



# News of 2017 from Wollaston



Well, that's another year already! We had a few neighbours over at the weekend for our traditional Christmas drink so the festive season is definitely under way. During part of the year (particularly from March), Bennie was "under the weather". Continually tired and listless. She went to the doctor and had various tests but nothing really came to light except that she had some balance issues (which explains some of the falls in earlier years). She gradually got back to normal and, with the help of some exercises, now has much better balance. This was not the case earlier in the year as will become clear!

## March 2017

On Sunday 19 March we were kindly invited to lunch to celebrate Peter's Aunt Betty's 85<sup>th</sup> Birthday. It was an opportunity to meet up with some of Peter's family but Bennie really wasn't feeling good. The meal was at the Hotel in Sharnbrook (not far from where we live) where we attended a wedding and an anniversary last year.

## April 2017

In April we went to Denmark for a party celebrating Steffen (Bennie's Brother) and Ulla's 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary and Steffen's 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday. It was our first trip to Denmark after EasyJet stopped flying from Luton forcing us to fly from the far less convenient Gatwick airport. We flew out on a Friday and stayed with Robert, Anja and Julie until the following Tuesday. Saturday afternoon (a very long Saturday afternoon) was spent at a dancing competition where Julie was taking part.

On the Sunday (a beautiful spring day) we went to Bakken with Robert and Julie. Bakken is an amusement park north of Copenhagen. Julie tried out some of the rides and the rest of us had some lunch and a couple of beers - it was lovely to be able to sit outside in the sun. As Anja was not with us, Julie managed to persuade Robert to let her try candy floss - she won't need to do that again and, of course, Robert ended up with most of it when she lost interest.



On the Monday, the two of us went to lunch at Bertel's (another of Bennie's brothers) with him and his wife Anne-Birthe. A very enjoyable lunch as always.

Tuesday evening we invited Robert, Anja and Julie out for dinner. There was a new restaurant in Ballerup (the town where they live) that had been opened by one of Robert's school friends and her Tunisian husband. It was an excellent mix of French and North African cuisine. Of particular interest was the location - it was in the old baker's shop where Bennie worked at weekends as a teenager. Our table was in the part that was formerly the shop front and display window (directly behind the *Torvet's Brasserie* sign in the picture to the right).



On the Wednesday we moved to the apartment that we had rented for a few days the previous year (at an extremely reasonable rate!). On the Thursday we had several of Bennie's friends over for lunch. This didn't go as well as hoped as the kitchen facilities were somewhat lacking. The gas pressure seemed to be low so the oven wasn't very effective and cooking on the gas rings took forever. Also, to make things worse, what should have been a simple pasta dish (creamy salmon and pasta) really didn't work as it needed double cream and, apparently, that doesn't exist in Denmark! The recipe really doesn't work with single cream - especially when cooked over a very low heat for a long time rather than a reasonable heat for about 5 minutes!

On the Friday (Easter) we needed to do some shopping. We had discussed this on the Thursday and Michael (Bennie's friend Anna's husband) had advised where would be open (they live very close to where we were staying). We headed off for a very cold walk and consulted Google Maps for the closest supermarket. The information disagreed with Michael's so we (stupidly) went with Google. After a long walk (there were road works that made it difficult to cross the road) we arrived (with a lot of help from Google maps) at Lidl. It was shut!! We then continued to the one Michael had suggested which **was** open!

Saturday was Steffen and Ulla's party. It started at 10:00 am and was scheduled to run into the evening. The idea was that people would come at any time during the day and stay for a while. Most people arrived soon after 10:00 and stayed most of the day. Embarrassingly, while Peter was official photographer for the day, we can't find any of the pictures. Hopefully we'll have something to put on the last page with Ulla's help.

Sunday was another bright day and we wanted to go out for a walk. Ulla suggested Bispebjerg cemetery. A strange suggestion? Actually - no - a very good one. The cemetery has a large number of Japanese cherry trees and it was the perfect time to see them in bloom. Now we get to Bennie's first balance episode. We were standing (not walking) on a slight downwards incline and checking our position on Google Maps (again). All of a sudden (for no reason) Bennie fell to her right. As she wasn't expecting it she didn't react to break her fall and managed (not for the first time) to damage a rib.



Bispebjerg Cemetery  
With Japanese Cherry  
Trees in Bloom



Monday was spent as tourists with Michael and Anna in Copenhagen. Just before lunch we passed the Russian church (picture to the left) just as its bells started chiming - it seemed to go on forever and was very noisy (but, also, very impressive). Next was an exhibition that was about to end at Amalienborg Slot (Denmark's Buckingham Palace). A strange exhibition made up of various items that belonged to the royal family temporarily taken out of storage. From there we went in search of lunch and, as usual, ended up in Nyhavn. The first restaurant seemed perfect - they had a big sign outside boasting that they had Denmark's favourite dish - *stegt flæsk med persillesauce* (fried belly pork with parsley sauce). They had sold out! We left. We then walked the length of Nyhavn looking for a suitable restaurant as Peter has a problem with rye. All the lunch menus were open sandwiches on rye bread). We finally found somewhere viable.



After lunch we walked through the main shopping street but a lot of places were closed for the Easter holiday. We had a quick coffee then went to catch a bus back to Michael and Anna's. Whilst we were queuing for the bus, Bennie nearly fell again but Anna caught her. She thought it went unnoticed - but it didn't. We spent the evening with them and Michael cooked dinner.

## June 2017

Time for our summer holiday that Bennie had spent a lot of time planning. On Sunday 4 June we took a train to London St Pancras International and then the 12:45 Eurostar to Paris. When we arrived in Paris we were fighting to get away from the illegal taxis (3-4 times the correct prices) and Bennie managed another spectacular fall - up or down a kerb on the cobbled surface (we have differing views of whether it was up or down!).



She hurt her wrist (which, about a week after we got back, she got checked out and found it was a small fracture). We gave up on the taxis and took the metro to our hotel close to the Gare de Lyon. We were staying in Paris for one night before continuing our journey on the Monday.

On Monday 5 June (Peter's birthday) we took the 9:45 TGV from Paris to Milan. The train - 16 coaches long - had 8 single height carriages at the front (going through the alps to Milan) and 8 double-decker carriages at the back (to be left in Grenoble). We set off on a very pleasant ride until we were about two thirds of the way from Paris to Lyon. The train stopped. After a few minutes the train driver made an announcement apologising for the delay. The train in front of us had hit an animal on the line. Whatever it was (probably a cow judging by most of the livestock we passed) it probably found itself on the menu in a local restaurant by that evening! After a 40 minute wait, we resumed our journey. We were late arriving in Lyon but during the rest of the trip they managed to catch up so that we arrived on time in Milan at 17:50. This time it was easy to get a taxi to our hotel near the station we would be leaving from on the Tuesday.



We celebrated Peters' birthday with an excellent meal including one of Peter's favourites - octopus with boiled potatoes.

The next day was the final leg of our train journey - Milan to Bari (Puglia in the South East of Italy). We left Milan at 10:35 and were scheduled to arrive in Bari around 18:20 (we actually arrived around 19:00). We took our seats - two facing window seats - and were joined by an Italian couple around our age. It quickly became apparent that their English was non-existent - French didn't work either. After a while, the husband couldn't keep quiet any longer so we started to communicate. Peter used his limited Italian but often got stuck - the husband resorted to Google translate several times and it worked quite well. They had spent the weekend in Milan to attend an opera concert (he showed several video clips on his phone!). They lived in Foggia (one stop before ours so we had their company most of the journey). We talked about families, about places we had been in Italy and finally got onto the topic of Denmark. On the topic of Denmark he started talking about *la sirena*. Again, with Google translate, this dropped into place - the mermaid! (Actually *la sirène* in French).

The train stopped at several well-known places - Parma (known for its cured ham), Modena (balsamic vinegar), Bologna (as in ragu Bolognese) - then out to the Adriatic coast through Rimini (where we first flew to Italy for a holiday in Cattolica in 1985). Our seats were on the inland side of the train but we still got some good views out along the coast.

After exiting on the wrong side of the station in Bari, we figured out where we had gone wrong and went back to the main exit where there were plenty of taxis. The nice aspect of the taxis in Bari was that they set the price at the beginning of the journey - so no surprises. We had a great hotel booked for two nights to give us a full day to look around Bari.



### The Train Journey

With the excessive rail prices in the UK, we thought it was worth listing the advance prices and relative distances (all prices are for the two of us)

From	To	Distance (km)	Cost (£)
Bedford	London	82	60
London	Paris	465	115
Paris	Milan	845	84
Milan	Bari	875	51

In round numbers that represents:

- £0.73 per km Bedford to London
- £0.25 per km London to Paris
- £0.10 per km Paris to Milan
- £0.05 per km Milan to Bari

### Back to the holiday (still June!)

We spent the day looking around Bari which is on the coast and has ferries to Greece. We found a restaurant for lunch where Bennie ordered a pasta dish with tuna and tomato sauce. The dish was fine but there was no sign of the tuna. We mentioned this to the waiter who said the fish had just melted into the sauce. He went to the kitchen to bring some "tuna" to show us and came back with a small plate with 4 anchovies on it! Same family, but definitely not tuna. After that we insisted on seeing the Italian menus rather than relying on their English translations. That evening we found a restaurant for dinner

where we had a very elderly, smartly dressed waiter in a jacket that stopped somewhere below his knees. He took us on a gourmet adventure (about 4 times as much food as we wanted). The highlight, however, was a big dish of deep-fried baby squid - they tasted wonderful.



Bari in Puglia

On Thursday 8 June, we had a taxi booked to take us to Bari airport where we had reserved a hire car. The taxi driver asked which airline and, again, didn't understand much (if any) English. This time, French worked. We explained that we were renting a house in Ostuni (the white city) and were going to the airport to pick up a hire car. He was then extremely helpful pulling out brochures of the places we should visit - searching under the seats and in the door pockets rather than watching the traffic.

We picked up the car and made our way safely to Ostuni where we had lunch before calling the English woman who managed the property (on behalf of the American owners) to meet us and let us in. The house was in a very narrow street so we had to park in the main square and drag our luggage up to the house (not too far, fortunately). The house was wonderful. There was a garage that had been converted into an extra bedroom with a bathroom on the ground floor. This also had a washing machine. The next floor was the main living area with a lounge, bathroom and two bedrooms. The next level had the kitchen, dining room and an outside terrace. Finally, above the kitchen, there was a second terrace with a great view over the whole town. The only drawback was the narrow and steep stairs. The upper terrace could only be used early morning or late evening as it was too hot. Late evening didn't work as we weren't up to the extra stairs after walking around the hilly town all evening. There are plenty of pictures of the house and location on trip advisor - click here: [Casa Josephina](#).



From our base in Ostuni, we explored. We had been warned that some of the roads into Ostuni would be closed at the weekend so we wanted to be back by a reasonable time on the Friday. We decided to go to Alberobello which was quite close and famous for the Trulli houses. We had lunch there and took a picture of a painting showing the Trulli houses.

Back in Ostuni, we checked with the property manager for the location of the market that was held there every Saturday as we wanted to visit it



(especially as we had cooking facilities). We decided to get some local sausages, peppers, courgettes and aubergines. It was a challenge to get one or two of things as they tried to give us 1 or 2 kg! We only wanted food for one night!!! The market was really large - not just food but clothes, shoes, fabric and all sorts of other things. Anyway, we took our purchases back and Peter made dinner (with some left over for Sunday brunch).

The song "Up on the Roof" kept on coming to mind as there was another world up on the terraces - the one place you were most likely to see your neighbours. On Sunday morning Peter had a conversation with the man opposite. He owned the house he was in and rented it out. He worked in Rome and came from the north (the Italian lakes). Also talked about Sicily being better than Puglia!



Top: Up on the roof - Bottom: Alberobello and picture of Trulli houses

On Sunday night we found a great little bar with a very wide range of beers. Peter tried an Italian Weiss Beer - so good, we had to return! On Monday we went for a longer trip further south to Lecce. We found a restaurant for lunch with the name Mad. Since Mad is the Danish word for food, we thought there might be a Danish connection. However, after a long and tortuous discussion with the waitress, we discovered that it was nothing more than the initials of the owners names. Anyway - excellent meal of grilled octopus.



Spoilt for choice at the beer bar in Ostuni  
Grilled Octopus  
Church in Lecce



On the Tuesday we took a short drive down to the beach at Ostuni - not a lot there. Wednesday we drove back to Bari airport for our flight back to Gatwick on British Airways. When we arrived at the airport and got a wi-fi connection we got the news of the ongoing fire at Grenfell Towers in London - a hell of a shock. Our flight back was OK - we just about managed to get something to eat before they ran out. Realised that BA are now using the low cost airlines as their benchmark - could have got better service on (even) Ryan Air! Still, now we know.

### July 2017

At the beginning of the month we had a short visit from Tina and her family (Tina is the daughter to Aase - one of Bennie's friends in Denmark). We decided to cook Indian food so spent most of the day before they arrived either cooking or preparing food.



Claus, Bennie, Connor, Tina & Cassandra

### September 2017

We were invited to the wedding of Andrew Harris (Peter's cousin Graham Harris' son) and Sarah. As the wedding was to be held just outside Weymouth on the south coast (somewhere we had never been) we decided to have a long weekend. We drove down on the Friday in the most appalling rain. After checking in to our hotel - with the rain almost stopped - we went for a walk along the seafront. It was cold, windy and it started raining again. We took refuge in pubs a couple of times before returning to the hotel. In view of the weather we decided to eat in the hotel rather than go looking for a restaurant.

Saturday was the wedding. The ceremony was being held in Bennetts Water Gardens just outside Weymouth. They had booked a double decker bus to collect guests from their hotels. The bus really struggled with some of the hills! Shortly before the ceremony was due to start (when we were out in the park waiting) there was torrential rain for a few minutes. Fortunately, the rain stopped for the ceremony but started again before the photos which, then, had to be taken inside (and at the reception). Then it was back on the bus to a village hall near Andrew and Sarah's new home. We were seated at a table with Andrew's brother, Phillip, his partner Gemma and a young couple - friends of the bride and groom. We had some very interesting conversations - one relating to the male friend's job as a farm manager - a large dairy farm.

For the wedding meal we had fish and chips (or sausage and chips or a vegetarian option). We had to go outside to collect this from the van where it was freshly cooked. Excellent fish and chips.

On Sunday, we went about 15 minutes along the coast to where the TV series Broadchurch had been filmed. It was cold and windy and difficult to park (the car park ticket machine was out of order). We gave up and went into Dorchester. After that we visited a cider museum. We left on the Monday and drove home.

### December 2017

So, Christmas is fast approaching. Bennie has been baking and we had some of the neighbours over at the weekend. All the Christmas decorations are up and most of the shopping is done. That's it for another year. Just some pictures and information to end up with.





As promised earlier (and thanks to Ulla sending some of the pictures) here are some pictures from the wedding anniversary and birthday party.



1: Steffen & Ulla      2: Anja, Julie & Robert      3: Martin & Melissa      4: Steffen's Cake  
 5: Ulla and Silja      6: Serine and Silja      7: Serine, Silja, Steffen and Martin  
 8: Anne-Birthe, Ulla, Bertel and Bennie      9: Bennie and cousin Brynhild  
 10: Peter - after the party and in front of the camera!

Featuring in the above are Steffen (Bennie's middle brother), Steffen's wife Ulla, Robert (Bennie's son), Robert's partner Anja and their daughter Julie, Martin (Steffen's son), Melissa (Martin's youngest daughter), Bertel (Bennie's eldest brother), Bertel's wife Anne-Birthe, Serine (Martin's wife), Silja (Martin's eldest daughter) and Brynhild (Bennie's cousin).

**So, for another year, we wish you a very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous 2018. Bennie, Peter and Rasmus.**



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