

Letter From Lisvane

Christmas 2019

We should start with the sad news.

Bran lost both her parents this year; Dad in late May and Mam in early November - both were 95 and had been married for 72 years. Dad was taken suddenly ill in the morning, and by the time Bran got up to Aberystwyth he had been taken into hospital where he passed away in the late evening. One or other of Bran and her sister, Carys, stayed in Aber with Mam whilst care arrangements could be sorted out, and in early June Mam moved down to Cardiff to Nazareth House, a Catholic charity that welcomes all faiths.

Mam had begun to settle in to Nazareth House, with the odd lunch trip out to a pub in Llandaff, when she too passed away, quietly and calmly on a sunny November morning.

Mam and Dad are buried together on a hillside overlooking Aberystwyth; may they rest in peace together.

We spent our usual few days in the Lake District in late February and this year the weather was surprisingly clement. It wasn't quite t-shirt and shorts warm, but was warm enough to hire electric bikes for a jaunt up and down the shores of Bassenthwaite Lake. Bran had been eager to try electric bikes for a while, and this presented her the perfect opportunity. David was less impressed, being used to two wheeled transport where the motor does all the work... however, it wasn't as physically stressing as he'd dreaded. These bikes do make light work of the hills though they're intrinsically heavier than a normal road bike. We didn't have the time to test out the range, but it was a fun morning in the sun, bimbbling on the lakeside. We did manage to avoid the film crew in the bike hire shop, asking the owners "how they were coping with the unseasonal weather".

Not long after handing the bikes back we took the car up Honnister Pass, where there's a slate mine more or less at the top. For the first time in living memory, it wasn't snowing, freezing, foggy or windy and we got a decent view in the sunshine back to Derwentwater and on to Buttermere.

The only major work on the house this year was to get the living room redecorated, though to look at it, all you think we'd done was to move some pictures around. It was however a task of fairly major proportions, given the amount of stuff lurking in wall units, sideboards and open shelves, and that was after the culling of things never used since we moved in 25 years ago! Gwen may have assisted Rhodri in her own inimitable way but she didn't get in the way too much. Well, not enough that she got splattered with paint.



We took our usual trip to France in mid-August, heading first of all to St-Robert for a week with our good friends, the Hunts. We visited old haunts, Terasson, Objat and Brive, and discovered new places, such as Le Bugue, location of a superb wine cave that even has been fictionalised in Martin Walker's Bruno books. (A good read, by the way.) And yes we did buy some wine there. And no, we did not buy any of the 1990 Petrus Pomerol marked at €4,250 a bottle...

After St-Robert and its new Old School restaurant (worth a visit) (and a repeat visit) we headed south to Puycelsi, the village on top of a rocky outcrop. The weather wasn't that great when we arrived, and the following day's excursion to Gaillac was positively rainy, but in the afternoon it cleared up considerably and we had glorious walks round the village, and an excellent dinner with a beautiful sunset.

Puycelsi was also a waystation on a bicycle event whilst we were there, so all through dinner cyclists were panting their way up the hill (it's quite a way up) to get their cards marked, photos taken etc, before coasting all the way back down again for their overnight accommodation.

The day we were due to leave Puycelsi we woke up to glorious sunshine, and a blanket of fog in the valley below – it was quite a sight. From Puycelsi we headed north to Orléans – we'd never been there, it's on the Loire, hotel in easy walking distance of the centre. And the weather picked up more-or-less as soon as we arrived into the 'not quite uncomfortably hot but on the cusp' level.



We were fascinated by the trams, so much so that one afternoon that's what we did – ride the trams from east to west and from north to south. The cathedral is magnificent and was a blessed cool oasis in the midday sun. We enjoyed the walks by the river, the breakfasts in a central square just off the tram lines, the dinners in different parts of the city, old and new, and the shops.

Now then – remember the Lakes and the electric bikes? In Orléans there were stands all over the place offering bikes for hire, some of which were deemed to be electric. Bran thought it an excellent idea to see a bit more of the city and so we hired a couple of electric bikes. Apart from actually trying to hire the bikes without an account with the city (perfectly possible, though the €400 deposit for each bike on the credit card was a little disconcerting) we got two bikes – shaft drive out of interest – and headed off to buy some lunch to eat on our trip. Bran was convinced she was getting electric assist as we careered towards the cathedral avoiding the tram lines. And the trams. Having established that the codes given for the locks on the bikes were fictitious, we headed (downhill) to the river to pick a spot to eat lunch. After a cool break in the shadow of a road bridge, we headed back uphill into the city – David now being very suspicious that his bike had no electric assist, and Bran wasn't convinced that the assist was as good as ones in Keswick.

We then decided to have a careful look at the bikes. In the front basket was a little notice that translated out to 'Remember to take your battery with you when you leave the bike or when you return it' next to what looked suspiciously like a holder for a box with two electrical contacts at the bottom. The bikes were indeed electric, but had no batteries! We found out later that you hired the batteries separately from the city, and were only for residents... Still, we got some exercise...

After Orléans we headed all the way up to Caen for a few nights before heading home. We did the tram thing again – cheap

entertainment! The last day we loaded up the car with food, wine and other stuff, and then headed towards Deauville for a look around (but decided not to) and went to Pegasus Bridge instead and the museum there. While we were there, the bridge was raised to let a ship through so we had that as an added bonus to a lovely last day.



Come September David headed back up to Norfolk. There were some new things to do this year – to meet up with his Godmother's other Godchild (after 61 years they'd never actually met before July this year) – and to go to the Norwich Aircraft Museum which he'd spotted in passing the previous year. That was an adventure in itself being at the very end of a very windy and meandering residential road, and blessed with a 20 minute cloudburst while he was there. There's a Vulcan there, and a Nimrod, a few Hunters, a Jaguar, a few civilian planes, and a lot of bits of salvaged planes. He spent the cloudburst sheltering under the Vulcan.

A few changes in Walcott too. The hotel is now under new management and will be called 'Seals' from now on, but the breakfasts are still as good. More importantly the stretch of coast from Walcott north to the gas terminal has been brought up by 7 metres in places in a bid to stop coastal erosion. There's been a huge amount of sand dumped on the beach, and now it's at the same level it was in the early 60s.

In November we headed to Solihill to attend our neice's wedding – a still calm day in an impressive house, with even more impressive catering! We wish Helen and Joe all the best for the future.

And that was our year...

Best Wishes to you all for Christmas and for 2020

Our address remains unchanged at
7 Church Close, Lisvane, Cardiff (Wales) CF14 0SL

The phone number is still 0(+44)29 2075 5253

Our email addresses remain branwen@dpabbott.com and david@dpabbott.com
and David's website is still <http://www.dpabbott.com>

David can be twittered on dpabbott2012

Gwen's interest in computers has expanded to being able to rename disk drives on David's desktop.
Big paws, small keys, blind luck.