

What you said about last year's edition

"Very much enjoyed it" – Ilona, Washington D.C.

"Loved the centre spread [baby quiz]" – Laura, Argyll

"We much appreciated your 'Schwitzer Times' – I look forward to it every year – especially this pandemic year!" – Anne, London

"Such a great thing to do" – Joanna, Bexhill

"Totally FAKE NEWS!!!" – Donald, Florida retirement home, via new twitter account

"Another bumper edition!" – Justin, Sydney

"Unquestionably the best Christmas publication", "most readable", "puts us academics to shame" – Wilson, London

"We enjoy reading it every year" – Fujiko, London

"I had a ball!" – Adolf, Berlin

"cannot compete with Schwitzer Times" – Peter, Cambridge

"I particularly like the bits about pruning and re-potting. The joys of retirement and staying sane" – Francis, Johannesburg

"Merciless" – Ivan the Terrible, Moscow

"Un grand merci pour la gazette 'Schwitzer Times' qui me fait toujours un immense plaisir" – Daniele, Lyon

"My favourite publication!" – Elizabeth, London

Mat's Memoirs are now online at www.schw.it/zer/memoirs.html As explained in William's 8-page foreword, these are a difficult read, but contain a wealth of interest. Supporting the original narrative are a Person Index (Appendix D) which cross-references every individual mentioned in the memoirs, and 64 items of correspondence and Red Cross messages (Appendix E) most of which are translated into English. It's all work-in-progress so will continue to develop.

Schwitzer Times

Published at Christmas by William Schwitzer, all rights reserved

47 Hornsey Lane Gardens, Highgate, London N6 5NY

telephone: +44-20-8340-0009 mobile: +44-7799-838483 email: will@schw.it

An index of past Christmas Newsletters is at www.schw.it

"HELL HATH NO FURY LIKE AN ECONOMY SHORN" – proverb

Schwitzer Times

"News untangled, fancies tickled, views dangled, quotes pickled"

Saturday, 25th December 2021

Grandma Covid & Wave Theory. Was that wave 4 or 5? Yes, you noticed, 2021 was the year we lost count. As countries went in and out of lockdown, we stopped and started like some gigantic game of grandmother's footsteps. Trouble is, Grandma's got a squint: you think she's looking over there, but actually she's looking over here. Was it all necessary? Don't exponentials multiply the same whether small or big? The case for a continuous approach is strong, with "sustainable" social distancing for the long haul. If you remember, those who tried to run when Grandma wasn't looking usually got caught the next time she turned.

*"But you gave away the things you loved
And one of them was me" - E. Conomy*

New-Build. Yasmin bought a terraced house in Manchester, next to popular Ancoats with its canals and converted cotton mills.

New Job. After eight years in the Civil Service, Edward switched to the private sector, working for a public policy think tank / consultancy.

New Tongue-Twister. Yasmin bought a chihuahua puppy, called Ciccia Schwitzer, who accompanies her at work and sometimes ends up doing some modelling.

"What thou hast always had might not make a man celebrate much, but when 'tis snatchèd from him then surely he will learn its true worth" – W. Shakespeare

Trip of a Lifetime. William with friend David cycled through the Italian Lakes and Dolomites, a trip postponed three times because of you-know-what. We met many lovely people and enjoyed splendid scenery and great food, and with no rain, punctures, or unplanned dismounts we felt truly blessed. Inside we offer a photo diary of our favourite days, and some pictures of our destination, Venice.

Tribute to Joan & Mat. Every page of this newsletter carries a tribute to Highgate and in particular to Highgate Cemetery, the final resting place of Joan and Mat, our still much missed parents, who gave so much love and inspiration. Can you guess what it is? *Answer inside back page!*

"They wangled your vote, so I mangled their quote" - Editor



Yasmin's chihuahua puppy Ciccia.
At work with a bride.
In front of her new terraced house
in Miles Platting, Manchester.



Imagine...

*Imagine all the people
Who could be living today,
Imagine there's no Johnson
I wonder if you can,
No lying or corruption
A brotherhood of man.*

*You may say he's a disaster
And you're not the only one,
Imagine there's no Johnson
I really hope you can,
I hope someday he'll leave us
And the world will live as one.*

- John Lennon

The Postman's Tale. Alfie the accountant, Billy the postman and Charlie the cheese importer are friends from Sumville. Alfie lives in Acacia Avenue, the road with the most houses, Charlie lives in Chapel Close, the road with the fewest, just 8 houses. Billy lives in Beech Street.

To relieve the boredom, Billy often adds up house numbers as he delivers mail, admitting he can only do this because no house number in Sumville has more than three digits. The friends usually meet in the *Sumville Arms*, midway between their houses. One Christmas evening, as they stare into their beers, Billy remarks casually that whichever end of his street he walks to from his house, the sum of the house numbers he passes is the same. Charlie ponders for a moment, and remarks that the same is true for him! So Alfie, not to be left out, gets out his pocket calculator, and before the evening is out reports that the same is also true for him!!

What are the three friends' exact addresses?

Tribute to Joan & Mat. This year's newsletter is set in **Highgate**, a sans serif font by Dalton Maag, downloadable from www.daltonmaag.com The design "draws inspiration from traditional British stone carving" with (wait for it) a "friendly, welcoming and sophisticated expression". Our masthead uses the alternate "pointy" **t** and **z** and diamond dots for **i** to (ahem) "push that expression further".

By the way, if you would like to visit Joan and Mat's grave, they are in the Western Cemetery: from the gate, turn right, their dark green granite tombstone is 100 metres up the path on the left. William will be happy to accompany you or lend you our grave owner's pass, he can also point out where George Michael is (Highgate's worst kept secret), and show you the new replacement Cedar of Lebanon and other illuminating stuff like Michael Faraday's grave.



◆ **MISSING** ◆

◆ **2,000,000** ◆

last seen heading back to Europe

◆ **REWARD** ◆

- ◆ fruit picked ◆
- ◆ petrol available ◆
- ◆ waiting lists days not years ◆
- ◆ supermarkets stocked ◆
- ◆ tumours removed ◆
- ◆ bricks laid ◆
- ◆ grannies cared for ◆
- ◆ appliances installed ◆
- ◆ tables waited ◆
- ◆ meals cooked ◆
- ◆ businesses saved ◆
- ◆ stuff delivered ◆
- ◆ veg harvested ◆
- ◆ taps fixed ◆
- ◆ patients nursed ◆
- ◆ diseases diagnosed ◆
- ◆ cappuccinos made (properly) ◆
- ◆ meat slaughtered ◆
- ◆ houses built ◆
- ◆ cocktails mixed ◆
- ◆ drinks served ◆
- ◆ people smiling ◆

“Freedom twinkles through many a facet / each helps it sparkle like a diamond /
but liberty of movement outshines all / with it you choose your life /
without it other freedoms are but a sham” - Koh I. Noor



Cinque Terre. In July, William stayed in Riomaggiore with friend David and son Peter. Following landslides, much of the *Via dell'Amore* between the five villages is no longer viable (and several locals said it will never be restored, though it is not clear to me whether that is an official position or just resigned scepticism). Instead, we walked high up between Manarola and Corniglia. Above, looking down on Manarola and the path we had just climbed up through the terraced vineyards.



12th September. We took the ferry from the *Lido* and spent the day in Venice. After the classic shots in *San Marco* and the most expensive cappuccinos known to man, we walked along the busy water front (*Riva degli Schiavoni*) and down the side *Rio* to the statue-adorned *Arsenale*. The numerous piles of duck-boards ready to use were an ominous reminder of the peril facing Venice, but at least the protective *Mose* - after 30 years of *blah blah blah* as Greta would say - has been built and is finally operational. We visited the naval museum with intricate ship and trireme models, and ate lunch outside in a quieter back street trattoria (in *Campo de la Tana*). Back at the *Lido*, we managed an hour on the beach behind *Malamocco*, before heading to a local trattoria.



8th September. We set off from San Candido after two wonderful relaxing rest days, retracing the cycle path back to Dobbiaco. There starts the *Lunga Via delle Dolomiti*, a former railway line, which we followed for the rest of the day, up to Cimabanche, and down through Cortina to Pieve di Cadore. We climbed the unsurfaced path through the spectacular valley, always at a steady gradient, then the valley opened out (above). Our coffee-stop at the Cimabanche pass marked the provincial boundary: we were leaving the Alto Adige and entering the Veneto – our fourth & final *Regione*.

For the descent to Cortina, we took the road. It was an exhilarating ride on the wide hairpins with the craggy dolomites towering above either side. We got back onto the *Lunga Via* in Cortina, ever descending, always separated from road traffic, and passed through many villages, some with former stations in the decorative style of their period (the railway opened in 1921). It was a joy to stay in one of these that evening at Pieve di Cadore, recently converted to a three-room inn by an enthusiastic young couple, who also ran it.

William (on the left) with new friend outside the *Arsenale*.



Edward joined Public First, staying in the education sector, helping universities, academy trusts and charities develop coherent policy positions, and influencing public debate in education.

Above, with Laura on Hampstead Heath in January.

Right, at Frinton-on-Sea in July, with Jonathan, Tommy & Jordan.

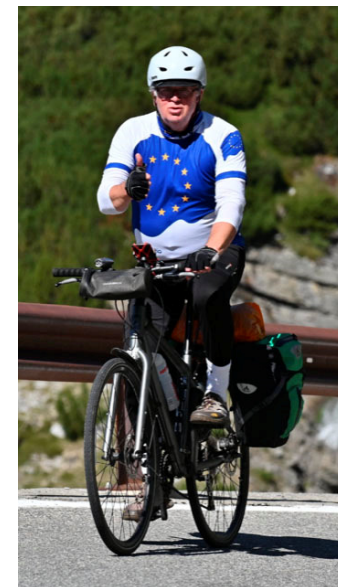
Below, at East Wittering in June with St Michael's friends, from left: Celia & Alasdair, Edward, Jordan, Sophie and Tommy.



Catching Up. With restrictions easing in the second half of the year, we managed to catch up with family and friends, many of whom we hadn't seen in months, years, or even never!! From left to right, top to bottom: with Hazel & Roger in Grimsby; Clara (Mat & Joan's youngest great-grandchild) in Edinburgh under Dad John's watchful eye; Laura in her pantry at Tullochgorm; with Raj in London; Veronika in the Orangery at Knole; and with Catherine, Anne and Graeme in Ayr.



2nd September. We set off early from Bormio (1200m), having preparing mentally for this day for two years: 22km of average 7% climb. We reached the Stelvio Pass in about 6 hours including coffee half way up and numerous other stops. The initial steep climb has tunnels, then ahead you see the valley wall with a flight of hairpins. Above a whole new landscape comes into view with a long straight section before the final flight of hairpins. The road was fairly busy with cyclists (almost all without baggage), bikers, classic cars and supercars, but probably not as busy as at weekends. We kept going at a steady pace – we had to: our accommodation was booked the other side! – periodically stopping to devour our fruit, energy bars & mars bars – and did it in the end. On one stop I watched an eagle soaring silently above me on the craggy peaks. There was good camaraderie and encouragement between cyclists – many clearly approved of our EU colours! The top (2750m) was chaos, packed with hotels, kiosks and road users of all types parked up. Looking down the other side we could see our accommodation down a vertical drop of half a kilometre, but there seemed no way of descending to it, so we set off from the pass with some trepidation down the extremely tight hairpins with alarmingly low side walls to Franzenshöhe (2200m). This mountain hotel was full of character, surrounded by cattle and marmots, seemingly cut off from civilisation and modernity. The pass fell silent at night and the stars shone bright in the pitch black sky.



5th September. With a tough day ahead – the last of 5 cycle days in a row – climbing 500m along the Val Pusteria up to San Candido, the sight of this splendid castle soon after setting off from Mühlbach made it all seem worthwhile.

29th August. After leaving Lake Como on our third day, we took the cycle path along the Valtellina (known in Italy for its yoghurt, salami and bresaola). Lunch we ate *pizzoccheri* which we would find on just about every menu in the Valtellina, along with ice-cream blended with *Braulio* and much more. Later we caught up with local ski-instructor Attilio out for his Sunday ride, who accompanied us for about 30km, telling us all about his valley and ensuring we didn't have to think about the route! At 93km it was the longest day so far.



30th August. Our first rest stop with two cycling-free days was Tirano, at the far end of the Valtellina. We stayed in the 'cosmopolitan' part near the station, with wide avenues. This might be all many travellers see, Tirano being 'just' the starting point for the Bernina Express (the amazing mountain train to St Moritz which we did that day). But in the early evening I went out to stock up on fruit and chocolate for the climbs ahead, and, crossing the *Adda*, stumbled upon the old part of town. Here I found a more chaotic street plan of older buildings, a beautiful church, a tiny square with fountain in the form of fasces (presumably from the 1930s) – plus an enticing corner bar with modern decor. We ate two great meals in cosy restaurants down narrow side streets, busy with a local clientele. The eye above the side door of the church caught mine.

Deliveries from Andromeda. Santa Claus lives on Cephisso, the outer planet of the Andromeda star system, whose year is 4 earth years and 8 months. Some presents are manufactured on the earth-like planet Borysthenis, whose year is 1.4 earth years, where certain special minerals are in abundance. But other presents have to be made on Apollonis, the inner planet going round Andromeda in just 7 months, which is highly volcanic and benefits from more stellar energy. Like our solar system, the planets move in near-circular orbits in the same plane and go round Andromeda the same way.

Now the inhabitants have managed to construct a transporter lift to move stuff between the planets, but it only works when all three planets are perfectly lined up with Andromeda itself (whether on the same side or opposite sides of the star). Whenever the planets are lined up, Santa Claus beams presents from Apollonis and Borysthenis to Cephisso and jumps through hyperspace to deliver them on Earth. How often does Santa Claus deliver presents?

A Furious Citizen Writes. Two phrases public officials said to me this year stood out. First, the customs officer asking me brusquely "*The reason for your trip to Italy?*". Not the purpose, the *reason*. Evidently I needed one. This was not a *French* official enforcing covid rules, it was a *British* official evidently believing *one now needed a reason to leave the country*. At that moment, it felt Britain had taken an enthusiastic stride towards Russia. Second, I was called by NHS Track & Trace under the self-isolation regime after declaring an overnight stay in France (in that brief period it was "amber-plus"). It's hard to convey how unnecessarily unpleasant the calls were: not helpful advice for a health emergency, more Party official telling me what to do and explaining the consequences if I did not. It felt like an extension of the hostile regime for illegal immigrants. No mention of my rights, like whether I had to take the call or answer their questions. No mention of food and exercise, or any assistance I might need. The first caller closed with a breezy "*Enjoy your quarantine!*". Was I supposed to laugh? Was that just an innocuous adaptation of "*Have a nice day now!*"? Should I have responded equally cheerily with "*Thank you, you too, I hope you enjoy making other people's lives a misery!*"? I was too stunned to know how to react on that first call, it just felt an appallingly insensitive way to close. So on successive days in calls from other consultants, I turned the questions around and interrogated the callers, who confirmed that was not in their script – they were only expected to "close the call politely". They also confirmed I was under no obligation to answer their questions. So why was that not made clear at the outset? Silence. But one consultant agreed their calls "were not right". What I can now answer is the question pondered by every history student: I understood in that moment just how easily people can be persuaded to cooperate with unreasonable state policy. Personally, I was ready to sign up to the Resistance on the spot. *WPS, London N6*



News from Brexitland



All the latest from the sunlit uplands where unicorns roam free and pigs can fly

2021 Achievements. This year England celebrated winning the European Football Championship, despite not actually winning it. Still it had been 55 years since we last won it, so we *could* win it (well, we could *then*), and surely with Brexit and everything we really *should* have won it? I guess it's just unfortunate that we didn't actually win it (*again!*).

"O, what a tangled web we weave when first we practise to deceive!" - Walter Scott

Beating the Virus. Meanwhile government celebrated beating the virus, despite one of the highest death tolls in the world and not actually beating it. The media joined in the general celebration, failing to spot the return to March 2020's "Herd Immunity" strategy (how could they when the Ministry of Truth had banned the phrase?). In July, with 30% of the population still unvaccinated, government dropped all legal restrictions. "*If not now then when can we open up?*" nagged the fruitcakes, not perhaps appreciating that there's this thing called a pandemic. Nobody batted an eye lid when government said it *expected* 200 deaths a day as a result (ok, Dennis Nilsen *expected* a few heads would end up in cooking pots, but that's different right?). And they were right, by autumn Britain's cases and deaths exceeded every other major country's. Oh, that's just because we test better, they said.

*"We followed the science"
- from The World's Best One-Liners*

British Exceptionalism. It was the Eurovision Song Contest which really brought home just how special Britain is. In May - *for the second consecutive year* - Britain achieved a perfect "*nil points*" (French pronunciation, *merci*). Not quite the fantasy of being loved *by* all, just love score *from* all. A unique distinction! Truly world-beaten!

"Ask not what we do for your country, ask what your country can do for us" - Official Cabinet Statement

Back to Bureaucracy. 2021 brought us customs declarations, passenger locator forms, immigration points, settled status, vaccine certificates, test certificates, green passes, passport stamps, visa queues, venue check-ins, and more. *What is going on?* Is this a return to mid-20th century bureaucracy?

"We know they are lying, they know they are lying, they know we know they are lying, we know they know we know they are lying, but they are still lying." - Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Levelling Up or Levelling With You? By summer the country was beginning to wonder what the government's flagship "Levelling Up" policy actually meant, and was amused to discover if you asked three ministers you got nine different answers. Newsnight's Emily Maitlis appeared to have worked it out for herself when she asked a minister "*Do you want to take money out of peoples' pockets and tell them you are levelling them up? Or would you prefer to leave more money in their pocket and not bother telling them you're levelling them up?*"

"A clown that fools an audience most is the funniest man on earth, a clown who fools a country is the most dangerous man on earth" - Nicolai Poliakov

Lost Army. Following Britain's departure from the EU, labour shortages hit many areas, a direct consequence of the removal of freedom of movement and the fear of giving equal rights to immigrants. Immigration from the rest of the world is of course OK as they don't have to be given equal rights. The "missing" are 6% of the workforce - *more than all the unemployed!* Yet curiously this massive gap is never mentioned by government or media.

Shortage of Excuses. By September, problems with services and supply chains became widespread. Hospital waiting lists so long you're more likely to die from waiting. At first government denied the problems. But petrol queues and bare shelves were in plain sight. Out came the logicless and desperate stuff: it's a global problem; there's plenty of petrol; it's the media's fault for saying there's a problem; the pigs would be killed anyway; it's the public's fault for panic buying.

*"Speak thou always Truth to Power,
lest there be no more need of Truth from Power!"
- Book of Matthew chapters 5-7 (Sermon on the Media)*

Double Trouble. By October the situation was clearly extremely serious when Pizza Express ran out of pasta and Nandos ran out of chicken *at the same time*. And so it was finally revealed that it had been the master plan all along to shift to a high wage economy. Ah. From a government that gave nurses 1% for fighting covid without PPE to go round. Why didn't they say before? Why no plan to train / encourage workers to these sectors? Not only would *the entire pool of unemployed* have to take up jobs forthwith (not credible), there would *still* not be enough workers!

Next Job in Cyber. Unfortunately there's not much need for cyber in care homes, haulage or abattoirs: these are unskilled roles and without significant opportunities to increase productivity through tech. So talk of high tech / high wage is just another distraction: what the country is short of is *any* workers. Or put it another way: *who do they want to pay higher wages to?* A simple question, but no one seems to be asking it!

**"SOME NUTS MAY HAVE GOT IN"
GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING**