
Strauss Annual Report & Travelogue 2020

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On the whole, as many of you would no doubt agree, 2020 is not a year we would choose to repeat. It started off well enough, with a new twist in the theme for the Ledbury's annual Panto, the traditional fairy tale being replaced with something much more modern. After a first half, in which some silver-suited sci-fi



baddies (excitingly lit in purples and blues!) did their best to torment the local village children, a magic rocket transported them to a Star Trek-style spaceship for a scary encounter with an evil force. As expected, it all came good in the end, but along the way there were some memorable scenes that had the audiences rolling in the aisles.

For much of February Pat was glued to her computer, firstly compiling a final video from the best bits of Panto footage that



Mike had captured during the run. From the lighting box in the theatre she sees the production countless times during

its run, but it never loses its attraction several viewings later. In January she had been approached by some tree-planting advocates in nearby Dymock who wanted to promote their work through a new map, based on one created by the same artist whose work she adapted the previous year for the Dymock church wall, so she was kept quite busy creating that well into March. Meanwhile Mike spent hours pulling together information he needed for our tax returns. Our winter was mild, with no snow, but looking at countless images of France bathed in sunshine during the planning of our annual camping tour were still a welcome antidote to the grey skies outside our windows.

By mid-March, as we all know, the world had turned upside down. Everyone was affected by the Covid-19 lockdown that was declared, and gradually all our future cycling and travel plans were cancelled. It took some time to accept that we weren't going anywhere this year, though in vain hope Pat continued to finalise the route instructions for our French tour. Mike took on the challenge of getting food into the house without setting foot into a supermarket, and Pat got to work on the list of 'projects to work on should we ever find time to undertake them'. Boxes and boxes of photos got sifted through -- half of them



dumped and others refiled more sensibly or even put into albums. Videos of photos shown at tour reunions from the past 10 years or so were created, with captions and music, and uploaded onto our YouTube channel (<https://tinyurl.com/Strauss-YouTube>). Some new shelving units were installed to make sense of collections of this and that to give us half a chance of actually finding things! Our offices and various cupboards and shelves were cleared of numerous bits and pieces of old computer equipment and such and sent off to the local recycling centre. Tragically, though, the virus claimed a very

close friend (half of the couple we had moved to Ledbury to grow old with) in late March, bringing the reality of the pandemic rather too close to home, and sadly we lost three other cycling friends around the same time, though from different illnesses.



delightful and at times comical *La Fille du Régiment* by Donizetti; from Mozart's colourful offerings to more cutting and sometimes hard-hitting operas by John Adams and Phillip Glass. Plus a whole lot more in between! We had never previously been enthusiastic opera fans, but we got hooked quite quickly.

Very rewardingly, Pat finally had an opportunity to delve seriously into her family background by signing up to Ancestry.com. Being descended from a goodly portion of the early 17th-century settlers of Nantucket Island, off Massachusetts, and nearby areas of the eastern US, she discovered extensive records of births, marriages and deaths, but also became more aware of the extent to which the families intermarried, as there weren't all that many to choose from! Several branches of her family tree had grafted onto other branches as mortality rates necessitated second and even third marriages; widows and widowers with children seldom seemed to remain on their own for long. Her

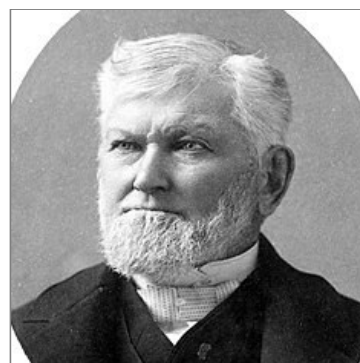


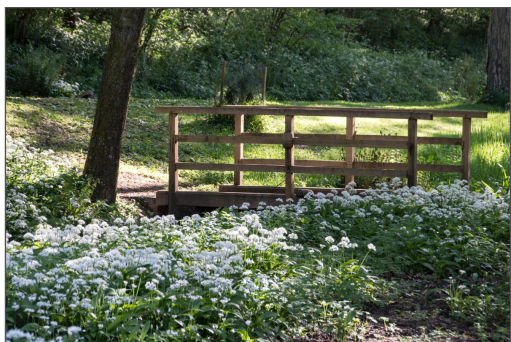
research also led to many stories of these people's lives, broadening her understanding of the social history of the time.

One incredible discovery in her tree was Wiford Woodruff, one of the presidents of the Church of Latter Day Saints, who worked with Brigham Young in converting Herefordshire people to Mormonism in the 1840s ... and who reportedly preached under Ledbury's Market House!! How close to one's past can one get???

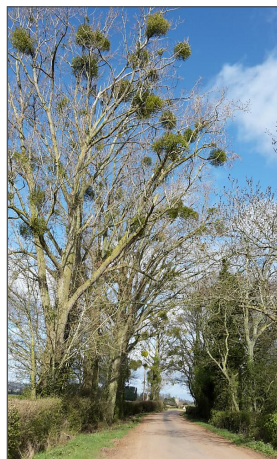
More modern-day connections also popped up. When a message came through asking where she learned that someone was her great-great-grandmother, a lengthy correspondence developed with a hitherto unknown distant relation in Tennessee, providing lots of names and other information on his side of the family. As it happens, Pat had a diary of the son-in-law of the woman in question, written in 1865-66, just after his discharge from the Civil War, along with some portraits of the time, though firm identities have still not been resolved. A bit later, she was contacted by someone on her father's side of the family, again providing a host of names she not been able to find!

With the entertainment sector worldwide at a standstill, we took advantage of the New York Metropolitan Opera's nightly streaming of encore performances. Over many weeks we watched over 80 operas, most with top class singers, recorded over many years: from a young Pavarotti in a 1977 production of *La Bohème* to a more mature but still going strong Placido Domingo in his 2017 performance in *Nabucco*; from the visually spectacular production of Wagner's *Ring Cycle* to the





The highlight of the spring and summer and early autumn for both of us, though, was the local cycling opportunities lockdown provided. Herefordshire's roads are normally pretty quiet, but this year they were downright empty, and the sky was a deeper blue than usual with no jet trails. A long stretch of good



weather gave nature a wonderful boost, providing prolific displays of daffodils, bluebells, wild garlic and blossoms that cried out to be photographed. Though he wouldn't have had a camera, John Milton must have felt similarly when he wrote...

*In those vernal seasons of the year,
when the air is calm and pleasant,
it were an injury and sullenness against nature
not to go out and see her riches,
and partake in her rejoicing with Heaven and Earth.*



Almost every week we got out on at least one afternoon, devising lots of different routes that, over time (and more than 1100km), covered most of the minor roads in the area. In normal years, because we spend a fair amount of time cycling at group events in other parts of the country and in France, we tend to give our own patch a miss, so it was very enjoyable to reacquaint ourselves with its loveliness. In lieu of one standing weekend we missed, we did a special ride taking in 16 churches we could get to in one day, including Gadfield Elm Chapel, (right) where her Mormon ancestor would have preached. An article on the ride featured in the October issue of our local U3A magazine www.tinyurl.com/16churches (pp8-9). Due to lockdown restrictions we always went out on our own, though we did meet up with another couple one day at a nearby church. As we sheltered from the rain in the church porch, a third couple approached. Amazingly, we all knew each other, but as they were far from their home in Somerset, it was a fluke that we should meet!



Partway through the summer Pat had her touring bike converted to electric-assist (motorised front wheel), which gave her a nice push up hills she claimed had been getting steeper each year. A godsend for the future, as you will learn below... Mike has also purchased a conversion kit that will similarly get put into action come the spring.

By September, with no real respite in sight, the theatre's tech team set about upgrading the stage lighting, providing Pat with something else to spend her time on. The existing setup was put in 20 years ago, and the electrical expectations of the entertainment world have moved on significantly since then. All was going well until one fateful Friday afternoon in late October when the ascent of one more rung on the

12-foot tall ladder she was working near the top of caused it to slip, sending it and her suddenly to the floor, breaking both of her legs – the femurs (thigh bones), the strongest bones in the body!! We'll spare you the gory details, but she was whisked away to the military section of the Queen Elizabeth hospital in Birmingham, where it is said if anyone can put Humpty Dumpty together again, they can. And they did!! Ten days later they had her briefly on her feet, then moved her to Ross-on-Wye community hospital for two further weeks of further recovery and rehabilitation/physio treatment.

In late November she was let out and moved back to Upper Hall, though for the first two weeks into the apartment under ours, which gave her level access



between rooms. By now she is moving reasonably well from room to room on crutches (even standing without them if she doesn't move), and Mike is doing his best as her domestique. At her recent checkup at QEH the doctors were most pleased with her progress, saying that many patients take three months to get where she is after just six weeks ! The cold weather is not encouraging her to venture very far yet, but the light at the end of the tunnel is getting clearer, and knowing she has a button on her bike she can press for power assistance is making it glow

even brighter. Though we will wait for spring before that is put to the test, a training/exercise bike is on the way to help her get those legs moving!

A quiet Holiday season approaches, with no physical Christmas parties are being held, but as a break from our traditional jigsaw marathon we're willing to share a Zoom gathering or What's App session with anyone willing to organise one. It is our most earnest hope that 2021 will be a better year for everyone, with a healthy balance of work and play to keep us all sane. As we go forward, we need to try not to just pick up where we left off but to take the opportunity to make sure we are leading meaningful lives, giving more time to things that matter, especially family and friends, and stopping a bit more often to smell the flowers....!

Pat & Mike

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