



A Reflection on 2009 visit by people from Trichy-Tanjore

"Would you like some apple crumble and custard?"

"What is apple crumble?"

"What is custard?"

"Anyway returning to our discussion on arranged marriages...." Such was the range of the cultural exchanges we were privileged to enter into with our Indian visitors in June.

The two gentlemen that came to stay with us in Loughborough were James Relton, a head teacher and Director of Education for the diocese, and Gnanadurai, a retired head teacher and director of Community Action Projects in the diocese. It was the first time they had visited England and they were fascinated by a lot of things we take for granted. They were amazed how long it stayed light for in the evening and that people were still walking around at 9 and 10 o'clock at night — especially lone females. They were surprised that Caitlin (aged 14 years) could sleep in a room of her own without getting lonely or frightened at night. They were astonished by how much of the cooking Hugh did (almost all of it!) Electric tooth brushes had not been seen before and their use had to be demonstrated - yet they were far more adept and prolific in their mobile phone use even than our children.

Over the course of a few days we learnt to adapt our European style meals to something more readily eaten by hand (apart from apple crumble and custard!) and to serve strawberries at every available opportunity as they are very expensive in India and considered a real luxury. Mealtimes have never been so lively or the subject of such in depth and weighty discussions with an open exchange and acceptance of different ideas, opinions and cultural norms.

Each day began early for our visitors with singing & prayer and mobile phone calls to family and work colleagues at home (there is a 5 1/2 hour time difference with Trichy-Tanjore.) While they tended to wake at 5.00am (so Caitlin informed us, being in the room next door to them - I am dead to the world at that time of day!) they were very happy to make their own early morning mugs of very sweet tea so we didn't have to surface until nearer to 7.00am to make breakfast! An early phone call from our indefatigable organiser, Anne Speight, would inform us of the inevitable changes to the day's plans and progress reports on tracking down lost cameras and so forth.

All the visitors had very packed programmes, varying between individual and whole group activities. On arrival in Loughborough there was a reception and tea held for them at Trinity Methodist church at which they were entertained by the BB/GB Band and by the Bristow family music quartet. Over the following days our guests visited various schools, the Human Rights and Equalities Advice Centre, the Oxfam shop, an Interfaith Day at St. Philip's Centre

in Leicester, had lunch in Queen's Park, climbed the Carillon, went to Mount St Bernard's Abbey, a Christian Aid committee meeting and also attended a meeting of our home church group where they particularly valued the time that was spent in prayer. Both James and Gnanadurai led worship at two different churches on the Sunday morning. And that's just the edited highlights!

Most evenings were spent at home with us where they were able to relax, rest and recharge their batteries. On a couple of occasions we found time to finish the day with a short period of bible study led by James which we found most enlightening. I also had the opportunity to meet James' daughter and family who live in Cheltenham — James travelled down by train from Leicester to stay with them on the Friday evening and I went to meet up with him and bring him back to Loughborough on Saturday afternoon.

We feel very fortunate and blessed to have had the chance to spend time with and get to know James and Gnanadurai; we learnt a huge amount and received great warmth, friendship and a real sense of the worldwide family of God. At the end of the week we were exhausted but would willingly do it again — and then there is always the prospect of a visit to Trichy in the coming years.

Anne's article in last month's Token ended with the words Hymn 758 (Methodist book 'Hymns and Psalms') the words of which are now even more meaningful for us.

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