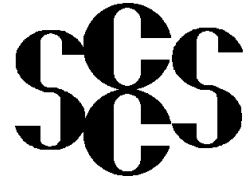


# Lockdown Diaries – Issue 1



## What I did the Covid 19 War - Allen Appleby

I am sure that we are all wondering just what our colleagues in the Choir have been doing to get us through the past 10 months? I know many houses have been decorated to death and gardens are looking more like the Nation's Garden centre at Wisley every day! But have we learned anything new or even dared to try tackling a new skill?

We had an early escape just before the shut down when we decided to cancel a planned trip to Italy. Things were moving fast at this time and when the TV news showed that St Peters Square was deserted – even the pigeons were gone – we decided to cancel. A great disappointment to us as it was only days before the government official banned travel, so we lost out financially. All contributions gratefully accepted! We ended up having a few days in Lincoln.

As my great passion is painting, I was able to dedicate some time to try and solve the problem of why I continue with such a poor return! However, I have many water colours which are not too bad but I was never too confident with oils. "Now is my time" I said to myself. I did three oil paintings, two completed and one in the process.... The third one is of John Lennon, but at the moment it is more like the death mask of Ken Dodd! However, the beauty of oil painting is that you can paint over mistakes and try again.



I have also done some baking, mainly Sour Dough bread. I have learned that as you build up the strength of your "starter" the bread gets lighter. My first attempt resulted in bread with the density of a breeze block which even the birds disregarded. I put it on the bird table and it fell over. Need a garden wall anyone?

Of course, I have missed the singing as well as the comradery the choir generates but I think that coming back too soon would be a huge mistake.

I am sure that we have all learned a lot about ourselves during this epidemic and when Covid 20 comes along we will know what to do.



## Anne Eustace

I expect some choir members will remember that our house is one side of a rather narrow lane which winds round a corner and there are four houses on the opposite side of the road. In early April our neighbour opposite, called Frank, suggested we meet for a drink at midday in his garden. We thought it would be better to remain in our own gardens so we brought two fold up chairs and they brought two plus a bottle and glasses and we sat and had drinks

opposite each other with the road dividing us. We had forgotten that our road has become a running and bicycling track since the lock-down so our drinks were frequently interrupted by walkers, runners and cyclists who saluted us and often stopped for a chat. It was an excellent way to get to know people who lived locally and prolonged our drinking sessions considerably. We continued to meet about once a week and the last session went on for five hours. Now winter is coming I think we will have to change the venue – has anyone got any suggestions? We have got a summer-house but it would be too small and cold but perhaps we could try the garage? It will probably have to be the kitchen at a distance.



**Anthony Wilder**

I'm not the most techie of people but lockdown has set me on a steep learning curve and I'm really pleased it has. I must say it has all been very enjoyable and well worth the effort, although there have been some tricky moments! My normal work involves teaching painting to groups of adults, in my studio at home and also at Sunningwell School of Art. I now do almost all my teaching via zoom, working from the laptop in my dining room at home, and I wondered whether to share some of those experiences. Alternatively, there was the pleasure of our SCCS zoom rehearsals so brilliantly directed by Paul, but you know all about them. In the end, I thought I would tell you about a recording project I was involved in with the London Symphony Chorus.

The Chorus commissioned Howard Goodall to write a special piece called 'Never to Forget' in memory of all the care workers, medics and nurses who died of Covid – 122 of them at the time when he wrote it. He took all their names as his text, so it is rather like a war memorial in music instead of stone, which turned out to be an inspired idea. He plans to update it with further names when all this is over. We rehearsed it via zoom, very much as SCCS has been doing.

When it was time to record, an email was sent to everyone with a link to the score and a backing track. Each singer recorded it alone at home and we had several days to complete it before the deadline. You had to listen to the backing track through headphones and read the score on screen while recording it on another device as it was vital not to record the backing track when recording your own voice. I used my laptop with headphones and recorded it on my mobile which was in selfie mode and set up on an easel. This was a video as well as audio recording so we each had to wear our chorus regulation black shirt and be seen against a plain background. I found a place in the kitchen – ideal until I realised we had a dripping tap (lockdown strikes again) so I had to clear a space in a bedroom! The piece lasted 8 minutes and we had to record it in two 4 minute chunks. It took 3 takes to get the first half right and 5 takes for the second half. The resulting files were far too big to send as email attachments and had to be uploaded to a special website. We were advised to do this overnight. With our very questionable broadband speeds this was wise advice – my first half took over 3 hours to send - the second half took 15 hours!

Altogether, it stretched my IT capabilities to the limit but I'm really glad I made the effort. It was very well received by the families of those who gave their lives to help others.

It was broadcast at the time and you can still hear it (and see it) on the chorus youtube channel by clicking the link below. Altogether it was a very moving experience and I thought it was a very appropriate memorial.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/LSChorus/featured>



### **Barbara Thompson**

It was the best of summers ... it was the worst! Such was Summer 2020 with its long warm sunny days ... but with its deadly Covid 19 virus. None the less, we all aspired to live our lives to the fullest within permitted limits and during the month of August up to 25 people were allowed to meet outdoors.

An exuberant outgoing, musical and tender-hearted friend Gillian, had personal contacts with a local charity and asked me to host a "Garden Soiree" to raise some funds for them. I happily agreed and promptly contacted 25 friends and neighbours who, with little else going on, were delighted to accept!

Our event was due to start at 5.00 pm, towards the end of what had been a lovely afternoon, with a programme featuring cello, harp and voice – all on the patio with the piano accompaniment resonating from inside! Guests arrived promptly and were keen to buy raffle tickets for an array of attractive prizes, including a beautiful painting by Andrea of a gorgeous rose.

With guests scattered over the lawn, Gillian bounded forth to welcome everyone, wrapped in a flamboyant blue feathered boa! The programme of cello, piano, song and harp continued to enthusiastic applause ... the first few drops of rain were disregarded, then umbrellas unfolded ... hoods donned and blankets wrapped around knees!

Such was the scene as raffle tickets were drawn and the slightly dampened prizes chosen!

I was so proud of my stoic and generous friends and neighbours who 'stuck it out' and raised £300 for a very worthy charity, and especially to Gillian who masterminded the event.

I am still picking up little blue feathers from distant corners of the garden!



### **Successful sowing – Birgitto Latto**

As most people, my husband Chris and I thrive on social activity and the Lockdown made that very difficult. Quite early on though, we managed to set up our iPads with friends for Zoom sessions in our gardens, so we played virtual Boules every Thursday afternoon with two or three other couples joining us. It worked surprisingly well and whilst you were still playing

against your own spouse, the total score was added up as women against men! Do I need to mention that the women were overwhelmingly superior, truthfully!? Sometimes the shrieking and yelping was an embarrassment, but I don't believe any SCCS members live that close!



Apart from this weekly highlight, where people also showed off their latest in afternoon teas, the garden, as such, just had the most calming and beneficial effect on us. We both spend hours out there working, reading, keeping fit and doing archery, clock golf, croquet and of course boules. We were blessed with a lovely long summer and for the first time ever, successive sowing became a success!



### David Cunningham

At the start of 'lockdown', Pam and I were very happy to accept the offer by young neighbours across the road to get what shopping we needed. It was a lovely gesture by them when V E Day arrived to make a gift to us of afternoon-tea picnic boxes which they had bought.

Suitably attired for the occasion, of course, we 'joined' with them, separated by the width of Westleigh Drive, to enjoy an assortment of finger sandwiches and cake.

It is a little sobering, though, to admit that we both remember being at the 'street party' on the actual day in 1945!



### Lockdown – Donna Xanthidis

When I'm asked about my lockdown experience, I know very well how lucky my family and I have been in the scheme of things. We have a comfortable home and both able to work perfectly well, full time, at home and prefer it.

It has been unbelievably busy for us at work. We're both in Technology which COVID put front and centre for a lot of businesses. Twenty years I have worked for Invesco and never been this busy but as I sit here reflecting on the past 6 months, I'm grateful.

My son should have sat his GCSE exams this year. We were again lucky in that we did not have to home school but we did have an anxious wait through an uncertain summer for the "results" he would get. He got what he needed to secure his position at Henley College studying Engineering and we could not be prouder.

I really miss singing so outside of our SCCS work, I've been practicing a few solo pieces just for fun and doing an awful lot of gardening!



### Kate Donegan

Early on in the lock down I was out for my usual walk. I was returning from the river via a snicket that leads to Star Road. Walking up Star Road there is a row of 30+ Edwardian terrace houses, with bay windows. I noticed that almost every window displayed balloons and streamers and colourful signs proclaiming: Happy Birthday Rachel! / Happy 18th Birthday! / Congratulations !!

It was very cheering. Along the way I saw a young girl standing in one of the doorways. 'This is amazing' I said. 'Who is Rachel?' She replied 'It's me!!!'

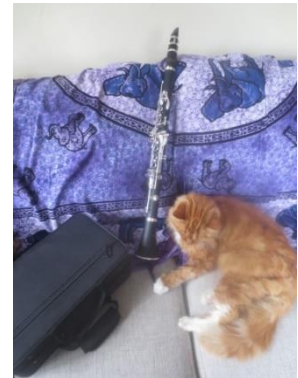
I wished her a Happy Birthday and hoped she enjoyed her day. As I continued along the line of festive greetings, I noticed behind me another young girl carrying a cake box to Rachel. It may not have been the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration Rachel had anticipated, but it seemed that her friends and neighbours had managed to make it joyous and memorable all the same.



### **Margaret's Lockdown – Margaret Perry**

When I was quite young, my mother used to take me to concerts. I remember going to see Sir John Barbirolli conduct the Hallé orchestra at the De Montfort Hall in Leicester and thinking afterwards that I would like to learn to play the clarinet. However, it was thought that I should start with the recorder. So, I learnt the descant and then the treble and played in a recorder consort on a Saturday morning. I also had piano lessons and when I was at secondary school, I played the violin in the school orchestra.

In March when we went into lockdown and all concerts ceased along with all social activities, I started by tidying up some cupboards and then the garage. After I had planted some seeds and sorted the garden, I remembered my desire to play the clarinet. So, I bought a clarinet from an online music store and with the assistance of some youtube tutorials I discovered which reed would be best for a beginner. Its unheard of to be told to stay at home for a prolonged period of time – unless you are ill, and lockdown provided the ideal opportunity to learn something new that benefits from regular practice. When it is safe to do so I would like to have some lessons but for now I am getting quite a bit of satisfaction from being able to play scales and arpeggios along with the tunes in my tutor book. My daughter has been learning the ukulele. Not sure what they will sound like together!



### **The Hut – Mary Esslemont**

Several years ago at The Henley Show I saw this beautiful circular wooden garden building with open sides and an integral table and benches, and after much haggling with the vendor bought it for a sunny spot in my garden. It immediately enhanced my garden space, but I didn't foresee just how well used it would be this year. The 'hut' has come into its own. It has been not only a

delightful place to sit and read, sew and write on sunny days and evenings but a place to watch birds and think deep thoughts and better still a perfect place to sit with friends in a socially distanced way and chat over a meal or a cup of tea. However inclement the weather it is still sheltered and dry. In fact, in the spring a wren made a nest in the eaves and stayed there until her brood had hatched.



### **Also from Mary:**

I thought it would be fun to join a friend who was making crochet straps for face masks for local care homes. As I hadn't done any crochet for 50 years I had to remind myself by watching some clips from Youtube. Once my fingers had got used to the new contortions I was putting them through and I could chat at the same time as doing the crochet it became a very satisfying pastime and hopefully the results helped a few more people keep their masks on more comfortably.



**Stuart Smith**

Alison and I enjoyed a great choir social at the County School of dancing a couple of years ago. It gave us an instant passion for dancing, so we continued with weekly lessons. Huge enjoyment! Then the dreaded COVID struck and the school was closed. Undaunted we took to dancing in our driveway! Much twitching of neighbour's curtains as we waltzed up and down and between the



cars. We even startled the postman as we enthusiastically Tango'd towards the gate just as he was arriving. We got 80 sessions in, but we're grounded again as Alison has just had a hip replacement. We'll be back at it soon though!



**Learning something new during lockdown – Tina Reynolds**

One thing a little out of the ordinary earlier in the lockdown was the need to acquire some dentistry skills! Jim had been to have some dental work done days before the lockdown which involved stitches in his gum. Instructions were that they needed removal the following week – well that never happened! Instead, he was sent a video of stitches being removed from the gums in the front of the mouth. Get someone to remove the stitches for you was the instruction.

Trying to hide my squeamishness, I duly got together nail scissors, eyebrow tweezers, boiled them and found a strong small torch! Jim lay down the full length of our dining room table, and I instructed him to hold the torch and set to! Stopping my hand from shaking took concentration. My first tentative cutting of the first stitch failed, and resulted in a bit of an ouch from Jim. Gritting my teeth I continued! The stitches Jim needed removing were in the upper jaw at the back! Not quite as straightforward as the instruction video! The last stitch was the most stubborn, and needed more pulling on to achieve its removal, at the end of which I abandoned Jim on the table and rushed outside to get some fresh air!

I am pleased to say, there were no aftereffects from removal of stitches and Jim's mouth is well healed.

