

QUATRE-VINGTS EN PLUS

A MEMORY OF SPRING 2007

CHAPTER 1

BROTHER GORDON.

It was sheer coincidence that the four of us had chosen to be on the same flight from Nice to Bristol on Thursday the 26th April. Lyn and I had planned to visit my surviving brother Gordon to celebrate, in advance, his 87th birthday. This falls on May 26th, but foreseeing that we should be unable to leave France on that date we had chosen to make an earlier visit to England. Originally we had planned to fly from Nice to Exeter, which is much nearer to Gordon's home in Budleigh Salterton, but the timing and frequency of flights on that route were not convenient. Hence the booking to Bristol. Given that choice we had thought we might also be able to visit Jayne, Gordon's youngest daughter, and her partner Andrew who live in the village of Kemerton, near Cheltenham and Tewkesbury. Upon sounding out that idea to Jayne and Andrew and mentioning our proposed travel plans we learned that they were, in fact, booked for the same flight. They were returning from Corsica, via Nice, following a visit to sign up for the purchase of a villa in Bastia.

We greeted each other warmly in the check-in hall at Nice Airport and managed to get seats close enough to each other for a flight-long chat en route to Bristol.



We parted and went our separate ways on arrival at Bristol where we had to pick up a hired car for our four-day stay in England. We had booked a room at the Filton Holiday Inn on the north side of Bristol. Having been stationed at the RAF base at Filton I had thought it would be easy to navigate our way from Lulsgate Airport, Bristol, to Filton. Wrong!!!

Taking the A38 which runs from Lulsgate, through the centre of Bristol to connect with the M32 on the north side, we encountered every obstacle imaginable – for a start it was rush-hour traffic and the heart of Bristol seemed still to be in a state of rebuilding following the devastation of bombing in the 1940s! Neither was the hotel as easy to find as I had confidently predicted. We drove around Filton and Patchway for a long time; asked two sets of locals for directions to the Holiday Inn and were given three sets of false steers. It turned out that there were two Holiday Inn Hotels in Filton. Needing refreshment we pulled in at a Pub and asked another pair of men for directions. We were given new, correct, advice in a distinctly French accent! Our guide hailed from Toulon in Provence! So we finally found our hotel and checked in. The staff, we found, were very efficient and obliging and willingly upgraded our room at no extra cost when we pointed out that it was rather cramped. Most of the staff were from other countries – Poland, Lithuania, Italy, etc. The hotel grounds contained a magnificent grove of mature *Sequoia Giganticas*.



To our delight the hotel boasted a Chinese Restaurant in addition to its traditional one. One thing we had missed in France was the availability of a genuine Chinese; there are several restaurants within a few miles of our home in Roquefort-les-Pins which claim to be Chinese but without exception they serve Thai food – very nice but lacking the subtlety of truly Pekingese or Cantonese dishes. Not surprisingly we enjoyed a couple of blowouts (literally I am afraid) during our stay. In the very pleasant grounds there were lots of rabbits grazing peacefully and we enjoyed the fresh greenery of the English Springtime.

Next day we set off for our planned visit to Budleigh Salterton to see Gordon. This was the main purpose of our visit to England and we arrived at his house at about 11.30, spending a happy half-hour sitting in his pretty garden.

Despite his (mild) protests we managed to take a few photographs of the old boy. And of his house and garden.







We had asked Gordon to take us for lunch at the Otterton Mill, nearby on the River Otter. He had told us a lot about this interesting tavern/studio which he visits for morning coffee or lunch frequently. It is indeed an attractive place in which to relax and revive, owned by Bob and Clare, largely staffed and frequented by would-be artists and would-be writers. Gordon is obviously very popular there, as he has been wherever he went. Lyn and I were introduced to many of them before enjoying their fare washed down by a good wine.

The three of us had a great time in each other's company and regretted that it had to end after two or three hours. However, at 87 Gordon needs a break and so, at 80 minus a couple of weeks, did Douglas. We dropped Gordon off at Hibberd House and set off back towards Bristol via Cheddar Gorge, Wookey Hole and anywhere else that took Lyn's fancy as the driver. Back at the hotel we feasted in their Chinese Restaurant.

Below: The Otterton Mill, Next page: Cheddar Gorge plus inhabitants.





The next day, Saturday, we enjoyed a wide exploration starting with the beautiful Wye Valley. It is such a peaceful part of the United Kingdom, with its gently flowing river, its green fields and grazing sheep.



Our tour took us round much of South Wales, including Abergavenny, Merthyr Tydvil, past Newport and back again over the Severn Bridge to our hotel on the outskirts of Bristol.

Next day, Sunday and the day of our departure back to our home in Provence, we drove up the M5, past Cheltenham, making for Kemerton, where Gordon and Edna had lived before their move down to Devon. We knew that Jayne and Andrew lived in the village but did not intend to intrude on them. Our intention was for Lyn to see this beautiful village and to see where Jayne and Andrew lived.

Coincidentally, when driving through the village, we spotted Andrew leaving the village newsagent. Choosing this easy way to find the house we followed him home in the car. Needless to say he too had spotted us and we ended up with a brief visit to their house.



After that brief visit we drove on through Tewkesbury and followed the River Severn looking for somewhere nice at which to have lunch. Finally we found, in the village of Frampton-on-Severn, a pleasant looking pub overlooking a cricket green where we could sit outside and eat.

From there, en route to Lulsgate Airport we drove to Bristol wishing to see Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge. On the way through we admired Bristol's Cathedral whose masonry had obviously recently been cleaned.



Clifton Bridge proved to be a popular tourist attraction as there were lots of motorists bent on the same mission. However we paid our 50p toll to cross it and found somewhere to park the car. The trip was well worth the effort. In addition to its marvel of design and construction the bridge offered breathtaking views into the gorge.



It was now time to make for the airport, to dispose of the hired car and to check in for our return flight to Nice, due to depart at 6.15pm. Not for the first time on this trip to the UK we were struck by the obesity of so many people. This was very evident in the busy departure lounge at Lutsgate. Both Lyn and I are moderately over a perfect weight but numerous people we saw were frankly obscenely gross with huge bellies, bums and other accoutrements. This is not to say that all French people are slender but at least in France the sight of a really fat person is remarkable.

The flight to Nice went well and we landed there just as dusk fell, picked up our own car and reached home gratefully at about 10.30pm.



Home Sweet Home April 30th 2007

CHAPTER 2

BACK TO THE UK AGAIN MAY 9TH – 10TH 2007 FOR SERIOUS CELEBRATIONS.

We had booked with Easyjet to fly to Gatwick on the 9th May, returning on the evening flight of the 10th and had arranged to stay overnight at the Copthorne Hotel.

The flight went well as we flew from the sunshine of Provence to arrive in a gloomy, wet afternoon at Gatwick. Every journey seems to be made more tiring and exasperating by the increased security measures at all European airports, but especially in the UK. Once arrived we collected a Fiat car from Europcar and drove to the Copthorne. Here we were met with the usual courtesy and allocated a very nice, spacious room on the ground floor.

Having patronised the hotel and restaurant a great deal in the past dating back to the 1970s we were pleased to recognise a couple of familiar faces among the staff, especially Giovanni now the Assistant Manager. We decided to fit in some of the time before dining by visiting John and Valerie Large at Crawley Down. They made us very welcome and treated us to a slice of Valerie's superb fruit cake. Out came the cameras.....



We dined well that evening in the Lion d'Or Restaurant at the Copthorne Hotel and reminisced with Giovanni about the New Year Dinners we had attended with our Pine Grove friends on several occasions in the seventies and eighties. Next morning Audrey Boome called briefly for a chat before Guy, Bridget, and Harry (10 years old and wearing his smart school uniform) arrived for morning refreshments. Birthday greeting cards, from Jack, Harry and Guy and Bridget were opened plus presents of a book and a cd about cricket. Out again came the cameras.....





Next on the agenda was preparation to go to the Gravetye Manor where we were looking forward to meeting, for the first time, Elizabeth O'Connor, a friend and neighbour of Geoff Bowden, Geoff himself, of course and Alan and Jean Walker. This involved the, by now unaccustomed task of donning a tunic shirt, collar and tie, along with a suit – an obligation, these days, only undertaken for Weddings, Funerals and attendance at the Gravetye Manor Hotel. Today was special however owing to the warm and long friendship with those attending. Lyn drove us in the hired Fiat car to the Gravetye Manor where we were greeted by more birthday cards from Elizabeth, Geoffrey and one composed by Jean Walker.. also by a bottle of fine Champagne.



It was a delightful lunch, hosted by Alan and Jean, culminating with a birthday cake, organised by Lyn. It was a relief that there was only one candle, not eighty, to blow out!

Below: Two Octogenarians and an apprentice Octogenarian with 16 days to graduate.



Time flew rapidly and regretfully Lyn and I had to say our thanks and goodbyes and to hurry off to Gatwick to catch our plane home.

We found the airport very crowded and although we had left the Gravetye Manor with three hours to spare before our flight the checking-in and lengthy security procedures left us only twenty minutes before our flight departure was called. We arrived home at 10.30pm (local time) very tired but with happy memories of spending time with more loved ones and dear friends. For the second time within two weeks it was

“Home Sweet Home”

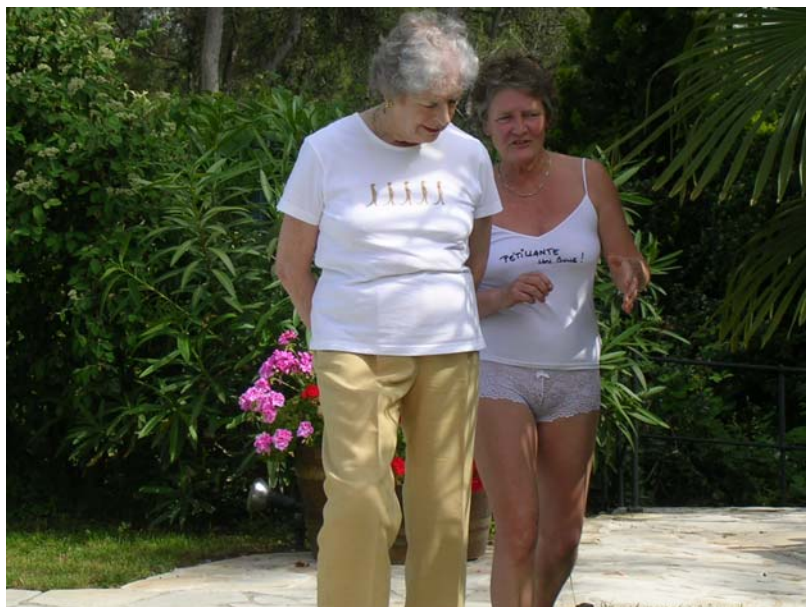
CHAPTER THREE

YET ANOTHER OCTOGENARIAN COMES FOR A STAY COUSIN PAM FROM SOUTH AFRICA MAY 22ND 2007

The last time I had met Pam Turner-Smith had been in 1995. She was over in the UK staying with her sister Audrey Malby in Bournemouth where we paid them both a visit for research purposes. Before that our previous meeting had been, when Pam's husband was still alive, at one of the Simonds reunions in Mayfair.

Since then we had kept in touch by mail and more lately by telephone. It was during one of these conversations when Pam had asked if she could visit us for a stay. We settled on a fortnight in May when summer would be starting in Provence and Autumn/Winter would be arriving in Cape Town.

At the age of just a few days short of 81, Pam took on a very tiring journey, having to fly from Cape Town to Heathrow, London, changing planes to fly from there to Nice in the South of France. She left Cape Town at 8pm local time and arrived at Nice 29 hours later. All went well however and surprisingly Pam did not seem overtired until several hours after we reached home. Then she had a couple of hours rest on her bed after which she was fine for the remainder of the day. Needless to say that we had a quiet time on the following day, confining ourselves to a visit to the village shops and in the evening, a light meal at a restaurant. Then, early to bed as the previous day's travel fatigue caught up with Pam. Below: Pam inspecting the garden.



Following Pam's tiring day of travel not surprisingly the next day was spent quietly, with Pam enjoying the house and garden.





We chose an unlucky day to visit the Nice Flower Market. It began cloudy and from then on the weather deteriorated to become a rainy day. However we had a good look at the most of the market before we decided to retreat homewards. We promised ourselves a better look later in Pam's stay.





Sunday the 27th was Pam's birthday. It also turned out to be bright and sunny. So we drove down to Cagnes-sur-Mer for a stroll along their fine ,new, broad boulevard. As we had hoped there was a large display of paintings on view, for inspection and sale, along the esplanade. Pam took to one particular painting of Nice market and , after a brief haggle over the price, we bought it as a present for Pam's birthday.



We also celebrated Pam's 81st birthday by dining, in the evening, at our local Auberge du Clos des Pins in Roquefort-les-Pins, where, at the end of the meal the landlord presented Pam with small birthday cake complete with candle.





Below: The painting from Cagnes-sur-Mer.



May 28th started with a Mistral which blew for the next 24 hours. It is a chill wind which blows down the Rhône Valley and sweeps along the Riviera coast. Its persistence is annoying and frustrating, so we spent the day mainly indoors . However the 29th May dawned bright and sunny so we drove down to Villeneuve-sur-Loup on the coast and followed the Bord de Mer to Antibes. The picture below portrays Antibes, with, centre scene, its Cathedral and also the Picasso Museum.



We drove through the old part of Antibes, went round the Cap d'Antibes and stopped for a look at La Garoupe. This is the highest point of the Cap d'Antibes which has the lighthouse and the Fishermens' Chapel. This point commands some magnificent views over the Bay of Angels to Nice and beyond to the Italian Ligurian Riviera. Turning round one has the panoramic view of Cannes Bay and, behind it , the Massif d'Esterel.



We also took the opportunity to inspect the Chapel, with its ornate furnishings and paintings, typical of the Roman Catholic style.



We had planned, from there to drive through Juan-les-Pins to Cannes. We had deliberately avoided Cannes so far in May because it is so full of traffic and “Wanabe Film starlets” during the Cannes Film Festival. Unfortunately we encountered a prolonged hold-up on the road from Cap d’Antibes to Juan-les-Pins. There was no explanation of its duration so we turned tail and made our way back home to Roquefort-les-Pins. We hoped for better luck later in Pam’s stay.

On Wednesday the 30th the weather looked bright with good visibility so we decided to drive up the mountains to Gourdon. It does attract a lot of tourists but the view from the edge at 2500ft above sea level is quite stunning.





Above: A view of the mountain-top village of Gourdon
We visited the silk shop in Gourdon, where both Pam and Lyn made purchases.



And then adjourned down the hill for an alfresco lunch at the Sarrazin Restaurant. We all had a Pasta dish and afterwards we felt rather full.

Below: The Sarrazin Restaurant.



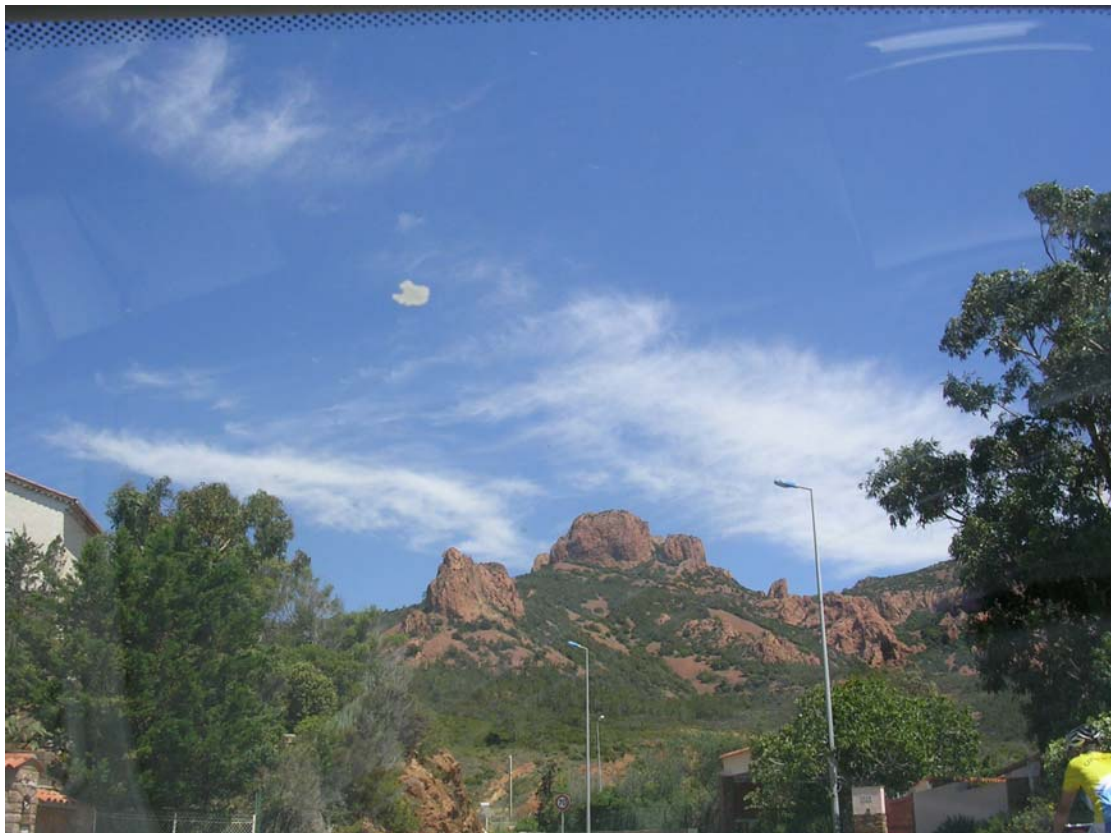
Below: The village of Gourdon perched on the cliff-edge.



May 31st was another quiet day when Lyn departed for the afternoon for her “Randonner” with the local rambling club, Pam watched some of the French Open Tennis from Roland Garros, Paris, before retiring for her afternoon nap and Douglas caught up with compiling this diary of Pam’s stay. The day, having started dull became wetter as it wore on – we had chosen our outing of the previous few days well to avoid the poor weather.

Weather permitting, we had hoped that Friday June 1st would prove to be more inviting. Sure enough it did, so Lyn drove us across to the Massif Esterel, turned toward the coast and reached it at the fishing town of St. Raphael, about 15 miles west of Cannes. This part of the coast is very beautiful with rocky coves, very like the Cornish coast. The rocks and surrounding mountains are of distinctive red sandstone rock. Here we came across the Miramar Beach Hotel at Theoule-sur Mer at which we had booked a table for lunch. Pam insisted on paying the bill once more.

Below : The red-rock mountains of the Esterel Massif.



The lunch was excellent.





Above : Some sculpture on a roundabout near Cannes – of interest to Deb?

En route homeward we stopped at the local “Tabac” in Roquefort-les-Pins where Lyn bought a pair of china cats for our mirrored alcove. Pam insisted on paying for one of them.



Sunday, 3rd June we finally made it to Cannes, taking the coast road from Villeneuve-Loubet, through Antibes and Golfe-Juan, Where, incidentally, Napoleon Buonaparte landed after his escape in 1815 from the island of Elba, and marched all the way, with an ever growing army of supporters, to Paris. Thence to his Waterloo. There he was defeated by Wellington and the Prussian army and subsequently exiled to St. Helena. The route from Golfe Juan to Paris is named “La Route Napoleon”.

Cannes presents a beautiful image, particularly on a sunny morning, with its numerous cruise ships anchored in the bay, its several marinas harbouring expensive toys for rich boys and for the splendid esplanade – “La Croisette”. It is of course famous for its annual Film Festival, when it fills up with thousands of bimbos and wannabe film stars.



Above : Douglas's other boat. Eat your heart out, Rod! Below: La Croisette, Cannes



Below: Pam admiring one of the Marinas at Cannes



Happily Monday 4th June began brightly and we went, as planned to another local market, this time at Près du Lac, Chateauneuf. Here Pam appeared to buy the whole market and we all enjoyed this varied display of produce, clothes and other goods. Below: a selection of pictures of the visit to the market.







Having helped Pam to spend all her Euros we retired homeward to take the rest of the day easily; Pam quickly adjourned to watch the tennis open at Paris. On her last evening Pam treated us once again to a supper at the Auberge du Clos des Pins.



All three of us had thoroughly enjoyed Pam's two-week stay with us – a perfect guest.

Tuesday, June 5th was Pam's day of departure and at about mid-day we set off for Nice Côte d'Azur Airport. We arrived too early for immediate checking-in but were greeted near the desks by a British Airways lady – Tracey – who hailed from Durban. She took over the job of organising the check-in and of arranging the wheelchair for Pam. She was very efficient and considerate. A few minutes later we made tearful farewells, then made our way home to Roquefort-les-Pins to track the progress of the flight to Heathrow on the internet. Later that evening we tracked the departure from Heathrow bound for Cape Town. On Wednesday morning we were able to track her landing at Cape Town 15 minutes earlier than schedule. Below: Goodbyes at Nice Airport.



