

The Hallas Courier

What Sam & Sheila got up to in 2021

Introduction

I think I may have mentioned before in this annual epistle that the same conversation is held in Hallas Palace at around this time every year. The discussion focuses on whether to continue sending a newsletter or concede that the practice has had its day. This year the debate took a different form. Do we have anything to write about? We haven't done anything out of the ordinary or particularly exciting. Even chats with friends have become a trifle wearisome when they almost inevitably include the question, 'Have you had your jab yet?' I expect that the same applies to most of you too.

However, despite the ongoing pandemic which doesn't seem to be burning itself out, we keep busy and another 12 months have whizzed past.



Sheila & Sam: ice cream at Canford

Family

Tim has several jobs to earn his daily crust. He teaches three days a week at Hills Road Sixth Form College in Cambridge and has recently started a new job with University College, London, teaching teachers online. He also writes reviews of music technology equipment for magazines and, from time to time, does the sound for live gigs.

Harriet has spent most of the year working from home and has very recently returned to the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine one or two days a week.

Zoe, now three, is totally adorable and as bright as a button. Her command of language is amazing and her imagination knows no bounds. She and Tim spend most



Zoe



Evie

Friday afternoons with us and a good time is had by all.

Matthew and Lizzie are still living in a house on the Aldenham School site. Matthew works very long hours but gets more holiday than his colleagues in state schools. Evie is as gorgeous, beautiful and special as her cousin but, sadly, we don't

see as much of the three of them as we would like. Evie is a very confident two year old, full of beans and a real live wire. She loves to run about on the school field and goes to swimming and ballet classes. She also loves to 'play' the piano but not without some sheet music on the stand in front of her.

Travel

We've had three brief trips away. We've been to Wimborne twice to stay with my sister and brother-in-law. The first, in August, included a walk around RSPB Arne and spotting lizards on the cliffs at Poole. A stroll along the Promenade at Branksome Chine, Canford, led to the ice cream indulgence pictured above. The

second visit was in November to see Iolo Williams, one of the Springwatch presenters, talking about his work with the RSPB. According to the publicity, Iolo was supposed to be on tour but the only performance we could find was the one in the Tivoli Theatre at Wimborne.



Poole Harbour seen from RSPB Arne

The Scottish story

In September, we had a brief holiday in Scotland. On impulse we booked a tour with a well-known company specialising in tours by rail. Well, it was good in parts and we met some very pleasant people but the organisation left something to be desired. We started in Dundee and the



V&A Museum, Dundee

holiday should have included a visit to the V&A Dundee as one of its highlights. We can vouch for the impressive exterior architecture but



Arbroath smokies

we cannot speak for the interior – it was closed.

Never mind, on to Arbroath to visit a smokehouse. Have you ever been to Arbroath? Don't bother. The best that can be said for it is that the freshly smoked haddock we were given to sample was delicious. That brief pleasure did not compensate for the next two hours when we were left to our own devices in a cold, windy, damp town where everything, including the public conveniences, was closed.

On the final day we were dumped at Aberdeen station with several hours to kill, the reason being that another highlight of the holiday was a trip to Edinburgh in vintage coaches being hauled by the steam locomotive, Tornado. The coastal scenery during the first part of the journey was stunning.



Aberdeen - the granite city

We then had one night in a smart hotel in Edinburgh before returning home. Four star it may have been but their idea of a pot of tea was a teabag dunked in a cup of warm water. Take a black mark, Radisson Blu.

Church

Church life keeps both of us occupied, particularly Sam. Services were held via the wonders of Zoom until July when the building was re-opened. Now we are back to having 'proper' services which are also being screened live to the Church's YouTube channel.

Sam, as techie wizard and webmaster, was and is responsible

for setting up and running the live screening. He has devised an innovative (and cheap) system using a computer and cameras worthy of the late Mr Heath Robinson. He claims that it's easy to operate so that other members of the technical team can work it when he's not there.

Our Minister took sabbatical leave throughout August and September which meant that I had to hold the fort

for the duration but I'm pleased to say that all went well. Fortunately, none of the visiting preachers I had booked were 'pinged' and had to self-isolate.

I was interested to see that the Minister's programme while she was away included an afternoon watching Coventry City play Nottingham Forest. I'm still waiting to hear what deep spiritual insights she gained from the experience!

At home

At home we've been doing some improvements around the house and garden. There was a long wait for the new curtains in the living/dining room. Fortunately the vertical blinds preserved our privacy. The silver birch tree grew too big for our small plot and it's now been replaced by a rather spindly looking sorbus aucuparia 'Joseph Rock' (a rowan tree). We look forward to flame coloured leaves and berries in the autumn after the usual flowers in spring.



Hitchin's Christmas tree

Early in the year we bought a triple nest box for sparrows, who ignored it. However we were delighted to see a pair of bluetits successfully rear a brood of chicks in it, though we didn't see them fledge.

We are looking forward to a gloriously chaotic Christmas Day with the eight of us, plus Gilbert the dog, all together.

As we write every year, we are sorry that we haven't been in touch with many of you but we hope that you are all well and enjoying life.

We wish you all a happy and blessed Christmas and a healthy and a peaceful New Year.

With love from Sam and Sheila

www.samhallas.co.uk/family/