

Cassie & Selwyn Tillett

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Dear friends

"Last posting date tomorrow is the rule" was the comment last year. Well, we were doing well; today IS the last posting date... Here, running closer to the wire than ever, is the Tillett Christmas update... and if it reaches you *after* Christmas this year, we're terribly sorry!

This year has had snowy bookends. Last year we took our usual post-Christmas-crashout in January with Dot & Milton in Bolton, and made it back to Norfolk just before the snow made the journey completely ridiculous. As this is written, more of the deep-and-crisp-and-even stuff makes the **Norfolk landscape** beautifully picturesque but insanely impractical - as all our friends (except those in warmer climes, such as Florida or the south of Spain) will know only too well.



The theatre activities dominate as always, perhaps even more so than usual. Two shows at the Sewell Barn for Cassie to perform in, several to watch, the designing of posters for the shows at the Barn, prompting - and various other concerts and fund-raising events in the parishes, too...



It started with *Come Back to the Five & Dime*, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean in February. Rehearsing through snow and ice made suspension of disbelief necessary (it's set in a Texan heatwave); the gang of **eight wonderful ladies and one long-suffering young man** proved a fabulous team to work with; much emoting in American accents, laughter, song and many new friends.

Cassie then plunged immediately into rehearsals for *Noises Off* - the classic Michael Frayn farce about the trials of a repertory company rehearsing and performing a farce. Not only was the play-within-a-play a tricky thing to learn, but the second act is viewed from backstage, with most of the action performed in dumb-show as things fall apart while the "show" is heard - but not seen - on-stage (that is, backstage... oh, do keep up!).

It was technically the hardest thing any of us had ever done, and in the event, a huge success, both artistically and in terms of sell-out performances throughout (including one extra performance). With another sensational team of performers and a matchless gang backstage and on set construction, it was an amazing experience. (In **this publicity shot**, Carole drops sardines down Cassie's t-shirt. It all made perfect sense at the time. Honest.)



Outside the Barn, we both took part in a revue entertainment in April with Lucy and her excellent team at Empowerment Theatre [raising awareness about domestic and sexual abuse]; in a reconstruction of the lovely little historical montage **991 and all that** (characters from the Battle of Maldon, first created in 1991 and re-assembled by our dear friend Beryl in September) - which also introduced us to new friends Fr Louis and the gorgeous Will down in Maldon; and once more in freezing conditions Selwyn accompanied the Upper Octave gang in their annual carols-and-melodrama outing at Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum.

Moving from performance to church activities, *Musick for the Parson* takes in both: our friend Mike Withers and a gang of wonderful musicians, recruited from across all available networks, provided a concert of music to celebrate the 270th birthday of Parson James Woodforde, enjoyed by visiting members of the Parson Woodforde Society. Narrated by Barrie, the father of one of the present occupants of The Old Rectory, Selwyn was one of **ten superb musicians and singers** entertaining in a style appropriate to the late 18th century, recreating the sort of music that the Parson himself might have heard.



Other church events during the year have included a highly successful joint benefice fete on the grounds around Weston Longville village hall; a return by the choir from Gresham's School to Great Witchingham; the Icenis Choir; and, latterly, a splendid carol concert with the renowned local Taverham [brass] Band.

After all that performing, we felt we deserved to watch others doing their stuff. More cinema than usual, including (of course) the latest *Harry Potter*, the exceptionally silly 'oratorio' *Not the Messiah – he's a very naughty boy* at Cinema City; the sad but beautifully observed Mike Leigh *Another Year*; the cute-and-silly *Tamara Drewe*; and recently we loved *Made In Dagenham*. Girl power rules!

Many visits to the local theatres: the Sewell Barn, of course (*Cymbeline*, *Dangerous Corner*, *RolePlay* [with the matchless Andie treating Mat to an astonishing lapdance] and, more recently, a superb *Hedda Gabler*); an average of one show per month at the Maddermarket, of which favourites were *The Birthday Party*, *On Golden Pond*, *Arsenic and Old Lace* and *Measure for Measure* – plus the lovely Jo Sessions in a delightful little lunchtime entertainment of Joyce Grenfell's *Nursery School* sketches (during the same week, she was playing Isabella in *Measure* – that's quite a girl!). Our friends in the Upper Octave were a pleasure to watch as always; a trip to Cambridge included a night at the ADC for the classic *Steel Magnolias*; Maria Friedman in concert at the Norwich Playhouse was a delight, as was Jessie Buckley at the Seagull in Lowestoft; and our local 'big theatre', the Royal in Norwich, gave us the completely insane *Spamalot* and the wonderful *Les Misérables*.



The Royal also brought us the Glyndebourne Touring Company, and Selwyn went to see *La Cenerentola* – which brings us to our visitors to Norfolk. Our colleague from Chimes concert days, Stephen Brown, was in the chorus and understudying leads during this tour, and we were delighted to welcome him to the Rectory while he was doing so.

Dot & Milton were with us in October - having set the questions for our local fundraising quiz for us, they had to be here! – and an invasion of family at the end of January celebrated **Cassie's father's 80th birthday**, in conjunction with birthdays for sister Jenny and her partner Carl, complete with wine-bottle-shaped cake.

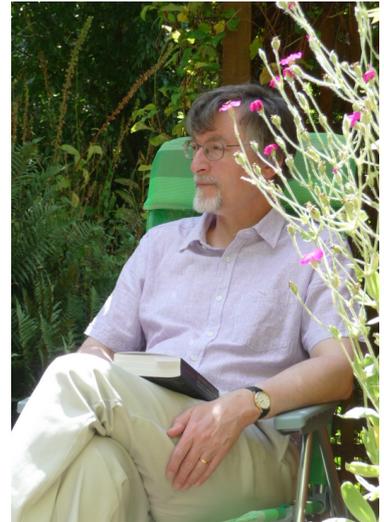
Good grief. Can we have some holiday now, please? In March we spent a few days in the delightful Retreat – a little self-catering apartment in Itteringham [not far from home, but we needed to get away!] – mainly so that Cassie could get one set of lines out of her head to make room for the next set. The post-Easter break was a joyful week in the **Peak District**.



We stayed in a beautiful apartment in a converted mill, meandering around the wonderful countryside and meeting up with Dot & Milton for a great day at a wildlife park. We also visited Cassie's old college

at Bretton Hall; the grounds were as lovely as ever, but it wasn't possible to go into the buildings and reminisce about old student days in the hostels, bar, mansion and drama studios. Very sad.

We're probably getting predictable in our old age, but it was back to France in the summer. We followed the usual pattern of two weeks' self-catering in different venues and short stops for half a week in each direction. Our route this year took us firstly to Brittany: Kerpoence is a delightful little doll's house of a place in Laniscat, run by the friendly Jez & Julie. The weather at this point was (unsurprisingly) still fairly British, but we spent some lovely times wandering the lovely local towns and villages – and some much-needed **crash-out days in the beautiful little garden**, books and beers at hand.



It was an especial pleasure to have **our friend Kim** joining us for five days during the second week of our holiday in the Charente, as our cottage had the extra bedroom; fabulous meals, scenery, shops and views, and absolutely wonderful weather. Wine-tasting, mussel-eating, lazing about in our beautiful cottage in Tonnay-Boutonne (near La Rochelle)... what a life.

Finally, we enjoyed a particularly pleasing three days in the Loire valley on the way back, staying with the superb Sophie at Les Chambres Vertes: utterly civilised evenings with her home-made wines, and her very superior cat, on the decking looking across the vineyards at sunset, and beautiful local places to visit. Oh, and of course, lots of lovely photo-opportunities: the photo on this year's Christmas card was taken during this holiday. Happy days.

An unusual little break took place later in August. This story begins way back in the 1980s, when Cassie first watched – and adored – the performances of Dave & Al Sealey, a pair of brothers from the Midlands who recreated - in beautiful style and with huge energy and accuracy – many of the songs of the music hall era, under the guise of Cosmotheke. Sadly, Al passed away back in 1999, but having always wondered what had happened to Dave, Cassie found that he was not only still performing one-man shows (tributes to Max Miller and Stanley Holloway), but was also in the process of re-creating the old act with his son Dan.

To cut an extremely long story only marginally shorter, Cassie has now created a website for Cosmotheke, reflecting all versions of the act; and in August, we spend a fantastic few days with the Sealeys, seeing Dave & Dan in performance (we love you guys!) and enjoying the wonderful hospitality provided by **Dave and Jill** – who are now starting up their own B&B business, so we were guinea-pigs for their services. We're delighted to report that since then, with a bit of help from Cassie's website design, they have a steady stream of customers for the B&B – and very well deserved too.



This leads neatly to the business of earning a living. Continuing his usual manic round of services and rural deanship (including dealing with a difficult local interregnum), Selwyn is as busy as ever trying to juggle five balls – sorry, parishes – and (alright, so the writer is biased) doing an excellent job; supported as always by our reader Pam, by the various

churchwardens and PCCs, and by our village support network of Dick & Dot, Ann, and retired priest Peter. We are, as this is written, hoping that this year's carol service – tomorrow – does not get snowed off as last year's did!



Village life is much enhanced in Weston Longville by **the pub reopening in October**: the Parson Woodforde has been completely revamped, including B&B, and serves excellent meals that attract a wide audience. We managed to be in there not first, but at least second, on the day that it opened – for a full English breakfast!

Business for Cassie has varied across the year, as is the nature of all things freelance, but there have been joyful encounters: several new websites to design and maintain, the odd bit of IT training, and several very satisfying decluttering jobs (including the workout that was several rooms in a six-floored town-house in West London – spread across three visits!). It's been a tough year for everybody, but (as the song goes) *I'm Still Here...*

Local networking events for business have proved a source of support, enjoyment and business, especially the monthly Coffee at Caistor meetings; and the more recent innovation of Norfolk Jelly – no, nothing to do with the refreshments, but a co-working event hosted at a local conference centre, where small traders can get out of the (home) office, share a workspace and ideas, chat or be quiet as they wish, and use the excellent café. With local fellow businesswoman Sophie Garrett and the King's Centre, we've run four successful days, and are looking forward to what 2011 will bring.

You'll have noticed a distinct lack of comment about either weight or exercise from Cassie; well, the plantar fasciitis continued throughout the year, but with the help of some specific stretching exercises, it finally decided to heal (after *two years*) within just the last few weeks, and finally it's possible to walk for a reasonable distance without feeling like she's a hundred years old. In addition, more walks around the village, a few gym sessions and some sessions with a hypnotherapist have helped enormously; and having regained all of the weight lost in 2007 by August 2010, ten pounds of that has now shifted again and it's all feeling a good deal better. As for the running, she's very much looking forward to getting back to that once the ice and snow have eased up!

Oh, and one last tiny project that has been of some interest. Since March 2010, Cassie's been maintaining (every single day) a Daily Photo project on Facebook. Images taken on whichever camera is to hand (iPhone, point-and-shoot or digital SLR), of anything that sums up the day – anything from a rehearsal to a flower in the garden, birds on the bird-table to an evening glass of wine, visiting friends or **a decoration on the Christmas tree**. It causes amusement among Facebook colleagues, but also is a great lesson in appreciating just how much we do all year!



So what are we looking forward to in 2011? Well, we'll be paying our usual brief visit to Bolton after Christmas, and the post-Easter break will see us spending time with the Sealeys in Worcestershire. Plans are also afoot for Selwyn to take a much-deserved sabbatical in the autumn (the last one was in 1999); we don't yet know what form that will take, and what combination of holiday, rest and study time, but all will be revealed in due course!



Theatrically, there are no board-treading episodes as yet planned; but we are jointly directing *The Shakespeare Revue* in February at the Sewell Barn – you might remember it's the show we directed for Imperial Opera back in 2004. Note-bashing rehearsals began in December, and in January we start work in earnest. With **seven excellent performers on stage and the Rev at the piano**, it's a new departure for the Barn, where musical events are rare.

Not the easiest of years, with (as we started) snowy bookends, dismal economic climate and all the rest; but there remains so much fun and joy in our home, our friends and family, our theatrical activities and our work that we continue happy and grateful. We hope your good times are joyful and your not-so-good times bearable, and we are blessed by your friendship.

With our love as always –

Selwyn
Cassie

