

September 2004 Visit to England

Sep 23

An airline magazine article about the Internet reminded me of sitting by the river in Stamford, CT in the spring of 1971 designing the NCSS network. It didn't occur to me then how pioneering that was, just that it was fun. J. Licklider described a Galactic Network in the early '60s, which Paul Baran recast as a command and control network that could survive an atomic war but the ARPANET project was only started in 1967 and the first nodes were deployed in 1969. When I made my design the first email program wasn't yet written and the ARPANET connected fewer than half a dozen computers.

Sep 24

The flight was 2 hours late taking off but the journey was uneventful. My bag weighs over 25 kilos and looks even heavier. Maybe if I repack I can make it easier to manage?

Sep 25

Madge looks very well after gall bladder surgery. I start making notes about Whalley and his brothers and begin to get a sense of what they were like. Alison and Chris take us to Michael's house for lunch. He's very funny. He describes his disappointment over a musical he saw recently: "The leading man was flagging even before the intermission and by the time he got to his big number in the second half he'd lost the will to live."

Sep 26

Alison and Chris take us to lunch at Tatton Park then Madge and I spend the rest of the day chatting, mostly about family. My picture of the brothers isn't changing but is being enriched with detail. I'll organize my notes when I get home and send them to Madge and Roy for comment. Maybe that will provoke more memories. I'm also keen to provoke a get together of Madge, Roy and Gill, organized around photos they all have.

Sep 27

John Howarth's cottage is schizophrenic. The half he's rehabbed is spare and elegant. The other is a jumble of building materials. Last night John described his research on the recipes prepared by P. G. Woodhouse's Anatole, who's Bertie Wooster's Aunt Dahlia's chef. John decided Anatole was modeled on Escoffier, who Woodhouse almost certainly knew, and he tracked down all but two of the dishes to his satisfaction. It occurred to me that there are two kinds of people, those like John who research things, and those like Madge who don't. I'd several times questioned her about when Whalley was born and we eventually decided it was about 1888. Then she mentioned she had a bunch of birth and marriage certificates, so now I know he was born in 1886. On a similar theme, John never knows what time it is because he doesn't care what time it is.

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Most crime in Britain is car and petty theft. At least 90% of it is drug-related, which started in the '60s. John thinks drugs should be legalized because that would eliminate the profit and therefore the pushers, so the incidence of drug taking would drop - or at least it would be like ending prohibition in the US, the criminality around the trade would be eliminated even if use of the product didn't decline.

John remembers things in terms of formulae. If he goes back somewhere, he won't recognize the way but he will know to take the third left and then the right fork. He remembers how to dance by the sequence of steps. A friend of his does so by seeing the dance floor from above - he sees people dancing. My memory retrieval works more by means of structures and patterns. I can't start a project until I can see the structure of the end product.

John mentioned someone who lost her long-term memory after an accident to her head. She knew her son still but never recognized his wife who he met after her accident. Then doctors noticed she was dreaming and woke her in the middle of one. She was dreaming about her daughter-in-law. New input was evidently going into her long-term memory but not coming out. John says some amnesiacs have normal memory of most categories of information but can remember nothing about, for example, their family. It must be the search mechanism that fails. My dad often had trouble recognizing familiar things after he started having strokes. He'd form theories about what things were and they'd be close, but wrong. His pattern recognition system was producing the wrong result.

Sep 29

Madge and I went out to dinner last night to an elegant but friendly nearby restaurant that's frequented exclusively by elderly locals. Madge was dressed stylishly as she always is and was well made up. She has a neat row of a dozen shades of lipstick on her bathroom shelf. She took my arm as we left the restaurant and walked back to the car. It was a charming evening.

I drove to Roy and Anne's house in North London this morning and started getting to know them. The last time I'd met them was in the late '50s or early '60s when I visited with my parents although I also have a vivid and entirely false memory of visiting them with Felicity when we, too, lived in North London. They're very likable people.

Roy only knew Jack and Jim but he did know things about the older brothers that Madge didn't. He's 77. They're both vigorous in mind, Anne the more opinionated of the two (sorry, Theresa Heinz, but I'd use the same word about Roy if it was the other way round). Roy just had a cataract operation on his left eye. "*Sorry about the black eye*" he greeted me at the front door, "*my wife beats me.*" "Oh" Anne replied, "*I wouldn't know where to start.*" He already had a successful cataract operation on his right eye, the better one.

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Sep 30

We went through half the photos Roy got from his dad, Jack, and Uncle Jim last night and the rest of them this morning. I made more notes and from one photo I discovered that my great grandfather, John Henry, had two brothers and four sisters.

Roy and Anne's youngest son, Richard, came to lunch. He's a very nice guy. His girlfriend of 16 years recently married someone else and had a baby. Richard is still friends with her and plays with the baby.

Roy and Anne have traveled a lot since he retired, to the US, Russia, France, Italy, the Baltic, Greece, Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, South Africa, and more. They prefer to decide for themselves where to go and what to do. I asked if it was hard for him to retire. *"Not really" he said. "I had a long run in my last show, almost eight years, and when it closed I didn't look for another job for a while. Nobody called with anything and after a few months I just kind of realized I'd retired."*

"All Sidwells are laid back," Anne declared, "and the brothers all married prim women." "I didn't follow them there" said Roy, "but I'll tell you something every Sidwell shares, they can't make up their mind. They're always indecisive." "Hmm" I said, "I'm not sure I've met enough Sidwells to know." "There you go" Roy replied, "you're just the same. What did annoy me," he continued, "was the way nobody said 'no' in Lancashire. If you offered Jim a cup of tea and he didn't want one he'd say, 'you're all reet' 'I know I'm alright' I'd tell him, 'but do you want a cup of tea?' 'You're all reet' he'd say again."

"How long is your trek?" Richard asked. "Thirty days." "It'll be good," he said, "and you'll be pretty high. How cold will it get?" "I don't really know," I told him, "not below zero Fahrenheit, probably." "Did you see that program last night about the guy who walked to the North Pole?" he exclaimed to Anne, "He must be mental! They had to cut two inches off his doodaa when he got back. He left his fly open and got frostbite."