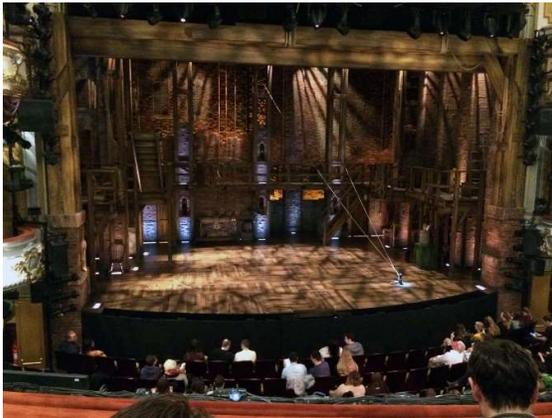




Sunrise at St Vaast

Is it really the end of 2018? Well, good riddance for the most part! While that might not be the best way to start a Christmas Newsletter, the looming shadow of Brexit and all the awful things that might happen are still with us. The worst part is that after 2.5 years we still don't know what the plan is, or how to plan on an individual level to deal with Brexit. We did, however, do some more interesting things in 2018.

Early January found us in our French home in Gruchet Saint Siméon. But we were soon back in London to see **Hamilton**, just a month after it formally opened in the city. It was a fantastic show and



Hamilton View of the Stage

we had great views from the front of the balcony. Also that month went to a **Colin Currie** concert at Kings Place where the percussionist did a bunch of pieces by Steve Reich, some of which Peter played in university with Bob Becker who was part of Steve Reich's group of musicians. They still stand up as pieces.

Back in France for part of February with a side visit to Paris to visit Grégoire, a young French friend who is finishing up his Masters' at the Sorbonne and loving Paris. End of February brought a light dusting of snow to London – laughable to our North American friends, but unusual for us. We saw the **Modigliani** exhibition at Tate Modern and really enjoyed it.

March included a visit to the Donmar Warehouse, our first in a long time. The **York Realist** was a drama about a young farmer who falls in love with a temporary immigrant male worker. Brilliantly performed and a set which really evoked the isolated farm. We saw both parts of **Harry Potter and the Cursed Child**, which was also great, with some fab effects. Won't tell you more in case you get a chance to experience it for yourself. Finally we went to see one of the last performances of **Mary Stuart** at the Duke of York's Theatre. This was a play where the two principals flip a coin each performance to see who does which role. That's a good way to keep things fresh! The Hayward Gallery reopened with a show by **Andreas Gursky**. This turned out to be a great choice to re-open the gallery, which is definitely brighter on the top floor.

April started with a concert of music led by Lawrence Cummings and sung by Ruby Hughes titled **Handel's Last Prima Donna** at St George's Hanover Square – a lovely 18th century church, home to Handel, in the centre of London that Peter had not been to before. We also went to see **Charles 1 – King and Collector** at the Royal Academy. This was an enormous show in both quality and quantity. This was when kings had cash to spend. We also went to a lecture by **Yanos Varoufakis** at the Royal Festival Hall who had some challenging views on how globalisation has failed. Fascinating speaker. Back in Gruchet at the end of the month with lots of grass cutting and garden work on the agenda. Shelagh planted 100 hawthorns to fill out the hedge, much to the entertainment of the resident ponies, and 4 little hazel trees which should in a few years produce hazelnuts.

Early May was the start of our sailing season. We had the boat out of the water for most of the winter and did some overdue jobs, including reseating the steps at the stern. This seems to have solved our water ingress problem from the season before. We saw **RED**, a play about Mark Rothko and a young assistant. Very engaging. Shelagh did a bunch of London Baroque Festival concerts but the highlight for Peter was a Sunday afternoon concert by **Skip Sempé** playing Couperin on the harpsichord. Back in Gruchet for the end of May we did a little touring of the region to enjoy the sun with Grégoire who stayed with us for a weekend in May. We took a trip to Etretat and walked up the cliffs for the best views. We finished off May in London with Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic at **Festival Hall**.



Etretat - not by Monet

June included the National Gallery exhibit of **Monet and Architecture**. This was lovely because it included lots of places we know in France. Middle of June saw us start our sailing holiday with a visit to Lymington and a seminar on liveaboard cruising. No plans for us to do that, but was interesting to learn what others do. We acquired a set of Bluetooth headsets to use on the recommendation of someone there and have found them to be very useful indeed at avoiding shouted conversations from one end of the boat to another while docking the boat. We eventually got to Cherbourg with poor visibility in the channel and our AIS receiver being wobbly. We went into St Vaast La Hougue just round the corner. Lovely little place with an island which was fortified against the dastardly British. Now they welcome them in, as long as they pay the entrance fee!



Seafood at St Vaast

We had thought that the west country and Dartmouth would be nice, but weather was against us. A dawn departure to head back to the UK with little wind meant that we motored most of the way and ended up following the Brittany Ferry into Portsmouth. June finished with a memorable performance of Schoenberg's **Gurrelieder** by the Philharmonia. This requires enormous forces so is not frequently performed. This was followed by a performance by three orchestras of a piece by **Stockhausen** the next day at **Tate Modern**. Thanks to Anne for supplying tickets to this. A fab short concert where you could walk around during the performance.

July found us visiting Gruchet again and another visit to Tate Modern. This time it was for a live performance piece by William Kentridge called **The Head and the Load**, a brilliant piece of multi-media work. Turbine Hall was transformed into a long narrow set with lots of performers, black and white, with text and quotations in English, French, German and African languages. South African influenced, it was about the participation of Africans in the 1914–18 war. Amazing. We also went to see **Spamilton** at the Meniere Theatre, a send up of the musical, which was very funny, especially since we had seen the original.



Back to Gruchet at the end of July and met up with Julie and Bernard for a catchup which included a street performance in Avranches of the Ensemble Nationale de Reggae. Great little band. Also visited the Satie museum



Street Reggae!

in Honfleur which is tiny but fab. Reflects his personality and did a little jazz concert in Villadieu Les Poeles with the gang.

August meant a baroque music course at an agricultural college for Shelagh, so Peter drove her down and back from Gruchet. Also made a run with wine and water after she discovered that the nearest shops were miles away. All of her new-found colleagues appreciated the effort. We packed up the house in Gruchet in preparation for the big job of the year.



Packing the Kitchen

After 18 months of negotiation we started the process of completely renovating our house in Gruchet. As we write, the earth ceiling has been removed, two huge cross beams replaced, the rest sanded back, and the builders are starting to re-lay the supporting joists. All the interior walls and the inadequate styrofoam insulation has gone along with all the bathroom and kitchen fittings. So we are left with four walls, a roof and the central heating boiler. By the time we are done everything else, including windows and doors will have been replaced.

September found us sailing at weekends but we also had a Sunday Petworth House. We were inspired to do so by a television programme showcasing the amazing art collection and the house did not disappoint, even if the Sunday drive was longer than expected. We also went to **Midsummer Nights' Dream** at our pub in Ealing – great fun with a young cast. A dash to France at the end of the month for a conflagration with builders. It also marked the return of Simon Rattle to his second season with the LSO and we managed to squeeze in two of his concerts.



The House in October - Destruction begins



October found Peter starting a new job at BBOX. They are a solar company providing off grid solutions at low cost, with an innovative funding component, for Africa. Peter has been to the Rwanda HQ twice in 2018. We also went to a fine concert at St Johns Smith Square for a concert by **Andrew Zolinsky** playing works by Debussy and Japanese 20th Century composers. Super playing and great music.

November included a concert with the BBC Concert Orchestra of jazz-related compositions including one by a former client of Shelagh's for turntables and orchestra. We also went to the British Library for an exhibition of Anglo-Saxon books leading up to the Domesday Book. Amazing bit of history, even if the displays were too dark for Peter's old eyes. We also went to the Wannamaker Playhouse which is a historic replica of an Elizabethan theatre for the **Trial of Raleigh**. A fun show despite the subject matter and knowing that the trial was fixed.

December included a disappointing concert from the Philharmonia. Esa Pekka Salonen has whipped them into shape, but the guest conductor that night failed miserably. A great shame because the London music scene is going to get tougher in future. A week long trip to Rwanda for Peter and a miserable trip to Gruchet and back for Shelagh to finalise plans for electrics and plumbing.



House in November and December

We're hoping for a quiet Christmas with Colin and Janice, as we had last year and the year before, with a trip to Gruchet just after the New Year to deliver doors and radiators. We hope that you have a safe and happy holiday, and that 2019 brings you good things. We are looking forward to a February trip to Pensacola and catching up with Dan and Claire.

All best wishes for 2019 from Shelagh and Peter