



1 Fog over the Weymouth hills looks like a big wave ready to hit the parked cruise ship

Last year's message started with the uncertainty surrounding Brexit. Today we have less uncertainty but no evidence it is going to be better. And our world, like yours, has been turned upside down by COVID. But as we look back, we have little to complain about compared to many others. Both of us have managed to work from home throughout and continue to do so now. Bboxx is struggling a bit because of COVID but a lot less than most UK businesses. Peter is now looking after a team of about 15 support people as well as a team of product owners and scrum masters. Shelagh continues to edit and proofread for a variety of clients small and large, spread all over the world. She even qualified for some government help for self-employed people this year and has received payments to help compensate for some of the unpredictable side-effects of the pandemic.

January started the year normally. We went to the Brigit Riley exhibition at the Hayward Gallery just before the end of the holidays. We fit in a trip to Bristol to visit a company that makes boat and caravan cushions and just wandered round some of the dock changes, including a tour of Isambard Kingdom Brunel's SS Great Britain. We also concluded the purchase of a new-to-us boat, soon to be



2 Galene on the Hamble river

renamed Galene (Greek goddess of calm seas). We put Timeout up for sale after 30 years and she was sold during the first lockdown. We didn't get the price we wanted but we did sell her and get some cash at a time when we were unsure just how long it would take to sell her if no one could visit. We also managed to get Galene onto her mooring. Peter's first and last business trip of the year was to Rwanda at the end of January. We finished the month as part of the audience for the Last Leg Brexit Edition on the 31st January which was funny even if the subject matter was grim for us, and yet another Brexit false alarm.



3 Shelagh enjoying the pilot house seating

February allowed us to our first nights on board Galene, enjoying the built-in diesel hot air heater. A good thing we did, because one of the first nights aboard coincided with one of the fierce February gales. Although she is only 7 foot longer than Timeout, there are a bunch more systems and lots more space to hide things. We have hot water if we run the engine, we have solar panel to charge the batteries (there are 3!!!) and we have an anchor windlass (now working). Getting used to

everything proved to be an interesting task this year with all the restrictions.

Early in March our plans for a long weekend were foiled by the car throwing a fit on the M27 and so we spent the whole day getting down to Hamble and then back to London without any chance of seeing the boat. We went to a concert at the Barbican of Richard Strauss and Ravel. Facebook says blissful. The middle of March was our last concert in London. We went to a recreation of Beethoven's famous 1804 benefit concert, four hours long with all his chart-topping hits to that date. We all knew it was going to be the last concert for some time. At dinner at Wagamama's we wondered how much of this would be left at the end of the crisis. Little did we know. And what remains of the institutions, restaurants and life as we knew it is still unknown. It was a fab afternoon with Stephen Fry narrating. The next day we went into lockdown.

Everyone has their own lockdown stories and ours isn't very interesting. London is pretty boring with nothing open. We did get in the habit of going for a walk each day. The rules loosened a bit and we managed a day sail in the middle of May. By the end of May we were staying on the boat overnight and no one seemed to care. But no marinas open for business. The excitement of putting a new leather wheel cover on was overwhelming in early June.



4 About to start spraying in the new kitchen

We were finally able to travel to France on the 20th June where our workmen had been continuing work all through their lockdown. After all it was safe enough for them to arrange to come one group at a time. Our job was to paint the walls. We used over 120 litres of top coat and the same of undercoat in the end. And went through three paint sprayers before finding one that worked properly. But there is no way we could have done everything by hand. Laying protective film everywhere was as much work as painting! We had our first dinner out in Dieppe, first meal out in three months! We got a 5G sim card and router to connect to the internet and it works well. Both of us can "tele travail" (or work from home) with no problem. We have both been on Zoom calls and had multiple devices connected. May never have a landline again in France. We ran out of paint so had to come back to the UK!

By the middle of July, we were able to stay legally on

the boat and the marinas were opening so we spent a night at Haslar in Gosport. Early August saw us head for France ahead of a possible lockdown preventing us leaving London. This didn't happen in the end but it was enough to make us up sticks and deal with the house stuff. Last painting was completed and the furniture moved in on the 8th August. The 26th August saw the arrival of a new ride on lawn mower. (gotta mention the important stuff) At this point we were still climbing a ladder to get upstairs. And no kitchen. The whole renovation project took 27 months from starting to get rid of the earth ceiling to finally getting the kitchen fitted. But we are there now and have a home to be proud of.

Early September was the first time we had been into Central London since February. We went to see Tenet. It the best movie of the year, but that doesn't say much. Movie theatres have really struggled with postponements of new films this year. By the middle of September we were able to take a proper if short trip on Galene to the west country. It seems to be our luck to have problems near Weymouth. This time it was the charging for the batteries which gave out. We hadn't bothered to charge overnight because we knew we would be motoring, but our trip across Lyme Bay had to be postponed because the batteries had been steadily not charging for some days. But Peter's birthday was spent happily moored on the River Dart with a glass of wine and a nice sunny day. We had wanted to get further west than Dartmouth but the weather foiled our plans so we had a lovely three days puttering around the town. We attempted the passage back on Saturday but strong winds and waves pushed us back to Brixham after an hour. A bouncy night in the marina, but the



5 Dophins in Lyme Bay

next day we did manage to get across Lyme Bay and into Weymouth again. Our passage back from Weymouth was badly planned from a tide point of view and the range was firing so we had to divert out to sea to avoid that. A long day ended up in Yarmouth on one of their outer buoys for the night. Nearly forgot to mention that there were seals at the entrance to Brixham and we saw several pods of dolphins crossing Lyme Bay. They have been encouraged by the lack of traffic to behave a bit more naturally!

Returning to France at the end of September meant changing plans as the workers in Calais were on strike. So we got the night ferry from Newhaven and arrived at 0400 in Dieppe. And I had work the next day but started a little later after some sleep. The man from Ikea arrived to inspect the kitchen. Some changes needed. He started by saying we had to move the electrical outlets and we said no. So a wider cupboard miraculously became a narrower cupboard that now holds oils and vinegars.

One of the sagas that we started in August was applying for our French health card cards. Shelagh was notified that she needed to make a rendezvous and we duly went. Another form signed. Apparently, they had everything they needed for me. Except that eventually I had to go in and sign the same form again in December. Grrr. We were really hoping that we will get these through before the ultimate nastiness of Brexit, but perhaps all will be well. We shall see.

October's highlight was getting the little wood burning stove connected to the chimney and legal. Although it is more for fun than warmth, if the electricity goes out it will provide a good source of heat! November's highlight was getting the kitchen 99% done. We still need a cover for the

dishwasher but everything works and we have filled most of the cupboards. We also went to a small concert our local Protestant church. We were allowed to socially distance although the concert started earlier so that we could get home before the curfew. And that was the last concert before the second lockdown.

December has seen us making a flying visit to London and 2 weeks quarantine. So stupid, but must be endured. Every day brings new changes in rules, regulations and forms. We expect to be back in France for Xmas. This year Bboxx has mandated a break for all UK staff between the 23rd December and the 4th January so Peter will have a decent break. We hope that France will continue to improve its handling of COVID and so allow us some freedom of movement. We expect to be in Gruchet for the real Brexit and hope to avoid the border shenanigans. When we arrived in Dover on the 5th December there were already trucks parked up to about 10 miles outside of Dover, and more just sitting in a lorry park visible from the motorway. There were also the highest numbers of police vehicles that we have ever seen in Kent. So there is clearly an expectation of trouble and strife in the run up to Brexit as well as after.

After we left the new strain of COVID hit Dover with delays and shutdowns while they sorted out new protocols. So now everyone entering France will have to have a covid test. The news reports confirmed our decision to be in France while the logistics get sorted out.

We will leave you with two happy pictures of us sailing this year and wish you a safe and happy holiday. Here's looking forward to putting 2020 behind us and a better 2021.

Peter



Shelagh

