

Lara, Melbourne

Sunday 18th December:



Just a day to recover from our journey eastwards with a gentle stroll around the charming shops and eateries in Fitzroy on a hot Saturday morning and later, a lovely birthday supper for Angela. Then we had to say a fond farewell and multi-thanks to BJ and Lu who we will not see again as they will be in Tas when we finally leave Victoria. A train took us into Southern Cross from whence we caught the 11.00 train to Lara where we were met and whisked to a splendid Christmas lunch en famille: chicken, ham, lamb, roasties, veg and a a Balnaves Chardonnay 2008 and Punters Corner 2000 (Helen is a bit of a wine buff) A mini-break before a rich fruit pudding, ice-cream and custard. Are we

spoiled or are we spoiled!? And I should mention the Christmas Crackers and the Father Christmas loo paper!! One family had to leave immediately after lunch for a typically Ozzie five hour trek home and before tea the other brood had left. We have had a restful evening. There won't be much more rest as Helen has plans for a two-day excursion to Port Fairy.



Monday/Tuesday ... to Port Fairy and back



Left some time after 11.00, after a lot of bustling around and tasks. Finally set off under a dull and drizzly sky and chilly! Real chilly! Helen rolls her eyes and thinks we're crazy poms (but is polite enough not to say!) not to have woollies and anoraks! We miss the first part of the Great Ocean Road as we've already done it in glorious sunshine. Before we hit the coast we stopped in Cobden for coffee and a snack. First stop, 'London Bridge' (which had fallen down a few

years back, leaving a couple of discombobulated tourists needing a helicopter ride!) This time, no turquoise seas, but lots of pounding breakers. The next stop was **the** most memorable – above The Grotto we left Helen in the car and climbed down to where the sea had swirled and left a wonderfully peaceful pool of water, while beyond it we could see the waters raging! Two further stops for the Bay of Martyrs and The Bay of Islands – all that magnificent erosion of this amazing stretch of sandstone coast. We carried on in a westerly direction through what turns out to be native homeland for Helen, we pass through Warramboul where she went to senior school. Beyond, the geology of the coast changes to volcanic black basalt and we



approach the beautiful, historic settlement of Port Fairy. This was considered the capital of Victoria, until Melbourne grew and grew in its superior location. Here we find our accommodation for the night – a 2 bedroom self-contained and beautifully equipped cottage with river frontage. Helen has come prepared and within the hour we are enjoying a lovely pasta dish with wine (of course!) from the drive-in bottle shop.



Tuesday and all that low cloud is lifting! The night had been decidedly cool and the sheet and light covering on the bed needed to be supplemented. However, after a short walk we were enjoying breakfast al fresco on the patio by the river amidst agapanthae and roses, and furthermore, shedding layers of clothing. All too soon we were tidying and packing and starting a thorough

exploration of this lovely town with its quaint, historic clapboard houses and shops and the magnificent umbrella pine trees which line the wide streets. We walked out to Griffiths Island named after Cpt. Griffiths who sailed his boat, *Fairy*, up the Moyne River in 1810. Here the mutton backs (shearwaters who fly there from Russia for breeding and feeding) nest in among the shrubby ground cover, keeping an eye open for the



browns and tigers (snakes) which thankfully stay in the bush. We stopped at a delightful sandy beach where Helen has decreed her ashes should be scattered and looked down to the lighthouse. We also saw the beach with the entirely safe tidal pool, where she used to come with her school to learn to swim. Later we saw two coach loads of secondary school kids out on the beach, many in the big surf!

She lamented some of the 'yuppy' additions in the environs, though they are carefully monitored by the National Trust. I guess they are the Australian equivalent of those multi-million properties at Sandbanks in the UK.

Having thoroughly explored the town and its surroundings we went back to the centre where we had coffee and a bite in a delightful cafe/shop.



Then we went in search of flowers to put on her late husband's grave – a solemn moment which didn't last for long. Helen was soon exploring the graves of the late lamented, many of whom she was familiar. She was particularly entertained by the grand stone on the grave of a thorough rogue. Helen is a delight, finding many things 'hilarious': our escapade in the bush and mine in the spa bath back at the cottage where I came near to flooding the floor and had added so much

bubble bath that they became an issue! Picture me, or maybe best don't, getting out completely bubbled over, add the unsavoury image of them sliding down so that I was standing in creamy white snow boots! Hilarious!

We have seen such a tiny bit of Australia and few people at home have any conception of the size. When some Pom friends were visiting Sidney they rang Helen, suggesting they come down to her for afternoon tea! Another hilarious idea! Over the last few weeks we have travelled such a tiny part of the continent, much of it entirely unpopulated. Did you know that the entire population of Australia equals that of Greater London? That **is**



remarkable! With that wonderful spaciousness come the challenges especially the fire danger which we can see is serious. On many of the highways one sees how vegetation has been cleared and/or burned to provide fire breaks and at intermittent places there are dials by the road indicating the level of risk. Farming is different. We have seen **huge** herds of cattle, beef and dairy according to the geography, but they roam **vast** tracts of land, which after the rain of

late, are only half as green as the UK. One can only *start* to appreciate the challenges caused by the eight year drought.



We have also become much more aware of the effect of the two world wars. Yesterday we drove through Mortlake where there is an avenue of fully grown sturdy and handsome trees: under each, the name of a soldier lost in one of those wars. And you drive on and on, hardly comprehending the loss! Helen well remembers the effect of the

war during her childhood. Australia was as isolated as the UK and had to be entirely self-sufficient; it was tough, and maybe doubly tough in the challenging environment. No wonder they are a hardy nation!

Reflections on why we are with Helen in Australia

Nick and I are here in Lara with Helen Glare because of an erstwhile neighbour of Nick's back in Newbury, David Glare. While teaching in, Tasmania, David was aware, for the first time in his life of other Glares apart from his own close family – there were few or none at home! He was enterprising enough to look up names in a telephone directory and drop a line, 40 lines actually, and the outcome was a Glare family get-together in Port Fairy, back in 1987. Helen's father was a descendant of James Glare who was deported, arriving here in 1826, aged 14. It turned out

that David in Newbury is a cousin of Helen (or to be exact, Helen's late husband Ron): and the amazing thing is that there is an uncanny family likeness. James' descendants became farmers here in Victoria.

I found a poem by Mary Gilbert which clearly expresses how Australia was founded from men and women just like James. I quote from 'Old Botany Bay'

*I am he
Who paved the way
That you might walk
At your ease today;*

*I was the conscript
Sent to hell
To make in the desert
A living well;*

*I bore the heat
I blazed the track –
Furrowed and bloody
Upon my back*

*I split the rock
I felled the tree:
The nation was –
Because of me!*



Thursday to Christmas Eve



On Thursday Helen took us into Geelong, the second city in Victoria. The first part was a brief foray into one of the two big shopping malls – same as UK, Singapore, KL, soul-less!

Then we went down to the waterfront with its famous personified bollards – a bit like Singapore's elephants. After a coffee we went to the Wool Museum; graphically cataloguing the history of sheep

farming and the wool industry. Then it was up to the Botanic Gardens where Helen was once an active volunteer. The gardens have sections – a typical Australian section with trees with bulbous trunks which hold water.

Not far on, there is a surprising, typically English, herbaceous border – though all the familiar plants with an indefinable Ozzie feel. After a touch of lunch it was on a further tour of the busy waterfront and the grand Geelong High School (Australia's Eton, Prince Charles went there, but it now has a majority of rich Asian and Arab students)



For the rest of the week we have stayed around Lara helping Helen prepare for Christmas. Nick has been digging up borders separating Iris corms, under Helen's strict supervision. I've been as helpful as possible, watering her lovely garden, also active in the kitchen and the laundry department. Today Helen and I were at the market at 7.30am (amazing value compared to Melbourne markets tho' could have done without the booming ho-ho-ho's of the Italian/Ozzie at that time of the morning!) Then Nick and I shot off for bolts from the Victorian equivalent of B&Q to sort the wheel barrow which was disintegrating. As I write this Helen is telephoning local folk as she hasn't had the time to whizz round with cards. Just like me at home! Cards get set aside till next year! Supper and a bit of a rest before Midnight Mass!



Christmas and Boxing Day

A leisurely start after a late night, and an elegant breakfast on the festive dining table. Because it is early/midsummer the tradition 'a la Glare' is ... fresh berries and yoghurt, followed by egg and bacon, followed by croissant and coffee.



This was followed by a quiet day, the Queen's Speech, very special Skypes to family at home, and then preparations for Christmas Dinner (a 10 year old red wine decanted exactly 4 hours previously!) Helen was adventurous, finding a duck recipe on the internet with pears and ginger, baby carrots and asparagus and sauté potatoes. All so civilized and, furthermore, delicious!



Boxing Day was our final day and Helen was determined we should make up for the few days at home by exploring the Bellarine Peninsula, south and west of Geelong. We went first to Point Lonsdale and the lighthouse there, where one can overlook the treacherous bit of ocean called The Rip which takes all shipping from the Tasman Sea and all points east and west into Port Philip and onwards to the safe havens of Melbourne and Geelong. Just looking out at the seas here makes one shiver. When the seas are running

high not even the Queensferry pilots are prepared to bring in the boats and they are left to ride the storms until the weather calms. Then we went on to Queensferry itself – a delightful settlement, full of character. Those who struck lucky in the goldfields came here to build elegant homes. From here a regular ferry runs taking cars and foot passengers across to Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula, (on the safe northerly side of The Rip!)

Then it was back to Geelong where Helen delivered us to the station and, on Platform No1, we exchanged our sad farewells. Helen has been so generous, entertaining, informative, and the week we have spent with her in her lovely home and lovelier garden will be another treasured chapter of our travels!

I finish this chapter with a poem by Dorothea Mackellar which Helen read with tears welling up. It communicates so well the terror and grandeur of this amazing country. Helen found a recitation of the poet reading her poem at the ripe old age of 93. Although she is a third generation, Australian she sounds like an extremely polite English gentlewoman. Bizarre!

My Country

The love of field and coppice,
Of green and shaded lanes.
Of ordered woods and gardens
Is running in your veins,
Strong love of grey-blue distance
Brown streams and soft dim skies
I know but cannot share it,
My love is otherwise.

I love a sun burnt country,
A land of sweeping plains,
Of ragged mountain ranges,
Of droughts and flooding rains.
I love her far horizons,
I love her jewel-sea,
Her beauty and her terror -
The wide brown land for me!

A stark white ring-barked forest
All tragic to the moon,
The sapphire-misted mountains,
The hot gold hush of noon.
Green tangle of the brushes,
Where lithe lianas coil,
And orchids deck the tree-tops
And ferns the warm dark soil.

Core of my heart, my country!
Her pitiless blue sky,
When sick at heart, around us,
We see the cattle die -
But then the grey clouds gather,
And we can bless again
The drumming of an army,
The steady, soaking rain.

Core of my heart, my country!
Land of the Rainbow Gold,
For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold -
Over the thirsty paddocks,
Watch, after many days,
The filmy veil of greenness
That thickens as we gaze.

An opal-hearted country,
A willful, lavish land -
All you who have not loved her,
You will not understand -
Though earth holds many splendours,
Wherever I may die,
I know to what brown country
My homing thoughts will fly.