
Strauss Annual Report & Travelogue 2018

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If we had a pound from each person who has remarked that this year has flown by faster than any before, we'd be very well off. But when we think of all that has filled that time, we know we already are ... in a different sense!

Following a quiet Christmas break at home, spending an indulgent amount of time working large jigsaw puzzles, the new year kicked us back into action quickly. Setting up the lighting and running it for 10 performances of this year's panto, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, certainly got Pat going again, but she also took on the role of Treasurer for the theatre. Taking in and paying out money was easy enough, though occasionally walking down to the bank with nearly £2000 of cash in her bag took a bit of getting used to! However, the reporting of attendances and takings to outside bodies, paying royalties and screening fees, working out who gets how much and learning such concepts as 'retained costs' sometimes made the learning curve feel more like a climbing wall! Mike went back to his never-ending record keeping, computer maintenance and board meetings.



February brought the second of our 'big birthdays' (Mike's was last year). Being more in need of an excuse to get away from the hubbub than a big party, we opted for a long weekend walking in Derbyshire's Peak District. Donning boots and rucksacks, we trained up to Buxton, admiring the snow-capped peaks from a distance. On our first day we took the



bus eastwards through several villages (including the plague village of Eyam), the local stone of the buildings shining in the late morning sun, then walked up from the wonderfully eclectic Grindleford Station cafe to Froggatt Ridge and headed south, enjoying glorious views until the sun set. Saturday's weather was unpromising, so we explored the town, with an evening at the opera house for Pat's birthday treat seeing *La Traviata*. On the Sunday, local friends led us on a more ambitious walk up from Errwood reservoir to well above the snow line and on up to Shining Tor ridge. A bit of a challenge for us, but a very memorable experience, confirming that we ain't old yet!



The weeks ahead were full of meetings, planning routes for our French tour, and theatre activities, including lighting an Agatha Christie play, and a county-wide drama festival over a long weekend (10 one-act plays put on by local am dram groups) at which LADS (our own am dram group) won 10 trophies. A month later, our theatre hosted the next round of the national competition, where again we did well. Pat was on lighting duty both times, working 'on-the-hoof' to produce lighting states each director had asked for. Then we got away for the Easter weekend with the Tandem Club to Bodiam, on the Kent/Sussex border. One of the rides took us to Winchelsea, a lovely town full of character, in the churchyard of which Spike Milligan's headstone bears his words "*I told you I was ill*", then along the seafront to the picturesque town of Rye -- making a refreshing change of scenery from land-locked Herefordshire!

By May we were seriously in need of getting more cycling miles in our legs, and the Short Cranks came to our rescue, with nearly a week based in remote cottages in West Yorkshire near Kirkby Stephen. The hilly terrain made for rather challenging cycling, but the stunning scenery made it very worthwhile -- quiet roads and vast expanses of rolling green hills, laced with stone walls and sprinkled with sheep and prancing lambs. Daffodils, long gone from down south, provided an extra bonus. What little home time remained was full of final preparations for our annual French tour and a 10-day exhibition in town of Pat's photos of 'a farming year'.

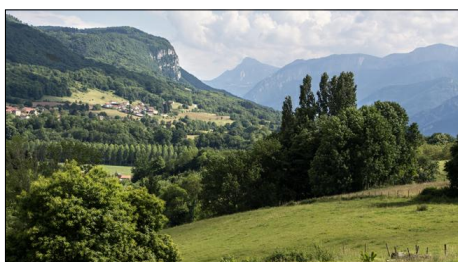




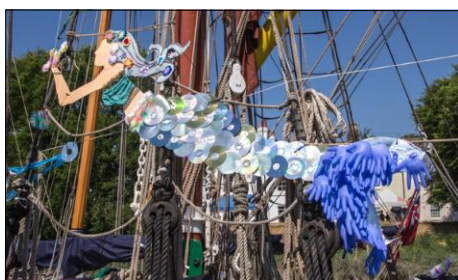
Soon we were off to France, riding north from Valence, keeping west of Grenoble and Geneva, for a month of cycling in the sun ... except that for the first two weeks we didn't have a single day without some rain!! When the sun did show its face, we made the most of our luck, enjoying beautiful scenery and some interesting curiosities, one being an amazing and totally unique artistic structure created over 33 years by a local postman from stones he collected on his rounds. Cheval's Ideal Palace, completed just over 100 years ago, is truly a marvel of imagination and hard graft! Worth a look-up on Google! Many of our rides followed river valleys and



canals, providing many enjoyable miles of riding alongside water, with the soothing tranquility that brings.



As usual, July's highlights included Ledbury's annual Poetry Festival, though we managed to keep our involvement down to a more manageable level this year, and a long weekend in Kent for the 5th reunion of the Kerala tour gang. Our base was near enough the coast to allow for picnic lunches on the beach – another welcome experience with water!



Our ride to Faversham coincided with a sea-faring festival, with several old sailing barges lining the river bank, one of which had captured a very colourful mermaid, her body imaginatively fashioned from CDs! By the end of the month we were back in France for a week at the Semaine Fédérale in the Jura – just a bit further north than we'd been in June, but the weather couldn't have been more different! We baked in temperatures up to 35C

(95F), though still did some short rides (better than sitting in a hot tent!), visiting a couple of old military forts and an extensive American war cemetery, then chilling out in the evenings in the campsite's music-filled marquee.



A week at the CTC birthday rides near Stafford was next on the calendar. Though the weather turned unusually cool for August, we enjoyed trundling around the lanes and along the canals, loosely following the planned rides, and catching up with seldom-seen friends. The scenery was pleasant if not particularly special, but viewing the Weeping Window poppy display at one of the potteries at Stoke-on-Trent certainly was! This nationwide WW1 commemoration project, which had started back in 2014 with nearly 900,000 ceramic poppies surrounding the Tower of London, was drawing to an end, so we felt fortunate in being in the right place at the right time to see the final exhibit. Quite fittingly, thousands of the poppies had been hand-made in one of the potteries in the area.

Our penultimate fling of the summer was to Norfolk for the 20th Flying Gate rally. We were treated to several visual interests: octagonal church towers; a life-sized, fully-dressed effigy of a young lady (sitting upright in a case in a church) who died in the mid-1700s; the Denver Sluice – a huge lock on the Great Ouse river; a particularly wide ford, which one determined chap attempted (successfully!) to cross on his trike; and the remains of a US Air Force airfield at Wendling, the base for many of the heavy bombers used in WW2 to strike strategic locations



on the Continent. All the public normally sees now is a stone memorial to those who served, but a knowledgeable local took us into an old shed where some of the airmen had hand-painted an array of aircraft in flight onto one of the walls.



September brought us gently down to earth, with several things offered locally at the theatre and the Master's House to tempt us away from our computers: LADS' very well done production of the 1950s comedy *The Ladykillers*; Ian McKellen's masterful interpretation of *King Lear*; a talk about how the clothes the Suffragettes' wore became so important to their cause; a solo performance of Agatha Christie describing her life and temporary disappearance; a delightfully funny and slightly risqué production of *As You Like It*; and the Ledbury Brass Band's Proms concert. Woven in between all this merriment was a lot of work on and testing of the new website for the cycling tours company, something that has changed the way people book our tours and veritably replaced the preparation of documents for all other leaders' tours that Pat has done for many years.



Sensibly, we always get someone else to organise the reunion for our French tours, as they know good rides in their patches, and we usually get to ride in an area we're not familiar with. However, one of our regulars living in the Chilterns picked up the baton this year, taking us back to familiar stomping grounds from our London days. Though some of the roads were busier than we remembered, or than we would really want to ride on, we found some lovely lanes by heading north from our base near the Chalfonts, and we didn't really experience that 'been here before' feeling. Twenty years' absence enabled us to see it pretty much afresh, and it was good to see others in the group enjoy some of the outer London sites, such as Hampton Court, Windsor Castle and Eton. We took two of them into John Milton's Cottage one afternoon and were given a fascinating personal guided tour by two very learned guides – something we never gave time to when we lived near there!

The time had come, though, for both of us to knuckle down to financial chores. Pat had to produce the end-of-year accounts for the theatre, a task that almost did her head in, as much of the terminology was new to her, and sums that ought to balance each other didn't, but eventually she survived the auditor's scrutiny. Mike had the mind-bending job of preparing our US tax return. There was also lighting to set up for the next LADS' play, *Blithe Spirit*, and for a WW1 play put on for schools at the Master's House, and programmes to produce for both. Pat's farming photos got another showing at a local cider 'brewery' during the autumn Big Apple weekend and at a most enjoyable harvest supper hosted at the farm where she had worked. Lots of positive comments!



Late October brought a remarkable visit. The house we live in (part of!) was initially owned by the local parish church, but in the mid-1800s it went into the private ownership of the Martin banking family. Waldyve Martin, the son of the John Martin who purchased the estate and converted it into a large Victorian mansion, laying out the extensive landscape grounds we enjoy today, was the last of the family to live in it, selling it in 1920 to the county council for use as a school. Now Waldyve's great-grandson had come over from Vancouver to see where his ancestors had lived! Sitting in the same room with a member of that great family was pretty awesome, and being able to take him and his wife into some of the rooms where his forefathers would have sat was a great privilege. A link with the past greatly solidified!

As November progressed, the pressure seemed to ease. 'Things to do' were crossed off our lists faster than new tasks were added, allowing us a bit of time for non-essentials (and more good nights' sleeps!). No doubt this won't last long, but for now we're looking forward to enjoying the remaining concerts and seasonal gatherings at a relaxed pace ... before we start on next year!

As usual, dozens of other things added to our year, but these were the highlights. We hope this letter finds you and yours in good health and in a happy position in life. Thanks for all your cards and annual letters – they are our Christmas decorations!

Pat & Mike

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