Letter - II

In the this episode: London and the_saga_of_the_luggage....

Well my work phone number has changed....

it is now 01-223-334-760 (w)

Everything else is the same.

Cambridge

Well, extraordinary is the only description. I have not been out a single day without being amazed by some part of the city or skyline.

I attended an Evensong at King's College chapel, certainly enjoyable however you were conscious that this was a full service and people "rubber-necking" gazing at all there was to offer, was not appropriate. I will have to come back during a tourist-open time, to get a chance to look at the church itself.

Certainly the choir was up to expectations, although their numbers were reduced, a number of them being ill, this caused a change in the programs, but little else, at any rate a re-visit is expected, (and in particular I'd like to hear "Jerusalem" sung, by the choir, in Kings.)

Just about every site (and sight) in Cambridge has a piece of folklore or trivia (or both) attached to it. Such trivia covers varied topics as the buildings and bridges, as well as the many more famous students of the University.

One folklore item involves a bridge in Queen's College. The bridge was supposedly made completely from wood, with only a few timber pins holding it together.

Apparently designed by Newton, it was disassembled by students/staff/town_folk (pick your story) 'cause they were curious/concerned (pick your reason) but they were not able to reassemble it correctly. As a result it was reassembled with metal pins and rods. (It is worth noting the bridge on the same site nowadays was actually only built in 1904, replacing the previously rotted one.)

Among all the folklore there is the occasional grain of truth, but I am still sifting...

Each college is quite proud of the achievements of its ex-Members, or the peculiarities of the buildings or the wonder of its collections of art and literature. The expression "...in the world" or "...in the country"
(whether its first, last, oldest, youngest, largest, smallest or whatever) features commonly in College literature.

There is an interesting link between Emmanuel College and Harvard University. Emmanuel College had a student, John Harvard, in 1638 he sailed to New England and began the process of setting up a "schoale at Newetowne", unfortunately he died of consumption a year after arriving in New England, but with the donation of half of his estate and books, America's first University, Harvard, was born. A period later the Newtown area was renamed Cambridge to honour John Harvard's academic home.

Having not known the origins of the Cambridge, MA I found the story interesting. Emmanuel College and Harvard University have several intertwined traditions including the exchange of students between them. The student from Harvard stays in John Harvard's original room at Emmanuel.

the_saga_of_the_luggage

Well I had two regular suitcases, fine no problems each about 25kg, no problems at all (the allowance was 32kg per luggage item)...

However I had two boxes, one containing mostly books, the other containing my road bike. I costed selling it in Melbourne and buying a new one in the UK, but shipping it turned out to be cheaper. Why all this worry about a bike ? well I rather like my road bike and as it is for racing, having it with me would give me inventive to continue to use it.

Unaccompanied luggage, wonderful concept, relatively expensive, but the only option (no excess baggage as the flight was booked out.) It turned out to be very fast getting from Melbourne to Heathrow (arrived Wednesday the 3rd, 3 days) the problem was Heathrow to Cambridge, this took over two weeks.

Simply put, the luggage was too heavy to take by train or bus, and I didn't have a convenient car. (Actually I was less than thrilled at the prospect of driving any car only days after getting into a foreign country, just a bit chicken I guess.)

Well British Airways (the people who shipped the luggage) offered a "door-delivery" service. Wonderful stuff, they take the luggage through customs often the most time consuming part of the process, 5 hours or more in some cases. Then a courier is organised to deliver the items to the final destination. Brit Air didn't charge an excessive amount of money for the facility and certainly cheaper than hiring a car for a day or such.

However, between organising a packing list and customs declaration, realising customs wont accept fax'd version of these (why did I feel BA should have known this?), sending forms, BA loosing forms, sending forms, BA getting forms, and finally having luggage cleared through customs and sent out, two weeks passed surprisingly quickly.

Bicycle and owner doing fine. (Also the books, misc. clothes and other rubbish all arrived without trauma or incident too.)

Bathroom Amenities

A friend remarked that British bathroom facilities always seemed so "quaint". This was very polite is my only thought. For a nation that until recently encouraged everyone to put their own mains plugs on appliances, it strikes most from overseas (myself included) as anywhere from amusing to crazy that electrical sockets are not legally allowed in bathrooms least someone get too cosy with the hair drier and the bath water. Oh well. The upshot of this is that only the newest bathrooms have a power socket for an electric razor. Sad really.

London

I was delighted to go back down to London the first week I was in the country.

When I had arrived at Heathrow, it was far from an introduction to London, seeing little more than the bus depot at that time.

My first impressions of London, and to a significant extent the (small) parts of England I had seen were that they were as I was expecting, this did not make them any less exciting, but it did give a terrible case of deja-vu. Too many British authors and British books and films, I think...

Actually one of the funniest was a realisation that on the trip from Cambridge to London I felt I was on a Hornby model railway. It would appear far too many hours of youth was spent pouring over Hornby catalogues and the result was that street signs, railway via-ducts, trains themselves, houses, and so on, all felt like they were right out of the catalogue. Of course, it only took me a split second to realise that of course they were out of the catalogue, these are the originals after all.

A long time friend has been in England for the past twelve months, and was able to show me parts of London both in my first weekend and another. Thanks to Amanda for willingly acting as tour hostess, an excellent guide at that.

The first, lasting, impression of London was how close each of the "traditional" sites were to each other. I was taken from place to place, taking pictures, admiring views and ooh-ing and aah-ing in the traditional tourist manner.

Sites seen included the British Museum, Piccadilly Circus, Trafalgar square, St Martin in the Fields, National Gallery, Admiralty Arch, The Mall, St James Palace, Buckingham Palace, Westminster Abbey, Houses of Parliament, the theatre district, St. Pauls, Tower bridge, Greenwich Observatory, the Horse Guards, a scenic time on the Thames (coming back from Greenwich to Westminster bridge by boat), Royal Opera House, Camden Market, Hyde park, Marble Arch and several other items I am sure I have forgotten.

Most of this was done at break-neck pace (a little like "1000 tourist attractions in a day") but the main objective was to get a feel for where things were in London, and how easy it was to get from place to place.

The Underground is as interesting as the places it can take you, there seems to be a station at almost every second street corner, at any rate a bit of a change to the "wait 35 minutes, if your lucky" MET system.

There were certainly places we spent a little longer than it must appear, and the second weekend I had in London I also spent a bit more time in fewer places.

Highlights included:

British Museum seeing such things as the Elgin Marbles, various extraordinary books in the Library (ranging from illuminated manuscripts to rather prominent historical documents) and the wonderful Egyptian collection including the Rosetta stone, a personal favourite.

Greenwich Observatory, including the mandatory "standing in each hemisphere" (I think everyone does that, don't they ?)

Charing Cross Road, I note there are the required enormous number of bookshops along Charing Cross Rd, although that more famous address was now, of all things, a Pizza Hut, sad really.

Kings Cross Rail station, a simple pleasure and at this stage I had not seen Waterloo or Victoria, both considerably more impressive, but it is amazing to see the "Flying Scotsman" and to gaze at the roof of the building and note where the smoke of an unknown number of steam trains (now long gone) had left their mark.

The Barbican, the London home of the Royal Shakespeare company, from the outside quite a dishevelled collection of odd shaped buildings, but walking around the towers, the ability for this collection of buildings to create many performance corners and spaces as well as having a collection of galleries and theatres seems quite clever. I didn't really have a chance to more than glance in a few foyers, but Barbican will be on the (long) list of places to look at and enjoy a performance at also.

Hertford house and a fascinating collection of art called the Wallace collection. I seemed to spend a significant amount of time going "I always wondered where that piece of art was" notables included a beautiful picture of the young Queen Victoria, The Laughing Cavalier, numerous .great masters. including Rembrandt (and a significant collection from the Rembrandt studios), the design drawings for "Adoration of the Magi" were also among the collection. (The Adoration of the Magi is now above the Altar at King's College chapel.)

Portobello Road Market, well it seemed to go on and on and on (and sold just about everything that could be sold, and perhaps a few things that should not).

Seeing The Royal Ballet Company performing Sleeping Beauty at the Royal Opera House, this was quite extraordinary, while we were seated in the "gods" it was an excellent view, and a fascinating performance. I think I was as impressed by our ability to go from "queueing that morning for tickets and seeing the performance that evening", as I was by the performance itself. In truth the performance was quite wonderful. It was made more interesting by there being significant injury and illness among the company, resulting in many substitutions. The substitutions however went unnoticed by yours truly. The performance was the same as the tour of Australia ?recently?.

Monument, the Christopher Wren creation to mark the Great Fire of London. (Obligatory trivia: the worlds largest free standing marble monument)

The banking district of London, really the centre of London city, it is interesting to actually .see. the Bank of England (no samples I'm afraid), other notables were the ill-fated Barings Bank (obligatory trivia: Baring's bank financed the Louisiana purchase and the 100 year war with France.)

A time was spent wandering along the river, looking at such things as Cleopatra's Needle, and a re-creation of Globe Theatre, this is due to be finished and open for the Royal Shakespeare Company in September.

I came to a quick realisation on my first visit (and confirmed by my second) that each item I whooshed past (and many I did not see in the whirlwind tour) could consume one or more days in themselves...

I think I saw more "Sir Christopher Wren" Churches than I could take in, including:

St. Pauls (I have not been into its various galleries, yet, next time.)

St. Mary's in the Strand, this church is literally in the middle of the road, on a traffic island, it looks rather forlorn actually. It has earned the dubious knick-name "St Mary's in the Way" by most Taxi drivers.

St Bride's with a delightful, if unusual tower, that legend has it inspired the first tiered wedding cake. Apparently the dress from the wedding are in the Church, I hope the cake is not there also. However the preservative qualities of Almond icing being as they are, maybe it also survived.

Well with the Cambridge to London train just 40 minutes on an express to 70 on a stopping all stations, I can see myself regularly making the commute.

Food

Nope, no food in this episode.

Although after my flippant remark in the previous letter, someone pointed out to me there is a Holiday Inn about a block away from my work (I shuddered at the thought).

TV licences

One of the people I am sharing accommodation with feels a TV/Video would improve the quality of life (I commented she had not seen the quality(?) of TV programs recently.) An interesting aspect of this is the TV licence. TV licences are the "user-pays" method for funding the BBC. Somewhat unfairly, this form of funding is used the whole of BBC (BBC-radio, BBC world service, etc as well as BBC-TV), however this policy is popular among radio-only households. TV licences cost about 80 pounds. Certainly food for thought for those who complain about the estimated cost of 8cents a day for the ABC.

The Term begins

Well since the last letter, the transient/student population of Cambridge has returned and the Lent term (2nd term to those that need numbers, like me) is back in full force. This transient population is estimated at around 12,000.

It would appear that all 12,000 take a bicycle to 9am lectures, running late, each morning. So many bicycles is quite an impressive sight, as long as you don't want to cross the road.

The main reason for the bicycle's popularity is that undergraduates are not allowed to own cars, without the special permission of the college to which they belong.

Actually this law predates motor vehicles:
1798:
Scholars were forbidden to drive carriages "particularly in the streets, to the great danger of order and discipline"

Amusing really.

Minimising cars is a good thing in the opinion of most. Cambridge is quite polluted in parts with numerous buildings undergoing perpetual cleaning and restoration from damage. The motor car is the main cause.

Well one result is that bicycles are common and as a result car drivers are a little more bicycle aware (sometimes anyway). Another effect is that there are a number of good ideas in the road system designed to accommodate the bicycle more fully.

One of these bicycle-friendly things is a special one way street. One way streets are commonly used as a traffic control mechanism in Cambridge, it gets a little like Brisbane city centre at times. Some one way streets are two way for bicycles, with a very narrow lane allowing bicycles to ride in the opposite direction to the flow of traffic as well as the same direction in the "in the thick of it" with the traffic itself.

One colleague remarked that bicycles act/are_treated/should_be_treated like very fast pedestrians with about the same possibility chance of changing directions suddenly, stopping and so on.

Another significant difference in the sign posting for traffic in general is that the signs are illuminated, making them a bit more visible in the fog.

Cambridge ? Which bridge ?

It was not quite the first question I had asked myself, but when I found out the answer it turned out to be more than a simple matter of "that one there". The short answer was the Magdalene bridge, but this bridge was certainly not the first, it just happens to now carry a road that was older still.

First a thumb-nail history of Cambridge...

Cambridge itself was first considered "created" when the Romans made the Cam river shallow enough to cross. The Romans built a road (as was their want) between Lincoln and Colchester and the road crossed the Cam at the city site. The estimates are that this all occurred around 40-50 AD give or take a few years.

The Romans also built a fairly significant castle mound (which still exists) and some sort of fortification on top of that. The Romans left in about 400 AD and after various historical ups and downs (including the Dark Ages) the Doomsday book documents about 2,000 occupants in 1085.

The Normans built a castle on the site of the Roman fort (mainly because there were many Saxons to be subdued in the surrounding fen land.)

Edward I converted the castle into an impressive stronghold during his reign (1239-1307). During this time a fairly significant event occurred in Oxford, but more on that later...

Cambridge became a significant inland trading port as the connection to the river.

(time passes...)

In Elizabeth I's reign the original castle stronghold was broken down and the stone sold, much of the stone went into some of the University buildings (including the Great St. Mary's, first built in the 1400's).

Well in time a college was built opposite the quay and this is Magdalene college, the college lends its name to the bridge.

The quay of Cambridge was still an active inland port up until the 1920's. Now-days it is a typical tourist trap with glittery stores selling trinkets.

A Cambridge education

Not having understood the education system (particularly of the undergraduates) to any large extent when I arrived I thought others might be interested in my understanding of the system.

Background...

In 1209 a handful of teachers and students were fleeing the Oxford riots, and found their way to Cambridge. The first mention of a University chancellor was in 1226 and mention of laws and statutes of the University in around 1250. In 1318 the Pope of the day (John XXII for anyone who thinks I am making this up) waved his magic pen and recognised the Cambridge community as a "studium generale". In 1284 the first of the colleges, Peterhouse, was founded and by 1352 there were eight colleges. In 1475 there were twelve and by the time Trinity College was founded in 1546, the University had both grown in size and international reputation.

In 1546 the University got a new set of statutes, which went largely unchanged for 300 years. An example of these statutes was that all students were to be members of a college, this is still the case today. In 1750 Isaac Newton revised the subjects of study, placing Mathematics as a compulsory requirement (replacing theology). In the early 1800's the subject range was revised once more and the classical tripos (Cambridge name for an exam leading to a degree) was introduced. During the 1800's Mathematics ceased to be compulsory, natural sciences and engineering were introduced and all religious tests were abolished.

A significant change occurred in 1920 following a Royal Commission. At this time the faculties were organised, also the university was charged as responsible for all public teaching, while the colleges retained responsibility for individual supervision of the students.

Not long after this the University also became responsible for the conferring of degrees (this used to be the duty of the colleges.)

Now-a-days...

Well as that "tiny-history" shows college's formed a fairly significant role in the education of students. Today all students must be a member of a college, there are the high prestige colleges such as Trinity or Kings and many lesser known ones as well (about 31 now I think.) Between them there are about 10,000 undergraduates and 4,000 postgraduates. The University supplies the lecture facilities, lab facilities (where required) and the exams. If successful in the exams, the University also supplies a student with the degree.

In parallel to this the College's supply their own form of education. A College allocates a student to a tutor, now the tutor doesn't generally do any tutoring directly, he or she is more in charge of the students welfare and to ensure the student is set up for the appropriate supervisions. Supervisions are periods of education between one, two or three students and a supervisor. Supervisors are drawn from all over the University, they could be college tutors, or graduate students, even senior undergraduate students or researchers from various laboratories. Supervisors are paid for by the college and this low student-teacher ratio is what makes the Cambridge education so (darn) expensive for undergraduates.

A student can attend supervisions in as many different subjects as they wish. The only condition is that the student does the work the supervisor gives out. The number of supervisions for a particular subject in a term can run from as few as three for a given subject to as many as eight or more, the actual number is decided by the tutor and such things as the opinion of the supervisor, the progress of the student and the particular subject all have a bearing on the actual number.

Okay a little more background, a Cambridge year is broken into three Terms: Michaelmas, Lent and Easter, running October-December, January-March and April-June respectively. Each Term is about 8 weeks, but most subjects do not actually run for 8 weeks.

Most subjects run for 4 weeks. A typical computing subject has 12 lectures in four weeks (lectures occur on Saturdays). But once the four weeks is up, the subject is over. As I mentioned a few subjects run for all 8 weeks, most usually because the subject has a laboratory requirement or such.

The result of this is that a student is able to do many more subjects, because effectively they only run for half a term. In the final term, (Easter,) there are no lectures in the last four weeks, this is the revision (swot-vac) period.

The students all sit one huge exam called the tripos, the tripos contains questions from every relevant subject of that year (from all three terms.) A typical undergraduate course runs for three years, called (for reasons I don't pretend to fathom), Part 1A, Part 1B and Part 2.

Well a typical student will often start off attending all the supervisions they possibly can. This gives them a wide variety of choice of subjects and so on. Of course some specialisations have their own particular subject requirements, but every course allows for students to select subjects from other courses. If a student satisfies the requirements for a particular course, in general, they are awarded a major or minor for that course. The end result of this is a lot of students turn up to the first supervision (and first lectures) but not to any others, and students often graduate with interesting combination degrees such as Pure Mathematics and Russian Language.

I was invited to supervise students for several subjects and at the moment I supervise a single pair of students for an Operating Systems subject. The students in this case are actually studying a graduate diploma degree, but this degree involves doing some subjects from the regular undergraduate course. As is common with the graduate diploma students in Australia, they are typically older (and a bit more mature) than the average age undergraduate in their course.

In my case (and this is quite common) the two students are very committed to their studies and are quite "smart" and a pleasure to teach. As is common in this university, there are many international students, in this case both my students are from overseas, one from the US and one from France.

From the supervisors point of view, these students are smart and you have to really know your stuff (no problems there for me, I had lectured in Operating Systems related material and tutored the undergraduate subject my department ran at Monash.) Also with such a small teacher/pupil ratio it is a lot of fun.

I have no formal feedback on the assessment of the student, my main task being to prepare the student for the Tripos. My only feedback is to the tutor of that student in the form of a student evaluation at the end of the year (this usually forms nothing more than part of a student evaluation by the tutor). Although I should note if a supervisor is having trouble with a student (or a student with a supervisor) the tutor is the point of contact.

Work

Well finally I have moved office. A move was expected, however I have exchanged external windows and a view of the Zoology museum for a piece of computing history and a rather efficient air-conditioning system.

About two weeks before I started work another Researcher was appointed on similar work (there were a lot of work positions to fill). It turns out she is an "almost" Australian.

By citizenship she is Australian and British, however she spent all her early, primary and secondary years in Australia (Melbourne mostly ! She went to University High) and still has relatives in Brisbane. Her parents and family moved to Glasgow, where she did her University education.

At any rate it was somewhat of a surprise to go all this way and find one of the people with whom I am sharing an office, and who started at about the same time as I did, was also an Australian.

(warning some technical rubbish ahead, skip to the "Weather" if computers are a mystery and you want to keep them that way.)

Computer Rooms and Names

The room I was moved into is one of several rooms that once together housed the University's main computer system, (singular). You know the sort of computer, the one that "once this filled whole buildings, but now it fits neatly into a single room. Well I am in a room that made up a quarter of the original "single room" and let me tell you the single room was quite large, at around 120' by 70' and of course this doesn't include the room for support staff offices housed in the rest of the building or any of the other support needed for the computer itself.

Because I am in an old "machine" room, the air-conditioning is very enthusiastic, managing to keep a very consistent "freezing". (Okay, well its about 20 C, but it feels like freezing.)

At any rate I am in one part of the original "Titan" room, for those with a computing historical bent, the primary designer, a gentleman called Wheeler, is still a part of the laboratory, and while about 80 years old is quite active in a number of fields.

Titan _didn't have VM, just Wheeler-designed 'segmentation' of a sort. (Maximum 2 segments for user processes, most only had one.) Only three of them were made: the other two were at the CAD centre (the computer lab used that machine while Titan was being moved to this building) and AWRE Aldermaston (which stayed at v6 of the OS, while by 1973, the computer lab had got to v16, for security reasons; people who maintained it said it was somewhat surreal trying to debug things, since none of them were security cleared and so they were never allowed to look at dumps...)

At any rate there is a precedent for naming rooms after machines and the room I have moved to is called Atlas, this was the name of British "supercomputer", built around 1958.

Atlas was built by Ferranti with the University of Manchester; only 3 were made, so it wasn't exactly a commercial success. (The death knell was when CDC beat it to a big Australian order.)

So officially I live in the "Atlas room" a bit of trivia for you all...

All silly names at any rate.

My own workstation has also changed, now I am in front of a nice 21" display on a pentium Linux box. One of the main project machines are some Digital Alpha based machines (generally based around the EB164 a fast Alpha on a PCI bus.)

What am I currently doing ?

Up until recently I had been filling my time writing documentation. A number of procedures as well as the oddities of some of the systems had never been given significant documentation. So being a new person and knowing almost nothing about the local environment I am perfectly suited to write "Idiots guide" type introductions. I should quickly note these "Idiots guide" are written for those with a background in the broader areas (this is a box, this is a disk, this is a blinken light.. well not quite.), but not having any ideas on how the Computer Laboratory does things.

At any rate I have to laugh a little as I never considered my writing to be Pulitzer prize material. It appears that just about every new Research Assistant or Research Associate gets the joy of writing an "Idiots guide"...

The main work I have been doing (apart from writing guides and moving offices) is the work related to adding software to this micro-kernel.

I am building a communications stack (an ATM API) that is based around the Fore company's SPANS specification.

This is an initial starter ATM API and the longer term is to implement an API (Applications Program Interface) that people in the project have designed specifically.

Some of you must wonder "why build an API for the switch that will be eventually replaced anyway" well its really a test rig we are building and the work we are doing is not useless, as it means others in the project group can do proof of concept work on such a prototype system. Another aspect is that the Laboratory has several Fore ATM switches so whatever they build for the Fore should work with my stuff.

Currently I am coming to terms with a micro-kernel that is largely undocumented (hence an "Idiots guide"), but that seems really quite neat.

I mean neat as in neat and tidy as well as neat and fast/bright and shiny.

The main machine this micro-kernel runs on is the ATM switch fabric that was designed in the Computer Laboratory. The switch fabric, "Fairisle", has been in existence for a significant time and as a result experience with it in particular and ATM in general is very high.

A related project is building a workstation without a primary bus, rather put a switch fabric in-between the main components instead. Sun, DEC and HP seem to be very interested in this particular project (or at least pretend to be...)

Weather

Well it has been cold, without a doubt. Things have frozen over in places all over the county, but not for very long. At least it is getting light earlier and dark later now (about 7:50 and 5pm respectively.)

However, being in Cambridge has already given me a unique weather experience...

>>> SNOW <<<

Yes it is true, I had never got around to visiting the Snow fields in Winter, so I had only ever come as close to the stuff as a picture tube will allow.

While, I wont bore you with some pathetic metaphor, I will say it is exactly as I had been told, sometimes like icing sugar, sometimes like cotton wool, and always wet. It was wonderful fun, and some lovely photo's were taken.

It does not snow often in this area, (a few times a year on average). This was emphasised to me by the inability of everyone at driving in the icy conditions.

I must have watched car upon car lock and slid, then bump gently (and not so gently) together, like a pathetic ballet. Possibly the most extraordinary site was a (double decker) bus locking up and sliding right past the bus stop. This was made more extraordinary because it happened in slow motion (about 5kph) but seemed so inevitable and unstoppable. Well a curb soon intervened and nothing was injured more than the drivers pride.

Sadly there was not enough snow to indulge in "Calvin and Hobbes" type activities (snow-men, snow-things, snow forts, etc) but much snow was thrown through the weekend. Next door attempted a rather amusing dwarf snow-man.

Darkness

By now you will have heard the news about the docklands bomb.

One thing quite odd was in many respects is the total imperviousness of some people to the whole situation (not that they don't care, but that they know it is not going to affect them or that they will not let it affect them), myself ? it gives a lot of clarity to unease I have had ever since I arrived in the UK, this doesn't lessen the unease, but it certainly makes clear the reason.

There have been many odd things about London in particular I could not put my finger on, great feeling of danger in some parts of the city, but not in others. Much of this feeling was to do with an image of London I had absorbed from the news over the past years however when I arrived there were many little reminders that this was a city with a strangeness about it. Little things like no rubbish bins at any railway station for example. The ever present security cameras (not just traffic control or such, but dozens of them in every nook and cranny) and signs (everywhere) indicating to take care of your parcels, and to report unattended parcels to a staff member. Depressing.

Regarding the bomb itself, I went past that particular building (the buildings around the Canary Wharf area are built around/over the docklands light rail) when I went down to Greenwich a couple of weekends ago. Amanda had worked for a while with a company located in that building.

There will have been a considerable change in the city between when I went for the sight-seeing last and when I next go down. It may be "interesting" to see the effect on the people of the city, but I notice there is a level of acceptance. One visible change spoken of is the city cordon called the "collar of steel". In its most visible form it is checkpoints and road-blocks surrounding the "city proper" as well as a vastly increased police presence.

The "city proper" or "The City" of the City of London is the expression used to now indicate the financial district more than anything else. Within a few buildings radius of the Bank of England, which really marks the centre of "the City", are exchange houses, the London stock exchange, and the head offices of every major British bank. Added to this, this area contains the offices of just about every bank in the world. Once this area was the centre of the city of London itself, now it is the financial centre. Because it is the centre of commerce for England, it is considered a very significant terrorism target.

I should also note the docklands are not part of "The City", but for reasons I don't understand they are also a popular target.

Of course it is uppermost in my mind that while the change and any change in the ceasefire in London is depressing, in Belfast and surrounds the ceasefire is manifest as guns and bullets.

The strongest thought in my mind is the Australian fortune, to be relatively free of such terror. I am confident of being safe, Cambridge is a long way away from all the IRA preferred pickings, still these events have been rather sobering.

Sad to end on that particular note, I promise something upbeat next time.

Best wishes to all and once again I say if you don't want to read this stuff, let me know. If you know others that want to read this stuff, and feel left out, let me know too.

cheers,
Andrew.