**What was that**

**Social distancing in a small world**

**By Stephen Burke**

**April 2021**

**1. A new decade**

The arrival of a new decade has always seen big changes in my life. I was born in 1960; I fell in love with Brentford FC in 1970; I got heavily involved with politics in 1980; my brother died in 1990 and we moved to the USA for a year; I got my first charity chief executive job in 2000; and Denise and I gave up our jobs and moved from London to Norfolk in 2010.

What did 2020 have in store? Well, we planned to move home from North Norfolk to North Essex to be close to our grandson and his mum and dad. It was also going to be the tenth anniversary of United for All Ages, our social enterprise bringing older and younger people together. And of course there’s my 60th birthday in June. I was really looking forward to 2020.

The year started well with a BBC Radio 4 programme about intergenerational housing on 1 January. United for All Ages’ latest report, Together in the 2020s, generated a lot of interest when it was published the following week. And on 11 January Brentford thumped arch west London rivals QPR and promotion to the Premiership looked a real possibility. Things could not be better.

Just three months on everything has changed. That has become the cliché of our times. Never before in our lifetimes and I suspect in human history has so much changed in such a short space of time across the world. Seemingly no one saw it coming. But no one will forget 2020. Unprecedented (there I go again).

Funnily enough a year previously - on Saturday 6 April 2019 - we were having drinks with our former neighbours, Mark and Jeanette Honigsbaum, at their home in their Shepherds Bush. Mark had just published a new book about his work - The Pandemic Century: One Hundred Years of Panic, Hysteria and Hubris (Hurst, £20). It sounded interesting but rather historical (not hysterical). After a few drinks Mark kindly gave us a signed copy of The Pandemic Century.

I read the first chapter of Mark’s book later that weekend. We don’t expect shark attacks in the UK. A year later it feels like the sharks are circling and getting closer. It’s more like a thriller.

Mark wrote a large piece for the Sunday Telegraph on 24 January 2020 on whether the UK was ready for what had taken off in Wuhan, China. Ever since then my dread and apprehension have grown daily as the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on health, jobs and the economy has become more and more obvious. Meanwhile Britain took almost two months to take serious action to counter the virus. Failing to prepare is preparing to fail, as we know. Serious questions must be asked about how we assess and mitigate risks.

In What Was That, I chart the advent and impact of COVID-19 – as a personal diary and a reflection on the big national and global issues. What a time to stay at home.

It’s been a time for reflection, for big thinking and enjoying detail, for opportunities as well as challenges, for predicting what has changed forever and what the new normal will look like. What has gone well and what has failed as we respond to COVID-19. What social distancing means in reality for family and friends, village life and our wider world.

Like many, I have been through a lot of ups and downs, sleepless nights, and anxiety about the future. Then calmer acceptance and planning for a new future.

We had hoped to move home this year. Now we face a tenth spring, summer and autumn in Happisburgh, and it’s quieter than ever. It’s almost exactly how I thought village life would be like when we first moved here in 2010. We are lucky to be in Happisburgh, in this small isolated community on the north east Norfolk coast, and not in a big city.

There’s no escaping the virus or 2020. We can’t rewind the clock. Instead, the world has been re-set for the foreseeable. Are you ready for What Was That? Welcome to my contagion fable…we are what we have lost.

**2. Before lockdown part one - firsts, lasts, everythings**

**When should this diary start?**

As the first chapter suggests, this is about 2020 and the beginning of a new decade, with lots of excitement ahead of us.

But of course coronavirus started before then. Somewhere in China in the autumn of 2019, whether we’ll really know where, how and when, who knows. And as mentioned, the history of pandemics is much, much older. The public health specialists and academics had warned for ages that it was just a matter of time. But we weren’t well prepared.

Christmas 2019 and we had Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan staying with us in Happisburgh on the north east Norfolk coast. Tom had a bad cough and felt rough all over Christmas. We only discovered in March that his firm had had a party of visitors from Hong Kong in mid-December. By February Denise had been ill and then me. But we still don’t know whether we have had coronavirus because we haven’t been tested and we don’t know whether we could get it in the future.

Here we go.

**Tuesday 1 January**

Up early on New Year’s Day to listen at 9am to BBC Radio 4 for a Positive Thinking programme on intergenerational housing which I had helped shape and contributed to. A thought provoking roundtable discussion in just half an hour including lots on ‘nudge’, behavioural change and ageism – big issues in the months ahead. Some great feedback, tweets and ideas for making it happen. A good start to the new year.

**Saturday 4 January**

It’s the third round of the FA Cup, and Brentford enter the competition at home to Stoke City. A day trip to London, lunch at the Bell & Crown with Dave and Matt, and then a very ordinary game of football between two B teams is saved by an extraordinary goal by Marcondes. His first for the Bees.

**Tuesday 7 January**

After a couple of months planning, writing, design and PR, we publish our new paper, Together in the 2020s. It’s packed with ideas on how to create a Britain for all ages by 2030, with contributions from some 25 organisations. Good national press and radio coverage. Denise is on BBC Radio 4 Today programme talking about it with Judith Ish-Horowicz from Apples and Honey Nightingale. The paper is very well received with lots of emails and people wanting to talk about collaboration.

**Wednesday 8 January**

It’s Denise’s birthday but I’ve travelled to London for a piece of work arising from the Radio 4 programme with an almshouse looking to develop an intergenerational offer for its older residents.

Denise’s birthday is listed in The Guardian’s birthdays. We go out to celebrate that evening at the Gunton Arms, the best and our favourite pub in North Norfolk. Brilliant as usual. Amazing food, artwork, service and deer in the middle of nowhere. But when will we be able to go there again?

**Thursday 9 January**

Denise’s cousin Ian’s funeral. We drive to Peterborough and pick up her mum and cousin and go to the crematorium. Ian was a police officer and though he had several jobs since, the funeral reflected his police service. He had been very ill last year and in an induced coma for several weeks but seemed to have recovered. Ian and the family had stayed with us in late October but he then died in early December. In retrospect he got out in time. Ian would have appreciated the service and the wake back at their house. But he would have been very frustrated living in lockdown.

**Friday 10 January**

So we can move to Wivenhoe in North Essex to join our grandson Ardan and his parents, we are putting our house in North Norfolk up for sale. A photographer comes round to take photos. Not the brightest of days but the camera never lies. Let’s hope it does the trick.

**Saturday 11 January**

An early start to drive from Happisburgh to London for the first big match of 2020. Brentford are playing west London rivals, QPR. It’s live on Sky so a 12.30pm kick-off. A magnificent twenty minutes in the first half mean we go three goals up and the Bees end up 3-1 winners, all on telly. That makes the Bees top dogs in west London having beaten Fulham in December at Griffin Park, our last season at the ground. Normally I travel to west London by train, but today I’m heading off to Wiltshire for the rest of the weekend to see my mum and catch up. Breaks the journey.

**Friday 17 January**

After a couple of days of meetings and work in London, it’s back to domestics. Our house goes on the market, or rather the details are live on Rightmove for the world and neighbours to see. A ‘for sale’ board went up two days ago, prompting local comments. And several representatives from the agents have been to visit to familiarise themselves with it.

**Saturday 18 January**

One of the reasons we chose to live in Happisburgh was a visit ten years to North Norfolk for Denise’s cousin Rob and Jill’s 40th wedding anniversary when we loved what we saw. Today it’s their 50th wedding anniversary and their daughter Elizabeth and husband Howard have thrown a family party for them. It’s great to see everyone together – for the last time for some time. We had Denise’s mum June and cousin Julie staying with us in Happisburgh, again for the last time before lockdown as it transpired.

**Friday 24 January**

One of the things about living in North Norfolk is you have to drive. Today we pick up a new car. For the first time, it’s not a diesel but a Toyota hybrid, so a bit more environmentally friendly. It’s great watching how the battery is re-charged as you drive. It also doesn’t have a key as we know it, plus a lot of others features we are getting used to. We still haven’t used the sun roof, which we weren’t expecting.

Today I hear from our former neighbour and author of The Pandemic Century, Mark Honigsbaum about the emerging pandemic in China. He has just written a big piece for the Sunday Telegraph on 26 January on what it means for the rest of the world. Is the Wuhan flu the next Big One for the rest of us? <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/health-fitness/body/coronavirus-dont-panic-least-not-yet/>

What is clear is that in the UK at least the government doesn’t seem particularly worried by what is on the horizon. Having chatted with Mark, I’m getting worried! But as the Health Secretary reportedly said on 24 January, the risk to the British public is low… <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/news/coronavirus-38-days-when-britain-sleepwalked-into-disaster-hq3b9tlgh>

**Saturday 25 January**

Another early kick-off as the Bees are on telly again, this time in the FA Cup against Leicester City who are riding high in the premiership. Both put out almost B teams. A nervous start by the Bees and an early goal for Leicester, but we settle down and lose creditably by that one goal. Plenty of time for a late lunch.

**Tuesday 28 January**

An interesting long distance day. The governing body of North Norfolk NHS Clinical Commissioning Group meets in Aylsham. Just over two months until the CCG is due to merge with four others to create a single CCG for Norfolk and Waveney. Most of the papers and issues for debate are local and about preparations for the merger. While Brexit is taken off the risk register, there is no mention of coronavirus. It turns out that this is the last meeting of the CCG governing body anyway!

After dropping off the dogs in kennels, I head to London for a big match as Brentford take on promotion rivals Notts Forest. Great tension before the match over dinner in the pub. Notts Forest win 0-1, with a lot of time wasting. I head back to Wivenhoe to stay with Denise, Rhiannon and Ardan while Tom is running a large international event in London. Easier than going all the way back to North Norfolk.

**Wednesday 29 January**

Drive from Wivenhoe to Redbridge, east London, for a visit, lunch and meeting at Downshall primary school where several days a week older people with dementia and depression join intergenerational sessions and lunch at the school with children. A successful project with North East London mental health trust, which could be replicated elsewhere.

Back to Wivenhoe for dinner at the Black Buoy community-owned pub, and then on 30 January for two house viewings. They don’t grab us. Return to Happisburgh and pick up the dogs.

The first month of 2020 is over. Everything seems like the old normal.

**3. Before lockdown part two – coming down the track**

**Are we ready?**

While everything feels like the old normal, there are plenty of warning signs for the UK. But February feels like a month of missed opportunities as we go about business as usual. How widespread is coronavirus in the UK already, what can we learn from other countries ahead of our curve, what are our plans for testing, tracking and tracing – how do we save lives? An important month, but are we ready?

**Saturday 1 February**

Unusually I spend a large part of the day in two pubs in North Norfolk. First with Denise’s cousin Rob at the Black Swan in North Walsham to watch Hull play Brentford on Sky. The landlord is a Hull fan. Embarrassingly Hull are very poor, the Bees go two goals up with ease and only a dreadful own goal by our keeper gives Hull a chance at 1-2 half-time. Second half we finish the job, winning 1-5. And it’s great to see Cliff and Robin on TV behind the Hull keeper celebrating our superb third goal.

Then in the evening it’s our first visit to the Lighthouse pub since its recent makeover – the second closest pub to our house – for the annual dinner for Happisburgh lighthouse volunteers. A good evening – we have a lot planned for 2020 to mark the 30th anniversary of becoming the UK’s only independently run working lighthouse and to improve the visitor experience. Everyone’s in good spirits and up for it.

**Tuesday 4 February**

Unusually I am in Hull for the day for a meeting of the Intergenerational Housing Network. A very early start for the long train journey from the Norfolk coast (would it be quicker to go by boat?). Hull is where Emma Garland, founder of the network, is based. It’s a ‘seeing is believing’ visit to an extra care housing scheme run by Riverside that provides flats for adults of all ages with additional needs. A tour is followed by an inspiring presentation on intergenerational enterprise by Hull city council’s Charles Cracknell, recent winner of The Guardian public servant award. Lots to think about and plan on the way home.

**Wednesday 5 February**

To the vets early, because our second labrador Mollie has had a large growth re-emerge on her right hip. It has to be removed and it’s going to be tricky to make sure it’s all taken out, let alone sewn up properly, given it was done in the same place less than a year ago. Luckily the vets know Mollie and love her, and she loves them. The operation goes well and she comes home late afternoon. Mollie needs a lot of TLC and the large wound has to be covered up with a special ‘bathing’ costume, together with wearing a collar. She loves rolling and swimming so this is not going to be easy. We never imagined the wound would take over seven weeks to heal by when we would be living in a different world. Before then, we will have become well known by all the staff as regular visitors to the vets.

**Friday 7 February**

We’re off to Wivenhoe for eight days to look after Ardan because Rhiannon and Tom are going skiing without him. It will give us a chance to experience more of Wivenhoe life, see more houses and sample the local area. Mollie comes with us while she is recovering, and Millie and Max are at the kennels for the week. Denise in particular is feeling very rough, a bad cough and chest, tired and breathless. We manage to see a house which we are tempted to make an offer on. How much? Is it where we want to live?

**Saturday 8 February**

Rhiannon and Tom have a very early flight for their skiing trip. We take Ardy for his weekly swimming lesson, where one of the instructors is hacking away in the pool. Denise takes him to the play park while I get the train from Colchester and commute to Brentford. Lunch with Dave at the Bell and Crown as usual, then off to Griffin Park for Brentford vs Middlesbrough. A thrilling game which Brentford win 3-2 against lowly opponents after going 1-2 down before getting the winner in the 87th minute through Ollie Watkins. Back in good time for a celebratory dinner. On Sunday we have old friends Stella and Simon who live nearby in Colchester around for dinner in Wivenhoe, a taste of our new lives to come.

**Tuesday 11 February**

Up early to commute from Wivenhoe to Norwich for a 9am meeting of the Norfolk and Waveney CCGs’ financial recovery oversight group which I chair. All on course to deliver at least break even across the five CCGs by the end of March. No sign of the storm ahead. Then a train to London for a meeting with the head of the Campaign to End Loneliness. I co-founded the campaign back in 2009-10 but ten years on it seems to be needed more than ever. Then across London to Brentford again for the Bees vs league leaders Leeds after a Bell and Crown dinner with lots of old friends for what feels like match of the year. We get a point as the game ends 1-1, but for the second time this season we are outplayed by Leeds and we were at both matches. Last train back to Colchester for the 12.30am bus to Wivenhoe.

**Wednesday 12 February**

Back to London again, fortunately not too early this morning. In Camden meet with Alec Smith, dynamic CEO of the Cares Family which is growing its groups linking young people in their 20s and 30s with older people in their local community with all sorts of activities. We chat about how we can influence policymakers and raise our voices to change society. Then head to King’s College London for the launch of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Longevity’s new strategy for healthier, longer lives. Reducing health inequalities linked to social and economic disadvantage feels like the elephant in the room and the biggest obstacle to progress. The large lecture theatre is full of health professionals and it feels hot, with few refreshments, and the most unhealthy place to be in the current climate. My final meeting is the advisory board of InCommon in Hackney to support their work linking primary schools with older people’s housing. Rush back to Liverpool Street, but the train is late getting into Colchester and I run for the connection with other commuters. I feel absolutely breathless having run up the stairs, frightening as I think of myself as fit. I sit on the train in fear and calm down by Wivenhoe.

**Thursday 13 February**

After dropping Ardan at nursery, I take Mollie into the local vets as her wound has opened up following exercise yesterday. They redress it but no more. Then Denise and I spend the morning discovering Colchester town centre. Good shops, bars and restaurants, lots of history and community life. An exciting new town to explore, with lunch at the Church Tavern where Aidan, Stella’s son works, and which is owned by Piers Baker who used to live in the flat above me in Shepherds Bush. Just one drink. The following day we go to his pub, the Sun Inn in Dedham, for Valentine’s Day lunch on Friday.

Back in Wivenhoe, I need a haircut. The first gents barber I go to has a long queue so I head down the road to the other one in town, Alfies. It’s a fateful haircut. After a chat with Alfie about what we’re doing in Wivenhoe, he says that the Old Bakehouse across the road is up for sale. He knocks on their door after my haircut is done, and we meet one of the owners. He is happy to show me some of the house and I fall in love with it there and then. I know Denise would love it too. We make arrangements to visit properly on Saturday with Denise and Ardan. I’m not feeling great come Saturday and the weather has turned nasty, Ardan’s swimming has been cancelled thankfully due to illness. Then it's back to see the Old Bakehouse. We spend an hour there looking around and chatting. Denise wants it, Ardan likes it, and we make an offer on our return to Norfolk. It’s accepted, so let’s hope we can sell our cottage in Happisburgh.

**Sunday 16 February**

Back to reality in Happisburgh and I pick the cats and dogs up first thing Sunday morning. Then it’s a private visit to the lighthouse with a difference. I take Joshua and Carla to the top of the lighthouse where he has planned to propose, with my knowledge but not hers. I have arranged flowers and fortunately she accepts. Lovely photos too. Something else we could promote the lighthouse for.

After a week away, I’m full of ideas for work. I plan a new report: Well Connected - how intergenerational interaction can improve health, care and wellbeing, and invite contributions by mid-March from a range of health and social policy leaders and practitioners. Mixing matters!

**Tuesday 18 February**

By Tuesday I feel rough. I struggle into the CCG to chair a finance and performance meeting, and back to the lighthouse for a visit by a couple doing a long arranged walking tour of the Norfolk coast. By the afternoon I have to rest and pull out of all my meetings for the rest of the week. I can’t make it to the Victory board away day at Carrow Road on Friday 21st and miss some important discussions. And on Saturday I feel feverish and can’t even get out of bed to go to watch Brentford vs Blackburn. I must be ill. Rest.

**Sunday 23 February**

After lunch, I feel ok to chair the Friends of Happisburgh Lighthouse but make sure I keep my distance from all the other volunteers. We have a lot planned to mark the 30th anniversary, not least a visit by our Patron in July, as well as painting the inside and refitting the shop.

**Monday 24 February**

Three visits to the vets this week for Mollie’s wound to be assessed and re-dressed. It’s going to have to heal naturally. A long and expensive business. I do my first virtual presentation for an online Hygge conference about bringing people together through the early years. Once I’ve worked out how to do it that is. Another useful lesson, and why travel miles to give a 30 minute presentation, when the world can come to you virtually. Our next door neighbour Ellen is away this week on a coach trip to Llandudno, so I drop her off and collect her from Stalham. As the coach arrives back on Friday evening, it manages to scratch the side of our new car on Stalham high street. The driver offers to pay for it there and then. Done but Denise is not happy.

**Saturday 29 February**

Leap year! But no proposals at the lighthouse. Instead Mark lets me know about his latest piece in The Observer tomorrow, up online already. Is Britain prepared for a pandemic? <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/mar/01/is-britain-prepared-for-a-possible-coronavirus-pandemic-the-signs-are-not-good> The answer is self-evident. And we don’t know whether we’ve had it. Bring on March.

**4. Here comes lockdown**

In February I began to descend into despair about where we’re heading. Illness, death, economic crash, unemployment, poverty, civil disorder. Spiralling all together. Denise thinks I’m being alarmist and anyway I can’t do anything about it. We now know that the first cases of coronavirus in the UK were identified in January, but the month of February seems to have been wasted. Lockdown is inevitable but when? Surely the sooner the better.

**Sunday 1 March**

Mark Honigsbaum asks the key question in The Observer: is Britain ready to tackle a pandemic?

**Monday 2 March**

Pilates at the Happisburgh community centre. The last one I go to before lockdown. I’ve really gotten into it on a weekly basis since October, and Sonya has arranged to do classes on Facebook. It’s just not the same for me. I like the peer group pressure and have nowhere ideal at home to do it.

The jokes start on whatsapp re coronavirus – locked down in a Spanish brothel, Chesham dogging cancels its activities etc. Seriously, it could affect the play off final in May if we make it. Who knows?

**Tuesday 3 March**

Denise goes to Peterborough for her Uncle Nev’s funeral, who was married to Cynth, one of Denise’s mum’s oldest friends, now in their early 90s. Nev had dementia and had been living in a care home for some time. Fortunately spared from the carnage to come. Denise makes sure her family get to and from the funeral and wake, and catches up with old friends.

I have an interesting day at Happisburgh Lighthouse. First a visit by Camilla Hodgson from the Financial Times who is writing a feature on the impact of climate change on the coast, with Happisburgh as an example. She is meeting several people in the village. Coincidentally, the following day a crew from the Huffington Post come to the village and lighthouse to film a similar piece.

Then late afternoon Graham the Bishop of Norwich visits the lighthouse as part of a trip to the Stalham deanery of his diocese. Catherine, Happisburgh’s vicar, is also the rural dean. We climb the lighthouse as it gets darker and the light comes on while we are in the lantern room. It creates an atmospheric photo. The Bishop is a keen dog walker along our coast and is interested in the impact of erosion on our local communities. Graham and Catherine are clearly also grappling with all the implications of ministering during the coronavirus crisis.

**Thursday 5 March**

We have a couple of viewings of our house. Fingers crossed. Thursday evening I go to the cinema in Cromer to see The Lighthouse, a suitably apocalyptic portrait of being stuck on an island in splendid self-isolation with one other person as natural forces take over. The last film I see at the cinema for who knows how long. There is of course Netflix etc.

**Friday 6 March**

With Cliff in Cuba, I have been charged with booking the Hind’s Head in Bray for lunch on Saturday 6 June to celebrate our combined 60th birthdays. Accommodation has already been booked in Cookham.

In the morning I do a private visit to Happisburgh lighthouse by several parents and their children - they are home educators. Like all parents will be soon. It’s the last time that a paid visit to the lighthouse takes place before lockdown. The public open days will also be impossible while social distancing and other safety measures are in place.

**Saturday 7 March**

I drive to London to meet Dave and Matt at the Bell and Crown for lunch. Then walk to Griffin Park where Brentford beat, sorry thump, Sheffield Wednesday 5-0. Is this the last match that we will ever see at Griffin Park? At least it was memorable, if so.

Then I drive to Wiltshire to see my mum. Today’s Daily Telegraph headline is ‘Visit elderly relatives before they must isolate’. We talk about a visit to Norfolk over Easter but it’s difficult to plan at this stage. It’s the last time I see Mum until lockdown is over. On the way back from Wiltshire on Monday, I stop at Fulham FC to get a birthday present for Steve. It’s the last time I will be in London until who knows when.

Back in Norfolk after a long drive. Steve and I have tickets to see British but US-based blues artist Joanne Shaw Taylor at Norwich Waterfront. On the way I earbash him about how worried I am about coronavirus and its impact on people, health, the economy, society and life in the UK and beyond. It feels strange in the gig standing so close to others, worried about every cough let alone fart. Fortunately it’s little more than half full. The last concert for how long? We already have lots of tickets for gigs this summer…

**Tuesday 10 March**

I chair the last FROG – CCG financial recovery oversight group - meeting before the new CCG is created on 1 April. Job done this year – finances are balancing across Norfolk but there are still big underlying problems, let alone what’s on the horizon.

In the meantime loo roll jokes and videos are proliferating as panic buying takes over. Supermarkets run out of more than toilet paper but the British obsession with poo is boundless.

**Wednesday 11 March**

Less than a month after becoming Chancellor, Rishi Sunak presents his first budget. Little did he know in February that the economic challenge of a pandemic would be so immense. It’s the first of three budgets he presents in nine days to prop up the economy, protect jobs and income. Who would have expected a Tory chancellor to pay the wages of half the country’s workers one way or another?

On Wednesday and Thursday the inside of the lighthouse including the 96 steps is painted by volunteers from Victory Housing Trust and RFT. A great job ahead of our summer season and a Royal visit by our patron HRH The Princess Royal to mark the 30th anniversary of being the UK’s only independently run working lighthouse. We make sure the volunteers are well fed and watered.

**Thursday 12 March**

While we were all busy getting on with life and planning our futures, we subsequently discover that 12 March was a key date in the British battle against COVID-19. It’s the day the government decided to abandon its testing and tracing plans! And it’s still advising care homes that the virus is a low threat to their residents and staff. Oh for the benefit of hindsight. But which Ministers were asking the tough questions on 12 March…?

**Friday 13 March**

Yes, Friday the 13th. A busy day ahead. I’m at the CCG’s last Audit Committee meeting, while Denise takes two of our dogs to kennels before we head to London for another big match in west London - we’ve been looking forward to the game versus Fulham for weeks, getting tickets, arranging drinks and meals before the game.

At 10.45am Fulham v Brentford is cancelled, along with all other matches that weekend and for the foreseeable. Our weekend in London is cancelled, but Max and Millie are already in kennels. So lucky Mollie joins us for lunch at the Hunny Bell on Saturday. Our last pub and meal out before lockdown.

We have a laissez faire government, which has let the football authorities make the difficult decisions. Have we seen our last match of the season, let alone the last game ever at Griffin Park?

Why hasn’t full lockdown been ordered? Instead the Cheltenham races continue unfettered.

**Saturday 14/Sunday 15 March**

A rather different weekend to that planned. What to do? I contact the vicar who is also chair of the Charles Summers Trust and its secretary to see what help could be provided to local families facing hardship. I also email the CEO of Norfolk and Waveney CCG about mobilising volunteer help.

**Monday 16 March**

I go next door to the Rectory to meet Reverend Catherine to discuss what practical support could be offered locally by volunteers – help with shopping, prescriptions, post and financial hardship.

In the meantime more and more meetings are cancelled, my diary empties, and phone calls/zoom meetings take over. I had been due in London, Bristol and Rotherham this week. No more!

‘Stay apart’ instructions are delivered by the Prime Minister. The government is desperately catching up to prevent more deaths but it’s still passing the buck to others to decide. I don’t go to pilates tonight – just doesn’t feel right.

**Tuesday 17 March**

The first of my Facebook posts – Notes to grandson - is from an empty Happisburgh beach early this morning.

*Note to grandson: this is 7.30am on Happisburgh beach, the morning after the Prime Minister told us to avoid non-essential contact. Just Millie, Max and me*

*Note to grandson: this is Happisburgh beach the day after the Prime Minister told us to stay apart. We used to be able to get down to the beach via metal steps onto these blocks. The look out from the war has been on its head on the beach for many years. The cliff is moving back as the old wooden defences fail. It always looks apocalyptic on this part of the beach, and it's where people find ancient archaeological treasures, including the oldest evidence of human inhabitation of Britain, footsteps that are 800-900,000 years old.*

Today I should have been going to Brentford v West Bromwich Albion for another much awaited key promotion clash, meeting up with the usual crowd and fellow former Daycare Trust CEO, Anand Shukla. Instead it’s a socially distant St Patrick’s day Guinness at home followed by a meal with our neighbours, Geoff and Katie. Our last social event out before lockdown.

**Wednesday 18 March**

Schools, universities, colleges and nurseries all close for who knows how long.

We meet in Happisburgh church where we can safely socially distance to plan community support with local volunteers. Most volunteers apparently don’t want to meet for fear of catching something.

The Hill House pub next door to us is now only opening 12-6pm except all day Saturdays. And it has a new cleaning regime.

**Thursday 19 March**

London heads towards lockdown as 40 tube stations shut.

Will we ever wake up to good news again? Sleepless nights, waking up early to catch the news on our phones and radios.

Tears at the sea, or a sea of hope as China has no new domestic cases

*Note to grandson: school's out for...ever? London heads towards lockdown. Will we ever wake up to good news again? A sea of tears - for those who have died and for all we have lost in just a few weeks. A sea of hope - linking us to the rest of the world. China has no new domestic cases today. Four months to go in the UK? Let's hope so for your generation...*

Windows downloads anti-virus updates onto my laptop which feels like a good idea.

BBC Question Times has Matt Hancock, Andy Burnham and no audience in a new socially distanced format.

**Friday 20 March**

Denise goes to her mum’s in Peterborough before lockdown starts with as much food as possible. Denise and Rhiannon had been due to go on a girlie weekend to Bury St Edmunds but they have already cancelled that.

Rishi Sunak’s third budget in nine days completes a broad set of measures to support employers and keep staff paid.

Don’t panic buy. Selfish Britain is hoarding, still going to pubs. Oh no they’re not, as the government orders pubs and restaurants to close down this evening.

**Saturday 21 March**

It’s the spring equinox. Feels like we are on the verge of a winter of despair. A Saturday morning visit to the vets is unusual but like everyone else they are adapting to the new world and practicing social distancing. So we have to wait outside in the car with Mollie and Max before they are taken inside for treatment. Mollie is ready to be signed off seven weeks after her operation, while Max has an unidentified wound to his leg.

*Note to grandson: everything has changed in the first three weeks of March 2020. But the day after the spring equinox, it's a glorious morning on Happisburgh beach, albeit with a stiff easterly. Make the most of every day...*

**Sunday 22 March**

I mow the lawn after 10am on Sunday morning. I will be doing lots more of this in the coming weeks.

*Note to grandson: a beautiful sunny mother's day 2020 in Happisburgh. No church services because of the coronavirus crisis but the vicar has delivered flowers to local mums. The cricket square is already looking in good shape but who knows whether there will be any sounds of leather on willow this summer. And the newspaper headlines tell the story. Three months at home for many people from tomorrow as social distancing is ramped up. Lots of time to mow the lawn and start a vegetable plot... And grandson, don't forget to thank your mum!*

**Monday 23 March**

23-29 March is intergenerational week, just as social distancing puts an end to social mixing!

The Prime Minister, a very serious Boris, addresses the nation at 8.30pm – it’s lockdown. Stay home, protect the NHS, save lives – that’s the slogan we can all repeat endlessly. We don’t know when we’ll see our mums next. Official lockdown starts now.

**5. So this is lockdown**

Lockdown proper was announced last night (23 March) by the Prime Minister with immediate effect. Nothing much changes because it had been very much expected and already actioned by many; it’s just starting later than it should have done. We won’t the price paid for this delay for years to come. Time to be patient.

**Tuesday 24 March**

The first day of lockdown. How does it feel? On our morning dog walk, it’s clear that Happisburgh car park, toilets and playscheme are all locked down. I still manage three dog walks and a run today, plus gardening and sowing lettuces, so plenty of exercise!

Apart from starting lockdown, the government announces its plans to create a 4,000 bed hospital at ExCel within a fortnight. It’s frightening they think that’s the potential scale of the problem we face, let alone what being a patient in a place like that would be like.

Today should have been the last ever meeting of the governing body of North Norfolk NHS Clinical Commissioning Group. In the circumstances it’s not surprising that the meeting was cancelled. Sadly for two reasons: we didn’t have a chance to discuss the plans to tackle coronavirus in Norfolk & Waveney and we couldn’t say farewell and good luck to long-standing colleagues. It feels like the CCG amongst many others in the NHS didn’t have the virus on its risk register early enough. There is a real danger that the huge response will severely undermine the rest of healthcare for people with all sorts of other conditions. But it might help save money in other ways such as reducing A&E attendances.

**Wednesday 25 March**

Diaries have emptied but we have a Victory housing trust board meeting online using Microsoft Teams for the first time. A difficult board meeting for lots of reasons, not helped by being online, but it gets a lot of issues out into the open.

Denise gets attacked on facebook by someone with the moniker ‘David Eagles’. A Palace fan? A sign of things to come.

**Thursday 26 March**

I should have been in Manchester today for the Housing Learning and Information Network annual conference. Instead I’m at home, it’s sunny again, and time for afternoon delight. There are reports of Russian ships manoeuvring in the North Sea. Can’t see them from Norfolk, but perhaps it’s just a sign of the new times.

What we do know is that events are being cancelled for some time to come. Happisburgh Lighthouse gets a message from our patron, HRH The Princess Royal, who is due to visit on 7 July – all her visits have been cancelled until at least 12 June. I also hear that the Together campaign launch has been postponed from 30 March to July or September.

It feels like we are now in for the long haul. Six months of this will feel like retirement – or like the life we anticipated when we moved to Happisburgh in 2010. Nice and quiet.

At last some help for the self employed is amongst the Chancellor’s latest announcement, but we seem to fall between the gaps again.

8pm and everyone in the village is out clapping for health and care staff in Happisburgh and across the UK. The first of a new Thursday routine.

**Friday 27- Sunday 29 March**

The weekend is cancelled: two lighthouse visits are cancelled, a visit by Denise’s cousins to stay with us is cancelled, Anne and Steve’s trip up from London is cancelled

On Friday, our plans for moving from Happisburgh to Wivenhoe are on hold as the housing market is suspended.

The Prime Minister, Health Secretary and Chief Medical Officer all go down with Covid-19. So anyone can get it goes the mythology. Not long ago the PM was joking about shaking hands with everyone, let alone attending large sporting events.

Our exploration of Netflix begins with the first three episodes of Messiah.

I have a sleepless night as panic sets in as I find it hard to breathe. I end up reading a book and scrolling my phone. I wake up tired and grumpy, and post a grumpy Facebook note to grandson – which gets a mixed reception:

*Note to grandson: after a week of glorious weather, the wind has changed direction, the clouds and waves are rolling in, temperatures plummet. The national emergency is also worsening as more people die, new mass hospitals are created, and government ministers have not been leading by example on social distancing. Like many, I am finding it difficult to sleep. Panic attacks, lots of reading and thinking about the future. I feel particularly sorry for 17 and 18 year olds who face huge uncertainty. And for whom a few months is a large chunk of their lives while opportunities seemingly disappear...*

*It generates lots of responses.*

I also hear from more old friends, including Graeme Shaw, former partner in crime at Bristol university. This is how I responded to his email:

*Thanks Graeme - good to hear from you.*

*All's well, touch wood, we're nice and remote in North Norfolk now that the visitors/tourists have been told not to come. It's almost how I imagined it would be when we moved here in 2010 except this time it's enforced (temporary) retirement and volunteering.*

*Hope all's well with you and yours. At least you're in outer London, and as you say people seem to be taking heed of the advice. Pity it took so long.*

*The good weather and strong winds have really dried out things up here. Perfect for lots of lawn mowing and gardening. Our work has also dried up - strangely people don't want to talk about social mixing at the moment. Hopefully they will when it's all over and we want to re-connect and build on some of the good things to happen.*

*Are you working from home? Those teleconferences are almost worse than normal meetings. Even more unsaid.*

*I'm finding it hard to be glass half-full at the moment. Just dread at the mega hospitals at Excel centre and elsewhere - the last place you'd want to be taken to.*

*Whatever happens, we will lose some bad things (like excess travelling - indeed the best thing to happen ever for climate change) and some good things (so many people/firms are going under financially) and gain some bad things (nationalism) and hopefully some good things (less greed, more neighbourliness).*

*Keep well and all the best*

*Stephen*

On Sunday 29 March the clocks go forward for British Summer Time. So of course it’s very windy, and there are two hailstorms - welcome to BST. On top of everything else. Plenty of time to watch the last episodes of Messiah.

**Monday 30 March**

A fundraising and charities day. Chat with the Collective Foundation on their Sprint idea to help meet emerging needs during COVID-19. And then a teleconference with the two boards involved with merging NFMS and CFMS. I am now much more confident about the latter happening.

*Note to grandson: These rainbows and messages of hope have been appearing around the streets of Happisburgh, thanks to the wonderful children and staff at Happisburgh primary school and their key worker parents*

**Tuesday 31 March**

Denise has packed three weeks of food to take to her mum in Peterborough for a handover without direct contact. She posts some emotional pics on Facebook of her mum on her balcony waving and shouting to Denise. Meanwhile I did a shopping trip for Jack in Bacton, a Victory tenant who apparently has no money and I refer him to Victory tenants support team. Sunshine has returned, albeit cool. Deaths reach a new record daily high as the reporting of deaths is increasingly being queried. Even Matt Baker leaving The One Show after nine plus years prompts tears. Anne and Steve phone to tell us they are going to become grandparents in October – a (post) Covid baby! What an emotional rollercoaster.

It’s the end of the first month of social distancing. And the end of five years as a lay member on North Norfolk CCG, just as it becomes clear that primary care has been ill equipped for fighting the virus and the NHS and government has failed to invest in research, planning and capacity. Our local GP surgeries are scratching around for PPE on Facebook!

**Wednesday 1 April**

No April fools? Not at this time of global crisis, with nationalism on the rise and the need to become self-sufficient.

Early signs of testing failures – not enough tests, it’s not clear who is in charge and why it’s failing.

563 people are reported to have died in the last 24 hours (2,352 in total to date), by far the highest daily number in the UK.

The Wimbledon tennis tournament has been cancelled this summer. Up to one million businesses are in danger of going under. The housing market could collapse with no AirBnB clients.

As a company director, we had to decide to hibernate The Together Project and furlough all the staff. A sad day for them and for intergenerational mixing between care homes and parent and toddler groups.

1 April will go down as the day the government in the UK (and the US) lost control of the battle against COVID-19 -  the highest death rate so far, failures on testing and PPE, almost a million businesses in danger, increasing car use as a hot holiday weekend beckons. Obviously they lost it months or even years ago by failing to prepare but 1 April is a notable date. The media has turned against them too, just as they appoint a new campaign tzar.

**Thursday 2 April**

Terrible newspaper headlines for Bozo, even though he’s still ill with Covid. But not surprising. Deaths are higher again today – 569, almost 3,000 in total, still two weeks behind Italy. There is more criticism re the lack of testing, PPE and ventilators. Matt Hancock comes out of self-isolation after seven days but not Boris. A damning piece about the lack of testing: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/01/public-inquiry-coronavirus-mass-testing-pandemic?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other&fbclid=IwAR2zk3TxVXDcIcdoWouID1y2zBI3tTF6LVMoz-WmySb6OM-FqjbqbVF_AOA> Mark Honigsbaum has written about this for the new edition of his book, due out in early June.

Today I do three dog walks, two walks to the post office and then at 8pm with Denise to the Happisburgh Time and Tide Bell to clap the carers. Eddie Large has died after a fall and then catching Covid in hospital. One of my fellow long-standing councillors from Hammersmith & Fulham, Brendan Bird, has died but not from Covid-19. RIP Brendan, let’s hope we can celebrate your life later this year.

**Friday 3 April**

The new 4,000 bed Nightingale hospital is opened at Excel centre by Prince Charles - remotely. More people are furloughed in the charity sector as finances tighten.

684 people died in last 24 hours, the highest yet, and new cases grow. Bill Withers dies, not Covid, ain’t no sunshine…

I begin an application to be a non-executive director for the Norfolk & Norwich University Hospital. After years working in the community and primary care, I fancy a (new) challenge.

6pm zoom and drinks call with Cliff, Roger and Tim. Our 60th birthday celebrations, planned for 5-7 June, have already been cancelled. What can we do instead? 61st birthdays…?

**Saturday 4 April**

A beautiful spring morning, perfect for mowing the lawn.

*Note to grandson: every morning during lockdown I wake with a sense of apprehension. Today is no different. It's a beautiful spring morning in Happisburgh. It's also two months since Mollie had an operation to remove a growth from her right hip. The wound opened up and has taken a long time to knit together. Today for the first time she went out without her costume and protection on. Rolling on the beach, running into the sea. The power of healing in the animal kingdom. With thanks to Bridge vets in Wroxham*

Keir Starmer has been elected as the new leader of the Labour party. No conference or formal announcement. Just a video and press release. What a time to take over.

The highest number of daily deaths in the UK to date. Another phone chat with Mark Honigsbaum. He reckons up to 28 million could die over the next three years worldwide.

Our first virtual zoom dinner with Rhiannon, Tom and Ardy. Who’s zooming who? Nice but not good for the digestion.

**Sunday 5 April**

An even hotter day, lots of temptation to leave home

I send an email to Peter Kyle MP supporting his press campaign on social care and the scandal of deaths in care homes.

HM The Queen addresses the nation at 8pm, just after Boris Johnson is admitted to hospital.

**Monday 6 April**

One year on from getting Mark Honigsbaum’s book on The Pandemic Century. We are now living it.

Cloudy, even rain for a change. Still feeling apprehensive. A long walk and run.

Telecons, shopping. We get handmade masks from Johanne - Denise’s looks particularly good.

We get a call to say there is some interest in our house, the same day as a forecast of a small price drop while there were 700,000 fewer sales this year. We need to make our own video of the house for people to see while they can’t actually visit the property.

8.20pm and news breaks that the PM has been moved to intensive care. The nation visibly shivers and shakes. More and more famous names have COVID-19 as the death toll grows.

**Tuesday 7 April**

A lovely sunny morning. So after a long walk, I make the video tour of the house for Sowerbys. About eight minutes with my voice over; the difficulty is sending the large file to the agents.

I speak with Emma Taggart who is doing introverted coaching or rather coaching introverted individuals. We first met some fifteen years ago. I wish I had had access to her advice back then or even earlier.

The Prime Minister is apparently stable in hospital, getting oxygen but not on a ventilator, and he doesn’t have pneumonia. Clap for Boris at 8? Cabinet Minister Michael Gove has also self-isolated. Feel strangely anxious. What’s up with Boris?

Numbers grow as deaths in community are added to the total. Up 786 today. It doesn’t look like we have turned a corner despite the official green shoots. Why is Germany doing better?

It’s a super moon.

*Note to grandson: as if there's not enough going on right now, along comes a 'pink' Super Moon. Almost as bright as sunrise. Stay at home views, so no moon over ocean shots sadly. We live in unforgettable times...*

**Wednesday 8 April**

The PM is still in intensive care at St Thomas’ hospital. What is Dominic Raab’s role as First Secretary?

A record 938 deaths in the UK in the last 24 hours. No relaxation of lockdown in sight, and perhaps forecasts have been too optimistic. Seventeen new hospitals are being developed…but care homes are the scenes of growing numbers of deaths.

The first 100 days: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2020/apr/08/coronavirus-100-days-that-changed-the-world>

And what hasn’t worked: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-britain-path-speci-idUSKBN21P1VF>

And the printed media are under pressure: Jewish Chronicle goes under published since 1841…survival of the fittest

**Maundy Thursday 9 April**

Very quiet, calm and still on the beach.

*Note to grandson: clouds often make the sunrise. Eerily quiet, still and calm this morning. Just the sound of birds. Unusual after a full moon and its high tides. Thinking of all those living and working in care homes over this Easter weekend, keep safe*

Zoom drinks with Mark and Jeanette. Mark also calls at 9am to discuss the latest news, the Reuters report etc.

Care homes are looking grim. I write a letter to The Times about the scandal, inbetween more calls about intergenerational issues during and post Covid:

*These are truly frightening times for anyone living or working in care homes and their families, as Alice Thomson and Joan Bakewell highlight (Apr 8).*

*No one seems to know how many care homes have reported cases of COVID-19. Despite what government says, numerous homes have not got proper personal protective equipment, the vast majority have not had access to testing, and all seem to be being told that ill residents shouldn’t be taken to hospital.*

*As a result deaths in care homes may not be recorded as COVID-19 and in any case won't be reported for weeks. All in all, it's ageism at its worse - writing off a generation.*

*Meanwhile the fragile care system is in danger of disintegrating. Thousands of deaths in care homes alone will leaving many homes unsustainable.*

*This national scandal demands urgent action.*

Wisden 2020 is published, but there’s no cricket season in sight – a far cry from last August when we went to see England play Australia at Headingley and another fine victory.

8pm clap for carers again.

**Good Friday? 10 April**

The highest number of hospital deaths recorded in the UK so far at 980 – more than any single day in Italy and Spain. USA goes over 2000. There’s a growing backlash against the government re personal protective equipment (PPE), care homes, exit strategy etc etc. When will a vaccine be ready?

Grey-ish day as Happisburgh gets mist/haze while the rest of the country is basking in sun so I rake the lawn, perhaps my least favourite activity! No Good Friday footie.

Messenger call with Terry. Zoom drinks with Anne and Steve. Will we get to Symi in September? So many gigs have been cancelled this spring and summer.

**Saturday 11 April**

Gardening, mowing the lawn, the first short cut this year. Then we get on with clearing eight years worth of brambles…

Watch the first two episodes of Ozark. Beef curry and cider!

**Easter Sunday 12 April**

A beautiful morning, breakfast in the garden.

*Note to grandson: a sublime start to Easter Sunday at Happisburgh beach. Perfect for swimming, followed by breakfast in the garden. Hope springs eternal in lockdown*

The PM leaves hospital. Boris almost died, he says and thanks the NHS for saving his life on Easter Day. Rejoice. He has been recovering with Sudoku, TinTin, Withnail & I etc,

Virtual easter services by Archbishop and zoom locally. Eggs and sunshine and gardening.

**Monday 13 April**

Bank holiday Monday and it’s very cold after days of glorious sunshine. No gardening. Write a response to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Integration inquiry into the impact of COVID on connection, particularly for the most isolated. The Times runs an editorial re care homes but not my letter. Snoozette is the best place to be on a cold day. More Ozark, six episodes so far. Killing Eve is also now available, but not as good as previous series. Quiz drama tonight on the cheating major who wanted to be a millionaire.

**Tuesday 14 April**

Easter is definitely over and it feels like we are in for the really long haul. Can you have too much of a good summer? Care homes on the front pages, including Anita Astle from Wren Hall about Covid deaths. Another letter to The Times:

*I had thought that shielding the oldest and most vulnerable people was a key government priority during the COVID-19 crisis. Now I know I’m mistaken. The failure to support care home staff with adequate protective equipment, testing, and access to healthcare for residents speaks volumes. As do the delayed and incomplete recording and reporting of deaths in care homes.*

*All in all, it's ageism at its worse - writing off a generation which deserves much better. Meanwhile the fragile care system is in danger of disintegrating. Thousands of deaths in care homes as a result of COVID-19 will leave many homes unsustainable.*

*This national scandal demands urgent action.*

I do a pharmacy pick up from Stalham Green surgery and drop off to a run-down house in Lessingham. I’ve always wondered who lived there.

I cooked a Jamie Oliver veg supper – pasta. Gets Denise’s thumbs up.

Two more Ozarks plus more Quiz. Too much telly.

**Wednesday 15 April**

My letter has not been published by The Times but the government is under attack re deaths in care homes.

I have an 8.30am call from Australia re the UK’s approach to Covid in aged care, as they call it. It’s difficult to recommend the UK approach so far. The more I am asked, the more inadequate our approach seems. 5pm Matt Hancock announces a new approach for social care re testing PPE etc and a badge saying care that was launched a year ago!

Gardening, finishing off the brick work for our new plant area. Lounging in the sun. Reading the papers. More dog walking. Speak to mums. Three episodes of Ozark, the signal for ITV has broken up so we miss the final part of Quiz. Catch up later!

**Thursday 16 April**

It’s all still rumbling re care homes. Breakfast in the garden, third day this week despite a heavy dew. After a long walk and run.

Trip out to the garden centre, a new pleasure, and get plants for our new bed, much better. Another NFMS merger telemeeting.

Lockdown is being extended for another three weeks - inevitable given the level of deaths but the weeks ahead are stretching over the horizon.

Clap for carers at 8pm, bang the bell again. Quiz final episode and another Ozark. This is what we have to look forward to?

**6. Lockdown is hard work**

It’s beginning to feel like a hard slog. Lockdown is definitely no longer a novelty. Everyone is saying how their emotions are going up and down. Tired and tetchy. In theory we have reached the Coronavirus peak in the UK, the curve has been flattened, and deaths and new cases will start reducing. But we are overtaking Italy, France and Spain as the sick country of Europe, somewhat ironically.

**Friday 17 April**

Another sleepless night, and Max is also very restless, getting us up several times. Lighthouse post on Facebook:

*Note to grandson: guiding the mariner since 1791, Happisburgh Lighthouse shines on regardless. Another three weeks of lockdown, more sleepless nights, anxiety and stress, social distancing for who knows how long, but but but. Ups and downs. When we get through this, the Lighthouse will still be there. It was stunning this morning, and some time we will be able to have open days again. Keep well*

We record a video to send Ardan. I send another letter to The Times, this time re intergenerational fairness:

*Britain needs intergenerational fairness, not an intergenerational war as Philip Collins suggests (Older generation must give more to the young, Apr 17). The response to the pandemic from communities across the country shows there is an appetite to bring older and younger people together to tackle common concerns. A key starting point on the road to intergenerational fairness would be a review of taxation of income and wealth, with investment in affordable housing, care and learning. Creating a Britain that works for all ages would be a positive outcome from this health and economic crisis.*

Transport Minister Grant Shapps says he’s not planning a summer holiday…but we’re still hoping to return to the island of Symi in Greece in September.

A chilly afternoon and evening. I send a letter about Happisburgh lighthouse to the North Norfolk News – we’re closed at the moment but... Masterchef final. No Ozark!

**Saturday 18 April**

The weather has changed, it’s cold and damp. Good for football, or for lounging on a sofa with the papers, and three episodes of Ozark. Finish off our Hacienda garden.

More care home correspondence by email. PPE shortage for NHS staff, how can Burberry help?!

888 more deaths today, but Captain Tom Moore has got to No.1 with You’ll never walk alone, so everything is ok.

Drinks by zoom with Rhiannon and Tom.

**Sunday 19 April**

Feels like a Sunday for a change! Sunny but chilly. Quiet. Chill in the garden after reading the Sunday papers. Lots of speculation about the end of lockdown. Less than 600 hospital deaths reported today. But a growing row over supplies of PPE. And The Sunday Times reports on the Prime Minister missing five Cobra meetings as the government failed to realise the seriousness of the situation.

Musicians perform for support workers on TV. Lizzo does a superb rendition of Sam Cooke’s A change is gonna come. Plus Killing Eve.

**Monday 20 April**

A quiet start to the day, go for a run. Still v windy and sunny. Denise goes to Tesco. Struggling to set up a Teams meeting! Feel flat. Three episodes of Ozark. Cook veggie pasta. Deaths below 500, the lowest for some time, but it is usually the same after the weekend.

**Tuesday 21 April**

Dogs go frothy, in the sea.

*Note to grandson: a frothy morning. Three dogs doing their own thing, oblivious to everything. They have to put up with us all day long gardening or watching Netflix except for a few volunteering runs. As long as they can walk and eat, all is fine. Life is pretty simple after all. Or very complex. No one has got the answers yet. In the meantime enjoy the wind, sea and sun, and keep on rolling on the beach*

The weekly Office for National Statistics publication on all deaths, this time reported to 10 April. It’s the highest weekly death toll for twenty years despite Good Friday, 8000 out of 18000 deaths due to COVID, over 1000 in care homes. I tweet re ONS’s Nick Stripe, and a bot replies angrily. Later in the day hospital deaths are reported at 850, while some academics talk about plateauing on 8 April. The Government is under fire on lots of fronts: PPE, testing, care homes, ventilators etc. We are heading for the highest death toll in Europe…and Trump is banning immigration into the USA.

I mow the lawn while Denise does consultancy phone calls. The wind blows away grass cuttings, saves me raking. In the afternoon I pick up three prescriptions for local people but only two are ready and I deliver them. Denise has another call. I might do one re primary care and COVID. I turned down a request for one asking about the body bags supply chain!

**Wednesday 22 April**

Wake up feeling tired and tetchy. Four weeks of lockdown is having its effect. A beautiful spring day and the wind has dropped. My mood was not helped by going to Boots in Stalham to pick up a prescription to be told it’s still not ready, come back later. It turns out to be a huge box with lots in it. Badly needed.

Mum is also worrying me from a distance. She burnt her foot with hot tap water in the bath, couldn’t get out, and bruised herself. She also had cleaner in to do her hair. Now the chiropodist has been, contrary to self-isolation. We need to get her an alarm.

First two episodes of Ozark series three.

Hancock says virus has peaked, but Professor Chris Whitty says social distancing will be with us for a long time to come, plus more care home deaths. 759 deaths today.

**Thursday 23 April**

St George’s Day. Really. It’s been a long month since the Prime Minister told us to lockdown. Another day at home, in the sun, in the garden, on the beach, doing emails, writing letters, getting angry. Almost 20,000 people have died in hospitals alone – a figure we were told would be a good result a few weeks ago. Hmmm. The worst example of risk management in UK history, with an impact that will last for years. Survival of the fittest? But at 8pm we all went out to clap for our carers again. Despite everything.

**Friday 24 April**

It’s getting to me. One month of lockdown, and it’s getting to me (again). Tiredness, more of the same old same old, a sea haze has cooled things down, household chores like clearing out the fridge and bread bag, yuck. Applying for a non exec role for the future when we move to Essex.

Denise has gone to Peterborough with three weeks of food supplies for her mum. They sit on a bench outside her extra care scheme. My mum phones. After much nagging from me, she has gone to the doctor about her foot burnt in the bath a week ago – a nurse dresses it and will be visiting her on Tuesday. Must get her a watch/alarm for future.

Sea bass from Kirsty for dinner, plus three episodes of Ozark. It’s getting to me. It’s also getting to Trump because he suggests injecting people with disinfectant to fight coronavirus. Dettol et al say no, don’t do it!

**Saturday 25 April**

We should be celebrating 30 years of Happisburgh lighthouse as the only independently run lighthouse in the UK – 30 years since the special Act of Parliament was given Royal Assent. But I write a letter to the North Norfolk News as chair of the Friends of Happisburgh Lighthouse:

*As North Norfolk News reported last week, Happisburgh Lighthouse was sadly closed over the Easter weekend and our public open days have been cancelled for the foreseeable future due to the coronavirus pandemic.*

*This year we had been planning to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Happisburgh Lighthouse becoming the only independently run working lighthouse in the UK. On 25 April 1990 an Act of Parliament enabled the creation of Happisburgh Lighthouse Trust to operate and maintain the lighthouse, following a campaign by the local community to save it from closure.*

*We look forward to welcoming visitors to Happisburgh Lighthouse when we are able to re-open. In the meantime the light itself will continue to guide mariners as it has done since 1791. At least next year we can celebrate 230 years since the lighthouse first opened!*

Or as I wrote on Facebook:

*Note to grandson: Today is a special day for Happisburgh Lighthouse. We are celebrating 30 years of being the only independently run working Lighthouse in the UK. On 25 April 1990 an Act of Parliament was given Royal Assent to enable Happisburgh Lighthouse Trust to take over the running of the Lighthouse. This Act followed a campaign by the local community to save the Lighthouse after it was threatened with closure. Their foresight means the Lighthouse still shines a light every day as it has done since 1791. Sadly because of the pandemic our public open days have been cancelled for the foreseeable future. Hopefully you will be tall enough to climb the Lighthouse when we are able to re-open...*

A further 813 people have died in hospital after testing positive for Covid-19, taking the UK total to 20,319. It comes almost six weeks after the chief scientific adviser **Patrick Vallance** said on 17 March that keeping the toll under 20,000 would be “a good outcome in terms of where we would hope to get”. And that’s just deaths in hospitals!

Only two episodes Ozark with our curry, it affects your mind!

**Sunday 26 April**

A beautiful summer day – in April. Gorgeous, and still so quiet in Happisburgh. Perfect time for Denise and I have to our first lockdown row – about this book! I need to learn. It only slightly disturbs the quiet – birdsong everywhere. And we have a ringed-neck dover nesting in the ivy outside our bedroom window. Cora! Two eggs in the nest and a very diligent mother. So nice that I paint all the garden furniture in bright colours to lift the mood and the garden. It works, a lovely photo of Denise drinking at the newly painted table.

Today sees the smallest number of deaths in April, but it is a weekend…

**Monday 27 April**

The Prime Minister is back at work. Lots of optimistic bluster from Boris as usual but also a cautious approach. Keep doing what you’re doing. There are five tests to be satisfied before easing lockdown.

Teleconference with ILC-UK re their annual conference in December on making society work for all generations. Will it happen in the normal way or online? Who knows what life will be like in seven months’ time.

**Tuesday 28 April**

The latest ONS statistics are out today. It’s the highest weekly death rate since statistics have been collected in 1993. Care home deaths are growing, taking the UK to the highest death toll in Europe, only behind USA globally. Hospital deaths are up today after the weekend.

The first rain for months. The garden needs it. It’s cooler too. And makes a change. I do a prescription collection from Stalham Staithe surgery to Eccles Bush estate in the rain.

I’m feeling low re United for All Ages and the impact of COVID-19 on intergenerational work. Social distancing is not good for mixing, despite some good efforts.

Two virtual board meetings, mainly focused on how we are dealing with COVID-19 at Victory and Leeway. Fortunately both organisations are sound financially, but both are having to work in very different ways to meet different and growing demands.

Mum has a nurse visit to redress her foot.

Two more Ozarks after Eastenders! And I have almost finished The Second Sleep.

**Wednesday 29 April**

How can we prevent this in the future: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/how-we-can-prevent-a-crisis-like-this-happening-again-bzlg99k09>

Care home numbers grow, while there are warnings re missed cancer treatment. The stories go on. Have we diverted too much of the NHS to COVID?

Denise’s mum goes into hospital for the day for a blood transfusion. Worrying times. She comes out ok after a long day. Apparently she was tested negative for COVID.

Throughout the pandemic we have seen real generous acts of kindness – today I was touched by a report about quite a posh hotel in Shrewsbury housing homeless people.

Today it’s five weeks of not shaving, the longest I’ve ever done. Boris and Carrie Symonds have a baby boy! From near death to birth - a symbol of the future. Paternity leave? Not at PMQs…

**Thursday 30 April**

Last day of month four of 2020! Boris does the daily press briefing and declares we have passed the peak and promises a plan for ending lockdown next week. I spent the morning sending out our bi-monthly e-news packed with optimism and reality. Quite a few responses and things to follow up. I also sorted out Zoom for first our big virtual meeting of the Intergenerational Housing Network. 8pm clap for carers at the Time and Tide bell again, with support from the peacock. Opposite the wonderful field of bluebells.

*Note to grandson: when you need cheering up in spring, just go for a walk and look at the bluebells in your neighbour's garden. Magical*

The last episode of Ozark series three, stunning ending. Bring on series four.

**Friday 1 May**

May Day, solidarity with the workers.

*Note to grandson: May Day greetings and solidarity with all the workers keeping us safe and well, here and abroad. United we stand! Hope is on the horizon*

The government thinks it’s reached its 100,000 tests target, depending on what you count and why it’s important. Denise goes into Norwich for a bit of essential M&S food shopping. I go to Tesco in Stalham to do volunteer shopping for a couple on the Bush Estate including sixty cigarettes – more expensive than the food. A real moral dilemma.

Dave’s birthday zoom meeting for Bees fans, a good turnout. Denise has a gin too many.

**Saturday 2 May**

What a day this was meant to be. The Bees’ last ever game at Griffin Park and promotion? Followed by huge celebrations. It’s eight weeks since I last watched a match – when we beat Sheffield Wednesday 5-0. Instead…

*Note to grandson: today at 12.30pm it should have been kick-off for Brentford's last game of the season at home to Barnsley. Not just any old game or any old season. It was due to be our last ever match at Griffin Park before moving to our new ground. And before lockdown we were very much in with a chance of promotion. So we were planning a double celebration with friends and family after the match, a tour of the pubs on the four corners of Griffin Park followed by a meal. Instead, we wait to see if the season will ever be finished, whether we will ever be able to say goodbye properly to Griffin Park, my spiritual home for 50 years, and what league we will be playing in at our new stadium. Up the Bees!*

A slow start to Saturday morning, coffee in garden with the papers on our new garden chairs. After snoozette, mow the lawn, tidy up the garden and borrow four paving stones.

More than 28,000 deaths registered today. But the numbers are still under-reported. Uncut Gems movie after dinner.

**Sunday 3 May**

Sunday papers, Boris says he almost died. Well, it was 50:50 whether he was put on a ventilator. More diversionary tactics like the 100,000 testing target. The question is how are we going to get people back to work, school, play etc safely without a vaccine? Testing data needs to be used strategically with tracking, tracing and isolation. Also an app is being tested on the Isle of Wight to help this process.

We plant vegetable seeds at last. Tired and chill. The Sunday papers are full of how and when lockdown will be relaxed. Very thin weekend supplements as advertising has virtually disappeared. Will they survive? Zoom with Terry, Anne and Steve.

**Monday 4 May**

All very quiet in the village, just an empty bus rumbling through while the birdsong and peacock drown out everything else. Denise does a weekly shop in North Walsham.

‘Only’ 315 dead reported yesterday, so talk is moving to how to get workplaces back up and running. The Prime Minister will address the nation on Sunday 10 May. It seems that lockdown is already relaxing. Let’s see whether there is a spike in a month’s time.

Then all hell breaks loose as both sides our neighbours have a tree surgeon in and strimmers are firing on all cylinders. Spring. But mind the dove nest please.

**Tuesday 5 May**

Coronavirus deaths reached 32,375 by 24 April, says ONS. 693 new deaths reported today. It makes the UK the highest in Europe. Watch out for more diversions from this (and anything else the government tries to sneak out). Ending lockdown carries so many risks, including a second spike like the Spanish Flu a century ago.

I start to develop Childcare Champions website, and plan next week’s Intergenerational Housing Network meeting.

It feels like SAGE is beginning to splinter as officials make honestly different statements publicly and Professor Neil Ferguson resigns for not social distancing with his lover.

**Wednesday 6 May**

Conspiracy theories abound. Why was Ferguson chucked under a bus last night? To divert newspaper front page headlines away from the worst in Europe to ‘Professor Pantsdown’. Followed by further critiques of his research by the Telegraph and Twitter. Starmer runs rings round Johnson at PMQs. Official deaths over 30,000.

Eerily quiet in Happisburgh. Three dog walks and I don’t see anyone to talk with. Except the dogs. Come on Millie.

Zoom with Stella and Simon.

**Thursday 7 May**

Beautiful morning, tractors round the lighthouse. What goes around comes around in the cycle of life. Ardy loves the photos, so we send him some for his playroom wall.

*Note to grandson: it's a beautiful spring morning and the cycle of life goes on. The farmers plough the fields around Happisburgh Lighthouse, the ships come and go, baby birds are born and there is another full moon. As the excess death toll grows in the UK, we have reasons to be both angry and hopeful. It has been a joy to see this spring so close up but never again like this please.*

Mixed messages re the relaxation of easing lockdown – what about sunbathing this bank holiday weekend? ONS shows that BAME people are much more likely to die from COVID than white people. ‘Sick of being excluded’ was a commission on race and health I chaired twenty years ago in London. Has anything changed?

Zoom re the Quality in Ageing and Older Adults editorial board and special Covid editions. Then an ILC-UK webinar on Covid and residential care/housing – interestingly given it’s an audience of mainly care home professionals, over two-thirds say they wouldn’t move into a care home at the moment. The Guardian has an expose of a 2017 government exercise showing care homes were not prepared for a pandemic.

Do a prescription run for 3 people from Stalham to East Ruston. Sunshine!

Clap for carers number seven! My turn to strike the bell. Watch Marriage Story first 20 minutes and then Black Mirror. Don’t go back for more.

**Friday 8 May**

The first Friday bank holiday that I can recall to mark the 75th anniversary of VE Day. Events have been severely diminished by the pandemic but at least it provides a distraction from the virus and the government’s incompetence. Fortunately it’s a sunny day despite some fret off the sea. Denise does Tesco shopping and picks up lobster from the local fish shop. Afternoon in the garden, reading and snoozing. 626 more deaths reported today. The government is being cautious about easing lockdown and it now seems like 1 June will be the key date for change. Mixed messaging has not been helpful for a bank holiday weekend. The Queen addresses the nation again at 9pm with parallels between VE Day and coronavirus. Never give up, never despair. We’ll meet again.

**Saturday 9 May**

Another sunny day and it feels like more people are out and about. Our neighbour Shaun shouts at some visitors to the village. Coastguards report more people on beaches than any time so far in lockdown. Will there be a spike in cases before the end of May? All the messaging now suggests Boris will urge caution tomorrow – you will be able to visit garden centres and exercise a bit more. Outside is fine. 1 June is increasingly looking like the target date. 14 days quarantine for people flying into the UK – so it will be hardly worth travelling here. Grant Shapps announces £2bn to support walking and cycling which is fine if you can get to work that way. Steak and chips. Drinks in the sunshine.

**7. Stay alert**

The slogan changes from Stay Home to Stay Alert to much derision. Five tests to assess whether lockdown can be eased. We are all getting restless and yearning for freedom. What a time to start reading 1984.

**Sunday 10 May**

All change today. The northerly winds cut temperatures in half. And the Prime Minister is to announce this evening a new policy: STAY ALERT which means er…. Mixed messaging didn’t work in March, and it’s not going to now. Some will go back to work this week but not on public transport and more exercising will be allowed, schools might start up again in June and shops re-open, then possibly parts of the hospitality business in July. Quarantine for air travel into UK. There were three days in the last week with more than 600 deaths, plus care homes are still in crisis. Boris makes his statement to the nation at 7pm – sober at a desk in the middle of a doorway: stay alert, control the virus, save lives. But much confusion about what we are all meant to do or not do. Whatever happened to clarity and leadership?

**Monday 11 May**

Confusion reigns, questions galore but it looks like more people are returning to work. A 50 page roadmap is promised this afternoon. After a long walk and run in the resurgent March weather, Denise takes the ‘new’ car into Norwich for a respray where the coach scratched it, and a visit to M&S. Planning a meeting of the Intergenerational Housing Network for Wednesday, and other meetings this week. When will schools and nurseries go back – 1 June? Planning Childcare Champions. More people looking to move out of the city to live in rural areas, so I write another letter to The Times. Try to print some photos for Ardy. Then Boris does another press conference after an impressive broadcast by Keir Starmer. And more Normal People, episodes 5/6 and the book resonates as a novel of our times.

**Tuesday 12 May**

Nigel and Becky are also watching Spooks from the start. Still very pertinent. At least the wind has dropped a bit. New series of Notes to grandson: Max stays alert. And a new idea for a post-Covid book. Denise shows a viewer around Anne & Steve’s house on behalf of the agent. Little did we know that the government was going to relax restrictions on estate agents this evening. Along with all sorts of other guidance about who you can see and what you can do. The government also extends the furlough scheme until October, another Rishi Sunak triumph, so they must be worried about continuing recession and unemployment. Boris is bad but Trump is even worse. The change of weather has made me tired amidst emails and reading. Mum has decided to stop using her car and has offered it to us post MOT etc. When of course we can go and see her… The A Word is a great BBC series for these times.

**Wednesday 13 May**

A restless night and late getting up, before a long walk, run and new Max alert. Stephen Bubb has an article in The Times about the failings in charities exposed by the virus crisis. And the Times has published my letter about the joys of living in the country.

*Having moved ten years ago to the north east Norfolk coast after living in London for fifty years, I must challenge Libby Purves' view of life outside the capital (Think hard before leaving city life behind, May 11). As always, it's a question of mindset and being prepared to throw yourself into local life as well as maintaining your wider networks of family, friends and workmates. Infrastructure and facilities from broadband to pubs are a lot better now than a decade ago. Working from home has never been easier, while travel around Norfolk, to London and further afield has improved. Of course not everything's perfect but that gives you the opportunity to get together in your community to make it better.*

Which is good timing since estate agents have been given the go ahead to return to work today. Hopefully someone will now want to buy our house – at least come and view it! Unlike us not being able to visit our parents! Denise does more shopping trips for our neighbours. PMQs focuses on deaths in care homes and Keir Starmer runs rings round Boris Johnson.

Two zoom meetings today. First the Intergenerational Housing Network. Annoyingly our internet goes down for the first half hour which I’m meant to be chairing. But we agree to set up three task groups to progress the work. Then the InCommon advisory board into early evening, looking at ways to be creative during and post the crisis.

**Thursday 14 May**

Denise and I have both found this week difficult, despite the relaxation of lockdown. It may have been exacerbated by the dogs getting up three times in the night. Fortunately the day ends with Charlie Brooker’s Antiviral Wipe, that manages to make the last four months funny, not least Peter Pandemic aka Matt Hancock, your older sister’s first boyfriend with a car. Today the sun has returned but still chilly. A variety of things to do: emails, webinar on APPG inquiry into connection during COVID, collect prescriptions for a couple in Lessingham, put more posters up. And at 8pm Max stays alerts as Denise bangs the bell for carers.

**Friday 15 May**

Walking, running, emails, shopping, phone calls, walking, eating, lawnmowing, gardening, lounging, cooking, news-watching, emails, walking. Life goes on in a way. Has lockdown been worth it or is the infection rate growing again already? Not a good week for the government. Just heard that Denise’s formerwork colleague, Anne Freeman, has the virus in hospital.

**Saturday 16 May**

Huge debate continuing about schools opening from 1 June – teachers opposed, government pushing hard, and Anne Longfield, the children’s commissioner, tells them to stop squabbling. 468 new deaths reported today, total almost 34,500. Good news that Happisburgh resident Helen Abigail’s son is just about to be discharged from intensive care after weeks with COVID on a ventilator in two hospitals. A miracle. Denise and I have a disagreement about Childcare Champions. Watch Britain’s got Talent for some mindless alternative entertainment.

**Sunday 17 May**

A warmer day in Happisburgh and definitely more visitors in the village, walking because nothing is open, not even the car park but people have moved ‘road closed’ signs to park there! 170 deaths today, the lowest figure for weeks and weeks since lockdown started. But my brother in law Ed’s father Terry died last night – having caught Covid while in hospital for a blood transfusion. Very sad and distressing, doubly so because Ed’s mother is also not well (not Covid) and I advise him on care options for her. It’s getting much closer to home and we must do what we can to shield our mums.

**Monday 18 May**

All in all it’s shameful why we are where we are as a country, fearful of easing lockdown and ill prepared to do so. The good news is that today we see the fledgling doves that have just left the nest and are learning to fly and coo. Magic. And the parents seem to be planning another brood, cooing away and rebuilding the nest.

On the work front, despite all the problems facing care homes and nurseries and the difficulties of promoting social mixing, we have two calls today from people planning to develop intergenerational care. Happy to advise them and look forward to seeing the outcomes next year and beyond.

**Tuesday 19 May**

Can’t get up this morning, even though the dogs are desperate for their walk. It feels like a day when things are changing in lockdown. More people and cars are out and about. More people are phoning us today about all sorts of things, some close to the end of their tether. ONS reports that by 8 May there had been 55,000 excess deaths related to COVID-19. Add on another ten days and that’s likely to be over 60,000 already. Deaths reported today are up by 545 after a couple of low weekend days. And the way the economy is nose-diving means there will be a pandemic of unemployment with many millions out of work and on very low incomes. Meanwhile, at the daily press briefing Professor Dame Angela McLean lets the cat out of the bag and says the government has failed on testing and tracing compared to South Korea and Germany. And then to cap it all, the police are at one of our neighbours, warning them about letting their holiday properties to visitors, contrary to all lockdown rules and community spirit. Hmmm! It turns out they have been doing this for some time. At least I’ve discovered a new pasta dish to cook.

**Wednesday 20 May**

The hottest day of the year so far. Everyone’s out on the beach walking their dogs early before 8am. And then the village fills up with visitors in mid-morning. Our neighbours decide to block off The Hill to stop visitors driving up to park outside the pub. Which of course is closed for the foreseeable. With a bank holiday weekend and more good weather on the way, the village fears an influx of visitors; car parks, toilets and other facilities will remain closed. It’s a rare day when even the sea breeze can’t be found. But the birds are still singing.

PMQs focus on the government’s record on testing, tracing and isolation. A debacle which the PM says will be fixed by 1 June, the next phase of easing lockdown like schools opening. Brentford means Brentford fans have another zoom and a drink for Cliff’s 60th tomorrow. We are not confident the season will be finished, which division we will play in 20-21 or when we’ll next see a match. Still there are always the memories and I send them all a copy of our photobook marking our sponsorship of the Bees vs Fulham on 14 December 2019. Those were the days.

**Thursday 21 May**

The weather has turned and there are fewer people visiting the village.

*Note to grandson: hope on the horizon? It's 6am on 21 May on Happisburgh beach. It feels like 21 August after a long hot summer. But that's still to come. The sandmartins are nesting, oblivious to the growing death toll. The next ten days in the UK are critical to the future of our country. People want to go on summer holidays but there are many more long hard days to get through first. Stay hope*

Get a new piece of work doing a workshop with YBS. 8pm and we go ring the bell for NHS and care workers, wherever they come from – just hours after the PM backs down on charging them for NHS services. Disgraceful, and another victory for Keir Starmer. Increasingly it looks like schools won’t go back for 1 June. And TTI systems won’t be in place by then. What a mess.

**Friday 22 May**

More visitors out early on the beach as I walk the dogs. A bank holiday weekend is a coming. When I get home, Denise is fuming – the chair of the parish council has emailed saying that the Beach Road car park would be opened from tomorrow for the weekend – the first time since lockdown started. Incandescent. It seems the parish council is split 5-4 on it. Telephone calls all day long with the district councillor – NNDC had already decided to keep the neighbouring car park at Cart Gap closed, so now the whole world will descend on Happisburgh this bank holiday.

Then we discover that we have a house viewing on Tuesday at 10am, which we will have to do. And we hear from Wivenhoe that the house we have put an informal offer on has gone on the market. Denise is not amused, nor about Childcare Champions as we launch a survey. A bit of a day. Take Max out for a late walk and he just won’t settle – has he got the scent? More than 36,000 people have now died having had a positive COVID test – of course the real number of excess deaths is much larger. What is also becoming clearer is the economic damage as April figures show. Forecasters predict a small pick-up in May.

**Saturday 23 May**

The Guardian and Daily Mirror have discovered that Dominic Cummings, the Prime Minister’s most senior adviser, travelled to Durham and stayed there for a week while ill during lockdown. When the rest of us have been told stay at home, particularly when we have symptoms etc. Lots of people haven’t gone to see ill or dying relatives, have made huge sacrifices and are furious. Twitter has gone mad.

*Note to grandson: amidst all the bad news, it has been the most wonderful spring in Happisburgh. Not just beautiful blooms but lots of animals too. We have been following this ring-necked dove from being an egg in a nest to fledgling to cheeky guardian of the bird feeder. Looks like s/he is staying home for the summer.*

It’s a Saturday of a Bank Holiday weekend but it’s very windy and not that sunny, so not many visitors in the village. The car park remains locked as it has been pointed out that no preparations and training have been done to re-open. The village sleeps on. Anne and Steve have exchanged on their Beach Road house and have come up to clear it before completion next week. We are the lucky recipients of a hoover and a lawnmower. They come round to celebrate early evening in our front garden despite the cool wind. All socially distanced outside, just good to have a real drink with friends. And a bit of a hangover.

*Note to grandson: I have told you about lots of things in Happisburgh that have helped get us through the coronavirus crisis. We've also got to know some of our fellow villagers better, whether it's out dog walking or through volunteering to help local residents. Here Rev'd Catherine Dobson writes about the community effort to support vulnerable people across eight local villages. Shopping, collecting prescriptions, posting letters and chatting with neighbours. We have met new people and been to parts of our local area that we didn't know. When it's all over, let's hope we can maintain this mutual community support.*

**Sunday 24 May**

More about Cummings in The Observer and Sunday Mirror. When will he resign? We have our own parallel stories in Happisburgh. First, parish councillor and big local farmer Thomas Love has used his large holiday let, Thatchers, to house his family for the half-term week. Another case of Cummings. Local tweets call on him to resign. In the meantime the chair of Happisburgh parish council, Glenn Berry, resigns – having led his troops up the hill and then not been able to open the car park. Too little, too late. It’s taken over nine years to get change at the PC.

At the 5pm press briefing, the PM comes out fighting and defends Cummings as acting ‘responsibly, legally and with integrity’. Hmmm. More in the Mirror/Guardian tomorrow? 118 deaths today. But it is a bank holiday weekend. Fortunately the weather has not attracted visitors to Happisburgh.

**Monday 25 May**

Bank Holiday Monday (again) but it really doesn’t feel very different to any other day. We have a house viewing tomorrow so a big clean-up is required, all rooms dusted, hoovered, washed and tidied, then the garden too with my new petrol mower. It had to be done. And it takes your mind off the madness of senior government advisors breaking the lockdown rules.

Talking of which, Dominic Cummings gives an unprecedented press conference to explain himself – from the Rose Garden at No.10. It raises even more questions than answers – not least the first: why did he leave his home in London to go to work and then later to drive to Durham, let alone what he did there and a bizarre 30 mile drive to test his eyesight. He also claims to have been warning about pandemics for years – and it then emerges he altered a blog only last month to demonstrate this – just like Orwell’s 1984 I am currently reading. The man is not only arrogant but also a serial liar. Let’s hope the continued pressure will lead to his resignation. Johnson’s poll ratings are crashing. And the TV schedule is up the spout as everything gets delayed.

Episodes 9 and 10 of Normal People are the most emotional yet, with an old friend of Connor’s committing suicide and then Connor is in therapy – takes me back. As has the whole series and book.

**Tuesday 26 May**

Cummings saga rolls on. The public are fuming, more Tory MPs want him to resign, and the media won’t move on despite the government being rude and officious every time someone raises the issue. Time to do something else. Our survey of parents’ experience of childcare in lockdown is now very timely. Two house viewings today, things are picking up – both have seen my video so they must be reasonably interested. Fingers crossed. Plus a Leeway special board meeting to consider a new long term approach to improve support, capacity and sustainability.

Today the UK has passed the 37,000 mark for deaths with a positive COVID test, but ONS also reports excess deaths at almost 60,000 by 15 May with 25,000 in care homes alone. Cummings continues to lead the news all day long including a hard-hitting Newsnight about him breaking lockdown rules at least three times. Still fuming.

**Wednesday 27 May**

After a long walk and run, time to focus on some work. Emails, planning meetings, phone call with ILC re the 3 December conference, Childcare Champions survey, alternatives to residential care. The Cummings affair drags on. The Prime Minister is grilled by the chairs of select committees – more bluster and ignorance. 412 deaths today, the highest figure for a week, as the government announces its track and trace programme to start tomorrow. ‘It’s your civic duty to do it,’ says Matt Hancock. Newsnight is slammed for Emily Maitlis’ introduction last night. My turn to cook tonight, more pasta.

**Thursday 28 May**

The USA reaches 100,000 deaths from coronavirus, a traumatic landmark, a lot of pain and grief. Civic duty vs Dominic Cummings. He is not being charged by the Durham police but the media still have the scent of a government on the slide. The PM announces a relaxation of meeting in groups up to six people outside, while schools and nurseries will open on 1 June. I have been preparing to release the Childcare Champions survey on parents’ experience of childcare coming out of lockdown. Denise has driven over to Peterborough to take her mum another three plus weeks of food supplies. She sits outside June’s flat, chatting on a bench, social distancing. Denise gets back for her first Happisburgh parish council by zoom. To open or not the car park and toilets – yes, from this weekend. It coincides with the last ever #clapforcarers after ten weeks – I bang the Time and Tide bell outside Happisburgh school for five minutes.

*Note to grandson: That will be the last time. Five minutes banging the Time and Tide bell outside Happisburgh school tonight. After ten weeks it's the last* [***#clapforcarers***](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/clapforcarers?__eep__=6&__cft__%5b0%5d=AZU3ah2z5envk--w6axYeF0klx3yT9xZ6TBn8Tj9AKeSYFlsxwnVoxb-MG4HZFKBN5EeV-e9b_xKR8Exu9pYhwzyizPY7Y5UiUh98vbQU6DmG95T36NEhczkfL9Uz_b1a78&__tn__=*NK-R) *but we will never forget all those who have lost their lives to coronavirus and all those who have saved many more through their skill and care. We salute you!*

Every day feels momentous. PS only one week late, but Cliff’s 60th birthday present eventually arrives – he seems thrilled by the red Harrington jacket with an old style Bees logo. A lovely photo. And the others like their photo book memento of our sponsorship of Bees v Fulham in December 2019. Seems like a lifetime ago.

**Friday 29 May**

Cummings has largely blown over but trust in the government has been substantially eroded. The focus is on the continuing relaxation of lockdown from 1 June. You can meet in groups of up to six in parks or private gardens but not inside - although they can use the toilet. But already with the fantastic early summer everyone expects the ‘rules’ to be ignored this weekend, risking a second spike in a few weeks. In the meantime the media doesn’t seem interested in our Childcare Champions survey on parents’ experience of childcare, much to Denise’s delight. So I go to Stalham to pick up a couple of emergency food parcels for residents of Walcott, another government operation. The Chancellor announces more money for furloughed staff and others as we emerge from lockdown. It’s a really beautiful day on the coast. But still not warm enough to go swimming, with an easterly sea breeze. Soon. But it has been the sunniest May on record thank goodness and one of the driest springs ever. Dinner and drinks in the garden again. Meanwhile, away from the UK, the USA is going up in flames in protest at the murder by a police officer of George Floyd in Minneapolis. Black lives matter. But Trump is pouring oil on the flames.

**Saturday 30 May**

Sadly no media coverage of the Childcare Champions survey today. Disappointing. Denise goes shopping while I catch up with emails. The village car park and toilets open for the first time for ten weeks. Hopefully villagers will remain calm. See Facebook post.

*Note to grandson: another beautiful day in this sunniest spring ever. Lockdown is eased, and Happisburgh car park and toilets are re-opened after ten weeks. As the sign says, please keep social distancing (or 'self-distance' as I do all the time) because the scientific advice is not so clear. Take care, be sage and enjoy the weekend ps Dominic Cummings is the ultimate dead cat*

Debate is growing about the government’s relaxation of lockdown from 1 June – too much too soon (after too little too late)? We seem to have gone from level four to level one overnight. We won’t know until it’s too late but a second spike would be disastrous for health and the economy but decisions now seem to be driven by money and business rather than science. The public already seems to think lockdown has ended, are out everywhere. Horrific scenes from a very crowded Durdle Door beach in Dorset where people are injured jumping off the arch, two air ambulance helicopters land on the beach and hundreds of people are crowded together so they can land safely on the beach. Just an example of what’s in store. Zoom/drinks with Anne and Steve, early to bed.

**Sunday 31 May**

A real old fashioned Sunday. Early morning walk in beautiful sunshine with the dogs, chatting with other villagers. Drive to Stalham to pick up the Sunday newspapers and the New Statesman. Scrambled eggs for breakfast in the garden. Read the papers, do some gardening. It’s warm despite the continuing breeze off the sea, so decide this is the moment to go for my first swim in the North Sea in 2020. Max comes with me. It’s surprisingly not cold for May, I get in and out twice to get used to it and then it’s fine for swimming. We are the only ones on the beach. Fruit salad and coffee, lounging in the garden, listening to Johnny Walker’s Sound of the Seventies, before the daily press conference. More relaxation of lockdown as people who have been shielded are allowed to go out. Second spike in July? Then family phonecalls, including my mum who is 84 today. Our present had arrived on time. My sister is driving to see her tomorrow, and I plan to visit her on 23 June, the first time since 9 March. Dinner in the garden. Not much on telly tonight, so we watch the first episode of State of Happiness on catch up, before the latest Killing Eve. Feel cold after the warm day.

**8. Flaming June part one**

Make or break time. As lockdown is eased, will we see health and economic recovery? All eyes were on how well the government was tackling the virus and whether there would be a second wave, politicians clashing with scientists when of course it was always going to be a balance with the scientists advising the politicians. But June then flamed up into a series of increasingly fractious and sometimes violent arguments about long-standing injustices – from racism to transgender, Madeleine McCann and of course ageism and the national scandal of why so many older people have died in the last three months. What a time to turn 60.

**Monday 1 June**

June already, first day of summer and another glorious morning in lockdown. Of course lots of things have been eased in the last couple of days. It seems that people are doing a Cummings and are out and about everywhere, shopping, walking, working, socialising, back at school/nursery. Although lots of schools have decided to delay re-starting. Warnings galore re the continuing dangers, but are people listening? Today’s press conference shows deaths have soared above 39,000.

After a rapid clean up, Denise shows a viewer round our house this morning and seems hopeful that it’s his type of house. I take the dogs off for a swim while the viewing takes place. The sea is lovely, the beach empty. I sort out emails, paperwork re my first pension due on my 60th, plan a presentation for Thursday, and we have Magnums in the sun. Chilling before dinner and then Denise has a zoom meeting re Happisburgh primary school re-opening on 8 June. Last episodes of Normal People – will there be another series?

**Tuesday 2 June**

Another lovely sunny day in lockdown, maybe the last one for a week. It makes life bearable by the sea, swimming and walking. But no news on our latest house viewing.

ONS publishes more statistics on the growing death toll up to 22 May. Excess deaths at over 60,000, COVID deaths at 42,000. World beating!

Up half the night as Max has a bad tummy. I take him for a walk in my dressing gown. Then he appears unannounced in our bedroom, desperate to go out again. Tired!

**Wednesday 3 June**

Dog walking, running, breakfast before a succession of zoom and telephone calls. And a prescription collection for a couple in Walcott who are obviously well enough to be out when I drop the pills off. Boris blusters again at PMQs, the country is none the wiser, despite assurances that he is taking direct control. What was he doing before? Starmer has rattled the PM. And the Business Secretary falls ill, sweating profusely, in the Commons and is rushed off for a test.

Another evening of telly, including episode two of State of Happiness, Escape to the Country in Happisburgh, Corrie, Sewing Bee and of course the news. Growing protests across the USA alongside more COVID shambles. And police hold a suspect re Madeleine McCann’s disappearance in Portugal 13 years ago. Why wasn’t he picked up earlier?

About 10pm we are alerted to the fact that the holiday let opposite us appears to be occupied, contrary to government guidance. I take Max for a walk to check to confirm and then Denise phones the police.

**Thursday 4 June**

The police have visited the cottage opposite and have confirmed it’s occupied - by key workers. We speculate what they are doing! What are they doing? No comings and goings, just working inside.

It’s ten degrees cooler today, strong winds, full moon (strawberry) and a very high tide. Prepare for an interview and discussion with a leading building society this afternoon and a house viewing – thinking while we clean.

Today sees the launch of the new edition of Mark Honigsbaum’s book, The Pandemic Century, updated re COVID-19 and warning of more pandemics to come. From 15 June, we will have to wear face masks on public transport, another sign of things to come but again too late. Deaths not quite 40,000 by the official figures. Test and tracing still in a real mess.

Meanwhile the USA burns ever more fiercely, as Trump’s election campaign rolls on for the next five months. Frightening times. Do Black Lives Matter to a white supremacist president who wants to get re-elected by his core vote?

**Friday 5 June**

Cold and wet this morning, feels like March, and I don’t feel like running after dog walking today. Instead a series of zoom meetings and calls. And a snoozette feeling tired.

I feel weepy and emotional today. My brother in law’s father’s funeral is today, having died after catching COVID in hospital. Kate Garraway talks about her partner Derek Draper’s desperate fight for life for so many weeks. And 357 more deaths have been reported, bringing the total over 40,000.

So Matt Hancock doesn’t start with this at the daily press conference. He’s doing it on his own, no officers with him. His main point is to tell people to stay away from Black Lives Matter protests in London and elsewhere on Saturday. And the R rate is worryingly high in two regions – NW and SW England. Hancock doesn’t reassure.

My turn to cook a veggie meal as we hunker down for a cold and wet evening. A TV tribute to Tom Jones at 80, a great example of ageing better – with an inspirational example of intergenerational action, duets with younger bands and singers that marked Tom’s comeback in 1999. It’s not unusual…

**Saturday 6 June**

Today we should have been in Berkshire – at Cookham and then Bray for a special lunch at The Hind’s Head to celebrate four 60th birthdays with our partners. All cancelled. Potentially re-arranged for November…who knows. Instead Cliff, Roger, Tim and I will do a zoom tomorrow evening.

A house viewing this afternoon has been cancelled, which is not a bad thing given the appalling wet and windy weather. I have to wear two pairs of gloves and a waterproof top for my morning run, having rubbed down three very wet dogs. Still waiting to see if we get an offer on our house from earlier in the week, and debating another house in Wivenhoe. Still prefer the Bake House after listing pros and cons.

It's raining on and off all afternoon. Perfect weather for doing a NHS volunteering trip to Tescos shopping for Sandra and Brian, and for us. Snooze and TV with Spooks and State of Happiness on catch up, before the first of Peter Crouch’s Summer for LCD TV with chilli con carne.

**Sunday 7 June**

Sunday mornings are now good reflection moments. Nowhere to rush off to, instead it’s TV and politics and Sunday papers. Today Professor John Edmunds whom I met some 25 years ago tells the government and the media that we should have gone into lockdown earlier. The papers are asking if we have learned the lessons so far, and suggest we are rushing to re-open the economy to prevent a jobs bloodbath.

Another cold and wet day. Have we had summer? I have a cold, swimming in the sea can’t have helped. Chill, read and write. Johnnie Walker and the Sound of the Seventies, our favourite decade. Followed by Sunday roast. And the last episode of Killing Eve – the third series has been a real disappointment.

In Bristol today, at my old university city, protesters kicked back at the city’s slave history and tore down the statue of Edward Colston. Symbolic gesture for Black Lives Matter and centuries of racial injustice. What will this lead to?

**Monday 8 June**

So much seems to be happening in our angry world this sad grey morning: so this is what is meant by flaming June?

*Note to grandson: After a glorious spring, several days of ominous dark skies, rain and wind, with angry seas, high tides and big waves. Our laissez faire government is letting everything rip. We need leaders who will get to grips with the pandemic and tackle the deep-rooted injustices exacerbated by the pandemic. Most of all everyone needs real hope in these dark times*

But what does the government think, say and do re racial discrimination? It coincides with its continuing failure to explain the disproportionate number of BAME to die from Covid, and a BBC special about the Windrush scandal.

Today sees the lowest number of reported deaths – 55 or 40,597 in total – since lockdown began. Is the virus under control? And the EFL announces that Brentford will play its 13 March match away at Fulham on Saturday 20 June, just 14 weeks late. Meantime arrivals at UK airports have to quarantine for 14 days. A series of legal challenges are planned on this and other issues.

The holiday let opposite us looks empty tonight, so what were the ‘key workers’ doing for the last five days? My laptop feels like it has been hacked as the cursor moves around of its own accord. Who is this. Watch out for the growing number of scams as lockdown eases.

**Tuesday 9 June**

The sun is shining, the wind has dropped, it’s warmer, the mood lifts, despite everything. Today the disaster is schools – most primary school children won’t go to school before September (at the earliest) – a disaster for children, parents, employers, the economy. It goes on. Excess deaths reach 64,000 by 29 May, 52,000 with Covid on death certificates. Meanwhile deaths in hospital are below average, as people are shipped out home or to care homes to save the NHS. Just incredible. 286 deaths today.

In news elsewhere racial divisions in the USA and UK are growing, statues of Rhodes and others now under review. Is this the tipping point?

Another zoom meeting about the Stop Ageism campaign - can we learn from what has happened on racism and sexism? Denise zooms with the US about technology for nurseries.

Then it’s lawnmowing after the recent rain. And while I cook, Denise has a zoom parish council meeting, not so fractious tonight. State of Happiness and the last episode of The A Word. More great music and acting.

**Wednesday 10 June**

Another restless night, after our missing cat returns home at 11.30pm miaowing loudly. After a dog walk and run, we spend the morning cleaning the house in preparation for a visit by a potential new estate agent.

We decide to change estate agents to try and sell the house by the end of September. But there’s 28 days notice, so the current agents still have a chance to show what they are made of.

A brief interlude as I get out for half an hour to collect and deliver a prescription for someone shielding in Happisburgh. Boris blusters through another press conference as debate rages on whether delays in lockdown cost 20,000+ lives, while lockdown restrictions are further eased to help lonely people.

In the evening we have a zoom call with the officers of Friends of Happisburgh Lighthouse. It’s clear that we won’t be able to run normal public open days at the lighthouse this summer. We also decide that we can’t run private visits either. All of which is a shame given all the work done inside the lighthouse and the fact that this summer we were due to celebrate the 30th anniversary of being the UK’s only independently run working lighthouse, together with a visit by our Royal patron. Next year. Hopefully.

**Thursday 11 June**

A day of writing blogs. One for STOPageism and one for ILC-UK on housing, plus an article for Care Talk on the future of intergenerational care. Fortunately it’s a wet day, good for nothing except writing, dog walking and shopping at Waitrose.

Media coverage has quietened down after the storms of the last week. The Conservative Party seems split on speeding up the end of lockdown while others are still cautious. Social distancing by two metres doesn’t help many activities from schools to pubs. Zoos to open on Monday, so that’s ok, plus all the shops we haven’t missed.

**Friday 12 June**

It’s definitely not over. This was the date that the PM predicted three months ago when we would see the outcome of lockdown. Also many restaurants and pubs had banked on opening by now. Instead the economy is tanking with GDP falling by more than 20% in April alone, completely unprecedented, some 25,000 older people with coronavirus in hospital were discharged to care homes saving the NHS but causing deaths elsewhere, poorest areas have been worst affected by Covid. 202 new deaths reported today. World beating, not.

We had a bad night, it’s mild and Millie is restless and not sleeping, so I was up several times. Tired after a long walk and run. Washing up and emails while Denise goes to M&S in Norwich. Feel like a change of scene after three and a half months in Happisburgh and surrounds. It’s hard work writing and reading while Happisburgh is covered all day by a sea fret.

At least we have the last two episodes of State of Happiness to transport us to 1970s Norway.

**Saturday 13 June**

While London and other cities were planning for a day of riots and violence around some statues, we had a change of scene – a day out in Peterborough and Lincolnshire.

First to Peterborough to celebrate Denise’s mum June’s 91st birthday. We’re allowed to go in the garden of her extra care housing scheme. It’s been in lockdown from early on, no one has got coronavirus, and now they have eased a bit to allow relatives to visit outside. Plus of course our three Labradors which delighted June who has received a huge number of cards. At 91 she’s younger than lots of other residents and seems stronger than a year ago.

*Note to grandson: sadly you couldn't join us for your great nanny June's 91st birthday today, but you are here in spirit and on her cushion! We look forward to seeing you tomorrow for more birthday celebrations this weekend. We are lucky to have a day out, socially distanced of course*

Then to Lincolnshire near Spalding for a late afternoon and early evening barbeque with Denise’s cousins. First time I had been at their house since the wake on 9 January for Ian, the father and grandfather of this multigenerational household. It’s a beautiful summer’s day, everyone is on good form, our three dogs get on well their two, and they spoil me in advance of my 60th birthday with presents and a wonderful meal with two fantastic desserts.

Another 181 deaths were reported today.

**Sunday 14 June**

My sixtieth birthday is not until tomorrow but it’s been a weekend of celebrations as much as we could in the lockdown circumstances. Today’s we’re at home and Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan come and visit from Wivenhoe. Pity that the day starts with fret and rain but it clears just before they arrive. They have brought the most wonderful birthday present – a specially commissioned illustration for the front cover of my children’s book, ‘Grandpa, can we visit your lighthouse?’. Brilliant. Followed by a fabulous lunch by Denise in the garden. It’s lovely just to be able to sit and chat after four months in my case since we last saw each other. Ardan has really grown up, now 3 years 9 months old, and he has long hair. We take the dogs to the beach, roll in the sand, and have water pistol fights. Then a rainbow birthday cake with six candles and lots of sugar bees. Sweet! Up the Bees. Photos galore. Just a shame Johnny Walker doesn’t read out Denise’s lovely request on Radio 2’s Sounds of the Seventies, denting her hit rate.

Today 36 deaths were reported, the lowest since lockdown started.

**9. SIXTY THINGS I WISH I’D UNDERSTOOD WHEN I WAS 16**

A baby boomer’s tips on his 60th birthday to generation C, his grandchild and nephew

1 Do something you believe in

2 Some things are for life

3 Love takes time

4 Spend time with your elders – and youngsters

5 Hard work pays off

6 Take part in team sport

7 You can take the boy out of west London…

8 Communicate directly

9 Keep asking questions

10 ‘Why?’ is the key question (and who benefits)

11 Travel (efficiently)

12 Keep fit and supple

13 You are what you eat and drink

14 Listen, read, listen

15 Religion has a lot to answer for

16 Don’t take your own life

17 Family is/are important

18 Knowledge, skills, experience count

19 Keep in touch with your friends

20 Sing if you can (or can’t)

21 It’s not worth lying

22 Money can be good or bad

23 Discover your running strength

24 Get on with your dad

25 Be yourself

26 You have to laugh LOL

27 Ageing is more than a number

28 Death do us part

29 Marriage needs hard work

30 Pop is for life

31 Dogs and cats

32 Talking always helps

33 Bullshitters vs doers

34 Don’t undersell yourself

35 It’s what you do that counts

36 Where there’s a will

37 Cherish unconditional love

38 What’s your legacy?

39 We are all imposters

40 Invest in home and homelife

41 Ask for help

42 Sleep well

43 Turn it off

44 Create your own narrative

45 Don’t let others pigeonhole you

46 No surprises

47 Network, network, network

48 Read widely

49 Politics can change the world

50 All you need is love

51 Football for ever

52 Genes are for life

53 Children can teach you so much

54 Listen to the animals

55 Sunshine, you shine

56 Learn your numbers, and learn to write

57 Fight your fears

58 Spreadsheets, statistics and data

59 Big boys do cry

60 Think big

61 Prepare for the end

**10. Flaming June part two**

The second half of June promises much – more good weather, the easing of lockdown, economic recovery, even my 60th birthday. If only life was that straightforward. You couldn’t make it up (again).

**Monday 15 June**

My 60th birthday. I don’t feel very well this morning after another restless night. Is the pressure affecting me? Or is it indigestion after a weekend of rich food or hayfever? I take the dogs for a long walk, and go for a run. Then I’m ready for the birthday treats: cards and presents. I have been spoilt by Denise, family and friends. Lots of Brentford memoribilia and pictures. A late breakfast, emails and preparation for a zoom meeting. Denise is also zooming before going shopping for a local person still shielding. While most of the country is bathed in sunshine, the Norfolk coast is covered by fret. A zoom Victory board meeting, then a zoom with Anne and Steve for a birthday drink. And Denise has made a curry for my birthday. Second episode of the Salisbury Poisionings, based on real events two and a bit years ago. Good drama, with remarkable echos of the current crisis. Now for my sixty first year…

**Tuesday 16 June**

Manchester United and England footballer Marcus Rashford kicks off the news headlines with his campaign to stop children going hungry this summer. By early afternoon the government climbed down and u-turned to give 1.3 million school children free school meals during the summer. A very impressive 22 year old man. Plenty more for him to do as Britain and the world faces up to racial inequality.

233 deaths reported today, plus the latest on excess deaths from ONS – 64,402 from March. 16,000 deaths in care homes. So with most shops now open, but unemployment up to 2.8m, highest for 27 years, and furlough still to end, it’s all in the balance. And there’s been a second wave in Beijing. But scientists have found an old drug that helps alleviate the symptoms of some of the most ill from coronavirus, potentially saving significant numbers of lives.

Today we have more photographs taken of our house – by the same photographer as in January but for a different agency. Hard to believe more than five months have passed since we last chatted with him. The last episode of The Salisbury Poisonings on BBC1 makes the parallels with coronavirus even more striking re the importance of locally run track and tracing. And the impact on those most affected – the people who almost die and whose recovery is limited, and those burnt out in helping prevent things being even worse. What can be done for them?

**Wednesday 17 June**

A warm morning and a calm sea, ideal for swimming but after a dog walk and run I only have time for a quick breakfast in the garden before the first zoom today.

*Note to grandson: A welcome sea of calm in Happisburgh this morning in these turbulent times. Perfect for swimming or just looking. Hope you have a few moments of peace and calm today to remember those who have died, those who have lost loved ones and those who are caring for the sick. It's not over yet*

Beijing has a second spike, 184 more deaths reported here today. How are care homes and schools in the UK managing to stay in touch during lockdown? Some digital creativity and some planning ahead needed. Hancock praises ‘Daniel’ Rashford.

The fret moves in and storms are expected tonight. So a 3.5 hour zoom isn’t the end of the world for a two part Victory housing trust board meeting. Too much on the agenda, too much to read, too much too late. Frustrating and I will say so. But Denise cooks a lovely pasta supper. Tired.

**Thursday 18 June**

The UK passes 300,000 for cases of covid. And NHS sources say they are gearing up for a second spike in October. The long-promised test and trace app has been scrapped and replaced by human tracers!

An intergenerational housing zoom meeting, emails and tweeting. The dogs are restless and Max is harassing Millie. It has rained a lot of the night and all morning. Then the sun is out all afternoon, after a snoozette. Tired.

First two episodes of Cardinal, a moody detective series from Canada. After supper cooked by me.

**Friday 19 June**

Long dog walk, run and breakfast in the sun. My first googlemeet with old friend Harry Hobson on tech and intergenerational links. My new blog on intergenerational housing has been published by ILC-UK and gets a few tweets. Good timing with Digital Housing Week on Monday.

Today it’s escape to Norwich – my first visit to the fine city since lockdown. Denise goes to M&S and I go to HMV for a splurge. Get that out of your system. The shops are still quiet.

Gavin Williamson does the daily Covid-19 press conference, not filling anyone with confidence about a plan for getting schools back anytime soon, even by September. Lots of hints that the 2 metre social distancing rule is to be relaxed as the state of alert is reduced to level 3. 173 new deaths reported today. Scandals galore on the horizon about massive contracts awarded to dodgy companies that haven’t delivered on so many aspects – from tech to PPE. It will all be exposed.

**Saturday 20 June**

A lovely summer’s morning, the sea looks really inviting. But I have to take Millie to the vets to have her anal glands looked at (and to stop Max pestering her). As usual I come back with lots of expensive drugs.

Back for a late breakfast and then the long run-in to Brentford’s first match back in the season re-start: away at Fulham, the match we should have seen on Friday 13 March, when lockdown should have started. We have free TV access to replace the rest of our season ticket for the outstanding nine matches, given no fans will be at any games. A tight and tense match which took off in the last ten minutes as the Bees won 2-0 to keep our promotion hopes alive. Huge cheering on our Bees zoom, and a fab cheese ploughmans by Denise.

Then, what else does one do on a sunny afternoon but mow the lawn after two weeks of rain and warmth. And do my back and the electric mower in. The afternoon gets hotter, so pizza in the garden followed by Cardinal series one last two episodes, very good. Football’s back too/two.

All the predictions are that pubs, restaurants etc will be open from 4 July…if you have the right app to order drinks of course.

**Sunday 21 June**

Set the alarm for 4am so we can get up to see the sunrise on 21 June. The dogs seem a bit surprised.

*Note to grandson: Nonna and I and the dogs were up for the sunrise at 4.28am on the longest day. There have been lots of long days this year. Mollie went swimming and we chatted with neighbours. A beautiful start to the day in Happisburgh. No midsummer beer festival here this year, just a few cars out early in the car park. Happy Father's Day too!*

Some lovely photos for Facebook. Particularly of the dog whisperer at sunrise. We can’t get back to sleep, so it’s out early for the Sunday papers, then clearing and cleaning our little car for selling this week. More on Marr about opening up from 4 July – something to look forward to?

Max gets a long lunchtime walk, before we settle for Sunday afternoon in the garden, Sunday papers and Sounds of the Seventies. A relaxing day but I have done something to my back and find it hard to relax. Still warm enough for dinner in the garden, followed by the start of the second series of Cardinal.

**Monday 22 June**

Have I been 60 for a week already? I can’t run because of my back but I take the dogs for a long walk and then a swim in the sea. It’s already warm for what promises to be the hottest week of the year. Divine. Catch up with Paul before breakfast in the garden and my call with Claire Chapman about setting up Norfolk Screen. I know nothing about the film business but do have some ideas re strategy and contacts. Claire is coming to see Happisburgh lighthouse as a film location on Sunday.

Lunchtime call with Judy Downey re the state of care and what next for care homes and reforms. Followed by a zoom with the board of the Together Project on how to re-open post furlough and build relationships with care home residents and parents/toddlers. Almost impossible at the moment after all the deaths and illness in care homes. Just 15 deaths reported today, plus more hints that 4 July is the target date for getting Britain out enjoying life, and 6 July for those shielding.

It's still very hot for the final walk of the day, a quick visit to the lighthouse to pick up souvenirs and see the latest work by the Tubbys. Denise trims my beard with the new shaver she bought me for my birthday. Looks a lot better than the three months growth. Dinner in the garden again – how many times this week?

**Tuesday 23 June**

A day with a difference. I don’t get to walk the dogs this morning because I’m taking a long train journey to Wiltshire to see my mum and pick up her car which at the age of 84 she has decided to stop driving. As Denise drops me off at North Walsham, I feel nervous as we approach the station. It’s the first time I’ve been to and across London since 7 March and even longer since I have been on a train or tube. I put my mask on, after kissing Denise goodbye, and get out of the car and onto the platform. No one else is there and by the time the train arrives at 7.45am, there is only one other person getting on. In normal times, this train would have been busy with workers and schoolchildren. No one checks tickets. At Norwich, the 8.30am train to London has been cancelled, so a longer wait for the 9am. At least a human being can tell me that, having walked past posters from the Campaign to End Loneliness and Red Cross – ‘you may feel alone but you are not alone’. Sitting outside the station in the sunshine, without a mask on, is much more pleasant. The station is very quiet and the roads outside at 8.30am don’t suggest a busy rush hour. The new working classes are those who can’t work at home. Everyone else has been furloughed. Where there are new spikes are the meat factories, enough to make everyone vegan. The 9am to London leaves on time, is a modern and clean train, nicely empty. No ticket collectors but the contactless buffet is open. I see online that my letter to The Times re intergenerational fairness for funding the recovery has been published, another minor victory. The train goes through the stations near where we hope to move to – Colchester, Manningtree etc, looking beautiful in the sunshine. Feel a lot calmer with so few people travelling. Even manage to use the toilet, but not in Alan Partridge hands free style. A quick dash at Stratford to get the Jubilee Line to Waterloo, and I just make the train for Salisbury. Lots of young people not wearing masks. Feeling immortal? How could they not see all the countless signs and directions, which will have to be taken down at some point, as Boris announces further relaxation today – but not quite the end of lockdown? Pubs, restaurants, museums, galleries, cinemas will all be allowed to open from 4 July. Will our local pub try to open on the car park which is common land? We have the evidence! The train to Salisbury passes through some awful towns like Woking which don’t even look good in the sun. Every station looks empty except for all the 2 metre distancing signage and Red Cross posters. Salisbury is the final stop, scene of the recent BBC drama of the real life poisoning. Not a lot happening and a taxi is easy to find to get to Hanging Langford where my mum lives. Pity about all the road works in Wilton which delay us by 15 minutes, but mum is waiting with lunch ready. I shower to wash off all the travel germs. The outside of her house is being painted, lots of scaffolding in the hot weather. We go through paperwork for her car and for my brother’s trust fund so I can take it home with me. We watch Boris’s last Covid-19 press conference as ‘hibernation ends’ and lockdown measures will be widely eased from 4 July, with one metre plus social distancing. The officials are much more cautious, clearly expect a second wave and social distancing won’t be further relaxed for almost a year. 171 new deaths reported. I leave at 6pm to drive back to Norfolk in my mum’s car, having done a trial run for petrol. It takes me just over four hours non-stop, fortunately traffic is light even around London. Tired by the end in the heat. Get a lot of cramp in the night.

**Wednesday 24 June**

Millie has had a bad day in my absence and can barely walk. Max has been a pest again, jumping on her and smelling her bum. It continues this morning so she doesn’t come for the walk. Another warm morning and I go swimming with Mollie while Max does a runner, only to be rounded up half a mile away by angry locals who phone Denise. It continues all day and he is locked down several times. Denise has gone to Peterborough to get the GP to see her mum and take her for an assessment at the hospital arranged by her GP. It turns out that communication has failed and no appointment seems to exist. What a waste of time and another example of how the NHS has been eroded by Covid-19. A domestic day for me – washing, cooking, dogs, bins etc. This afternoon sees the creation of The Family Mediation Trust as we complete the merger of Norfolk and Cambridge family mediation services. I stand down as chair and hand over to a new board. Then I pick up a new pair of black 511 Levis! Denise returns and dogs harmony of a sort is restored. The heat is tiring. No press conference today but 154 deaths, over 65,000 excess deaths. Government definitely trying to change the subject.

**Thursday 25 June**

149 deaths today and half a million people on the beaches of Bournemouth. Has Britain gone mad? It is the hottest day of the year so far, after all. But still nine days before a lot of things open up. Frightening. Then Liverpool win the premiership and the city goes mad too. Riots after illegal rave parties in Brixton. And the list goes on. A day of telephone calls and emails. Staying out of the sun following weather warnings of very high UVR. Had enough swimming at 7.30am and breakfast in the garden. This is not Britain! We let our hair down with a couple of drinks in the front garden with neighbours, Helen and Mike and their Mollie. Sweltering night too.

**Friday 26 June**

186 deaths reported today. After all the partying and beach life. When will we wake up?

It’s a very hot and humid day, but no storms on the north east Norfolk coast. Walk early and swim with the dogs, but they don’t want to go out in the midday heat. I feel equally lethargic after a late night.

Intu shopping centres go into administration. Locally, we don’t know when the Hill House pub will re-open. Lots more bad news to come this summer and autumn re job cuts.

But the big match this evening was Brentford v WBA – originally due on 17 March. Another top performance and 1-0 win for the Bees, taking us to 5 points from the automatic promotion places. All to play for with seven games to go!

**Saturday 27 June**

A day with a difference. After the usual Saturday morning chores and tidying up, Denise’s multigenerational cousins from Lincolnshire come over for the day, together with their 2 year old retriever. They all go swimming in the sea after putting up a large canopy in our garden because the weather forecast is not good. Then a lengthy lunch, chatting and snoozing, tea in the garden, another walk, and move to the front garden for a light supper and FA Cup quarter final on TV. A relaxing day and little interaction with the wider world. And some great photos of the garden and house and people.

**Sunday 28 June**

The weather is still very changeable – hot one minute to showers as the wind blows through storms. A warm dog walk, the Sunday papers run, scrambled eggs on toast. Then I deliver some parish newsletters, while the vicar is leading a service on zoom. More dog walking. Then to the lighthouse for the first time for a fortnight to show round Claire Chapman (and daughter) from Norfolk Screen, looking at potential film locations. It’s great watching the storms around us from the top of the lighthouse. Back for a Sound of the Seventies special on Glastonbury after a weekend of not the festival. Zoom with Anne and Steve, planning a USA road trip to the south west in June 2021. If the USA has got covid under control by then. 36 deaths reported in the UK today, but worries about local lockdowns, particularly in Leicester. Do 21 grant letters for my brother’s memorial fund, £4300 in cheques. And finally two more episodes of Cardinal. A good weekend, but what’s going to happen next weekend when pubs etc re-open?

**Monday 29 June**

Feel tired after a disturbed night and an early waking. It’s much cooler, which will suit many but is not good for our day out in Suffolk and plans for river swimming. Before then the Prime Minister promises to ‘build, build, build’ towards economic recovery (and divert attention from the continuing health crisis and threat of a second wave. He admits Covid-19 has been a disaster for the UK). So it’s appropriate that we are visiting Mark and Jeanette Honigsbaum in Marlesford, Suffolk, a few weeks after the revised edition has been published by Penguin of Mark’s The Pandemic Century, updated for Covid-19. He does a radio interview while we’re there. Not good enough for swimming, so a long walk through the Suffolk countryside and farmland before a lovely Cromer crab salad lunch. Denise also buys a replacement stag’s head for our living room wall from the antiques emporium in the village. Great to catch up with our old next door neighbours from Shepherds Bush. On the way home, we stop at Aldeburgh for a fish and chips supper. All are tired back at home. Meanwhile Leicester is the first city/area to face a local lockdown in response to a concentrated outbreak. More to come no doubt.

**Tuesday 30 June**

Still not flaming June – cloudy and cool. Perfect for my first run for 11 days after a back problem of some unknown sort. Spend the day drafting July’s e-news from United for All Ages and making sure our database for its circulation is up to date. Denise goes into Norwich for M&S shopping. Today the ONS reports that in mid-June total deaths were less than the five year average, so no excess deaths for the first time since March. But there are another 155 Covid deaths reported today. Back at home our washing machine has broken down, a few weeks after our dishwasher. Then it’s a 6pm kick-off for Reading v Brentford, seven games to go in our promotion push. A comfortable 0-3 win and the gap at the top closes further! A couple of beers and pizza to celebrate.

Here ends the first half of 2020. Let’s hope it improves…

**11 The second half starts here**

Things can only get better. The first six months of 2020 have turned from hopeful to not even half-empty. But as July starts, it looks like we might have got through the worst. The government wants us all to have a summer holiday, a Staycation at least, and the Prime Minister hopes all will be back to normal by Christmas. Are we sleepwalking out of lockdown or will there be a sting in the tail?

**Wednesday 1 July**

We’re planning a normal day at home, with Denise out shopping for neighbours and collecting a prescription. The phone rings over breakfast – it’s her mum’s GP, and she needs to go into hospital for urgent tests. Denise rushes to get ready to drive 2.5 hours to Peterborough. So after I’ve sent out our July e-news and dealt with some responses re #AllAgesMatter, I go to Tescos to do two rounds of shopping, always a learning experience buying products for the first time, and pick up the prescriptions, and then deliver to three addresses. The dogs are impatient on my return for their lunchtime walk. The afternoon I spend fixing the washing machine and trying to fix the dishwasher. One out of two ain’t bad. Fortunately Denise’s mum doesn’t need to be admitted to hospital and can have her minor op tomorrow but because of lockdown Denise can’t stay overnight and heads back home. More deaths (176) reported today and more local lockdowns threatened. In the USA, coronavirus cases seem to be spiralling out of control.

**Thursday 2 July**

Today the government tells us how it plans to get all children back to school in September. Meanwhile summer holiday travel plans are still on hold as quarantine arrangements are waiting to be confirmed. More job losses on the horizon after some 11,000 were axed yesterday.

Denise heads off to Peterborough again to take her mum to Stamford hospital this time. More time for me to do emails, phone calls, home chores etc. Lots of requests to speak at webinars. Another day when summer seems to have disappeared after a bright start, dark clouds and rain, some warmth.

**Friday 3 July**

So much excitement about pubs in England opening tomorrow (but not until 6am), but amateur cricket can’t start, and the Prime Minister is urging everyone to ‘act responsibly’.

Spend most of the morning trying to fix the dishwasher which doesn’t seem to drain properly. Fail, so we call someone out for Monday. Then mow the lawn in the afternoon. Knackered.

The Prime Minister gives a rare press conference in late afternoon to celebrate the much vaunted mass easing of lockdown tomorrow. But they all still sound very cautious. Don’t go mad (again). We stay in to watch two more episodes of Cardinal. It’s also clear that some caravans in the local caravan park are occupied tonight, a day earlier than allowed! Nothing changes.

**Saturday 4 July**

It’s here, but the weather’s not encouraging for spending the day outside the pub.

*Note to grandson: welcome to Independence Day, Super Saturday or whatever. More than one hundred days after lockdown started, England (NB) sees a big re-opening of pubs from 6am, restaurants, cinemas and hairdressers. Mother Nature has designated it a Grey Day in Happisburgh. The village pub is not re-opening today but the caravan park was open last night. The community playscheme was re-opened this morning but sadly the Lighthouse is closed this summer. This afternoon I shall be watching Brentford playing Wigan from the safety of my laptop with a bottle or two of London Pride. Wherever you are, whatever you do, keep safe and 'act responsibly'. After all, it's still out there.*

More people are around in the village. A spat breaks out on Facebook about the caravan park being open a day early. No respect. 137 more deaths reported today.

Another Saturday, another football match. Brentford take on Wigan who went into administration during the week. Undefeated for months, a tough challenge but will they be distracted? A Benrahma hattrick is the answer, another 3-0 win, five consecutive victories, no goals conceded. But still third in the championship. Five games to go. A good catch up on zoom with the Elleys, Bedwards, Dave and Matt.

Two more episodes of Canadian detective series Cardinal, then That’s 70s music.

**Sunday 5 July**

So today is the birthday of the NHS – 72 years old this year. Not in great health after five months of Covid-19 while many other treatments are put on hold. At 5pm we bang the bell for another time and clap. Not so many people out today compared to the Thursdays in April and May.

We spent the warm, windy and sunny morning in the garden, pulling up lots of weeds. After an egg and bacon breakfast. My body is aching all over, particularly my back, hips and legs. It’s like sitting in a warm hairdryer. Relaxing to the latest Sounds of the Seventies.

After the applause for the NHS, we watch the end of series three of Cardinal to discover there is a series four. And then watch more Canadian produce: Schitt’s Creek. A different barrel of laughs. A very mild night.

**Monday 6 July**

We both have restless nights in the warmth. But for the first time in almost two weeks I manage to go for a run without aching. Then it’s the visits of the repairers – dishwasher and electric radiator. More tomorrow. A quiet afternoon preparing a presentation, emails etc before I cook supper and we settle down to more Cardinal. The good news is that Greece will be admitting direct flights from the UK from 15 July so our trip to Rhodes/Symi on 8-15 September should go ahead. Here 16 people are reported to have died from Covid-19 but they have given up reporting numbers tested. The PM causes a furore by blaming care homes for the high death toll there.

**Tuesday 7 July**

A dozen words by the Prime Minister has done more to unite the care sector than years and years of inaction on the reform and funding of care. Unity in anger. Particularly re things beyond their control such as positive patients being discharged from hospital into care homes, the lack of testing for residents and staff, and ever-changing guidance. 155 deaths reported today.

This morning started with a rude awakening as I took an unexpected swim at high tide, trying to dodge around an incoming lagoon. Much fun for observers and the dogs. Today the washing machine leak is fixed – a rat had gnawed through a pipe – but the bathroom radiator still doesn’t work, despite two visits by Homecare. Fortunately our local specialist Steve is on the case. Submit a response objecting to the latest planning application from the local caravan park – they still haven’t implemented many of the measures from previous permissions! Write half a piece for the journal, Quality in Ageing and Older Adults, about the Covid-19 experience. Then it’s Brentford v Charlton. After five wins in a row, this has trouble written all over it. Charlton score the first goal against us for six matches and we don’t score until the last 15 minutes. A very tense 2-1 victory. Time for beers, supper and more Cardinal.

Today was meant to have been the day that HRH The Princess Royal visited Happisburgh Lighthouse to help mark 30 years of being the UK’s only independently run working lighthouse. Another Covid casualty, postponed until 2021.

**Wednesday 8 July**

A quiet day. Lots of exercise first thing before porridge because it’s chilly and wet in July. Continuing issues to be resolved on the phone and by email. An early lunchtime walk so we can see PMQs and then the Chancellor’s latest £30bn statement on protecting jobs and boosting the economy. We sadly are most interested in the stamp duty change – nothing to pay up to £500k. Good timing as our new estate agents took over today and the revamped details are on Rightmove, looking good. Fingers crossed. An afternoon zoom with people from Camden Intergenerational Network. And after dinner, the final episodes of series four of Cardinal. That’s it folks. Except 126 deaths were reported today and the PM won’t apologise for blaming care homes. Worrying news about the long term implications of Covid and what it can do to you. [Beginning](file:///\\beginning) to sound more lab-made than bat.

**Thursday 9 July**

Sleep in after 8am, very unusual but there was some dog disturbance overnight. It’s very wet out on the first dog walk of the day. July is not flaming like June. While Denise heads to North Walsham supermarkets, I do some household chores and catch up with emails. After lunch it’s an ILC webinar on ageism, ableism and Covid-19. Some stimulating contributions. A government press conference to announce gyms, pools and more opening up. Doubts raised about the Chancellor’s package announced yesterday and whether it’s targeting the right people and sectors. Unfortunately Leeds thrash Stoke so the Bees’ chances of automatic promotion are evaporating with only four games left to play. A zoom call with Stella and Simon in Colchester; they are coming to stay in early September. Not a lot on TV tonight.

**Friday 10 July**

After walking the dogs and running, the final leg of today’s triathlon is cleaning Little Thrums and the house in advance of our guests arriving today – Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan. Ardy is staying with us for four nights while Rhiannon and Tom have two nights away in real North Norfolk ie Burnham. A lovely lunch in the garden, then a couple of hours playing on the beach. The sun is shining and Ardy loves it, playing ball with Max while Mollie barks at anyone who comes close to us on her beach. Finally dinner in the garden – sea bass and gooseberry pie. We’re all tired. Tom and Rhiannon happily working from home in Wivenhoe and no change in sight. The Prime Minister says tonight that people should wear masks more often and go back to their workplaces rather than work from home. Sounds like this will prompt more resistance.

**Saturday 11 July**

Nice enough to have breakfast in the garden. Rhiannon and Tom head off for their weekend in Burnham while Denise and Ardy go to Tescos in Stalham. I read the Saturday papers and get ready for the big match – an early kick-off for Sky, 12.30pm as the Bees play at Derby County. Meet up with the usual gang on zoom and pizza/beers for lunch with Ardy watching. I’m feeling a bit nervous about this one. Derby are challenging for promotion too and have Wayne Rooney pulling the strings. We score very early, Derby equalise, then Benrahma scores two – a goalkeeping error followed by a wonder goal. 3-1 the Bees and we’re pushing hard on the two leaders. WBA can only draw, so the gap narrows to three points with three games to play. Tense! Another trip to the beach, I go swimming, Max goes roaming and then Ardy and I play in the sea. Denise videos and looks after the dogs. More dinner in the garden, and chat with our neighbours, Geoff and Katie, who are visiting for the foreseeable. An early night.

**Sunday 12 July**

An early start. A fine sunny day. To the beach only for Max to meet a bitch in season, get very excited and then run back after her twice on the way home. Fortunately he made it back for breakfast. After getting the Sunday papers, I go for a swim, beautiful conditions on my private beach in Happisburgh. Return to find Denise setting up the paddling pool for Ardan – and me. Very cold water from the outside tap. But hours of endless fun and photos/videos as Ardan pushes and splashes me this way and that. More in the afternoon. It’s very hot and I burn for the first time for ages. Government Ministers contradict each other re wearing face masks in shops, as we approach 44,800 deaths. More confused messaging. Ardy is very tired after the pool frolics and goes to bed early for a long sleep.

**Monday 13 July**

Cloudier but still warm, almost stormy but not quite. Denise takes Ardy shopping in North Walsham. More pool time, but it feels a bit chilly. Rhiannon and Tom get back from their two nights in Burnham Market but don’t want to jump in. Catch up on two days fun, snooze while they drink. I have a Blue Jeans call to the USA with Facebook’s social research team on intergenerational connectedness. Then supper before Denise has parish council meeting. Sounds like a noisy zoom.

**Tuesday 14 July**

Face masks will be compulsory in shops, it has been eventually decided by the government, but not until 24 July. Bolting more stable doors very late. Almost 45,000 died by today, record outbreaks across the world, and a warning that 120,000 could die in the UK this winter. We have the first viewing of our house through the new estate agents today, so after a long breakfast and farewells to Rhiannon, Tom and Ardy, it’s all hands on deck to clean and tidy everywhere. I get sent out with the dogs for another long walk before the visitors arrive. We shall see. Finish our presentation for tomorrow and do a hand-out. And pray for West Brom to lose to Fulham to boost our promotion chances. But they draw 0-0 which isn’t good enough. A quiet evening in, TV and salad.

**Wednesday 15 July**

The most beautiful English summer morning; should have gone for a swim but I end up running after walking the dogs. Followed by fruit, yoghurt and honey in the garden. The best part of the day is over, clouds roll in and work follows. Email, presentation, tweets, blog, letters. This afternoon Denise and I record a presentation by zoom on connecting young and old for the US parent and nanny conference in September. I have a blog published by Stop Ageism. And The Guardian is publishing my letter tomorrow on funding care. All exciting. Late afternoon at 5pm Brentford kick off against Preston North End, a tough match against play off contenders. The Bees win 1-0, eight wins in a row, one point off the top two, but only two games left to catch them. Tense. A quiet evening in.

**Thursday 16 July**

A grey cool morning. We live in strange times. We have fallen out with China over Hong Kong, Huawei and Covid; today we are falling out with Russia on election interference and hacking of Covid vaccine researchers. What next? Covid is still here as second spikes elsewhere and the USA demonstrate, let alone local worries in the UK. We have now passed 45,000 deaths of those tested positive. Tweet about my blog and letter in The Guardian, and write another letter to The Times. Zoom with Bristol public policy researchers on intergenerational action. Finish off a piece for the QiAOA journal. Dinner in the warm sunshine at the end of the day after a chat with Martin and Patrice on the evening walk. Still tense about the football.

**Friday 17 July**

Post-lockdown life feels strange. Still in limbo, no return to normal, no sense of anything new, no desire to do the old things. Just ups and downs in bodily aches and emotions.

I can still exercise, so a run before it gets too hot. Denise is having her nails done for the first time since March by her cousin Elizabeth behind screens etc. Meanwhile I cut the grass and tidy up the garden in anticipation of more house viewings. The Prime Minister does a late morning press conference to announce more easing of lockdown and the road to recovery over the next nine months and a normal Christmas. The government is very worried about the speed of economic recovery, wants more people to return to their workplaces to help save city centres and businesses, and must be worried that slow recovery is going to undermine Brexit later this year. The afternoon includes a couple of interviews with impressive potential trustees of The Together Project in advance of it converting to charitable status when I will initially at least chair the board. Then dinner with our neighbours Geoff and Katie, relaxing in our front garden from the sunshine heat at 6pm-ish until darkness just before 11pm. And at the same time West Brom lose to Huddersfield meaning that Brentford still have a great chance of automatic promotion. We sleep in our spare room and I have a sleepless night dreaming about promotion to the premiership and the dogs wake us several times.

**Saturday 18 July**

A real up and down day. It starts with lovely sunshine for our dog walk and a swim in a beautifully calm sea. Then we clean and tidy the house for a viewing, by people who aren’t interested, while I take the dogs out. The Times has published my latest letter on care funding, and I tweet etc. Then we settle down to watch the lunchtime kick-off between Stoke and Brentford. Nerves are jangling, the Bees never really get going and the ref doesn’t help. We lose 1-0 and there goes our big chance. The season isn’t over. But we all feel flat. Denise and I go and do a shopping trip as NHS volunteers, as a distraction. Home to sit in the sun and chill. Nothing planned for the rest of the weekend…and I can’t face watching Match of the Day after the result earlier.

**Sunday 19 July**

A wet night and morning, so the beach is unusually empty for a Sunday morning. Then to Stalham for the Sunday papers. My letter re care funding is in The Sunday Times – three letters in four days, so I hope the government is getting the message. Even BBC’s Marr programme is dominated by discussion of relations with Russia and China, two big rows. Scrambled eggs for breakfast, then sorting out several months post, more dog walking and the sun is out. Snoozette, afternoon delight and Johnny Walker’s Sounds of the Seventies in the sunshine. And dinner outside before a zoom catch up with Anne and Steve. Covid is not going but the government seems to be more focused on preparing for Brexit. We shall see.

**Monday 20 July**

A long walk with the dogs and then a run despite my back feeling rough again. Fresh fruit and yoghurt in the sunshine. While Denise is out on parish council business, I do two more zooms recruiting trustees for The Together Project – excellent candidates. Follow up emails, then start preparing for an APPG presentation tomorrow only to be told that it has been postponed until September – MPs are clearly in end of term mode. Sunshine it is instead. And cleaning before another house viewing when I take the dogs out for another walk. Denise has a school governors zoom meeting so I do supper. Pasta favourite. Fascinating paramedic programme filmed during Covid. Lots of lonely, disconnected older people.

**Tuesday 21 July**

It’s strange how the rhythms of life still dominate. So late July and it feels like the end of term with everyone desperate to go off on their summer hols.

*Note to grandson: it's been a tough four months. Sometimes like Max you just need to take some time out and rest at the end of a long walk. Enjoy the summer wherever you spend it, but don't forget that the virus is still with us and remember to take your mask. Keep safe, keep well folks!*

So it may be time for summer but we can’t take our eye off the ball. Both Denise and I volunteer for the vaccine trials. In the meantime the government clearly wasn’t watching to see if the Russians interfered with the Brexit referendum. As Parliament winds down for the summer, our country feels like it’s in a bad place for many reasons.

A couple of zooms re intergenerational projects between schools and care homes and a journal board on a special Covid-19 edition. It’s brightened up after a cool start, so an afternoon in the garden, inbetween emails and amending my article. Submit it eventually. TV full of repeats and A&E specials. Time to read some more classics.

**Wednesday 22 July**

Today is the last day of the Championship season. Can Brentford get automatic promotion? Again it was very much in our hands, but we lose to Barnsley and WBA go up. The margins are so fine, just one goal the other way would have made all the difference. We now face the lottery of the play-offs over the next 12 days. Flat and fed up.

While waiting for this excitement, I managed to write all the articles and presentations I have to do before the end of July and the summer break. Not long now. Then a quiet August and a week in Greece in early September.

Last Prime Minister’s Questions before the break, but again it sheds no light just a lot of bluster.

**Thursday 23 July**

Early start because Denise is going to Peterborough. It was a warm night so we go swimming first thing before Denise goes. Household chores, gas boiler service, then go to Val and Mark’s shop in Bacton to give them some new canvases of my photos of Happisburgh to replace the winter scenes. Fall asleep in the afternoon sun. Denise returns and we go for a second swim today. That’s the life. Beats depression after football.

8pm and do a zoom with colleagues from Generations United in the USA – from the east coast to Hawaii. All about intergenerational housing and reopening post Covid-19.

Masks (face coverings) have to be worn in most enclosed places from tomorrow! Test and trace is still not effective. But care homes can now have visitors, albeit on a very limited basis, long after much has been eased elsewhere. When will re-opening really take place?

**Friday 24 July**

My back is playing up again so I don’t go for a run after the dog walk but for the first time we go to River Kitchen café overlooking the Broads at Wroxham. A good veggie breakfast, well organised for Covid and good service. Look around Wroxham’s shops and end up buying a pair of Levis and one of their T shirts in Roy’s sale. Another warm day so sitting around, chilling with Magnums, and doing emails, but it’s very quiet given it’s Friday afternoon on the edge of the summer holidays. There are certainly more people around in Happisburgh. Including on the beach as we go for a late afternoon swim and Max makes several new friends on our ‘private beach’.

I achieve another ambition – to watch the film Groundhog Day with Bill Murray and Andie McDowell. Don’t know why it’s taken so long, but it’s a film for our Covid times. Like everything else we seem to being going back to the future, holidaying in the UK and going back to basics.

**Saturday 25 July**

It would have been my parents’ 61st wedding anniversary, but my dad only it to the 54th and we speak with my mum every day. The weather forecast was bad, but it’s been humid and threatening storms but without much rain so far. After a run today, we spend the morning cleaning up the house in preparation for another house viewing this afternoon. I take the dogs out in anticipation. The visitors don’t seem ready to move to Happisburgh. Denise does some shopping, Steve Kinsey comes to fix our bathroom radiator.

The influx of visitors to the village has left a lot of clothing debris on the beach:

*Note to grandson: there's been a lot of concern about littering during the pandemic. When people visit the beach, it's amazing what they forget and leave behind. Here's just a sample from this morning at Happisburgh. Enjoy summer safely and take all your things home with you!*

Another quiet evening in. What to watch on Netflix? A western/goldmining series called Deadwood.

The late news on a Saturday evening is that British holidaymakers in Spain and all its islands will have to quarantine for 14 days on returning to Britain. Chaos predicted.

**Sunday 26 July**

A real Sunday in July. Walk, to the shops to get newspapers and beers (plus a few other things). Chill in the garden over breakfast. Dog walk and relax in the sunshine. Snoozette and Johnny Walker’s Sound of the Seventies. Then get ready for the first leg of the play-offs semi-final – Swansea v Bees. Let’s just say that it’s not going our way at the moment – missed chances, penalty to Swansea but saved, then our left back Rico Henry sent off bizarrely and Swansea score within two minutes. Gutted. But it’s half-way through and still only 0-1, so all to play for. Feel tired!

**Monday 27 July**

Can’t get up today. The forecast rain hasn’t arrived yet, so a long walk and then a run, good conditions. Do lots of emails, planning for August and Autumn for All Ages. The weather is blowing through so quickly, you can’t plan much outside. Prepare for tomorrow’s meetings.

A pet cat has been tested positive for coronavirus, caught from its owners. A St Bernard has had to be rescued from the top of Scafell Peak by 16 people!

A stunning TV reality drama of Anthony, an 18 year black man killed by racists in Liverpool. It imagines his future as a young man that never was. Very moving call to action.

**Tuesday 28 July**

Not a bad day after all, very windy, so perfect for painting.

A Sunday supplement suggests sprucing up gates as a way of making a better first impression. So I get out some of our garden furniture paint and start on our front gate. Before a two hour zoom for the Intergenerational Housing Network on opportunities post-Covid in high streets and elsewhere. Then a board meeting of Leeway which is doing well despite Covid. A lovely salad for dinner.

The debate about quarantining visitors from Spain ie British tourists is still raging, with many cancelling holidays or very angry or both. Feels like this is just the start, with more countries being pulled into the frame, as we move towards Brexit and little Englanders. Will we get to Greece in September? ONS confirms that the UK has the highest number of excess deaths in Europe to the end of June, and the official deaths figure closes in on 46,000.

**Wednesday 29 July**

A day off work stuff except for emails. After a long dog walk and breakfast, it’s tidying up for a viewing at lunchtime. Then painting the front garden gate having done the gate to the house. I go out with the dogs while Denise does the visit. Then mow the lawns and fall asleep in the sun exhausted after all the physical exercise.

Saving myself for the big match this evening. Play-off semi-final second leg: and what a game it is. Brentford come out all guns blazing and go 2-0 up within 15 minutes, then score again at the start of the second half – three great goals. Only a silly mistake by our skipper lets Swansea in with a sniff but we hold out for a 3-1 win and 3-2 on aggregate. Bring on Wemberley – and probably Fulham – on Tuesday 4 August. Won’t sleep tonight!

**Thursday 30 July**

It’s getting hotter. I have my last major work commitment before the summer season: a conference for several hundred trainee GPs in South Yorkshire, whom I talk to about intergenerational interaction and the benefits for health and wellbeing. All goes well despite some technological challenges. Much better by zoom than travelling to Rotherham as had been originally planned in late March just after lockdown started. As a reality check I do some volunteer shopping for an older man on the edge of Happisburgh – bleach, bread and milk. A former publican leading a lonely life since his wife died, at least he can sit in his garden.

Celebrate by taking the dogs for a late afternoon swim as the summer weather continues to improve. Pack for our weekend away. Then comes a shock government announcement that several million people are facing new lockdown measures in Greater Manchester, East Lancashire and West Yorkshire. After the Spanish quarantine earlier this week, clearly the government is worried about the level of new cases in parts of the north and more generally. Predictions abound of additional measures that might be needed. But again the messaging is not clear and raises more questions than answers.

**Friday 31 July**

It’s a lovely hot summer morning, so I take the dogs for a walk and a swim. Before taking them to the kennels for the first time for five months – all feels rather strange having our own drop off slot. Then finish cleaning the house. We are going away for the first time for five months to stay with Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan in Wivenhoe, North Essex. We drive the long way round to stop at The Two Magpies bakery in Darsham, Suffolk, for pies and sausage rolls. Then on to Wivenhoe which feels like home. A stroll around town including the Bake House where we hope to move to when we sell in Happisburgh. There is a viewing this afternoon so we await some good news. An early evening meal at the Whalebone in Fingringhoe, a mixed experience of metal cutlery and cardboard boxes, ordering drinks and foods from a door, while the weather at least is very warm.

Britain’s hottest day this year, just as the panic about Covid-19 is growing again. What freedoms will we lose again to gain control of the virus? Will we get to Greece in September? It feels like going back to square two, despite knowing more about the virus, it’s still out there and we don’t have the track and trace and testing systems in place to be confident about being on top of it. Farewell July!

**12 It’s the hope that kills you**

In some ways August is like any other month in lockdown. But it’s different as more people are actually on holiday rather than not working, while the government is desperate to get businesses and people back to work. Norfolk is busier than ever as staycation is the new holiday experience and the government encourages everyone to eat out. We have great hopes that the flood of visitors will mean a housebuyer. And I hope that the longest ever football season will see Brentford reach the premiership at last. Hope!

**Saturday 1 August**

A weekend away in Wivenhoe. A very hot night has not been restful. Stroll to the Norwegian bakery for delicious bread and pastries in the business workshops. Then to the Co-op. Everyone is friendly and relaxed. After breakfast we drive to Mersea Island for our first visit. Straight to the famous but busy Oyster shack for wonderful sea food after a wait. Then a stroll for ice creams, beach, café and shops. A nice day out, masks when necessary. Back home for tea and take away curries. All in the back garden, before the rain and neighbourly noise bring the outdoor fun to a halt. Still warm.

**Sunday 2 August**

Up for a walk/run along the river eastwards to check out potential dog walks and the nearest beach, although I didn’t quite find it. A beautiful stroll with lots for dogs to explore. After breakfast we go for a long walk in the Wivenhoe woods, one of Ardan’s favourite places where his nursery decamps to once a week. Again another dog walking option. Back for a lovely barbecue before driving home to Norfolk. A great weekend away and a bit flat on our return home. No offer from the weekend viewings. Finish off the diary for July and watch The Edge on England’s cricket revival in 2009-13.

**Monday 3 August**

A cooler night and sunny morning so I go for a run and chill for breakfast before picking up the dogs from kennels. They seem pleased to see me, rushing straight out into the car but clearly haven’t done much exercise for the last three days. Several short walks to get them moving before lunch and zoomette. It’s a very quiet couple of weeks on the work front, no meetings just a few calls and emails. So I start reading Catch-22 as well as the papers. Plus the first ever Line of Duty as the whole series is shown again from episode one.

**Tuesday 4 August**

Big match day as Brentford take on Fulham in the Championship play-off final to get promoted to the Premiership. Nerves build during the day as our WhatsApp group pings more and more messages. It’s at Wembley but we’re all in our respective homes but join up by zoom before kick-off.

Earlier, after the dog walk, Denise and I go into Norwich for some shopping, starting with a breakfast subsidised by the government as part of its Eat out to help out campaign. Lots of stores have closed, are closing or moving. We get our wedding anniversary presents (glass tumblers for 15th), Denise buys some dresses and HMV is closed while moving. M&S has a new pizza for this evening, Tescos has London Pride. A long and slow afternoon ends with a swim as the temperature rises at our favourite private beach.

Shower, photo with Bees gear for Facebook, dinner, then settle down for the game. Fulham were the better team and win 2-1 in extra time, the first goal a long range free kick embarrasses our keeper. Hopes dashed again, but it may all be a good thing if we’re not ready to go up. It gives us a year to settle in our new ground while football recovers from Covid-19. It’s the hope that kills you.

**Wednesday 5 August**

A sleepless night, what might have been or what was that. Feels even worse in the cold light of day. A long dog walk but my back is causing too much pain to go for a run. So I decide to start the long-awaited bonfire at the end of our garden. The wind is blowing out to sea. Everything is very dry and is all burnt within an hour, huge flames but under control, I think. Denise has her nails done while I wash out the bonfire smells, and write up some notes from last week’s intergenerational housing meeting. It’s very hot today so even sitting outside is unbearable after a while. More emails and calls. We decide to drop the price of our house to £425k to attract a buyer. In the meantime the pub outside our front door is preparing to reopen on Saturday 8 August but it looks like they will be setting up tables on the common land outside their licenced area. We shall see. It’s Tom’s and Ellen’s birthdays today so lots of jolly messages. Ardy puts eight candles on Tom’s cake for 35 years old, very clever boy. After swimming and Max messing about again, I cook supper. Settle in for a night’s TV from Corrie to Covid. Huge ammonia nitrate bomb has destroyed the port in Beirut. And Aberdeen is locked down as cases rocket there.

**Thursday 6 August**

Denise and I have been married for fifteen years today. We exchange cards and facebook messages, and glasses for our glass anniversary. This evening we are having our first proper night out since lockdown with dinner at the Gunton Arms. A real treat made even more special by Rhiannon and Tom sending a bottle of Cremant to celebrate over dinner.

Another hot day which finishes with a swim with the dogs. When I get home, Denise shocks me with the news from my sister that my mother has been the victim of a huge scam. I spend the next few hours asking how, what, who and why! More questions than answers but this may be another consequence of Covid-19 as more isolated older people are targeted by criminals. Fortunately my sister can go down to Wiltshire this evening to help mum sort things out.

**Friday 7 August**

A sleepless night asking the questions over and over, before getting up at 6am on what is meant to be the hottest day of the year. It feels it already as I go swimming with the dogs at 6.30am. The early start means we have plenty of time to clean and tidy the house before the viewing at 11am. Seems promising. I then head to the lighthouse to let in a crew doing a photoshoot for Barbour clothing’s autumn/winter range on the hottest day of the year, and feel sorry for the model. By afternoon I am ready for a nap, some emails and booking our belated 60th birthday weekend in November. It’s 6.30pm before the final swim of the day.

**Saturday 8 August**

Another hot sleepless night. Up early for a swim and walk with the dogs. Denise goes shopping while I sort out things at home. Our neighbouring pub, the Hill House, is opening for the first time today since lockdown was eased. It will be interesting to see how many people pitch up and how they cope with all the restrictions. We move our cars out of the way. A house viewing but clearly not interested. Time for a swim and chill on another warm day. After burgers, we settle in for a movie – Official Secrets based on leaking of secrets around the Iraq war in 2003-4 and the abuse of power. Very important today too. A growing scandal over the awarding of Covid contracts to friends of the Tory government.

**Sunday 9 August**

After days of hot sunshine, today Happisburgh is covered by fret and temperatures hover around 20 degrees until about 2.30pm when the sun eventually breaks through. A chance to catch up with chores in the house and garden and prepare for a second viewing tomorrow. We are both tired and need a snoozette before Johnny Walker and Sounds of the Seventies at full volume in the front garden. It’s warming up so the first swim of the day is at 5.30pm. I then phone my mum who is still in shock from her nasty experience. Some preventive measures are in place and more to come as my sister has gone home. The Covid headlines today are Boris urging all schools to open from September as normal. We shall see, as the number of new cases continues to rise.

**Monday 10 August**

I manage a run before it gets too hot. Then tidying and cleaning for a second viewing. She loves it, he is more circumspect, but they spend almost two hours chatting with us. We shall see if they make an offer. It’s the hope that kills you.

A hot afternoon, then a swim, dinner and episode three of the first series of Line of Duty. Still stunning. Meantime the Scottish government is in a mess over exam results while the government insists schools must fully reopen. Greece fears a second wave and announces a curfew in bars etc from midnight to 7am.

**Tuesday 11 August**

No sign of an offer – they are still considering. But more interest from others – more viewings later this week and an enquiry from Canada. A waiting game.

Another very warm day means swimming first thing and late afternoon. Despite the heat the waves are relatively big, plus lots of seaweed being churned up. Finalise our zoom meeting next week re the future of intergenerational care. Another Line of Duty – the first series really was a stormer.

**Wednesday 12 August**

The glorious twelfth. It’s good for grouse that track and trace is still failing. The number of new cases is growing again. And the economic news is bad – recession, a record 20.4% drop in GDP in the first quarter of 2020-21, unemployment continues to grow.

An airless day, no breeze which is very unusual in Happisburgh. Went for a run first thing and sweated for ages. Sat in the shade most of the day until a late afternoon swim at our private beach.

Invited next door to the Monastery for a lovely paella with Geoff and Katie and their visitor friend Lorraine. By the time it’s pitch dark, it has turned cold and our Millie is barking to tell us it’s time for bed! Have a headache and feel depressed (from too much rose or sunstroke?).

**Thursday 13 August**

Today it’s A levels grades – not results as Denise keeps reminding me. My nephew James gets 4 A\*s. A good return on ten years’ school fees. It raises all sorts of questions about education, why, how and privilege/disadvantage. And why the Tories have created yet more chaos in the wake of Covid.

Most of the day we are covered by a fret. There was a meteor shower last night which some photographers caught over the lighthouse. At least temperatures have dropped down to 20c, but the dogs are still flagging. A viewing today so we spend the morning cleaning/tidying only for the visit to be cancelled ten minutes in advance. I end up doing a volunteer shopping trip, to get my gent a greater variety of frozen food. And catch up with emails.

**Friday 14 August**

The A levels shambles is creating more waves and unhappiness. Simply unfair. Exacerbating previous unfairnesses. And the most useless of governments is doing virtually nothing to remedy the problem, having stood aside waiting for something to happen over the last five months. Another lockdown failure

Although it’s not sunny today, the humidity makes me sweat gallons after my run. More emails, prep for next month. We have three house viewings so I take the dogs out for a swim, a long walk along the beach and buying some cheese from Walcott. I get back to meet the Betts who seem very keen and chat for some time. We suddenly feel more confident.

A lovely salmon chilli noodles for dinner, BBC4 summer hits and That’s 70s pop nostalgia. The mist rolls back in. A nice welcome back for all those Brits who had to be back by 4am tomorrow or face 14 days quarantine. Another shambles.

**Saturday 15 August**

A misty cooler start to the day. Big waves too so no swimming for me or the dogs. Instead it’s a bit of a clean up before three house viewings in the morning. I take the dogs out for a long walk in Bacton Wood and car drive. Denise is spitting about the rudeness and lack of interest but never mind, we have a second viewing by the Betts this afternoon and a second viewing on Monday afternoon too. The Betts want to make an offer after a tour, questions and cup of tea, but I suggest they do so on Monday to the agents. We could be moving in November and we need to set up a meeting in Wivenhoe at the Bakehouse. But let’s get an acceptable offer first. Sort out my things for the next three days in Wiltshire and have an early night.

**Sunday 16 August**

It’s been very wet overnight. It doesn’t look good for the long drive to my mum’s but Max and I head off after the morning dog walk. We reach Hanging Langford by 12.45pm, for a quick walk and paddle in the river with swans, lunch, a snooze and tea. Max has a proper walk up the steep valley slope behind mum’s. Then dinner and he is allowed to join us in the lounge for the evening’s TV. Mum is still shocked after her scam experience ten days ago. Derren Brown is celebrating twenty years as a TV illusionist, making suggestions to gullible people. My father would not be amused. Let’s hope Max sleeps well, I set the baby monitor…

**Monday 17 August**

Max had a bit of a sleepless night in his strange home, Mum’s kitchen. But he’s keen to go for a walk and then I run round The Upper. Denise phones to say that we can accept the offer on Thrums and the wheels start rolling. Now it’s up to the solicitors and us to conclude on the Bakehouse in Wivenhoe. I do all the paperwork on my brother’s fund and the latest applications for grants before my sister arrives for today’s main business. Early afternoon the Bobbie Van arrives to offer my Mum advice on security and safety following the recent scam. All good common sense, easy to implement. The big question is what happens the next time someone tries a scam. Lots to think about and do. But she also needs to wear her hearing aids. This evening the TV vibrates and distorts as the volume is turned up for Line of Duty, last episode of series one.

**Tuesday 18 August**

Another run and a sunnier morning. Finishing off some tasks for my mum before Bill, the odd job man, comes round for gardening and security. He gives me his number for future emergencies. An early lunch, mum has her chiropodist and I head off to Chandlers Ford to see old university friend Nigel and partner Becky. They and Becky’s daughter, Eve, love Max as we go for a walk and catch up. A chance to reflect on the A levels algorithm fiasco, travel to Greece, Nigel’s latest book and life at 60. After tea, a long drive back to Norfolk made worse by the M25 being completely shut after an accident. Home at 10pm knackered.

**Wednesday 19 August**

My first dog walk on the beach for three days before we drop the dogs off for daycare while we head to Wivenhoe to finalise our offer/purchase of The Bakehouse. We get there, still love it and agree a price including lots of the furniture. Feels good. Socially distanced, government subsidised lunch outside at the Black Buoy, one of our new locals, as it pours with rain, before driving around Brightlingsea in the rain. Back to Wiv to pick up Ardy from nursery, tea and then supper at the Greyhound to celebrate our new home. Home just before 10pm. Tired but elated.

**Thursday 20 August**

A restless night as we think about moving to Wivenhoe. I go for a run and feel tired and energy-less. All day I feel hot, heady and slight coughing. Too much to do, first picking up the dogs from kennels, then speaking with lawyers and surveyors and preparing for three zooms this afternoon. Walking the dogs again as next door comes round to see our range cooker. The word has spread re our sale. A meeting of The Together Project board, a brainstorming re intergenerational care, and the Victory board. Three zooms in a row is exhausting and one more to come. After supper and family calls, it’s a zoom with Anne and Steve re our holiday to Symi. Travel to Croatia has been made subject to quarantine but Greece is still ok. But Steve’s passport has run out – will it be renewed in time? And can we find a cheaper way to travel from Rhodes to Symi? Two and a half weeks to sort it all… A warm night.

**Friday 21-Monday 24 August**

A long weekend ahead as Denise’s cousins, Lynn, Rebecca (Denise’s goddaughter) and Rob come to visit from Lincolnshire plus their retriever Fynley. Tidy and clean before they arrive inbetween phone calls. A nice meze lunch, lazy afternoon and long beach walk for the dogs, their second of the day. Rob and I then go and pick up fish and chips amid the madding crowds at Walcott. Everyone’s tired after a long day, as I fill in forms for our solicitor.

Walk the dogs Saturday morning and breakfast in the garden. Then getting ready to go to the Gunton Arms at lunchtime. Not for a full meal, just a drink and snack to give them all a taste of the fab setting, art and food. Service and marquee weren’t brilliant but the rest was, including the pyramid and man in the park. Tea then out with the dogs to watch cricket and they’re having tea, so it’s a tour of the highlights of Happisburgh graveyard. Back to North Walsham for a Mediterranean dinner at Shambles, very nice.

Sunday walk along the cliffs with Rebecca and dogs. Get the papers, then a big Sunday breakfast on fruit and yoghurt followed by bacon baps. The weather continues to be much better than forecast so we spend the morning and afternoon lounging in the garden. Rob and I do the last walk of the day and bump into a neighbour and son, also with retrievers. Rob says he think he knows the guy – it’s his step-brother! We go past his house and his car registration is a give-away – it’s Paul H. Then we bump into him outside our pub and it’s him and they quickly catch up. Small world, and Rob calls his sister. We sit down for a lovely roast beef dinner. Thanks Denise! All feel relaxed after the weekend, even Lynne who is not well.

Monday morning, despite it feeling autumnal on our first walk, it’s nice enough for breakfast in the garden, with smunchy peanut butter. Sort out some lighthouse souvenirs and then Rebecca, Rob and Lynne head off to Holt before going home. We catch up on emails, paperwork for the house, and a snoozette. It’s sunny again in the afternoon. A Victory housing board meeting on zoom, then the chilli con carne we didn’t have at the weekend, followed by an evening’s TV, including series two of Line of Duty.

A nice August diversion from all the worries of the world. Meantime the exams fiasco threatens to undermine the return to schools, local and international outbreaks and breakdowns of rules, Greece cases increase and Harry Maguire is arrested there.

**Tuesday 25 August**

Autumn has arrived. A chill in the air, rain and high winds with Storm Francis on the way. The beach is empty as the tourists stay indoors. Good weather for running after five days off, slightly damp. Breakfast definitely not in the garden, emails, social media. Then prepare September’s e-news for United for All Ages, promoting Autumn for All Ages and other activities. Denise has more physio treatment on her shoulder, hopefully she can go swimming when we are in Greece. The head of Ofqual takes the rap for the exams fiasco and resigns. Harry Maguire is found guilty in Greece of various charges but will appeal. Covid cases in the UK continue to go down nationally. There are concerns that people can get the disease more than once. Still waiting for a vaccine. Trump says the Democrats are trying to steal the presidential election under cover of Covid. Another unarmed black man is shot by a US police officer. And the government u-turns again on Covid – this time requiring secondary school students to wear masks. Is this the worst government in history – or living memory at least?

**Wednesday 26 August**

What a windy night. Storm Francis rattled our bedroom window from the west all night. Exhausting. After walking the dogs, Denise heads to Peterborough to see her mum and take her shopping. I crack on with sending out our September e-news and spreading the word about Autumn for All Ages. Some positive responses already and a request for a blog. Catch up phone calls with two old friends, Paul Brett and Andrew Lynch, mainly about the worst government in our memories. Still windy for our lunchtime walk. After sorting out more emails, I deliver the September church newsletter to Coronation Close and adjacent houses in Happisburgh. Households chores, rubbish out for tomorrow, and clear up before Denise returns. Beef stir fry, TV and episode three of second series of Line of Duty. Very powerful. Now who will accept responsibility for all the failures of the last six months?

**Thursday 27 August**

A familiar pattern of dog walks, run, emails, shopping at Tescos, emails. No swimming since the weather has cooled. Still hopeful of going to Greece on 8 September as it’s not added to the quarantine list, but Steve has failed to renew his passport so it looks like he and Anne may not be able to go with us. Begin the big clear out in advance of moving – starting with paperwork galore in the office. Quite therapeutic to clear a cupboard and some great reminders of the last ten years, press cuttings, letters, photos and strategy papers for all sorts of organisations I used to be involved with. It's my turn to cook tonight, the favourite pasta dish, before episode four of series two of Line of Duty. Covid numbers across the UK continue to fall but local lockdowns continue in some places.

**Friday 28 August**

The dogs take me on a different walk this morning, round the houses and cliff. Mollie rolls on the stubble by the harvested bales. It’s rained a lot of the night but despite the forecast it remains dry today. The forecast for the bank holiday weekend is awful and lots of the tourists have already gone home. At least there is no church fete on Monday. Clean and tidy up for Rhiannon and Tom and Ardy’s stay this weekend. Still reeling from Trump’s pre-election convention rally from the White House in a divided USA while the British government urges everyone to return to work and Covid cases increase at a Norfolk chicken factory. A low key Friday before bank holiday. A blog published, tweeting about the ageism of #lodgersforcodgers, a new Channel 4 programme, walking and snoozing. The kids arrive at 6.45pm, time for beers, dinner and 70s music TV. Looking forward to being able to do this in Wivenhoe soon.

**Saturday 29 and Sunday 30 August**

Bank Holiday weekend with Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan. It’s wet and very windy, tides are high. The early dog walk is a struggle coming north into the wind as it hurtles down the north sea. Not a beach day. We decide to go to Norwich, that fine city, for lunch at the Bicycle Shop and shopping, getting Ardy some early birthday presents. Chat is mainly about life in Wivenhoe and our forthcoming move. Sausages from the new butcher in Wivenhoe for dinner. Followed by a social documentary about Bob Marley in 1970s Britain.

Sunday is drier and windier, and the sea wilder. We head inland where the wind is much lighter in Reepham for Sunday lunch at the Dial House and then to Roarrr!, a dinosaur play park. Several missed calls from people trying to let us know that Denise’s mum has been admitted to hospital, breathless with chest pains. Home for more walking and a vegetarian pasta supper. Reading Ardan some of his new books for bedtime. Broadband cuts in and out to foil our Line of Duty catch up but terrestrial TV is fine with the latest Strike series. News of ongoing difficulties re Covid – more new cases, will everyone go back to school and work this week, let alone university, and 25 million cases worldwide. No end in sight, despite vaccine rumours. The phone goes at 11.30pm as a hospital doctor updates her on her mum’s health, her heart problems, and the need for blood transfusions.

**Monday 31 August**

The last day of summer, we should have had the village church fete today but it’s another victim of Covid. Never mind it’s almost the coolest Bank Holiday Monday on record. Denise is up early again looking after Ardy once he wakes up. But at a cost as she catches his cold. The kids head back to Wivenhoe after breakfast and probably their last ever visit to Thrums, and we tidy up. Denise is not feeling well and rests, inbetween more episodes of Line of Duty. After a weekend of fine dining we don’t have much left in the fridge, so it’s back to basics with a jacket potato. Her mum is having more blood and another night in Peterborough hospital. An early night and lots of drugs to help her sleep better.

**13 Back to school, back to work, back to…?**

Autumn starts this month, cooler days are ahead as are more economic problems. But what will the virus do – second wave or damp squib? As activity takes off around the country, schools and offices return and more people travel, what could go wrong? The whole country holds its breath. Again.

**Tuesday 1 September**

A bright sunny morning, I wake early and take the dogs out while Denise rests. Head to Stalham to be first in line at the barber’s to have my first haircut since March. Mask, gown, temperature check et al. Not much off, just some shaping and tidying up. Apparently others have also decided they like longer hair during lockdown. Down Down. Shopping then morning coffee in the sun for the first time for days. Denise is out too for the warmth. Everywhere is drying out after the wet weekend, so the afternoon is split between mowing the lawn for almost the last time at Thrums and watching Brentford play their first match at our new stadium, a friendly versus Oxford United. It looks great but will we get to go in this season? A gentle evening and supper as Denise recuperates, her mum wonders why she is not at Peterborough hospital, but visitors aren’t allowed and she’s not well anyway. I publish chapter 12 of this diary. Another early night as Scotland quarantines arrivals from Greece! Who next?

**Wednesday 2 September**

Another beautiful morning. A dog walk on the cliffs and then a run. Clean up Little Thrums for Stella and Simon’s visit tomorrow. Relax in the sun with the papers. Warm enough to go for a lunchtime swim with the dogs – could be the last time this summer. Phone call with Jenny Watson about living in Norfolk and opportunities, with some follow ups with key contacts. Emails re moving home and giving up various board positions. Our solicitor seems happy with the paperwork re our move so far. Denise does shopping for our visitors. Tomorrow her mum may be discharged from hospital, fingers crossed, then the battle with the GPs can start, again. Meantime Denise is struggling with her throat. Still no sign of what the English government will do re Greece – Scotland all out ban or Wales just Zante? We need a holiday. While schools are going back and some are returning to work, we are worried about the prospect of not being able to travel to Greece. Not surprising since test and trace can’t find 200 people who returned on a flight a week ago. And the first PMQs as Parliament returns sheds absolutely no light as the PM blusters even more helplessly.

**Thursday 3 September**

Our latest visitors arrive today, having delayed 24 hours due to Denise’s bad throat. It’s wet so lunch indoors before a beach stroll. A big evening at the Gunton Arms. As usual good food, service etc. Stella and Simon are also going through house moves. Stella has sold her house and Simon’s is going on the market this week, but they have yet to find the home they want. They will probably have some of our furniture when we move.

**Friday 4 September**

Denise is off having her holiday nails done, we have breakfast and I am left looking after the dogs while they all go to Coltishall for some Broads walking and the dress agency. We meet for lunch at the White Horse at Neatishead, which is a great local in a village with lots of community facilities, followed by a stroll to the local mooring point. Home for cake and beach walking, this time showing Simon all the destroyed sea defences and pillbox on its head. Dramatic scenes and photos of erosion in action. Followed by a lovely paella and drinks and chat. Tired by 11pm.

**Saturday 5 September**

Stella and Simon join me for the long first walk of the day. Beautiful bright sunny day. After breakfast they head back to Colchester and more house hunting. We clear up in preparation for our purchasers this afternoon. Paul and Juliet come loaded with questions and do a tour to see what we are leaving and where they can put their stuff. All positive and roll on with exchange asap. More Line of Duty after a few evenings off.

**Sunday 6 September**

Denise is going to Peterborough to see her mum for the first time since she left hospital. I rush the dogs’ first walk, get the Sunday papers from Stalham, do the Passenger Locator Form for Symi, lots of laundry for the holiday and then drive the dogs to the cliff for their second walk down onto the beach. Mollie swims but it’s too cold for me. Back in time for zoom with Dave and Brentford’s first competitive match at our new ground – the Carabao Cup vs Wycombe. 1-1 then we win on penalties. Away at Southampton in the second round. Sunshine and Johnny Walker before Denise returns home. More holiday preparations, dinner and last three episodes of series three of Line of Duty. A headache! But the big warning sign is almost 3000 cases of covid – the highest since mid May. Young people are being blamed.

**Monday 7 September**

Getting ready for holiday. Taking cats to the cattery first thing, dogs to kennels at the end of the afternoon. And the surveyor comes to look at Thrums for a building survey for our purchasers. Packing, emails, chasing solicitors. Fun that makes you want to go away. Then the government announces another change in its policy on travel – seven Greek islands are subject to quarantine but not Rhodes or Symi. Here we go! Just got to finish the packing…

**Tuesday 8 -Tuesday 15 September**

Holiday diary from Symi via Stansted – we get to have a week in Greece. Phew!

**Wednesday 16 September**

Back to reality after eight days away. That means a run for the first time for nine days and then picking up the cats and the dogs in that order. They are always perky and feisty after their time away. It’s great to have them back. We have calls to make – to a Guardian journalist re an obituary for John Woodward and to our solicitor re queries on our sale/purchase. Denise then heads to Peterborough – her mum’s discharge from hospital has been delayed because of a delay in her covid test, but Denise can see her and get things ready for her return home. I catch up with hundreds of emails then prepare for a Victory Housing Trust board meeting, including a chat with the chair of the residents’ panel. The meeting by zoom is very unsatisfactory – no video and stilted debate aren’t good for scrutiny and governance. The backlash against online meetings is gathering pace. But can we meet in person?

**Thursday 17 September**

Max’s big day. Up very early to give the dogs a good walk before I take Max to the vets to be castrated. At the age of eight. Poor boy but he seems to go in undeterred at 8am. See you later Max. Back at home still catching up on emails post holiday and then a zoom advisory group meeting for a national intergenerational project between young people aged 5-14 and care homes. Have to leave before the end and add some thoughts by email later. Then pick up Max from the vets. He seems very woozy but not in great pain while he’s drugged up. We have an actual meeting at the Church Rooms of seven officers of the Friends of Happisburgh Lighthouse to plan the AGM in October, find replacements for Denise and me, and agree that the lighthouse should remain closed to public open days and private visits given the difficulties with social distancing. Sad in so many ways. Still the meeting didn’t take long so plenty of time for supper, TV and reading.

**Friday 18 September**

A slightly better night’s sleep as we adjust back to home. The worsening Covid news hasn’t helped me sleep, as I wake several times breathless. Max can’t walk far but I go for a run after taking Millie and Mollie to the beach where the tide is very high again. Denise goes shopping while I catch up on United for All Ages activities particularly for Autumn for All Ages as the optimistic keep going in the face of more care home lockdowns. Warm sunshine makes for a leisurely lunch and afternoon. Then it’s dinner with Marg and Jon in Happisburgh who lived in Wivenhoe for 39 years and still have family there. We swap tips about village life and have a lovely dinner of paella and eton mess. A nice evening and I am sure we will see them in our new home.

**Saturday 19 September**

Slightly hungover but it’s a beautiful late summer’s morning – warm sunshine despite the sea breeze. First time we’ve had our Greek breakfast since our return from holiday – lovely fruit salad, yoghurt and honey. Then we head with our neighbour Ellen to the open house viewing at the new housing development in Happisburgh – nine homes. We are agreeably surprised – they are much nicer and bigger than they look from the outside but still feel over-priced. Ellen seems interested. Back home to mow the lawn for the first time for weeks, and it’s grown quite a bit with the rain and heat. It’s much greener and lusher than early summer. The sunshine is warm therapy before Brentford’s first home league match at our new stadium vs Huddersfield. The stadium looks great but the football was not quite sunshine. Three goals in the second half make it a comfortable win and a huge relief after the tension and disappointment of recent months. Will we be able to watch a live match this season? Judging by the news, there will be more restrictions announced soon as Covid cases, hospital admissions and deaths increase. The first Match of the Day I have seen this new season. Previous years it would have been Saturday night socials at the Labour Party annual conference.

**Sunday 20 September**

Max has his first proper walk this morning following his castration. Another warm breezy start. Then a dash for the Sunday papers before the BBC Marr programme with Matt Hancock’s latest excuses and Keir Starmer showing why he would be a much better Prime Minister than Johnson. Sort out testing! Boris is due to make an announcement re lockdown measures on Tuesday as numbers grow again. More in the Sunday papers in the sunshine. Max in his bathing suit to stop him licking his wound. Bacon baps for brunch. Then two and a half hours at the lighthouse where Nick and Sarah are filming a video for their song, ‘To the Lighthouse’ - on the stairs and in the lantern room. Lots of passers by interested in the lighthouse but they can’t come in. Home to discover a bit of rotting rabbit left under our bed by one of the cats, as we are making the bed. More football on telly on BBC1 this evening as Leicester beat Burnley, alongside Denise’s second day lasagne. Then drama of Us, a middle aged couple on the brink of separation.

**Monday 21 September**

The last day of summer? A beautiful sunny morning and the first long dog walk since Max’s operation. He survives and the other two keep up just about. Denise is having a major new shorter hairdo this morning before heading to Peterborough to help her mum and do her hair too. I catch up with emails, seeking support from the Intergenerational Housing Network for schemes in empty high street spaces. The CMO and Chief Scientific Officer give a press conference (with no questions), doom laden with the latest statistics and projections on covid cases, hospitalisation and deaths – a precursor for the Prime Minister’s announcement tomorrow. Things are not getting better. Time for some last sunshine before writing a blog for the Stop Ageism website before Denise returns. Some more toing and froing re our house sale. Then an evening of salad and TV.

**Tuesday 22 September**

The first day of autumn feels like the last day of summer. The sun is up, the sky is blue and by lunchtime it’s 25 degrees, so I go swimming in the North Sea, probably for the last time this year. Lovely, albeit colder than Greece. The dogs have lots of outdoor activities as we enjoy this last day of sunshine. It also distracts from the government’s announcements re new covid restrictions – pubs closing early at 10pm, home working is encouraged (again), more fines for not obeying the rules. Boris on TV and in the House, a nice contrast to Keir Starmer’s new leadership speech at the online Labour conference. Can Boris get any worse? And there is a backlash from pubs, young people, commuters etc. Why not ban households mixing like Scotland and Wales? And what about sorting testing and tracing? A million dead worldwide, 200,000 in the USA alone as Trump dumbs down for the 3 November election. At least Brentford beat West Brom on penalties in the Carabao Cup. Are the new restrictions doomed to fail – scuppering the economy while failing to stop the spread of Covid.

**Wednesday 23 September**

A day of change. It’s cooler and pouring with rain, as autumn kicks in. Just about stay dry during the dog walk but get soaked at the end of my run. Max has been restless overnight so we’re both tired after disturbed sleep. Can’t really settle all day, do some emails, trawl the web re Wivenhoe, set up a new email account for Victory, have a snooze. A day to be indoors. PM Questions another round of meaningless bants. But over 6,000 new cases reported today as the predicted growth takes off. Too little too late again with the prevention. Six months on from the first lockdown and it feels like we are back to square one.

**Thursday 24 September**

Up early in time for sunrise, now 6.40am, as the days draw in. Beautiful light – bright sunshine with very dark clouds, some lovely photos. A long walk with the dogs, before returning to clean Little Thrums in anticipation of our visitors at the weekend. Denise is seeing a physiotherapist in Cromer about her frozen shoulder, but still not clear when she can get treatment on the NHS because of Covid. Meantime I have a Flagship Group strategy morning, all on zoom, about how Covid has changed the way the housing provider works and will work. It’s turned much colder, some heating on – hard to believe that two days ago I was swimming in the North Sea. An afternoon chilling, emails, letter to a donor. I cook supper. Mercury Music Prize awarded to Michael Kiwanuka for my favourite album of the last year, Kiwanuka. Looking at Wivenhoe history. My mum says she’s interested in looking at moving to Wivenhoe when we have got there. Four generations in one small town? A new jobs protection package is announced by the government to replace the furlough scheme, while a record number of new Covid cases is reported. Are we losing on both health and economy?

**Friday 25 September**

A very quiet day as the wind and rain descends for three days. We don’t even make it to the beach as 70mph gusts descend, massive waves, heavy rain, cliff falls and trees fall across the village and surrounding area. It also means that broadband is at best patchy, so little wifi, few emails being a Friday. But the storms seem to be mainly down the east coast. Denise just misses a tree down on the road from North Walsham coming home from having her nails done. It hits a milk container instead, phew. No powercuts here but no catch up TV either. Apparently the most powerful winds in Norfolk for twenty years. Takes your mind off covid even though the number of cases, hospitalisations and deaths continues to rise. Debate rages about whether we need to lockdown more while students are being locked in as universities return and outbreaks start. My blog for Stop Ageism has been published in advance of their launch next week.

**Saturday 26 September**

We have to brave it today, that’s enough hiding indoors, the dogs need proper exercise. Still blowing a hoolie, we all get soaked and swept away on the beach. Selfies of the hardy rugged explorer and Max looking at the new holes in the cliff in front of the lighthouse. Phone calls with our purchaser and vendor and everything seems on for completion on 30 October for our move to Wivenhoe. The weather means there is little else to do except crack on with the big clear out. Kitchen and dining room. All very therapeutic, and helps with the slight disappointment of Brentford only getting a 1-1 draw at Millwall. It’s still windy but we head out to Oasis in Stalham for a curry with masks. Delicious and good to get out. Match of the day ends the evening.

**Sunday 27 September**

The third day of storms. The lighthouse is still flashing after 8.15am (and again at 5.15pm) so it must be gloomy. Sunday papers, Marr, more clearing out, this time my clothes. Johnnie Walker provides the Sunday afternoon soundtrack, one of the best 70s selections. Powercuts as the lights etc keep going. Email Nigel an article from the Sunday Times and he’s going to refer to it in his lecture tomorrow. Lucky students. My brother Tim would have been 58 day today.

**Monday 28 September**

For the first time in more than three days it’s not blowing a gale. But we can’t walk down onto the beach because there’s a four foot plus drop at the bottom of the ramp. Let’s hope it gets fixed before half term and when we move. It’s not the same without a walk first thing on the beach. Instead we go round the lighthouse and still the dogs managed to go the wrong way! There are also two large holes in the church roof and the cricket pavilion’s roof has blown off completely while the cricket nets have been crushed by a falling tree.

Today the world seems to be going Covid mad as we reach one million deaths worldwide (an underestimate of course). More severe local lockdowns in the north east, more test and tracing chaos with the app, more draconian law making by an unchecked government, and of course more mixed messaging as useless Ministers tour the media studios. The dark days of 2020 seem to be getting darker. A zoom call to plan a session at the Housing LIN annual conference reconvened in December after postponement in late March. And Denise has a two hour governing body meeting before dinner, and Line of Duty now that our broadband is working again.

**Tuesday 29 September**

A rare sleep in until 8am, sweet dreams as the heating kicks in. Very still before more rain as the dogs get used to a different non-beach route. Get ready to send out our monthly e-news for October. Some useful responses and requests for articles etc. A really good zoom on developing intergenerational housing with architect Roland and Sally from YMCA. Very positive. It’s Andy’s 60th birthday today, card in the post. Still no time for celebrations, sadly. What is happening to our basic civil liberties, Parliamentary scrutiny, and social interactions.

**Wednesday 30 September**

These are strange times. You try and do things which seem normal. Run, walk, email, eat, zoom and then something reminds you things have changed. I am accused by someone who really should know better that promoting #AllAgesMatter undermines Black Lives Matter. I don’t agree but rather than being united in tackling ageism, we are pitted against each other on race. Which is just not the case. Still, there are other things to be proud of: I give my notice as a board member of Victory Housing Trust after more than eight years on the board in anticipation of our move from Norfolk to Essex. Get some nice responses and challenges for the future. The last two episodes of Line of Duty series four and late to bed.

**14 Stoptober and move out**

A month dominated by two things – moving home and moving towards lockdown. By the end of October we have ‘achieved’ both – only one was our ambition back at the start of 2020. What an exhausting month as the clocks go back and we are surviving on adrenalin. As Private Eye jokes, it’s back to March…

**Thursday 1 October**

Another month, the final quarter of 2020. And a quarter of the UK’s population are under local lockdown, mainly in the north of England. Whether you can trust the figures given the problems with testing, it’s suggested that the rate of Covid spreading is slowing. We shall see. And should we have houseguests from London next week?

In the meantime we crack on with shopping, work and selling/buying our home. It’s International Older People’s Day but it seems muted this year. Lots of twitter on related issues around ageism. The solicitors are having one of those days where they seem not to understand each other let alone the purchasers/vendors. Afternoon delight before Ellen comes round for tea and local news.

Brentford beat Fulham 3-0 in the fourth round of the Carabao (league) Cup to get some kind of revenge for losing at Wembley eight weeks ago and to reach the quarter finals of this cup for the first time. And shortly after The Guardian has published its obituary of John Woodward. Not quite what we expected but it tells a good story and will increase recognition of his life and achievements.

**Friday 2 October**

A quick dog walk round the Moles route, where the rough sleeper is still sheltering in one of the old look outs despite the wind and rain. He seems ok. Then drop the dogs off before heading to Wivenhoe for our final recce/visit before the move now scheduled for 30 October. It’s wet again and not ideal for viewing. But still looking forward to our next big move. Measure up, decide where furniture will go and what else we might need to buy. Let’s move first! Followed by lunch in the Black Buoy – I could get used to this – before taking Rhiannon and Ardan back for one last weekend in Happisburgh.

The whole day is overshadowed by the news that the Trumps – POTUS and FLOTUS plus entourage – have tested positive for Covid. What does it mean for them and for the presidential election on 3 November? Trump is later admitted to hospital after taking an unproven cocktail of drugs.

**Saturday 3 and Sunday 4 October**

A last weekend in Happisburgh with Rhiannon and Ardan before we move to Wivenhoe. Saturday morning and it’s still pouring with rain. I go for a run after the dog walk. Then we head to the lighthouse to pick up some souvenirs and after some coaxing Ardy decides to climb the 112 steps to top with us. Not bad for a four year old. He is full of it and gets a certificate, particularly after disliking the walk down. Chilling for the rest of the day, chicken casserole, and Line of Duty.

On Sunday after a walk, paper collection and breakfast, go to cheer on and sponsor the Happisburgh runners in the virtual London Marathon – Stephen Brown and Susan Bond, and Paul Hovell who I didn’t know was running. At least the rain has stopped for a bit. Denise, Rhiannon and Ardy take Max for a walk in Bacton Woods, but I fancy the Sunday papers and a snooze at home. Preparation for this afternoon’s big match and zoom: Brentford vs Preston North End, back to league action after the cup successes. 2-0 up at half time, 4-2 down at the end. A game of two halves, capitulation. A roast beef dinner is the only way to recover. Followed by an Ollie Watkins perfect hat-trick as Villa beat Liverpool 7-2. Goals, goals, goals. So pleased for Ollie after his £28m transfer from Brentford.

**Monday 5 October**

Ardy wakes us up, as does Millie, in the middle of the night. Knackered by 6am and for several more days. Denise goes into Norwich shopping and lunching with Rhiannon and Ardan before they get the train home. I go running. Preparing for two zooms today – Centre for London on housing for older people in the capital and Talk Together on intergenerational connection in the age of Covid. Has Covid worsened things or just heightened inequalities? Meanwhile today’s controversy is about some 16,000 tests lost, due to an excel spreadsheet cock up (ie not enough columns/rows). And cinemas are being shut as the latest Bond movie is delayed again until 2021. Life as we know it is slowly being throttled.

**Tuesday 6 October**

A day for the big clear out as we get closer to moving. Chucking out in the office, snug and dining room today. A trip to the charity shops in Stalham to donate six bags of clothes, with gift aid. Much more to follow. The big news today is the rise in hospitalisations, particularly in northern cities. Will there be more national and/or local lockdowns to save the NHS? Will my trip to the Peak District in ten days time be on? So much has been cancelled this year, and when will we next go to a film/gig/party/proper pub/football match?

**Wednesday 7 October**

An interesting day and typically different. After a walk along the high tide below the cliffs on slippery mud and a run, it’s a sweaty breakfast. The phone goes and the caller is Joan Bakewell. She is preparing for a debate in the House of Lords and asks about the impact of Covid on intergenerational relations and care and housing. A good conversation. Then later in the day the BBC call about filming in Happisburgh for a new programme, It’s a simple life, about moving from the city to the country. A couple from Manchester are staying in the village and want to visit the lighthouse etc as well as looking around to buy somewhere. Lisa and Siobhan were due to visit for a couple of days but we cancelled due to Covid, bad weather and our impending move.

**Thursday 8 October**

Denise and I clear some more stuff. This time in the dining room, the hall and Little Thrums. Lots more still to do but we are making progress. A skip has been booked for 19 October and Graham will take other stuff to a tip. Today’s zoom is for partners involved in the recently launched STOPageism campaign, to discuss where it’s going and how we can help shape it. The final long episode of series five of Line of Duty. When it’s over, we see that the cast have been tweeting from the filming of series six. Bring it on.

**Friday 9 October**

A sad day. We can’t concentrate on work or anything else as we wait for the online screening of John Woodward’s funeral from a crematorium near their home in Rugeley. At 11am What a Wonderful World rings out. In come those who can attend – mainly family and a few close friends and colleagues. It’s hard to hear some of what’s being said but poignant and very different contributions from Ruth (read by Gary), Steven and Tom. All over in 30 minutes, after 65 years. I’m pleased we helped arrange an obituary for John in The Guardian. Denise messages Ruth and we hope to meet up when all this is over and we have moved. Managed to focus on doing some work, writing, emails, tweets etc. Then I do a zoom with an old colleague Mike Browne who is doing a piece about comms people who become CEOs, how and why, what tips etc. Denise goes to Stalham to get a gift for this evening. Dinner with Matt and Helen in the village, feels like another farewell do. Lovely food and interesting chat re Covid politics with the Treasury and Amazon. A bit too much wine, good company. The Hill House has closed because the children have been sent home from school with a temperature and have to be tested. Cases are rising in Norwich, Yarmouth and close to home.

**Saturday 10 October**

Much colder today, really feels autumnal. And wet as well so no mowing the lawn. Bit of a lay in with a mini hangover. Then all there is to do is start the big clear out of the office. A dustbin full of paper for recycling plus lots of personal stuff, photos etc and Denise has found an ipad from 2015 when she was working in the Netherlands. Does it work? Highlight of the evening was a BBC2 docu-film re Teddy Pendergrass and Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes. Wake up everybody! A song I want at my funeral. Time for bed

**Sunday 11 October**

A rare lay in beyond 8am, as the dogs obviously want to as well (or so we think until we find the pile of poo in the dining room later). Another windy but bright morning, choppy waves. Prepare for today’s big event – the AGM of the Friends of Happisburgh Lighthouse this afternoon. We’re meeting in person at the largest hall in the village. Only 11 people in fact but enough for Denise and me to stand down before we move and to elect some new officers to take over. All done smoothly. The pub is still closed and looks like it will be for some time. We need a drink before dinner, then a very emotional last episode of Us, a bit close to home.

**Monday 12 October**

Get up swiftly for a dog walk and run before Denise drives over to Peterborough to see her mum. A bit of a flat Monday – perfect for chucking more stuff out, ordering a skip for next Monday, and reminiscing going through paperwork. Today sees the latest government restriction announcement – three tiers: medium, high, very high! We’re all getting worse as Covid sweeps across the country, students leading the way and passing it on to older people. Looks like we can still go away walking in the Peak District this weekend. Some interesting calls from the BBC about a programme being filmed at the lighthouse next Monday and a west coast USA film producer re a film on ancient Britain and the Happisburgh footsteps. Denise back in time for lasagne before the October parish council meeting. Up for an argument!

**Tuesday 13 October**

Slept in after a restless night. A rushed dog walk so I can get ready for our visit to the opticians and then drive to my mum’s in Wiltshire. First though it’s chasing our solicitor to crack on with exchange; her office in Newcastle has been closed because of Covid. The good news is my eyes have not worsened since June 2019 despite everything. That also means no new frames. Four hour drive to Wiltshire and all well with mum. Her gardener is chopping down a tree. Lots of emails to catch up with after six hours without contact and documents for signing from our solicitor. Progress towards exchange on our sale/purchase. A gentle afternoon/evening of tea, supper, Eastenders and phone calls. Tired.

**Wednesday 14 October**

Another restless night – moving house, Covid, being away from home, all that and more. Up early for a run around Hanging Langford, up the Hollow, round the Upper, via the church and the grave of my father and brother. Back to the house and my mum is still not up, unusually. So time to shower before breakfast, Radio 4 and the papers. It begins to sink in that Tiers 1/2/3 were not going to end Covid, deaths or the economic damage, were diverting blame to regional/local government up north, and increasingly were going to be a real mess. Two hours of paperwork handing out grants to ordinands from my brother’s fund. And two more letters arrive asking for funding. My mum has arranged to go out for lunch with neighbours, so I have a salad and then head back to Happisburgh, missing rush-hour traffic. Back in four hours. We go over to Ellen’s where she witnesses our signatures on our sale and purchase documents. Full steam ahead. Denise and I chill once we’ve made the bed.

**Thursday 15 October**

It’s windy and pouring with rain for the dog walk. Denise is going to the Quadram institute for the Covid vaccine trial – placebo or not? She’s impressed by the set up and efficiency – definitely better than test and trace. London has now become tier 2 and no indoor household mixing, but Manchester/Lancashire are refusing to go to 3 where Liverpool already is. Our weekend in the Peak District now looks a non-starter. A strange mix of zooms etc – proving my right to work holding my passport, being quizzed re care discounts for a public affairs pitch, my annual appraisal as a Victory board member. Inbetween we have the final report on our house purchase and we are ready to go ahead with exchange tomorrow – phew! We move in two weeks’ time. Then zoom to cancel our Peak District walking weekend and catching up with Steve and Anne. The Trump Show looks at the president’s first year while my nephew James has his first article on the USA election published by The Oxford Blue website. Tweeted him. I draft a piece for Municipal Journal on intergenerational living.

**Friday 16 October**

I was due to be on a train from Norwich to Chesterfield today but the weekend has been cancelled. A run instead. It’s a big day because we are due to exchange contracts on our house sale/purchase. The solicitors check we are ready to roll. Yes, all systems go please. Denise has a morning of pampering, her last in North Norfolk. Still no news when she gets back and we chase after lunch. Something seems to be holding it all up. Not sure what until more calls and emails and it’s not going to happen until Monday! Why didn’t they say earlier? Meantime I mow the lawns at Thrums for what should be the last time ever – very wet and long. We feel flat not having got the go ahead. An evening of TV – soaps, Have I got news for you and Mrs Brown before the real news – the rows over tier 3 are growing as Greater Manchester and its mayor Andy Burnham tell the government where to put it. A north south divide on top of all the other divides and inequalities being exposed by Covid.

**Saturday 17 October**

Late rising and the tide is still high so can’t get on the beach again. Bump into the film crew for It’s a simple life and ask if they want to film at the lighthouse. Maybe… We can crack on with clearing and packing stuff for the move. Making some progress. Ellen, Joyce and Elwyn select some canvases for their walls. Then it’s time to catch up on zoom and ifollow to watch Brentford v Coventry. Hopefully the Bees will regain form after the international break and losing our two star strikers. No need to worry as we win 2-0 with Toney scoring twice. A curry and drink are needed. Plus the first two episodes of The Bureau, French spies. And one match on MoTD before Millie barks me to bed.

**Sunday 18 October**

Scrambled eggs on toast while watching Marr on Sunday morning after dog walk and paper run. A nice way to start the day, despite Gove v Burnham. More clearance and the vicar picks up some canvases plus a children’s slide and swing for a local family. The skip arrives tomorrow. Packing and chucking. Johnny Walker for two hours of seventies music with the Sunday papers. Followed by a massive casserole with dumplings. Mark has an article in The Observer on when will the pandemic be over. No time soon, but we do need reasons to be optimistic. Start doing an application to be a non-executive director with ESNEFT when we move. And it’s a new BBC series, Roadkill.

**Monday 19 October**

Hear from Donald that his mother has died – another funeral restricted to close family but he has shared a recording of her funeral service. Donations to Dogs Trust which Denise has long supported.

Today promises to be a big day. The skip arrives at 8.30am and I start filling it immediately. Denise and I then spend most of the day clearing our utility room and shed of more than ten years’ worth of stuff, stuff we don’t need to take with us and is not worth much to anyone. Skip is 90% filled in the day and we are knackered. But elated by the news at 2.37pm that we have at last exchanged contracts and will move on 30 October. Finish clearing then start contacting the utilities re our move. Just a bit more to clear tomorrow. Exhausted, chilled evening of pasta and TV. Wales is locking down over half-term but a backlash is growing. The UK is becoming more and more fractured, like the rest of Europe.

**Tuesday 20 October**

Ten days until we move. The day starts with shifting a fridge and freezer to the tip, then having a lot of furniture (but not all) collected by BHF, and climbing over the skip to create more space for more stuff to chuck out. I also leave the table football I got for my 40th outside for any takers. After cleaning years of dust where furniture used to sit, we retire to the office for the rest of the morning and afternoon. A third of the office is cleared. Then a zoom to prepare for Thursday’s book launch. It’s strange without any tables left in the lounge but we manage to eat dinner before EastEnders and Bake Off. And more notifying utilities about moving home. Fingers crossed. Andy Burnham is being hailed as King of the North for standing up to the PM re Tier 3 – now it will be imposed and Greater Manchester won’t get as much money. Government passes the buck.

**Wednesday 21 October**

I can’t go for a run this morning, feel exhausted, but the dogs get a long walk. Today it’s clearing the office, filling the skip, a quick zoom with a PhD student, preparing for the book launch tomorrow and a network meeting in November. But the highlight has to be the Bees away at Sheffield Wednesday, zoom and live on Sky. The Bees win 2-1, two more goals by our new superstar Ivan Toney. Worth a pint of Pride.

**Thursday 22 October**

We both have a restless, sleepless night – too much to plan and think about and not enough sleep. Feel like I’ve got out of the wrong side of the bed. Take the dogs for a long walk and then run, before throwing more stuff on the skip and jumping up and down to flatten it. We bag up more stuff to chuck. Knackering but the deadlines are looming. Eight days until we move. The sun is shining for the first time for days. Ellen brings me some London Pride as a thank you for the photo canvases. Then a zoom book launch where I am speaking along with five others. We need a quiet evening, TV and pizza. Trump Show on the same evening of the final presidential debate. Meanwhile Covid rows grow as money for businesses and workers is reviewed, MPs vote against free meals for children in holidays despite Marcus Rashford, the country feels more and more fragmented.

**Friday 23 October**

Our last full Friday in Happisburgh. Head into North Walsham to pick up two months of our prescriptions before our move, and even more importantly go to the bank to transfer funds to our solicitor to enable completion on our house purchase next Friday. The skip is collected bulging with stuff from more than the last decade of our lives. Perhaps we should throw more out as we go along – and consume less to start with. Times are changing. The afternoon sees a zoom with ageing CEOs about a new narrative re older people in the UK. Some very familiar themes but can everyone work together to make a difference? MPs face growing backlash over the failure to support free school meals during half-term. Calls to stop subsidies of MPs’ own dining in the House. Football is beating politics.

**Saturday 24 October**

Our last weekend in Happisburgh. Up early and it’s a beautiful late October sunrise, lots of photos for Facebook. Then prepare for the big clear out – our L shaped leather sofa which no one wants because it’s been a super dog bed for the last six years of so. We work out how to break it up before Graham and I manhandle it through the French doors into the back of his van. We’re getting there, the living room is looking bare and the dogs each have a new bed in preparation for a new regime in the new house. More clearing out, chucking and packing. Brentford lose at Stoke 3-2 but I decided not to watch, thankfully. Val and Mark return eight of my photo canvases that haven’t sold at their shop, so I need to find homes for them. Saturday evening is now strictly come dancing, all very Covid safe. Restrictions grow across the country, it feels like life is being squeezed out of the UK, two months to Christmas. Six days to Wivenhoe.

**Sunday 25 October**

The clocks have gone back as summer time ends, a bit of extra time in bed and still get up and out early to walk the dogs, then pick up the Sunday papers from Stalham for the last time. Professor Fauci, leading US expert on Covid is interviewed on Marr, making it clear that Trump has failed to rise to the challenge. The Sunday Times has an investigation on older people with Covid not getting intensive care treatment, simply being allowed to die earlier this year. Packing reaches last leg, clearing out the office with bags more paper to chuck. We’re getting there. TV tonight ends with Roadkill (Tories a la 1980s in modern times). Too tired in winter time to watch MotD.

**Monday 26 October**

Packing starts today. First a walk and run. Packers arrive and start on the kitchen, library and lounge. Kevin and Jason from Shorts in Colchester. Boxes galore. Dogs disoriented. Take several bags of Denise’s clothes to the Break charity shop in Stalham. Lucky them and we get a gift aid acknowledgement later. Lyn and Rebecca also come over to pick up some items from the house and garden. Get absolutely drenched as thunder, lightning and hailstones join our final dark walk of the day in this wettest of Octobers. Clean up the library after the books are removed, leaving ten years’ worth of dust. CDs boxed. Lounge looks empty. Less than four days to our new home but BT say they will post our new number to us. Almost 45,000 deaths from Covid, hospitals are better prepared to support patients but other conditions are being left undiagnosed or untreated. Soaps followed by first episode of The Sister. Creepy.

**Tuesday 27-Saturday 31 October**

Five days that pass in a blur of sleepless nights, frantic days, running around and chasing people as we get ready to move, then move and settle into our new home. Tuesday is packing and chucking. Wednesday I drop off the dogs and cats to kennels/cattery, then go to the tip with Graham with another van full of stuff to chuck, followed by lunch with neighbours Geoff and Katie at the Gunton for our final meal there. Thursday is our last full day at Thrums, some tears as Ellen realises she didn’t see Jack our cat to say goodbye before he went to the cattery, plus cards and gifts from other neighbours. The packers get three vans full and head back to Essex.

Friday is moving day. Which means the last bits of packing, lots of cleaning, all done by 12 noon when the Betts’ removal vans arrive to move in. Denise left before ten and our van by eleven, ready to move into the Bakehouse when our funds clear. I arrive at 3pm to organised chaos as Denise and Rhiannon unpack boxes and sort out the living area where it’s clear we can’t fit it all in, most boxes etc head into the shop for the time being ie our office, books, vinyl/CDs, pictures and miscellany. An Indian takeaway with Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan completes the day. Saturday is Halloween. Another sleepless night, as the excitement is too much. I even forget to use my vouchers to pay for the papers. Time to get serious with the boxes and sort out the kitchen/dining/living area. We make a lot of progress and Tom and I go to Colchester recycling centre to get rid of all the packing and assorted rubbish. Such is the activity and diversion that I don’t clock the Brentford score until after 5pm by when the Bees have beaten Luton 3-0.

It becomes clear that the government is about to announce a national lockdown after denying for weeks that it is needed. The PM is to hold a press conference late afternoon after the UK passes one million Covid cases, hospital admissions threaten to overwhelm the NHS and inevitably deaths are rising, with projections of thousands of deaths every day by Christmas. Boris Johnson announces a national lockdown, almost back in time to March-July. Fortunately we have a table booked at the tapas bar next to the Bakehouse for a last meal out before lockdown. A very friendly reception and good meal/evening. Thank goodness we managed to complete our move on 30 October and didn’t wait until November – all done in two and a half months. Welcome to Wivenhoe! We are very lucky.

**15 November is the longest month**

Inevitably as the numbers go the wrong way, the UK has gone back into lockdown – albeit differently in each nation. The usual run up to Christmas of shopping and drinking has been severely disrupted and November feels like the longest month as the nights get longer and there’s nowhere to go. A strange way for us to experience our new home and new town. In some ways this helps us focus on home-making but it’s not so good for getting out and about and meeting new people.

**Sunday 1-Wednesday 4 November**

The calm after the move? In theory yes, but the reality is somewhat different. Sunday is about making the downstairs liveable and ready for the return of the pets on Monday. More sorting and emptying of boxes and more to take to the tip. First roast dinner cooked on the aga. Monday up early to drive back up to Norfolk to collect the dogs and cats and bring them back to their new home in Essex. First walk with the dogs on a sunny lunchtime, lots of photos. Then more sorting. The dogs are restless overnight and have to be taken out in the middle of the night for a walk and a poo. Tuesday is election day for the next President of the USA, very familiar from our visits there in 2004 and 2008. I go into Colchester by train for an HMV treat and M&S shopping. Lunchtime stroll with dogs and we bump into Vanessa Potter and catch up. The afternoon I sort out the shop and pile up boxes in some kind of order. More of Denise’s aga cooked homemade lasagne for dinner, another triumph, then try and follow Brentford on the phone as they draw 1-1 with Swansea. BT have failed to sort our broadband and have promised to send a mini hub to get us online tomorrow. Wednesday and another disturbed night as the dogs want to sleep in our bedroom. After an early walk, I can barely run, still feel exhausted after the last week and lack of sleep. I get our November e-news out with our new hub. Then it’s our last treat before lockdown – lunch at the Greyhound and a stroll in the November sunshine plus some local shopping and nosing around. We collect Ardan from nursery to stay this evening while Rhiannon and Tom have their last night out before lockdown – across the road at the tapas bar so he can wave to them. Knackered and fall asleep in front of the TV while Denise does a zoom call with Happisburgh school. It’s been a long week and still lots to do.

**Thursday 5-Sunday 8 November**

Almost a week in Wivenhoe and we’re beginning to settle in. But today is weird, a beautifully sunny and misty November day and the first day of lockdown. Walking to the Coop for the newspapers, I just can’t stop thinking why everywhere en route is closed. Denise was meant to be going to Norwich today (after dropping Ardy at nursery) to have her second Covid ‘vaccine’ injection but trains from Colchester have all been cancelled. So another day in the Wiv sorting out stuff. Friday is our first Ardy day. The weather is still great so we head to Frinton on Sea where I went for family holidays some 55 years ago. It’s remarkably unchanged on the sea front, the beach is gorgeous and we walk and play with the dogs. We’ll be back here in summer 2021. Fish and chips for lunch, sitting on the cliff top. This is the life. For the first time the dogs sleep through the night as do we. That means I feel able for the first time to do a proper run to the beach at Alresford. Then Saturday is clearing more boxes upstairs in the lounge and bedrooms. Before zoom starts for Brentford v Middlesbrough – a dire 0-0 draw. Too much football and no fans make for great frustration. Take away paella from the tapas bar next door is the best we can do in lockdown. Midway through the game four days after voting it’s confirmed at last that Joe Biden has been elected as the next President of the USA. Rejoice. He speaks of hope and history. Sunday continues in the same vein as the world wakes up to the prospect of a new start in 2021. It’s Remembrance Sunday but there are no live services in Wivenhoe, just a pre-record online, while a few people lay poppies on the monument outside the church. Ardy is with us most of the day, we go to Brightlingsea for more seaside sun and fun and dog walking. I leave my bike at a free cycle workshop and miraculously it’s transformed two hours later into something rideable again. We record a message for Mark’s 60th birthday video, complete with conspiracy theory. More people to see in Wiv in due course. The last episode of Roadkill tonight.

**Monday 9 November**

Ten days in Wivenhoe. Feels like we are beginning to settle but Denise has a parish council meeting this evening in Happisburgh, virtually that is. Important issues for residents there re car park, planning etc. Feels a long way from Wivenhoe. Amazing news announced about a Pfizer covid vaccine is announced – could older people start being vaccinated before Christmas? Feels like a game changer. But we have reached almost 50,000 deaths (officially) in the UK, the highest number in Europe. Develop a temporary format for thank yous for the house warming gifts and wishes. Photos are beginning to look great.

**Tuesday 10 November**

Denise is going to Norwich today for her postponed vaccine test injection and check-up. This time she makes it by train via M&S. I have a zoom meeting of the Intergenerational Housing Network with two great presentations by architects of award winning potential schemes. Then the dogs and I drive to Alresford Creek for an explore and new walk by the quarry, along to the beach where Mollie rolls, of course. Some ancient machinery on the deserted banks, prehistoric marshy scenes, all in brilliant warm sunshine for November. Stunning photos. We then meet Denise at the station off her train home. Another quiet lockdown evening at home. Except for the new BBC drama, Industry, about the cut throat city financial world and its young recruits.

**Wednesday 11 November**

A sleepless night as Millie is restless and won’t settle. Eventually wake at 7.30am and rush to put out the bins for this week – glass/tins, food and general rubbish. A long walk/run after the dogs, before buying a new pair of running shoes as the sole has just fallen off my old ones. Then a phone call with the office of the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales and a zoom with consultants reviewing governance at Victory/Flagship – almost like an exit interview given I stand down from the board at the end of December. Get warm welcomes to Wivenhoe from the local Labour county and district councillors. Elections for both in May 21. Continuing problems with BT trying to get the broadband sorted and Denise is getting more and more het up. Put up more pictures and the house is gradually coming together. Ardy is staying tonight so Rhiannon drops off his latest wardrobe and food. We all pick him up from nursery and he returns for kitkat, apple and squash with CBeebies including JoJo and Gran Gran, followed by supper and Grandad’s Island. We are tired.

**Thursday 12 November**

Millie barks throughout the night and Ardy joins us in bed just after 3am, so sleep is limited. Grandparenting! Denise takes him to nursery after breakfast, then a trip to the Coop. I prep for my interviews this afternoon. First time I’ve put on a proper shirt for months and Denise takes some head and shoulder pics for my online profiles, conference pics etc. I zoom with the CEO and Chair of ESNEFT NHS hospital trust about the non-exec vacancies. Proper interviews next week. Mollie seems reluctant to go for dog walks today, barely out of the door and she sits down. Today is the first day when the new cat flaps are unlocked and Jack and Suzy are allowed out to explore Wivenhoe. There’s no holding them back. Put up more pictures and move more things around. We’ll be doing this for some time.

**Friday 13 November**

Grandparenting Friday. The weather forecast isn’t good, we have zooms and parcels to wait for in the morning, so it’s home time and toasties for lunch. After a long walk and run, I have a zoom first meeting of a new Welsh government cross-party group on intergenerational solidarity. Too much to fit into an hour but a good start. A better afternoon and we head to Alresford Creek for sunset and some beautiful photos. It’s BBC Children in Need evening, alongside the usual soaps. Millie has some new calming medicine so we hope she sleeps tonight.

**Saturday 14-Sunday 15 November**

A free-ish weekend which means time to sort more boxes out and particularly the upstairs bedrooms and lounge. We get a lot done and it really begins to feel like home and ready for visitors, when they are allowed to. Lesley is coming to Brightlingsea in December, so she may be first, before the Christmas rush of mums and family. Tom sets up our virtual bell, the cat flap is in action, and the garden lights outside look great. Saturdays are also an excuse to go to the Norwegian bakery to get cinnamon rolls and orange bread. And Saturday evening it’s takeaway from our tapas neighbours, even better than last week. No football this weekend as it’s the international break. Strictly tonight, and on Sunday evening it’s the start of I’m a Celebrity from Wales while BBC1 shows the first of black films – Mangrove is magnificent. Time for action, only 50 years on – also learnt some history, not least that one of the nine worked in H&F council’s education department.

**Monday 16 November**

Our third full week in Wivenhoe at the Bakehouse. Time to order the change of address cards cum Christmas cards to be sent out at the end of the month. Also planning Xmas decs for our windows. Beginning to settle into a routine. The dogs are sleeping better since Millie has had calming drugs, getting used to the house and their three walks a day in new surroundings. I’ve had my first run in super light new running shoes, performance enhancing. Daily walk to the Co-op to get the papers and other sundries, just a pity that virtually everything else is shut. Getting rubbish sorted into the right boxes/bags is one of the biggest challenges.

**Tuesday 17 November**

More disruption as Max needs to go out for a poo after midnight. On our morning walk Max finds a dead duck, washed up by the very high new moon tides, and decides to pull it apart and eat some of it, while getting muddier. A zoom with a Dundee student on creating effective intergenerational spaces. Then final preparation for this afternoon’s stakeholder presentation/interview for ESNEFT NED role. Now set up for zooming in first floor lounge library area on one of the bureaus. Much better. Interview tomorrow. Feel a bit more relaxed and have a drink with supper.

**Wednesday 18 November**

A bad night’s sleep as Millie keeps barking. So much so that Denise relents and says she can sleep in our bedroom tonight. Not good prep for the final interview or anything else. A wash-out day all round, the interview is fine but doesn’t really click. Is it the right opportunity? We watch the first of the new series of The Crown – fine TV, compelling and beautifully filmed and paced. The Christmas/change of address cards have arrived so that will be next week’s task to get them in the post to arrive on 1 December.

**Thursday 19 November**

Colder today. Take the dogs for a different first walk so Max doesn’t get the chance to collect more birds, but good for sunrise pics. After a run, we get the train to Colchester Town, two for £6.40 return with our railcards, to do some lockdown shopping at M&S for food and WHSmith for our 2021 diaries. Very little else open but good to get out. While in Smiths I get the call to say I hadn’t been successful in applying for the NED role at ESNEFT – not strong enough on technology and transformation. Oh well, something else will come along but I am disappointed and a bit adrift having given up most of my other roles as part of moving. Still there’s dog walking, house tidying and sorting a plenty to do plus grandparenting, TV and reading. And of course The Crown. November seems to be the longest month anyway and for my mum it will be seven years next week since my dad died.

**Friday 20 November**

Grandparenting day. Fortunately the rain is holding off but it’s cold. We decide to go to Harwich, still a busy port, an interesting old town, grand buildings, a pier. And a parking ticket/fine and very average fish and chips. Still Ardy enjoys his latest day out with the dogs. Afterwards we play football for an hour in the park; he has improved a lot in the last year. He stays the night and is as good as gold. We chill, it’s Friday evening.

**Saturday 21 November**

Max is not well. He had a restless night and had to be taken out for a walk/poo before he starts playing games on the streets of Wivenhoe at 2am. Tired again. But still manage a run after the dog walk. Fortunately Ardy slept in past 7am. Denise takes him to the bakery for gingerbread men and cinnamon roll treats, and then with Rhiannon to Lidl for Christmas shopping. I get my bike out for the first time since it’s been fixed to cycle to pick up the Saturday papers before settling to write the first of the Christmas cards. The afternoon we spend clearing out more boxes and stuff. Then a takeaway curry from Saffron. Full!

**Sunday 22 November**

It looks like lockdown will be relaxed for a week over Christmas and then reinstated until Easter. What fun! Feel even more depressed and devoid of meaning, purpose and connection. So four months to sort out the future, and save money. The second in Steve McQueen’s Small Axe series is even better – Lovers Rock with memories of house parties and DJing with Janet Kay’s Silly Games and reggae crunchers.

**Monday 23 November**

The Prime Minister announces the end of national lockdown from 2 December, back to regional tiers with some relaxations and some tougher rules. Still no mixing indoors. It’s a time to be jolly careful, as he says. Certainly not jolly. We order materials for our winter/advent window at the Bakehouse. A zoom call and preparations for conferences in early December. Denise has a school governors meeting so I have to use the aga to prepare rice and stroganoff – phew. Interesting BBC4 Storyville re a hijacker in 1971 who has never been caught after he parachuted from the plane with a $200,000 ransom.

**Tuesday 24 November**

Seven years today since my dad died. Wonder what he would have made of 2020. Denise is off to Norwich for a check up on her Covid vaccine trial. Nice little escape. I clean and tidy up. Then take the dogs to Alresford Creek for a walk to the beach. Muddy and Max and Millie need a hose. We meet Denise at the bus stop on her return and Mollie is very excited, despite three long walks today. This evening is Eastenders, Industry and Bake Off final.

**Wednesday 25 November**

A lot of zooms today. Stop Ageism re an intergenerational project. ILC-UK re next week’s annual conference session on housing. A NEF/WBG roundtable on reforming care. Denise picks Ardy up from nursery. Then a shock email from Lesley to say that Martine’s brother Danny has killed himself. I didn’t know him but it brings back so many memories of my brother Tim and my heart goes out to Martine and her family. An evening of emails to friends, after a zoom meeting of Wivenhoe branch Labour Party. Lots of new comrades preparing for May’s election. National lockdown will end on 2 December as the number of new cases is dropping (deaths rising still) but will be replaced by Tier1/2/3, mainly 2/3 with lots more restrictions. Christmas is the main focus – 23-27 December, up to three households together. How to balance family life with risk?

**Thursday 26 November**

Up at 1am to take the dogs for a mid-night poo. Am tired come 7.15am but the dogs are up for the walk. Mollie doesn’t seem to like me taking her on the lead at the moment. Finalise our December e-news but decide to hold it until tomorrow or Monday. More Christmas cards for posting Saturday. After Martine’s news yesterday, we discover that the police investigations in Wivenhoe on Tuesday followed the discovery of a suicide in the alley besides the bookshop. November is a grim time. Then in quick succession I hear of the deaths of former colleague and fellow councillor Min Birdsey, fellow schoolmate John Durnin and my parents’ bridesmaid Liz Drummond. What’s going on? Min’s death prompts more emails and messages. Spend the afternoon sorting out the boxes in the shop so we’re ready for the removal men to take some of our old bedroom furniture to Stella’s new home next week and to dress the windows for the village advent calendar. We start our Christmas decs. More of The Crown, with astonishing scenes of Diana and Margaret. But it’s only a drama.

**Friday 27 November**

Grandparenting day. We oversleep after the previous night’s disturbance. Ardy comes round with Tom. Sits down for breakfast and TV before we head out to Tiptree Heath for a walk with the dogs and then fish and chips or chicken nuggets and lolly. Play football with Ardy in the park on our return. Ardy is staying the night, so it’s children’s TV, light supper and bed before I retreat to Brentford v QPR on TV and zoom with Bees fans. We win 2-1 and move up to 4th. Things are looking up.

**Saturday 28 - Sunday 29 November**

After a longer run this morning it’s a weekend prepping for Christmas. Everyone seems to have their lights up already. What are we going to do in December? We get our three trees up, wreaths on the outside doors, lights in various places, new lamps, cards posted, books collected. Denise does a home-made curry.

Millie is poorly Sunday morning, diarrhoea and can barely do her morning walk. She rests all day. Is this it as she reaches 14? We also feel tired and snooze around Jonny Walker after Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan pop in post Xmas tree shopping. Small Axe series continues with a film about a black recruit to the Met Police. Superb reality drama.

**Monday 30 November**

One month in Wiv. Denise goes Christmas decs shopping with Rhiannon outside Colchester. After running, I send out our December e-news, deal with responses and prepare for The Together Project strategy session tomorrow. In the afternoon I have an initial interview to be a trustee with Access Social Care, while Denise puts up her new lights. It looks like a runway ready for take off in our kitchen/lounge! Christmas preparations seem ridiculously well advanced but thankfully November is over. The longest month ever in lockdown? The end of an era with the death of Basil Moss, as an email arrives. Another bad bit of news in 2020.

**16 Happy Christmas?**

As lockdown ends and Christmas preparations start, what lies ahead? There appears to be light at the end of the tunnel as vaccines are approved for roll-out. Families look forward to five days together over Christmas. And then what? The numbers start to climb rapidly – cases, hospitalisations, deaths. Christmas mixing is reduced to one day and travel depends which tier you live in. From the jaws of optimism comes despair.

**Tuesday 1 December**

The last day of lockdown before we move into tier two in the east. Not much difference but at least there are pubs and shops to visit. In total 75,000 have so far died from Covid, according to their death certificates. Today is a strategy session for the new board of The Together Project – needed more than ever but still hamstrung by Covid restrictions. The evening is watching Brentford at Rotherham on Sky, another Bees victory 2-0 and up to 4th. A slow start to the season is ratcheting up as the Bees learn how to grind out results.

**Wednesday 2 December**

Millie is much better and we all have a good walk this morning, then a run for me. A second interview to become a trustee of Access Social Care, this time with the board. I prepare my speech notes for the ILC annual conference tomorrow. Then Denise and I do the shop windows with Christmas scenes for the 24th day of advent on the local village trail. It looks great. But today is dominated by the news that the Pfizer vaccine has been cleared by the UK regulators for roll out from next week. Is this the moment we have all been waiting for? Mums, NHS and care staff first.

**Thursday 3 December**

An unusual day. Wet and cold for the dog walk. Then all day ‘at’ the ILC-UK annual conference which we have been supporting this year as part of our tenth anniversary. As I’m getting dressed and deciding what shirt to wear, I get a call from the ILC to ask if I will join the panel for the first session of the conference starting in half an hour (after a Labour spokesperson has dropped out). Of course, a good opportunity alongside Full Fact, ILC’s director and Sophie Howe, the Welsh Future Generations commissioner. All goes well, then I do my session on intergenerational housing, and then dog walking and back to the conference for the rest of the day. Some stimulating sessions on climate change and generational warfare, long term thinking and the evolution of human bodies. Yes! Don’t sit around. Lots of tweeting etc too. Strange doing a virtual all day conference but it has generated some new contacts as well as ideas etc. And this evening it’s my turn to cook, veggie on the aga. Time for a drink, the last episode of series 4 of The Crown (War) and music by The Doors. Riders on the Storm! It’s winter. Meanwhile the Tories fight over who gets vaccine credit, over 60,000 have died (official figures) and what next? Ministers claiming we are the first in the world on vaccines due to Brexit…

**Friday 4 December**

Sometimes various strands of your life come together. So yesterday evening I heard that Access Social Care want me to join their board as a new trustee. So after years of campaigning, advising, influencing and delivering social care, I have been able to call on two referees to support my application. It’s a small world. And today we are heading out with Ardan for our first meal since early November and the latest lockdown – to the Sun Inn in Dedham run by Piers, an old neighbour from Shepherds Bush. Who now employs in his other establishment the son of one of Denise’s old friends, who is moving house today. Piers remembers our previous visits and even the wine friends ordered – and encourages us to return. A great new relatively local pub, lovely food (black squid ink risotto with white crabmeat, one to remember) and to complete the circle Piers raves about the Gunton Arms, the last pub we went to before leaving North Norfolk. Small world 2. Ardy is full of eating out, playing restaurants when we get home, after a long wait at Boots for our first repeat prescription in Wivenhoe. An evening of catching up, doing bills/letters/emails, and making up a Christmas wreath. And to cap it all, my sister has been told she is covid positive having done the weekly ONS survey test for months, and therefore is isolating for a fortnight and my nephew has to stay with his girlfriend on his return from Oxford.

**Saturday 5 December**

For some reason a lot of old male friends have their birthday on 5 December. All brilliant men in their own way. Today we are struggling to stay awake after Ardy joined us at 4am and got us up early. Denise gets breakfast from the Norwegian bakery, Ardy continues watching children’s TV. Brentford are at home to Blackburn Rovers, so I don’t get my haircut this afternoon. It ends 2-2 but we should have won having gone 2-1 up with Blackburn down to ten men, but our subs give a silly goal away. Two points lost. A gloomy TV evening, even Strictly is in a rut.

**Sunday 6 December**

After lockdown and waiting for things to resume, now I’m out for my first session with Wivenhoe Runners. The dog walk is my warm up. Don my mask for the proper warm up in the park car park, then go for an interrupted 4km run with a hard run half way through. Phew but I survived. A photo and facebook afterwards. I am knackered for the rest of the day. Snooze through Jonny Walker, Sunday papers. Wake up for Wheatley, the more uplifting fourth in the series of Small Axe films by Steve McQueen.

**Monday 7 December**

Still aching after yesterday’s run but I’m determined to join the group out tonight. Catch up with emails, articles, speeches, reading, prep etc. Three dog walks, a trip to the coop, search for Ardy’s lost hat all leave me feeling ready for a run at 6pm. It’s cold and frosty, so well wrapped up. Feel better than expected until the last few hundred yards when the pace picks up. It’s certainly pushing me. And for the first time for ages I get that warm post-run glow aka endorphin rush. I’m going to go running again but not tomorrow.

**Tuesday 8 December**

After the dog walk, it’s a Teams meeting from 9am-1.30pm with the University of Winchester for a panel revalidation of their Liberal Arts degree courses. Time to question Professor Tubbs and his team about their relevance to the changing world. They pass with flying colours. Exhausting. Nigel and I catch up later. Denise does a childcare webinar on zoom in the afternoon. We make vegetarian risotto together, another first on the aga. Plus the last in the series of Industry. Stunning TV.

**Wednesday 9 December**

After the dogs’ walk, we get the 61 bus into Colchester. Such great public transport choices. Breakfast at Fenwicks followed by some last bits of Christmas shopping. Still 16 days to go. Cards virtually done except any we forgot. At some point this morning the middle finger on my right hand starts getting red and then swelling rapidly. Is this Heberden’s nodes in action? Or as the doc tells me, it’s much more likely to be gout given my history. What has brought it on? Food? Drink? Injury? Stress? Or a combination? It gets more and more painful. First major attack for 15 years, having had medication to manage it. But never before in my hand, normally in my foot/leg. My mood is not improved by a very disappointing Brentford display in a 0-0 draw with bottom of the table Derby. No creativity.

**Thursday 10 December**

A sleepless night as my finger throbs and I move bedrooms to leave Denise in peace. I decide to contact our new GP. I’m triaged by a nurse who prescribes some strong drugs to reduce the inflammation which are already there when Denise goes to the chemist to get some pain relief for me. All in all a good NHS experience. But it’s not good preparation for a morning’s seminar with Housing LIN on intergenerational housing – a 15 minute presentation and Q&A with the other speakers. Very good feedback from attendees, best of the week apparently. Tired and agitated afterwards, I can’t focus as my finger throbs. I get my first client through the social enterprise Brave Starts which should be interesting. Plus we’re contacted by a new project Diaspo where older people pass on culinary skills to younger people. But I do sleep better after an early night…

**Friday 11 December**

Rested I decide to go for a run, the first since Monday but my body is not keen. Lots of walking as well as running. I feel 60, whatever that means. Ardy comes round after his swimming lesson. He is almost off the armbands. Clearly exhausted but he stays awake all day as we go to the Horse and Groom, Wivenhoe’s traditional Adnams pub, where they serve coconut ice cream much to Denise’s delight. Half the price of The Sun Inn and hopefully no after effects.

**Saturday 12 December**

It’s a miserable wet grey cold December day. Just how I feel after almost no sleep as I toss and turn with my finger despite the drugs. Worsened by waking to hear the government has designated four naval gunships to deter EU boats fishing in our waters post Brexit no deal. Ardy leaves after doing more drawing, I deliver some local cards while Denise does a local Xmas stall and finishes Christmas Day planning. Waiting and snoozing for a haircut by Alfie across the road but it’s a busy Saturday. Tonight we are watching John Cooper Clarke live from Colchester online. Would be much better live with a few pints.

**Sunday 13 December**

Not well enough to go for the Wivenhoe Runners, so Denise and I get ready for breakfast with our guests – except it starts raining just as Lesley arrives by train and Jo and Janet, the runners, a few minutes later. I haven’t run because of my finger. So rather than sitting in the garden we open the French windows for the first time and sit with a breeze by the doors. Such is covid life. Good to see Lesley after too long and to meet the others. Then a tour of Wivenhoe, various artists’ studios and stalls before they head off walking in the rain on the Wivenhoe trail. Sunday papers, Jonny Walker, chilling. Sunday evening TV with almost the best last, the final Steve McQueen Small Axe film – Education. Has much changed?

**Monday 14 December**

After an early dog walk, I phone the doctor’s surgery and email a photo. I’m prescribed antibiotics to tackle the infection in my finger which is red, swollen, painful and looks disgusting, drugs collected by 10am. A relief for the moment. Then catching up with emails and telemeetings. Sort out some vinyl singles for James for Christmas. Plus other parcels.

**Tuesday 15 December**

The day starts after a brisk dog walk with recording an interview for a radio programme on older people and housing. Takes me back to the beginning of the year and Radio 4 and what might have been without Covid. While things haven’t progressed as much as we would have liked re intergenerational housing, the time is now right post covid. Then a call re a PhD student’s work on older people with dementia and intergenerational interaction. Denise heads to Admire in Hythe for a new hairstyle, shorter and styled, very nice! I hear that the offer of joining the board of Access Social Care has been withdrawn and I respond annoyed to the chair after references etc have been taken up. Tuesday evening sees the best game of the season so far by the Bees – a 1-1draw at Watford. Keeps us in the top six mix and really we should have won.

**Wednesday 16 December**

Another big day as links with Norfolk gradually erode. It’s my last board meeting with Victory housing this evening, with lots of preparatory reading first. Denise and Rhiannon have gone to Norwich for a final bit of Christmas shopping and a lunch treat at The Ivy. Lucky them. One hundred months on the Victory board, lots of progress despite some recent ups and downs. A late dinner. Nationally the data is getting worse, many more areas are in tier 3 except us still in tier 2 in North Essex. But Christmas looks doomed, small and short. What should we do for our mums? People start to change their plans, just nine days in advance. And a new variation of covid has appeared which seems to be spreading quickly. Third wave here we go.

**Thursday 17 December**

A better night’s sleep but still fitful and waking moments are dominated by my finger – swollen, throbbing, painful, red, pussy, and worse. So I email another photo to the GP and ask to see someone. A call confirms an appointment for 11.30am. Phew. Other things to sort out first like papers, parcels, haircut etc. Then the wounded finger is lanced, dressed and stronger antibiotics are prescribed, just need to be collected from Boots. Another good NHS experience. I manage to get an appointment with Alfie the barber opposite us on the High Street via his app – what a palaver and see him at 2.20pm for a shorter cut to see me through the next lockdown. In time for our meal tonight and to catch up with Denise’s hairdo. I do an interview with a Liverpool university project on older people in rural areas. We try another pub for dinner – the Lion in East Bergholt past Dedham. Nice enough but pricey and lacking atmosphere. Would have rather stayed in or gone local.

**Friday 18 December**

One week to Christmas. Finish cards including quite a few locally. A bit of cleaning, shopping, dogwalking etc before Tom arrives with Ardy. He has just swum a width without any floats/bands etc. After lunch we go to the park via the post office to play football on a promise of strawberry ice cream afterwards. Later we have steak and chips and Ardy can write it. Still feeling slightly queezy and my hand/finger is sore. All tired.

**Saturday 19 December**

The day that Christmas was cancelled. Ardy is with us all morning while Rhiannon and Tom recover from their night away in Dedham. Great hilarity drawing reindeer and snowmen. After Ardy goes and the dogs are walked, it becomes clear that the Prime Minister is to hold a press conference this afternoon and that the Christmas relaxations will be lifted. How far? Brentford are playing Reading, 5th vs 4th. By half-time we are 3-0 up and the match is close to over. Boris is due to speak at 4pm. By 4.20pm or so he comes on. The mutant virus is spreading rapidly, particularly in London, south and east. Many are put into a new tier 4 and can’t go anywhere or do anything over Christmas. Denise’s mum will be locked down in Peterborough. We can see Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan on Christmas Day. My sister won’t be able to go to my mum’s. A complete mess just five days before Christmas with so many plans made. The worst in my lifetime. A mass exodus from London starts as people flock to their families before the Sunday deadline. Denise is so down after all the planning and excitement for her mum about seeing Ardan and the houses in Wivenhoe. What can we do? Well the only solution is to visit her tomorrow.

**Sunday 20 December**

An early start and we hit the road to Peterborough with the dogs, food supplies and Christmas presents for Denise’s mum. Clearly her extra care facility is planning going into lockdown but Denise can still go in and see her while I walk the dogs. She comes down to the car park to see us all. What a Christmas. Messages are confused, public anger palpable, and people are planning all sorts of law breaking over the next fortnight. But at least we have seen her and Denise is more relaxed. Back for Jonny Walker and 70s Christmas tunes. We see Jupiter and Saturn forming the brightest star south west on the horizon over the river. But we won’t be driving home for Christmas. A chilled evening, tired after travelling, SPOTY, Match of the Day and a hot chocolate drink helps the best night’s sleep for ages.

**Monday 21 December**

Today is the shortest day, the winter solstice. Things can only get better. Except we wake to news that the French government has closed its borders to British visitors/lorries following Hancock’s statement yesterday that the virus is out of control. This is Brexit before Brexit! Can it get any worse? Everything the government touches is turning to shit. Strangely warm in the rain this morning, not very Christmassy. I head to the doctor’s to have my finger cleaned and re-dressed, plus more antibiotics ordered. It looks disgusting. Cliff thinks I might need to see a hand specialist. I may have to suggest this on Thursday. A strange day – wrapping presents, cards, emails, collecting unpaid postage. Highlight is a BBC programme about Marcus Rashford’s campaign to end child food poverty. A wonderful man, just 23. End the evening listening to the soulful jazz of Gregory Porter’s new album. Smooth/soothing.

**Tuesday 22 December**

After the dog walk and being accused of having a crapper, I head to the chemist and co-op for more drugs and Xmas booze. Sadly I pick up my repeat prescription, not the antibiotics I need. Then it’s off to the vets for the first visit for Mollie, Jack and Suzy for their annual vaccination. A very different set up and approach – they are not into vaccinations, especially for older cats. Mollie is exhausted. Denise does a huge last Christmas shop at Waitrose and Tesco before stocks run out as the port blockade continues. The real excitement starts at 5.15pm for the pre-match zoom as Brentford take on Newcastle United. We win 1-0 and reach the first major cup semi-final in our history thanks to a goal and superb performance by Josh Dasilva. How long before he’s bought? Exciting times amidst all the gloom. If only I could have a drink to celebrate.

**Wednesday 23 December**

After a restless night, we wake up late. Hardly feel festive (despite the need to clean and get ready for the 25th), just feel gloomy. Confirmed later in the day by the announcement that Tier 4 is being extended, covering the east including us in North Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. Must be bad as the numbers rise exponentially. If only 2021 was looking better. A Brexit deal is due to be finalised tonight. But Tier 4 will kill off any economic growth and it’s too late to prevent rising cases, hospitalisations and deaths. That’s why I’m gloomy despite revelling in last night’s cup result. I can’t stop watching the winning goal, swapping messages and waiting to see who wins the other quarter finals. Bees v City, United, Spurs or Everton? It’s Spurs away on 5 January, the best draw. Time to cook my veggie pasta, low key before the big blow-out.

**Thursday 24 December**

Full on Christmas preparation after a bit of co-op shopping and another trip to our surgery re my finger. Some debate between the triage nurse and the GP but they think the infection has been dealt with, the swelling is down, so I’m off the antibiotics, still on Naproxen, and a new dressing for Christmas. It looks gross but getting better, I hope. Back again on 29 December for another look and some tests. Clean and tidy for tomorrow. Boris Johnson heralds his Brexit deal announced at the last minute; its major selling point is it’s not no deal, even though it’s very much a ‘trade reduction treaty’ and will damage our economy for years to come. Plus he makes a bad joke about Brussels and sprouts. 5pm round to Rhiannon and Tom’s for Christmas Eve supper. In theory we should only be celebrating with another household on Christmas Day but we are Ardan’s childcare bubble. A nice relaxed evening in their smart home with our Christmas jumpers on. Denise puts the turkey in the aga before bedtime.

**Friday 25 December**

Christmas Day excitement is too much for the dogs who get me up at 1am for a poo and run around the village. We wake up at 7.30am in time for me to get out with the dogs for a beautiful sunrise and facebook photos/greetings. Very quiet in town. Another hoover up of the dog hairs, then laying the table while the rest of the food is prepared. Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan arrive at 11.50, time for champers then zoom with Catherine, Ed and James, followed by presents in the under-used lounge upstairs – including a painting commissioned of the Bakehouse. Strange not having our mums with us, first time for many years, and no prospect of being able to see them for months. A beautiful crisp and sunny Christmas day, with families sitting out on West Quay quaffing champagne. Then lunch from 2pm, fish platter followed by turkey and trimmings. A break for the last dog walk, with football in the park with Max chewing Ardan’s ball. Then deserts including Denise’s classic trifle, more wine, clearing up and snooze. Cheese and biscuits in the upstairs lounge. They leave around 8.30pm after a lovely day. No news, little social media, no covid/Brexit except in conversation. Eastenders before bed.

**Saturday 26 December**

Boxing Day. We are in tier 4 from midnight so little to see/visit/shop from now through January and beyond? Will Christmas lead to more cases? Max and Mollie out at 2am so we sleep through to 8.30am, Denise awake watching TV. Chilly and grey start. A day for staying in rather than walking/shopping but do both locally. Brentford play Cardiff today, following online. 0-1 at half-time as I take the dogs out. Back for the first of three wonder goals by Sergi Canos for a complete turn around in the second half, final score 2-3 to the Bees. 15 games unbeaten. Is 20-21 going to be our season? Congratulations to the coaching staff in helping Canos back from injury, into confidence despite early setbacks. We then head round to Tom and Rhiannon for part 3 of Christmas dining, the Boxing Day supper of leftovers. A nice low key meal and evening. Walk back at 8.30pm and everywhere is deserted, just like a curfew not just Tier 4. An early night and finish V2, Robert Harris’s WWII novel.

**Sunday 27 December**

Another lie-in after more disturbed sleep as Max and Mollie and then Millie bark to go out in the night. It’s very wet and windy in the churchyard as Storm Bella blows in. Debris everywhere as we do our normal morning walk. The good news is that The Together Project has got a big splash in the Mail on Sunday on front page and page 3 for the PM’s son Wilfred’s art swap with Betty, a care home resident. Good coverage picked up elsewhere. Feels like Sunday unusually at this time of year, Sunday papers from the Coop, lots of walkers out in the emerging sunshine. Lunch and dinner are more leftovers, seems better this year, and Denise makes a chowder for new year’s eve. Clear out more of our stuff from the shop and Rhiannon and Tom take some more pictures for their house. Feeling tired again, phone calls, supper, TV, First episode of Black Narcissus.

**Monday 28 December**

A beautiful morning, even some warmth in the sunshine over the frost. After walking the dogs, I go for my first run for two and a half weeks due to my finger. At least I haven’t overdone it at Christmas. I feel a lot better for it but the post-Christmas blues seem to have descended. So that was it? And no mums. When will we see them? Not just Covid, but Brexit implementation and many other reasons not to be cheerful. I was always a glass half full type. Some lovely photos of Dry Dock in the sun with reflections on the water. Followed by cleaning and more leftovers. Eastenders and second episode of Black Narcissus.

**Tuesday 29 December**

First non-public holiday working day since Christmas. More people out running and dog walking but it’s grey and cold. We’ve got three long months ahead of us. Record numbers of Covid cases and people hospitalised by Covid, fortunately fewer are dying but the pressures are growing on the NHS, and we haven’t even had the Christmas effect yet. Today is an admin day – telling more people about our move ie notification of change of address two months after the event. Sorting out the rubbish after the Christmas excesses for recycling. Doing tax and VAT returns. Then late afternoon it’s back to the surgery for a look at my dodgy finger – it looks disgusting but once it has been cleaned up, swabbed and skin removed from two-thirds of it, it begins to look like a finger in progress, still can’t bend it properly. Back again after new year. TV dinner, Eastenders and final Black Narcissus.

**Wednesday 30 December**

A beautiful sunrise for Facebook after a frosty start. British Gas Homecare engineer does a service visit and he remembers the Bakehouse as a restaurant – he thinks the makeover is great and reassures us that they didn’t skimp on heating/boiler/radiators etc. Instead of going out for a walk, Rhiannon, Tom and Ardy come round for lunch. I snooze after a restless night. 5.15pm it’s a zoom for the last big match of 2020 – Bees v Bournemouth. After a manic start, we settle down and come back from 0-1 to win 2-1 and move second. A great end to the year after missing out in the play-off final just a few months ago. The post-match zoom is full of excitement.

**Thursday 31 December**

Another disturbed sleep after two dogs want to go out several times – and it’s the coldest night of the year. Beautifully frosty in the morning and not many people about. So it’s the last day of the worst year of our lives? Apart from getting ready for dinner this evening, here are five highs and five lows of 2020 and five wishes for 2021 when we find the re-set button:

2020 highs: moving house and new places to explore (when they are open); more time with Denise; Brentford’s year up the league; grandparenting with Ardan; squats and exercise, volunteering, reading and writing this diary

2020 lows: not seeing live football since March; people ill and dying unnecessarily, too many we know; government incompetence; work coming to a standstill; losing life, contacts with mums, family and friends, activity in Norfolk

2021 wishes: more mixing; more exploring/travel; living the life and meeting people in Wiv; seeing football live; finding meaningful work; enjoying London again

So this is the last day the UK is in the EU – I still can’t understand why anyone would want to leave. And it’s another record high for deaths this winter and hospitalisation from Covid. At this stage you have to remain optimistic that 2021 can only get better. We have a lovely meal in our bubble and see the new year in with Jools Holland and firework noises off.

**17 The longest month**

As if things couldn’t get any worse and as people look brightly forward at the start of 2021, guess what? More Covid cases, more hospitalisation and the NHS buckling under the strain, and more deaths, as a new variant of Covid runs riot. Was Christmas worth it? The good news is that the vaccine roll-out is more than meeting predictions. Everything else is too little, too late. Covid and lockdown is really hitting everyone’s mental health and there’s no escape in this long dark winter month. Except hoping that it gets better soon. But no one can plan anything at the moment.

**Friday 1 January 2021**

Ardy wakes us at 6.45am – happy new year! Tired and sore heads after a great evening despite curfew. No one around for the first half of the dog walk, a few people emerge for new year greetings. A day for chilling, snoozing, walking and reading.

**Saturday 2 January**

After dog walking, my first run of 2021. Feel ok but my finger still feels funny and it’s cold! Denise does the Co-op run. Sadly no football today as Bristol City have pulled out of playing the Bees because they say they have Covid in the squad. Match of the Day later will have to do. Instead we travel seven miles to Rowhedge to look across the River Colne less than a few hundred yards to Wivenhoe with Millie and Mollie. Really weird. The late afternoon sun is perfect for photos of our new-ish home town. Rhiannon and Ardy take Max for a long walk in the meantime. He’s knackered again. A lovely Cooks curry for dinner.

**Sunday 3 January**

31 years since my brother Tim killed himself. More than half my lifetime, well over half his. Still no clearer why. The Tim Burke Memorial Fund lives on, albeit relatively quiet at the moment due to Covid restrictions.

Boris is on Marr, his usual self. Behind the curve. Not leading. Schools are safe to open tomorrow. We shall see. What we know is that the numbers are all going the wrong way. Vaccinations are being rolled out but it’s still a postcode lottery. No sign of the mums being vaccinated. Sunday walks, papers, snooze, Johnnie Walker etc, plus Sunday evening TV including episode 2 of creepy The Serpent.

**Monday 4 January**

Calls for a new lockdown grow as schools go back. The graphs are frightening – almost vertical in new cases, particularly for London, south and east. Trying to write our latest e-news, both to be upbeat and to take account of the changing situation. Boris is to address the nation at 8pm. At 4pm I go to our GP surgery to have my finger examined and redressed. The practice nurse decides it’s still looking bad and refers me to the urgent treatment centre at Colchester hospital. Drive in the dark and anxious about what might be in store. By 10.30pm I have seen several doctors, nurses, admin staff, had x-rays and intravenous antibiotics. And an immediate referral to the specialist hand trauma unit at Broomfield hospital in Chelmsford. An hour’s drive later, they decide not to operate tonight but arrange for me to come back at 11am (I get home around 1.45am). The nurse makes me a cheese sandwich and tea after no food all evening. The care, professionalism and cheerful yet thorough communication throughout in the face of Covid pressures is remarkable. Thank you NHS. Meanwhile Boris has announced the third national lockdown, basically stay at home except for essential food shopping etc. The NHS is on the brink.

**Tuesday 5 January**

Denise is going to take me to Broomfield hospital near Chelmsford to drive me home after the operation/anaesthetic. Rhiannon will see the dogs at lunchtime. We get to Chelmsford about 10.30am in pouring rain. By 11.30am having read The Times, I am being seen by a nurse at the first stage of the minor operation on my finger. Change into theatre gown, assessed by consultants on what needs to be done, and prepared by nurses for the op. Lying on my back, with my right arm flat out waiting. Anaesthetic by the doc, then a few minutes wait for numbing, before he gets to work. Not watching! But feel various bits of pulling and tugging at my finger, imagination runs riot. They dig and wash out the infection and dead skin. Will it do the job with the antibiotics? It doesn’t take long and by 12.30pm I am up and having a cup of tea and biscuits and get told about next steps – back next week for review and redress plus drugs to take away. I’m glad Denise is with me because I’m not fit to drive for an hour. Another good NHS experience. I don’t do much for the rest of the afternoon. In the evening it’s a zoom for Brentford’s biggest cup match for ages – the semi final of the Carabao cup vs Tottenham Hotspur. We lose 2-0 but don’t disgrace ourselves and really should have scored. Turns a bit fractious at the end. At least we can now concentrate on the league and getting promoted – if the season reaches a conclusion given the spread of Covid.

**Wednesday 6 January**

Not a bad night after the operation – no need to take any painkillers, which hopefully is a good sign. After the announcements on lockdown, I amend our January e-news and send it out before a zoom training session on governance for The Together Project board. Very useful, lots to do. In the meantime Covid deaths exceed a thousand for the first time since April and hospitals are wobbling. And Anarchy in the USA as Trump supports right wing fanatics protesting his election defeat (steal) inside the Capitol building and disrupting Senate proceedings due to ratify Biden’s election. True anarchy all urged on by Trump, disgraceful. Biden responds strongly and wisely. Things can only get better.

**Thursday 7 January**

Up early this morning, not just because of the dogs, but so our new sofa can be delivered at 8.30am. The dogs are slightly freaked by all the furniture being moved around again. All settle down by 9.15am. The world is far from settled, not just Covid, but turmoil in the USA following the storming of the Capitol building and the Senate, all urged on by President Trump, enemy of the state. Extraordinary times, uncertain times. After a zoom re a new centre for all ages, I finish off sorting out Denise’s birthday presents and card for tomorrow. Hope she likes it. A great photo of Jack for Facebook sitting on our back garden buddha. Follow up contacts from our latest e-news and LinkedIn posts. After the day’s last dog walk, I fall asleep for over an hour – the last few days (or weeks) of disrupted sleep are catching up on me. Covid deaths reach 1162 and rising as hospitals struggle with ever increasing numbers. Catch up on first episode of Traces, a Scottish style Silent Witness.

**Friday 8 January**

Will you still need me…Denise’s 64th birthday today. Coffee in bed, cards and presents, some she knew about and some she was surprised by – including the blue whale fluke pottery. Stunning. A good start to an excellent day in the circumstances. We have Ardy today and we can’t go out. So it’s fun and games at home, with a few dog walks including a trip to the only café open to get hot chocolates to drink with chocolate cookies on the waterfront. Rhiannon and Tom join us for a Cook’s curry selection and no booze. Lovely evening and Denise has had a good birthday, lots of Facebook messages and a mention in The Guardian birthdays column. What more could a girl want? Well, an end to Covid – 1362 deaths recorded today, the highest total for any day in the UK since the pandemic started and the official total in the UK is close to 80,000 but in reality much higher in terms of excess deaths.

**Saturday 9 January**

Ardy wakes us up before 7am and it’s very cold, an icy night. But clear and bright and beautiful. Perfect for walking several times today. Denise also goes out for a walk with Stella. I’m feeling rough with the drugs, sleepy and my finger doesn’t look much better. Have five days to my next appointment… Third round of the FA Cup today and the Bees are playing at home against Middlesbrough, mainly B teams with both clubs interested in promotion from the Championship and Covid running rife. The Bees win 2-1 with several debuts and two players scoring their first goals for the club. Streamed by the FA for free. Followed by more curry, Chicken Korma.

**Sunday 10 January**

Up a bit later and it’s like everyone’s out on a new year resolution walking/running/dogwalking. Too many people out and about, particularly given current circumstances. We drive over to the other side of the river to look across at Wivenhoe and photograph our house. We both feel tired after Denise’s birthday and looking after Ardy. Endless FA Cup football on TV and then the latest episode of The Serpent, very creepy true story.

**Monday 11 January**

Max and Mollie wake us up for a poo at 3am – it’s very cold out and it takes me ages to get back to sleep. The usual round of morning activities – dogwalking, Coop for papers and things, moving the car to a good parking space in the square, while work is going on at the church. Rhiannon takes Max out for a longer lunch time walk while I do Millie’s stroll. A few calls with What Impact, York’s intergenerational coordinator, and Vistage chair. Lots to think about before pursuing this opportunity. Denise has a Happisburgh parish council meeting by zoom and I watch TV and start our annual accounts.

**Tuesday 12 January**

A good night’s sleep and get up after 8am. One more day until I go back to the hospital and my finger is revealed. Today ONS reveals that 2020 saw the biggest increase in deaths for any year since 1940 ie as a result of World War II. Some 91,000 more than the average for the last seven years – the Covid effect and that only really started in March 2020. Catch up with bits and pieces and move the statue in the garden, put out the recycling and walk the dogs. We view a flat as a possible place my mum could move to in Wivenhoe, but we need to sell the whole idea first. Hear that John D is in hospital with Covid, and emailed about a streamed funeral on Friday. Another 1,243 deaths today. The talk is all about whether more restrictions are needed. Or whether we need to be tougher on those ignoring them. We have to stop contact. Stay at home. And watch TV (more Traces tonight), and write this diary. The Bees’ next two matches – tomorrow and Saturday – have been postponed due to Covid. Will the season be completed?

**Wednesday 13 January**

Get up early to get to Chelmsford to Broomfield Hospital for a 9am appointment to review my finger post-op, redress the wound and start hand therapy. It’s looking a lot better, washed and redressed and new splint which I have to wear for the next eight weeks and a collection of exercises. Home by 11am. A big relief after five weeks of to and fro. We watch the last two episodes of Traces, a gritty Scottish Silent Witness. The big excitement during the show is the sound of roadworks outside as highways fix the local potholes – unfortunately not very well as we discover in the morning.

Today sees the highest number of deaths – 1564 – reported in the UK in one day since the pandemic started. The Christmas effect. And Trump has become the first president to be impeached twice. What will he do before inauguration on 20 January?

**Thursday 14 January**

Today is very wet and cold, miserable. Not much fun for any of the walks, lots of towel work. Finger exercises. Emails, telephone calls, powerpoints etc. We chat with Geraldene about her older friend who had been abused by carers. Denise has been busy baking today – two pies and a large lasagne – which will keep us all going for a couple of days. We’re both tired. Speak to mum and she has her Covid vaccination tomorrow – hooray!

**Friday 15 January**

Today we have had Millie for ten years exactly, making her approximately 14 years old. She has been showing her age this week but still insists on going out walking three times a day. It’s Ardy day. We’re not going anywhere today so it’s a mixture of learning, drawing, TV and football in the park. Denise’s chicken pie is delicious.

**Saturday 16 January**

Ardy gets up before 7am. It’s snowing! Not much more than a light dusting but it’s cold and dusty. And it remains cold and dark most of the day. We watch the first three episodes of The Queen’s Gambit, a stunning 1960s story of a girl chess champion growing up in unlikely circumstances. Compelling and stylish TV. Makes up for the lack of Bees football as Covid leads to another game postponed. We are still fourth in the Championship with games in hand.

**Sunday 17 January**

Bright sunshine, clear skies today. Perfect for dog walking and running, but not going out further afield by car. More people are being vaccinated, almost four million so far, and the government says everyone will be done by September. But what does that mean re everyday life, travel etc? The peak of deaths is higher than last April and we still have a long way to go. We watch the final four episodes of The Queen’s Gambit – brilliant TV, very modern about another time which leaves me with many thoughts about chess, patriotism, adoption and genius.

**Monday 18 January**

A quiet Monday start but a day that takes off later. Aka Blue Monday, third Monday of the new year, when Christmas joy has gone and everyone feels thoroughly depressed, according to the marketers. After dog walk, Coop shop for dinner, we have a telecon with Bright Horizons re new markets for their childcare services. Very interesting. Then Denise gets a call from Dubai about developing their childcare. And after chasing her Mum’s Covid vaccination, she speaks to a Daily Mail journalist about why her 91 year old mother hasn’t been vaccinated while the government is now telling 70 year olds it's their turn. More random chaos. In the meantime I write a blog about Biden’s new hope for Britain, get invited to an online Aspen seminar, and cook dinner and watch TV while Denise has a school governors meeting. Variety!

**Tuesday 19 January**

So Denise’s mother and Denise and Rhiannon are pictured in the Daily Mail complaining about the vaccine postcode lottery. ITV news interview Denise for the lunchtime broadcast. She has the buzz and her mum has more social interaction than for the last nine months. I publish a blog about whether the US inauguration could lead to big change in the UK - but not much interest here. What a dull country. At least I am offered a scholarship to attend a UK-US seminar on leadership in March. I take Millie to the vets to have her anal glands seen to, everything else is fine for a 14 year old dog. And at the end of the day we pick Ardy up from nursery and take him home so Rhiannon can show us their new furniture etc. Very sixties. The 10pm news is dominated by a record daily death toll on 1610 and a distressing report from Clive Myrie about the struggles at the Royal London hospital.I can’t breathe tonight. And it sounds like many others are having trouble sleeping.

**Wednesday 20 January**

The big day for the USA and the world – the inauguration of Joe Biden as President and Kamala Harris as VP. An historic day which Trump has not got the grace to attend and the security and Covid means hundreds of thousands of others can’t either. Fortunately nothing untoward happens, Biden reassures and 22 year old poet laureate Amanda Gorman steals the show. Hope for us all. Two zooms, preparing for a webinar next week and a campaign this year, plus football this evening. Bees scrape a 1-0 win vs Luton, a match they almost threw away. Up to third with games in hand. Meantime 1820 deaths reported today, another record. And on top of everything else, there‘s flooding in the north west where godson Robin lives. Will he be evacuated?

**Thursday 21 January**

So Robin wasn’t flooded but he’s not moving his furniture back until the all clear. In the meantime Didsbury is visited by Boris. Today’s main focus is another trip to Broomfield hospital in Chelmsford to see how my finger is healing. An hour there, an hour back by car. Good service when I get there, car park machines out of order, seen on time and speedily. The wound on my finger is healing well, it’s cleaned and redressed with a smaller bandage, plus a smaller splint to help with doing the finger exercises. The droop is barely visible so that’s good. Priti Patel leads today’s press briefing on the virus – all very downbeat. Why?

**Friday 22 January**

Ardy day today. Apart from having a nasal flu inoculation at lunchtime, he is with us all day and plays football in the park with me. That’s after the first meeting of the new board for The Together Project which I chair and it goes well; lots to do and follow up on. Denise has made a lovely steak and mushroom pie for dinner before we read books to Ardan and carry on writing his book about a fox catching a plane. He’s obviously excited because he wakes up at 11.45pm and joins us. I have to relocate for the rest of the night! Worried because the government has announced that the new virus variant is 30% more deadly and questions about vaccination rage. Denise’s mum was vaccinated earlier today after the lobbying earlier this week. She now has to keep safe.

**Saturday 23 January**

Tired this morning and aching after a night in another bed. My back/lungs feel funny. Need a snooze later. Take the dogs for a long walk this morning – clear and still but cold. It snows later. A chilled day at home, doing housework, walking dogs and watching football and Saturday evening TV.

**Sunday 24 January**

Sunday morning in lockdown isn’t very different now to the rest of the week except the Co-op doesn’t open until 10am. So have to watch the Health Secretary on Marr, yet more bluster and lack of direction. It’s cold and grey today. How many football matches can you watch in a day – three if it’s the FA Cup. Including Brentford v Leicester, (we lose 3-1 so we can concentrate on the league and a big match on Wednesday), and Chelsea win too but it’s Frank Lampard’s last match in charge. Sunday evening is the creepy The Serpent, really takes you back to the 70s.

**Monday 25 January**

Very cold overnight, clear blue sky. Ice everywhere. On my way back with the dogs, near Wivenhoe sailing club, I see a woman about 50 yards in front of us slip, her feet go from under her, she falls on her back and hits her head on the ice. Max and I rush to her, help her up and onto a bench, talking to her to check her consciousness. She is a bit wobbly, shaken and feeling sick. I walk with her back to our house, drop off the dogs and say I will walk with her home. But as we walk up the high street, it makes sense to take her into the doctors’ surgery which has just opened. A doc checks her out. A bit later I check on her at home and she and her husband are grateful for my help. Phew, she seems ok but it could have been worse. Life is so fragile. A radio interview recorded before Christmas on intergenerational housing and United for All Ages has just been released and promoted via social media. Prepare for tomorrow’s conference presentation, various emails and meetings. Tired after fresh cold air walks. Denise redresses my finger after the dressing gets wet. Record numbers in hospital but cases are falling, prompting premature talk of schools returning and restrictions being relaxed by Easter. We shall see.

**Tuesday 26 January**

Still cold but grey today. A suitable backdrop to the very grim news that official government figures today record 1621 new deaths meaning that more than 100,000 people have died as a result of coronavirus. Last spring we were told that 20,000 would be a good outcome. 50,000 people have died in the last 77 days. The British public need to be shocked out of their complacency. It didn’t need to be this bad – just look elsewhere – and more could have been done to prevent deaths. Boris Johnson just hangs his head but won’t take responsibility. Everything else pales by comparison. I did make a presentation to a zoom webinar on intergenerational care and dementia. I have had a lot of responses to the news that I have become chair of The Together Project. But it’s a grim afternoon and evening all the way to the Ten O’Clock News. I’m also toying with applying for a new job, final decision required by the end of the month.

**Wednesday 27 January**

1725 deaths today. But the government hopes schools will re-open on Monday 8 March. The Tories are five points in the lead in the latest polls as Labour fails to lay a glove on them and despite press columns pointing out multiple failures. Denise goes to Tescos, picks up her drugs and I catch up on emails and enquiries following yesterday’s event. We have our flu jab this afternoon but no news yet on the Covid vaccine. Just before lunch I get a call from Mike Sullivan from Brentford FC asking after my wellbeing and if I’m happy with the offer for frozen season ticketholders or words to that effect. Of course, what more can the club do. The Bees have a big match this season at Swansea, 3rd v 4th. It finishes 1-1 which doesn’t tell the true story – only one team deserved to win and it will be a travesty if Swansea go up. Mr Angry!

**Thursday 28 January**

Another trip to the hospital today, hopefully the last one before final sign off. I end up getting a parking ticket for the first time in five trips to the hospital. I shall appeal! But the wound has healed well, so no more visits until 2 March but I have to wear the splint until then. I’m knackered when I come back. Luckily I had been running first thing in the morning but I must stop eating sweets in the car. Follow up and prep for zoom sessions this and next week. Cases of covid seem to be falling but hospitalisation and death rates are still high and it will be some time before we return to normal.

**Friday 29 January**

Another Ardy day. After dog walking and clearing up, he arrives with Tom. All he seems interested in doing today is watching TV. I have a lunchtime zoom with the CIPR on communicators becoming CEOs - a good turn out and discussion. Meanwhile Denise takes Ardy, Rhiannon and dogs out for fish and chips in the lovely spring-like weather. A false dawn it turns out. I take Ardy to the park for football but after a quick kickabout he decides he doesn’t want to play football. Spagbol for dinner and garlic bread which Ardy loves. A quiet evening in watching TV and reading to Ardy. The EU and the UK are at war over access to vaccines. Not clever.

**Saturday 30 January**

Ardy joins us around 6am, maybe earlier, and brings the dogs in too. Wakey wakey! Take them for their walk and go for a run in the rain, nice and early before Saturday chores, Co-op etc. A grim day, not good for doing much except reading the papers and watching football. Bees are playing bottom of the table Wycombe but at half-time it’s 2-2 and very tight. By the end Bees win 7-2 as they make the necessary changes! Saturday evening it’s steak and chips, gorgeously tender on the aga. And then Netflix for The Dig, great new film re a 1939 archaeological dig in Suffolk, so local; moving and relevant. Starring Rafe Fiennes. Match of the Day.

**Sunday 31 January**

Have been thinking about why Mollie and I are both so fed up with our dog walking. Decide to take them out in the car first thing to do something different. We drive to Alresford Creek and walk to the ‘beach’, albeit through lots of mud and water but at least the cold weather has frozen some of it. She seems happy, the sun is shining and I feel happier. Back for Marr, Sunday politics and papers. No letter in The Observer, sadly. Short walks, snoozette, Roger Daltrey for Johnnie Walker on Radio 2’s musicals special. Sunday family calls, exceptional chicken pie made by Denise and episode six of The Serpent, just so creepy! While the government is revelling in its vaccine successes (three point lead in the latest poll) and the EU’s embarrassment of poor supplies and low vaccination rates, there is bad news. Captain Sir Tom Moore, age 100, has been admitted to Bedford hospital with Covid. The hospital where my brother in law’s father died from Covid and his mother had only recently left following Covid. Stay strong Captain.

**18 The shortest month**

February feels like an inbetween month. The end of lockdown is on the horizon but it’s still full lockdown. Nothing is open, nothing to do, except walk locally, shop online, work, zoom, read and watch box sets and football. The big success is the rollout of vaccines to the vast majority of older people over 60 and together with lockdown it seems to be having a positive impact on cases, hospitalisation and falling death rates. Less than four months until all will open up if things continue this way.

**Monday 1 February**

This morning we drive to Brightlingsea, one of the cinque ports, for the dogs’ first walk of the day, Walking along the raised path by Brightlingsea Marsh, drier and less muddy. Will be doing more of this as the weather improves. Then emails, phone calls, and Martin comes to fix our guttering etc damaged by the wind and rain on Saturday.

Government is celebrating that all care homes have been vaccinated (well, offered it) but this unravels fairly quickly as lots of unvaccinated staff appear. Also the South African variant is spreading rapidly across the UK.

My turn to cook dinner. Turns out ok despite the low fat crème fraiche. We watch the first episode of The Drowning, a bit spooky.

**Tuesday 2 February**

January was not only long and dark, it felt the wettest on record. This morning is no different. A wet dog walk. Then the sun comes out and it warms up. My letter is in The Times and generates some good responses. But come lunchtime it’s clouded over and news emerges that Captain Sir Tom Moore has died. The nation mourns. At the same time more variants emerge and Covid seems like it will be with us for ever, which of course it will, but is there no release from the bleakness? A zoom about a centre for all ages in Brent, then draft our February e-news. Sausage rolls, then fish for dinner after tea with scones and strawberry jam as Denise’s baking with the aga gets even better. TV ends with part two of The Drowning. Getting better.

**Wednesday 3 February**

An early walk around the quay and avoiding the rubbish bins. Early so I can do a 9am zoom with Ten Years Time re a Dorset review. A piece of work for next week. And a Swansea professor asks me to join his research funding bid. Send out our February e-news and deal with some swift responses and invitations. Prepare for tomorrow’s radio interview. Then Rob comes round to measure up for the books and music shelving in my men’s shed. Denise’s latest creation, shepherd’s pie, is delicious. All set up for the Bees latest game, the twice Covid postponed match v Bristol City. We go 0-1 in the first few minutes but panic doesn’t set in. Equalise for 1-1 half time then take the game to 3-1 before late subs, a goal and we win 3-2. Nineteen games unbeaten in the league, Ivan Toney reaches 20 goals for the season already and 20 games to go. What a team. But I miss The Drowning and Denise gives me the sp. More John Le Carre and Smiley’s People – almost finished.

**Thursday 4 February**

After a 4am poo, and a quick one at 8am, we take the dogs to Brightlingsea (cinque port) for walkies. It goes from sunshine to thick fret as we drive there. Not great for a picturesque walk. Denise goes back to Brightlingsea this afternoon to visit a new nursery there. Apart from emails etc, I prepare for an interview with Mervyn Eastman for East London Radio this afternoon on lifelong things such as ageing, intergenerational, political and campaigning. It goes well despite dogs barking and Jack the cat molesting me, plenty of material for more than an hour. To be released in three weeks. A Nursery World award for childminders at Torbay care home. How will life change post Covid for Mark Honigsbaum. The Together Project minutes and skills audit. Two dog walks in the rain. Snow forecast. And then chicken fajita. And the final episode of The Drowning.

**Friday 5 February**

Ardy day. Run first, tidy up. TV for Ardy. A glorious sunny day, fish and chips on the waterfront, followed by football in the park, with Ardy wearing his new boots. Exhausting, plus another long dog walk. Pasta dinner. Reading to Ardy. Yet again the government fails to close the borders when it’s obviously the way to reduce the spread of variants while vaccines are administered and developed.

**Saturday 6 February**

Ardy gets up at 6am. An early walk for the dogs. It’s raining. Denise and Ardy go to the co-op while I listen to new CDs, watch the India v England test match, take Millie and Max for a stroll after Max has an outing with Rhiannon. It’s a weekend of sport – cricket, rugby, football. Brentford are at Middlesbrough – we go down 1-0 down after three minutes again, 1-1 by half time and win 1-4. Up to second in The Championship. Three wins in a week, 14 goals. What a team. Rhiannon Tom and Ardy come round for an Italian takeaway and a relaxed evening. Almost feels like normal.

**Sunday 7 February**

So as forecast it’s snowing, not very heavily at first, and a bit windy, but hardly Beast from the East 2. The dogs love it and have several walks fit for snow-loving Labradors. More indoors weather for me, having got the papers, watching Marr, reading the papers, listening to Johnnie Walker. Typical Sunday. A lovely late afternoon walk in the park with the dogs like young children in the snow – Max running, Mollie rolling and Millie. Today we watch episodes 3, 4 and 5 of It’s a Sin. Marvellous, sad, shaming. Keep thinking about my brother who died in January 1990 at the peak of the programme. Plus the penultimate episode of The Serpent.

**Monday 8 February**

It has snowed more overnight and the dogs love it, romping in the churchyard before we go on our morning walk down to the Colne barrier and beyond. Another commission to present on intergenerational housing and care then the trickier walk in the snow up the hill to the Co-op and back down again without falling over. More zooms in the afternoon for a student dissertation and employment lawyers. More dog walking in the snow, the dogs love the park in its snow blanket. Great fun for all. More snow falls in the evening, as Denise zooms with Happisburgh parish council. She is not Jackie Weaver. Max romps again in the snow during the late night poo. In the meantime the government urges anyone over 70 who hasn’t had their first inoculation to get in touch asap. Then Denise and I should be next to get a call.

**Tuesday 9 February**

Not sure what Max has eaten but he’s been crying to go out overnight. I go out in the snow in my dressing gown and walk up the high street just before 4am and Denise goes out at 5.30am with him again and they bump into Rhiannon on her ‘early’ morning walk. Not long after we hear that Ardy’s nursery is closed today because too many of its staff can’t get to work because of the snow. So we have him for the day. I do a zoom re a funding bid for pioneering research on age segregation. Shopping at the Co-op as the snow comes down heavily again, buying Cadbury’s chocolate fingers for Ardy. Then it’s off to the park with Ardy and his sledge, Denise and the three dogs. Max joins me in pulling Ardy up and down and the slope, and Denise and Ardy once as well. Great fun but knackering in the cold. We all chill in the afternoon before another walk in the snow after Ardy has been collected by Rhiannon. We’ll have to see what tomorrow brings. Early dinner before zoom with Anne and Steve, some five months since we went on holiday with them. The government threatens stiff jail sentences (up to 10 years!) for visitors who fail to be honest re their travel/covid status. But a year later still no border closures. The biggest mistake?

**Wednesday 10 February**

The day that Brentford go top of the league. The Bees beat fourth placed Reading 1-3, another strong and controlled performance after going 1-0 down. 21 league games unbeaten, Toney has scored 23 goals and had 9 assists, Dasilva scores two crackers. 18 matches to go, one game at a time. Denise makes a huge lasagne for the second half. All on zoom are full of it.

Denise had a strange call from her covid vaccine trials. Why did you have a hysterectomy? Only to discover later that a drug for ovarian cancer is being used to tackle covid. I manage to do my sample for a bowel cancer screening. Rhiannon also has a smear test, reminding her of recent years. Day 4 of snow and ice creates a nice photo on Facebook from the morning walk.

**Thursday 11 February**

The coldest night of the winter so far. I don’t want to get out of bed and take the dogs for a walk. But I have to. Small slow steps to avoid slipping on the icy pavements. Enough snow left for the dogs to roll and frolic. Slide up to the Co-op and then prepare for the afternoon meetings while Denise finishes our planning application. Zoom with The Together Project CEO and then an interesting discussion with TVT and TYT re grant making in Dorset. A lovely clear evening for the last walk in the park where we bump into Rhiannon collecting Ardy from nursery. Follow ups from the afternoon and lasagne before more FA Cup football on TV. The big issue today is the new government white paper on health and care which is hardly earth shattering but confirms the direction of travel re integrated care systems. Time for something more radical. Meanwhile Matt Hancock has booked a summer holiday in Cornwall but tells the public not to book anything.

**Friday 12 February**

The second day this week with Ardan. Denise takes him to Tescos while I do follow ups from this week. Too much snow on the ground to play football, so we build his marble run to a couple of different designs and have marble races. Lovely photos of us playing marbles, more drawing, and general fun and cheekiness. Local fish and chips for dinner makes life easier. We re-write the end of our story, Freddie Fox catches a plane. Double EastEnders.

**Saturday 13 February**

Ardy wakes us up at 6am, brings in all the dogs. It’s far too cold and dark to get up yet. Saturday morning always starts with children’s TV before we get the papers plus any bakeries. Feels bitterly cold again in the wind. Rhiannon takes Max at lunchtime. I retire to the upstairs living room to listen to some new music – The Staves, Celeste – reading and a snooze during England v Italy rugby. It’s five years since Cliff, Rog and I went to Rome to watch Italy v England, a strange weekend while Tim went skiing in Bulgaria. It’s one year since I went to the barber’s in Wivenhoe and he introduced me to the Bakehouse – fate. This evening we watch a new disaster movie Greenland and Contagion made in 2011 which foretold the pandemic and how we should respond. Incredible, not. Today would have been my father’s 92nd birthday.

**Sunday 14 February**

Valentine’s Day, cards and presents but nowhere to go – eating in. The government celebrates the first 15 million vaccinations to the over 70s and other target groups. Lots more to do (let alone second jabs) but the government is already raising hopes of relaxing restrictions once schools are fully open from 8 March. In the meantime it’s half-term.

The weather is on the turn, moving from very cold dry weather, melting snow and ice, to a warmer wet week ahead. Good timing given we’ve just had our first quarter’s gas and electricity bill for probably the coldest part of the year.

The Bees’ latest match is a 1pm kick-off v Barnsley because of their FA Cup match on Thursday. We never really turn up and Barnsley score early in both halves to win 0-2, our first defeat in 22 matches. It had to happen, let’s hope it’s not a wobble and we get back to winning ways vs QPR on Wednesday.

**Monday 15 February**

My first run for ten days as the weather warms and the ice melts. Phew. Huge speculation about the relaxing of lockdown. An announcement is due to be made on 22 February but everyone insists it’s about data not dates. Are new cases of Covid, hospitalisations, deaths etc far enough down? Vaccinations are going well and we are waiting to be summoned. Schools will go back on 8 March. PM is cautious and optimistic. Sorted out next week’s meeting of the Intergenerational Housing Network and prepare for later in the week. It’s nice to not be slipping and cold out on the walks.

**Tuesday 16 February**

An early start as Denise speaks at 7am to Dubai/PwC re a bid for social support. Early walk and chilling. Rearrange my final hospital appointment re my finger to 16 March – ten weeks after the operation. It’s half-term week so relatively quiet even though for many families home schooling it’s just another week at home. No escape. Terrible winter weather in Texas, yes Texas, leads to cancellation of a zoom this week. Submit an entry to the Silver Linings competition. Domestic duties and I end the day cooking dinner. Very nice too.

**Wednesday 17 February**

Denise is up early again to pitch to Dubai. Just as sanctions against Dubai are being discussed by governments. Out early for the dogs’ walk and then a run. Anne Longfield, Children’s Commissioner for England, gives her last speech attacking government before standing down from the role. I have an interview with the agency for Hallmark Foundation – seems to go well and it fires me up. Catch up before the lunchtime walk and more home made sausage rolls. Prepare a presentation for another event next week. Then relax before tonight’s big match in west London – QPR v Brentford. We go 1-0 up, Ivan Toney’s 24th in the league already this season, but disappear in the second half as QPR win 2-1. Something’s missing from the Bees or we’re collapsing again under expectations and pressure. Prince Philip goes into hospital, not long before his 100th birthday.

**Thursday 18 February**

Still hungover from last night’s defeat, more so when Denise realises her alarm has not gone off and she has a train to catch to Norwich. She makes it in good time, plenty of shopping at M&S and then another trip to the Quadram Institute for the vaccine trial. She still doesn’t whether she’s had the real deal but lots of questions. I have a couple of calls re ageism campaigning and Sparko innovation. Possible developments to follow up. Walking and feeding dogs before Denise returns. A lovely early spring evening before a relaxed M&S dinner and film – Tom Hanks’ latest, News of the World.

**Friday 19 February**

Ardy day after a run and tidy up. He looks tired after a week outside at nursery. So no football but lots of drawing, writing and TV. Denise hears back from the planning office and our application is now going public for comments within three weeks. Notices up in our front windows and more photos taken. Ardy wants to come to the fish and chip shop with me. Denise has sent his and my story to his nursery and they are going to do a circle time with it next week. Ardy falls asleep quickly and doesn’t wake until 7.30am, a record, he must have been tired. We watch a I Care A Lot, a new film about scamming older frail people. Very disturbing and original.

**Saturday 20 February**

More details emerge of next week’s government announcement on lockdown relaxation. Families will be allowed to visit relatives in care homes. The total number who have died from Covid has reached 120,000 officially, which of course is an under-estimate. And the Health Secretary is told off for the huge number of valuable contracts that were not published properly with their Tory mates. More chumocracy aka corruption. Lunchtime Sky match is Coventry vs Bees, our chance to get back to winning ways. Instead we are worse, and lose 2-0 deservedly. But by the end of the afternoon we are still second as others also lose. Bring on Wednesday on Wednesday. But I still feel flat. Chin up, tonight is birthday celebrations for Rhiannon – take away burgers, champagne and presents. Lovely break from the new normal.

**Sunday 21 February**

A quiet day except the sun is out, as are the runners and walkers as I trot round the village front. For the first time since we moved, we sit out in the courtyard in the sunshine for lunch after a trip to the Co-op for Sunday papers and a big snooze. It soon cools down, as do we for a chilled Sunday afternoon of 70s tunes on Radio 2 and a late dog walk. Sunday evening is a brilliant new movie, The Trial of the Chicago 7, followed by a new TV thriller, Bloodlands, from the people behind Line of Duty.

**Monday 22 February**

A big birthday day. Rhiannon’s birthday and Mollie is ten today. Mollie celebrates by swimming in the River Colne first thing. Brrrrrr, even though it’s warming up. Zoom in preparation for tomorrow’s Intergenerational Housing Network meeting and then a quick trip to the Co-op. Rhiannon and Tom pop round to pick up her birthday presents, and the lamp looks great in their lounge. After lunch a zoom with Texas and Holland re StopAgeism. My interview by Mervyn Eastman for East London Radio has gone live, we listen and promote on social media. Some nice responses, not least from Denise. This afternoon the PM unveils his roadmap towards the end of lockdown for the next four months. It looks like it will be another three months before I can go to see mum in Wiltshire. Cautious and optimistic, much will depend on what happens after schools open up on 8 March and whether Easter sees mass resurrection of the virus. Try not to get too excited when we have been over-promised and under-delivered to for the last year. Meantime Denise is getting anxious about Facebook comments re our planning application; Tom and I say don’t react! Soaps and then a new series of Unforgotten – which gets good reviews.

**Tuesday 23 February**

Another disturbed night’s sleep, not helped by the comments on Facebook and by the dogs needing to go out for a pee. By 7.30am we are tired and grumpy, and I don’t feel like going for a run. Denise goes off to help Rhiannon highlight her hair while I chair a zoom meeting of the Intergenerational Housing Network, its biggest meeting yet. Mollie’s 10th birthday cake arrives during the meeting and it’s a pre-lunch feast. It’s warm enough to sit out in the courtyard again for lunch, then another zoom with Sparko about their TV based communications service for older people. Go for the last dog walk of the day with Denise and Rhiannon, pick up Ardy from nursery, and go to the dog exercise area in Wivenhoe park. There’s a cute five month old Alsatian puppy running around, very friendly. Ardy chases the ball, trips and the puppy is all over him, playing it seems, but Ardy is frightened and the owner is distraught. All your worst fears but thankfully no damage except maybe in Ardy’s fear of dogs. At least he is with Millie, Mollie and Max (who is very protective) a lot. Home, we’re both tired and have a gentle evening of supper, TV and an early night.

**Wednesday 24 February**

Big Match day. After three consecutive losses following a 21 game unbeaten run, can Brentford beat Sheffield Wednesday this evening? Yes, 3-0 without some of our best players out injured. The last game we saw live was 7 March 2020 when the Bees won 5-0 vs Sheffield Wednesday. What a year. It's confirmed that teachers will assess student exam grades. After the roadmap, there is more caution re the dates/data debate even though vaccine are being rolled out rapidly. I’m being done next week at Colchester United FC, with a second at the end of May. It will make it easier to visit my mum. Earlier it’s the intergenerational linking project and a debate on how we influence. My favourite subject.

**Thursday 25 February**

After the dog walk, it’s all about preparing for and delivering a presentation to community leaders on intergenerational action. Lots of interest and follow ups. In the afternoon I join an all party group at the Welsh Senedd to discuss manifesto plans for the Welsh government elections in May and make some suggestions which I then incorporate into a blog for StopAgeism. After egg and bacon baps for lunch, it’s a lovely salad for dinner. Then we watch the Moneyball film which of course Brentford have adopted to challenge the big boys. Excellent, if only I had millions to invest in the club…

**Friday 26 February**

Ardy day. Dog walk and run on frozen ground as the sun comes up. Another beautiful day. Sitting out in the courtyard for lunch with the washing drying around us. Ardy draws, watches TV, eats and then in the afternoon I take him to play football in the park. He’s getting a lot better as a goalkeeper and kicking the ball. I’m knackered, especially with another dog walk. Pasta is needed for dinner. Then soaps and an early night for corn on the cob after Gavin and Stacey.

**Saturday 27 February**

Ardy wakes us up at 6am, fortunately we didn’t have a late night. Another clear cold night with the stunning snow moon, now brilliant sunshine as I walk the dogs down towards Alresford. As we return the distraught owner of a lost 4 month old black labrador puppy is appealing to everyone. Fortunately the Wivenhoe facebook network works wonders and he’s found. Hooray. Ardy is painting before going to the Co-op. Then picked up by Rhiannon. I let out a loud gasp when I discover that my first girlfriend at Bristol university has died – two years ago! I am troubled. The afternoon is Brentford vs Stoke. We give away a goal in the first minute but in the second half two cracking goals give us a 2-1 win and build a gap in second place. Celebratory curry and drink and TV.

**Sunday 28 February**

The end of the shortest month and after a beautiful week it’s misty and cold. Mollie spills coffee on my laptop lead and shorts the electrics. All sorted when we find the fuse box, eventually. Go for a longer run but feel knackered by the end of it. Fall asleep with the Sunday papers after the Budget trailer on Marr. A quiet day, except we had to reset the aga after the morning’s power outage. A useful lesson. Sounds of the Seventies in the afternoon, more football on TV, then the second episode of Bloodlands – where is this going? Three weeks to Line of Duty series six starts!

**19 Towards the end of lockdown**

We have a roadmap but there are several obstacles that could still delay a return to so-called normality. Feels like we are in limbo, so close yet so far. Reasons to be optimistic, reasons to be fearful. Will the ‘new normal’ be better than the old normal? What have we learnt? And can we build a better world? Or are we very cosy with what life has become, much smaller and local?

**Monday 1 March**

St David’s Day. Twelve months on from when it really started in the UK. A week of zooms, preparation, reading and writing, and the jab. Thursday evening to Saturday morning this week is the Aspen seminar on ethical leadership in crisis times. Lots to read in advance and think about, with some very high powered people. Draft our March e-news, lots going on.

**Tuesday 2 March**

The day starts with a dog walk and run. Then get our March e-news out, and deal with responses. Zoom with Sam Brandman of Two Generations about promoting their homeshare scheme in North Essex and East Suffolk. Lots more reading for Friday. Then another trip to Broomfield hospital for a hand therapist to look at my finger. It’s taking a long time to heal, still swollen and reacts to the cold. I get new latex covering and a contraption to wear at night to keep it straight. Three weeks to the next appointment. Fish dinner then two zooms. Denise with Wivenhoe Town council planning committee on our planning application which they decide to object to, and me for the AGM of Wivenhoe & Mersea branch Labour Party and planning for the May elections. More reading.

**Wednesday 3 March**

A quick walk in the cold after a restless night with the new contraption on my hand and Denise feeling pissed off re planning. 9am zoom with Helen and Sam about the demise of Grandparents Plus (now known as Kinship) and a possible gap in the market for a new grandparents organisation. How to do it with little resources? More emails, reading, comments. Denise still fuming after last night and blasting off at anyone and everyone. Speak to Neil O’May, one of my fellow Bristol students from Badock Hall in 1978-9 about the death of our contemporary and former girlfriend Sue Bowmer at the age of 59. A real shock. We catch up on the last 20 years. Another zoom on schools/care homes intergenerational linking. Get invited to a final job interview next week. Final walk in the cold, then preparation for the big match at 5.30pm: Canaries vs Bees, 1st vs 2nd. A tight game, 1-0 to Norwich, they deserved to win. Onto Saturday. TV and dinner.

Today was Budget day. Lots more splashing of the cash by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak – particularly to those areas with a Tory MP. Levelling up! And tax rises on the horizon for families and businesses plus big spending cuts and nothing for social care.

**Thursday 4 March**

Another early morning, this time for a good reason. We’re off to Colchester United football ground for my first Covid inoculation. The appointment is 9.40am and it’s all so efficiently run that I’m done and out before then. As good as they say, and no blood. Twenty million now done. But will there be any side effects? It gives us an excuse to stop at Waitrose on the way home. Lots of reading to be done and brownies to be baked in advance of the Aspen UK seminar on Ethical Leadership in Times of Crises which kicks off this evening. A cocktail party by zoom! A nice bunch of fellow attendees, albeit a bit samey in background and views. The cocktail they provided is quite strong and I feel rather hot – covid inoculation at work? Hope I feel better tomorrow.

**Friday 5 March**

After the dog walk, it’s get ready for a 9am start for all day zooming, discussion of various texts, most of which I have managed to read. Some very interesting and challenging discussions plus breaks to go (dog)walking along the quay as they suggest. The afternoon is heavy going and I feel flushed and headachey again. Can’t get to grips with Antigone but manage to take part in a home made drama re Creon/The Queen, not bad for a bit of improv. Meanwhile Denise is looking after Ardan and the dogs on our grandparenting day. He is very well behaved. The seminar finishes for the day at 5.30pm and I get fish and chips for all. An early night once Ardan goes to bed.

**Saturday 6 March**

After the dogs and papers, it’s back to Aspen for the final morning. I tell Nigel it feels like a condensed Liberal Arts degree. The final three texts are challenging and get debate going. All are positive at the end and we will meet again, online and when we can in person.

Back to normality. Unfortunately Brentford’s match this afternoon has been postponed because Rotherham’s squad has had an outbreak of Covid. It gives other teams the chance to steal a lead on us which they do and gives us the chance of an afternoon nap. Then catch up with the European indoor athletics championships. Nothing on TV so we start a new box set – This is Us. Hooked after one episode and we watch three. Then Match of the Day.

**Sunday 7 March**

A bit of a lay in. Tired after a 48 hour zoom. After a run, it’s a day to chill with the dogs, papers, music and Denise goes for a stroll with Stella and Max. More This is Us with our Sunday roast, well done because the aga needs turning down! Third episode of Bloodlands, a bit weak. And Manchester City lose to Man Utd.

**Monday 8 March**

Feel better today now the tiredness and vaccine have worn off. A morning when several things seem to go right. It’s the first step on the roadmap out of lockdown, the streets are echoing with the sounds of children returning to school with their friends. Later today care homes open doors to visitors. The council planning officer calls to discuss our planning application and suggests a positive way forward. Details to follow. I discuss it further with Carol, the previous owner of the Bakehouse. The Together Project wins some free market research which I referred to them. And lots of traction on social media re International Women’s Day and Intergenerational Week. Denise has two Happisburgh zooms – school and parish council – so I can prepare for later this week. Time to catch up with other stuff, including the new Aspen WhatsApp group.

**Tuesday 9 March**

So dogs get a walk despite the strong wind and then I go running before the rain. It’s the morning after the night before when Harry and Meghan’s interview with Oprah was broadcast on ITV. The fallout has already been huge re racism in the royal family, mental health and suicide. Piers Morgan and others resign eventually. Bridges have been burnt. More division. Not healthy. And it distracts from Covid, the continuing issues of coming out of lockdown, and why we have spent £37 billion, yes billion, on a test and tracking system that doesn’t work. Heaven help us. At least today I can focus on a strategic workshop by pro bono consultants for The Together Project, all rather formulaic. It also kicks off again about our planning application when near neighbour Roddy stirs up the locals to object, with a flurry of old untruths and says we should run an ice cream parlour. Denise is fuming because it’s all in her name. From the frying pan to the fire…

**Wednesday 10 March**

Up early so that Rob with Richard can start work on the shelving in my man cave. This will be interesting. Lots of cups of tea. Get briefed by the recruitment agency in advance of a job interview tomorrow. Finish my presentation – once I’ve decided how to start. No midweek football for the first time for weeks – I’m sure the players need a break. But Brentford are advertising for a new non-executive position and I’m thinking about applying. Tweeting re #IntergenerationalWeek. More This is Us. Feel really glum after the news that a police officer has been arrested following the disappearance of a woman in Clapham. The outcry and shock and sadness are immense and demand a response – from men, not women. Difficult to sleep.

**Thursday 11 March**

Waiting for Rob to come round to work on the shelving while Denise goes to Waitrose. I have to ask him to take down and start again on a third of the new unit. He does so and it looks so much better. Phew! Just need to paint the shelving next week and add books, records and CDs. Prepare for my interview presentation this afternoon, after supervision with The Together Project CEO. A tough hour of questions, challenge and thoughtful discussion. Will hear by next week. Need a drink or two afterwards, alongside an Aspen webinar on uncertainty. And two more episodes of This is Us, every one really hits you hard. End with QuestionTime at the end of a draining week of violence, racism, mental health and neglect.

**Friday 12 March**

Awake early again, a bright sunny morning. Good for a run even though I feel knackered. Tom brings Ardy round for his Friday with Nonna and Grandpa. A quiet day at home except for a dog walk at the local army firing range across the river. After a snooze, Ardy wants to play football and then we walk the dogs. I’m knackered. And that’s before dinner (more lasagne) and the Bees’ first game for nine days, away at Blackburn Rovers. We win 0-1, a penalty by Ivan Toney who already has 26 goals this season, but it’s a struggle. Up to second until at least tomorrow afternoon. And the good news is that Ardy now wants a Brentford kit, which will no doubt annoy his Birmingham supporting dad.

**Saturday 13 March**

It all gets going around 6am, with Denise and Ardy up early. Usual Saturday morning – dog walk, breakfast, TV, drawing and writing, then Ardy and I go up to the Co-op for papers and cookies etc. I record a video for Aspen about last week’s seminar. Ardy is collected by Rhiannon before lunch and I walk back with them and the dogs, Max won’t leave him behind. Saturday afternoon and evening is a binge of This is Us, it gets sadder and sadder and perhaps with everything going on this week I am more weepy than normal. There is a large vigil at Clapham Common for Sarah Everard murdered last week – hundreds of women gather despite covid and restrictions and then get ‘man-handled’ out of the way and some are arrested, prompting a massive backlash. Is covid being used to suppress dissent?

**Sunday 14 March**

The end of a week for women starting with International Women’s Day ends with Mothering Sunday. Denise gets a card from Millie, Mollie, Max, Jack and Suzy plus some prosecco truffles. More this evening as we pop round to Rhiannon and Tom’s for a roast and lots of cards and pressies. A nice break from lockdown. Sandwiched by more This is Us and Johnny Walker’s Sounds of the Seventies. Still feel very tired and unusually not wanting to go for a run. Is my 60+ body telling me something? Bloodlands finishes but it’s not as good as it thinks it is. Bring on the new series of Line of Duty next Sunday!

**Monday 15 March**

Up early to walk the dogs because today is the final part of fitting and finishing the new shelves/cupboards. Lots to do but Rob has finished by early afternoon and they look fab. We just need to paint them before loading up. Manage to do a couple of zooms despite the work going on.

**Tuesday 16 March**

The paint has arrived so after a run etc, we start putting on the grey paint on the shelving. Two coats done today and another needed but we have to order more paint. Still it’s looking great. But no news re last Thursday’s job interview so I fire off an email to the agency. I get a phone call back about 6.45pm, just as the zoom was starting for this evening’s big match. I’m the preferred candidate but there are to be further stages. All a bit odd. Still, it’s good to be wanted. Let’s hope the Bees win tonight. A good start against Derby County and 0-2 lead at half-time. But it’s a game of two halves and we are lucky to get a draw 2-2 by the end. We just seem unable to execute a change of plan. Feels like a loss as we lose ground on the leaders and automatic promotion looks increasingly tough. I am full of questions and my mind is racing about the job, football, life. What’s it all about at age 60?

**Wednesday 17 March**

Don’t sleep well and feel rough. Well it is St Patrick’s Day although it’s been very quiet this year. Guinness must be struggling. Sort out references for the job. No painting today as we wait for new supplies. More This is Us, not yet into the second series. The government launches the outcome of its defence review – a 40% increase in nuclear weapons. Why? When cyber security is the big issue. One of its biggest proponents, Dominic Cummings, is giving evidence in the House of Commons and calls the DHSC a ‘smoking ruin’, unprepared for Covid, PPE, procurement etc and the vaccine programme had to be removed from them. Much gnashing of teeth.

**Thursday 18 March**

It’s the launch today of the WHO/UN report on tackling ageism. Inspiring and widely welcomed. Finish off the painting, the first real decorating we have done in the last year which is surprising given we have sold and bought a home. The second series of This is Us is beginning to warm up. So much depends on your mood. The government’s vaccination programme hits a big rock just as it seems to be going so well – supplies have dried up so no new jabs for the under 50s in April. And meanwhile the European Union has given the all clear to the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine after worries that it caused blood clots.

**Friday 19 March**

It’s Ardy grandparenting day and he’s already with us by the time I get back from walking the dogs. I spend a large part of the day sorting out CDs and records and putting them on the new shelves. Exhausting. And then I played football and park games with Ardy, dog walked with him while he was being harassed by Oscar the Alsatian pup, and ran up the skateboard ramp with him. The morning saw another call from the agency confirming details of the next phase of the appointment process ie another interview. It’s Comic Relief tonight so Red Nose Day and kids are running around wearing them and telling awful jokes. Not so much fun so it’s more This is Us, after fish and chips supper.

**Saturday 20 March**

Ardy gets into our bed before midnight! He is restless and coughing, so I relocate to the spare bedroom so everyone can have a reasonable night. Denise goes to Waitrose with Rhiannon, Ardy watches TV while I sort out more shelves. Then we walk the dogs before I get ready for today’s big match on Sky, an early kick off at 12.30pm between Brentford and Nottingham Forest. Before the game, Ardy tries on his newly arrived Bees kit which looks great. We go 1-0 up but a poor second half sees Forest equalise and leaves everyone in despair. Fortunately there is a two week break for international fixtures before the next game on Easter Saturday. At least the rugby is better with France beating Wales before more box sets.

**Sunday 21 March**

After a long leisurely getting up, Marr (with Ben lookalike) and papers, it’s finishing off the bookshelves and taking photos of it all freshly hoovered. Looks fab. Then Denise and I set about sorting out the ‘shop’ to turn it into an office which we should have done first before submitting a planning application. Rearrange, chuck and sort out and it begins to look better. Not sure whether there will be space for a sofa bed. Big highlight this evening is the return of event TV – first episode of Series Six of Line of Duty. Which sets the scene for what promises to be another cracker. With a hint of the Jill Dando case.

**Monday 22 March**

Monday afternoon is spent stuffing letters and postal vote forms to potential Labour voters for delivery this week. We also encourage our candidates to get magnetic stickers for their cars as we did in North Norfolk. Denise has a Happisburgh school governors meeting, not many more to go before she can try and become a governor in Wivenhoe. I hear about my second interview for a new job – a 20 minute presentation and more. Hmmm. Finish off my application to be a non executive director at Brentford FC and send it off after Unforgotten. Will I get past the first stage as an older white man?

**Tuesday 23 March**

One year on from the start of the first lockdown proper. Which as we all know now was too little, too late. A mistake repeated three times. Almost 130,000 dead, the highest death rate in the world. Wall to wall media coverage, government press conference, one minute silence at noon and candles/torches at 8pm. Judging by the zero lights in Wivenhoe, the public has lost faith in these gestures. Not a lot has changed since I posted the Be good, back soon dog cartoon on facebook. Go for my first run for five days after the hard work of shifting boxes galore last week. Mollie is desperate for a swim so we take the dogs to St Osyth for a lunchtime beach walk and dip. Plus chips for Denise. Afternoon trip to Broomfield hospital – my finger is improving but I have to be patient because the swelling will take a long time to subside and keep exercising the finger/hand. We try the local fisherman/shop and have some lovely skate for dinner alongside the first anniversary remembrances. Never again. Followed by Kate Garraway’s harrowing Finding Derek – one year and counting in hospital.

**Wednesday 24 March**

Highlight – we get a 9am bus into Colchester to go to M&S, WHSmith and Dyas for a plunger to sort out our bathroom plumbing. Still nothing re an interview date. Phone calls, advising a Berlin based woman re her mother’s accommodation in London. The days blend into one.

**Thursday 25 March**

Walk then run. Then clean the floors. Prepare a presentation for next Tuesday. And a US based zoom on the 100 year life and what it means for all of us. England play San Marino in the first 2022 World Cup qualifier. Ex Bee Ollie Watkins come on as a sub and scores with his first shot to make it 5-0. Much rejoicing and Facebooking. He is one of ours.

**Friday 26 March**

Ardy joins us for a day and a bit. He is wearing his Brentford shirt with pride and we tell him about Ollie. A morning of TV, baking sausage rolls, writing and emails. My second interview with Hallmark is confirmed for 8 April, four weeks after the first. Then football in the park before the heavens open. I have cheated again apparently. Later Ardy chases Max on our walk as he chases the ball, and holds Nonna’s hand as we meet the lively Alsatian pup, Oscar. Pizza night. Corrie and Aesop’s fables.

**Saturday 27 March**

Ardy doesn’t wake us up all night and appears just as Denise gets up at 7.10am. The dogs get me up. Very breezy and cold morning. Denise takes Ardy to Tescos and I go out leafletting, discovering new bits of Wivenhoe on the lower western and eastern fronts. Tired after two hours but more to do in the afternoon in upper Wivenhoe. A town of two halves, very different communities and housing stock. Fresh air and walking, great exercise for the Labour party. Two more episodes of This is Us, very emotional scenes around the death of Jack Pearson. Watch it! Then an hour in my new man cave, reading and listening to music.

**Sunday 28 March**

Spring forward, British Summer Time starts today, clocks forward one hour. It’s very quiet out on our first walk but not very summery. A cold breeze under grey skies. Too tired to run. A quiet Sunday morning all round, little news but just over five weeks to the local elections and despite everything the Tories are still ahead in the polls. Over 30 million have had their first jab by today. England bear Albania 2-0 and Denmark beat Moldova 8-0. We’re tired in BST and need a snoozette. Rhiannon, Tom and Ardan pop by after walking to see the two primary schools that Ardy has his name down for. Decision time soon. He’s still coming to us on Good Friday despite the bank holiday and when my mum is getting her second jab. More lasagne, two more This is Us almost at the end of season 2. Then the second episode of Line of Duty – getting better. Mollie is getting over her cough but Millie seems tired and ill. Needs a good night’s sleep like all of us.

**Monday 29 March**

After the poor weather and then a run, we are in for three days’ early summer. Sitting in our courtyard, enjoying the sunshine, doing some washing and sorting out our outside space. Summer bliss, everyone in a good mood until we came across some teenagers littering the park on our dog walk. Denise has booked a beach hut at Walton on Naze on 23 April in hope. Get invited to give a talk to youngsters from St Paul’s about working for charities and volunteer to speak with Bristol university students about careers. An evening of soaps. Today lockdown has been eased further – we can sit outside with others and play outdoor sports. Will there be another upsurge? The final episode of Unforgotten is moving and gets better reviews than Line of Duty – so far at least.

**Tuesday 30 March**

Sunshine means washing and sunbathing in the courtyard most of the day, joined by Rhiannon in the afternoon. Reminds us of lockdown days a year ago. While they take the dogs out, I do a lengthy webinar with too many speakers on too many subjects, also beset with technical problems. Was it worth doing? A series of ‘independent’ government reviews acquits them on policing at Clapham, racial discrimination and abusing office. The BBC has become a tame and toothless broadcaster. Time for another two more episodes of This is Us – another emotional rollercoaster.

**Wednesday 31 March**

The end of another month in lockdown. Sunshine and warmth for the last three days, with restrictions beginning to be relaxed, have all raised the spirits. Plus Easter holidays on the horizon. Denise and Rhiannon go garden centre shopping, while I do some work and preparation for a final interview next week. The dogs have upset tummies and Millie poos in the courtyard while I do a zoom. Disgusting. Sort out various domestics before England vs Poland in the latest world cup qualifier – a former Brentford keeper plays for Poland. England win, just, 2-1 after giving away a goal. Feels like watching Brentford in recent times.

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