

*Christmas
2018*

2018 has been a busy year. Much travel, a couple of birthday celebrations (one mine), several theatre trips (including one in Berlin), any number of family visits, and a letter from the Pope.

A good year for us then, and we hope for you too. And we hope for a *Merry Christmas*, and a happy and prosperous New Year for ourselves, and for all our readers.

A Big Birthday in Every Sense

On October 22nd this year I completed 75 years on this planet, and that accomplishment seemed worthy of a decent celebration.

Five years ago around my 70th birthday when Liz died, I did wonder if I would get here, but clearly I have - although with a new family now. And while I have far from forgotten my old one, it did seem an excellent occasion for Vicky, Naresh, the twins, and what I suppose will shortly variously be their step brothers sisters, nephews, nieces and cousins, to meet each other.

Earlier in the year we organised a massive search of many resources to find a suitable place for a gathering of some 23 people. Some places were nearer to London and near to many of Henrietta's family and Vicky, others were lovely but too far away. In the end we settled on Woodbridge, just north of Ipswich in Suffolk. A bit of a drive for some but such a wonderful location that everyone agreed it was the best place.

Henrietta had never seen any of Suffolk or Norfolk, so we decided to add a few extra days on the front for a bit of touring.



We started with the Boston Stump, then drove to Cromer for some crab - which turned out to be not quite as good as we had been hoping - and finally we drove back along the gorgeous North Norfolk coast with those spectacular beaches.

The second day saw us travelling down through Norfolk where I hoped to convince Henrietta of the beauty of the Norfolk Broads. I even persuaded the manager of the boatyard which rents my favourite boat to open it up so she could see inside. I think she was impressed but I'll find out when the time comes for a Broads holiday. We finished the day in Aldeburgh, and the next day travelled over to the birthday venue.

At 6 o'clock the Tesco van rolled in with a £300 plus order which Vicky and Henrietta's daughter Jo had organised (and which we hoped would provide food and drink for the 21 people there over the 2 days). In the event their combined talents provided us with a great breakfast on the Saturday morning and excellent food over the rest of the break.

For the Saturday night I had organised caterers - against some fairly strong opposition I

might add - from Henrietta ("that's a lot of money!") and Jo ("I could do a heck of a roast dinner for a lot less than that!"). The caterers did, however, provide an excellent meal, and we played a game I can recommend for such company called the Peg game.

Each person starts with 5 clothes pegs which they attach to some portion of their clothing. A number of words are banned from the conversation, and when someone uses one of these words the first person to point this out get a clothes peg from the offender.

As the words we picked were birthday, chicken, Terry, cake, and wine, you can imagine many clothes pegs changed hands, and much laughter was caused. The eventual winner was young Alice with a total of around 100 clothes pegs attached to various parts of her clothing.

The weather over the five days was just perfect - you may remember the weekend of the 20th of October - and advantage was taken of this and the tennis courts provided. It was a great weekend, a great birthday, and I felt well and truly celebrated.

A Long Awaited Letter Arrives

You may remember that this time last year Henrietta and my wedding plans were on hold because of difficulties with my previous divorce.

As a result, during the course of the year, I was sworn to secrecy, interviewed - twice - at length, and after much deliberation, the local diocese sent a letter of application off to the Pope.

We were only told that "these things take some time" so we weren't holding our collective breaths.

Then, just before we went off to France in September the letter finally arrived and the man from the Vatican - he say YES!

We are free to marry in Henrietta's local church.

It took some time and effort but our wedding plans are back on track. (See page 2)

Wedding Plans

It's not true to say that Henrietta doesn't make plans, she does - just not until the week before the event. As you can imagine, this doesn't work too well for me, and, fortunately, it doesn't work too well for Jo, her daughter (who is a corporate event planner by profession).

So, in early November Jo asked her mum what she had done about planning the wedding - not the venue and stuff, but the important bits like wedding dresses and flowers. Henrietta said that it was too soon, the wedding wasn't until "next year". That didn't work and Jo made a date for us to go round for dinner and do some proper planning.

I went along with my laptop on the basis that you simply CANNOT plan a wedding without at least one spreadsheet, and it turned out that Jo, and Lucy

(Jo's shortly-to-be 18 daughter and chief bridesmaid) had theirs out too. Henrietta was the only laptop free zone.

We discussed - briefly - my two brilliant ideas of a huge white meringue dress for Henrietta, and a lovely red routemaster bus for transport. I say briefly, in fact they were discussed for the length of time it took everyone to look at me as if I was barmy. Sad. It would have been nice.....

Anyway, Lucy had loads of ideas and websites for bridesmaids dresses, younger daughter Alice had been auditioning for the wedding cake gig for some time and had come up with a couple of ideas, and Jo got down to the nitty gritty of flowers, invitations and guest lists.

It was a productive evening despite my lack of input and it appears that it is quite possible to plan a wedding with no spreadsheet at all. Who knew?

We will be getting married on Thursday May 30th in Ashby.

A Honeymoon Postponed

When it became apparent, at the end of last year, that our wedding plans would have to be at best postponed, at worst cancelled, we had a problem. We had paid deposits on the venue, and the honeymoon. The venue was fine, they could either refund the deposit or hold it against a later booking, and we chose the latter.

The honeymoon was a different matter. We had booked a river cruise on the Rhine - Henrietta's first ever cruise - but neither of us wanted to do it as it was supposed to be the honeymoon and now it wouldn't be. The cruise company wouldn't refund the deposit and nor would they postpone until this year. So we postponed it until the last possible moment - the October half term week (in the hope that we might hear from Rome in time for an autumn wedding), and went as far south as we could to keep

it warm - a cruise up the Douro in Portugal.

As it turned out, it still wasn't the honeymoon but we went anyway.

The cruise was lovely, (although the weather was what you might expect in late October) and we met some lovely people. We learnt more about the making of Port - indeed just about everything to do with Port - than we ever wanted to know, and we saw some amazing buildings - old ones in Salamanca and new dams and locks on the Douro.

The cabin, the food, the crew, indeed, the entire ship were all amazing. Absolutely everything about the cruise was beautifully organised, and therein lies the problem. It was just too organised for us, so I don't think we'll do another river cruise.

Piano Needs Good Home

Would anyone like a nice piano? This is Liz's piano, and I am afraid it is time for it to go. She left it to her god-daughter in her will, but, alas, the god-daughter now lives in Ibiza and the shipping cost is literally prohibitive—around £800! So, she would like me to sell it for her and will put the cash to something that will always be a memory of Liz.

It is a Knight K10 (school edition). Knight is probably the

best of the British pianos and although the school edition is generally worth less than the regular piano, it was made in 1964 (serial 37936) and we bought it in the early 80s so it hasn't had a very hard life.

It will need tuning after being moved, but other than that it is in nice condition and it comes complete with a duet stool. So if you can give it a good home, or you know of anyone who can, I would love to hear from you.



Lambing 2018

Andy decided to lamb at the farm this year, so in late April and early May our sheds were full of young lambs, noise, and happily, lots of grandchildren. Vicki came up with my two granddaughters, two of Henrietta's children added six more grandchildren and they all loved feeding the baby lambs. I had asked Andy especially to make sure there was at least one

lamb in the shed who needed feeding, and Andy and his wife, also Jo, were really good with all the children.

There is so much children can learn, quite innocently, about the whole birth process from watching lambing (indeed, I learnt more than I wanted to over the years) - it's a world away from urban living.

The biggest sticking point seemed to be the poo - some of them just couldn't get used to the idea that little lambs didn't have little lamb toilets.



Iss Snow Fun

Mike, Sally and I went skiing again in January. We had a week in Park City just outside Salt Lake City, and then, having dropped Sally back at the airport, Mike and I headed north on the 400 mile drive to Big Sky in Montana. We have done this drive a number of times and while it's a long day, we switch driver every hour or so and stop regularly for coffee (and a lool).

This time, though, as we got towards Yellowstone, the weather started to deteriorate and the photo with the truck was

taken on the last 50 mile section up highway 191. It was pretty bad, and, as you can see in the second photo, at one point the visibility was so poor, and the road so undefined that Mike ran off the road.

It was apparent quite quickly that we weren't going to get ourselves unstuck, but night was falling, it was VERY cold, and we were literally miles from anywhere. Fortunately Montana is a friendly state and everybody - everybody - who passed stopped to see if they could help. One guy tried to pull us out with his pickup and failed, but eventually (long story short) one man, with a VAST pickup, who was quite determined, finally pulled us out. Boy were we grateful.



We also visited the Great Salt Lake



Mike and I walked into the Roadhouse Honky Tonk just outside Big Sky and it was full of hardy Montanans who had arrived in the huge pickup trucks parked in the car park.

We were the only two men alone in the place and then we sealed it by ordering a bottle of wine.

People at the three tables near us were watching fascinated. Two old guys drinking a bottle of wine. Had to be gay.



No Brits!

Seen outside a French Restaurant.

Translation:- The way we cook our Limouzin beef:-

Blue, rare: Recommended
Medium: Acceptable
Well done: Refused (not negotiable)

A Caravan Trip to France

In September, Henrietta and I took the caravan to France. We were both caravanners in our previous lives, and we have been away before, so we thought we would try France. Henrietta and family tended to stay in Brittany, while Liz and I preferred the Charente area so I looked out four camp sites, two in Brittany (or at least on the coast) and two further inland.

We had a lovely trip over on Brittany ferries. The boats are French so, of course, as well as the self service restaurant, they have a proper French restaurant. Unfortunately, having a caravan, we were among the last to board, and so found ourselves on the waiting list for a table.

But we chatted to another couple in a similar situation, and eventually went in and had a great meal. A lovely way to start the holiday.

The first camp site was right on the Atlantic coast, and, happily, turned out to be a very popular area for shellfish. There was commercial harvesting of mussels every tide (with tractors and trailers - a serious business) but fellow campers would just go out and collect their dinner - cockles, mussels and even oysters. Something new.

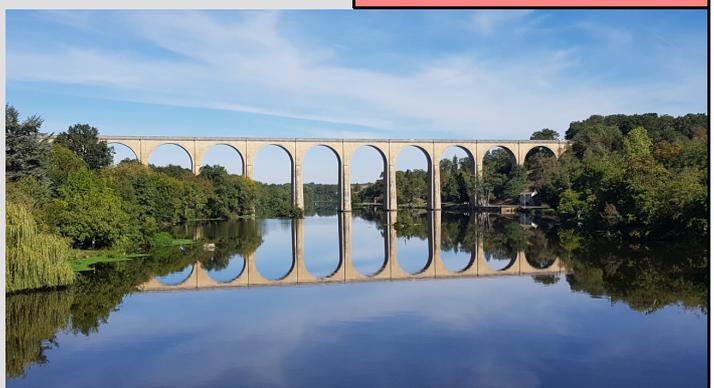
Our second site, on the Ile de Re was less successful - the whole place was just too busy so we will skip that next time.

The third site was one of my favourites - nearly 20 acres of woodland and you could park where you like. But - it is very isolated and didn't appeal to Henrietta much.

The last site was a huge success

for both of us. Beside the River Vienne and very peaceful. Restaurants in the town a short walk over the bridge, and lovely surroundings. The picture of the bridge is taken a few miles upstream at L'Isle Jourdain - and is identical to the same picture I took when I was there about 20 years ago.

Utter Peace.



Snippets from the Times

.....reminds me of a tale about Bertrand Russell. He was awaiting a local train when an express bound for his destination stopped there at signals, so he began to climb aboard. The station master shouted that he couldn't get on because the train didn't stop there. Russell retorted that he was therefore not getting on - even as he did just that.

..... mention of her colleagues' obsession with designer labels in the 1980s reminded me of when I was living in the United States, where this strange obsession began. I was approached by a perfect stranger who complimented me on the sweater I was wearing. "Whose is it?" she asked. "Mine," I replied.

With her son and heir reaching his 70th birthday today, the Queen shows no sign of abdicating. Nor is she likely to. Penny Junor, a royal biographer, told Iain Dale's Book Club podcast that when news was brought to HM in 1980 that Queen Juliana of the Netherlands was standing down at the tender age of 71, our Queen paused and then simply responded: "Typical Dutch."

And amid all the screeching, howling accusation that constitutes discussion these days:- David Aaronovitch. The Times 12/4/18

"People who cannot see beyond their own goodness rarely manage genuine understanding of others"

Misunderstanding of the Year

Overheard on the bus - its not the temperature, it's the humility.

Website of the Year

Conjunctivitus.com - a site for sore eyes.

Put Down of the Year

Charlotte Whitton (1896-1975) - first woman mayor of Ottawa.

"Whatever women do, they must do twice as well as men to be thought half as good.

Luckily, this is not difficult."

Misreading of the Year.

As we wizzed along the road home from the ski slopes in America, I glimpsed the Temple Hair Salon. Odd looking building I thought - and a subsequent proper look confirmed the "Temple Har Shalom". Easy done.

Wot? No Health & Safety?



Poetic Therapy.

The faint sound of bagpipes and the whiff of boiled neeps that hung over parliament recently reminded me of the story about the health secretary who was being shown round a hospital. In one room he saw three poor souls gibbering apparent nonsense.

"The best laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley," one said. "O, wad some power the giftie gie us to see oursels as ithers see us," said a second. "Wee, sleekit, cowrin, tim'rous beastie," added the third. The health secretary asked what affliction they had, to which the consultant replied: "Oh, this is our Burns Unit."

Boom! Boom!

Thought for the Year

Just because you go to church doesn't make you a Christian in the same way that standing in a garage doesn't make me a car.

That'll Work

1.

For reasons that don't matter here, we had to clean up a flat which had been empty for a week or two. Henrietta noted that the electricity had probably been off for some time, and the rechargeable vacuum cleaner at the flat would have run down.

So she took her mains one.

That'll Work

2.

We had been to visit Henrietta's daughter, Kathryn, for lunch, and as we left her house Kathryn asked her mum if she could put one or two bits in her handbag as she hadn't brought one.

We had a pleasant lunch and on the way back, they popped into a supermarket to buy a few bits which were also stashed in Henrietta's handbag.

We had a goodbye cup of tea and set off for home, only to discover, as Henrietta went to her bag for a tissue, that Kathryn had not asked for her shopping back and it was still in the handbag.

Never mind we said, give her a ring, Henrietta called but got the answering machine and I didn't notice because the car had started to make a strange noise which worried me a bit. Henrietta tried again and still got the answering machine.

In the end I tried on the car phone with same result - answering machine - and all this time the funny noise from the car.

Eventually it dawned on us both - of course you've got it - the funny noise was Kathryn's phone ringing in Henrietta's handbag. We had actually tried to call Kathryn to tell her we had her phone. Duh!

Isn't old age a terrible thing?