Last year, in our Christmas Letter, we referred to our forthcoming trip to Australia. This proved a memorable experience. We arrived into a very hot Perth on December 8th and within a couple of days were winding our way eastwards across the Nullarbor Desert, towards Adelaide, on the Indian Pacific. This 3 day train journey was all we had hoped. We met and enjoyed the company of many other travellers. In Adelaide, we were hosted by Nicky, Ben’s friend from his 2004 Australian gap year. We enjoyed her company and that of her flat mate Ashley. We spent a wonderful evening with them on one of Adelaide’s beaches, toured the Adelaide Hills and mingled with the Koalas, that roam freely in that area. During our stay, we were entertained, by Ben’s cousin Neil and wife Ingrid, to a sumptuous meal at the Penfold Wine Estate. We hired a car and drove along the great Ocean Road to Melbourne and took the night ferry over the Bass Strait to Tasmania. Here we enjoyed the company and rustic hospitality of our ‘Australian’ family, attending the boy’s end of term assemblies, taking them to Paddington 2 (just released in this remote region !) and sharing a memorable Christmas day, by a blazing BBQ. Rob, Shelley and the three boys took us out and about. We climbed ‘the Nut’ (almost a miniature Ayers Rock) by the coast, at Stanley, and visited some dense forested areas. During one of the forest expeditions one of the boys shouted he had seen a ‘copperhead’ which saw Peter pick up a sturdy stick and head straight for the nearest tarmac path! We saw in 2018 with them, as guests of one of their friends, in the garden of her lovely old dutch styled house that bordered the River Forth.

Although 2018 has not seen us travel around as much as the previous year, it has been one of varied activities and drama ! At Easter, we flew over to Guernsey to spend the weekend with Peter’s cousin Ruth and husband Andy. The weather was a little wet on arrival but improved to allow us to get out and about and on Easter day walk along the stunning coastline and take in lunch by the sea.

Much of April and May was taken up with Ben perfecting his recording of his great grandfather’s memoirs (see below) and preparing for the family event of the year- Ben’s sister’s wedding which was scheduled for June 23rd. Ben organised a photographic display (as we had for our own partnership in 2012) and received many contributions from family and friends in order to do this. Peter organised a quiz for the tables. There was also clothing to sort and both of us bought trousers to match the groom, ‘bestmen’ and ushers. When Peter was confronted with what Aled had chosen he said ‘I’ll never get into or look good in slim line’ but in the event I think we both looked fine.

It was with some shock, we learned that Ben’s dad had had a stroke the week before the wedding and of course all rushed over to Stoke on Trent hospital that day. Although it meant a week or so in hospital and convalescence he did get to the wedding, walked Ellie on the day and has made great progress in recovery since.

June 23rd was about the third week into the UK’s hot summer and that Saturday was hot! Ellie and Aled had chosen to be married in a lovely walled garden, near Stafford, and the ceremony was in a glass house bordering the wall. Need I say more. The groom sweated, the registrar sweated, orders of service were frantically waved but there were no faints and it all was a great success complimented further by an excellent reception, inspiring speeches, a traditional South African braii and lively live band.

One of the planned events we missed, due to Tony’s hospitalisation and convalescence, was a trip to Cornwall, to the launch of an exhibition for which Ben had recorded extracts from his great grandfather’s memoirs. Fortunately, two of his cousins, who we had planned to meet with there, were still able to go and they reported back to us on the event. Last month, we heard from the exhibition organiser, that a website will to go live in Spring 2019, which features Ben’s recording. We also received a copy of a book published about the Trengwainton Estate which contains extracts from the memoirs and a very distinguished photo of Ben himself ! To learn more about William Cooper and hear Ben go to [www.trengwaintonheritage.co.uk](http://www.trengwaintonheritage.co.uk)

Our common interest in ancestry remains as strong as ever and we both dabble in our quite extensive family tree regularly updating as new facts or material come to light. This year Ben’s part of the tree has grown significantly, through research, and new relatives have emerged in Canada with whom he has had interesting correspondence. Following leads in another direction, he has discovered ancestors who were the first settlers in South Africa and he came across a published book written by one of his ancestral family.

As with many families, we both were anxious to research and find relatives who may have served in the Great War particularly with the 100th anniversary. On 11th November, we both joined the remembrance gathering at Leicester’s Remembrance Arch and attached labels for Albert Morris (Ben) and William Arscott (Peter) who were our ancestors

In July, we visited Harrogate. Peter’s Dad was Methodist Minister in the town from 1958-1962 so the place holds some memories for him. A year or so ago on the TV program ‘Restorations’ we saw his old church being converted into luxury flats. That was of interest but not as much as finding that the main church building is now a B&B called ‘The Chapel’. We decided to stay there for a night and found ourselves sleeping in Peter’s Dad’s old vestry. ‘The Chapel’ recently featured (aired 12 November 2018) in and won the Channel 5 ‘Four in a Bed’ award.

We were really pleased our friends James and Jeanette shared the weekend with us. We did Park Run on the Stray with Jeanette on Saturday, then after the obligatory tea and cakes at the famous Betty’s tea rooms we found a good ‘quietish’ place with good beer and big TV to watch one of England’s World Cup games.

This August, we took the Euro Shuttle to France and drove into Belgium stopping first at Veurne. In Ypres, we attended the ceremony at the Menin Gate and went to the Tyne Cot Cemetery where we found the engraved name of Ben’s relative. It was a moving experience. We visited Tongeren where we walked around one of the largest antiques fairs in Europe, held each Sunday morning. After a few days staying on the banks of the Rhine, at Linz, we headed home.

My Christmas Present from Ben had been a trip around Buckingham Palace during its summer opening. This was fun and a memorable day. We topped off the ‘Royal’ weekend by visiting Windsor and indulging ourselves, on what was a sweltering day, with lunch in a posh restaurant on the banks of the Thames.

We both have continued to enjoy our membership of Birstall Running Club and free from injury have both been out with the club on Mondays and Wednesdays more than in our first year. We both have clocked up the park runs and hope to run our 25th park run together in a few weeks

We haven’t done as much motor biking this year despite the hot summer excusing ourselves on occasions because it was too hot ! Peter’s model railway continues to make progress but I wonder if it will ever be finished !

Our Christmas decorations have largely stayed packed in boxes for a second year as we are off travelling again. After sharing Christmas Eve with Ben’s family in Sheffield, we are travelling to Birmingham airport on Christmas Day and from there fly out to Sri Lanka until after the new year.

We hope this letter and our Christmas Greeting finds you well and you and your families have a very happy and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous year in 2019. For those of you further afield than Leicester we would be delighted to see and welcome you, should you be passing through or nearby.

MERRY CHRISTMAS

Our Website [www.penprivate.com](http://www.penprivate.com) shows some photographs of our year. Peter’s Dad is remembered in a website www.revarthurmerritt.com