

EUROPE 2023

4 months | 6 countries | 8 house swaps | 10 journey legs | 2 grand-boys



Blayze not wanting to be touched inappropriately by young Shakespeare



London

Prior to setting out early in the morning for our journey to Blackheath, a charming suburb of London where we would be staying for a few days, Heather, Blayze, and I ventured through Stratford upon Avon in search of a café for breakfast. It was too early for cafes to open but the leisurely walk through the quiet streets, free from both traffic and pedestrians, was truly delightful. The recent gloomy weather hadn't dampened our spirits as we marvelled at the timeless architecture. Blayze amusingly referred to the buildings as "wonky," a fitting description for their slightly askew charm. Most of these structures showcased a distinctive black-and-white aesthetic, characterised by black beams and white infill—a testament to their centuries-old heritage.

We strolled along the serene Avon River, taking in the graceful presence of numerous swans and an unexpectedly large gathering of signets. The air was crisp, and my mind wandered to the curious thought of how the swans managed the chill against their submerged bodies.

To beat the 8.20am parking deadline of 8:20 we loaded up the car and departed from our classic old pub sojourn. Our overnight pub, the Queens Head, was certainly old and basic but the food last night was very wholesome.

Breakfast ended up being a disappointment at a service stop - expensive and unappetising. In hindsight, opting for some simple muesli and milk, which we could have purchased the day before and enjoyed in the comfort of our accommodations, would have been a wiser choice.



Our anticipated three-hour journey was extended due to a puzzling decision by Emily, our GPS, which led us through downtown London instead of the intended outskirts route. This diversion wasn't the faster route by any means.

After some time stuck in traffic we finally reached our house swap destination. Our car had been rented through Turo, offering both a competitive price and a customised pickup and drop-off location. The handover to the company driver who came to meet us at our house swap location proved to be very convenient.



Welcoming us, were the couple we have exchanged houses with, providing a detailed introduction to the layout of their Georgian terrace house—tall and narrow, spanning three floors. Maddi and Deakin's bedroom was humorously noted as "closer to God." The house itself boasted an eclectic style, a reflection of Elizabeth and Stephens's three and a half decades of residence there. The house was built in 1905 and Stephen's house guide states that the kitchen is a "work in progress, made worse by holding their daughter's belongings". Their daughter is off to live in Ireland and has left them an extra fridge and washing machine! The range of drinking cups is huge.

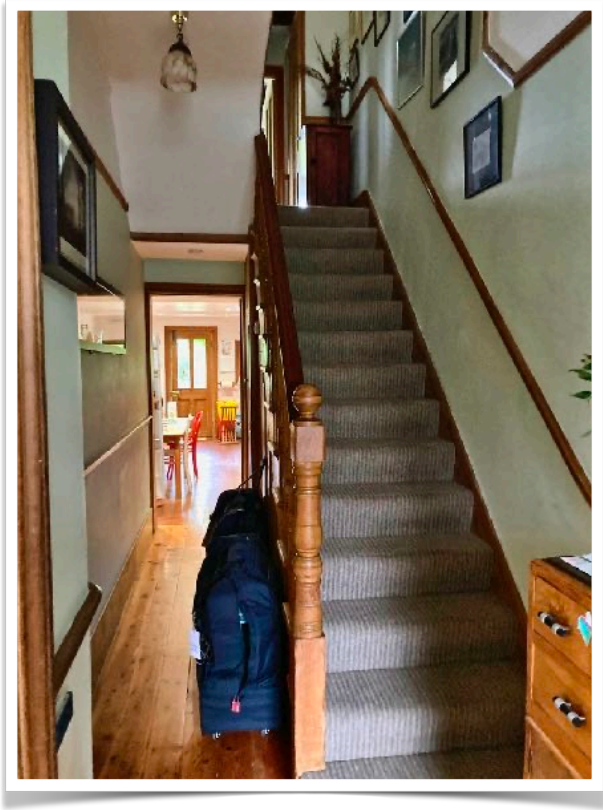
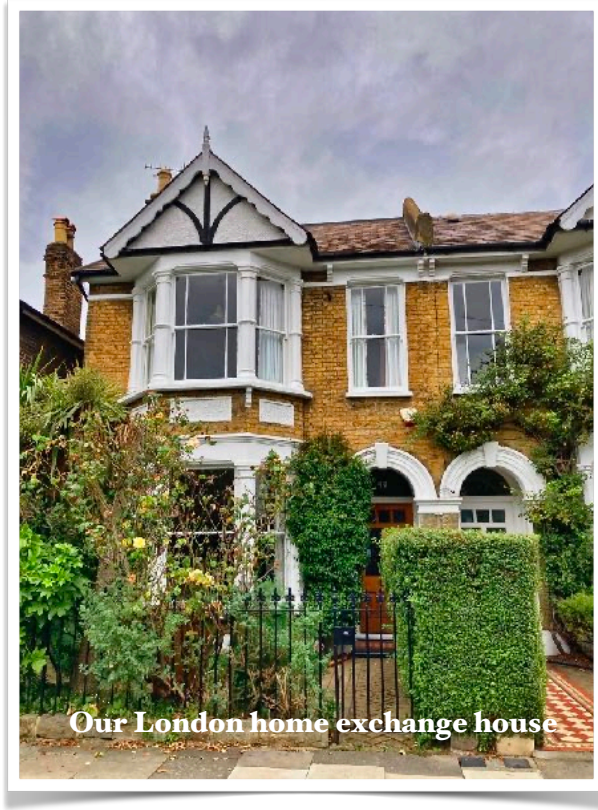


Our exploration continued when they left us to their house, as we located the nearby supermarket and shopped for essentials. Heather and I then embarked on a brief bike ride to familiarise ourselves with the area. However, the combination of heavy traffic and a couple of steep inclines curtailed Heather's initial enthusiasm, prompting our return home to chart the course for the

upcoming days. Armed with our London Pass and travel card, we look forward to the upcoming adventures and attractions that London had to offer. After this week, the "children" will be journeying back home, enriched by their experiences. We hope.



Tonight Heather & Blayze decided that they had to play Monopoly whilst in the land of its inventor. The rest of us refused to partake. I can see this game lasting the whole of our visit. So far Blayze is ahead. Heather has been in jail four times! I reckon this is in keeping with her more recent convict history.





All Saints - Blackheath - on the edge of Greenwich Park.