

Cassie & Selwyn Tillett

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Dear friends

We're somewhat alarmed to realise that it's twenty years since our first missive. We 'became an item' in March 1994, married in April 1995, and are still being as active - and annoyingly soppy – as ever. Thank God.

The first, key news of 2014 is that we've moved... Apologies to those who haven't picked it up via other channels – largely Facebook – but this happened just two months ago, and in the chaos of the move we felt it sensible to rely on forwarded phone calls and post for the moment until we could update you while writing anyway!

About a year ago, we started actively looking for Selwyn's next (and final) ministerial position. We knew that, as he turned 60 this year (on the day we moved house, as it turned out), and intends to retire when Cassie reaches the same age in eight years' time, it was wise to find that post as soon as possible. We looked at, and he was shortlisted for, a couple of others (all in the Norfolk area); but when in June we came to the interview for the Flegg Coastal Benefice, we had a feeling it would turn out to be the right one.



As you see, we now live in Winterton-on-Sea (the temptation to call it Walmington-on-Sea can be overwhelming); some nine miles north of Great Yarmouth and twenty miles east of Norwich, half-a-mile from a **beautiful beach**, and we are deeply happy here. We have kept most of the rest of our social and practical lives unchanged (especially theatre work in Norwich, of which more anon); the house, while smaller than Weston rectory, is very lovely (and still generously sized); the welcome has been warm (even while the weather has been freezing!) and we're so glad we came.

The other three churches are those of Hemsby, West Somerton and Horsey. Winterton has a population of around 1700 (the total size of the whole of our previous benefice), and Hemsby is double that; both of them double in the summer with the visiting holidaymakers. Horsey and Somerton are tiny. All four churches are active and friendly, with their own unique personalities.

Leaving Weston Longville was, of course, an emotional time, just as our departure from Beddington had been nearly ten years (yes, really) earlier. We were touched and delighted by the good wishes, gifts, cards; the rendition of John Rutter's *The Lord Bless You and Keep You* at the end of our final service; and the attendance of **many of our friends from the Wensum group** at Selwyn's licensing service a month later. We were also thrilled that other dear friends from our past were there: Pam & Ian and Heather & Jack from Beddington, and Bob & Margie from Cambridge.



We were fortunate enough to have a month to get sorted. Two weeks of non-stop box-unpacking (with some much welcomed help from Rachel & Martyn!) was followed by a week to recuperate in a lovely self-catering cottage on Rutland Water; then a few days after our return came the licensing service, and the first Sunday services were on 16th November, exactly a month after leaving Weston. As we write, the house is all but completely straight; all boxes unpacked; just one more bookshelf to install and some more stuff to go to charity shops. The new suite was delivered just yesterday, the old one sold to a friend (it was just too large to fit into the new living room, sadly); new kitchen units have been installed, a new cooker (courtesy of the generous gift from the Wensum Benefice) replaced the dying old one, and after a couple of IKEA raids we're pretty much there.

During all this, of course, life has continued as (what passes for) normal. That is, theatre and music, watching and performing; Cassie's business; Selwyn's parishes; Cassie's family; holidays; our friends and colleagues... and, as always, much more. Are you sitting comfortably?!

Clearly, quite a lot of the year (from June onwards, at any rate) was occupied with preparation for leaving one benefice and arriving at another, sharing documentation and allocating responsibilities. Selwyn worked hard to ensure that all was left in good order for the parishioners and local retired clergy who would be holding the fort for a few months; Cassie passed her various responsibilities for local charities, other treasurership-style support and technical matters to happily willing volunteers. Meanwhile, services, fund-raising events, meetings and the rest continued apace.



Cassie, meantime, started to step back conclusively from other responsibilities: specifically those for apdo-uk (the Association of Professional Declutterers & Organisers, which she was instrumental in creating in 2004). Having resigned as President in late 2013, other jobs have gradually moved to members of the wonderful Operations Team, as well as some commercial outsourcing; within the next couple of weeks, the main admin responsibilities will be SEP (someone else's problem!) and the last bit – the Treasurership – will follow early in 2015. This leaves her free (a) to be 'just a member', and (b) to concentrate on her own business! The apdo-uk 2014 Conference was a superb and exciting event, with large numbers of our membership, overseas colleagues and interested parties attending. Cassie was delighted and moved to be acknowledged on that occasion, and also at the **tenth**

anniversary gathering in London on 4th November, when she was awarded a trophy and Honorary Lifetime Membership. As for the rest of the business: she's been delighted to continue to work with people in their own homes, helping them to master computers, streamline paperwork and processes, or declutter and improve living spaces. One especially exciting booking was a four-day job in Basel (Switzerland). Better still, the client managed to get in touch while we were on holiday in Colmar, France – just 50 miles away – so we visited Basel for a consultation while we were there!

And speaking of holidays... As always, we've been very fortunate to enjoy some wonderful breaks from the ongoing busy-ness. We started with a few days in Sea Palling – oddly enough, just up the coast from where we now live – in the cottage belonging to our long-standing friends Andrea & Ian. It was on this occasion that we paid a visit to Wroxham, went for a walk along the tow-path of the river, and Selwyn managed to slip on the wooden edge of the path – and ended up waist-deep in water. Cassie feels that she was extremely restrained not to take a photograph. (Caption: "He's fallen in the water...")

Our Easter break was a return visit to Paris, exactly twenty years after our first ever holiday, six weeks after our first date. Photographs of us on the Pont Royal opposite the Musee D'Orsay in 1994 were **carefully recreated in 2014**; we had a glorious and highly sentimental journey.

Our summer holiday took us to unfamiliar parts of France: largely down the eastern side. We stayed in and visited several countries as well as France: Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Switzerland. Our first week was based near Colmar, the second in Burgundy; beautiful self-catering cottages both. We visited a butterfly farm, a birds-of-prey centre, beautiful towns and tiny villages; vineyards, castles and much more.

In May, we slipped in an additional few days for a specific purpose. Cassie has very fond memories of days with Sing for Pleasure, the choral organisation that linked with her college choir, The Bretton Singers. Sfp reached its 50th anniversary, and as the celebrations were in Bolton, the conclusion was a no-brainer... Dorothy and Cassie therefore had a fabulous weekend singing and socialising, and Selwyn came up and joined them for a few days afterwards.



Oh, and one more thing. After all these lovely holidays, it felt positively 'spoiled brat' for Cassie to take another; but this was special. Having been increasingly unhappy about weight gain in recent years (much due to foot injuries but equally to sulking, to be honest), she was given the extraordinary opportunity to attend a Spanish health resort, at no cost except flights and extra treatments. In return, she agreed to interviews, photos, video footage and so on, charting her journey and progress. Her gratitude for this amazing chance knows no bounds – both to the staff and to the lovely Debi Haden, who made the offer – as well as the support and positive encouragement of husband and friends.



The Obsidian resort is beautiful, friendly and inspiring. Based in Benissa, an hour from Alicante, it gave time and resources for a complete rethink, much rest, exercise, counselling and friendship, together with an eating plan of juicing and vegan cuisine. Nine days later she'd lost seven pounds. The work continued on returning home, with three-mile walks becoming a regular feature, juicing for most breakfasts, elimination of caffeine, and reduced (but not eliminated) alcohol, red meat, wheat and carbohydrate. Six months on from the Obsidian experience, she is thrilled to be **over two stone lighter**, a medically 'healthy' weight for the first time in five years, and much happier. The *Vive la France* concert (see below) allowed the return of a particular concert dress that she never thought she'd wear again! The

wardrobe, incidentally, was severely pruned – it covered three sizes before – with some wonderful help from Sarah Morgan, a local 'image consultant'. Quite a relief to have dealt with that before moving house.

As mentioned, Selwyn's 60th birthday happened to be on the day of the move. This of course prevented any parties on the scale of those enjoyed on our respective 40th and 50th celebrations. However, we were able to welcome our beloved friends Dorothy & Milton for the weekend before (so they were also there when we said goodbye to the Wensum Benefice), and we surprised Selwyn with a **gang of our local theatrical friends** at our favourite curry house. And, of course, a magnificent piano-shaped cake – created (as was the one for Cassie's 50th) by the lovely and talented Angela.



There have, of course, been some very difficult times among the cornucopia of good things. **Cassie's father** is settled and comfortable in Dorrington House in Dereham, but his dementia is so advanced that he does little but eat (well) and sleep (well). He still knows Cassie, Peggy (wife) and **Bob** (brother), and



can happily identify his own parents and grandparents; but he has little idea who the grandchildren are, and Selwyn is a nice man who sometimes brings Peggy to see him. However, he never asks to 'come home' and is mostly fairly content; it's the best we can hope for. Peggy is very lonely in Aylsham, and we are making strenuous efforts to find her an appropriate bungalow in Winterton to address this; hopefully the property market will wake up in the new year. Meantime, it's a 50 mile round trip to Aylsham or 90 miles to Dereham, which we try to ensure happens as often as possible.

We've suffered some particularly traumatic RIPs this year. Back in March, we were shocked and stunned to lose our very dear friend **Alic** to pancreatic cancer. Aged just 49, dearly loved by her husband and five children, an accomplished and talented woman, she'd suffered from poor health (including fibromyalgia) for many years but had always come up smiling. We were honoured that Selwyn was asked to conduct the funeral; we miss her very much.



That same disease took a friend of Cassie's from her Sing for Pleasure days. Peter was a gentle giant, a talented musician and a hugely kind man. He, like Alic, passed away less than two months after diagnosis. (It will be no surprise that our charity donation this year – for sending electronic Christmas cards where this is possible – will be to Pancreatic Cancer Action UK.) We also give thanks for the lives of past parishioners Sheelagh Willis (Beddington), Joanna Price and Jackie Reader (The Wensum Group), and distant relation and genealogical colleague Peter Finch. May they all rest in peace and rise in glory.

On a more cheerful note: as ever, we have attended far more 'amateur' than 'professional' (for which read: paid) theatre. We continue to support, and love, the work of our friends at the Maddermarket and Sewell Barn Theatres (17 shows at those two venues alone!), with the occasional visit elsewhere too. Highlights at the Maddermarket included two superb items of 'lunchtime theatre' from our talented friend Judi Daykin, a truly fabulous production of *City of Angels*, a first-rate *Anne Boleyn*, a haunting *Hitchcock Blonde*, and gloriously funny *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*. Over at the Sewell Barn, it's very hard to choose a favourite: but *Can't Stand Up for Falling Down*, *The Shape of Things*, *All My Sons*

and *Unscorched* have all been staggeringly fine pieces of theatre. Not much cinema this year; but the National Theatre production of *Ghosts* was utterly riveting, and *Pride* remains one of our favourite ever films. If you haven't seen it, we can't recommend strongly enough that you do.



We've still found time for a couple of performance outings of our own. A lovely informal reading of *Under Milk Wood* (in celebration of the Thomas anniversary, of course) saw Cassie as Polly Garter (who else?) among others, and Selwyn as Revd Eli Jenkins (ditto), and Butcher Beynon. One Vocal Score concert: a fabulous celebration of all things French in *Vive la France* in July (close to Bastille day), and we were as thrilled by and proud of our fellow performers as always.

However, our main project earlier in the year was a directorial one (although Selwyn was on stage too). We were delighted to be asked by the Sewell Barn to create a show for a 'mini-slot' (four performances instead of eight, in between two regular slots) as an experiment: bringing more music to the Barn's repertoire. We chose to write the show as a tribute to the performers in the Golden Age of Music Hall – not just those famous ones (Marie Lloyd, George Robey *et al*) but also those at the bottom of the bill (*Down Among the Wines & Spirits*, which was the name of the show), such as The Sisters Cuthbert, Fred Earle and Norman & Noyes. The 'Norman' in this case was in fact Ben Norman, aka Ben Tillett – Selwyn's grandfather. We included the famous and the obscure numbers, dialogue between characters (all of which was based on historical fact), it was supervised by the manager of the Norwich Hippodrome, Frederick Fitt (in the guise of your very own Selwyn Tillett); and we were utterly thrilled with the result. **Every one of our ten performers** (playing twenty-seven characters between them) was completely professional and dedicated to the task; audience reactions were magical; and we couldn't have been more proud. And we must have done something right, as we've been given a 'real' slot at the Sewell Barn in May 2015; and this letter is being typed the day before our auditions for *Cowardy Custard* – a revue of the words and music of Noel Coward.



So here we are, thankful for another busy and action-filled year; for our beautiful new home and community; for the chances to continue doing the things we love with the people we love. We hope that your own lives have brought you much love and laughter, and continue to do so in 2015. If you find yourselves able to visit the eastern coast of Norfolk at any time, we'd love to see you!

With very much love as always –

Selwyn
Cassie