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# Strauss Annual Report & Travelogue 2024

## vol 3, no 26

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2024 did a very good job of keeping us upright, sane, on our bikes, well occupied and happily entertained. What more could we ask? We've not gone into detail on the long list of everyday things that keep us off the streets, but hope the highlights below of our comings and goings during the year fill you in sufficiently on how the months were filled.

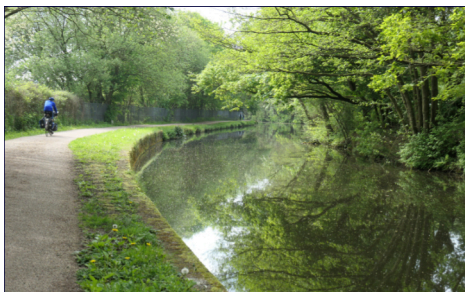
This year's Ledbury panto (Robinson Crusoe and the Pirates) in January did its usual job of keeping away any post-Christmas doldrums, with a fresh script, very colourful sets and costumes and a very talented cast. We might be biased, but we feel our local productions are much more in the traditional spirit of panto than the big commercial ones and offer a lot of good laughs!!



As the month (indeed, the next few months!) progressed, our weather did some serious yo-yos, -- one week we'd get near freezing temperatures and then next was quite mild, bringing out flowers that usually wait until nearer March to come out. During a bit of early spring cleaning around some windows, Pat tried to scratch something off one with a long stick, but the stick just went straight through the wood leaving a larger hole than the stick! Good start to the year...

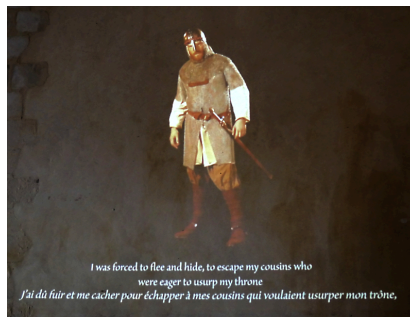
February kept Pat very busy doing her usual job of sifting through 20 hours of raw material from five nights of Mike's videoing our Panto into one final 2-hour version for the cast. She almost learned all the lines of the play by watching it so many times! Then the trombones started to play, wishing her a happy birthday. Getting to the age her mother was when she had a stroke brought an uneasy feeling, but it made her even more grateful that she can do so many things she wants to do. Mike strongly echoes her feelings.

We went to an abbreviated Tandem Club gathering for the Easter weekend in March. With the weather being quite wet, we decided to wait at home in the warm and dry and go a day later than intended. We had a short but very nice ride on the Saturday, with a couple we newly met, and a very enjoyable gathering of the clan during the evenings, but the ground where we were camped was deeply rutted and puddled, and the forecast for the Monday morning was again wet, so we gave up and came home on the Sunday afternoon. That train journey, that should have taken a couple of hours, wound up taking more like six, with long waits at stations...



Except for a long list of meetings, April passed pretty uneventfully, but we made up for that in May, first by going up to the Yorkshire Dales, near Gargrave, for a week with the Short Cranks. Delightful weather, company and scenery, with more sheep on the gloriously green hills than one could possibly count! We rode along sections of the Leeds Liverpool canal on a few days, but we were grateful for the motor-assist we have on our bikes on some of the roads!

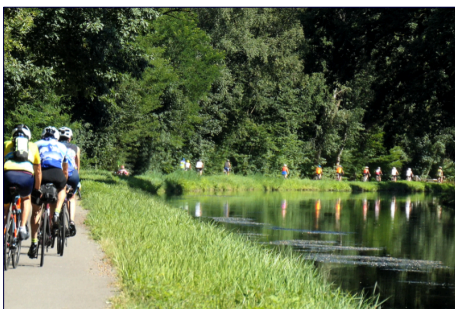
Two weeks later we crossed the channel to Holland and spent our first two days cycling south to where the Tandem Club was having its International Rally. Again the weather didn't do us any favours, but it was good to be able to cycle so much of each day on well-made cycle paths that missed out almost all of the main roads and, as usual, to meet up with lots of people we see only once or twice a year was a big part of the experience.



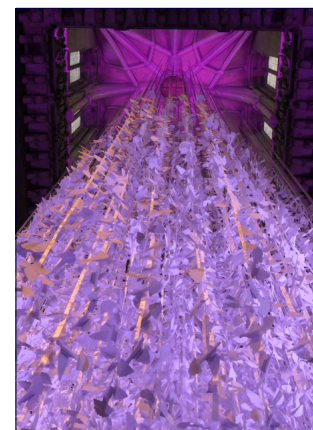
From there we went directly to Normandy to spend the next two weeks with our usual cycle-camping group, starting near the most attractive coastal town of Honfleur, then meandering through varied scenery, our route curving to the east then south and west, ending up near the D-Day beaches. Riding along quiet lanes that offer changing land use, foliage and views is probably the primary focus of these tours, but one local custom caught our eye – the planting of greenery on the ridges of roofs. Towns, though, offered loads of interesting things to look at, in passing or by visiting. Falaise was probably our favourite town, its château offering fascinating animated ‘portraits’ of past kings and the like relating something of their lives, reenacted by modern actors, projected onto the walls. The stories were quite interesting, as was the technical creativity of the presentations, but what captured our imagination was the way in which current-day men tried to portray important figures from centuries ago, having to impose onto them conjectured personalities. In truth, no one can possibly know how far from accurate they might have been! The views from the castle walls were also impressive, as was the Memorial Museum next to the castle that tried to show, through lots of old photos and posters, how the local population tried to deal with the devastation and hardships of WW2.

The rest of June and first half of July were far from quiet. Going away brings a lot of catching up on its tail!! For a change, Pat spent a lot of time during the Poetry Festival working in its hospitality room -- putting out food and beverages to keep the visiting poets going (and cleaning up after them!), but also getting the chance to chat with them and other volunteers, putting the world to rights... Two theatre members also answered her request for help with the accounts (to take on some of the load), so she is now sharing the treasurer’s job with them.

Mid-July brought the onset of four wonderful weeks of cycling adventure, starting with a week in Roanne in France at the Semaine Fédérale, an annual fixture on our calendar. On two days the route out and back went along a canal towpath. Mixing in with faster riders was a bit of a challenge, but we did find a few opportunities to stop and take a photo or two, and cycling along the flat was a welcome contrast to the hilly day we rode to see the Château of the Rock sitting in the middle of a river.

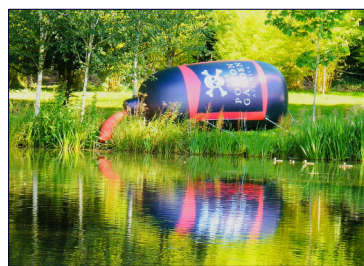


It was blistering hot the day we arrived, making our first task the finding of a little spot where we could pitch our tent so as to get shade for the afternoons and evenings. Tricky on a huge uneven field with hardly any trees! We guessed from the cloud buildup in the afternoon and early evening that it wasn’t going to be a dry night, but at 2am we both got out of our sleeping bags, with minimal clothing on, to try to stabilise a tent pole that supported our porch, which was being driven perilously sideways by the storm. The rain was coming down in stair rods, and the wind was blowing a hoolie, soon accompanied by thunder and virtually continuous sheet lightning. We took the arched pole out of its fittings at either end, making it straight so it couldn’t break, and held it in front of us trying (in vain) to help keep us dry. We sat there in puddles for over an hour as the rain blew in, then the pegs holding the rear of the tent gave way, flipping the tent on top of us and dumping our sleeping bags into a puddle. Times like this one doesn’t know whether to laugh or cry! Fortunately, a kind neighbour who had got out of his tent to investigate his poles, was able to put the rear pegs back in, enabling us to move into that space and lie on our sleeping mats until daybreak, by which time the storm subsided, leaving us in one piece but with sodden sleeping bags and a lot of wet kit!! It was later revealed that a tornado had swept through the campsite...!!



As July came to a close, we returned to the UK, travelling on the Bike Bus as far north as Leeds then cycling up to Northumberland to a Tandem Club rally at Alnwick. We needed only eight cycling days to do the distance, so worked in four 2-night stops into our itinerary: in York, Helmsley, Barnard Castle and Durham. Highlights included: staying with friends in York and seeing the city (again) on foot; spending a day wandering around the town of Helmsley and what is left of its castle; getting an almost aerial view of Rievaulx Abbey; watching the mechanical silver swan in action in the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, and savouring an exhibition there of paintings by LS Lowry and Norman Cornish, depicting the industrial life and mining community of northeast England during the early-mid 20th C; plus seeing a magical arrangement of strings of paper doves, illuminated in pink, streaming down from the transept of Durham cathedral.

A very scenic ride along the coast north from Newcastle got us to Alnwick for our final week with the usual round of cycling and eating and chatting. By this time 'summer' had basically disappeared, leaving us rather on the cold side, needing to borrow a blanket to put over our sleeping bags and cooking/eating all our meals in the group marquee! But we did get out and found a few things to take photos of, including Alnwick Castle's 'poison pond' and Craster Harbour, plus a tender moment shared by two highland cattle!



Ten days later September rolled around bringing the annual Flying Gate weekend, another gathering that brings together fellow cyclists we see only at this event. As it was held in Tenbury Wells, not far from home, we were able to pedal up there, avoiding potential rail disruptions. All went well until our ride home on the Sunday afternoon, when the heavens opened big-time, leaving us delayed and drenched when we arrived, with friends who'd been visiting Ledbury that weekend and were expecting dinner waiting on our doorstep! The first week in October stood out, though, when the U3A photography group Pat helps to run put on an exhibition of their work in a gallery in town. She was kept very busy for the two weeks beforehand, printing and mounting her photos and those for members who couldn't do it themselves. She got lots of positive comments about her work and even sold two of her prints!

Finally, we can gratefully say we are both in pretty good shape, for the shape we're in, though seeing a wonderful local osteopath a couple of times a month helps to keep our bodies that way. And Ledbury has been fortunate to not have had any major problems with the flooding that beset parts of this country. We've heard that some of the roads between here and nearby towns have been puddled and rather muddied with the run-off from farmers' fields, but haven't gone out to check... 😊

Hope your year has been good and that you are looking forward to some good times ahead!

*Pat & Mike*

