

We started the new year at home in Gruchet Saint Siméon, and are likely to end this year there as well. Brexit has occupied the political landscape for UK residents, but the reality is that not much has changed in the last twelve months, except for the pound's devaluation causing prices to start rising. Looking back, we spent quite a lot of time in France in 2017. At the end of February, we went to a lovely little concert in the Chapelle Corneille in Rouen that alternated John Cage and Scarlatti. Back at the end of March, we made an early season visit to Giverny, home to Monet's waterlilies. End of April and early May saw the work on the garden started, with the sheep shed disappearing and the ground levelled ready for grass. At the end of May we managed to get our residency permits for France. This means we have the option to shift our residency from the UK to France if things go badly with Brexit. In July and August, we paid short visits to see how our grass was getting on and had friends over for music making. Jane MacSween enjoyed driving the tractor and is welcome any time to mow the grass! We write this from Gruchet in the middle of December and we have visited nine times this year. I guess we like it.

March took us both to Amsterdam, Shelagh for work and Peter to enjoy. We saw a wonderful jazz concert at the Bimhuis and managed a nice dinner there as well as a rijstafel the night afterwards. Stedelijk modern art museum was very interesting. We met with Wick and Natalie, for whom Shelagh edits AI Practitioner.

Sailing season started in April with a visit to Chichester with the RAFYC. We went to our annual polo match at Ham Polo Club on a pleasant Saturday in May. Peter started work with Dealflo the middle of May. This only lasted six months before he joined a series of people who quit the company within the year. A shame, because it is potentially a great company, but the fit was not good, and the revolving door of people didn't make for a 'strong and stable' environment. Peter did manage to fit in a trip to Montreal and that provided an excuse to see Tracy and Griff in Ottawa. They took him to an Ottawa Redblacks Canadian Football game. Sadly, his presence didn't help them win.

May was a bit of a disaster for Shelagh. She fell while cleaning windows in the flat, and ended up having a major operation to repair her knee. We had only had the private health insurance a week when the accident happened, but they did pay for everything. A lengthy convalescence ensued, which put paid to our sailing season and much else. Shelagh spent most of the summer in a wheelchair, housebound because she couldn't open the doors to the flat or the building. The rest of the summer was spent trekking back and forth to the hospital for appointments and physiotherapy. She's lucky to have found a great physiotherapist, and both the consultant and her agree that she should make a full recovery, albeit with a much titanium as some sculptures.

In August, Shelagh received the shocking news that Wick, who she has worked closely with over the last eighteen months, had brain cancer. She managed to visit him in the hospice in Arnhem in September, before he passed away in October.

Shelagh continues to enjoy playing and has now got people with whom she plays regularly in both the UK and France. She has attended a few courses, one in a wheelchair! A highlight on the travel front was a visit to Cape Town and the Winelands at the end of November. This was partially a reward to Shelagh for having got herself back on her feet after some intensive physiotherapy, partially for Peter who did absolutely everything – shopping, cooking, cleaning and laundry – for three months while Shelagh banged around the apartment in the wheelchair. The walls, the corners in particular, have scars to prove it.

We loved the South African scenery, and put a fair few kilometres on the rental car, visiting the Cape of Good Hope, Simons' Town, Hermanus, Stellenbosch and Franschhoek. Some really good wine tasting (but some pretty average wines as well).

We went to a few performances this year with Mark Powell starting with a staged performance of Fidelio by the London Philharmonic in February. He also accompanied us for the first LSO performance conducted by Sir Simon Rattle in September featuring 20th century works, ending with a reading of Elgar's Enigma Variations so good I barely breathed during the whole performance. Rattle's first concerts bode well for London and we are looking forward to seeing more of the LSO. We enjoyed Pierre Laurent Aimard and Tamara Stefanovic playing Brahms and Messain two piano works at St Johns Smith Square. Aimard was also on the agenda to play the Ligeti Piano Concerto followed by Daphnis and Chloe by the Philharmonic with Juka Peka Salonen conducting. We saw the LPO doing Bartok's Concerto for Two Pianos and Percussion and Mahler's Symphony 6 in May. Mahler 9 was on the menu at the beginning of December. Another great concert and you could have heard a pin drop at the end as the orchestra gradually wound down to the finale.

Early in February we went to a great exhibit at the British Museum on South African art and artefacts, as well as Robert Rauschenberg's exhibition at Tate Modern. April saw us go to America After the Fall, a collection of 1930s paintings, uneven but fascinating, with some clearly influenced by the Russians, post-revolution. We loved Blade Runner 2049 and Call Me by My Name as films this year, and saw both at PictureHouse Central where we have a membership for the second year in a row. We also fitted in a visit to Whitechapel Gallery for an exhibition by Thomas Ruff. And Shelagh spent ages longer than planned with Melanie at the brilliant Jasper Johns retrospective at the Royal Academy.

Theatre this year included Tom Stoppard's Travesties and Terence Ratigan's Love in Idleness directed by Trevor Nunn at the Menier Chocolate Factory, although our theatre organiser Claire decided to abandon us for the wilds of Pensacola with Dan. We miss the organisational skills and the wonderful good humour (which is nearly but not quite the same on Skype). And we are looking forward to seeing the back of another vintage year (for all the wrong reasons) with our friends Julie and Bernard in France.

Here's wishing you all the best for the holidays, and hoping the year ahead brings good news for us all.

Peter and Shelagh