

An Angloholic confesses

Something terrible must have happened to me when I was in Baghdad. I wasn't aware of it at first. This sickness that has overtaken me was more like a slow creeping sensation, nothing was blindingly obviously wrong. But the symptoms persisted for weeks.

I found myself craving beer; not having homicidal impulses when *The Archers* came on the radio; even needing to trawl through pubs – places that had held about as much interest for me as, well, cricket grounds.

Then on Saturday when I went to Lord's to watch England play (although some might dispute this term) South Africa, and by the end of the day – that's almost eight hours of cricket – and none the wiser of the rules despite numerous heroic attempts – I practically wept when I had to leave. England's humiliation was not the reason. I knew I needed to seek help.

My name is Heidi, and I'm an Angloholic.

I have lived in England for a long time but never been an Anglophile. I like it just fine but I like the cosmopolitan nature of London, not the thatched cottage-tea and

scones image of some Middle England fantasy.

Lord's. Cricket. Sport. To most right thinking individuals, these words are anathema. No longer. I'm like drug addict craving my fix of England and I can't get enough. Cricket, a sport I have spent years deriding, had me riveted. Such a new experience was it that it came as a revelation to find out that the two batsmen incomprehensibly, astonishingly played for the same side.

Funny little problems like how you were supposed to tell the different teams apart as they all wore the same thing seemed charming rather than just weird. Terms like deep cover, googly and third man sounded like terms of endearment – and from British men they usually are.

Breaking for lunch, and then tea, during play – imagine! – clapping when the other team does well! Then when your team does well, then just for the hell of it, which once would have been ample reasons for mirth, now ended up as perfectly charming rituals. Charming.

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Indulging this sickness meant that the next day I had to go to the English countryside. I needed to imbibe the fairy story picture book England through every pore and with every sense.

Cookham, painter Sir Stanley Spencer's home town, was chosen as the destination, where my English idyll continued on its surreal untracked trajectory. Hook 'em and cook 'em, said my friend Jim, reminiscing about a show on US TV when he was a kid.

Trying to derail my enthusiasm, he mentioned that the trains were slowing down because of hot weather which caused problems with the track.

Of course England is full of quiriness. "Excellent food from 12 - 2.30" advertised the blackboard of the pub we had chosen at Cookham Bottom – presumably after that it's crap, no doubt. We did as instructed in the parking lot – please park pretty – or so we thought.

Then we waited by the sign on the empty narrow stretch of country road that said "Plant Crossing", trying to work out what it could mean, with the attendant hope that we might actually see some



HEIDI
KINGSTONE

ON THE AGENDA

action. Was this Triffid country where mutant plants were going to hog the road or devour us if we drove in the wrong lane?

Like most Europeans, when it comes to signs the British are hopeless, but as they say, there are some corkers. On the motorway we passed: "Sign Not Yet in Use". OK, but thanks for sharing.

Clues for life, like on the monopoly board, were dotted along the motorway from London to the Kent village. "Changing Priorities Ahead". Jim and I debated for ages what those should be.

"Are you cured yet?" he kept asking, hoping to have purged me of this ailment. If not, the barbecue at Frieth should have acted as quickly as salmonella. We obviously missed the excellent food that stopped at 2.30pm and got the other stuff.

I have no 12-step plan. My name is Heidi, and I'm an Angloholic. This for sure is a googly.