us, so we decided to have our picnic and put on our waterproof trousers – just in time, as the rain began the moment we finished preparing for the worst. Luckily, the wind was behind us, and our backpacks gave some protection. After the first downpour, we enjoyed a short respite before another cloudburst swept over us – this one even more violent, with Moses diving for cover under the bushes. Fortunately, it passed quickly, and the sun reappeared!

The downside was that the rough track we'd been following turned into a sea of mud, incredibly slippery underfoot. We were grateful for our two sticks, as walking would have been impossible without them. Passing under the mainline railway bridge, we noticed a large industrial area on the opposite side of the river. The footpath here was clearly little used, the lush grass long and tangled – Tom remarked it was like wading through spaghetti, and I had to agree!

We were getting tired, and our pace had slowed considerably. Luckily, Richard appeared from the other direction, reassuring us that only three-quarters of a mile remained. The route took us across the railway line once more and up a steep bank to Richborough Castle, an important Roman fort during the invasion of Britain in AD 43.

Day 13

Today, we left our Sandwich Airbnb and walked directly to the start of our route. The town has a rich history, dating back to the seventh century.

Known as "the town on a spit of land" , Sandwich served as a gateway to Europe and was owned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, who provided ship service to the king. It thrived on the timber trade, and in 1227 King Henry III granted a licence to hold St Clement's Fair, bringing considerable prosperity to the town.

The harbour gradually silted up, but the arrival of French Huguenots and Flemish Protestants in the sixteenth century gave Sandwich a new lease of life. Many of the gable-ended houses from that era were still visible as we walked through the town. It's a charming place with narrow streets, medieval houses and flint-and-stone walls – many with blocked-up doorways – and dominated by large stone churches. In fact, it's probably the most attractive town we've visited on this walk.

We followed the old medieval town wall beside a delightful meadow, originally the town's moat. It had begun to rain steadily, but we didn't mind as we were walking along a charming, wooded path with a canopy of trees above us, the Virgo Spring to our right and numerous dog walkers hurrying past.

We crossed a bridge where the Virgo Spring meets the Stour. The rain had now turned torrential, and within

minutes we were soaked, barely able to see in front of us. Realising the situation was hopeless, we made a plan to meet Richard at the nearest road access point, about half a mile away – and with no sign of the deluge easing, we decided to return to our accommodation.

After using a tumble dryer to dry our clothes and backpacks, we were ready to set off again two hours later. We returned to where we'd left off, but with clouds again gathering, we realised it would be crazy to risk getting soaked where Richard couldn't reach us. Instead, we decided to head to Deal, our end point, and then walk in the direction opposite to our planned route as far as possible, weather permitting.

We arrived in Deal and strolled along the long, well-maintained seafront promenade, flanked with rows of fine townhouses set back from the sea. Hundreds of wooden benches lined the parade, each dedicated to the memory of loved ones, and many adorned with charming messages and containers of fresh flowers.

We passed the wooden pier, rebuilt after the war and opened by Prince Philip in the early 1950s – the previous one having been removed during the Second World War due to fears of invasion. On our left stood the fine building of the Royal Marines School of Music, and along the parade was the memorial bandstand – built to honour the 11 musicians killed and 11 more seriously injured on 22 September 1989, when the IRA exploded a bomb at the music school.

We continued walking for another hour before the threat of heavy rain again forced us to stop.

Before returning to Sandwich for the night, we drove to Pegwell Bay, where St Augustine of Canterbury first landed in England in AD 597. A

couple of miles further on, we came to the life-size replica of a Viking ship, gifted by the Danish government in 1949 as a memorial to the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in the same bay some 1,500 years earlier. It was rowed to its present site by 52 oarsmen.

The day has been different but an interesting one.

Day 14

This was the penultimate day of our walk, and we made our way back to Deal. The weather had improved, with rain only forecast for 4 pm. Back on the esplanade, we continued along the seafront.

An information board told us about the infamous Goodwin Sands, which have claimed more than 2,500 ships over the centuries. The sea between the Goodwin Sands and the mainland still provides excellent commercial fishing.

As we left Deal, we passed Walmer Castle, one of three castles built by Henry VIII in the town – the others being Deal and Sandown – to defend against a potential French invasion. Walmer Castle is now the grace-and-favour home of the warden of the Cinque Ports and apparently has a beautiful garden within its walls.

Because of its strategic position, Deal had played an important role in naval history since the time of Elizabeth I. The construction of a large naval yard brought trade to the town, fitting out and supplying the fleet. Further along, we reached Kingsdowne, another important fishing village that was once known for smuggling. Many of the houses along the seafront were built on stilts to take full advantage of the sea view – some very modern-looking and striking.

At the end of the village, we caught our first view of the towering white cliffs that would accompany us for the next two days. The Saxon Shore Way led us up nearly vertical steps to the top of the cliffs, and we were pleased to manage without losing too much puff!

From here, we walked beside a golf course, enjoying spectacular views of the Channel and the distant French coastline. Beyond the golf course, we entered the National Trust land of Brockhill Farm – a pleasant walk through rolling farmland, with an abundance of wildflowers lining the path.

We passed a large obelisk commemorating those who died in the Dover Patrol during the two World Wars. After entering St Margaret's at Cliffe, I called Richard to discuss our lunch stop. A lady walking past overheard my conversation and was surprised I even had a phone signal! When she heard we were meeting at the bottom of the cliffs at a restaurant called the Coastguard, she kindly showed us the steps that led directly down, saving us the long detour by road.

Striking up a conversation, we asked her whether many illegal boats

arrived in the area. She confirmed this was the case – and added that it was a nightmare for the coastguards, who often faced criticism for intercepting them. The boats that get through are met by smuggling gangs – and the rubber dinghies are abandoned, presumably after their outboard motors have been removed. This fact is never mentioned in the press.

We enjoyed an excellent lunch at the pub. The steep return to the top followed a zigzagging wooded path, which made the climb far less strenuous. Back on National Trust land, we passed the now-abandoned lighthouse, originally erected in 1634 after a petition by shipowners concerned about the loss of life on Goodwin Sands. The path was busy with walkers, including large groups of children, presumably visiting the lighthouse before boarding their ferries home from Dover.

We could now see across to Dover Harbour, with a constant flow of Channel ferries coming and going. The wind was picking up, and the forecast for tomorrow looked grim: a weather warning had been issued for 50 mph winds from the southwest – the very direction we would be walking towards Folkestone.

Unless conditions change overnight, we've decided it will be too dangerous to continue – and so we'll bring our walk to a close today rather than risk waiting for the weather to clear. It's been an interesting 14 days, full of discoveries about this part of the country.

No one to turn to . . .

Eva and William* lived on their family farm south of Harare, a thriving enterprise with maize, cattle, sheep and vegetables. They devoted their lives to farming and raising their two sons.

In 2020, the farm was brutally seized, and the family evicted. They managed to find occasional work on another farm. Skilled and hardworking, William laboured tirelessly, but after two years, this farm too was taken – and the family was left facing despair and imminent ruin.

Over the next few years, Eva and William eked out a living doing hardscrabble work, though they never again owned or leased land. Sheer grit kept them going, but each move brought further instability and loss. Then William suffered a massive heart attack followed by cardiovascular complications. The family moved to Harare, a hard adjustment after years of living on farms.

Recently, William suffered a fall that caused bleeding on his brain. There are no social services or effective state-funded healthcare in Zimbabwe, so the family faced a grim choice – pay for William's round-the-clock care or put food on the table. With unemployment in Zimbabwe at 95 per cent, their two adult children are also struggling to survive.

ZANE provides regular food parcels and assistance with William's medical expenses and caregiver costs.

Eva and William say, *"We had no one to turn to. Without ZANE's care we would be wholly destitute. Please thank ZANE's generous supporters."*

**Identities have been changed on grounds of security*

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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 over 440 aged and frail veterans and their widows. These people fought for the Crown in WW2, Malaya, Korea and Aden. Without ZANE, they would be living with insufficient food and no 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. Fifteen treatment centres have been established and over 6,600 children have received treatment to date.
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8. ZANE ensures your donations 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. ZANE asked an independent consultancy to review 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."*

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

giftaid it

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.

Date Signature

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 ☐

DONATE BY CHEQUE

I enclose a cheque for £ **payable to "ZANE: Zimbabwe A National Emergency"**

DONATE BY CARD

or please debit my Debit/Credit Card for £

Visa ☐ **Amex** ☐ **CAF** ☐ **Mastercard Credit only*** ☐

Name on Card

Card no ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐

Start date ☐☐☐☐ **Expiry date** ☐☐☐☐

***Please note we cannot process Mastercard Debit, so please use Mastercard Credit only**

☐ I would like to make a new regular gift via Direct Debit of:
OR
☐ Please increase my existing Direct Debit to:

£ 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)

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

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

DIRECT Debit

Direct Debits can only be set up if you provide a postal address. **Please fill in your postal address overleaf.** Under Direct Debit regulations, we are not able to set up any direct debits without an address being provided.

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)

Bank/building society account number

Branch sort code

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.

Reference (for office use only)

Service user number 8 3 9 9 7 5

Signature

Date

Please ensure your name and address are completed overleaf
Banks and building societies may not accept Direct Debit Instructions for some types of account.

DD15

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 data 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:

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