

LOCKDOWN – AGAIN

2nd November 2020:

When I finished writing, on 30th June 2020, I said that things were getting routine and, indeed, so they remained for the summer and I began to visit local shops. The shop-keepers were excellent in providing sanitisers and screens but, eventually, the Government insisted that masks should be worn by shoppers (though those who served in shops were excused masks). Other people wearing masks is exceedingly difficult for me, as being somewhat deaf, I lip read. I simply cannot tell what people are saying behind their masks and, if they shout, it makes it even more muffled.

Gradually, it became clear that many people were complacently ignoring social distancing and going about in groups and generally feeling that everything was probably all right. In September some, but not all schools, returned but normality did not. Children were put into year ‘bubbles’ of maybe 500 pupils, precautions and sanitising were arranged, and children entered and exited through separate entrances. It was not easy, and the virus began to spread into the homes via young folk. The young themselves were hardly affected but passed the virus to parents and grandparents. Then the University students returned to their places of learning

Much about the problems within University accommodation and the way of lectures being on-line, will be written about elsewhere – young people are naturally gregarious, and the virus spread rapidly in University cities and towns.

Saturday 30th October 2020:

and the Prime Minister solemnly declared that, once again, Lockdown will begin in England (Wales and Scotland have their own rules), for one month.

So here we go again, Lockdown No. 2, though I do not think it will make a huge difference to us, because we have become used to getting our shopping on-

line and I have been meeting my friends one at a time and, usually, outdoors – no going into a café now unless they have a garden. But the weather up to a couple of weeks ago has been fine and now it is much colder. Last week I went to my friend Helen's house and we agreed to sit in the garden, delightfully she had put a rug out on each chair and then disappeared inside to reappear with hot coffee and (oh bliss!) a hot water bottle for us each. We had about half an hour together then the rains came!

Then the Prime Minister decreed we must not go into each other's house nor into each other's gardens, but we could meet outside in a public place but no more than two at a time. Doris and I tried a few meetings in Jubilee Gardens in the centre of the town, but the weather turned wet and miserable.

I have really missed seeing my friends regularly and having a cuppa of something at a local café, but we do keep in touch by phone or e-mail and by Zoom. Quintus has been teaching his pupils on Zoom and, rather to his surprise has found it to be rewarding for him and his pupils. He has noticed that his pupils seem to be more focused on the music and that his own teaching has become more concentrated. Many of his colleagues have told him the same thing and that some pupils are happier with distance learning, than when the teacher is sitting (too close perhaps?) beside them. One advantage is that, when demonstrating music, the teacher can use the same octave rather than octave above or below – as would happen in a side-by-side lesson.

Very few people had used, or even heard of, Zoom before Lockdown and now it is a commonplace topic of conversation and an amazing way of keeping in touch with far flung family. It seems to be much better than its competitor Skype.

3rd November 2020

We are not yet officially in our month-long Lockdown which will start on 5th November. The Government hopes that it will be 'circuit-breaker' and that incidents of the virus will go down so that we can all celebrate Christmas, but I feel this will be unlikely. So, what is different for me about this second Lockdown?

I have got used to ordering our groceries on-line for a home delivery. I would rather go round the supermarket and pick things up for myself but, I suspect, I am saving money by not making impulse buys! But having got used to restricted shopping, I miss going into our local, smaller shops even if I must wear a visor. On that subject, again, meeting people who wear masks is difficult. I cannot hear a word they are saying, I lip read and trying to understand through a mask is impossible.

I have had to visit the dentist (an aching tooth is no fun at all when the dentist is shut down) and have a tooth out. Kim Griffin at Church Street Dental Practice has a clear voice, and I was able to understand him with very few queries. Everyone at Boots Opticians was willing to use a visor rather than a mask, which was enormously helpful, and it was the same at Addenbrookes Hospital when I had to attend a clinic there.

A week ago, I had intended to book an appointment at the Hairdressers to have a tidy-up trim and blow dry but now they are to be shut. I have become used to having my hair straight, after a lifetime of permed curls, and my hair is in much better condition and I have saved a lot of money by washing it myself. However, I must now put up with hair that needs taming. Somehow, it just doesn't seem to matter anymore and that is true of many things in Lockdown.

Dress down and Lockdown go together – or so it seems. I am wearing the same clothes for much longer; they are clean, and I don't feel the need to change

into dresses. Trousers and a loose-fitting top have taken over from dresses worn with tights – amazingly comfortable. Quintus seems to have been in his gardening clothes since mid-March. However, on my birthday in October we declared that we would dress properly for the day and discovered how much better we looked in each other's eyes. A lesson learned and both of us have made more of an effort in the last few weeks.

For some weeks, after Lockdown 1 and before Lockdown 2, I had been restless and feeling short of a purpose in life, my brain was feeling as though it was filled with cotton wool. A great discovery has been free on-line courses run by many of the Universities around the country. So far, I have completed seven ranging from Food Waste which was interesting to Life Beyond the Ballot about women after they had won the vote and about the early female MPs. There are another three booked for the New Year including one on Sleep Deprivation (not for me, I go to sleep quickly and sleep soundly till morning) which may help me understand why Quintus is unable to sleep well. Another Course is Understanding English Dictionaries, I love the use and background to words and, if I could only have one book, it would be the Oxford English Dictionary. So, I am looking forward to this Course very much.

20th December 2020:

Bad News! The virus is mutating and spreading faster than ever so now the Government has reversed its announcement about Christmas. A short while ago, it was agreed that rules for getting together could be relaxed for five days and that three households could meet indoors to celebrate. Last night, the statistics showed an alarming rise and now, Christmas Day is the only day and rules about households mixing are changed. Many people are furious at the Government for changing its mind but, really, it is the only sensible thing to do. The country has been listed into

Tiers as to whether the regions are lightly or severely affected (Tiers will explain by more erudite texts than mine) London, Manchester, Kent and South Yorkshire are just some of the areas badly affected and listed as Tier 4 which equals Lockdown. Uttlesford District Council area, where we live, is in Tier 2 and Cornwall which is relatively free of the virus, is still Tier 1. Travel at home is restricted and journeying abroad even more so – a certificate of testing is required to show you are free from Covid 19.

It occurs to me that the description of the virus has changed since I started writing my thoughts. At the beginning it was known as Coronavirus, but its name is now being referred to as Covid – Co (**C**oronavirus) vi (**v**irus) d (**d**isease) and 19 equals 2019 when it was first identified. Covid 19 it is.

The good news is that the scientists, working under pressure, have found more than one vaccine and that a programme of vaccinating is gradually being rolled out. First to have it will be the NHS workers and those on the 'frontline', then the old – so that includes me! Lord Butler Leisure Centre in Saffron Walden is being prepared as a vaccination centre and I await a text from the GP with a time for me to go and get my jab. The only text so far has been one to say 'please don't telephone the surgery' they will contact me.

On top of all this, an epidemic of Bird Flu has broken out in Norfolk and anyone keeping hens (or other domestic birds) must keep them indoors. So, Quintus has had to pen our lovely 'ladies' in under tarpaulin. The flu is spread by wild birds and domestic birds must be protected from droppings from above. It nearly breaks our hearts so see our birds so confined, especially when we are playing table tennis because they can hear us playing and they chatter among themselves as if to say "they are playing their game, why aren't they letting us out into the garden" – it

seems so sad. It has been raining, raining and raining and the smaller hen run is full of mud and the hens look as though they are wearing wellingtons.

We have had to replace some of the wooden window frames at Cabbages and Tony Saytch, from the village, is skilled at doing work on old buildings. If he must come into the house, he puts on a mask and each time we sanitise the door handles. Truly the world gets more and more strange. Tony has done so much work for us for many years and sanitising seems demeaning, but it must be.

21st December 2020

As if the troubles of looming Brexit are not enough, the Kent ports are being closed to traffic and mile after mile of lorries are parked up – what history will make of it all remains to be seen.

I am still playing Solitaire and have reached Silver Grandmaster 5 – sounds very grand but, really it just goes to show how I start and finish the day.

Quintus is getting the hang of on-line shopping (well nearly) – he thought he had ordered six bananas and six bags of six arrived. We have tried freezing some unpeeled ones, individually wrapped in cling film, I understand they taste well mashed up with yogurt. (Later: No they don't!) We also have four bags of three garlic bulbs, but we like garlic both raw and in cooking, so we can use all those.

The Sampford Signal, an e-mail village newsletter, is here and set us off laughing out loud. Someone has given their address, described that they ordered six bananas and got six bags – please would we help ourselves. Quintus has replied that he is glad he is not the only one!

On Saturday, my son and his family made a tremendous effort and drove down from Buxton in Derbyshire to see me and my daughter, from Halstead, came too. We met, outside, in Bridge End Gardens because we must not meet indoors. I found it all

quite daunting and, having only spoken to one person at a time for many months, trying to follow the conversation between six of us was strange and hard-going. But it was lovely to see them all. They brought interesting looking parcels for Christmas Day whereas I had ordered my presents to them through Amazon, having first found out what they would like (at the right price) – seemed practical but somewhat lazy. My daughter, Carol, was made redundant from her job at Stansted Airport so money is tight, and we set each other a challenge of finding a present for each other, spending no more than £2 each.

Christmas Eve

Such a strange Christmas! TV has shown pictures of shoppers, no masks, and no social distancing so surely, we will have another spike of this pandemic after the holidays. In the meantime, France has shut its ports to drivers from the UK and thousands of lorry drivers are parked in huge queues in Kent until they can be tested as virus free. They will not be able to join their families for Christmas and are feel frustrated and angry, the Police have a hard job there. I feel sorry for everybody involved.

Our Christmas tree is up, and real candles are ready to be lit tonight. We are fortunate to have a large, brick-floored room where the tree is safe. In this old house, dating back to 1450, modern decorations would not be appropriate, and we decorate the beams with holly and ivy and there are no baubles on our tree. This year we purchased our tree from Lowe's wonder shop in Thaxted. They sell 'everything' to do with keeping hens, livestock, gardening, ironmongery and this year, Christmas trees with a portion of the profit going to Thaxted Primary School.

Just Quintus and I for Christmas Day. Usually, his sister and nieces and nephews join us on Boxing Day for a big family meal but, not this year as only three

households are allowed in one house and no more than six people. It is nice to have such a relaxed Christmas together and not having to cook for a dozen folk.

Boxing Day 2020

The news tells us that a deal has been done with the European Union and on 31st December we really will be leaving the Union and Brexit (as it has been called) will happen. In 1975 I had voted in the referendum to stay in the EU but in 2016 I voted to leave. I do not like the idea of the ever-closer political ties and the EU has 28 countries and I felt it had got to be and, they (it?) had never published audited accounts as to what they were really doing with all the money. Each month the whole Euro parliament moves from Brussels to Strasberg – such a stupid waste of money. Brexit problems will sort themselves out eventually, but it has been hugely difficult for the Government to deal with Covoid and Brexit at the same time.

I keep telling myself that “everything passes” and, even the Black Death and the Great Plague eventually died out. So, I keep cheerful most of the time.

New Year's Day 2021:

Well, Christmas came and went very quietly. I felt dreary and extremely low in spirits this week. Lockdown seems to be lasting forever and I long to meet my friends and be normal – then I remind myself I am in a lovely place, with a lovely person and I am, indeed a lucky woman!

One piece of good news is that we can let the hens out again. I looked up the DEFRA website for advice and found that their map showed that we were not in an area of restrictions. We laughed out loud to see them running about again, clucking and singing to each other and to us, we each had a lump in our throat we were so pleased to see them out again. It really lifted my spirits.

Quintus has two pupils ready for their ABRSM Performing Exams one 10-year-old doing Grade 2 and a 12-year-old-who is, unbelievably to me, doing Grade 8. They each must record a video of their performance, introducing themselves then play all four pieces in one go. The video will then be uploaded to ABRSM – quite different from having to attend at a Centre and meet the examiner face to face.

Next week, Quintus has video examining to undertake – again, quite different to travelling to a Centre and examining candidates personally. Another difference here in that he can mark the candidates at home, and their videos come from all over the world. So, exams from Hong Kong and Thailand candidates are marked just as those from towns nearby.

Whatever will 2021 bring with it? I seem to me to have been only a short time since the marking of 2000 and the Millennium celebrations.

4th January 2021: Lockdown No.3 announced

Here we go again! A huge spike in Covid cases, a new variant, and the Government just had to declare a Lockdown again, and the schools are not returning after the Christmas holidays. All this does not affect us greatly, we live in a lovely wide-open space at Cabbages and, when villagers walk by, we all keep our distance. We can take our 'bubble' of just us two to my house in Castle Street and I can enjoy my own home, but I will not be going into town.

Poor shopkeepers, some of these small businesses are not going to survive but the 'Click Local' website is a good one. Many small businesses in Uttlesford (which includes Dunmow) have got together and shoppers can order on-line, and their orders will be co-ordinated and delivered. Good idea and a way of supporting our lovely local independent shops.

I have heard a neighbour say that “it’s only like flu, and we have flue every year, why is the Government doing this to us” – no, it is not just like flue and the whole world is affected by a terrible virus. We must take it seriously, some cases are mild, but thousands of people die from it. The vaccine is being ‘rolled out’ but I still haven’t been called for my turn – being over 85, it should come soon for me. All NHS staff and frontline people clearly must have their injection first and there are many at greater risk than me. Quintus’ brother, who lives in Cambridge, has had his second jab already – the Government is considering whether one jab would be as effective, anyway, we now have what is called the Oxford vaccine and that requires only one jab. Our scientists (all over the world) have done a marvellous job.

This morning, I went for a hearing assessment (long overdue) at Radwinter Road Community Hospital. I am to have upgraded hearing aids – hurray! All concerned wore masks, hands were sanitised, and every possible precaution taken. I sat, alone, in the Waiting area and am so, so glad that I was able to have the assessment – it would not have happened if the date were any later. I am going to write to the Audiology Department at Addenbrookes to say thank you for making it happen and making it so easy for me. The audiologist wore a mask and was fully understanding of how difficult that is for me, her voice was clear and she made suitable signs and gestures.

11th January 2021:

Along with many thousands of women, I am wondering why the Government seems to announce another Lockdown just when I need to have my hair cut. I have got used to having straight hair, and the hair cut which Nikki gave me is pleasing, but I need it tidied up and can see that it will be another white cloud round my head before

Lockdown finishes. In a way though, it is somewhat of a relief not to have to care what I look like – everybody else is in the same boat.

Worrying about my hair seems ridiculous when the BBC news announced yesterday that 1 in 20 people in London have the virus, most have the new variant type. The overall figure is 1 in 50 – now it is becoming scary. The message reads “Stay at Home: Protect the NHS: Stay safe:

We are allowed to walk out, for exercise, once a day and can be with one other person – but we must not sit down on a bench to talk with each other. We must not go into one another’s houses or gardens. I have walked round Bridge End Gardens and back with Doris and I have walked round the Common, along East Street and back home with Helen (no we did not sit down) and we met on the Common and parted company at the end of Pound Walk (at the top end of Castle Street). Each walk took us about three quarters of an hour. I was horrified to see labels stuck on to lamp-posts saying, “Resist the Vaccine”, so we pulled the labels from the posts. The news told us yesterday that both the Queen and Prince Phillip had had their jabs, royalty does not usually tell us about things medical, so I think the Queen is sending us the message “Get Vaccinated”. I still await my call whether by letter, phone, or text I know not. People with underlying conditions will get called first so even though I am old, there are others to be called first.

16th January 2021:

Snow in the night but, after rain, slushy roads for my journey from Great Sampford to Saffron Walden to have my vaccination injection.

Just had my first vaccination ‘jab’ – superbly organised by the NHS at the Lord Butler Leisure Centre in Saffron Walden. I received the AstraZeneca vaccine (known as the Oxford vaccine) and will be called again for a second jab in 4-6 weeks. From getting

out of my car, entering and all along the line, security questions, hand-sanitising, temperature taken, name asked for and checked with NHS records, checked again at the table where the jab was given. Plus, had I felt unwell afterwards, there was an observation area. However, I am fine with needles and came straight back to Cabbages. Really glad to have had this done and to see the system being rolled-out across the generations and across the nation – perhaps the beginning of saying “Good-bye” to Coronavirus. Though other parts of the world are suffering from new strains, our Government has brought in strict rules as to who, and what, can come into the country.

Just had two chocolate digestive biscuits with a cup of coffee on the grounds that they are good for people who have had an injection. Not really a good reason, of course, but I did feel in the need of a treat.

Still going ahead with free on-line Courses and adding to my Covid learning list. I am not doing all the ‘further reading’ that is suggested and am working at a fairly basic level. When Lockdowns are over I will print out a list of Courses achieved just to show what I have been doing.

1st February 2021:

I have not written very much at all recently, not because I do not want to write but because the days are all so similar. I continue to do much the same things, my hair continues to grow as does the scarf that I am knitting. A scarf needs to be as long as the person, who is going to wear it, is tall. Since this is for a 6ft fellow, I have some knitting yet to do, the scarf is presently about 2ft 6ins (I am not into metric measurements) Google tells me that it is about 76 cms which means little to me.

The highlight of this morning was to make spiced red cabbage with onions, red wine, red wine vinegar, sugar and raisins and cinnamon. Not much of a highlight really but something different to do.

My friend Helen told me in her last e-mail that the highlight of her week had been the delivery of two new bras from M&S (that's Marks & Spencer) and I replied that it must have been an uplifting experience for her.

5th February 2021:

The rate of the virus is beginning to descend in this area but, in some bigger towns and particularly London, the rate is still alarmingly high. Millions of people have now been vaccinated (just one jab each as yet) which is a light at the end of the tunnel but only just apparently. There are many people who are refusing to have the injections and there are some weird rumours that the government has arranged a micro-chip in the injection, so that they can control us all (daft), some of different religions are concerned and GPs are doing all they can to reassure these people that it is safe, religious leaders are also urging people to take up the vaccinations as all is in accord with religious beliefs.

It occurs to me that I must have another photograph taken outside my house, this would give amusement to those reading my notes (in 50 or 100 years) to see the difference in my hair. Fortunately, no difference in weight as I am being really careful what I eat. However, I have changed shape! This time last year, I went swimming once or twice a week, went out every day so that even walking around town was gentle exercise, and I did Pilates with a teacher every two weeks. So, I have lost muscle tone and haven't the mental energy to do anything about it.

26th February 2021:

There has not been much happening in my life and, when writing or e-mailing friends, we are all finding it difficult to find things to write about. Nothing is happening and we are not going anywhere – so we send each other some cheerful video or something to make us smile.

I am finding that friends, and my daughter, ring up to get cheered up. However, when I feel a bit low myself, I find it hard to cheer other people up and, after the telephone call sometimes feel a bit fed up, but I do not tell them that – I am glad to be able to help by listening to others.

However, the Prime Minister has announced the Government's plans for coming out of "the last Lockdown" – I sincerely hope it is the last. As it might affect us: -
8th March – schools begin a staggered start, back to school. Plus, testing in secondary schools.

The Stay-at-Home requirement will remain, but people can leave home for recreation outdoors such as a coffee or picnic with their household or support bubble, or with one person outside their household. (Hurrah! Doris and I can take a vacuum flask of coffee on our walks and, bliss, sit on a bench – this applies to Helen and Kathryn also).

As part of step one, there will be further limited changes from 29 March, the week in which most schools will break up for Easter. Outdoor gatherings of either 6 people or 2 households will be allowed, providing greater flexibility for families to see each other. This includes in private gardens.

At this point, the Stay-at-Home order will end, although many lockdown restrictions will remain. *We will have been at home for over a year by then.*

From 12th April - VERY IMPORTANT!! Non-essential retail, personal care premises, such as hairdressers and nail salons, and public buildings, such as libraries and community centres, will reopen. Oh! to have my hair cut and styled will be bliss for me, I have got used to straight hair but it has grown a bit too long and wild after so many weeks.

No earlier than 21st June. It is hoped all legal limits on social contact can be removed. OH! PLEASE LET IT BE.

I don't think we can stand much more of any Lockdowns and the economy needs to come alive again.

Last Tuesday, Quintus had to go to Chelmsford because, being born Swiss, he had to show some papers for the Home Office to issue his 'Permanent Residency' licence as required now we are not part of the European Union.

It was agreed that he would get out of the car at the right building and I would go and park till he had finished. Chelmsford has a horrendous one-way system, and I had no idea where we were or where I could park. Then, for the first time in my long life, I had a panic attack with my heart racing and unable to breath properly, I was scared. So, I stop the car by some dustbins behind the railway station and decided to stay there and, if anyone came to ask why I was parked there, I would explain I was feeling unwell but, thank goodness, no-one challenged me.

I realised what had happened – I had not driven anywhere other than the 7½ miles between our two houses for nearly a year and, faced with traffic and one-way system I had lost all my confidence. Anyway, Quintus drove back to Dunmow where I took over and drove home if I had not done so I felt I might never want to drive again. But all is well and, on a positive note, having had such an attack has made me more

understanding of anyone who might tell me that they had one – so no experience is ever wasted, however horrible.

9th March 2021:

Children went back to school yesterday, in some cases with staggered starting times and we can meet another person, outside, and sit on a bench and chat together.

Hurray! When I go for a walk with anyone, we can take a flask of coffee and sit down on a bench to talk and refresh ourselves.

This is the first of the gradual way out of Lockdown, the Government has decreed that we must do things gradually and there will be five weeks between each gentle step. This gives a month of statistics to tell us the effect of the first steps before moving on to the shops opening. I just hope that 'everybody' behaves themselves so that we can move on to the next stage.

Yesterday involved a trip out – to Addenbrookes Hospital in Cambridge. My prolapsed bladder needs six monthly checks and, to accomplish that, a trip to the hospital was necessary. At the clinic, I was amused to find a room of women all wearing masks and sitting at the recommended social distance. However, down one side of the waiting room was a line of young and very pregnant women, waiting for the ante-natal clinic. Down the other side, where I sat, was a shorter line of grey-haired women, also social distanced, waiting for the other clinic. Whatever our age, everyone's hair needed the attention of a hairdresser! Some long white hair on one side of the room, some dark roots on the other – hairdressers open in April.

Quintus is dying to get the scissors out and, almost daily, offers to trim my hair – my reply being that "I think I can wait till April". He does do a fairly decent trim but what I really need is a styled cut by my hairdresser in Saffron Walden.

My progress at playing Solitaire on the laptop is not as rapid as in the first Lockdown. I have reached Silver Grandmaster level 8, but I have been playing a game called Wordscape on my smart phone. This is a fascinating game of rearranging letters into words and has rather taken over from Solitaire playing – I have reached game number 1298, so a lot of time used up in using my brain.

IT's a Whole year – 18th March 2021:

We went into personal isolation on Wednesday 18th March 2020 and have remained very careful for a whole year. We have had three total Lockdowns and now we are beginning to hope for some form of normality to gradually take over. This week I have had two outings to Bridge End Gardens – one with Helen and one with Doris. We can go out with one friend, sit on a bench, and have a cup of coffee. The days were cold but oh how we enjoyed having a warm drink together. Sssh! When I went out with Doris, we had a spoonful of brandy in our coffee which certainly warmed us up. I think we can go into each other's gardens on 29th March but not in each other's house. And, oh joy, on 12th April, non-essential shops will be opening again which means the hairdresser and Craft Days. I let Quintus loose with the scissors again to trim my hair which was in need to a trim but it is not the same as having Nikki give it a good wash, stylish cut and a blow dry.

On bright spot is that my daughter, Carol, who was made redundant from her job at Stansted Airport has now got another job at Waitrose in Sudbury. She is happy and feeling very relieved about this.

Another bright spot is the birth of Hugo – another great grandson for me. Helen (Carol's daughter) was fed up that he was over a week late, but he arrived safe and sound. His sister Daisy, now nine, is loving helping with him but Olivia, age six, doesn't think her brother does very much. He was three days old at the time and

she was disappointed he would not look at her or play with a rattle. However, she solemnly informed me that (as if I may not know) Hugo has a willie – well I am glad that he has all that he should have. Two of everything that goes down the sides and one of everything that goes down the middle. A Covid baby indeed.

On 26th March 2021 eleven weeks after my first Astra Zenica injection, I have had my second vaccination. It feels great to be protected in this way even if it not 100% certain protection. The Lord Butler Leisure Centre was so busy that I had to queue up in my car to find a parking space, volunteers were on hand to guide us to spaces. After queueing for a while, the process of entering, registering, sanitising my hands and waiting for a space to become vacant took only a short time – again, the volunteers were extremely efficient and helpful. A nurse from my GP practice did the injection quickly, cheerfully and sent me on my way.

This time I did have a reaction to the jab, I was SO COLD that I sat, near the Aga with a hot water bottle and a rug round me, whilst Quintus got me a hot drink. In the end I went to bed, fully clothed, to get warm and slept and slept and then slept some more and woke up with a headache. Took some Paracetamol and drank a lot of water and the headache went.

Quintus had his second jab the next day and has had not ill effects at all but, at least, we are now both 'done' – though there is some talk about a booster injection in the autumn. We shall find out eventually about that.

29th March 2021 – we are now allowed to meet outside with up to six people in a group – Quintus and I went to see his sister, who lives in Linton, his brother and his wife also went, so that made six of us because Rosemary's son was also there with his mother (Q's sister).

I have not been to see Rosemary or her son Victor for a whole year and I found it strange to be talking and laughing within a group – such are changes which Lockdown has made.

Nature had kindly sent us a beautiful sunny day and it was a joy to be outside and, as British Summer time was at the weekend, the day was a little longer. It feels to be a cheerful step along the road to normality beginning. I just hope that people don't go mad and congregate in great crowds, thus starting a new wave of Covid outbreaks. Time alone will tell.

April 12th is the next date to look forward to when smaller shops and hairdressers can open – and women's hair will look different!! I am still looking forward to my hair being done properly. I cannot quite remember when coffee shops and cafes will be allowed to open again. Must look it up..... 12th April for those sitting outside and 17th May for up to six people to sit inside.

Easter Day 2021:

It has been a lovely sunny time for Easter this year and it is hard to believe that we have been restricted for a whole year. People, including me, have begun to feel a touch of 'normality' in the air but the virus has not gone away, and we still need to take care but so many of us have now been vaccinated that reassurance is settling in a bit. There have been some bad reactions to the different vaccines, but you can read about those elsewhere. I am just so in awe of the scientists who have been able to do all the work so quickly and feel safer for receiving the vaccinations.

11th April 2021:

I am so looking forward to tomorrow, many of the shops will be allowed to open and – yes, I shall be going into many of them. Saffron Walden shops have spruced themselves up, windows have been cleaned and some shops have new signs. The

first shop to visit will be Craft Days and I plan to buy some lovely new wools to replace some of those which I have knitted up during Lockdown. I have many small balls left from that knitting and I have wound them all up into one BIG ball and am crocheting a blanket for charity, the colours just coming in wherever they happen to come. It is all working out very well.

More news – my hair appointment is booked for 26th April. My hair certainly needs cutting and shaping but, in an odd way, it has been a sort of relief not to care what it looks like.

Monday 12th April 2021:

Oh! Some normality in my life again. Saffron Walden shops are opening up again, many of them having had a spring clean, windows cleaned, pavements swept and some with new signs. Alas some empty now and closed for good, Covid has not allowed them to survive.

My first port of call was, of course, to Craft Days and it felt so good to see Jane in her usual seat of custom again. New stock, re-arranged shop and such a warm welcome – I was their first customer back.

It was a pleasure just to wander down to town and find that our charity shops are open again. Some of them are inundated with donations (well we have all be clearing out our cupboards) and others report a rush of customers.

I wore my visor, as per Government instructions, but having had my two injections I really felt quite safe, but shops have notices in them saying “no face covering, no entry”. We still need to be careful, and restrictions are being lifted gradually. May 15th is the next lifting when we can go into a café or restaurant or pub. At the moment, only those businesses that serve refreshment outside are allowed to open.

I feel hopeful and more light-hearted, but I really hope that our country's borders are not opened too swiftly to too many people, but many people are just longing to fly abroad for a holiday. Many countries are still not introducing a system of vaccination and cases are still increasing – so visits to these countries are not yet allowed.

22nd November 2021:

Yesterday, I had a lovely back massage and facial at Le Mirage in Emson Close – it is over a year since my last one and, oh boy, did I need it. It feels so good to have all the 'knots' in my poor back massaged out. I have my hair appointment on Monday and my straggly hair will get shaped and cut, I can hardly wait to see Nikki.

Today, I met my daughter Carol, in Finchingfield and we sat outside a café, ordered cups of coffee (two each!) and each had a brownie. Hers was made with white chocolate and mine with dark chocolate. A treat indeed because it was a lovely sunny day and we chatted for over two hours; it has been a long time since we were able to do something so normal. Though I have been saving quite a bit of money by not being able to meet with friends for lunch or coffee – I paid the bill today with much gladness.

Monday 12th May 2021:

The day which begins the gradual 'waking up' from all the restrictions. Local shops are open, we can (if we want) go inside a restaurant or café. The pubs can have people inside, but space restrictions apply. We are allowed to HUG people!! Hugging made headline news on the BBC and two households can mix inside.

However, an Indian variation of Covid has reared its head in many places and it is to be hoped that this will not have an adverse effect on the final date of 21st June. I cannot understand why the airlines could bring into this country people from

India, where the virus has gone mad and towns such as Bradford, Bolton and Bedford, where large populations from India have settled are now facing further restrictions. There is an appeal for everyone possible in these towns, to get vaccinated in the hope that this will limit the spread of the disease.

I understand, of course, the desire of people who are British citizens to come home to be with their families and away from the awfulness in India but, perhaps, our Government should be patrolling our borders more carefully. History will tell its own story.

There is little more that I can right about for this personal story from 17th March 2020 to 17th May 2021 but I hope it may give some insight to anyone reading it in the years to come.

I am alive and well – and I am so thankful to have come through it all. I wonder what history will make of it all.

Best wishes

Ann Holloway