

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

GSA-10  
 England - What Every Visitor Knows

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Dear Dick,

Visitors have it all over residents. Everyone knows that to be confused about a country you have to be a resident. Visitors in this country are able to look at it generally, take the wide view. With the objectivity of detachment, with the grasp of the mind uncluttered by details, foreigners can see England and Englishmen as they really are.

One does not have to be in England longer than 200 cigarettes of time to know that the English are niggardly--tobacconists don't give away a book of matches, the way we do at home, when they sell a package of cigarettes. Englishmen are also insular. An Englishman going to France says he is going to Europe--with palpitating delight at going to a place so exotic. If England joins the Common Market, as it appears she will, it will be the end of 15 years of isolation from the rest of Europe.

One of the first things that a visitor to England discovers is that all Englishmen are joiners. It is MY Local for the pub where the Englishman drinks his beer. He rivets his social position with a club membership. He wears a school, regimental, or college tie, and he takes his local loyalty seriously either through the county regiment, cricket team, or football club. The "upper classes" find their security in a defined social position, in the old-boy network woven of old school ties, in the time polished code of what is and isn't done. At the top of the class there is the Establishment, that almost nepotistic concentrate of the old-boy network, an aristocracy of habit and of rule. At the bottom are those who wormed themselves into the upper crust. They are monied, but, as a friend of ours would say, definitely not true blue.

All Englishmen who aren't joiners are snook-cocking individualists. There was the titled mother of a friend of ours who kept a goat to carry her groceries home from market. Her vicar once bred a green mouse. A lady of the village invited Nancy and me for a ride; she said she was bringing the dogs, if we didn't mind. After looking forward to a romp with the cockers, we were confronted by nine animals in a Morris Minor--from a great dane down to a scotty. The twelve of us went for a drive. Oxford has its long haired iconoclasts, both sexes--young fascists, Marxists, esthetes, and professors who march to ban the bomb. The joiners tolerate the individualists. Safe is the swivel chair of the bank director who races parrots, has a mistress and makes speeches for Labour. Birdwatchers and baritones have no trouble getting passports.

England IS quaint. The Times (everything here is THE: THE Times, THE Alpine Club, THE Automobile Association) devotes nearly as much space to birdseed, roses, royalty, and the reminiscences of aging civil servants as to Cuba and Berlin. Four members of the RSPCA were dropped from the rolls for filibustering against foxhunting. Churchmen, to the delight of the babloids, make speeches about the population's virginity. The roads are narrow and the dons wear robes--and at Oxford dons weren't allowed to marry until the 1880's. A middle-aged friend said that the greatest joy of returning to England from the USA was to get back to her cold bedroom. The Bodleian Library had no lights until 1928 and so, on winter afternoons, books closed with darkness at 3:30 p.m. There's no end to examples.

A foreign woman, who has been in England longer than I, and thus lost her perspective, said that the English marketing system was outdated. She had forgotten the joys of searching in 11 shops to buy the 13 items on her shopping list. She had forgotten Oxford's two markets. The Covered Market, owned by the University and in the center of town, looks like a basketball court filled with shops. There are butchers, greengrocers, grocers, fishmongers, seedsmen, florists, Brown's Cafe, yard goods counters, a petshop, and a delicatessen--run by Mrs. Palm, an Austrian Jewess beloved of cooks whose taste goes beyond horseradish. Fish gleam on marble slabs, there are pyramids of oranges, pigs hang nude in the avenues. Red-handed men push carts of New Zealand mutton and truckers bring in sacks of onions and cases of cauliflower. It's a busy place: our butcher, with a small shop, sells to more than 1,000 customers a day.

Everything is cheaper in the market than in the street shops, but meat is not the bargain vegetables are. Good minced chuck (hamburg) is \$.50 a pound. Excellent roast beef (rump or buttock) is \$.78 a pound. New Zealand mutton, as tender as lamb when roasted, is \$.50 a pound. Dover sole, one of the more expensive fish, but not as dear as salmon, varies between \$.30 and \$.45 a pound. But we buy fish at the Open Market on Wednesdays or from the same man when he comes to the church square in Eynsham on Thursday mornings.

The stalls at the Open Market (Wednesdays only) face onto a large square where, in fenced enclosure, cows chew and moan, pigs squeal, and sheep stand while auctioneers chant. Between cattle and stalls hordes of Oxonians jostle, buying cloth, clothes, kitchenware, fish (but no meat), cookies (broken ones at half price), canned goods, fruits, vegetables--and flowers, plants and Christmas trees in season. The cookie-man is a wag who calls me Squire. Otherwise in the market one is called Love or Dear. "Tew pound uh Brussels, Love? What'll it be, Dear?"

Two brothers sell blankets, sheets, and other household linens cut rate. Their patter draws a crowd. "Ere, ere, lovely sheets, two bob off the pair, whatsa matter, Lyedy, I'd buy um meself if I ad the money. Use um yerself or take um ome to Mum, (sharp hand clap). Cmon, Love. I says to me chum larst night, ave yer ever seen such sheets, (sharp hand clap) sold to the Lyedy in the at. Now, eres two lovely towels . . ."

A few market gardeners sell their vegetables directly in the market, but most of the stalls are run by Cockneys who buy the produce from the Covent Garden market in London and work the big market days. Their prices are several pennies below the prices in the covered market. Some sample July prices:

	<u>In Cents</u>		<u>In Cents</u>
bananas	10 per pound	lettuce	6 per head
oranges	26 per dozen	cucumber	8 for a big one
lemons	15 for five	cabbage	3 each
peaches	15 for five	tomatoes	13 per pound
apples	19 a pound	summer squash	13 for a big one
potatoes	4 a pound	onions	5 per pound
carrots	8 a pound	cauliflower	13 for a large one

Beer barons are killing English socialism. England has more than 25,000 pubs, but over 75% of them are owned by six giant brewery companies (and a few smaller ones) as outlets for solely their own brews. This leaves only 25% Free Houses where the thirsty can buy any beer they like--or any brands the owner chooses to sell. Two of the six giants recently merged, giving them control of 50% of the 75%, or control of more than 9,000 pubs. The senior director of the merged companies denied that this was a take-over. He said they were creating an industrial commonwealth. A famous Oxford haunt has succumbed thus. The Trout at Godstow is no longer a Free House. The Coleman family sold it two weeks ago to Charringtons Brewery for £61,500.

Eynsham, population 2,373 (Civil Parish), has nine pubs, only one of them a Free House. The pubs range from the White Hart, down the street from us, to the Queens Head, around the corner, to the Swan and the Jolly Sportsman. Villagers have their own Local and pretty well stick to it. Certain types of people tend to go to certain pubs. The teddy boys and teddy girls seem to hang out at the Newlands, farther down the street than the White Hart. Tradesmen, carpenters, and a bit smoother types drink in the Queen's Head, and less polished 'working' men and women (women are now accepted in pubs) go to the White Hart. One sees neckties in the Queens Head, but rarely in the White Hart.

Some pubs have only one bar (the White Hart); most have two or three. There is always the Public Bar and sometimes a Smoking Room and Saloon or Lounge Bar. Draught beer, usually about \$.15 a pint in the Public goes up two pennies or more in the others to pay for the plusher furniture. In a pub that caters to both a village and a fairly large out-of-village trade, most of the locals will go to the Public and the foreigners to the Lounge Bar. Every brewery sells innumerable types of beer, and if Guinness sells the five million bottles of stout a day that it says it does, one can guess that England's daily consumption of pints, bottles, etc., is in the hundreds of millions. I have only a leaner's knowledge of British drinking tastes, but I think that after beer the popular drinks are shandy (a horrible mixture of beer

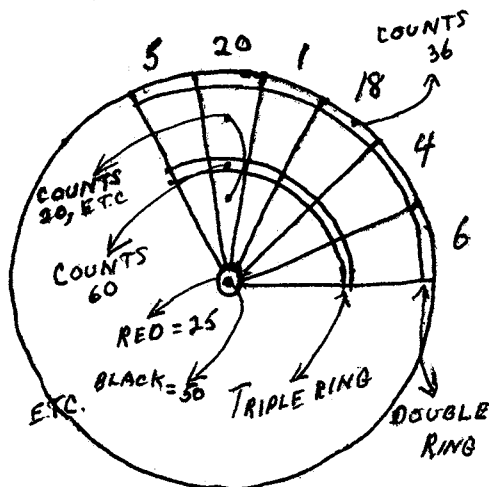
and ginger ale or ginger beer), gin and tonic, pink gin, whiskey (no 'e' in England, and it means Scotch) and soda, whisky and gingerale, and, for the ladies, Babycham, a fake champagne made out of pears. Appreciation, or at least consumption, of wines and sherries is becoming widespread. Wine shops are proliferating. But port is going out. A friend of ours heard of a new drink the other day. A chap asked for a gin splice. The bartender, a kid new at the job, called on the manager for help. Turned out that the man wanted the 'gint's plyce' and he was directed around the corner.

With local variations, pubs are open from ten till two at midday and from six to ten at night. In celebration of long summer evenings—when the men work late in their gardens—closing time is ten-thirty. As every reader of Eliot knows, the fount dries up on the words "Gentlemen, time please." Englishmen, not to speak of the unindoctrinated, think these hours are silly, but they don't do anything about it. I'd always thought that the licensing laws were written by parched old ladies from the WCTU (lips that touch beer after ten-twenty nine shall never touch mine), but these are the hours favoured by the breweries—and most publicans of my acquaintance. They figure that overhead (lights, etc.) is too close to profits to make it worth while staying open much after ten. At least England is better than Scotland. Here one can get a drink on Sunday. Well, in Scotland, one can too, but it takes ingenuity and energy.

Some pubs have a dining room and go in for lunches and dinners; most offer only a cold lunch, on request, of pork or veal pie, and rounds of cheese, ham, or beef. A round is a thick sandwich and half a round is just that. In a reasonable pub, a round of cheese ought to cost about a shilling and a round of beef about one and six. With a pint of beer at one and tuppence, lunch costs about \$.48.

The dartboard is in the Public Bar. The games are infinite, cricket, naughts and crosses, 301. The pub provides darts, but devotees carry their own. Three-oh-one is my game.

A dartboard is divided into pie-shaped wedges of values from one to 20, the red bullseye is 25 and the black centre in it counts 50. A dart in the thin outer ring counts double, and triple in the thin inner ring. In Three-oh-one the players start with that many points and subtract their scores. The first man with zero wins. A player must throw a double to begin subtracting and throw a double with his last dart to bring him exactly to zero. If a player has reduced his 301 to 30, he must throw a double 15 to go out, or reduce his score to the minimum, two and try for a double one. Players have three throws a turn.



When playing partners, the game may start at 401. In Berkshire, if one partner has his double the pair are off; in Oxfordshire both partners must throw a double to start scoring. In Yorkshire and Northumberland, I'm told, one has to get a double top (20) to start. Darts is the closest, these days, an Englishman can come to being Robin Hood.

Visitors here soon notice that Englishmen are like Chinese. Both have a national self-confidence, a never-questioned faith in themselves. The English do not bear this country-confidence like a shield; they wear it comfortably, like a tweed jacket long in the family. Englishmen simply believe that the grass is always greener on their side of the fence.

This calm confidence can make the individual smug or poised. It can make the nation politically urbane or patronizingly superior. The belief comes easily that the national superiority carries the right or duty to tell other peoples what's best for them. In 19th Century Britain this attitude grew to the imperialism on which the sun never set. In 1956 it was the attack on Egypt. And in 1961 the Lord Mayor of London clucked a reprimand to Nehru for criticising Britain's behavior over Katanga. India's Prime Minister should not criticise England, said the Lord Mayor, because he had been made a freeman of London and as such was under the Lord Mayor's discipline.

The British Government's belief in the burdens of superiority did not die with the Empire. The Colonial Office still believes that a constitution written in secret by British officials and a few carefully selected Africans, passed by Parliament in London, and presented with ribbons to the new State (perhaps with the Duke of Gloucester or Kent to inaugurate it) is better than a constitutional document hammered out by Africans themselves. Whereas if Africans wrote their own constitutions they would have, when they had finished, some idea of what they'd got and why they'd got it. The Colonial Office holds this opinion despite the relative success of home-made constitutions in Ireland, Burma, India, (I hate to mention Pakistan) and the difficulties posed by British-made constitutions in Ceylon (made with an English advisor), South Africa (where there is a move afoot not to recognize the present constitution because it was passed by an English Parliament), the West Indies, Nigeria, and one predicts in Kenya, Central Africa, and elsewhere.

After a longer look on both sides of the fence, the English might be content that the most imperial thing in England today is the robin. To Americans I must explain that their "robin" is really a thrush. The British robin is pure of lineage, as imperially slim as Richard Cory, and sociable but dignified. He sings sweet and intricate melodies all year round. Anyone who can sing through an English winter has sun in his soul and more guts than a chickadee. He is cosmopolitan enough to have a habitat stretching from Scotland to Arabia. Having watched them over a winter at our suet, Nancy and I can testify that robins take no sauce from sparrows, greenfinches, or great tits, and dine man to man with starlings.

Visitors will soon, I fear, lose their supremacy as the most detached observers. What with the Telly, newspapers, and American visitors, for example, Englishmen can know all about the States and never leave their pints behind. An Englishman told me the other day that Americans were affluent but insecure, menaced by right wing zealots, culturally brash, politically trigger-happy, and diplomatically naive. Faced with such acute observations, I recognized defeat. The residents had won.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Red Austin".

Granville Austin

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