

Christmas News 2020

from Gillian and George Mackie

This has not been a particularly fun year. It started badly with heavy snow in January and then Covid19 struck in February. Our string quartet got in one January session when we played arrangements of music by Bach and his North German forerunners and contemporaries and another afternoon of Venetian baroque masters, Vivaldi, Galuppi, Monteverdi, Gabrielli and the Marcello brothers, but we had to cancel a meeting planned for Friday March 13 and have not played since. I have 'hung up my bow' and do not expect to play the cello anymore – no great loss to the world of music as my technique was getting worse due to stiff fingers and lack of stamina, but a downer none the less as its the end of many years of deeply rewarding amateur music making.



We had a nice visit from Charlotte and Drew and Claire before covid struck but few grandchildren have come since for obvious reasons. Vancouver Island was not badly hit compared to other parts of Canada and life went on normally in many ways. I minimized my grocery shopping trips, we washed our hands, wore face masks, rarely had more than 6 people in the house, distanced a bit when we met outdoors with friends during the summer. Family members, particularly Al and Quentin have made a point of coming out to see us, often bringing things we need and taking Gill for drives so we have seen more of them than usual. I started growing a beard when lockdown began and haven't shaved since. My beautician(!) keeps its trimmed.



With April came bad news from Plymstock. Quentin Bone, our friend from Oxford days, contracted Covid while in a nursing home recovering from hip replacement. He survived, is back at home with Susan and their sons Matthew and Oliver but still bed ridden. I phoned Oliver recently and he let me talk to Q who sounded himself though a bit disoriented. He has not lost his sense of humour. He jokes with the professional carers who come to look after him. He told me "I'm glad we are both still alive!".



With covid isolation I have been on the computer a lot, corresponding with similarly isolated people with an interest in family history. In April Al was contacted by Ken Hunnisett who many years ago had bought Gillian's aunt's autograph album in a second-hand shop in Cambridgeshire. Aunty Alice was 14 in 1912 when she started writing it. Ken sent pictures of the contents, which contained much of interest to our family including a drawing by Gillian's grandfather George Rowbotham of his house "Avenham". It is thought he had studied architecture and designed the house himself. If so, his inscription "My House" can be taken literally in the fullest sense.

The house is still there at 101 Church Street, Iffley, looking much the same.

At the same time our son Richard put me in touch with Ken Mather who is writing a history of Lake House, which was commissioned by the Mackie Lake House Foundation. My uncles Hugh and Austin lived there in their retirement years. Ken's chapter is devoted to them and covers their youth in England, emigration to Canada, the school they founded and which I attended as a war evacuee, and their life in retirement at Lake House. Ken was able to use background material from my [Mackie Men and the Empire](#) and I have learned a lot about my Vernon relatives including Paddy Mackie, who was a friend to us all and left the log cabin at Sugar Lake to Richard. The cabin, which was built in 1922, has been undergoing repairs to the roof and fireplace after the chimney fell down under 10ft of snow last winter. Getting it rebuilt is a work in progress but Richard and his daughter Juliet have made a good start on cleaning up the interior, and the fireplace has now been largely rebuilt.



RICHARD CLEANING UP THE RUBBLE

Yet another historian confined by Covid, one Marcus Budgen, tracked me down from memoirs on my web page - Gillian's story of her [childhood](#) and mine about her [family background](#). Marcus is interested in Gill's father Roland (Ronnie) Faulkner. "I am researching the career of Ronnie Faulkner... his amazing life from the trenches of the Western Front to the Gurkhas and on to Gibraltar during WW2. My main interest is in the Royal West Surrey regiment"

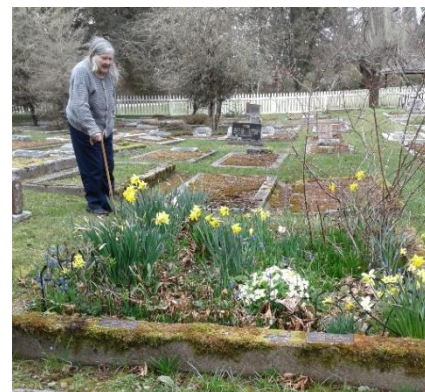


(Ronnie's regiment). This led to a long correspondence out of which it emerged that Mr Budgen was a medallist at Spinks and has in his possession Roland Faulkner's medals, including the MC.

The boredom of isolation was briefly alleviated by a fire that destroyed the gas dock and boats across the bay from our house. I phoned 911 but someone else had phoned already, and firetrucks eventually came and quenched the flames, far too late to save the boats and buildings. I sent my photos to the Times Colonist newspaper who blazoned them across their front page.



But April also brought a lovely spring, enriching our lives at home and allowing visits to the beach and other beauty spots, including St Stephen's church and churchyard that date back to the 1850s. When Al came and took Gill out, he often included a stop at a café when restrictions permitted. Then they would come back for supper, a simple meal cooked by me or, better, something Al had picked up at Pâtisserie Daniel. Quentin also started coming as summer drew on, taking Gill to the Butterfly Gardens or Seaquarium. Gill went every other week to have tea with Akiko Shewring, her sister Yoshida and our old friend Christel Tompa. Our friend and neighbour Ellen Carey often comes down to see how we are getting along, or stays for a visit when I have to go out unexpectedly.



On Sept 23 Tina and Chris arrived from London and started two weeks of quarantine. We left their Subaru in the airport parking lot, they got in and drove to Swartz Bay in total isolation, waited 3 hours for the ferry to Mayne Island, finally arriving late in the evening at their house and looking forward to a hot bath, food and a stimulating drink but as Tina tersely texted “We had a power cut till 1:00 am, water cut off all night”. Everything got sorted out of course but what a bummer, after rising early in London heaven knows how many hours ago. Tina’s work went well, she made some beautiful new watercolours. Chris helped me with computer problems and made beer. After quarantining they came over to visit us every week, bringing home cooked meals, booze, and gifts culminating in a Galaxy 20 5G cell phone for me. Chris, who never loses his cool and suffers fools patiently, helped me get the hang of this terrific gadget.



Al and Kjerstin have been renovating their house and garden, major jobs both. Here is Stefania Evangelista, our family gardener, creating a new flower bed at the front of the house, while work on the deck outside the bedroom is proceeding on the right. We saw all this for ourselves at a much later stage when we joined them for Thanksgiving. We ourselves have had to rebuild the bathroom floor in the cottage and put in a new septic pump tank and drainage field but unlike Al’s improvements, there is nothing to show for it that gladdens the eye.



Quentin has recovered almost completely from a broken leg and a pulmonary embolism last year and has continued to practice and teach archaeology. Here he is at supper with us. Currently he and his colleagues are working in the Wa’s (Woss) River system where their excavations show that salmon were already present 14,000 years ago at the end of the last ice age. Where there are salmon, its a fair bet that humans will come and fish for them. But had people yet arrived at the northern tip of Vancouver Island? Excavations at the site have revealed hundreds of chipped stone tools, including flake knives used for preparing salmon for human consumption. Overall, the scientific results to date reveal a 13,000 year record of repeated human land use and occupation on the terraces of the Woss River.



BREAKFAST WITH QUENTIN



With Ellen, we picked and made blackberry jam, peeled, cored, sliced and froze apples for the winter, made apricot jam when Okanagan apricots appeared in roadside stands. Pat and John Hutchings came with home grown basil and we made pesto and had pasta-pesto suppers under the wisteria as in previous years. The basil plants grew back enough leaves for a second batch. John always brings a special BC red wine for these evenings.



SUPPER WITH PAT AND JOHN



I have done a bit of pottery this year but having a bad left knee has cramped my style and I have less time for it anyway these days. The two plates on the right were made this year, the one on the left 10 years ago. As you will gather, I am interested in writing as decoration. The plate on the left has an Arabic inscription which was a photocopy transfer. The one on the right has Japanese and early Chinese calligraphy. The one in the middle is mostly an invented language but it has some Kushitic characters. When asked what it says, I tell people it can be loosely translated as “To hell with Donald Trump”.



Here finally is a picture of our house taken by AI with his Hasselblad XPan, a remarkable roll film camera providing standard 35mm format negatives but with the ability to change to full panorama format without having to change the film. I remember so well how we moved to this house in 1969 after I got a job at the University of Victoria. Gillian found the house while driving around with our real estate agent. It is a 35min drive from the University which seemed like an awful long way, too long in fact but, when we went and visited the house and met the owners, we were so taken with it that we felt we had to make a bid for it. The house is on the waterfront and there were even jellyfish (*Polyorchis*) swimming below the dock! Luckily the owners liked us and thought we would ‘do’ as neighbours and brought the price down so that, with two mortgages, we could buy it.

I am writing this newsletter in early December as some of our old friends like to have printed copies mailed to them. There is much still to look forward to in 2020 in particular a visit from daughter Rachel who has flown over from France and will be here for Christmas. I can already almost smell the delicious odours of *Canard aux Olives* wafting in from the kitchen!

With love and best wishes from us both,

George Mackie