

I can hardly believe that it was November of last year, now five months ago, that I delivered my last blog to the BVS. As somebody said to me recently even though not a lot is going on, time is just whizzing by. Bad news giving me two weeks to write the blog as each day I say I will do it tomorrow which never seems to come. Too much procrastination. Anyway time has whizzed so I need to get my finger out.

I started the last blog saying that I looked forward with a heavy heart to the imminent future. It was quite prophetic really. The tier system had started kicking in and before we knew it we were in full lockdown in the New Year. Maddeningly I missed going to the Nigel Clayton and Bingham quartet course at Benslow by just one day. (Still, I was fortunate to have that brief window between July and November when I could resume my planned walking and music courses.) We have all transferred to Nigel Clayton's course at the end of this year which, at the moment, looks more optimistic with the successful rollout of the vaccination programme, plus a three month lockdown and a more cautious reopening. Maybe after two postponements the Cecil Aronowitz contest will be able to go ahead in the Autumn. So difficult for all those young contestants as well.

I think I'm not alone in finding the latest lockdown the most difficult of all. The dark evenings and bad weather didn't help either. I suppose what helped to keep me going was regular viola practice, meeting up with my pianist friend every few weeks (all legal, we are a bubble), PE with Joe and yoga with Adrienne, courtesy of YouTube. And my daily escape for a local walk. But I can't tell you the excitement I felt when I got on a bus in mid-April for the first time since last year, to meet a friend at Congleton for a walk somewhere different. Even texted my eldest daughter to say that I was on the bus and that it was like a new window had been opened. Now, how sad is that!

The other exciting thing is that I'm actually writing in the diary for planned events. First lesson in 15 months with Lucy this week. With May 17th fast approaching emails and phone calls are flying between my musical friends to meet up for trios, quartets etc. Besides the Nigel Clayton and Bingham quartet course at Benslow in December, there are two courses at Louise's newly formed Milford School of Music- one for amateur violists and the other where Louise has agreed to accommodate my string trio. Then there's Martin Outram's course in August and the Primrose Quartet in September, both taking

place at Benslow. I shall be spending all the money that has accumulated with not being able to go anywhere.

But lockdown does strange things to you. There is a frisson of fear at going out and doing all these new things. Even travelling on the bus for the first time in ages made me nervous and it was something I did constantly having no car when I went on all my mad explorations. You get used to a routine which half of you wants to break out of but the other half is fearful and set in its ways. Amazing how we can institutionalise ourselves.

One good thing is that the lockdown has (for now) broken my obsessive goal of walking every trail and footpath within a certain radius which was expanding year by year, the list being endless as you discover more and more places as you travel around. Also the number of boxes with leaflets of various places, possible walks etc. etc. I had filled 10 boxes and I'm sure that wouldn't have been the end of it. One of the hardest things I had to do was to throw away eight of the boxes as I have moved in January to a much smaller place and have had to drastically downsize. I tend not to be sentimental which makes it easier for moving but that was tough. I even shed a secret tear as I threw them into the bin. Moving when charity shops are shut makes life difficult as well. Throwing away good stuff goes completely against the grain. But I have found room for my extensive collection of OS maps and a good proportion of walking guides. Although the sense of urgency about walking has disappeared, the difficulty of places to stay and travelling putting a damper on things.

They do say that a leopard can't change its spots so I wonder what obsession is lurking round the corner. Maybe the viola? Or, now having outdoor space having moved from a flat to a bungalow, I'm finding that there's an alarming tendency for pots filled with plants to be growing like mushrooms, seemingly overnight. Oh to be more Zen like.

To all my viola playing friends let's hope that the rest of 2021 is a good'un.
Enjoy!

Janet Pazio