

Cassie & Selwyn Tillett

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Dear Friends

The world has had a challenging 2016. So many iconic figures have left us, so many changes on the political and international stages, so much upheaval. No matter what your opinions of all this, it won't have gone down in history as a peaceful year.

Confining ourselves to comment on our own lives – still full of love and delight, challenge and pain, triumph and disaster (to coin a phrase) – for those who are interested, here's our annual wander round the increasingly surreal World of Tillett.

The four churches of the Flegg Coastal Group continue to meet challenges with tea, cake and fundraising. A few highlights included: finally achieving decent lighting in Hemsby and heaters in Winterton church – the inside temperatures having been measured at below freezing point on several occasions last winter. We shared a Passover supper in Hemsby – a tradition that we much enjoyed during our days in Beddington and have long wanted to resurrect. Horsey was visited again by the charming Harnser Ensemble, bringing gentle music and spoken word to this atmospheric little church. We were honoured to **provide an entertainment with our good friends from Vocal Score** in Somerton, in celebration of the 90th birthday of Her Majesty.



Cassie's business has become very busy over the last six months; several new clients arrived, some for just a session or two, some for much longer. She's delighted to continue to restore order to various levels of domestic chaos; and also exceptionally proud to see APDO, the Association that she was a founder member of in 2004, growing and developing superbly well, with conferences, training courses, media coverage and much more.



Last year's Christmas letter was written before the arrival of our visitors: Cassie's sister with her family. It made for the best Christmas in many years to be able to share the season with Jenny, Carl, Jack and Sammy-Jo, complete with visits to the reindeer, walks on the beach, playing in the amusement arcades in Hemsby, shopping in Norwich and Secret Santa. And of course, we were also thrilled to be able to invite lots of the usual suspects from **our London family** to join us for a mid-festive-season day together.

Mum, of course, was very happy to have the extended family around her throughout these celebrations; and Jenny came with Cassie and Mum to visit Dad in the residential home on Christmas Eve. Dad continues to

decline gently; he has now got to the stage where the only name he can remember without prompting is his brother Bob (who, of course, has been around in his life for longer than the rest of us), and while he knows Cassie, Jenny and Peggy, the names have begun to elude him. He's still happy to see us each time we visit, but is asleep most of the time and has no sense of time or place. However, he is generally peaceful, eats well and is safe and

well cared for, which is the best we can hope for at this stage. It's hard to believe that he's been in the care home for over three years now.

There have been some sad losses this year in our personal circle (as well as all the celebrities, untimely and otherwise). In particular, we give thanks for the lives of Christine Ross and Freda Davison from previous parishes; David Hare and Chris Hurles from our theatrical lives; Charles Crane from Cassie's family; Cassie's primary school teacher, Pam Cranefield, a great influence; two mothers of close friends, Sheila Bucknell and Norma Cooper; and a long-standing family friend, Monica Carlisle, whose zest for life will be much missed. May they rest in peace and rise in glory.

Returning to happier topics: as we've discovered a huge amount of mainland Britain and France over the years, we decided to try some new holiday areas. First, post-Christmas, was a short city break to Amsterdam. We booked a self-catering flat through AirBNB, and had a truly wonderful week exploring this amazing city. And before you say it, no, it's not all sex and drugs. In fact, one of the things that delighted us was the sheer inclusivity of the city. Nobody bats an eyelid at your colour, sexuality, religion or anything else; and the sex and the drugs are clearly signposted so that you can find them if you want – or avoid them if you don't. Simples. There was the beautiful display on **National Tulip Day** in Dam Square; the obligatory boat trip on the canals; the zoo; the handbag museum (yes, really); Anne Frank's house; a marvellous production of *The Glass Menagerie* – in Dutch, with English surtitles across the top of the stage; and a festival of dozens of amateur choirs, performing across two days for 20 minutes each, to which you could come and go as you pleased. It's a vibrant, glorious place, which we loved.



Post-Easter saw our annual pilgrimage to dear friends Dorothy & Milton in Bolton, for a much-needed dose of sightseeing, feeding, shopping, theatre and friendship. Then in July, we took another city-break: this time to Edinburgh, and travelling by train, which proved cheaper and less stressful than any of the alternatives. Another self-catering flat and plenty of time to walk and explore; meeting up with Selwyn's Cambridge-days friend Robin, once for a church service and again for **a very posh tea at the Balmoral Hotel**; meeting up with Stevie Wren, for the first time since Cassie left Bretton Hall in 1984, for a fabulous lunch and reminiscence; a day of magic, where sleight-of-hand artists left us stunned and awestruck with their skill; the stunning Camera Obscura, with its illusion exhibits, where we played at being big kids for most of the day; museums, gardens, churches, parks and so much more. Truly wonderful.

Finally, in September we took a very different holiday: the Isles of Scilly. As Cornwall isn't the easiest place to get to from Norfolk, we took our two week break in bits, half a week in each direction and a week on the islands. We started with a visit to our past: St Mary's Beddington, staying with Pam & Ian, who were such an important part of our life there; meeting up with Ellis & Claire after far too long, and attending church on Sunday morning. Then off to the West Country, one night in Somerset, a long overdue visit to Barbara & John in Cornwall, and two nights near Penzance, reuniting with Annie – a long-ago musical friend, now a priest in Cornwall; achieved a long ambition to visit the splendid Minack Theatre (a magnificent production of *The Crucible* in pouring rain); and stayed in a gorgeous B&B with views to St Michael's Mount.

Then we took the baby-plane-flight across to St Mary's, the largest of the Scillies, and spent a blissful week exploring: island hopping on the boats, walking, being driven in a vintage car, **enjoying a 'low tide' food festival between islands**, gardens, mostly glorious weather – and Cassie was beyond excited to have the chance to go snorkelling with seals (an experience she'd repeat in a heartbeat). Highly recommended. Lastly, on our return, we then stopped with Nicolette and Andy in Devon and Dave & Jill near Redditch before returning to Norfolk. A really special and magnificent holiday.



Cassie's still tiresomely proud of maintaining a healthy weight after so many years of struggle. A lot of this has been due to the support she's received from the remarkable members of the Mother Nature's Diet community, and their redoubtable leader, Karl Whitfield. Seminars, 'walk-and-talk' events and online forums have been key in this journey. Another element has been the development of the 'Life List'...

Back in March, she decided to create what's sometimes known as a 'bucket list' (don't like that phrase much as it sounds so final – hence 'life list'). The Facebook community of friends was asked to make suggestions – which they were glad to do; some welcome, some less so! But the list began to grow, and many new activities have taken place – and some have remained as a regular part of life. It would take too long to explain them all (and you can have a look on the blog [\[rectorswifelifelists.blogspot.co.uk\]](http://rectorswifelifelists.blogspot.co.uk) if you're *really* interested in this utterly self-centred project), but since March, **activities** have included : swinging through trees on zip wires and rope ladders on a Go Ape circuit; a scuba try-dive (in a Bolton swimming pool); indoor climbing; snorkelling with seals (in the Scillies); cycling; Nordic walking; a night under canvas; a 15 mile sponsored walk (in aid of Pancreatic Cancer UK) across the Thames Bridges; open water swimming.



And the challenge that started it all (**top left of the photo above**) – which does deserve its own comment: circus aerial hooping (AKA budgee-hooping). Friends Dawn and Tasha are already skilled proponents of this art, and introduced Cassie to the excellent Jo, who runs the classes. Although she's still not at all graceful or clever at it, it's the most exhilarating and eccentric form of exercise, and brings a great sense of achievement and a huge amount of fun.

There seems to have been a bit more cinema-visiting this year than usual. Mostly viewed at our favourite venue – Cinema City in Norwich – we’ve been delighted by all that we’ve seen: *The Danish Girl*, *Suffragette*, *Anomalisa* (a quite extraordinary and disturbing piece of animation), *The Jungle Book* (well worthy of all the hype), *Florence Foster Jenkins*, *Bridget Jones’ Baby*, *A Streetcat named Bob* (superb and moving) and, of course (as dyed-in-the-wool Harry Potter fans) *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*.

This still leaves plenty of room for our first love: live theatre. It’s somewhat alarming to see that we’ve watched no fewer than 32 productions between us, and that’s without any performing or directing credits included. Far too many to list, but highlights included Alan Bennett’s *The History Boys* at the Sewell Barn (a triumphant sell-out run); Cassie spent a day in London with fellow Barn Artistic Director, Clare, seeing a magnificent and innovative production of *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare’s Globe; there was the challenging and still terrifying *Brimstone & Treacle* at the Barn; and two superb pieces of community theatre by Broadlands Theatre, *The Jungle Book* and *The Mysteries*. We are very lucky to have such high standards of entertainment within reach.

There hasn’t been a lot of time for performing ourselves. Having taken over as joint AD, Cassie didn’t anticipate any board-treading for a while. However, fate had other ideas, and somehow she found herself playing the superbly-named Thane Lampeter in the opening show of our first Barn season, *Accolade* by Emlyn Williams. Thane is in fact written to be a man, but casting challenges meant that the role was re-sexed! Her first performance on in a straight play since 2012 was highly enjoyable and shared with **a delightful cast and crew**.

The year is concluding on its usual chaotic note: having believed that the joint ADs would have a bit of a chill-out and time to think about the 2017/18 season after *Accolade* finished at the end of October... we found ourselves directing the January production. The director, through no fault of her own, has had to pull out (mainly pressure of work) – so Clare and Cassie have taken on directing it. It’s a fabulous little modern Irish play, by Frank



McGuinness: *There Came a Gypsy Riding*. A splendid cast and crew and we’re much enjoying the process, but it’s meant that there has been no let-up in the frequent 45 mile round trips to Norwich! The brief pause for Christmas will be much welcomed, and so will our prescribed ‘crash-out’ time for a few days across New Year with Dorothy & Milton in Bolton.

It’s been a funny old year for us all; but we hope that your own has had as many wonderful moments as ours. We send our very best love for 2017, and wish you all that you would wish yourselves.



Cassie
Selwyn