

Archive of past posts

November 2020

Looking back on November is a little tricky ... not much happened. We were put into "Tier 3", the highest tier of Covid-19 control, not because of the infection rates in Durham but because Newcastle and its surrounding boroughs were high and to London we're all the same. Then from November 5th we were put into a form of Lockdown, but schools and most shops stayed open and everyone kept going to work. The only thing that changed was that restaurants and pubs closed. During the day and early evening everything was normal – traffic levels were high and the only way of telling anything had changed was that more people wore masks. Evenings were quieter, but only a bit. After that we went back into Tier 3 which meant that schools and shops stayed open and everyone kept going to work. It was hard to tell. However, the Government announced that we'd be allowed to mingle over Christmas, although that was largely because people would have done it anyway so we got the worst form of regulation where rules follow practice! It'll inevitably cause a surge in infection in the New Year, but there you go. At least it looks like there might be a vaccine.

All the while the courts stayed open (albeit with controls and variation), we continued remote interviewing and most meetings were on Zoom, Teams or WebEx. Not much changed! Hannah's schools stayed largely Covid-free so her teaching practice wasn't disturbed much.

Tara was upset by the five days of Guy Fawkes night! Not surprising – we were too! Bangs, whistles and flashes started on 4th (the evening before lockdown) and went on until 8th. The amount of money that people spent must have been significant. We think it's about time the Government stopped the sale of explosives to the general public. It wasn't a nice period – a panic stricken dog is not very nice for anyone. However we found the wonders of valerian and skullcap tablets (which sounds like something from Game of Thrones) and now refer to them as "Tara's Valium". They helped enormously although a spaced out hound can be fun to watch!

We made use of the PawsPlay facility a few times, which Tara loves. However, she rarely manages the full 50 minutes without getting flaked out so we will start to take a picnic with us next month – it's a nice spot for a picnic and there are never any other dogs around!

October 2020

October saw a return to something like normality. Everyone pretty much got on with their lives (although that was set to bite us later). Judicial sittings were normal-ish (with only two on the bench), and meetings settled into the new normal of Zoom/Teams/Skype/whatever. We've realised that something is missing from these, so although they are cheaper (no expenses) and quicker (no travel), they miss that important chatter before and after, where a lot of important work was done. That work now isn't being done and a kind of malaise is creeping in to things. That may well get worse before it gets better.

Ian "attended" an RSGB conference via Zoom, which was excellent, worked brilliantly and which he thoroughly enjoyed and he also "attended" a talk streamed from the Gairloch

Museum which was great, too. He would not have been able to attend these in person, so were a huge bonus offered by the pandemic response.

We're also noticing that the communication of efficient and effective companies is doing better than before – they have instigated technological solutions really well so that staff can work from home properly, having phone calls diverted to them, being able to access their office systems and using the last six months to employ more staff to cover the shortfall due to illness. Less efficient companies are still talking about the effect that the “coronavirus pandemic” (a phrase they use as a kind of trump card) is having on them as an excuse for poor communication and awful customer service. We assume that as we go on, these less efficient companies are the ones that will fall by the wayside.

We squeezed in a trip to the caravan in the highlands, which we'd like to say was lovely but it was plagued with heavy rain and strong winds! Tara had a great time, though, and is now not so fazed by such weather! A high point this month was finding a fantastic secure dog-exercise field where we can let her off the lead and she can run free. Lovely!

September 2020

September was an interesting and busy month for us all ... it came as a bit of a shock after the last few months of comparative leisure.

Lois went to Denmark to follow up on her research project into her forebears. Denmark was on the list of places that didn't require quarantine after a visit, which was great ... and controls for Scotland and the North-East hadn't been put in. It was a short window of opportunity which opened just right for her. She had a great time and more details are included in the travel blog you can access from the “Adventures” link in the menu.

Hannah started her teacher training course. She'd already visited the school but this was the start of her course itself. Lots of administration to start with, of course, and then down to real work. She is having a whale of a time and thoroughly enjoying things so far.

We got up to the caravan for a lovely week, mid-September. Although it did rain a lot! (Maybe the location suggests we should expect that.) We hadn't been for a long time for various reasons, so it was great to get back up there. We had ought Tara a grand new cage to sleep in – somewhere larger – and she found that very good.

Lots of Court sittings, of course, and remote work too ... we're all getting used to this way of working which we find very satisfactory. But on top of all that, Ian got into school as a Governor, being very careful but seeing the way in which education can flourish in a COVID-safe environment. It was super to see the students being responsible and following the rules properly – for them it's just the way to do things, so they do!

August 2020

August saw a return to something close to normality. Traffic was pretty much back to normal and apart from wearing masks in them, shops were back to normal too. Tesco deliveries were easily available and there was little or no queuing outside. In terms of our activities, that was pretty much back to normal too, with judicial sittings returning to normal

(but only two on the bench, not three, and more work being done over video systems) and Lois taking part in some medical research too.

Following the submission of her PhD thesis, Hannah had a lovely week in Edinburgh in the caravan; we had managed to get a booking during what would have been Festival time between everyone cancelling their bookings but before they rebooked! The site ended up full to capacity, but there was a two-day window when bookings were easy ... and we caught it. We took her there, dropped the caravan off and then left her there ... with the reverse at the end of the week. All worked well and apart from a couple of days of rain it worked brilliantly. Edinburgh was odd without the throngs of people who would normally be there for the Festivals and the Fringe ... but maybe that's not such a bad thing since it was getting a bit silly in terms of overcrowding and overcharging. We also got dental appointments!

The high point, apart of course from the PhD submission, was that Ian became the first chair in the country of a panel recommending a new magistrate after a remote interview. Exciting, and the rest of the country will now learn from our experience.

Tara has had a great month, developing her own ways and enjoying the opportunities to see a bit more of people around the place. She is still a bit nervous around new people (I think we've all found it a bit odd, actually) but that is disappearing.

July 2020

Lockdown was relaxed as the month began. Actually, in practice, it relaxed rather more than was intended ... it looked like everyone pretty much got back to normal. In England anyway – Scotland was a bit more careful and things reopened rather more slowly there and as a result, people took things a bit more seriously. Here, people just got back to their business, congregating in huge numbers as the seaside and following football matches where they also managed to deposit a huge amount of litter; I suppose if someone disregards a social distancing rules, they will also disregard littering rules. Traffic noise pretty much got back to normal. And Ian and Hannah had visits to the hairdressers!!!

Ian had a terrific “big Zoom session” as an old school reunion, which was great fun. Hannah also visited the school where she'll be undertaking the majority of her teacher training course next year and came back full of excitement and wanting to get on with it NOW!!

Travel, as we said, was getting back to normal and so we were able to go across to Runcorn for a funeral of one of Lois' distant cousins and we were able to have a lovely post-interment lunchtime meeting with a large number of her family. It was very nice to congregate in groups again – although we both found it a little overwhelming to start with. Then we got to revisit the caravan – Scotland lifted its ban on tourist travel. Mind you, most of the motorhomes in England also came up the A9! It was nice to get back up there for a while, although the weather was awful and so were the midges. Having said that, we managed a couple of nice walks that included the a beach which was quite crowded ... 5 or 6 people were there (see photo above). Tara got introduced to the sea by doing a bit of paddling but wasn't really impressed. She was very intrigued by the sea and its sparkly bits, though! Once we got home, it was all hands to the pumps to prepare the tourer for Hannah's forthcoming trip to Edinburgh ... but more of that later.

We spent a lovely afternoon attending a "socially distanced social event" at HoG near Hartlepool. It was a get-together organised by Lois for the Trustees in the hospital grounds. It was the first time we had attended any sort of big get-together for many months and felt a bit odd; very pleasant, just odd! We had to keep well away from the buildings of course and over 2 metres from each other, so there was quite a lot of shouting. . . and there wasn't any drink (or toilets) but apart from that it was great. It was actually a highly successful and enjoyable event!

Thanks for the nice comments about the "family roo" video.

June 2020

As we entered our fourth month of lockdown, June was an interesting month of contrasts. We had to cancel a lot, but also did some extras that we wouldn't have done otherwise. The cancellations included our long planned for trip to Devon to try out Mike Green's stone-circle solstice calculator – a stone circle in a field in Devon. We mentioned it in the travel blog at the time. We booked a cottage a year ago. . . cancelled it as a result of COVID-19. . . and rebooked for next year. More positively, we held a fantastic Tarot exchange over Zoom, including a breakout "room" for the readings themselves. We're getting good at this videolink stuff! The Sunderland Faculty of Education and Society wouldn't let viruses get in the way of their research conference and continued it – very successfully – over MS Teams. And court sittings kind of resumed, although they were different and sometimes over Skype for Business. The weather was lovely at the start of the month and we got some great barbecues in. . . although it then turned to winter weather! We had an anti-Christmas dinner ("anti" in the sense of opposite rather than against) on 25th June, including a Christmas tree, beef from Campbell's with all the trimmings and we were even allowed a guest! Even more positively, Ian took an on-line course in amateur radio (something he's wanted to do since he was 14), took the examination on video and passed so he's now a licensed radio amateur (callsign M7IGN). He is dead chuffed and is now learning Morse code!

Last month we included the throwaway remark 'We even have a "family roo" on most days.' and as a result we've been asked "What on earth is a family roo, when it's at home?" Well, rooing is a bit like a howl that some greyhounds use to let everyone know they're there. The pose is a full-on "howling-at-the-moon-nose-in-the-air-and-neck-fully-extended" look. And the sound is lovely. With Tara, the tail is wagging like mad. She (and we) love doing it together, hence the family roo remark, and we can start it off by one of us rooing ourselves so that everyone joins in. It's a remarkable noise. . . goodness know what it sounds like outside, mind you!

May 2020

May was. . . well, May really. The weather crashed from arctic to sweltering and then back again. We took advantage of the warmer bits by having several barbecues which got us out of the house. . . albeit only onto the deck!

We got on with our third month of lockdown, although there were some minor adjustments. We all got used to a wide variety of videoconferencing platforms. Our

preference remains with Zoom - it being, in our experience, the best functionally, the most reliable and easiest to use - but we've also had to cope with MSTeams, Skype, Skype for Business and Webex, all of which are different in their setup and operation, all behave differently and all have their idiosyncrasies. We've learned that running two video sessions simultaneously across our broadband is only JUST possible and not while a Netflix stream is also going on. However, we've also found how to share a connection on one PC between broadband and mobile data which solves the problem. It went through bizarre fun to just "what we do".

Hannah had a super birthday given the circumstances, having a couple of Zoom sessions with various groups as well as a pizza meal including Ben who joined us virtually – picture above. We think she deserves a proper party some time. . when we can! Tara perfected her stair work and can now run up and down with some panache whenever she wants to! She has got into the habit of wandering up to the landing when she wants a bit quiet time or to check out what's happening next door or across the road, taking advantage of a high vantage point and floor-length windows! No fools, these greyhounds. She really is part of the family now – or is it that we are part of her pack – and is becoming a champion member either way. We even have a "family roo" on most days.

We took advantage of the variations in rules by going for a picnic during the warmer part of the month, which was just lovely! And Hannah had a properly socially distanced meeting with Ben.

April 2020

April. . well, what a month that was! We all learned a new way of living. For archive purposes: we all had to stay in our homes except for specific designated activities (shopping, exercise, medical, key working). For us, we got into a routine pretty quickly – Hannah did Tara's morning walk as exercise for both of them followed by a bit of yoga or a workout for Hannah before breakfast. We had a quiz session after our family breakfast to get the brains going. Lois and Ian did either a long walk early afternoon or later in the evening with Tara, depending on the weather, and we went shopping when we had to. The evenings, we have to admit, have been taken up utilising our Netflix and Amazon Prime subscriptions, BBC iPlayer and so on. Any platform where we can avoid interminable adverts, really!

Shopping was interesting – while we are not vulnerable, we fall into the "at risk" category so are trying not to go to places where other people are. . as we've been advised – the government has asked us to use home deliveries whenever we could. However, Tesco were completely overwhelmed and their home deliveries and click and collect were simply unavailable a month ahead. This appeared to be so right across the country. They didn't give any information or any help. . availability simply stopped. Morrison's and Iceland kept going pretty well with a much better web portal than Tesco, as did Sainsbury's - and Lidl were fantastic. Our concern has been that if we had to isolate for a fortnight, we couldn't have eaten! But Morrison's and Lidl, between them, came up with the goods – literally. Loo rolls became available as the month went on as did pasta, both of which were simply unavailable for the first half of the month.

What are the up-sides of our month, then? We had planned to go up to the Highlands for Easter, but that wasn't within the rules so we didn't; so we had a lovely Easter at home. . . the supermarkets near to home having a surfeit of chocolate eggs! We also had a couple of barbecues when it was warm (Lidl did well for those) but apart from those days we were in an arctic airstream (literally) and it was cold. Above all, though, it was quiet – it still is. Lovely and quiet! It's quieter than our Highland retreat now! Very few cars go by and going for walks has been lovely; indeed we have found some beautiful places to walk close to home (see above right). Brandon Woods, for example. . . we didn't even know that they existed before and they offer some fantastic walks in near solitude! There are also lots of open spaces – grassed, lit and maintained by the Council. . . wonderful. The air itself is fresher and cleaner than we've ever known. . . and the clarity of views is fantastic too. It just shows the crap that we pump into the air normally.

Oh, and Tara has learned to go up and down stairs. She sounds a bit like a drunkard coming down, but greyhounds are hardly built for stairs!

Perhaps the most uplifting of all the activity going on at this peculiar time is the “clap for our carers” on Thursday evenings at 8:00. We took part in them – from a high platform on the deck in the garden so that we could see over the hedge. At first we felt a little guilty at our surprise of the enthusiasm of the people of Brandon, but then felt quite emotional at the solidarity of the support for those who are in the “front line”. We haven't used pots and pans to make more noise yet (as some do) – we'll keep that for next month.

Towards the middle of the month came the news that the lockdown would continue for another three weeks at least – no surprise there. Settle in.

March 2020

WOW! Well, how things have changed since last month. And it's all happened since the latter half of March. For those reading this as an archive - Covid-19 hit the UK hard and serious controls had to be put into place. Around the middle of the month, the government gave strong advice to everyone to stay indoors and not congregate. That was just before a nice weekend when everyone went to Snowdon and Ben Nevis, thus congregating. People went to pubs, some restaurants stayed open. It was exactly what one might have come to expect, really. On top of all that, lots of people with camper vans tried to go to Scotland to isolate and one story had it that 30 such vans turned up at the Ben Nevis visitor centre car park (where there are no facilities) demanding to stay there; police were called and it was all a bit messy. So the government had to get heavy, putting out a direction, rather than advice, that we all had to stay indoors apart from very specific listed reasons. Schools closed, clubs, pubs and restaurants closed, and so on. This was all backed up by law which was hurried in.

For us, we settled in to a routine which included outings for only getting groceries and exercise (which included Tara of course). The huge news was that we managed to get some toilet roll on Friday 27th March! The first available for weeks. We still don't know why everyone panic bought toilet roll - Covid-19 causes neither diarrhoea nor sneezing - but the nation ran out. We're a funny bunch aren't we! The joke of each morning saying in a Geordie accent "Day 4 of lockdown in the house" quickly became stale. Two interesting

things struck us. First, just how quiet it is without traffic. Round here rivals the Highlands for quietness now. The loudest thing is the birdsong! Some would regard it as spooky or even scary - we think it's the silver lining of all this. The other is the lack of sociability. We understand the social distance requirement but we hadn't expected people that we see on our daily exercise walk to avoid eye contact or any greeting! That's a bit odd and maybe will settle down as we all get used to this strange way of living.

But, in common with just about every other monthly update since we began them, this month we had some work done (and like just about every previous report, it was the last bit of work to be done). This was to streamline the garage storage. Ian of ISWORX got it done just before the lockdown and it looks fabulous!

January/February 2020

After the rigours of Christmas and New Year (which in fact were not all that rigorous at all), January and February have been much quieter. The high point was a trip to the Highlands, a Travelodge stay. Full details about that on the Travel Blog in "Adventures". Apart from that, it's been very quiet indeed. . apart from us having incorporating our open stairs closed in. Ian from ISWORX did a great job as always. Picture below. . We had our birthdays too, which was nice. February was even quieter. . looking back I think we kind of hibernated! One point of mention is that Hannah found that her role with Orangebus/Capita was not as billed. . it was market research rather than product research! Not even close to her desired career pathway, so they parted company (amicably). She's now decided to follow mum and dad's footsteps and go into teaching and in the meantime is concentrating full time on her PhD writeup; as a result it's going very well indeed now. She has also started working p/t as an intern at the UTC which is really great experience for her and is retaining her role as a STEM ambassador at the UTC in Newcastle. All very good indeed and she is looking forward hugely to getting under way with her new career direction.

December 2019

Looking back on December to summarise it for you is quite tough ... because not very much happened, really! A glance through our diaries shows that Lois and Ian spent nearly every day doing some sort of voluntary work ... Hospital Trustees, Research Groups, Patient Groups, Judicial work, Advisory Committee stuff and so on. It was, depending on how you look at it, either a mad week or one that showed a marked lack of diary control! Hannah continued with her job – which has now graduated away from "new job" to just "job" as she settles in to professional life and the joys of commuting and, towards the end of the month, a Tyne & Wear Metro strike which was carefully timed to hit end-of-year festivities as well as a key NUFC football match. Season's Greetings to the RMT!

More positively, Tara gained Kennel Club recognition as Flomur Tara, her "posh Sunday name" after a protracted email discussion between Ian and the KC followed by a really, really helpful telephone call with Lesley from the Club who painstakingly and with enormous patience talked Ian through a whole new world of terminology including "sires" and "dams" which previously he had thought were about mediaeval kings and irrigation control, and "stud book" which is a phrase not well served by Google searches! It's a long time since Ian was fazed by terminology and he found it refreshing ... or maybe another word. Also, the Christmas food started to arrive ... by van from Tesco, another van from Iceland and a

courier also in a van from Campbell's Meat in Linlithgow. Might've overdone it a bit ... indeed we had to nip out and buy another freezer to accommodate everything.

We also went to see "A Jazzy Christmas" at the Sage which careful readers will remember we saw last year. We'd booked the tickets in the "BT era" (ie Before Tara) and were now a bit stuck because she's not yet confident enough in us to be left for several hours ... not without us (although probably not her) "worrying". However, Hannah and Ben volunteered to look after her while we gallivanted. And we had a fabulous time. And then there was the Strictly final ...

Christmas itself was wonderful – mostly food orientated of course – but terrific. We all had a brilliant time and Ian got a pie in a tin for Christmas. Nuff said!

November 2019

November was a nice, quiet month (for a change!) We have been enjoying getting to know Tara and she us. We have established a reasonable routine, now, which makes for an easier life for us all. Hounds like routine, we find, and Tara is no different. She goes to bed and sleeps through without hassle and, like us, doesn't really like getting up in the morning especially when it's cold ... and certainly not when it's raining. She enjoys her walks on a set route for morning, afternoon and evening "pee and poo" sessions. She also loves going for rides in the car and we have had a couple of lovely visits to the Greyhound Trust people one of which was their Christmas Fayre at Hardwick Park. We have also had a super session at home with Vicky from Have a Good Dog (www.haveagooddog.co.uk) who started us on basic training (in fairness, it really was us rather than Tara who needed training). Vicky really was great and we got a proper set of notes, handouts and references as part of the fee, as well as a very enjoyable session. Thoroughly recommended.

There is now a link in the menu on the left for Tara's background data including her pedigree and race results before she retired. And some photos too.

Apart from that, the month has seen a lot of interviewing for new JPs – Durham & Cleveland are right in the middle of a recruitment campaign at the moment and we've also had a couple of excellent events at the University. And Ian had a very enjoyable "black tie" dinner at the UTC to launch their new STEM initiative.

So all in all a very pleasant month with enough interesting things but a lot of enjoyable stuff going on too.

Oh, and the Christmas trees are up ... in November! I know!!

October 2019

Well, what a month October has been! We had the last bits of the new kitchen fitted and the decorating more or less done. In amongst that, Lois had a few days on holiday in London, visiting her family and catching up on some of the genealogy stuff she's been working on. We got the rubbish removed from the old kitchen (a truck full) and the old but still good fridge and freezer as well as a whole lot of other superfluous stuff went to the BHF charity shop. Later in the month, Ian did a quick run up to the North West Highlands!

Alongside all that we attended an excellent Lieutenancy dinner and got on with our usual Judicial business; so all in all a very packed month!

But we know you don't want to hear about any of that! You want to hear about Tara don't you! It's a while since we had someone in the household that needed lots of care and attention - 25 years, in fact! Rescuing a greyhound is remarkably similar to having a baby! September saw Tara settle in, understand what a house is, what stairs were and what a Hoover is like. October has been much more about getting her into routines to that she feels comfortable as a new member of the family. What they say about a couple of hours' snooze for each half-hour walk is about right and we have found some lovely routes round about that keep us clear of the main roads. We have been pleasantly surprised by the amount of green space there is around here – loads of it. All of which makes for a wonderful smellscape to be created for a hound. We daren't let her off her lead, though. . she finds rabbits very attractive and will go for magpies like a shot; well, she did race at Sunderland after all (that's a local joke). But other dogs rattle her. . unless they are other greyhounds. We attended the monthly Sunday walk organised by the Darlington Greyhound Trust where she linked up with some of her old friends and we made some new ones!

September 2019

September was dominated by the arrival of Tara. But that wasn't the only thing that happened, so before we tell you about Tara, here are the other highlights.

We spent a wonderful week in Shetland. We've done Orkney before, so wanted to go a little further afield and do the northernmost extremity of the UK. Details are in the travel blog, of course, which you can access from the Adventures link in the menu on the left or by clicking [here](#).

On our return, we prepared for a lunch to which we invited some friends. It turned into quite a big "do" with about 20 people coming. We'd originally envisaged it being a barbecue but the weather was a little unkind to us - maybe not a surprise for mid-September, but annoying nevertheless. Instead we did a roast dinner (beef, lamb, pork, chicken, salmon and a veggie option too). It seemed to go down well and we had a very relaxed afternoon eating, drinking and chatting; it was very pleasant. In parallel, we had emptied the kitchen because, yes although we'd said we had finished the renovations for now, we got an excellent deal on a new kitchen so went for it. Not great timing, but. !

Alongside all that was the arrival of Tara who we adopted on 12th September. Tara is a four year old ex-racing greyhound, rescued by the Greyhound Trust at Darlington. Tara's first race was on 21st July 2017 in Kilkenny, Ireland and she raced 5 times before coming to the UK. Since she was trained in Ireland she has an identification tattoo in both ears. She raced at Sunderland 48 times from 8th September 2017 to her final race on 30th June 2019, winning six times. Unfortunately (or maybe fortunately for her) she wasn't all that good at keeping to her lane as she raced and there are numerous notes in her record about bumping which means that she bumped into the dog running beside her or crowded them – she didn't balk them, which would have meant that she interfered with them, she just wandered a bit. She also has notes about being slow away and running on. In other words,

she wasn't a very good racing greyhound which presumably is why she went for adoption at quite a young age.

She's still settling in to life here - we've had a few sleepless nights and some "accidents" too, but things are improving by the day as she learns to trust us and enjoy her new life with us.

August 2019

August has been a month of getting on with life, really. There have only been a couple of excitements! We have both been settling in to our volunteering, catching up somewhat on things that have drifted by. For once we didn't do much in the way of holiday. . we didn't need to because we can go any time (did I mention we're retired). And anyway, Scotland is currently sinking under the sheer number of camper vans on its roads - best to stay away unless you have a camper van of your own. We nipped up to Edinburgh to collect Hannah from university - for probably the last time. We've done this for seven years, what with her first degree then her PhD, and it was a bit of a "lump in the throat moment" to drive away after we'd loaded up. We'd intended to have a "final breakfast" at Frankie and Benny's in Fountain Park, but they don't open until 9:00 and we were ready to leave at 8:10, so we went to McDonalds in Berwick-upon-Tweed instead which was very nice and a fitting "full stop" - or maybe a semi-colon - in Hannah's educational journey. Next month she starts her first full time job!

We spent a few days up at the caravan, which alternated between very hot and pouring rain on what seemed like an almost hourly basis, but which was actually only daily. The key entertainment was watching the croft owners using a mini-digger to remove rhododendron bushes (which are weeds up there). It ranks alongside "Bones" in entertainment value. Ian also had some work with UHI so than necessitated a trip to Inverness which is never a hardship.

We've kept the big new until last, though. You'll recall we we're considering adopting a rescue dog and we have spent a good deal of time in July and August visiting rescue centres, seeing all kinds of dog (often embodied in one animal). After a lot of thinking, an interview, a home visit and a great deal of reading around the subject, we have reserved Tara - pictured above with Hannah - who will join us in September. We'll begin yet another chapter of our history as a family. . and we'll tell you all about it here.

July 2019

Last month I promised to tell you about the photograph of the Forth Bridges, above. Well, here you go!

In February 2015, Lois was in Scotland visiting Hannah in Edinburgh and decided to drop in to South Queensferry to see if she could find out about the building of the Forth Replacement Crossing, as it was called then. Construction had been going on since 2011 and it was due to open in 2016, so it was close to opening around the time of Ian's 60th birthday, she thought. Something linked to the bridge, like a visit to an exhibition about the construction might make a suitable additional birthday event. While wandering along the narrow road through South Queensferry and admiring the existing bridges that reached so high she spotted a small shop and studio on the High Street called Words & Pictures. Along

with wedding and family portraits there was a nice print of the Forth Bridge and the Forth Road Bridge, plus another photograph of local architecture. These took her eye and she called in. She met Alistair Pryde, the studio owner and chatted with him. Between them a plan was hatched that involved a commissioned photograph of the three Forth bridges, to be taken once the new crossing had been completed. This was agreed and then the wait for the perfect shot began.

Alistair quickly realised, based on our brief and his creative knowledge, that a night-time photograph would be best, but even after the formal opening by The Queen the work on the bridge was still going on. There were overnight lane closures (with all the orange flashing lights necessary for those) and the bridge's own lighting design was still under discussion so was not yet in place. Furthermore, there were still lots of construction paraphernalia on the bridge – portacabins, plastic sheeting and so on. It didn't make for a good photograph, so we waited ... sort of patiently. It wasn't until November 2018 that the works were finally completed and the construction paraphernalia cleared away. So Alistair had not been able to take advantage of the autumnal light which he favoured. Meanwhile he had been hunting around to select the best spot from which to take the picture. We waited for further news. The winter weather, however, was very poor which led to more delay. January 2019 Alistair had chosen the perfect location, but now faced another problem. The newly installed lighting to complete the bridge was an issue. Alistair wrote: "The lighting on the Queensferry Crossing continues to frustrate us because it is so much more intense than the lighting on the other two. So shooting at dusk is the solution to this dilemma and will give us the contrast that Ian wants, and will look spectacular in black and white."

On 9 July 2019, we collected the print!

The picture hangs on the end wall of our dining room, alone and spectacular. The causeway in the foreground takes you as you walk into the room from the other end and leads you forward into the picture. On the left is the new Queensferry Crossing, to the right is the Forth Road Bridge. Look beneath the Road Bridge and you can see the Forth Bridge.

Apart from the picture (which obviously took over the month, really) we've fitted in another couple of things. Ian had a very enjoyable couple of days at UHI sitting on their assessment boards. Always very good discussion and an excellent group of people. He also had a day at the University of Sunderland Graduations - it's always lovely to see the students crossing the stage.