



At the end of the previous letter I was just about to retire and set off to Europe. Well I feel like I still haven't retired, well obviously I have been retired for almost five months now, but the first couple of weeks we were getting ready for the trip, three months were spent on holiday and we have just got back and unpacked. People say that when you retire the first part feels like being on holiday, well in my case I really was on holiday.

This was a very different holiday, for a start we were back last year and also this time we were going for three



months. Going on consecutive years meant that either we would have continuity with everyone we met last year, or we would wear out our welcome, I guess it depends on your viewpoint.



Three months, that's a long time for a holiday, previous visits have been generally between one and two months, with or without remote working, depending on how the negotiations with work go. In these shorter visits we have generally been based in Manchester (thanks Roger) and travelled to see people usually staying a night, sometimes less often two nights. Last year we



even ended up going up to Inverness for a night.

Its great

and very full on but not completely relaxing. For this trip we were going to try and do it a little differently. We planned the holiday to have a three week break in France and then a week at each stop, except for a little running around in August. I say it's a holiday, and it is for me, Steph however was doing some work, she had to do some supervision sessions usually about an hour at 9pm UK

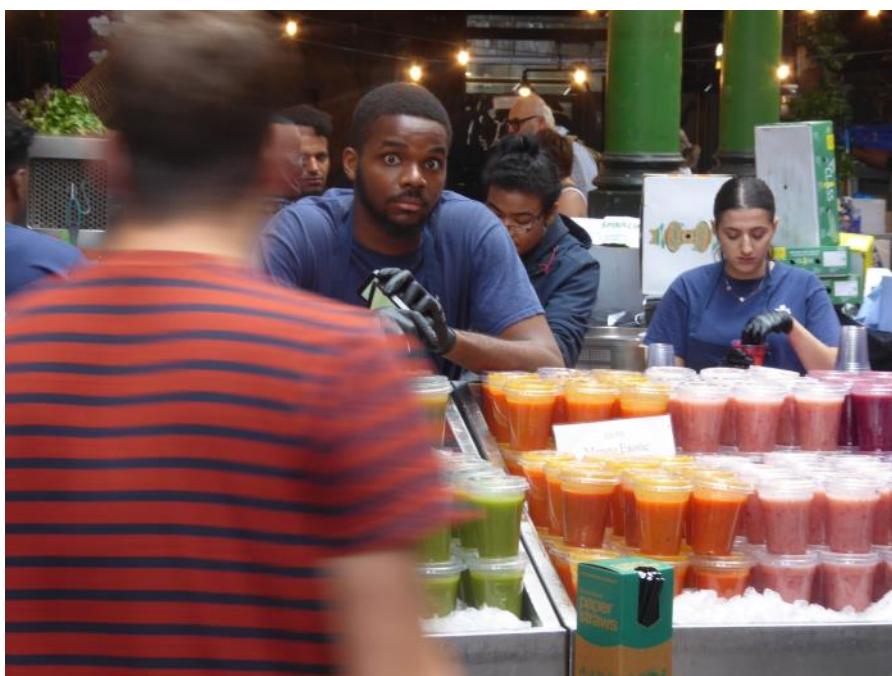


time and 10pm in France.

We were pretty flexible, with no work to book holiday from, so it was a bit difficult to decide out when we should go, so it was quite handy to have Tim and Leslie's party

was a welcome tent pole at the beginning of June, three months seemed like a reasonable time so we booked to come back at the beginning of September. Its possible we didn't give ourselves more time before the party as we were still pretty jetlagged, I can remember standing up around 10pm thinking that if I sat down I would simply pass out, so it was a great relief when Steph asked if it was wrong to go to bed while it was still light.

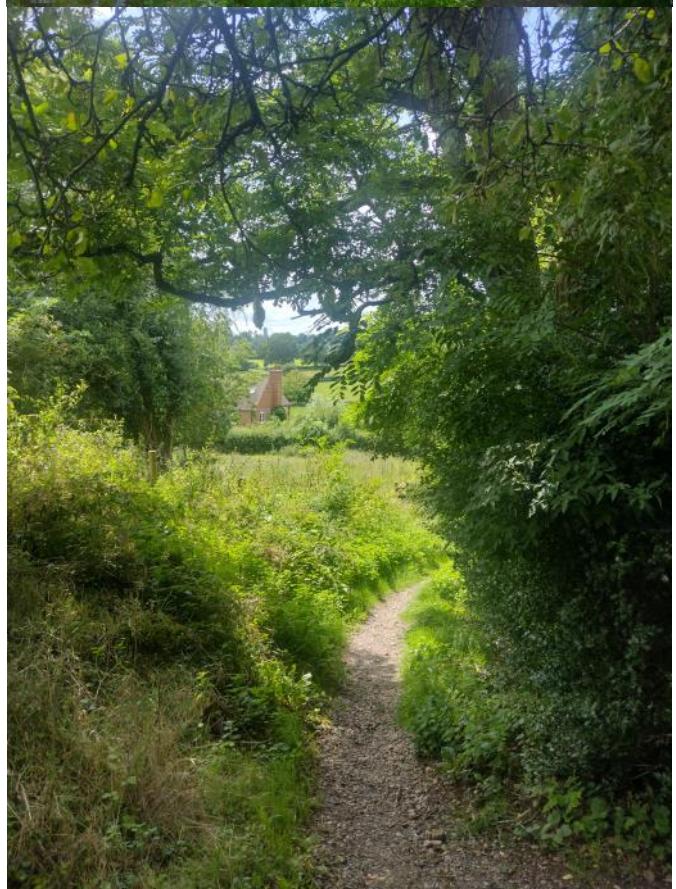
We travelled back for two months last year, I was still in negative holiday when I retired, and looking back I am



surprised how much things have moved on this year. Last year for long haul flights there was paperwork to complete, testing to be done, masks to be worn and insurance most definitely to be taken. This year I have to say it really did feel like old times, except perhaps the cost, the only remaining reminder of those times was that masks were recommended not required; I have to say we wore masks on the way to the UK but I guess as a response to the complete lack of masks in the UK we didn't on the way home.

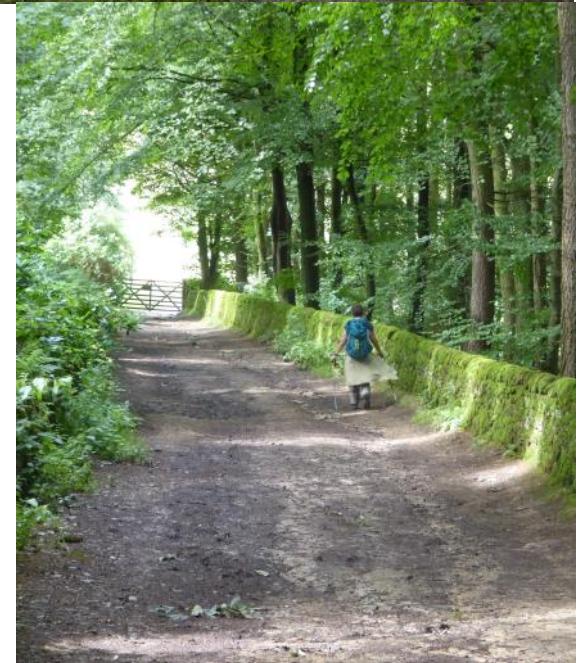
As it happened Steph's sister Caroline was going to land at Manchester airport around the same time that we would arrive, around 7am. So we agreed to meet up, she has a bog full of our stuff we keep in the UK, we would repack and have breakfast in Manchester and then catch the train to Nottingham, where we would see Philippa and James, who stayed with us last Christmas and who offered to lend us a car. It would cost double on the train if we didn't book in advance, so we took a gamble and predicted that we would be able to get the midday train. So now all we needed was all the linkages in our trip, bus -> train -> bus -> plane -> plane -> plane -> car -> train -> train -> car to go like clockwork. As it happened it did go pretty well, mind you we were pretty knackered





by the end. We watched Taskmaster to try and stay awake and we had to watch it again when we got back to NZ, the program a complete surprise to us both on the second viewing, neither of us could believe we had seen it before.

This holiday like last year seemed to revolve around walks in the countryside, and unlike last year playing cards. We walked some very splendid tracks, Jenny



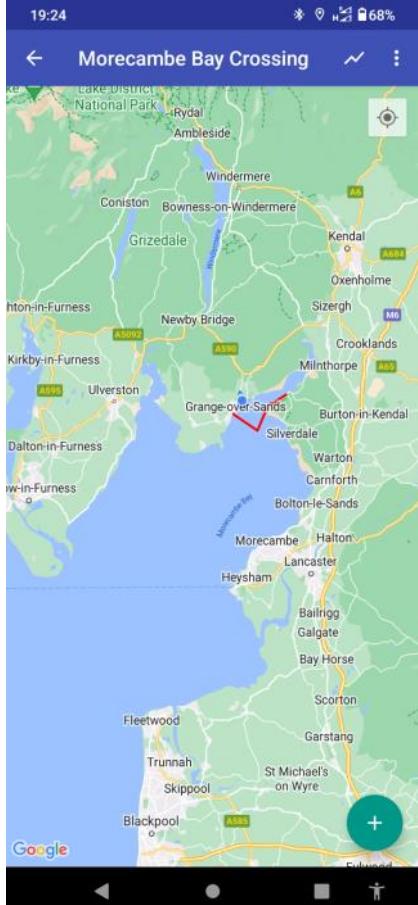
showed us her new local walks now she has moved near Stratford upon Avon, I do love that I know the quick walk over the hill she does after work, somehow it makes me feel more connected. We also did Pat and Tim's local dog-walk, a somewhat more substantial hill, and we also got to do some of the South West Coastal Path between Looe and Mevagissey which was very pretty, quite hot and did have some long slogging steps. A sort of holiday in a holiday Caroline took us away to a very lovely cabin at Grange-over-sands complete with a spa so that we could do the More-





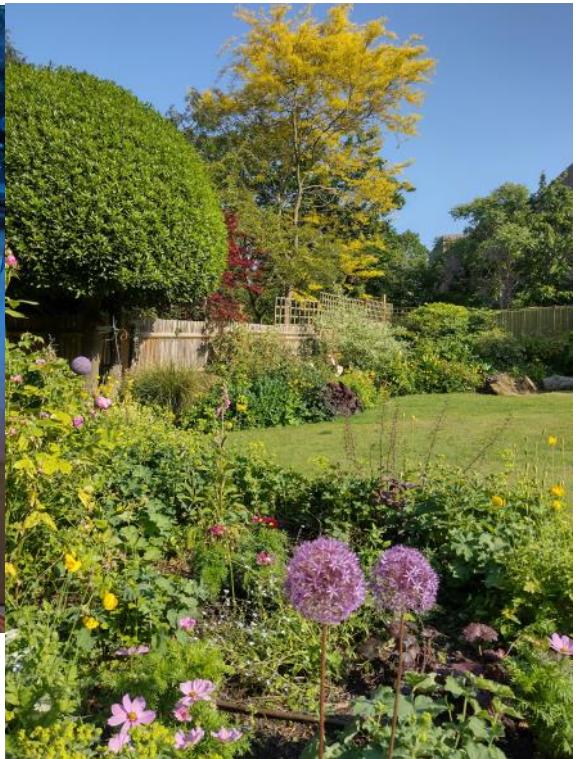
cambe bay walk, with 600 of our closest friends ☺

I guess because it's a new part of these holidays the card play was a source of great joy, dropping in on a kitchen



in a planned stop en-route to sit in the kitchen and play all day, playing knock-out whist (something I haven't played in years) in a pub waiting for the Morecambe bay walk to start sitting in a sunny park playing knockout whist again, even playing remotely in hastily improvised webcam and computer rig up all the time complaining about the luck we were having while knowing that actually we are blessed.





Steph had a phrase for this holiday, she wanted to feel more like visitors and less like tourists, and I think we did feel like that. We seemed to have time to help and earn our keep, we cooked for people who were working or busy, we both enjoy cooking and it was nice to give something back. We moved storage heaters and put up curtains; repaired blinds helped at an “open garden”, assembled and disassembled gazebos. We even moved millstones, the archetype for a





heavy object is well earned, in the end we had to roll them on their edge over the hill one pushing and one using a nylon belt to pull, of course our technique was only perfected on the last stone. We could try and fit into the patterns of people's lives, walking to the pub for a beer on a Friday evening, walking dog





morning, noon and evening. Steph got her nails done for the first time (I am really not sure about this, it just looks weird, but I guess its good to try things out), we went for a picnic in a very small



beach hut on a windswept North Sea coast, strangely nobody wanted a swim. The ashes cricket providing a



backdrop to the first part of the holiday, we listened while we moved bookcases in France, and while we did our improvised gym on the terrace, and walking with Jenny and Steph I let them get ahead so I could listen to the end of the final test cheering us all the way home.

We did meet people who we knew from Wellington but

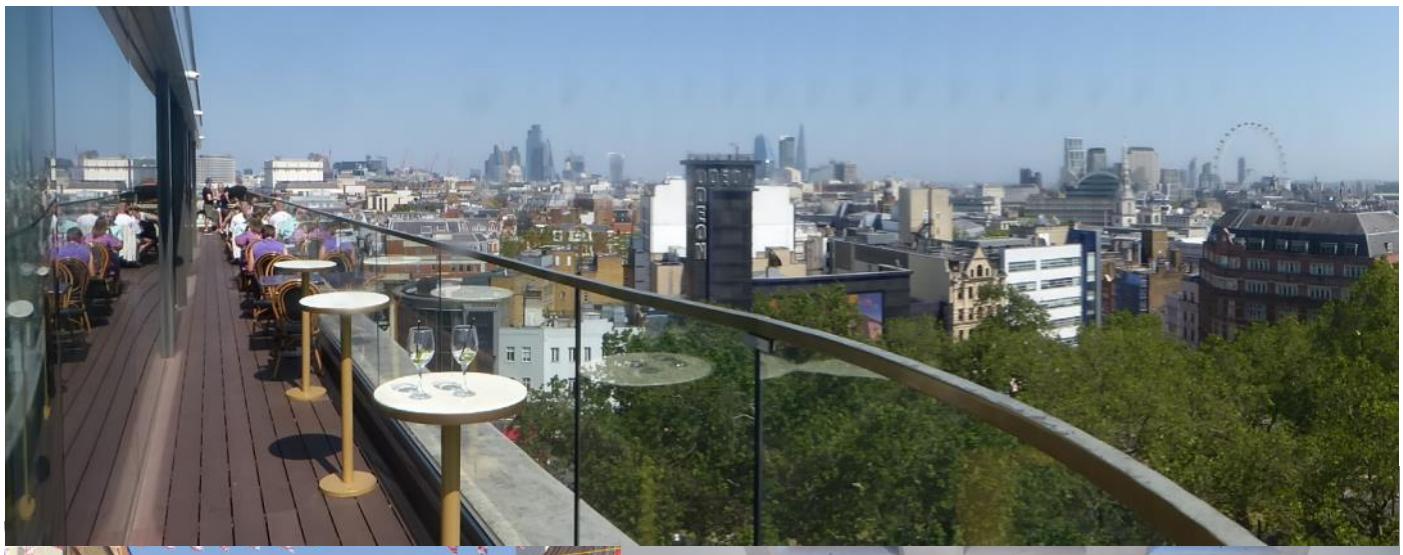


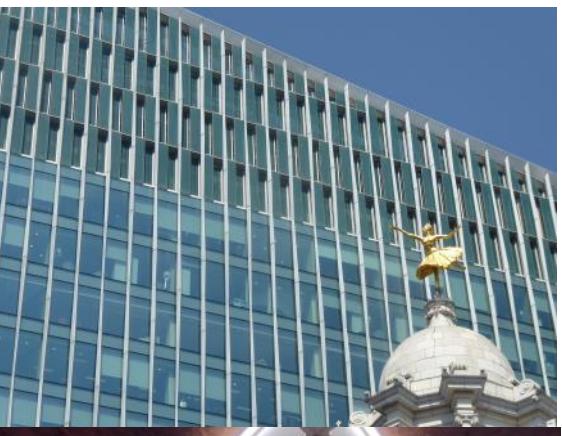
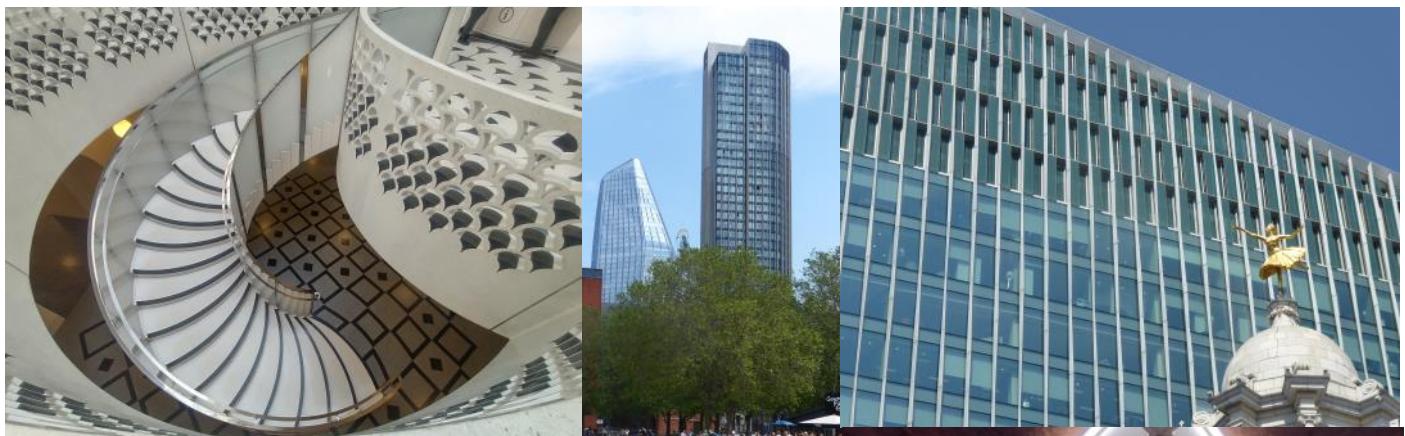


who now live in the UK. Its interesting to see why they made the opposite trip that we did and to understand how that fits with their life at the moment.

We also took time to enjoy some of the culture that the UK offers, we saw “The Ocean and the End of the Lane” and “Witness for the Prosecution”, the latter in the old GLC chamber (I’d recommend both), went to the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall, did a splendidly sarcastic self-guided walking tour of Nottingham, a city I’ve never really been to, and even made it to the cinema to see Mission Impossible. From previous trips we knew that we enjoyed taking time in London and so this time we went twice, we did lots of the things regular tourists do, we









went to art galleries and museums and even did a tour of the Houses of Parliament, and again we walked and we walked.

We finally did make it to Manchester, it seemed a very long time after we had arrived. We got time to see our old houses and Mum's old house; the new owners are renovating and did offer to show me around. We managed to play badminton, my



first time since we were in the UK last year, and we got to see new attractions like the Viaduct Garden but all too soon it was time to eat the last cheese and wine and pack up for the long trip home. We just managed to dodge the super-typhoon in Hong Kong, the airport closed 90 minutes after we left, we had an unexpected overnight in Sydney, in a hotel as the airport really does close overnight



I suppose I really am retired, in fact one of the things we did while we were in France was to



have the meal that my team got me as a retirement present, we even got to catch a rural French bus to get there, who knew they existed, and so cheap with internet as well. The meal was lovely but I guess that means that we will have to decide on what is the shape of our new life.

