

Pawn must adjust his opinions to match reality. Cuisine can conquer. Appearances may deceive. Strangers can be trusted. Sunday is for Sunday roast. And sometimes a pot is just a pot.

On any normal day, starting out with a cheese toastie may well mean that you are starting at the top and things can only go down from there. This, my friends, was no normal day. I awoke at about 6:15 and after giving up on returning to sleep, got up, made some tea, and then a cheese toastie, using up the Buffalo cheddar and a goodly portion of the Edam. It was cheese-toastie-licious! While I worked and wrote, X slept in for a change (not).

Part of my exercise this morning was to determine the proper disposition of our recyclables. Once X arose, I loaded up our largest carry-bag, the one with the reinforced shoulder strap and rip-proof nylon, and made my way, clanking like the tin woodsman, tottering up Tottenham Court Road the three blocks to the recycling point. Thankfully the only other people out on the streets at that hour were still out, rather than on their way to church, likely as not.

That properly sorted, we set about planning the day. I purchased a vase for Â£68 (\$100) on Ebay a few weeks back, and as luck would have it the seller is located in Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire, just about 25 minutes north-west of London, not far from North Harrow,

Pawn's birthplace.



Today we had planned to go fetch it.Â We had debated whether or not X would join me on the quest.Â There are still some things (like Picasso at the National Galleries) which she wants to see, and it was just an errand.Â “Maybe they’ll invite us in for tea,” X offered.Â “I wouldn’t count on it,” I replied, “You know the Brits, polite to a fault, but not very friendly.”Â On the train I rang up Jayne, the seller, to let her know we were on our way and that we planned to stop for lunch first, as we were quite early. She said not to worry, recommended the Fishery Inn, and said to feel free to pop in either before or after dining.



The Fishery Inn is across the road from the train station, over a moor and a canal. We enjoyed the brief stroll there, and were really looking forward to taking a sit-down overlooking the canal while dining on Sunday Roast, or some other item from their tempting menu. When I approached the bar to order, however, I was informed by the flustered barmaid that the tills (cash registers) were down, and they couldn't take any orders. "It'll take 5 minutes to sort, and I'll come and take your order then," she said. Fifteen minutes later, we finally went and got some wine, at least, and continued waiting... Okay, even we have our limits, and 45 minutes was it. We were expected at Jayne's at 2:00, and it was already 1:45 when we finally gave up, settled with the staff for our wine, and trudged off still starving and with a little buzz from the wine on an empty stomach. We strolled along the footpath between the moor and canal and marvelled at the bucolic beauty of it all. There are several permanent residents on the canal, their house boats moored along the banks. Cooking out on barbecues and playing with their dogs.

After a short stroll down the canal we crossed over to the other side of the moor and the rail tracks. We walked through a lovely old tunnel, again on a footpath,

and when back out on the main road proceeded another couple hundred yards down the road, up a short walkway, and then rang up again to tell Jayne we had arrived. Tony, her husband greeted us in the forecourt and lead us into the house, an assortment of dogs (Roy, the Shepherd/Rottweiler mix, Blossom, a little mutt, and Lilly, a chihuahua) all barking and sniffing, tails wagging merrily.

When I had corresponded and spoken with Jayne I had envisioned a right proper British matron. The woman was selling me a Victorian vase, and her voice was all Upstairs/Downstairs proper and all. Well, was I in for a surprise. Jayne stepped out of the back lounge in a flowing black floor length skirt and tight black bodice, bare armed, slender and well muscled. She looked more like an extra in a Tori Amos video than the right proper country lady I had imagined. Next to Tony, himself a svelte man, they made quite the striking couple.

We settled in the lounge, and I couldn't help but notice the lovely pottery all around the place, and the stunning Art Nouveau cabinet in the corner. As I complimented her collection, Jayne asked if we would like some wine. We had already explained that we had tried to stop for a meal at the Fishery Inn, as she had suggested, and that we still hadn't eaten. This did not deter them, and we soon each had a nice glass of white wine, and were chatting like old friends and examining their entire collection of vintage pottery, glass, majolica, etc. as well as some lovely furniture.

Well, before you know it we were getting along famously, the wine flowed, the pottery was shown, and we were invited to join them for their traditional Sunday Roast. "Dinner won't be for a couple of hours," said Jayne, at about 2:30, "but I can assure you it will be worth the wait." She explained that as hectic as their lives get, they always sit down to dinner together; her, Tony and her three adult kids.

Over the next several hours we got to know these people, but it seemed we had always known them. We discussed politics and immigration, art and pottery, Ebay and Internet culture, Libraries and motor cars. Frequently throughout the afternoon and evening Tony or Jayne would pop out to the kitchen to tend to the dinner and retrieve another bottle of wine.

And
Time

Passed

It was 7:30 when we finally sat down for dinner, five bottles of wine later, and good friends to be sure. Oh, and what a dinner! We had:

Roast chicken, pulled from the bone

Home made gravy

Cranberry sauce

Yorkshire pudding

Onion and rosemary English stuffing

Sweet peas

Green beans

Asparagus

Broccoli

Roast potatoes

Roast Parsnips

Oh, and for desert? Fresh strawberries dipped in chocolate!



It. Was. To. Die. For!

Then came the coffee and some spectacular port wine.

By now it was after 9:00 and we had to beg our leave. The last train would be through at 10:00 or so, and we dare not risk missing it. It was hard to say goodbye to our new friends.

We exchanged vows to stay in touch. I will come to visit them again, for certain. One doesn't easily make friends in England, they are a very private people, but Tony and Jayne had truly welcomed us with open arms. I am sure that had we missed our train, they wouldn't have batted an eyelash at putting us up for the night, either.

More photos [here](#).

Ta!