



FAR CRY FROM THE HEYDAY: Travelling by plane is not the experience it once was

Faced with crowded airports, a hip replacement can be a boon

IN ANY airport, why is the boarding gate to or from Norn Iron invariably located on the extreme periphery, as far out as a lighthouse?

You feel as if you've already trekked halfway to your destination on foot, only to discover in the departure lounge every seat is occupied and a lengthy untidy queue standing dead-eyed amidst a welter of baggage, waiting for the check-in lady to arrive – which may or (more likely) may not, be soon.

A door opens; the queue surges forward more in hope than expectation, surrender their boarding passes and disappear. A third of the passengers through, the door closes upon a concerted groan from those still waiting. Little do they know the 'lucky ones' have merely swapped the muggy warmth of the departure lounge for a lengthy foundering on the narrow draughty concrete steps leading to the runway, because the plane has to be refuelled and disinfected before new passengers may board. Should you be near the back of the queue, you will inevitably find upon embarking, that passengers already aboard will have filled every overhead locker with their stuff and there is somebody who has 'mistakenly' taken your seat.

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In such circumstances, one or two hip replacements can be a boon when flying. May I offer a paean of praise and gratitude for 'Special Assistance'? Such a civilised service – my luggage spirited away and checked in. I'm chairborne along secret routes through doors marked PRIVATE and long empty grey corridors to security. Where others

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are stripped (metaphorically) to vest, pants and socks and patted down, I, fully dressed, am lightly run over with a bleeper wand and wheeled triumphantly past the envious, struggling back into their clothes with a long walk still ahead of them. I have to resist the urge to incline my head and wave graciously as I pass. Thence hoisted aloft to the aircraft cabin door in a lifty-uppy thing. First aboard, a front seat (though uncomfortably close to the toilet) and solicitous enquiries from the crew whether or not I am comfortable.

Apropos of nothing, what is wrong with people on a one-hour flight who can't wait to go to the loo until they disembark?

The entire process is conducted in reverse upon landing. It's rather pleasant to sit by the baggage reclaim carousel, point to one's suitcase and watch someone else nearly

rupture themselves wrestling it off. I do not travel light. However welcome the services, it's not without drawbacks. I am a nervous flyer, usually fortifying myself before boarding with a sinew-stiffening gin and a displacement therapy trawl of the duty free shops to soothe my apprehension. Alas, Special Assistance precludes these panaceas. As the late Loving Spouse used to say, "What a saving!"

I may have neglected to mention that, along with many other failings, I have no sense of direction. Despite detailed instructions, I have a tendency to get serially lost, even in places I've been to before. On a recent visit to Birmingham, I got a sweet and smiley young Special Assistant, who enquired, "Where are you meeting your friends, madam?" "In the car park," I replied. "There are several car parks, madam. Which one?" Duh!! In the fast falling dusk we toured all of them on a tooth-jarring marathon over what felt like ornamental cobbles, in the course of which I heard his life-story and also the somewhat discomfuting information that this was his first week on the job.

Ten days ago I left the semi-tropical heat of Stansted airport and arrived home to pelting Derry rain. Though Special Assistance gives one priority boarding, the snag is you're last off the aircraft. My chair and its attendant awaited. I descended the steps on foot in the dark and seated myself.

By the time I reached the terminal building, a chilly creeping dampness in the nether regions was manifesting itself. I was dressed head to toe in rapidly darkening pale grey. I advanced crabwise to the waiting taxi. Please, Lord, don't let it have fabric-covered seats.

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ON THIS DAY

SEPTEMBER 14 1921

General Quizzed over Murders

IN A lengthy letter, Mrs Maire O'Donovan, Deputy Mayor of Limerick, replies to General Prescott-Decie who was Divisional Commissioner in Limerick during the lengthy reign of terror in that city. The General now has relinquished his duty, having fallen out with the attempt of the British Government to find a national settlement. Before his departure he wrote a letter in the Morning Post.

When the murders of the Mayor Clancy and ex-Mayor O'Callaghan were committed, the city was entirely in the hands of the Crown forces. Mrs O'Donovan calls for answers from General Decie in relation to these crimes 'as you are in an especially good position to supply them, having been in charge of the police in Limerick on that fatal night'. 'Mayor Clancy's house is about 200 yards from the Strand military barracks. The sentry on guard swore at the inquiry that he heard the steps of three men pass, going in the direction of the Mayor's house. Ten minutes afterwards he heard six shots. He reported the matter...but men were not challenged and no patrol was turned out.

'The Deputy Mayor adds: 'Prescott-Decie says that the Irish population is divided into three distinct parts – a/ the loyalists, b/ the extremists – at present Sinn Féin, including corner boys, murderers, etc – and the intermediate portion. Obviously he would include in division (b) the two Mayors elected unanimously by the Republican Corporation of Limerick.'

'The Old Order Changes'

Editorial

THE Earl of Meath – who invented 'Empire Day' – owns two big residences in Ireland, two other huge homes in England, tens of thousand of acres... But he is a poor man. Kildrummy in County Wicklow is one of the earl's 'seats'. He has a large number of employees in the district and he told them on Monday that he was compelled reluctantly 'to reduce their numbers'. Now, his lordship [said] he must live in a small house.

Lord Meath is a 'good' landlord but it is to be feared his sad picture of his struggle to make ends meet will not evoke sympathy. The days of the landed magnate exercising rights and performing functions have passed away forever.

THE descent of a fragile peace under the Truce left many people demanding justice as this attack on the former Military Governor of Limerick shows. In March 1921 the city's Sinn Féin Mayor, George Clancy and his predecessor, Michael O'Callaghan were murdered in their homes, almost certainly by Crown forces. Meanwhile, The Irish News welcomed the declining power of the Anglo-Irish landlord class who once ruled supreme.

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