

LETTERS FROM GREAT BRITAIN 1976

David Carment

2016



At Loch Lubnaig in December 1976

Introduction

My first of many journeys to Great Britain occurred during November and December in 1976. I was living and working at Perth in Western Australia but about to move to a new job at Rockhampton in Queensland. I had long wanted to visit Britain, the country from which most of my ancestors came, and decided that the few weeks immediately prior to leaving Perth provided a good opportunity to do so. I was keen to see friends in Britain and visit places about which I had read or heard for much of my life.

The letters to my parents Diana and Maxwell Carment that follow are presented here very largely as they were written with only minor editing. They provide my initial first hand impressions of a country I came to know much better over the following 40 years. Some background is in my *Letters from the West 1975-1976* (<https://dcarment.com/2015/09/25/letters-from-the-west-1975-1976/>) that I self published in 2015.

As indicated below, I also spent a couple of days at Paris in France just before returning to Australia. I did not write letters from there, as they would have failed to reach my parents by Christmas Day, when I was with them.

London, 29 November 1976

*Well here I am in London. It hardly seems true. So far my expectations about the place I have all been fulfilled. [A short section about two days in Perth immediately prior to my departure is omitted here. It is included in *Letters from the West*.] On Saturday the plane was to leave at 5.00 pm but because of engine trouble in Sydney it was delayed for seven hours. During the waiting period I was provided with a room and meal at the Parmelia Hotel. We finally got away at about midnight.*

The flight was on the whole a good one. We stopped at Singapore and Bahrain. From my window seat I had panoramic views of the Persian Gulf and the Austrian Alps. I managed to get a fair amount of sleep and arrived in London feeling reasonably fresh. I have so far suffered no jet lag at all.

My-Van and Fred¹ met me at the airport. On the way to their house Fred drove via the major sights – the Tower, Houses of Parliament etc. His house is at Thorsden Way near Gypsy Hill Station and is very comfortable indeed. I have a nice room and bathroom to myself and also, of course, the benefits of My-Van's magnificent cooking.

Last night Tom² came to have dinner with us. He was in excellent form and told us of his recent journey to Italy. He is boarding with friends of Ross and Libby.³ I hope to see him again while I am here.

This morning I got the bus to Trafalgar Square where I met Ian Hamill.⁴ We had lunch at a nearby restaurant. He is now with the Department of Defence, which he seems to enjoy. Afterwards I went to the British Museum. It really is a magnificent place where I could have spent weeks. I particularly liked the Assyrian exhibits.

I have just got back to Fred's house and am waiting for dinner. On Wednesday Fred, My-Van and I are going to hear [the singer] Nana Mouskouri. On Sunday I am going to a classical concert with Ian and Rowland Sammut.⁵

¹ Fred Robins, a diplomat, and Tran My-Van, a historian. Both later had academic positions in Australia.

² My brother Tom Carment, an artist.

³ My cousins Ross Kalucy, a psychiatrist, and Libby Kalucy, an entomologist, who had recently moved from London to Adelaide, where they both had academic positions.

⁴ Ian Hamill was a British civil servant.

⁵ Rowland Sammut was a mathematician. He later had academic positions in Australia.

I have, by the way, received letters from Ian and Gordon Hope-Morley⁶ and Ben Hervey-Bathurst.⁷ I will, I hope, see all of them.

The devaluation [of the Australian dollar] was a shock. It was just as well I went away when I did and decided to use US dollars. Otherwise my trip would have been far more costly.

Fred and My-Van send their regards.



Oil wells in the Persian Gulf



Nelson's Column at Trafalgar Square

⁶ Ian Hope-Morley and his father Gordon Hope-Morley were involved in business activities. Both later became Lord Hollenden.

⁷ Ben Hervey-Bathurst and his wife Elizabeth lived at Eastnor Castle.

London, 2 December 1976

Thank you Dad for your letter. I was sorry that Mum has been ill and that the local industrial relations situation seems no better. I will get the shoes for you Dad [he wanted a special brand of shoes from a shop at Piccadilly] as soon as I have the opportunity. As I mentioned in my last letter, I saw Tom on Sunday. He was well and in good spirits. He has not been in touch since but I shall certainly see him again before my departure.

Since I last wrote I have been very busy indeed. On Tuesday morning My-Van and I visited the Tower of London. I found it even more interesting than the British Museum – perhaps because it was more British. We had lunch in an excellent Chinese restaurant at Soho. After lunch I did some Christmas shopping. That night I ate with Ian Hamill. He showed me some of the sights of the West End.

Yesterday morning I visited St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. Both proved worthwhile. In the afternoon I went to the National Gallery where there was a good exhibition of 17th century Dutch painters. I then shopped at Harrods before joining My-Van and Fred at the Albert Hall to see Nana Mouskouri. It was, as you can imagine, a wonderful performance



At the Tower of London



Westminster Abbey

London, 3 December 1976.

Since I last wrote I have kept up my busy routine. Yesterday morning My-Van and I set off for Greenwich, where we spent the whole day. It really is a glorious spot and one where I could have spent weeks. We started at the National Maritime Museum. The superb displays kept us interested for hours. We then walked to 'Cutty Sark' and 'Gypsy Moth IV'. I liked 'Cutty Sark' although I don't know whether I would have enjoyed a long trip on her. From there we walked through the park to the observatory. The weather was perfect – a bright sunny day without a cloud in the sky. The sunset over the park was particularly beautiful.

Last night I had dinner with Ian Hope-Morley. His wife was in Paris so there were just the two of us. He has an impressive house at Holland Park decorated with original eighteenth century maritime paintings. We ate at a very good French restaurant in Portobello Road.

Today was again fine so I walked through the park from Buckingham Palace to Trafalgar Square. I must have taken about 20 photos en route. Once at Trafalgar Square I took the tube to Madame Tussauds [wax works], where I spent a couple of hours. I lunched at a nearby pub and had traditional English fare of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding. After lunch I move on to the Imperial War Museum. Its displays

were interesting but rather poorly arranged. I then went to Piccadilly, where I looked at the beautiful shops. I bought your shoes Dad but you will, I think, be horrified at the cost. The Burlington Arcade [where the shoe shop was] is, indeed, magnificent. I also visited Fortnum and Mason, where I had afternoon tea. Tonight My-Van is having some friends for dinner.

Fred and My-Van are great hosts. I am being really well looked after. I shall have to get them an appropriate present before I leave.

Tom rang last night. We had quite a long chat. I asked him to come to Paris with us when we go there but he is not sure at this stage if he can make it. I will get in touch with him again before we set off on our trip next Monday.



My-Van on 'Cutty Sark'



Burlington Arcade

London, 5 December 1976

After I last wrote to you I had a very enjoyable evening with My-Van, Fred and some of their friends. I did not get to bed until about two in the morning.

The next morning I went by train to West Ewell, where Ian Hamill and his girlfriend [whose name I no longer recall] met me. They took me to the house that Ian shares with Mike Perry⁸ (who is currently in the United States on a business trip). After lunch I spent most of the afternoon chatting with Ian and we also went for a long walking the nearby common. That night I went with Ian and his girlfriend and Rowland Sammut and his girlfriend [Maggie,⁹ whose surname I no longer recall] to

⁸ Mike Perry was a businessman.

⁹ Maggie and Rowland later married and she became Margaret Sammut.

see Daniel Barenboim conduct the London Symphony Orchestra at Croydon. They gave a really superb performance.

Today My-Van, Fred and I drove to Balham to pick up Tom. We then all went to Richmond Park. The weather was superb but very, very cold. Last night there was a heavy frost. The grass and bushes were covered with a lovely white coating. The lake is already beginning to ice up. Children were walking around its edges. The Park is very beautiful. Tom seemed impressed by it. You need, by the way, to have no worries about him. He knows London like the back of his hand and is now busy again with his painting.

This evening I went to pick up my [rental] car from Godfrey Davis. It is a brand new Ford Cortina complete with radial tyres and a radio. We set off for York first thing in the morning.



Rowland, Maggie, Ian's girlfriend, Ian at Croydon



My-Van, Tom and Fred at Richmond Park

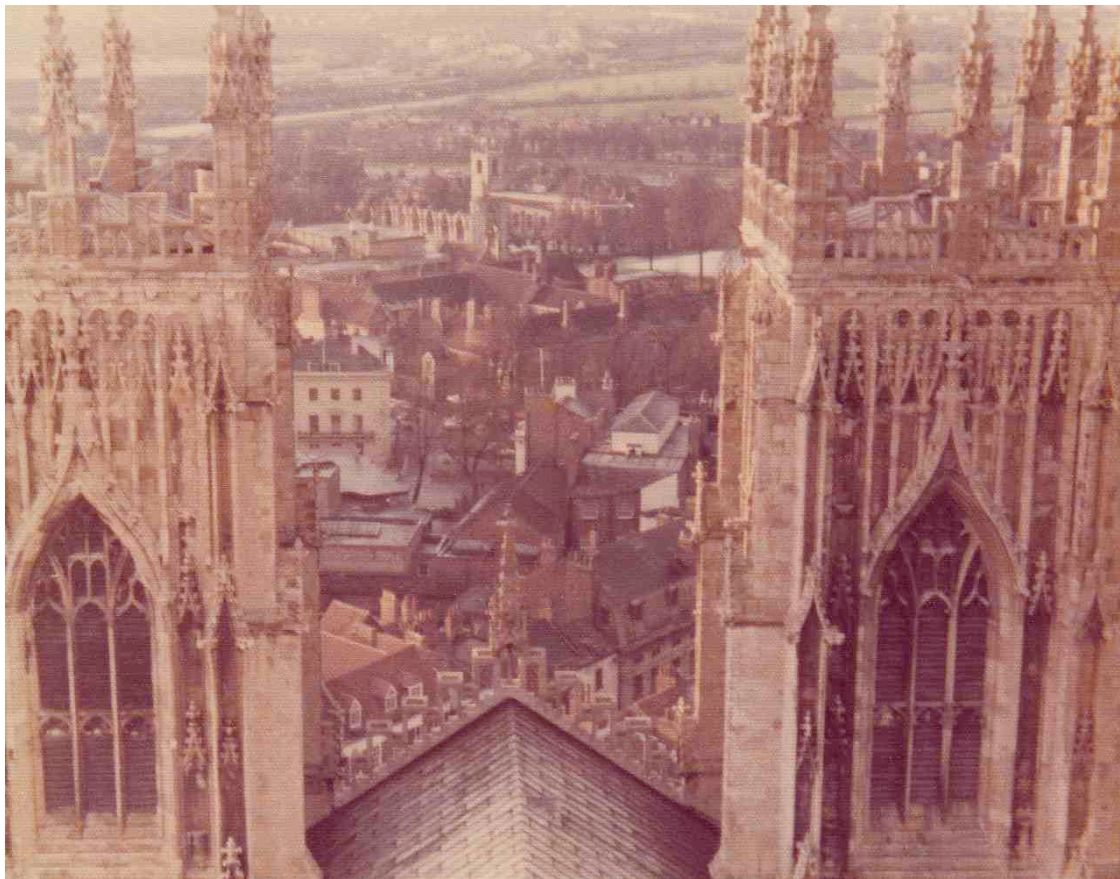
Edinburgh, 7 December 1976

I write to you from my room at the Caledonian Hotel in Edinburgh. We reached here this evening. We set off on our journey north very early yesterday morning to avoid the London traffic. Most of the journey was along the A1, a good though crowded stretch of road that goes almost all the way to York.

We got to York just before midday. We spent a couple of hours before lunch looking around the minster. Architecturally it is more impressive than either St Paul's Cathedral or Westminster Abbey. The whole place is most harmonious. We climbed to the top of the central tower, which was most exhausting. In the afternoon we went to

the National Railway Museum. It includes old engines, carriages and guards' uniforms. I found the old royal carriages interesting. During the evening we walked around some the quaint narrow streets and ate in a small pub. I stayed the night in the Royal Station Hotel, a huge Victorian building. [In Australia I had purchased a package that included car hire and hotel accommodation. My-Van and Fred stayed separately during the trip in bed and breakfast places.]

Yesterday we had a fascinating and beautiful drive. We first went to Durham, where we looked over the cathedral. It is supposed to be the best Norman building in the country. We crossed the border with Scotland just south of Jedburgh. My hotel is very conveniently located on Princes Street.



View from York Minster



At the Scottish border

Inverness, 9 December 1976

I got up early yesterday morning and walked with My-Van and Fred to Edinburgh Castle. The city looked lovely as it snowed the night before. The whole place was covered with a thin layer of white that now glistened in the strong sunshine. I found the castle interesting and enjoyed its regimental museums. After leaving [I recall My-Van and Fred left me at this stage to see friends] I walked down the Royal Mile to Holyroodhouse. On the way I stopped off at shops and historic buildings. I liked Holyroodhouse very much. I shared a guide there with one other person. I walked back to Princes Street via a long route that took in the Burns Memorial. Once back I went to the Royal Scottish Academy where there was an exhibition of Scottish women artists.

This morning we left Edinburgh at about 8.15 am. We crossed the Firth of Forth and then embarked on a fascinating journey to Inverness. In Perthshire the

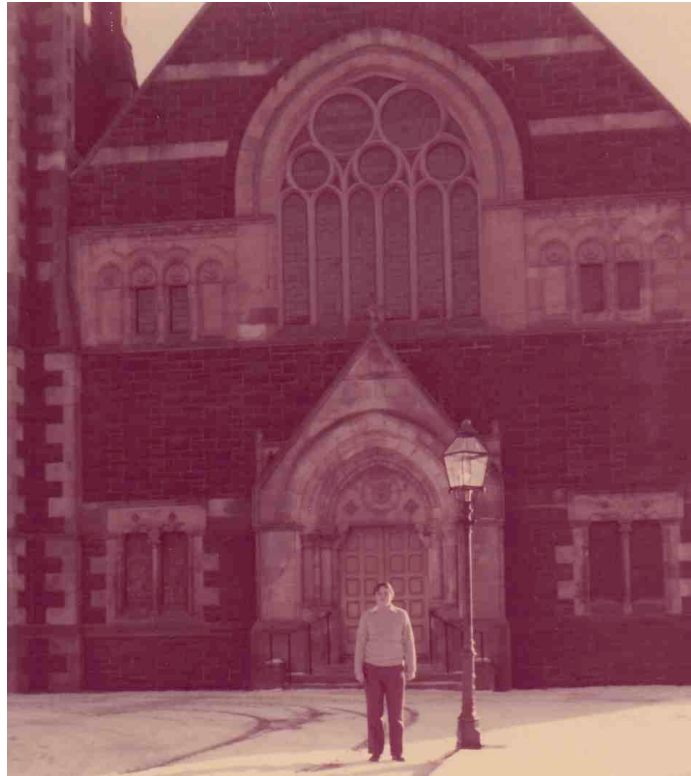
country was unbelievably picturesque. The weather was excellent and everywhere there was quite a thick layer of snow. We drove through the pretty village of Callander, the 'Tannoch Brae' of 'Dr Finlay's Casebook' [a popular television series]. I bought a postcard there to send to Sally Callander¹⁰ in Perth. We then took the road along Loch Earn before stopping at Comrie, which looked beautiful in its winter setting. I visited the church that was built for my great great grandfather James Carment, discovering his portrait in the front entrance. I was unable, however, to find his grave. [I located this during a later visit.] Comrie cannot have changed much since he was there. We continued to Dunkeld and then took the main road north. We passed out of the more populated regions into the Highlands. Although not conventionally pretty, I found the bare, snow covered hills and mountains most attractive. As we neared Inverness it started to snow hard. The roads became very slippery. The drive was hard work so I was glad when we got there.

I am staying the Station Hotel, which is old but very comfortable. It was hard to find because of all the one-way streets. This evening I ate fresh North Sea haddock – a delicious meal.



Fred and My-Van at Edinburgh Castle

¹⁰ Sally Callander, later Sally Langdon, was a schoolteacher in Western Australia.



At the Presbyterian church in Comrie

Turnberry, 11 December 1976

We set off from Inverness early yesterday morning. The weather was bright but there was heavy snow the previous night so the roads were quite slippery. We drove along the shore of Cromarty Firth until just before the port of Invergordon we reached the tiny hamlet of Rosskeen, where Rev David Carment [my great great great grandfather] was minister until his death in 1856. His first [Presbyterian] church, which he occupied until the Disruption of 1843, was obviously a handsome building but is now in poor condition. It appears to have been abandoned for some years. The former manse is in an even worse state. It is sad that they have been allowed to deteriorate. The Free Church is still in use but it is a building erected after David's death. From Rosskeen we drove across Scotland through very rugged and most beautiful country. We followed the road that ended at the fishing port of Ullapool, where we saw the North Sea fishing fleet at anchor in pretty Loch Broom. We lunched at Ullapool and moved on through wild looking country on narrow, snow-covered roads. Just outside Lochcarron we heard a loud scraping noise under the car. We thought the exhaust was falling off but it only turned out to be the auxiliary silencer so I breathed a sigh

of relief. We joined the main road again at Auchertyre, driving from there to Invergarry. From Invergarry we went to Fort William near Ben Nevis. We 'bed and breakfasted' there with a pleasant Gaelic speaking family. [Fred and My-Van were keen that I join them for a night at a bed and breakfast place so I knew what it was like.]

Today, unfortunately, the weather finally let us down. We did not see much at all. We were, nevertheless, able to view something of Loch Lochmond as we moved south. We bypassed Glasgow and were in Ayr in time for lunch. This afternoon the weather improved somewhat. I quite like the Ayrshire countryside. It is clearly fertile but it lacks the wild grandeur found in the Highlands.

This evening we visited a cousin of Fred. He is a farmer near Girvan who is obviously prosperous. He lives in a lovely house and owns a brand new Volvo. I found him delightful. He fitted my image of a Scottish farmer. [I omitted to mention in my letter that we also visited Cullzean Castle near Ayr.]

I am staying in an excellent hotel, the Turnberry. It is a huge old place that looks out over the ocean. Among its facilities are two 18-hole golf courses for the use of guests. Most of the people staying here are on golfing holidays.



Near Fort William



Ayrshire coast

Tintern, 13 December 1976

We left Turnberry at about 10.00 am yesterday morning and drove through some attractive Ayrshire villages. We then passed into Galloway. There we took a narrow road through rolling hills and via Irongray and Lochrutton where some of our Carment ancestors lived. We stopped for lunch at Dumfries before joining the motorway at Carlisle. We turned off at Penrith and moved into the Lake District. The area was, unfortunately, shrouded in fog but our few glimpses of the scenery made me realise that it is a delightful place. I spent the evening at a hotel in Ambleside.

The fog again dominated today's weather. We left the Lake District at Kendal and headed down the motorway until the Kidderminster turn-off. We lunched at Bewdley, a pretty Midlands town and the birthplace of [British Prime Minister] Stanley Baldwin. We then pushed on through Hereford and Ledbury and stopped for a couple of hours at Eastnor Castle. The castle is interesting but in need of repair. Some of the paintings were good. The Hervey-Bathursts gave us tea and toast before we proceeded on our way. We continued until Tintern, where I booked into my hotel.



Fred in Galloway



Near Hereford

London, 16 December 1976

Thank you for all your letters, which I got on my arrival back in London yesterday. Thanks also Dad for the general news from Australia. The press here is preoccupied with Britain's economic problems, Rhodesia and devolution and reports little of what goes on in Australia.

On Tuesday morning we looked around the magnificent Tintern Abbey before driving through the Wye Valley and the Forest of Dean. We had a delightful journey along minor roads in the Cotswolds, passing through picturesque villages. We lunched at a small pub in one of them. During the afternoon I left My-Van and Fred at Didcot Station and proceeded on my own to Oxford.

I occupied all yesterday morning with a walk around the university. The old colleges were very interesting but the town itself is far from beautiful. At midday I returned the car to the local Godfrey Davis agency and then took the train from Oxford to Paddington in London. I caught a cab back to Thorsden Way.

Last night Mile Perry and Ian Hamill came over. Mike has just returned from a business trip to California that he much enjoyed. Ian recently heard that he would be posted to the Ministry of Defence's personnel section.

Tomorrow we leave for Paris.



In the Cotswolds



Oxford

On 17 and 18 December I was with Fred and My-Van in Paris, where we fitted much into the time we had. I was back in Perth on 20 December.



At the Eiffel Tower in Paris



My-Van and Fred in Paris