



**Chutzenstrasse 54, 3007 Berne**

**December 2023**

2023 has been a year of learning to slow down – not always easy! It is always difficult to know what one can do and what one cannot, and even more difficult to cope with offers of help from well-wishers who assume that if I take time over, for example, tying my shoe-laces, then I can't tie them at all. But it's a good way of learning patience.

Tricia has also joined in the slowing-down experience, by formally retiring in May from her work designing software for transport information systems. To you and me that means the screens and other things that are more or less commonplace on trains and buses nowadays. (I know a lot more about the geography of the London Underground and the operation of the Piccadilly Line than I used to :-))

This, together with an accumulation of holiday entitlement, allowed us to escape from Switzerland for five weeks in spring and spend it in Norwich, starting to get the mid-terrace house which Tricia has bought and had restored, updated and improved, into a more lived-in condition. This was fun, but not entirely straightforward – coupled with all the other hurdles of living life in England (at least we speak the language – though Tricia can remind me that the bishybarnabees are more bootiful in Naarich)!



England is not quite as third-world as cynics sometimes paint it – though the High Street shops are not as thriving as they could be, and the stories about the amount of service the postal service or the National Health Service are actually capable of probably have a grain of truth in them. However, we had Sainsburys a few hundred yards away, so could turn our backs on this. And by coincidence, Tricia's sister, Liz, and her sister-in-law, Jo, also retired in the summer – a good excuse for a party...

We managed a second trip to England in August to do some more setting up and sorting out. We went by train again, through Germany and the Netherlands, taking the night boat between Hook of Holland and Harwich. This has become our favourite route, though we haven't completely mastered the art of changing trains at Venlo, on the German/Dutch border, which involves competition with large numbers of bicycles for a place in the inadequate lifts. The return journey typically ends in our arriving late, which is not a problem, thanks to the railways' generous compensation system.



It was mixed weather. We went to Tricia's niece's wedding, which proved a splendid day, despite the constant downpour. Fortunately, Kirstin and Kev are very handy at building furniture (before and after their honeymoon in Mexico). This was a great help. And thanks to Tricia's sister Liz's hard work, our garden had plants and flowers thriving in it through the summer.



*Downtown (Downvillage?) Oberammergau*

We planned to be more mobile in the rest of the year, too, but doctor's appointments and church engagements have made finding a suitable slot quite difficult. and needless to say, time has flown. At the end of September we squeezed in a few days in Bavaria, staying at the Hotel Antonia in Oberammergau. (We were attracted by the name, but things were even better: we had a large apartment at our disposal with balconies commanding magnificent views over the local alps.). We enjoyed sunshine, scenery and culture...and excellent Bavarian breakfasts. An experience to be repeated when time allows.

The family thrive – Antonia and Owen are still in Brisbane, she processing statistics for Queensland Health, he installing electrical systems for large firms. Tamsin and Erik are nearby, just up the hill in Köniz, she coping with the demands of managing care provision in a large home just south of Burgdorf, he specializing in financial advice to local businesses. Sebastian and Kadle are on the other side of Berne, he looking after large computer networks, and she combining digital business management with further and further study. And I should also mention the grandchildren, Patrick and Sarah, and Matthew and Oliver.

Tricia joins me in wishing you an enjoyable festive season and all the best in 2024. We shall escape to Norfolk to see the New Year in – it's less ice-ridden there :-)



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