

THE ENGLISH LETTER FEB 2025



Hello once more.



I think we must start with Verona and the call we received on Boxing Day as we drove back to St Anne`s. It was a message that affected the first two months of 2025.

It was a tragic call as it informed us of her death on Xmas Day. Bev grew up with Verona as they both lived close to each other and she was seen as her "Cousin". We had met up in the Sept tour and she was in good health at that time. The sudden illness came as a shock to all of us including Frank, her husband.

We knew that there would be a funeral to which we would go but the date only came through a few weeks later and then at short notice.

It was a reminder of the fragility of life with Verona being one of those who loved to entertain and a person that would always be there. We shall miss her dearly and thoughts go out to Frank.

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Our day had started on a happier note with Courtney staying with us through to NYE.

The early morning was at St Anne`s with stockings and the essential Xmas hat.



After a good breakfast we headed up the M6 to Kendal to spend the rest of the day with Melanie, Alex, Mackenzie and Sam. My condition is such that even this 1 hour drive was a challenge but it went well

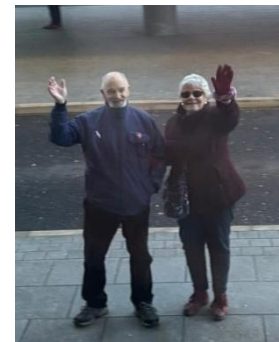


NYE arrived and the three of us went down to Allegria for dinner after which we joined up with others in the main Sandhurst Grange lounge to see in the New Year.

Allegria is an Italian restaurant of choice and they managed to fit us in upstairs giving us views of the St. Anne's illuminations.



All good things come to an end and so it was as we said farewell to



Courtney by way of a Toby's breakfast at the sea front before driving her to Preston to catch her coach back to Greenhithe via Victoria. A short walk after Toby's tells you a story about the beach size and weather on this sunny day.

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But it wasn't always sunny with a cold and snowy snap hitting us for a short time. This was unusual as being at the coast the Gulf Stream keeps us a little warmer than those in the Pennine or other inland spots.

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This letter reflects the things that we have done rather than other people as that is their story to tell.

However we could not make the 400km trip to a rearranged Citizenship ceremony. This picture captures that final moment when allegiance to the crown etc had been made.

The whole process had taken years and cost a great deal of money and effort where Andrea was the main driver in all senses. Whilst Andrea was British, Courtney was born in SA and thus the procedure was complicated and lengthy. I sort of support that but it is a mockery of the rules when others find a way in through other routes. Now she has applied for a British passport.

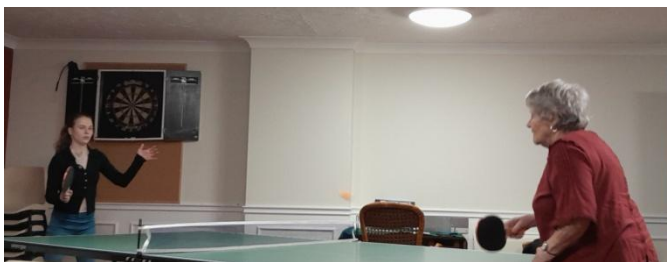
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Whilst Courtney seeks a British passport (application approved today) Mackenzie and Sam are about to use theirs and the visa obtained to travel to Australia to have a good look at the country. They all came down to us with Melanie bring a picnic basket of goodies for lunch preceded with



darts and table tennis in the main lounge.



It was a fun occasion but their flight out took place on the same day as we drove down to north London for Verona`s funeral.

This was another great challenge for me but with careful preparation I was able to complete the 5 hour journey with the usual stop on the Birmingham toll road service station. My condition is such that frequent and urgent visits to the loo necessitate fine planning. I say to the older guys once more...get your PSA tested.

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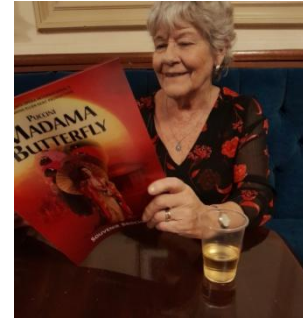


In Feb we had booked to go to the Grand Theatre in Blackpool for a performance of Madame Butterfly which was touring around the country. It was predominantly a Ukrainian cast and to my mind they gave us an excellent classical version of this much loved Puccini opera.

My cell phone tried to capture the atmosphere with conductor arriving and then the final curtain which was made after the whole group assembled on stage to sing their national anthem



with the full audience rising in support as the Ukraine flag was also brandished on stage.



The best pic is of Bev at half time sipping a glass of wine.

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The funeral then took us south for mid week whistle stop visit to see people being many from Sept 2024 but in addition a dinner with Catherine who was close by.

Courtney`s shift pattern was such to make a meeting very difficult but she was free to attend the wake in Southgate and then to join us at Catherine`s before booking into the Best Western Hotel.



Catherine had gathered some family members and this picture shows the group who were able to provide interesting and vibrant conversation that took us close to midnight before a rush to book into the hotel.

professional soccer ranks with Portsmouth and other clubs before ending up lecturing economics.

Catherine`s son Mathew is also a much talented person with at least three books being published as shown right. Most of us were also Arsenal fans.

Catherine was a member of the Tufnell Park Theatre



group and you can see how the conversation flowed easily from old times to the present.

At 20 minutes to midnight we speedily said our farewells and Mathew kindly directed us to the BWH where I was able to knock on the main door and gain entrance. Whew, very close call.

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Our trip had only just begun and yet we had done so much. We dropped Courtney off at Finsbury Park Station and this prompted our Tom Tom to steer a path to Swanley via north London`s back roads and many of our old haunts before crossing the Thames via the Blackwell tunnel and reappearing at Sidcup and then Swanley.



For reasons I cannot explain I took virtually no pictures from this sector of our journey but the first stop was to see my brother Ken who looked in fine spirits. Perhaps the best health we had witnessed for the last year or so.

We were kindly hosted by ex neighbour Sheila and that night saw us take her out to the Clove restaurant for the usual fine Indian meal

There then followed quick 1 to 2 hour visits to Gavin and Stephanie followed by Jade and Ben. It was nonstop talking with no cameras to capture these moments. We could not link up with Courtney again nor see Jemima and Richard. Next time.

Our last day had in itself three events being a great roast lunch from Sheila then the visits mentioned above before returning to see ex neighbours, Martin, Justyna, Jacob and Miriam. Once more the time restraints meant that the video film of the Sept trip could not be shown but we caught up on the plans and thoughts of the moment. We have here Sheila and the Phils.



It was all rather hectic and we did not do justice to the distance travelled but people have to work.

Well that is about all as I write this on Feb 18 but finish with the latest addition to the Sandhurst Grange equipment being a brand new table tennis table which Roy purchased with social club funds and other donations. It has been well used and this photo shows the dart board and TT in action the other day. Not approved by management but set up before they could comment. Clever Roy.



Bye from us both and talk again in a month or more. Alan and Bev