

Letter From Lisvane

Christmas 2023

A nearly normal year! What a novelty...

We made it back to the Lake District in February as we normally try to arrange. A small change this time was that while we had booked the Borrowdale Hotel - due to reopen after a thorough refurbishment a few days before we were due to go - that refurbishment was still being finished up, and so we were relocated to the Lodore Falls Hotel just up the road. It was ok, but so much larger, and so much more in demand for weddings and the suchlike that it felt a little impersonal, almost corporate, and we missed the quieter and more cosy Borrowdale. However, this was remedied when we had an early September break in Scotland, stopping off at the Borrowdale on the way up. To our delight, their trolley based roast of the day (the real USP) had not been disappeared into the corporate streamlining of the chain (they're part of the same group as the Lodore).

The trip from Keswick to Oban was a little longer than expected, given the 45 minute standstill on the A66, the roadworks that are the M8 in Glasgow, and the rather nasty looking collision in Tarbet. We got to our log cabin, just outside Oban at Lagnakeil, by the skin of our teeth given the suggested checkin time, only to get a message "the keys are in the door - hope you have a lovely time."

A mile and a bit down a one-track road, and that three miles outside Oban itself, the log cabin was set up the side of a hill, with a view (if you craned a bit and squinted through the trees) down to Loch Feochan and out to the Atlantic. The silence in the evening there was only broken by birdsong and the occasional sheep; mornings were glorious and we always breakfasted outside, watching the birds. The weather was quite warm most of the time we were there, warm to the point of "really quite hot" a few days. We did have quite a decent thunderstorm one night.

We had a day on Lismore, an island an hour's ferry ride north of Oban. It wasn't the best day weatherwise - probably the worst day we had up there - but it didn't rain too hard, and the sun did make an appearance. There's a great cafe and museum not far from where the ferry road meets the main road (the only road), and the kirk is all that's left of a once larger building referred to as a cathedral. The ferry ride back was interesting as we were delayed docking by a sailboat in the approach to Oban exercising the "sail before steam" principle in an exaggerated tacking fashion. The ferry crews' reaction was "They do this all the time...".

We stopped off at the Lake District again on the way down, for two nights this time, at the Leathes

Head Guest House. Set dinner menus each night on a rotation of three, fish based, so we headed into Keswick the first night for a meal in the Skiddaw Hotel (same chain etc). The next day we did a whistle-stop tour of Keswick and Grasmere ending up at the Armathwaite Hall Hotel for afternoon tea with David's boss. The tea was epic in scale, we chatted non-stop, and there was even an air display off the RAF. We doggie-bagged what we didn't eat there and then, and so didn't need an evening meal.



A great USP of the Leathes Head was the breakfast room, complete with bird feeders just the other side of the window. We saw all kinds of tits, sparrows, robins, chaffinches and a few stately nuthatches.

We were back in Cardiff for less than 24 hours (Gwen greeted us with her usual enthusiasm, having evaded the cat-sitter every single day we were away) before heading back up to Defynnog to meet up with a Canadian friend of David's who was holidaying over here. David hadn't seen Steve Walker for 40 years; they first met when David was the Lab Tutor for Steve's second year practical Chemistry course. We met up with Steve and his wife, Diane, at "The International Welsh Rarebit Centre" where we had a good meal, and just talked and talked and talked. Eventually, we had to be asked to leave as the place wanted to close up...

David also took a few days up in Norfolk again; back at Seals Hotel in Walcott (excellent breakfasts). One part of the trip was to call in and see his godmother, who had recently moved to a retirement home in Thetford. It turns out that that was not a good move for her and her companion, so they've now moved back to Gillingham in Dorset.

The usual places were visited though. Walks on the beaches in Bacton and Walcott; seeing how much

more of the beach at Happisburgh is now there, given the mud/sand composition of the 'cliffs' (in the past few days there's been a storm up there, and the access road to the beach car park is now under threat of being swept away). Dereham (looking for conkers on the Neatherd), Wroxham (boats), Cromer (Jarrod's), Sheringham (trains and ice cream - always too early in the year for damson...) and Sea Palling (impressive sea defences, being strengthened this year). It was mainly the walks on the beaches.

In March, Bran's church - St Denys in Lisvane - took possession of their new build resource building, named Ty Price in honour of the couple who donated the original house. Bran was commissioned to fit out the kitchen, and much visiting of Ikea, Charlies Stores and various charity shops ensued, with a concomitant dinging of the credit card.

The venue has been in use for all youth work and many church socials, but will soon be open for a drop-in café, and for hire once the church committee gets its ducks in a row!

As we're living in the same street, guess who has to check it out when the alarm goes off?

Also, of course Bran leapt at the chance to 'do' the garden - he, he, he...

The church building itself has got an EcoChurch award which Bran steered through. She also volunteers at the Old Library in Lisvane, and at the Rainbow of Hope in Splott, which reaches out to the homeless and disadvantaged.



New discoveries this year included David's discovery of pickling - spurred on by Bran's growing of gherkins, and Bran's sister having a surfeit of cucumbers. Apart from gherkins and cucumbers, cauliflower was tried out, and that was probably the most successful. More experiments will be attempted soon - possibly even pickled onions.

Bran read a book 'Perfumes', a comprehensive review of an awful lot of scents, can occasionally be seen obsessively sniffing samples in Cardiff's premier department store...

We still visit Aberystwyth at semi-regular intervals, mostly to check out the house, but also to take the opportunity to stock up from a good Italian deli (Agnelli's) and a Spanish one (Ultracomida). Bran took the chance one trip to finally get to the top of Cader Idris (in fog, no clear view of the precipitous drop, thankfully)!

Next year will bring forth some changes here. David informed the Church in Wales that he intends to retire as of his 66th birthday in September 2024. As he's been a one-man band there for a good 20 years, this does pose a few succession issues, but (at the moment) we think they're understood and catered for. Time will tell.

We lost a dear friend, and also our next door neighbour this year - Nevil and Bill will always be in our memories.



Best Wishes to you all for Christmas and for 2024

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 are branwena@gmail.com and dpabbott@gmail.com
and David's website is still <http://www.dpabbott.com>**

If allowed into the room, Gwen will leap onto the back of David's chair and participate in any video call by sitting serenely, and occasionally giving a direct, withering, look straight into the camera.