This is the second Scrum Gathering that I've attended.

Last year, I wrote a series of blogs about navigating a new town - in that case, Dublin - and how much that was akin to the journey to where new ideas could take you. However, this year, the conference is in London and, as I was born in London and know my way around, I can't use the same trick.

But I didn't know as much as I thought. Somewhat inevitably, there was a problem with the Underground and I found myself waiting around London Bridge. I started listening to a tour guide as she shepherded tourists around the station:

> 'Britain was named after Brutus of Troy, who also gave London its first name, "Troia Nova". When the Trojans left, the Celts bastardised this to "Trinovantum", but that didn't last long. A chief took London and named it after himself: "Caer Lud", meaning Lud's fort. But it didn't trip off the tongue for the locals, so they called it "Kaer Liundain". And, finally, our friends the Romans turned up and called it "Londinium". The rest is history.'

It struck me as odd that a single place needed so many names. In fact, it struck me as odd that people felt the need constantly to change things (minus one Agile Point for me). Was it an improvement? Did it make it better?

This was the theme of this year's Scrum Gathering - Better. Better Leaders, Better Scrum Masters, Better Product Owners and, most importantly, Better Teams. Was it 'Better' to change London's name so many times? And was it strange that I found it odd?

In her talk 'Your Brain on Change', Laura Powers talks about why our brains are wired to resist change. There are four parts of your brain that determine behaviour:

- The **amygdala** examines change and makes you act on it.

- The **entorhinal cortex** makes mental maps about your physical and social space.

- The **basil ganglia** monitor habits and understand rewards.

- The **habenula** guard against failure.

So, if you are going to elicit change, each of these parts of the mind needs to be placated in some way. Transparent early communications help the amygdala to be less fearful, understanding social implications can keep regulating the entorhinal cortex, to prevent it from 'having a bit of a flap'

(technical term!), and so on. Laura describes a 'pathway to change', which takes into account these four main areas and so eases the way when it comes to resistance.

Our own pathway to change has been a bit of a sledgehammer blow in some instances, that is, the overnight adoption of Scrum, and glacial in others (other departments working in a more Agile way) but maybe adopting this 'Change Pathway Toolkit' could help us complete our journey.

Of course, the stuff the tour guide was talking about was all made up - literally (and this is about the only time someone is going to use this word correctly) - by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the Twelfth Century. It's well recognised that his *History of the Kings of England*, going back 2,000 years, is pretty much fiction. At best, it is the taping together of a series of tales told in the oral tradition and passed down. But how do we know this? Because the understanding of the past became less about belief and more about testing. Empirical study.

OBSERVATION

In the workshop 'What's Really Going on?', Julie Wyman asks us to do exactly that by looking beneath the surface. Watching people build simple structures, we looked at the body language, the positioning, the tone of voice and all the other elements that are often forgotten in meetings. Julie encourages us to observe these facets more.

And we should. Waiting to speak, I know I'm guilty of this and I'm positive others are. Perhaps instead of patiently waiting for someone to finish so that we can back the point that is burning in the back of our throats, we should take a breath. Watch our colleagues, see what subtle communication they are giving us before we respond.

But, back to history. The Excel Centre, where the Gathering is being held, is not far away from Billingsgate. In Geoffrey's *History*, this was the first time a port was built in London by a warlord named 'Belinus', who built a gateway (Belinus=Billings…more Dark Ages bastardisation action….) on the Thames to try to regulate the constantly fighting merchants and pirates at the time. Where money is concerned, whether it be in the shape of goods, chattel or hard cash, conflict can quickly escalate.

In her workshop, Christina Hartikainen structures this conflict as 'The Drama Triangle', so called because there are three roles that shape it:

- The Persecutor, the person who wants to blame others for problems

- The Victim, the team member who feels like they are being always 'picked on'

- The Rescuer, the bridge between these two, trying to save the day

But these three roles can keep the problem spinning. Rescuers are sometimes not selfless and, if they are not careful, they can become Persecutors or Victims. A better way is to adapt these roles once you are in conflict. Rather than Rescuer, become a coach within a dispute, empowering the participant to empower themselves to resolve it.

At Aquila Heywood, we have utilised such methods to give teams the ability to resolve arguments in a discussion-type forum but, even then, using a change of perspective such as that presented in the Drama Triangle may help.

Billingsgate was only the first of many ports along the Thames and, over the next five hundred years, it thrived. If anything, a little bit too much. At certain times in the 1800s, you could walk from one side of the Thames to another. The logistics of such congestion must have been staggeringly complex.

In his keynote talk 'Why Collaboration Is Messy', Tim Harford talked about a series of social experiments undertaken in the dark days of the nineteen fifties which examined subjects such as conformity and how teams evolved to work together. Despite popular belief, it is not always sets of like-minded people that complete projects in the best way. The studies quoted by Harford found that collaboration could evolve in a competitive manner when empathy was involved. This certainly may explain how a chaotic system such as the Pool of London worked. Tim also described how a series of studies showed that, when given a complex task, an individual would get it right about forty-five percent of the time: add three friends to that individual, and it rose to fifty percent. But change the dynamic to the addition of two friends and a stranger, and the success rate jumped to seventy-five percent. This shows the value of diversity in such a system.

Within our Scrum teams at Aquila Heywood, we have diversity, both in terms of culture and role, but maybe it would be interesting to add someone from a non-technology background to a task, to see what a differing perspective can do to our odds of success.

But now, most of the London docks are no more. The location of the Excel Centre itself is on the location of the old Royal Victoria docks. An area that used to be busy with the loading and unloading of goods is now a place for the exchange of concepts and ideas.

Is this better?

I don't know.

But, as illustrated by today's talks, there was change, thinking, resolution and improvement.

And that can't be a bad thing.