

Dear friends

Another year, another update. More changes, more of the same. Music and theatre, challenges and delights, a new home and friends; a new (for him) job and (for her) set of clients, losses and gains, triumph and disaster, exhaustion and excitement in pretty much equal measure.

Last year we'd just a few weeks before Christmas landed in our new parishes, based in the lovely village of Winterton-on-Sea, a few miles north of Great Yarmouth on the eastern Norfolk coast. The village and the beach continue to be a source of considerable pleasure. Cassie's continuing health pursuits take her to said beach most days; the community is a friendly and welcoming one; the delight of having village shops within walking distance hasn't faded, and we've been pleased to welcome many friends to visit. The chippy and café are of course visited as often as the sea-life – at least, when we have visitors as an excuse!



The four parishes in the benefice keep Selwyn busy, with a ferociously active social calendar in each, especially the two larger ones of Winterton and Hemsby. The doubling in size of village populations in the summer season is a new and pleasant experience, reflected as it is in attendance at both sacred and secular activities. Old familiar routines take on a new slant: a village open gardens day will include an appearance from a retired lifeboat, our Good Friday Walk of Witness around the village and into the sand dunes is accompanied by a drummer from the sea cadets, and we celebrate the first service of Easter around a bonfire on Winterton beach as **the sun comes up** in breathtaking manner.

Selwyn began the year with an unwitting appearance on a local stage. The Hemsby Harlequins presented their annual pantomime (a combination of child and adult performers, with some seriously skilful work in evidence): Goldilocks. When it came to the obligatory scene in the kitchen between the cook and the policeman, **a volunteer from the audience was required...** As can be seen, Selwyn's anticipation that the pie was destined for his own face was not realised – but the group makes no promises for the next year!



We've introduced other theatrical events, as you might expect – both involving ourselves and others. In June, we were thrilled to welcome Faronel - three exceptionally talented musicians playing fascinating medieval instruments – to West Somerton, the concert being themed on the reign of King Edward III in line with the paintings on the walls. Led by our good friend Mike Withers (who was much involved in the music played at our wedding two decades earlier), this was a highly successful and much appreciated evening.



We followed this up – in the rather chillier October season – with a recreation of one of our favourite concerts: **Hats Off**, celebrating the works of Flanders & Swann – also in West Somerton. Leon came from London, Bob came from Wales, Rachel & Martyn joined us from within the county, and a splendid time was had by all.

Other performances were already rooted in local tradition. The Norfolk Broads Concert Band provided their wonderful music on several occasions, within and without church services; likewise the St Mary's Singers, whose Hemsby concerts are always guaranteed a full house. More unusually, we also celebrated SamFest in September: a weekend of music for the 50th anniversary of the death of Sam

Larner, well known in the folksong world, and welcoming skilled musicians from far and wide to venues in Winterton and North Walsham – including the renowned Peggy Seeger. Funds raised for the parish were presented to Selwyn on a suitable cheque (drawn on the Dogger Bank, naturally) at a special evening some weeks later.

One other cultural topic that should be mentioned is artwork. Firstly, our local Somerton parishioner John Finnie held a wonderful art exhibition in the Hostry of Norwich Cathedral, and his diverse and skilful work was hugely appreciated and much admired. Secondly, our own good friend David Lloyd, who had painted almost all the churches in which Selwyn has ministered, came along to complete the set with a stunning creation featuring the four active churches and one ruin in **this benefice** (and finally also provided the two missing churches from Selwyn's Essex days). The whole set of 19 buildings is now proudly framed and displayed on the 'Lloyd Wall' running up the Rectory staircase.



As we've said, it's a great pleasure to welcome friends to our lovely new world on the coast. We started the ball rolling with a gathering on the first Sunday of the new year. **A motley crew from around the county** joined us for a glorious walk on the beach followed by food and silly games back at the Rectory. Just a couple of weeks later (and we'd only just returned from spending New Year with them!) we welcomed best buddies Dorothy & Milton to explore our new manor for a few days; and many others have been in the course of the year. We're looking forward enormously to the final visit of the year: Cassie's lovely little sis Jenny, with her whole family, who are spending Christmas with us, including mum.

Speaking of mum: her move to Winterton was one of the main projects this year. As friends will know, life has been extremely difficult for her since Dad went into residential care over two years ago, and her location in Aylsham was too distant for more than weekly visits. Having found the ideal bungalow, just a few minutes' walk away from the Rectory, in January, various delays meant that it was in fact early August before we could bring her to Winterton. The new bungalow is comfortable and spacious, a few minor items of maintenance have been dealt with, and it's much easier being able to call round there every day to ensure that all is well – and being five minutes' walk away in the case of a practical difficulty rather than an hour's drive.

Dad, meanwhile, continues to sadly but gently decline. He remains comfortable and well cared-for in the home; he seldom appears distressed; he still recognises mum and Cassie, and is pleased to see us, but has lost memory of most other people, except for his brother Bob, who visits from Cambridgeshire as often as he can. When younger daughter Jenny paid a short visit to the UK back in May, he clearly knew she was a member of the family and that he was pleased to see her, but made a wild guess that she was his sister (who died in 1979). He eats well, spends most of the day asleep, and has no idea whether our last visit was two hours or two months ago (it's usually about three weeks). Cruel and painful, and happening to so many these days.

There are always a few sad farewells, and this year has been no exception. We remember especially Brian & Bronwen Skingley from Cassie's family, who tragically passed away of separate causes within days of each other; local churchwarden Simon Peasley, taken far too early by aggressive cancer; David Hare, a gentle and much-loved giant of the local theatre world; Margaret Treasurer, a beloved friend from our days in Beddington; David Eden, a long-serving stalwart of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society; and Bill Davis, a close relative of Selwyn's discovered only through genealogical researches, who became (with all his family) a dear friend. May they all rest in peace and rise in glory.

On happier notes: much as we love the seaside, we've made many wonderful visits to lands beyond... One especially profitable visit was to the border with Suffolk, where we finally decided to entrust various long-stored and unused items to the auctioneer Gaze's of Diss. The sale of most of the pipes collected by Selwyn's father (we kept a few favourites), plus some family china and a couple of items of artwork, brought in a few modest but welcome sums, and it was fascinating to experience the world of Bargain Hunt, Flog It and the rest at first-hand. And, indeed, Elizabeth Talbot, one of the auctioneers, frequently seen on such programmes.

We celebrated the wonderful wedding of our good theatre friends Joe and Tracie, with plenty of attendant laughter and glamour. We much enjoyed a superb fundraising event, in aid of the Acute Stroke Fund Unit at the Norfolk & Norwich Hospital, organised by our splendid friend Louise, as that unit had provided such marvellous support to her father when

he was seriously ill – and her powerful efforts paid off in spades. We have spent our Thursdays off in a mixture of the practical and the relaxing, but always enjoyable, in various parts of our lovely county.

And, of course, we've been fortunate enough to enjoy a couple of very fine holidays. After Easter, we explored within easy reach: the lovely area of Suffolk close to Woodbridge, including wonderful seaside walks and delightful towns. In August, we returned to a favourite place: Llanymynech, which enjoys the distinction of being half in England and half in Wales (close to Oswestry). A truly delightful cottage and a beautiful area.



You'll have seen several references to walking so far, and this has been mostly due to Cassie's continuing health quest. Having last year reported good progress with returning her weight close to an appropriate norm, she took up the gauntlet again in late January (having kept the weight consistent across the combined pitfalls of new house, his birthday, Christmas, New Year, holiday and her birthday), and set to work. By Easter, the next half-stone had gone, and the final few pounds have been shed since the summer. Now back well within target weight – **and almost three stone lighter than in June 2014** - the healthy eating combined with regular walks continue to do the trick. Those dunes and that sand make for a great workout!

Additionally, a wonderfully supportive group on the internet helps with ideas and motivation. The fabulous (and exhausting) Karl Whitfield shares his experiences and ideas with generosity and boundless energy, and has turned up at just the right time in the journey. One especially eccentric outing came about through that group: 36 hours to Wales and back. Yes, that's right. From Norfolk. Drive to Stevenage; driven by another member of the group to Milton Keynes; driven from there by yet another friend all the way to the Brecon Beacons. Settle in, 4 mile round trip walk to village for pub meal. Stay overnight in a rather excellent YHA venue, ready to climb Pen-y-Fan the following day. Start the climb, only to be greeted with Storm Barney. Get about a mile up the mountainside and discover that standing up straight is likely to result in us being blown off the mountain. Descend again. Make for Brecon Country Park, refuel with lunch, walk some more in increasingly strong winds (70mph, we later discover), bringing our total mileage for the day to less than the four mile trip to and from the pub the previous night. Reverse the driving process, and arrive back in Norfolk around 9pm on day two. And you know what? I wouldn't have missed it for the world. Fighting the elements was incredibly exhilarating, and it's definitely an experience to be repeated in slightly more clement weather conditions!

With new parishes, mum's house move, Cassie's business and health activities to be fitted in, there seems to have been less time for performing. However, we've managed a bit of board-treading. As mentioned earlier, we were delighted to reprise the Flanders & Swann evening. In May, we were honoured to direct once more at the Sewell Barn Theatre: this time it was **Cowardy Custard** (the words and music of Noel Coward), with all the humour, pathos and elegance that implies. Selwyn took his place both at the piano and on the stage with eight other supremely talented performers – some old friends, some new – and we were thrilled with the results.



Finally, we were equally charmed to be invited to provide a **Cowardian entertainment** for the wedding of a local couple in the stunning surroundings of Voewood, near Holt: a splendid country house, complete with grand piano – concluding with our specially-rewritten version of 'I have been to a marvellous... wedding', which was much appreciated by bridal party and guests alike. Huw, Gill and Scott, from the Cowardy Custard cast, joined us to perform songs from the show and other numbers from the appropriate era.

A few more visits to the cinema this year – mostly at our favourite Cinema City – the highlights of which were *Paddington*, *45 Years* (filmed entirely in Norwich and on the Broads, and including a number of extras from our local theatre societies!), *Iris* (not Iris Murdoch but Iris Apfel, the flamboyant nonagenarian New York fashion icon), and latterly the excellent *Lady in the Van* – which we were fortunate enough to see in its stage incarnation many years ago, and were not disappointed by its translation to screen.

As audience, we continue to support local societies and professional companies, and as usual, the unpaid actors provide us with shows that are more than a match for their remunerated colleagues. Of the two dozen shows we have seen in the last twelve months, of particular note were *Mint* (a released prisoner attempts to readjust to life and acceptance in the 'real' world); *The Thrill of Love* (the story of Ruth Ellis); and Camus' *Caligula* (a mesmerising and terrifying portrayal of power run mad, with which we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary) – all on the unique stage of the Sewell Barn. At the Maddermarket we were especially delighted by Noel Coward's last play, *Star Quality*; and by the beautiful four-hander *Quartet*. The Norfolk and Norwich operatic society provided a magnificent show with the joyful *Sister Act*. We were proud to see our lovely young friend Rachel in her theatre course showcase, a compilation of musical theatre on the subject of relationships – with plenty of Sondheim, beautifully performed, keeping Cassie very happy. The extraordinarily talented Judi Daykin created a moving and poignant tribute to our local heroine, Edith Cavell, near the centenary of her execution in WW1. A concert in Ranworth church, including the music of and conducted by the renowned Patrick Hawes, was a melodic delight. Finally, we were reunited – after a way-too-long sixteen years – with a friend from Chimes concerts in London, the gorgeously talented **Alison Roddy**, who performed a selection of Canteloupe's *Songs of the Auvergne* with the Norwich Philharmonic. And this is just a small selection. We really are very spoiled for cultural choice.



One more important thing to say about the theatre world. Our main theatrical 'home' since our arrival in Norfolk in 2005 has been the tiny Sewell Barn, where we've now directed together three times and Cassie has performed in four wonderful plays. The old order changeth; the present Artistic Directors conclude their tenure with the present season, and Cassie takes over – **jointly with recently retired Head of Drama, Clare Williamson** – the role of AD, with effect from autumn 2016. As such, the preparations have already begun for that new season and all the challenges and excitement it will bring. It's a whole new ball-game, well beyond previous comfort zones, but one which feels right and inspiring.

So... there you have it. Another mixed bag of a year, and the joyful anticipation of the health and opportunity to enjoy many more. We hope that your own lives have brought you experiences of all kinds in equal measure, and wish you the happiest and most peaceful of new years.

With much love

Solwz Cassie

