

Letter From Lisvane

Christmas 2020

Well. What can we say?

A year of substantial changes in lifestyles and working patterns – yes! – Branwen has retired! This had been brewing for a while now, and come early 2020 Bran took the decision, and started to move the necessary pieces into place. In July, she attended her last teachers only meeting in school – a celebration for those leaving – and at the end of August ceased to be an employee of Cardiff City Council. And what has she done since, we hear you ask? There's been some serious needlework, walking, reading, gardening, and painting – the 'Bob Ross' style, complete with 'Magic White' and 'Odorless (sic) Paint Thinner'. We were both taken by BBC4's decision to show 'The Joy of Painting' nightly since the pandemic started, and have watched almost every episode. The least said about the results, the better...



Skype and FaceTime have been our communication tools of choice. Zoom's been used for work and other uses, and David prefers Teams as it plays nicely with the iPad. One of his colleagues he can only WhatsApp or Teams with as the phone signal in her flat is so bad she has to stand in one corner with the phone as close to the wall as she can get it. Phones, iPads, computers have all become necessary communication tools, and experience required in the software! One of David's colleagues was getting annoyed that she couldn't participate in group meetings with her team until it was pointed out that the computer she'd taken home didn't have a camera. Or speakers. Or a microphone.

We did get away to the Lake District as usual before global chaos struck. It seems a long time ago now, and almost

feels like it belongs to a different world, but we stayed at the Borrowdale Hotel as usual for a pleasant, if chilly, few days. There had been substantial rain the week before we arrived, and so Derwentwater had expanded its area by a good 30%. We went for familiar places, familiar walks, familiar shops. David's walking boots, purchased 15 years ago to replace ones that fell apart (literally), fell apart. This necessitated an in-depth visit to George Fisher in Keswick, resulting in a good, sturdy but lightweight, pair of walking boots which are now being used weekly (sometimes twice a week) instead of annually, discovering walks all within easy distance of the house. Daily exercise allowed...



There is something to be said for working from home, which we both did from the end of March, and David still does. Not having to bundle up like a hiviz Michelin Man in the dark to brave the Cardiff traffic on a scooter is a highlight – though the riding of the scooter, and motorbike, became pleasant diversions in the summer months when travel regulations allowed. Bran was back in school on a rota basis depending on need; Glantaf was the Welsh language hub school for kids whose parents were key workers or where there was a safeguarding risk. David's had to go back into the office only twice so far; some of his colleagues have been in once a week to deal with laptops, cameras, printers and the such. All in all the Church in Wales has functioned reasonably well with most of its staff working from home, and only a minimal presence in the office to deal with the post. We even managed to hold a Governing Body meeting entirely over Zoom – though the IT staff were very relieved when the second attempt worked without major, meeting stopping, issues.

Bran's computer skills increased exponentially – needs must – as her pupils moved to working online. She was delighted with their response and their overall attitude was exemplary. School restarted for the last three weeks of the Summer Term and the atmosphere was very happy – they'd even missed their teachers!

Needless to say we didn't get away to France this year, even though plans had been made, and passage booked. Apart from missing seeing our friends, we think the main casualty was our wine cellar, as there are certain favourites we like to stock up on, and of course new ones to try out. Instead, David took the annual leave previously booked anyway and we had a few days in Aberystwyth, checking up on the house and having day trips while we were still allowed.

There have been a few upgrades in the house too. We had the bathroom redecorated, including the removal of the polystyrene tiles on the ceiling... a fire risk waiting to happen. The washing machine decided to make a sound akin to rocks being dropped from a great height on entering a spin cycle, and the tumble dryer just got rumblier and rumblier and both had to be replaced. We also had a tree moved, and it hasn't died yet, so that's good.



David's health has been under scrutiny since February, and he's been poked, prodded, bled, x-rayed, and ultrasounded to the current conclusion that a vitamin deficiency is causing the problem, and so has just finished a 2 week, 6 shot, 'loading dose' of vitamin B12. 'Pincushion' is a good word to use here. Booster shots every 12 weeks for the next year and then reassess.

We're pleased to report that none of our friends and relatives have suffered badly from Covid, and really hope that this is true for you too.

Church has also gone online (no singing allowed until recently) and now outside with services in the graveyard. The first thing they did was to create an emergency number for anyone in need, and people in the area were glad of that at the

start. Bran has been keeping in contact with neighbours living on their own, and visiting when allowed.



Gwen has relished us being home more-or-less all the time. There have been only a few embarrassing 'entries' into video conferences, either by leaping up onto the back of David's chair (impressive leap) or walking over the keyboard presenting her best aspect to the camera. While her present-presentation rate seems to have diminished, her ability to read the clock and demand food at 6:30am, noon, and 5pm more or less on the dot is astonishing. It's almost embarrassing to say she gets three meals a day, yet at the moment she shows no signs of becoming a furry balloon, despite the mid-morning nap, the pre-lunch nap, the after-lunch nap, the after-lunch nap on David as he tries to work, the pre-supper nap on David as he tries to do the Times crossword, and the after-supper nap before shooting out of the cat-flap for a night out. That's not forgetting the mid-evening nap on Branwen as she tries to knit.

So what's on for next year? Some travel outside Wales would be nice. We've had to miss out on France this year, David had to forgo a trip to Norfolk, and it's unlikely we'll be able to meet up with close relatives living at a distance before the New Year. When David's office does open up again, it's unlikely that he'll be commuting daily, point proven that all his work can be done remotely. Maybe once a week just to remind people what he looks like in three dimensions. The walks every day are proving helpful and at least get us out of the house. Otherwise, life continues – we don't miss the pub (never went much anyway), we've got plenty of books to read and TV series to watch, old skills on the harp and piano to refresh.

Best Wishes to you all for Christmas and for 2021

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>

Gwen's interest in computers has expanded to know when a video conference is in progress, then to make as big an entrance and impact as her small body will allow.