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**THE VIRUS SO FAR**

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**1. Chinese Origins**

Very soon after Christmas 2019 the media started reporting a growing number of infections in Wuhan, China, from a new, unknown, and very contagious virus, which could cause respiratory failure and death. It became apparent that the risk of death increased with age, weight, and the presence of certain pre-existing conditions, which reduced the effectiveness of the immune system. Young people generally had either mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. In serious cases treatment involved hospitalisation where patients would receive Oxygen, and when breathing failed, artificial ventilation in intensive care units. The virus has been given various names: Conavirus, Covid-19, and SAR Cov 2. Here for clarity it will be called the Virus.

We learnt that the Chinese authorities in Wuhan were using strict lockdown (aka house arrest or shutdown) measures to restrict the Virus's rapid progress. These included forbidding people to leave their homes. We were dished up harrowing TV news clips of food being winched up to flats, ambulances screeching through streets, hospitals full of Virus victims, corpses being removed, and the rapid construction by the Chinese army of a vast temporary hospital.

When, and where, the Virus originated from is not clear. We'll probably never know for certain. It seems that Virus symptoms began to be noticed in Wuhan during the Autumn of 2019. In Wuhan bats, live poultry markets and medical research laboratories have all come under suspicion. At first, the authorities in Wuhan downplayed the Virus as being akin to flu. It was only when a young whistle blowing doctor publicised the cluster of cases of an unknown disease in Wuhan was the world alerted. The brave doctor subsequently died.

**2. The Virus Strikes**

It was not long before a vicious epidemic was raging in China. Strict lockdown measures were imposed throughout the country. At the same time cases of Virus infection were reported outside China. On Sunday, January 24th, I noticed hand cleanser dispensers being carried around Prague Airport, which had one flight a day from China. The UK was slow to repatriate its citizens from Wuhan. They were placed in 2 weeks' quarantine on arrival home. On the 2nd February we had my Chinese career mentee, ZZ, to lunch. She arrived wearing a face mask. At our encouragement, she took it off.

Around the beginning of February the first Virus outbreak in Europe was reported in North Italy around Bergamo. The media reported ambulances queuing up outside already full hospitals. Soon it had spread all over Italy, and a national lockdown imposed. In rapid succession the same thing happened in Spain, France, Germany and the rest of Europe with the exception of Sweden and the UK. Libertarian Sweden decided to follow a route that did not involve lockdown, whilst in the UK the government dithered. It reassured us that the spread of infection would be controlled by the testing, tracing and self isolation system that was in place. Although in February the government's committee for emergencies, COBRA, met weekly to consider the Virus outbreak, the matter was not considered serious enough for Prime Minister Johnson to follow normal practice to attend and take the chair.

By the end of February Jo, my wife, & I, like others, recognised the Virus was here in the UK, and presented a health risk. I took the precaution of buying extra loo rolls. However, we didn't realise just how contagious the Virus was, and we weren't limiting our activities. Jo's exhibition at the Minster Gallery went ahead with a very cramped opening on Thursday 5th March. This could have been a super spreader event. Luckily, it wasn't. Inevitably, with fear of the Virus, sales were disappointing. The exhibition closed early with the imposition, eventually, of lockdown.

## Politics

By this stage the government PR machine was cranking up with a slogan about regular hand washing, keeping 2 metres apart from other people (social distancing), and saving the NHS. This was backed up by a populist campaign to applaud the efforts of NHS and its staff. Every Thursday evening people came out on their doorsteps to bash pots and pans. This all sounded very political. The Tory government was clearly anxious that the resource constrained NHS should not fail in the face of the surge in demand from infected patients, especially when its capacity had been hardly adequate during the winter months in recent years. With the NHS being culturally iconic, the Tory government saw the political consequences of any NHS failure under its watch as politically devastating.

## Severity and Consequences

In the week beginning the 9th March the severity and seriousness of what now was a worldwide epidemic, a pandemic, hit Jo & me. In the UK Virus related deaths were rising steeply, as were reported infections and hospital admissions. The Virus crisis was building exponentially. Because of the Virus's growing impact in the US and Canada we cancelled, without financial loss, our expedition to Seattle, British Columbia and Alberta, which was scheduled for 31st March to 19th April.

Quandaries about going with friends to the cinema and opera were avoided when the venues shut. Travel restrictions abroad were coming in fast. X, our daughter, and Y, her longest standing friend and soon to be her flatmate, cancelled their trip to Argentina on the day they were due to depart, Friday 13th. If they had departed they would have spent their 2 week holiday in quarantine, presumably in a Buenos Aires hotel. The stock market crashed. The Bank of England started cutting its base rate. The Virus was administering a shock to the global economy, more severe than the 2008 financial crisis. A global recession was inevitable with the severest consequences for the poor everywhere. We were heading for the most serious global economic crisis since WW2, or so it seemed. Unemployment in the UK was predicted to double to 8% in due course .

## Chaos

The government's sayings and actions did not inspire confidence. Multiple voices gave multiple messages. After Mr Johnson started advocating social distancing, he was seen on TV failing to do so with his colleagues, and shaking hands with hospital workers with accompanying bravado. A government that despised experts was now saying, to defend itself, that it was following the science, when it was clear that the science was very uncertain. On the 12th March Public Health England's tracing operation was suspended. It had been overwhelmed. Chaos.

## The First Lockdown

The country, that is England, Wales, Scotland and N Ireland, were ordered by their governments into a legally enforceable lockdowns taking the lead from other European countries, except Sweden, and many other countries around the world. In England the lockdown was fully in place by 26th March. As well as chaos, fear and panic were in the air.

The idea behind lockdown that Virus transmission would be inhibited by preventing people from passing it on to others, and so the incidence of infection would reduce, taking the pressure off the NHS, and lives would be saved. The main elements: stay at home except for shopping for food and other deemed essentials; no visiting in care homes; could go out each day for one hour's exercise; no car journeys or other travel unless essential; all shops, other than for food and other essentials, shut; all bars, cafes and restaurants shut; all schools shut; work at home if feasible; all gyms and swimming pools shut; keep 2 metres apart from people not in your own household; and wash your hands as much as you could. People with a high risk of death if they got the Virus were to shield for at least 3 months. The high risk category included over 70s, those with immune system repressing conditions or taking medication which did the same, the overweight, and diabetics. In addition, the government promised to put billions behind a world beating testing, tracing contacts and isolation regime. Generally, the public, in a state of shock, accepted lockdown as absolutely necessary. Compliance to begin with seemed good. I took the view that although I am 74, I would not consider myself in the high risk category being fit and healthy. The media gave lots of attention to police efforts to enforce the lockdown and public behaviour that ignored it like driving to beauty spots,

## Shielding

Persons shielding were meant not to go out of their homes and self isolate for at least three months. For those living on their own how practical was this? Those who had the Virus, or had been in contact with someone with it, were meant to self isolate. In the case of contacts this was to last two weeks providing they did not become ill. I don't think there was any difference between self isolation and quarantine. Local councils, supported by volunteers, were enlisted to give assistance to those shielding and self-isolating.

### Softening the Economic Impact: Rishi Sunak

Lockdown meant that there was no work for many employees. To prevent redundancies the government rapidly introduced a furlough scheme to pay 80% of the wages of those who would otherwise lose their jobs, and so keep them employed. A similar scheme was introduced for the self-employed. A raft of other measures were introduced to limit the economic impact of the Virus including a £20 per week temporary increase in universal credit, a business rates holiday for shops, pubs, bars and restaurants, and improvements to the government sick pay scheme. We were promised further measures if they were required.

Rishi Sunak, the Chancellor of Exchequer since the 12th February, abandoned the tight control of public spending, favoured by his Tory predecessors, for a blank cheque. The extra spending would be paid for by public borrowing far exceeding that which was necessary during the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath. Public borrowing on the scale envisaged brings the risk of inflation, especially when a large part of it would be financed by the Bank of England, colloquially described as printing money. Rishi Sunak reputation soared. The public saw him as relieving some of their worst fears about the personal financial consequences of lockdown. For some, he had found a magic money tree.

### Prospects for a Vaccine

What were the prospects for a vaccine that could conquer the Virus? Not so bad. The Chinese published the Virus's genetic make-up on the internet in January. This gave researchers all round the world a head start. In the past it would take years to produce an effective safe vaccine. Not today with all the technology that is available to universities and the pharmaceutical industry, and the speed of communication, the time could be much shorter. We were told that the global effort could produce a vaccine before Christmas, but more likely in 2021. Historically, the government had funded vaccine research as part of its support for the country's strategically important pharmaceuticals sector. It pledged to provide all the funds that were needed for UK's vaccine effort.

### **3. Personal Feelings and Reactions to the Virus and the First Lockdown**

The Virus had put us, the community, the country, and the world into a state of collective shock, anxiety and fear. The implications for everyday life and economic activity were marked. How did it we feel, and how did we react?

We had to accept lockdown down as a fait accompli. It was spooky walking in the deserted and ghostly Winchester High Street. Roads were deserted. We thought that the outlook should become clearer in 3 or so months when the effectiveness of lockdown could be gauged, and the prospects of a vaccine further assessed. We had to be patient. We had to politely decline a number of invitations to take part in e-mail poetry chain letters. We never do chain letters. Our freedom was being restricted by law. We had better make the best of it. There was certainly opportunity. The mounting death toll was horrid. We heard of friends who had had the Virus, and of a few number of people who had died. The media kept us informed of the deaths of public figures.

### Getting the Virus

How did, and do we, that is Jo & I, feel about getting the Virus? Like any illness, we don't want to get it, especially as it could be serious and end in death. We must be in agreement on whatever we do. What level of risk of getting it are we prepared to take where we are free to make a choice? The lower the risk the better. Given that both our knowledge of the Virus, and information about its prevalence, are limited and uncertain, assessing the risk involves a significant degree of judgement and commonsense. Further, our emotional wellbeing, and that of others, are factors in making decisions. Bearing in mind my age, should I die from the Virus, so be it. My time would have come. I wouldn't want to be ventilated irrespective of some ethical reservations I have about the procedure. I do, however, recognise that those who love me would regret my death, and that I still have plenty of fulfilling years ahead of me. My attitude to death may mean that I will accept a higher risk than those who are less accepting of death. Certainly, it was a factor in rejecting personal shielding. A decisive factor in what we do, when others are involved, is their willingness to meet us. We could be a source of infection just as they might be.

The lockdown rules in some circumstances curtail our freedom absolutely. In my view, where this is not the case, to retain self respect it is important that personal decisions are my own, and do not robotically follow what the government dictates. Some will obey the rules as they are law or government guidance, and they can't countenance breaking them. Others, because deciding what to do is too difficult, will abdicate to the government any personal discretion. They will be happy to follow the rules irrespective of their cogency.

Lockdown prevented a lot of normal activities including most socialising, use of St Swithun's swimming pool for regular exercise, going out to pubs, cafes, restaurants, the cinema, theatre and opera, and shopping apart from food, drink and D-I-Y. It felt like a quarter of our waking time had suddenly become vacant and needed to be filled. Fabulously good weather made the task of adaption easier.

### Arthur Road

As lockdown hit, it rapidly became apparent that we were being compelled to severely restrict our social contacts. In our vibrant and friendly street, Arthur Road, people could need help to survive this, and they needed reassurance that, where possible, this would be available. In recognition, we put notes into the letter boxes of Arthur Road saying that, if help was needed, please contact us, and vice versa. This

was well received. It resulted in a street Whats App group being set up by Z from across the road. The group provides a new effective communication medium that is really useful.

## Zoom

Although I was not into on-line video calling and conferencing, I realised quickly that there were on line tools readily available that could be put to good use during lockdown. The platform that gained traction in the social sphere was Zoom. At my initiative my book club's meeting on 30th March was conducted on Zoom, as have all the others since. As a result I am now the group's Zoom master. A, who joined us in April, hasn't met any of the members face-to-face. Jo's book club followed the Zoom route too.

Zoom helped us keep in touch with friends and family. Until mid-summer we zoomed them regularly from our kitchen. The sessions were arranged by e-mail in advance, would last for around an hour, and felt a bit contrived. They were a lot better than nothing. It was heartening seeing people, exchanging news, laughing, and chatting about how we were coping with house arrest. Once lockdown eased the impetus to use Zoom eased, except for Anglo Chilean Society's webinars that added to our Chilean experience following our trip there in 2018.

Jo used Zoom to conduct art classes during the early summer, and early autumn, and winter 2021. In true Heath Robinson fashion we rigged up a mobile phone as a camera to convey practical demonstrations of painting techniques. The sessions for a maximum of 4 students lasted an hour. Stress points were hooking up the students, camera fragility interfering with functionality, spasmodic internet weakness, and resurrecting the session after Zoom timed out after 40 minutes. Later on, timing out was avoided by taking out a Zoom subscription, and the mobile phone was replaced by webcam.

With Zoom I found that I could still undertake career mentoring for Southampton University students. One session that stands out is when I linked up with B, a very impressive undergraduate, at his home in China. We had an excellent meeting discussing his options for graduate studies in Economics in the US.

Part of lockdown was for people to work at home wherever possible. The video conferencing tools provided by Zoom, Microsoft, Google and others make it a reality.

## Allotments

One of the attractions of living on the North side of Arthur Road, as we do, is that our gardens border on a field of allotments. We have two and a half plots, half of which is devoted to a vineyard. Had we spent the most of April away, work on the plot would have been curtailed at a crucial time in the annual horticultural cycle. The vineyard wouldn't have to have any work done on it, and given the state of the other growing areas, the prospects for cultivation would have been severely reduced. Lockdown was an ill wind. We committed ourselves to bed preparation and planting with gusto, as did our neighbouring plot holders, many of whom were our street

neighbours. On the plots we could maintain good contact with socially distant chats. For all of us, this reduced social isolation and helped our sanity.

## Walking

We replaced swimming with walking. We took the opportunity to explore the countryside around Winchester, something, which over 25 years as residents, we had done shamefully little of. Many of our walks took between 3 and 4 hours, rather than the 1 hour Mr Gove thought was sufficient. We reasoned how could walking in the open air, and respecting social distancing encourage virus transmission? The weather in the Spring and Summer was perfect. For most of lockdown our walks started and finished at our front door, This meant that on some occasions we spent an hour walking forth and back across Winchester. On the occasions we used the car, we deemed it essential for our mental wellbeing.

We planned where we went by using large scale Ordnance Survey maps and 2 books of walks. From the beginning of the first lockdown to now we have done nearly 40 walks taking us: North to the Grange, the Itchen Valley, the Dever Valley, and Micheldever; South to Hursley, Twyford, and the River Hamble; East to the Meon Valley, Winchester Hill, Hambledon, Cheriton, and the Butterfly Reserve; and West to Montisfont, Broughton, and Farleigh Mount. We discovered Barton Meadow. This is a new public access nature reserve between us and Headbourne Worthy on land provided by the Barton Farm developer. The magnificent down land around Winchester with its inspirational views, was intoxicating. We passed 4 vineyards, cattle, sheep, horses in fields or being ridden, pigs, deer in the distance, lots of different birds, rivers, streams, ponds, closed pubs and churches, farms, houses, and humans, sometimes with dogs. Closed pubs were upsetting. Socially, through serendipity, we met, and then chatted with, many friends, who we came across, as we did with the other people, observing social distancing, of course. Sadly, once swimming returned to St Swithuns at the beginning of August walking was no longer a priority. During the second and third lockdowns, when the pool was again not available we returned to walking. Because of the Virus we are now much better acquainted with the countryside around us and loved discovering it.

At the car park for the Crab Wood Nature Reserve, near Farleigh Mount, we encountered an instructive example of official idiocy. On a Hampshire County Council Virus regulation notice there was an exhortation to take exercise in the nature reserve, but the car park would be closed if it was used. For a lot of people it would be impractical to use the reserve without using their cars to get there. To be fair the car park was full, so clearly the Council realised how illogical its notice was.

## Tesco

Our supermarket of choice is Tesco on its self-contained campus at the Winnal roundabout. As the Virus struck, like other supermarkets, it experienced runs on particular lines including loo paper, mince, pasta and flour. Pretty quickly supplies returned to normal.

One thing I noticed before lockdown was recruiting posters in the store for the extra temporary staff it needed to operate during the pandemic. Nationally, it set out to recruit 25,000 people. As soon as Tesco became aware in early January of the impact the Virus was having in China, it formed an emergency group. Initially, it was focussed on its Chinese supply chain. The group met daily. As the Virus spread out of China, the group started considering the consequences more generally for Tesco's UK business, and the actions that needed to be taken. Hence the recruitment drive, and the speed at which it introduced Virus safe arrangements.

A couple of years before the Virus crisis, Tesco carried out a crisis management exercise where the scenario played out featured the head office being rendered inoperable, so its staff had to work from home. The effectiveness of this was limited by staff members having inadequate IT equipment for home working. Tesco acted straight way to remedy this deficiency. Tesco's readiness for the crisis is impressive.

As Tesco Club Card members, we have had timely e-mails from Tesco outlining the measures it was taking including materially increasing the capacity of its click and deliver/collect service. After an initial getting acquainted, we used the service successfully over the Summer until we got bored with stressful on-line ordering. We returned to the store, which we had missed. Now in the third lockdown we have returned to Tesco on-line. Tesco shows that it is possible be manage a crisis successfully. We have been fed, and so have all its other customers. Tesco gets little recognition for this. Thank you Tesco and all your colleagues, as its staff are called.

Hyde Street

As part of official Virus response, at the government's behest a temporary traffic scheme closed Hyde Street to cars. This seemed very odd. There had been no consultation. The frustration, inconvenience, and illogicality of the closure made me, as a Hyde resident significantly affected, write two letters to the Hampshire Chronicle both of which were published, and take the matter up with our county and district councillors. Others did more than I did. Nothing has happened. Councillors have either passed the buck, or shown no empathy, or displayed a head in the sand approach. Quite likely, there is a hidden green agenda at work.

#### **4. Family Experience**

X

Whilst X was in lockdown in London we kept up regular contact with her. To begin with things were tough. She was on her own in the flat she had purchased and moved into just before lockdown. Her employers, Grey Advertising, offered her furlough or continued work from home but with marginally reduced hours. She chose to continue to work. Further, in early March she split up with her boy friend, and had to cancel her trip to Argentina. To begin with she could be emotional during our calls, Slowly her spirits lifted as she developed her routines, socialized with friends on line, took on-line exercise classes, worked on homemaking projects, and Y took up residence after spending lockdown with her parents in Surrey

C, D, E

C, my son, F, his wife, and G, my grandson, all worked or schooled at home from their house near Clapham Junction. D, my sister who lives 20 minutes walk away from us in Winchester, coped with lockdown. We met up once, socially distanced, on Oram's Arbour to give her a mask. E, my other sister, and her husband, I were held up in their house near Shepherds Bush. E's first daughter, H, produced her second child in April.

J & K

Just as concerning as X's plight, but in a different way, was that of J, Jo's brother, and his wife, K, who live in Cheltenham. At the beginning of March they flew back from Kenya where they had been visiting their daughter L, M, her husband, and their 3 children. K had awful misfortune there. She broke her hip slipping on her hotel room floor. She had an operation in Nairobi to set the hip. By the time she checked into the Gloucester hospital for a review of her injury, the Virus crisis was roaring ahead. Discomfiture around the fracture had been building up. After X-rays were taken, the reason for this became clear. The wrong metal work had been put in, so the bones were slipping. A remedial operation was required, but theatre time and bed availability were strictly limited. A week or so later, K decided not to seek an operation while the Virus persisted. All this time K was under treatment for partial kidney failure making her highly vulnerable to the Virus's viciousness. This meant that she and J were shielding, and so did not go out of their home, or have anybody entering it. Not a nice situation to be in.

## **5. Handling of the Virus Crisis by the Government**

Whilst we were acclimatising to lockdown, we became more and more aware of issues around the government's quixotic handling of what was the worst crisis to hit the country and the world since the WW 2. In its defence the government would say that Virus pandemic was an unexpected shock, so there was no reason for the country to be prepared, and, indeed, know what to do to protect the public. It would also point to the readiness of vaccine developers, in particular at Oxford University.

Much of this defence is made of straw. Firstly, In recent years there have been outbreaks of new deceases including Severe Acute Respiratory Disorder (SARS), Bird Flu, Ebola, Sika Virus and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS). The medical world, as reported in the Economist, considered a new Virus pandemic likely, the only question was when. Eastern Asian countries took on board the lessons of SARS, so they were prepared. Secondly, in the UK in the last three years the NHS carried out a crisis management exercise around a flu epidemic. By the beginning of the pandemic nothing had been done about remedying the short comings that the exercise revealed. The government had more important priorities.

Delays and Indecision

In April, the Sunday Times Insight Team reported on the delays and indecision that resulted in, for example, lockdown being ordered two weeks later than it could have been making the pandemic worse than necessary; and the chaotic response to the

shortage of personal protective equipment for medical staff. The government relied on endless committees for advice. One called SAGE, it was reported, had 90 members, who were experts of one form or another. Any recommendation it made would likely reflect the consensus view of its members i.e. the lowest common denominator. Matters were made worse by individual advisers continually using the media to increase their influence, or force the government's hand, or protect their positions, or any combination of these reasons, it seemed.

It wasn't difficult for fact checkers, like Tim Harford of the Financial Times and the BBC, to show that a lot of the statistics the government used in its Virus statements were flawed, and subject to political spin.

Many individuals were being tested more than once, so the total number of tests being carried out per week was spun by the government to give a misleading impression of coverage. Testing was being done by different organisations for different though related purposes. Inevitably, the different published results confused the anxious public. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimated the weekly national infection rate from the result of tests on a random sample of the whole population. These estimates are more accurate than those obtained from testing data from the health bodies, where multiple testing for individuals leads to double counting, and those, who are infected but don't get tested, are excluded. Despite this the government put emphasis on data from health bodies as it became available more quickly than that from the ONS. A key figure for the public was the grisly death toll. The government's figures based on the cause of death on certificates was significantly less than with excess deaths over the historic average, indicating that in reality the death toll was a lot higher than officially stated.

Johnson

Then there was a conveyor belt of news that heightened public scepticism and bewilderment. Soon after Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister and the English version of Donald Trump, was seen on TV shaking hands with hospital workers, he fell so ill with the Virus that he had to be hospitalised for a few days to be given Oxygen and monitored intensely. There was no Deputy Prime Minister, although he gave Dominic Raab, the Foreign Secretary, the authority to take prime ministerial decisions if he was incapacitated. We were told that Johnson was in control while in isolation in his Downing Street flat, or his hospital bed, or Chequers where he went to convalesce for a short time. The public has a right to ask whether Johnson has suffered any long term effects from the Virus. His performance after he had the Virus was quixotic as it had been before, but worse: all bluster, hubris, contradiction, bullying, and fantasy, not the stuff of good leadership.

Cummings

The media publicised breaches of the lockdown rules by ministers, public officials, politicians and celebrities. They could result in resignation. It didn't for the acerbic Dominic Cummings, Johnson's chief adviser and the architect of the Leave Brexit campaign. He broke lockdown rules by taking his family to Durham to stay at a property of his parents. In addition, while there he did some tourism to Barnard Castle on his birthday. His excuse for breaking the rules was that as he and his wife

were suffering from the Virus they had to go to Durham to get childcare. This was available in London. Johnson took the view that there was one rule for his adviser and another for the public. Condoning Cummings's behaviour he did not sack him.. It was at this point that the public acceptance of the government's handling of the Virus crisis began to wane. Later, in the middle of the Autumn, Cummings left the government after a power struggle against Carrie Symonds, Johnson's fiancé, and Allegra Stratton, his press spokesperson.

## Ventilators

Whilst the concern that there were not going to be enough intensive care beds drove the lockdown decision, a shortage of ventilators became quickly apparent with government seeking the assistance of industry to plug the gap. Just replicating existing designs was not enough. Ventilators of a new design were to be supplied to the NHS. These haven't been used yet due to changed requirements, a pattern only too typical in public procurement.

## Personal Protective Equipment

Shortages of personal protective clothing (officially called equipment) for medical staff and carers quickly became an issue. These days they are one-use disposable, so very large quantities were needed rapidly. The government scoured the world and paid whatever price was required to secure immediate extra supplies in the face of media incredulity, and competition from other countries, which were in the same predicament. On occasions unusable supplies were bought, or got stuck at airports abroad. Some supplies were made up by community volunteers.

## Deaths in Care Homes

Care homes were sealed off from the rest of the community as part of lockdown. This was in recognition that the elderly were one of the groups that were most at risk from the Virus. As the Virus crisis developed, to increase the number of hospital beds for Virus patients so called bed blockers were transferred in considerable numbers to care homes. Hospitals were very infectious places, yet many of the transfers were done without precautionary tests putting many care homes at heightened risk. Very upsetting was the news that the high death rates being experienced in care homes were explained by this negligence, and untested temporary staff moving between homes, and the wider population.

## Vaccine Development

Without a vaccine, the suppression of the Virus and the return to normality would take as long as herd immunity developed naturally, or the Virus mutated into less virulent forms. This could be years, if not decades. It meant that politicians and the public, except anti-vaxers, put great store on the development of safe and effective vaccines as soon as possible.

During April news was coming through about the work being done on finding vaccines. There were over 100 teams around the world engaged in vaccine development, including one under Professor Sarah Gilbert at Oxford University's

Jenner Institute. The work there was going well. We were told that by July the Oxford team would be 80% sure that the vaccine they were working on would be safe and work. As well as being prepared for the emergence of the Virus, vaccine developers benefited from the early publication of its genome. The consensus amongst experts was that a safe and effective vaccine would not be ready for at least a year.

### Test and Trace

Until an effective vaccine emerged the government could only restrict infection by encouraging social distancing and washing hands, using varying degrees of lockdown, and using a test and trace system. Such a system involves individual testing to establish infection, contacting those who had been in close proximity to an infected person, and directing that they self-isolate for 14 days (later reduced to 10 days). From April onwards we were promised that we would beat the Virus by a world class testing and tracing system. This meant redesigning the system that was suspended in February, and expanding rapidly its capacity. Baroness Harding, whose career in business and consulting qualified her, was appointed to run the system together with an army of expensive temporary staff.

### Contact Identifying App

Mike Hancock, the Health Secretary, and a great enthusiast of technology, had great faith in a mobile phone app that would identify the close contacts of infected individuals. Such apps were already playing a part in holding back the Virus elsewhere, particularly in Asia. The idea was that the identified contacts would self-isolate and therefore prevent further Virus transmission. Google and Apple developed an app for this based on a decentralised approach, which would not give the government access to the data collected. Despite data protection concerns, the government wanted access, so it decided to finance the development of another app that would do so by using a central data base. We waited with bated breath to see what would be the result, being fully aware of the government's lamentable record on IT projects.

## **6. Coming Out of Lockdown**

By May the pandemic started weakening. The national re-infection rate was below one meaning that if it continued to be so the infection would eventually die out. Hospital admissions and deaths from the Virus declined. Attention shifted to lifting lockdown restrictions, so that life could become more normal, and the economy begin to recover.

### Socialising, Going Out & Swimming Returns

The early summer was spent coming out of lockdown with shops, restaurants and bars reopening and restricted social mixing allowed indoors and outdoors. It was like coming out of hibernation. We began to socialize with friends in our garden and their gardens, including a dinner party given by N and O at their new town house in Cannon Street. N had been hard at work during lockdown writing an autobiographical novel, which she had self-published on Amazon. The novel

covered her recent travels to South America and her experiences in lockdown. Friends came to stay. Later in the early Autumn we had two socially distanced dinner parties for six at home. As we are very much people-people the re-introduction of social life, albeit within the restrictions that the government still insisted on, was very welcome.

From July 4th bars, cafe and restaurants were allowed to re-open. Not all did, some sadly had thrown in the towel, while others needed more time to prepare socially distanced facilities for their customers. On 5th July we celebrated our wedding anniversary at Rick Stein's restaurant. This was followed by drinks and supper sometimes with friends at the King Alfred, The Vine, Brassiere Blanc, and the Chessil Rectory; and on Saturday morning coffee at Tom's Deli. We were really impressed and appreciated the efforts all these venues made for our Virus safety. Sadly, the easing of restrictions was too late, and not enough, to allow the Glyndebourne and the Grange Park opera festivals, which we were due to attend, to go ahead. Another joy was the return to swimming in July under a painless social distancing regime. This meant that our very successful walking programme was suspended.

Rishi Sunak continued to burnish his reputation with two further measures of largess. The first was a temporary and limited stamp duty holiday to stimulate the housing market. The second was a £10 grant per meal bought in the hospitality sector in August with VAT reduced to 5% to help recovery of the badly hit sector. Subsidised meals out were most welcome, but with Virus still active, with hind insight the boost to the sector seems to have been premature.

### Cap Ferret Holiday Rescheduled

Other European countries had also managed to reduce the severity of the pandemic and were coming out lockdown. Would this mean that summer holiday plans could go ahead? In our case this meant Cap Ferret in France at the end of June for 2 weeks. About six weeks before we postponed the trip. We were not too worried about whether we would have to quarantine on our return. More important was how we would be received in France. Would we be able to go to restaurants and bars? Would we have to quarantine ourselves there? It wasn't at all clear what the situation would be at the end of June, and we wanted to give our hosts the opportunity to find alternative guests if they could. In the hope that it would be possible to go to Cap Ferret later, we rescheduled to the end of October, and made a booking for July 2021.

### Streaming

During lockdown and afterwards our streaming of video entertainment grew from the occasional film to practically replacing terrestrial TV. Our streaming is through Amazon Prime. It includes Netflix, courtesy of X, and the Metropolitan Opera (Met). With films the key is to research what you want to watch before hooking up. Just relying on personal memory and on screen suggestions is not enough. Since the beginning of the Virus crisis we have watched over 20 feature films. We gave 5 stars to: Clint Eastwood's 'The Mule' (2018); Ella Kazan's all time classic 'On the Waterfront' (1954), starring Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, Rod Steiger, and Eve Marie

Saint in her debut, and with music composed by Leonard Bernstein; 'The Stranger' (1946) starring Orson Wells, Loretta Young and Edward G. Robinson, and directed by Orson Wells himself; 'The Secret of Henri Pick' (2019) starring Camille Cotton of 'Call My Agent' fame and Fabrice Luchini, and directed by Remi Bezancon; 'Sunset Boulevard' (1950) written and directed by Billy Wilder, and starring Gloria Swanson, Erich von Stroheim, and Nancy Olson; and 'The Truth' (2019) starring Catherine Deneuve and Juliette Binoche, and directed by Hirokazu Koreeda. With streamed TV series word of mouth, listings and media reviews help select our viewing. Streamed series that we have enjoyed so far are Call My Agent, the Bureau, Emily in Paris, Suits, Schitts Creek, & Below Deck; and through the BBC iPlayer, Normal People & Spiral.

## Opera & The Met

In April we started watching some of the daily free streams from the New York Metropolitan Opera (Met). The Met has a library of around 130 videos of its productions available for streaming. They often come with commentary and interviews with the singers and the creative team. So that we have an unrestricted choice from its library, we took out a subscription to Met on demand. So far what we have streamed includes Der Rosenkavalier, Aida, Rigoletto, Die Fledermaus, Don Giovanni, the Merry Widow, Lucretia de Lammermoor, and Tosca, From U-Tube we have seen Fidelio from the Vienna State Opera, and Eugene Onegin from the Berlin Comic Opera.

## Date Nights

Before the Virus if we were not otherwise engaged, Saturday nights were often date nights. During the Virus they have been important in pushing it out of our consciousness, having lots of hedonic fun, and being romantic. They typically start with cocktails, and odes that we compose to reflect our feelings on the subjects of the day. We compose them at the drop of a hat. Quite remarkable. Cuisine under candle light is from Chez Josephine or Chez Julian. Menus are planned and recipe books consulted to give a catholic selection of home cooked dishes. For example: on Valentine's weekend 2021, on the Saturday we had smoked salmon pate, followed by roast pheasant on a bed of vegetables with a jus of red currant jelly, followed by Mackie's vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce, all prepared by Jo, and washed down with Luberon rose and Nero d'Avila red. On the Sunday we had Wiener Schnitzel and asparagus, followed by Sacker Torte and a raspberry compote, all prepared by Julian washed down with pink champagne. Very occasionally we have used home delivery from Cook. The clearing up is done by the magic butler, Julian, and, the magic maid, Josephine. We go to the opera at the Arthur Road Opera House, see films at the Arthur Road Roxy, dance, including Viennese waltzing, at the Arthur Road ballroom and night club, and more. Each date has a dress code to ensure that we change out of our usual workaday clothes into attire fitting for the occasion: gowns for Jo, and bow ties, evening jackets and smart trousers for me. It also has a programme, adjusted as the mood takes us, to help give shape to the evening. I have to admit that our date nights are exciting, and even during the worst moments of the pandemic and the weather, we didn't stop looking forward to them.

## Curry Nights

An innovation since Christmas has been Tuesday curry nights when I indulge further my enthusiasm for cooking. The idea is that we broaden our knowledge of the curry cuisine, enjoy it, and have a much better understanding of menus in curry houses. Our principal guide is Madhur Jaffrey's 'Ultimate Curry Bible'. It was a timely Christmas present from Annie. She had intelligence that I was contemplating a move into curry. So far, we have covered some of the classic curries like lamb biryani, a marathon to produce, chicken korma, pea curry, and beef bhuna. Whilst not being such a fan of hot spicy food as me, Jo has been encouraging about my results. A surprise has been that our herbs and spices collection has been up to the curry challenge with only a few additions needed. Making a dish's underlying paste is the best part of curry preparation, so prepared ones are out.

X

At the end of June X was made redundant with a package that would pay her bills for 6 months. Despite a generally deflated and uncertain job market, here was the opportunity for her to move her career out of advertising, where she had well and truly served her apprenticeship reaching Account Director. She felt undervalued.

X accepted the challenge with alacrity and didn't waste time. With a persuasive CV, she embarked on a text book campaign using networking, head hunters and recruiters, LinkedIn and other online tools, and answering advertisements. By the end of August she was recruited by Day8, a holiday company focusing on young adults, to be its head of marketing at an enhanced salary and with her own team. Not only that, she was off to Croatia for 7 days to get acquainted with one of the company's principal products, yachting holidays and partying. This news was terrific. X really deserved her success.

J & K

At the beginning of July we were invited by J and K to visit them in Cheltenham. They were still shielding. This meant that we could only socialise in their attractive garden with social distancing, and if the weather was forecast to be bad the trip would be off. Fortunately, this didn't happen. When we arrived we found that Nigel had injured a knee and was in some pain. We sat down to lunch in the garden. To help J bring the food out I went through the open French doors into the kitchen. On the second occasion, surprisingly, J discouraged me. Shielding was being enforced.

Again in late September we were asked over to Cheltenham. Now we would be allowed to socialise in a conservatory. We agonised. We took the view that, irrespective of J & K's opinion, this could compromise her shielding, so to maintain its integrity we stayed away. We did not want to take the risk of infecting K. All rather difficult.

P

On the 30th August my cousin P died in Lewes at the age of 80. She had been suffering from Emphysema and a weak heart. Jo and I were very close to her. Fortuitously, we had been to see her 4 days before she died. We had a very jolly, and not socially distanced, lunch with her in her cottage that has an awe inspiring view of the Downs. I did feel, however, that she was a little reduced from the last time we had seen her in the early Summer.

We made the trip to Lewes again on the 17th September for P's funeral. Numbers were limited by Virus regulations. Apart from that, it was a wonderful, but sad day. The weather was warm and sunny, a mounted horse accompanied P's hearse along Lewes High Street to the Church of St Pancras. Wonderful Mozart was sung at the funeral mass just like at her wedding. For her internment, P in her coffin was taken on a pick-up truck to her grave at the East Chiltington church in the country where she grew up. Afterwards, we managed to have a good drink at the near-by Jolly Sportsman with Q, P's daughter, and others. All this had been planned by P we were told. The Virus didn't stop it. It's fair to say that if it hadn't been for the Virus forcing us to cancel a trip to Nairobi to see Jo's niece, R, and her family, we would not have seen P just before she died.

Cats: Marco & Maria

Through the Arthur Road WhatsApp group, we learnt about Hampshire Cat & Kitten Rescue run by S from her home in Headbourne Worthy. We had been through nearly six months mourning for Monti, so after a little hesitation Jo telephoned S to say that we would be happy to have 2 cats. In early June S called to say 'would we like 2 black & white kittens, one male and one female, and brother and sister?' We picked them up a couple of days later.

The kittens had been found behind shops in Eastleigh, were around 8 weeks old, pretty tiny with radiant turquoise eyes, and very frisky. We referred to them as the children, Jo came up with names: Marco & Maria. To begin with they stayed in our kitchen and were good at using the earth box. Slowly their privileges were extended to the rest of the house and the garden, and eventually free roaming including the allotments, but not the road through our front door. We took them to the vet for micro-chipping and vaccinations. They are now fully grown and boisterous as ever.

We are not the only ones in Arthur Road to become parents of S's rescues. T and U at No x gave a home to Eric and Ernie, marmalade cats, just before Marco and Maria arrived. The Virus doesn't affect cat life although the cancellation of our travel plans meant that the bonding process with Marco & Maria was not interfered with.

Jo's Art

With the less severe restrictions, in June Jo took her art students to paint en plein air in various paintable locations in and around Winchester, including Micheldever, where one of our walks had taken us. In September she re-started her art class at the rugby club with social distancing. Later in the month she took a 3 day residential oil painting course at West Deane College. With the reopening of shops, sales of

her Winchester prints through Kingsgate Prints became buoyant. On the down side commissions and sales of original paintings dried up.

### Birthdays: Meon Valley Walk & Petworth

Despite the Virus we were able to celebrate our birthdays properly. For mine on the 13th July we had a snack and a drink outside at the recently reopened Shoe Inn at Exton, and then a decent walk. We first climbed up the Downland to the West of Exton, with its vineyard on our left, to Beacon Hill with its panoramic view of the Meon Valley. Next we went North East across the Downs to Wheely Down Road where there was a working foundry. We followed the road to Warnford passing the entrance to the Hampshire Hogs cricket ground on our right. From Warnford we took a path eastwards to the Meon Valley Trail. The trail is a converted disused railway line which is hidden in a tunnel of trees. It is a very valuable community asset. We walked South along it until we reached Exton, our starting point.

For Jo's birthday we drove to Petworth where we explored its centre, had good quality sustenance at a coffee shop in East Street, visited Petworth House, and walked in its grounds. Petworth town is very unspoilt. It nestles under the high walls of the House, and somehow the A272 and A283 intersect through its market square, which is straight out of the 18th century. Petworth is still a centre for the antique trade.

The National Trust Grade I listed Petworth House, with its Capability Brown designed deer park, is one of the jewels of Sussex. It houses the art collection of the 3rd Earl of Egremont mainly in three galleries that have paintings up to their high ceilings. The collection is famous for its Turners, which we had a wonderful opportunity to see as there very few other visitors. We noted that the house had a hideous chapel, and we were disappointed that we did not get to see the principal bedrooms. Outside we explored the pleasure gardens on the North side of the house, and the deer park that spreads out to the West in front of the house. Disappointingly, we didn't see any of the largest herd of fallow deer in England.

From the car on the way home on the A272 just outside Petworth we spied the vendage in progress at the Upperton Vineyard. Parked close to the vineyard we could see a Spanish coach parked. Rather strange, until you realise that each year gangs of Spanish pickers work their way northwards as grapes ripen. Now they are reaching Sussex. We rounded the day off with dinner at the Chesil Rectory, another place where time stands still. Couldn't have been better.

### Rugby

When the Virus hit in March what remained of the season for Winchester RFC was cancelled. As rugby is very much a contact sport, social distancing prevented normal rugby for adults returning in September when the new season was meant to start. The sad truth is that no rugby was played for the rest of 2020. The Virus stopped Saturday afternoon fun and harmless emotion on the touch line, home and away, the easy camaraderie with rugby friends, and the tribal and cerebral interest in Winchester's competitive performance. The club is without its bar profits and room hire fees, so very careful stewardship is being exercised to maintain financial health.

My interest in rugby goes beyond Winchester. I am an investor in the bonds of Exeter Chiefs that give 5 1/2%. In early Autumn they won both the European and domestic club championships playing under strict anti Virus protocols. This was sufficient for me to roll over my investment and put in a bit more cash.

## Trump

On 3rd November, whilst the Virus was rampaging, the US went to the polls to elect a new president. Donald Trump, the incumbent and Republican candidate, lost to Jo Biden of the Democrats. Jo Biden received 7m more votes than Trump, and 306 votes to Trump's 232 votes in the electoral college. Trump refused to formally concede saying that the election was stolen from him by electoral fraud. Despite not being able to present any credible evidence, Trump made many legal challenges to the results that all failed. His last throw of the dice was on 6th January 2021. He incited a motley band of his supporters to take their protest to the Capitol in Washington with words that encouraged them to storm it, and interrupt the sessions of Congress that were validating Jo Biden's election. It wasn't until Jo Biden's swearing in on 20th January, and Trump's departure from the White House that we could relax. Because of his behaviour on 6th January, he is now being impeached for the second time.

Trump is a disgrace to his country. He should never have been elected in the first place, but he was. Before the onset of the Virus, it was quite possible that he would have been re-elected such was the state of US politics. Not surprisingly, he had no idea how to lead America through the pandemic. He politicised it. He gave contrary advice, berated health officials, recommended bizarre medication, blamed the Chinese, gave little support to lockdowns, and pawed scorn on the wearing of face masks despite on occasions wearing one himself. All the while the economy plunged into recession. Jo Biden, once he had become the Democratic nominee, was statesman-like from his home in Delaware. By August Jo Biden had almost a 10% lead in the opinion polls, and then won the presidency on 3rd November. Further, the final part of Trump's campaign was interrupted when he fell ill with the Virus due to his own irresponsibility. One would think that this was enough for some undecided voters to give their support to Biden. At least the Virus helped get rid of Trump.

## Cover of Darkness

During the pandemic my father's book 'Cover of Darkness' was republished on-line by Sapere Books without any interference from the Virus. During the Spring I spent a fair amount of time writing, at the request of the publisher, a short biography of Daddy for the book. Unfortunately my sisters, D & E, objected to my draft when out of courtesy I e-mailed it to them. They wrote their own very short version which I couldn't accept as what I wanted to say. Apart from that their suggestions and comments were helpful. I told them so. The biography was well received by V of Sapere and by readers. Cover of Darkness is selling well through Amazon. So far my sisters and I have benefited from 2 royalty cheques. As a result of learning about Cover of Darkness an unknown until now second cousin got in touch. Before lockdown, our last sortie to London was to go to Sapere's party in Soho.

## Mental Health

Despite the easing of lockdown, we continued to experience, like everybody else, varying degrees of uncertainty, uneasiness, unreasonableness, stress, worry, fear, anxiety, frustration, misunderstanding, desperation, depression, and social tension. These were consequences of living through the pandemic. We could only imagine what life would be like during lockdown for those living in small flats in tower blocks with young children. In short, staying sane during the pandemic was just as important as staying safe. People needed their own personal strategies to stay sane. The media put emphasis on exercise, whilst alcohol undoubtedly gave relief to many, including us as it normally does. Our response was to be as normal as possible, walk when we couldn't swim, use technology to keep in touch with family and friends when we couldn't see them, and entertain ourselves at home, especially with regular Saturday date nights and streamed TV. Staying sane did not form part of the government messaging. Being allowed out of the house to take exercise did help.

## Life Gets A Little More Normal

From July to the second Lockdown in October life under the Virus approached normality. Virus infection rates had declined. The pressure was off the hospitals. Three friends had elective surgery: an appendicitis, a gall bladder removal privately, and a heart valve replacement. Still the need for social distancing restricted group activities like live indoor theatre and parties. We were back swimming, the shops were open as were restaurants and pubs, and we could socialise inside with restricted numbers. Travel abroad was problematic, but we had hopes for a trip to Cap Ferret at the end of October. The news was that we might even have a vaccine by the end of the year. Mundane things like car servicing, dentist check-ups, tree removal, handy man maintenance, boiler servicing, the vendage (a bad year), and garbage removal all happened. Jo had lucky breaks with hairdressers, and I she cut my hair. Will I ever go back to the hairdresser?

## **7. Worries**

There were, and still are, two issues that particularly worry us. The first is the problematic performance of the government in responding to the Virus. The second is the progression of the Virus.

### **a. Government's Response to The Virus**

The government's response is exemplified by the often ridiculously bluster of the Prime Minister, regular policy U-turns, damaging tardiness in making decisions, mixed messages from a host of different government sources, and failures to deliver on promises. Important examples of the government's lack lustre performance are: testing & tracing and the associated app, education, school meals, mask wearing and international travel.

## Testing & Tracking

Testing by growing cultures in Petri dishes from swabs taken from individuals was used from when the Virus infection first appeared. Problems soon became apparent. Testing capacity was well below what was needed, the time to get results significantly reduced their usefulness, false positive and negative results were common, especially with the lateral flow testing system that was introduced to complement the Petri dish one. We were told that testing together with the tracking of potentially infected people, and having them quarantine (self-isolate) themselves were a key part of the government's strategy, so testing and tracking capacity would be increased. What this actually meant is still not clear. The performance of testing and tracking slowly improved, but fell well behind what the government promised. Even now there seems to be no clarity on who qualifies for a test. There are two fundamental flaws in the system. The first is with the idea that those exposed or were infected by the Virus would self-isolate. Self-isolation for those who could not work at home means not working and not being paid. With only sick pay to rely on this provided a very strong disincentive to self-isolate or get tested. Research shows that even when people do self-isolate only 20% do so properly. They have to buy food and take outdoor exercise, and it may be physically difficult to do so in their homes.

## The App

The second flaw is the mobile phone app, and personal reluctance to be involved with it. The app for identifying contacts of the infected failed its trial on the Isle of Wight, so the government changed course and involved Google and Apple to develop their app for use in England. The app was launched with a fanfare in the early Autumn. Little has been said as to how effective it has been. Any contribution that the app can make must be qualified by the number of people who have mobile phones turned on when they are out and about, and whether or not they wish to run the risks of engaging with the app and the tracing system it supports. I am in this category not being an active mobile phone user, and not wishing to expose myself to the Kafkaesque tracing system. I will voluntarily isolate myself if I know I have been exposed to the Virus, or when I have its symptoms. I will only engage with the medical services if I feel I am ill enough to need their help.

## School Reopening & Closing Again

Education was severely disrupted by the first lockdown. All schools were shut except for the children of essential workers. The summer's GCSE and A level exams were cancelled. Tertiary education --universities etc -- changed to on-line teaching and assessment with face-to-face teaching being suspended. The government promised that children would return to primary schools at the beginning of June. In fact only those in their first and last year's did. A further promise was made that all schools would be open for the Autumn term. This was met. On the day before all schools, colleges and universities were shut as part of the third lockdown, Mr Johnson and his education secretary, Mr Williamson, were proclaiming that they were Virus safe

and should reopen again after the Christmas holidays. Quite bewildering, but typical of the government's performance.

### Cancellation of Public Exams

The cancellation of school public exams meant other criteria would have to be used to award grades. Mr Williamson and the education authorities chose teacher assessments. These were to be moderated by an algorithm to take out the effect of assumed favourable teacher bias. The response to the published results was uproar with many students claiming they had been unfairly treated by being marked down by the algorithm. Mr Williamson had been advised that this would happen. The results were withdrawn. New results were issued based only on teacher assessments. As school public exams for Summer 2021 have been cancelled because schools have not re-opened for the Easter term, the government has given itself plenty of time to set in place a replacement system of assessment, so there shouldn't be another damaging U-turn.

### Extension of Free School Meals to the Holidays

During the summer a populist campaign, led by the Manchester United footballer Malcolm Rashford, put pressure on the government to extend the free school meals scheme for children, whose parents are on benefits, to the holidays as an anti-child poverty measure. After initially rejecting this extension to social welfare, the government predictably U-turned.

### Mask Wearing

As an infected person sprays the Virus into the air through breathing out, and infection takes place by breathing it in, reducing transmission of the Virus by wearing a mask in public makes just good commonsense. TV and media photos showed that mask wearing was de rigueur in Asia. We were told by the government that mask wearing was not effective, it would encourage wearers to break social distancing rules, and it would divert supplies from the NHS. The WHO was ambivalent on the subject. Ignoring the counter intuitive advice, we adopted mask wearing in April. As there were none for sale in the shops that remained open, we made our own as anybody could. The newspapers carried instructions on how to make them. When we used them we looked like bandits, they were uncomfortable, and as my specs misted up I had to take them off. In Tesco we had to reassure the staff that we weren't about to do a robbery. Our mask problems didn't last for long. We ordered a stock from a number of different Chinese suppliers through Amazon. Delivery took around 3 weeks as promised.

By June the government U-turned: masks should be worn in shops and on public transport. Supplies materialised, and the WHO started to encourage mask wearing. However, the messaging on mask wearing is deficient with many let outs. Undoubtedly, the idea jars with libertarians including those in the government.

### Restrictions on International Travel

Rather late in May the government introduced restriction on travellers arriving from abroad. They would have to self-isolate for two weeks. So that people could take summer holidays outside the country the restrictions were relaxed for countries where the Virus infection rate was lower than in England. In early July so-called air bridges were set up. This meant that holidays in France, Italy, Spain etc were on. By mid-August the air bridge to France was withdrawn as the Virus was taking hold again there. Many people quite understandably were forced to return home at short notice to escape quarantine by self isolation. Various schemes for testing travellers on arrival to reduce quarantine requirements were put in place since the Summer. In January 2021 all air bridges were withdrawn to reduce the risk of mutant strains of the Virus being imported.

## **b. The Progress of the Pandemic**

### 2nd National Lockdown

The second issue relates to the progress of the pandemic. When infections were down, and the national R factor was below 1, we were continually reminded that they could start rising again at any time to bring a second wave, and that we should stay safe by following the ever changing official regulations and guidelines. By September infections were on the rise in the North. To cope with this restrictions were tightened there, the government being against a further national lockdown. By the middle of the month experts were calling for a 2 week lockdown, called a 'circuit breaker', over the school half term to break the cycle of infection. This was not something the government wanted to do. Infections continued to rise, especially, in London, so by the middle of October a 2nd national lockdown was imposed. This time for 4 weeks. Schools remained open, but we had postpone 2 dinner parties and the overnight stay of two friends sine die.

Restrictions were duly eased at the end of 4 weeks, although government medical advisers expressed concerns about rising infection rates in London & the South East. At the same time the government announced that social mixing rules would be eased for 5 days over Christmas. How wise was this? There was further good news.

### Vaccine Success

On the vaccine front, we heard that Pfizer's vaccine was safe and effective, and would be put forward for approval. Spirits rose, especially when the Oxford (Astra Zeneca) vaccine was submitted for approval soon afterwards. Both vaccines were approved in December, and the programme to vaccinate the whole population started before Christmas. To get vaccine approval in under a year was stunning technological success for those responsible.

The securing of vaccine supplies for the UK was handed to a small task force headed by a biochemist turned venture capitalist, Kate Bingham. Well before vaccines were being approved orders had been placed for 367 million doses from Pfizer, AstraZeneca, Valneva, GSK, Janssen and Novavax. These suppliers had been identified by the working group as having the most promising vaccines in development. Very sensibly the country's fortunes were not going to be hazarded by

putting all its eggs in one basket. Kate was able to work outside the Whitehall machine with only a committee of four ministers authorised to sign contracts. Here the government did well by keeping itself out of all but the contract signing part of the procurement process.

### Christmas and the 3rd Lockdown

The good news about the vaccines was tempered by that of the continuing rise in infection rates. The second wave was now established with deaths rising rapidly. A week before Christmas the government restricted the easing of social mixing rules to only Christmas day. At the same time London was put in lockdown with travel restrictions out and in put in place, and more areas, including Winchester, had to close pubs, bars, restaurants and non-essential shops. We were really concerned as to how these businesses would survive, and how the livelihoods dependent on them were threatened.

On the Monday 4th January the whole country was put into full lockdown for the 3rd time. All school, college and university students were ordered to stay at home with learning to be conducted on line where they had the facilities. This didn't affect us directly, but we wondered how people coped with home schooling and the stress involved. It goes without saying that the reduction in education resulting, plus that incurred in the first lockdown, has very serious consequences for the students involved. Many won't catch up.

### Christmas Present Exchange with J

A couple of weeks before Christmas J called about exchanging Christmas presents. We were not going socially mix over the festive period to respect K's shielding. He suggested a pub near Newbery as a rendezvous. We did some research and located one near Marlborough where we could eat inside or outside. If we were to eat Nigel insisted that if it was inside it must be in a covered area that met government Virus ventilation rules. So be it. We booked for the Tuesday in Christmas week but to no avail. Our meeting had to be cancelled once the government started tightening restrictions. A pity.

### Christmas Day

Following our strategy of maximum normality we made Christmas plans. On Christmas Day we would be 7: X, D, my sister, her friend W, XX who would be staying with us, and YY. To be as safe as possible, we were to have lunch in the open under a Heath Robinson awning thrown over the wisteria covered pergola. This is attached to the side of our house's back extension. It took me a good three hours of strenuous exertion to get the awning up.

On the day, we took part of the live stream on U-tube of Christmas Mass from St Peters. That is the gospel and Fr Mark's sermon, which was pretty good being all about God. At lunch we were only 5. YY and XX felt happier staying at home with the tightening of restrictions. They missed a Christmas lunch of the highest standard prepared by Jo, lots of booz including Grange sparkling, and lots of good conversation.

X

X was with us for just under 2 weeks over Christmas. She escaped from London by car. This was after she called us to say that Y, her flatmate, might be showing signs of the Virus. Alternatively, she could be suffering from the results of drinking the night before. Exasperation. We couldn't conceive of X remaining in London for Christmas possibly on her own, so we encouraged her to get home. Anyway, X had the Virus in the early Autumn, so she would be less likely to pass it to us. We didn't really know.

### A Close Shave

Soon after X arrived she got a text message from the tracing service advising her to isolate until Christmas Day. A person in her yoga class had the Virus. Fear. Even if she didn't cook up symptoms, she could still be a carrier. On Monday morning she sought a test at the local testing station. To get the test she had to say she thought she had symptoms. She would get the result in 48 hours. Just as the 48 hours was up, she was texted a negative result. Enormous relief all round. Our closest shave yet.

### New Year's Eve

Annie was with us on New Year's Eve. We had to celebrate as best we could. New Year's Eve can be anti-climactic. When thinking about this in the middle of the night I had a brilliant idea. We would invite Arthur Road residents through the street Whats App group to open their front doors, like we had done for the NHS during the first lockdown, and sing Old Lang Syn with us. We duly did this very successfully with perhaps 40 people taking part.

## **8. The Future and What Have We Learnt**

So how do we feel about the future. We have some confidence that with vaccinations well under way here and abroad, there is now light at the end of the tunnel. At least the government says so. Certainly, the vaccine roll out in the UK by the NHS, with the assistance of the army, is going well. The initial target to vaccinate all those at high risk by mid-February has been met two days in advance. The UK is ahead of most other countries on vaccine roll out, including those in the EU where the Commission has shown ineptitude. As people-people we long for the return of seeing our friends and family as we used to before the Virus struck. WE long to shake hands, hug & kiss. We long for the return of international travel. We long for not having to treat everybody we meet as potential sources of infection. We hope that 2021 will be a year of reducing restrictions and trips abroad will become possible again.

Of course, many normal things have gone on hardly disturbed or enhanced: our reading, my writing, Jo's art, our vineyard and wine making, our allotment, the annual

tax cycle, house management and tasks, my cooking enthusiasm, DIY, car servicing, learning IT, and tidying up to name but a few. And our bank accounts have never had it so good. Reduced spending means bank balances grow.

What's Important?

Adaptability

The lockdowns and the pandemic have demonstrated the important part concern for our immediate family and friends, socialising, trips abroad, and exercise play in our lives. On the social side our own neighbourhood in Arthur Road has become much closer, something to value. Throughout the country communities have become closer. We have shown to be adaptable in the face of adversity. We have substituted walking for swimming. As a result we have at last properly experienced the glorious countryside that surrounds Winchester. The opportunity we had to work on the allotment did not bear fruit in the way we had hoped. I expect a lot more work was needed, and our lack of basic horticultural knowledge held us back. At least for the coming season, we are in better position than we would have been in if the Virus hadn't hit.

Technology

We use the internet to socialise, imperfectly, to shop intensively, and to conduct business wherever possible. We love parcels and opening them. Our explosive use of the internet, together with the speed at which vaccines have been developed, emphasises the important role technology plays in our lives, and the potential it has for improving them. The pandemic has accelerated inevitable change, especially for the traditional high street, and in the location of work with many working at home. As the use of cash is seen as a source of Virus transmission, electronic payments are now the norm.

Freedom and Democracy

The pandemic brought with it the withdrawal of many aspects of our freedom to socialise, travel, exercise and to shop. This was accomplished by the government issuing orders that were backed by new law. It was needed to prevent the Virus from over running the NHS, and to protect the community from infection. Democratic parliamentary accountability was muted. Populist authoritarianism was on the march for the greater good. Amongst MPs, it was only Tory backbenchers who exercised any check on the government. With the Labour Party recovering from the Corbyn era and Kier Starmer biding his time, it had little impact on what the government did. With the exception of the Queen through her TV address in April, the great & the good seemed remarkably silent. The media, however, found the pandemic full of material for stories that no doubt impacted the government.

To begin with the high public compliance with lockdown is said to have surprised the government. Research shows that the public favours strong measure. As the normality returns, the curtailments to freedom that we have endured must end. If it doesn't the pandemic would have pushed us along the path that leads to fascism.

## To Lockdown or Not

The lockdown policy raises the question of intergenerational equity. Whilst lockdown reduces the spread of infection, this is much more important to the high risk groups, mainly those who are nearing the end of their lives, than to the young, that is children, students, and adults up to middle age. Lockdown policy has had a very damaging effect on education, the economy, far worse than, and in addition to Brexit. It is adding at least £400 bn to the national debt. These adverse effects will reduce the standard of living and increase poverty, and the effect will be greater the younger you are. Conscious of the inter generational equity issue Jonathan Sumption, a retired Supreme Court judge, argues that an alternative to lockdown policy should be effective shielding for those in the high risk group, who wished to do so, and let the rest of us live normal lives with herd immunity building up. The longer lockdown policy continues the greater will be the cost. Sumption's proposal, and the reasoning behind it, demonstrate how important the current vaccination programme is. Without it, the argument for his alternative to lockdown would get stronger.

## The Government's Performance

It is in the area of government that lessons from the pandemic must be learnt and acted on. Political leadership is not dithering or messaging by bluster. Serious deficiencies have appeared in preparedness, government communications to the public, and in the execution of decisions through the public sector. Yet again the civil service, with its bureaucratic imperative, has been deficient in execution. It may be good at policy development, but it lacks doers and the capacity to get things done. If Tesco can feed us, Netflix entertain us, and Amazon look after many of our shopping needs, why has the government been so inept in much of its pandemic response. Why is the UK's Virus death rate per head of population the highest in the world? Dithering and mixed messaging from the government throughout the pandemic has pushed up the death toll, and increased public scepticism and lowered moral.

There are two exceptions to the government's incompetence. The first is the Treasury's performance in putting in place and delivering efficiently economic support measures, and in arranging the necessary funding by public borrowing amounting to at least £400 billion. The politically charged question of who pays is left for the future. The second is the procurement of vaccine supplies in which there was minimum Whitehall involvement, and in their roll out by the NHS assisted by the army.

One of the roles of the modern state is to provide its citizens with personal security. Historically, this covered defence, and the upholding of the criminal law through the police, courts, and punishment. In the 19th and 20th centuries this role widened into health to the extent that today the state provides, directly or indirectly, a significant part the medical services for most citizens including public health. The government, is the agent of the state, and thus is controlled by political processes. For this reason, the managing the pandemic in England was inevitably affected by political considerations, exemplified in dithering and lack of leadership, and government ineffectiveness due to bureaucracy and the lack of doers. The development of vaccines and their role out shows what can be done. Some will argue that the government's performance is the price we pay for our democratic political system.

No doubt having a leader rather than Johnson as Prime Minister would have helped. However, other democracies, in particular Germany, have done better than England. Lessons from their experience need to be recognised and applied in future pandemics.

For those who needed to go to hospital, the NHS and its staff have done a heroic job in the face of politically determined resource limitations and the lack of planning. Our thanks go to them, but also especially to the staff at Tesco, Amazon and St Swithun's swimming pool, who have done so much to keep our lives going and making them tolerable..

The Virus has killed many. For the rest, it is an existential shock which will end. The question is when. Hopefully, a bit sooner now with arrival of vaccines whose development has been a fantastic scientific achievement. Our experience in the pandemic tells us that we must be patient.

Julian Chisholm

***(6 April 2021)***