

France – May 2015

Sunday 3 May



Calm crossing and after driving through several heavy, very heavy showers we arrived at the house in sunshine. We used the Nav Mii app on Rick's phone as it uses GPS and not the internet. It was our first visit of the year and we were expecting lots of damp and mould but it wasn't too bad. I was dying to see our neighbours Pierre and Isabelle so I could try out my "Michel Thomas French Course" phrases. I said in French "It gives me great pleasure to see you" but I need to check out that I had it right as Isabelle didn't understand a word and Pierre laughed his head off. Oh well, at least I tried, funny thing is that I seem to get it right when listening to the course! Big news of the day was that Princess Charlotte was born.

Monday 4 May

Lovely sunny morning as I carried on washing, scrubbing and airing everything in sight, Helen will be most impressed. I weeded both front and back of the house and made a little herb garden by the back stairs. The top garden is quite overgrown and dandelions, briars and weeds are suffocating the grass. Before rain stopped play I managed to clear a patch by the back wall where I am going to plant some bits I had brought from our garden.



Meanwhile Rick has been busy hoovering the loft and taking up the floorboards to work out where the opening for the staircase is going to be. We bought the staircase last year and we should have assembled the bottom platform as some of it has now warped. Rick's a bit concerned that because of the position of one of the loft beams we may have to move the staircase forward which means it won't start snugly against the corner of the room. After lunch it poured with rain but we had to go to Point P to purchase some wood to help reinforce some of the loft beams that are going to be cut. We decided to take the beams on the trailer as they were going to charge 70 euros plus fuel for delivery, however, they did offer an alternative of hiring a van for 35 euros. We then had a 15 minute trip to the supermarket at Pre en Pail for a top up with smelly cheeses, wine and beer. This was followed by a technical stair telephone conversation between Rick and Don. All fires were lit to help chase away the damp and make for a lovely cosy evening. I left Rick hammering away at the platform for the new stairway in between watching the snooker final between Bingham and Murphy. Getting the sander and hacksaw to the stair platform parts is the first job for the morning, meanwhile he is keeping the village awake with his hammering.

Tuesday 5 May

Bingham won the snooker final. My wellies were full of water, it really rains in France, big downpours, nothing like the drizzle at home. Popped into Carrouges and it looked more dead than usual but there were quite a few cars parked in the square, however, there is an amazing new Pharmacy. Pierre has a lovely, excitable puppy that he doesn't bother to keep on a lead. He appears to have a very contented life driving the school bus, fishing and shooting. Rick struggled most of the day persevering to get the parts of the stair platform to fit and after lots of sanding and sawing he finally succeeded.

I have been very busy washing curtains, pillows and extras. I planted up all the pots and in the top garden I planted a blackcurrant bush, rhubarb and some perennials in my newly dug border. I continued pulling all the ivy, briar's and weeds off the back wall and also started to clear the front boundary line of briars. My hands and back are sore but I am pleased with my progress. Rick was completely exhausted after giving the grass its first cut. Occasionally we question why we are doing all this and came to the conclusion that the sense of achievement makes it worthwhile.



To give Rick's back a rest we drove to Brico Depot to buy some acro props to support the ceiling while the staircase was being fitted. It took some persuasion for me to get Rick to do this as he was intending to borrow some of the acro props holding up the kitchen floor but that was definitely a bad idea !

I've changed my greeting from “ It gives me great pleasure to see you” to “I am very happy to see you” but they still don't get it. The lady from the Epicerie just kept saying the sun was shining which it was for a while. I must see what I am doing wrong by trying it out on Gaby tomorrow.

Wednesday 6 May



We brought a replacement coffee table and television cabinet with us, courtesy of Don and Helen, and there is also a matching corner unit and cabinet to come. I am delighted with the kitchen curtains I made from a £30 Ikea duvet cover.

With the domestics out of the way now onto to the “pièce de résistance” - the new staircase. After lots of measuring Rick cut the hole in the ceiling so there was no going back now.



The staircase steps were being stored behind the sofa, I am still not over how heavy they were last year we had to load them into the trailer when I was feeling like death from a stomach bug. Rick says "this is what we will do, we'll place the staircase on some chairs while I attached the platform". So that's what we did, but of course most of the joints came out and then there had to be bits cut off and sanding to make them go back in. This was followed by "Now we'll lean the staircase against the loft beam and push the whole thing into place." "What, what, what, I can't possibly do that!" however, by something short of a miracle we got it up but I had to use all my strength to help support it as the platform kept twisting. After lots of banging, heaving and pushing it sort of went into place, the next problem being that we are not sure if there is enough headroom. We decided to talk through the options once Don gets here. It looks much better than we thought it would and doesn't impose on the room much at all.

Completely, completely knackered can't do another thing.

Thursday 7 May

Election Day!

We've given ourselves a bit of time off and went to Carrefour to top up with supplies. I read through the parish news. Quite interesting as they want to develop the Rectory opposite into holiday lets, high speed internet cables are in the process of being installed and they have spent a fortune on landscaping the bank behind our old Granary as the trees and hedges were obscuring a communication pole. The villages appear to get a lots of grants to help towards these things. There was also a note about the picking of uncultivated mushrooms. Each family is limited to 5 litres per person each day. Picking is banned on Tuesday and Thursday and you can pick from 8am until sunset on other days. You must cut them as the uprooting is banned.

Time has slowed down at last but it seemed ages until Don, Helen and Julie arrived and we were able to sit down and enjoy our roast pork supper. Of course, that was after proudly showing off all our handiwork since their last visit especially the progress we have made with the staircase.



Tonight we are sleeping on the lounge floor where we will be able to monitor the latest election news.

Friday 8 May

Election fever has hit us all but Rick and Don were anxious to get going as they need to move the staircase up and along a bit.



We left them to it and stopped at a Pharmacy on our way to St Ceneri le Gere but it was closed, very strange for a Friday. St Ceneri is such a pretty village and was quite busy as there was a special VE Celebration service for the fireman in the church. Scattered around the village was an exhibition of metal birds, I would have loved to have one but they were way too expensive; 500 – 1000 euros each. After our coffee stop Helen drove us to the nearby village of St Leonard des Bois. We just drove through but it's a must for our next visit. The supermarket at Pre en Pail was also closed.



We are now at an age when most conversations turned to current and past ailments and we have to be careful not to try and outdo each others but at least we had a good laugh about it. Back at the house the stairs were such a major job and being so limited for time we girls didn't want to start any projects. However, being 3 active girls with strong personalities this proved a little difficult especially as we were all being wary of treading on each others toes. Put your glass or cup down and whoosh it was washed, dried and packed away. Drop your damp towel and in a blink of an eye it would be hanging up to dry. "Anyone for tea or coffee" almost before you had made up your mind a filled cup would appear. We had sorted out the cooking rota - me last night, Julie's curry tonight and Helen's surprise one tomorrow. Who would believe that trying to relax would make you so fidgety and tired.

After finding the Pharmacy and the supermarket at Pre En Pail closed we were beginning to think that something was going on. It wasn't until we tried the shops in Carrouges that it dawned on us it must be a holiday because of the VE celebrations. No bread or extras for us today then.

Meanwhile Rick and Don were going great guns and without our constant chatter and interruptions they had managed place the staircase into a position that gave enough headroom and ended level with the loft floorboards - I know from our experience the other day that this was no mean feat.



What a brilliant, unexpected result with the Conservatives getting a majority of 12 with 331 seats to Labours 232. What a day with Miliband, Clegg and Farage resigning ! The SNP were celebrating their victory of winning 53 seats leaving just 3 to others. Nicola Sturgeon did a great job for her party but we are all getting fed up with the Scots moaning and are beginning to wonder whether we need them after all.



All crashed out!

Saturday 9 May



We left Rick and Don still working on the supporting beams and replacing the loft floorboards while we headed off to the market at Alençon where we stopped for coffee while taking in the ambiance and sunshine.



Back at the house Helen busied herself with the beef stew while Gaby got us up to date on the general local gossip. The village are going to sell the Vicarage opposite as its too expensive to

renovate into a gite. We're still finding it difficult settling down to doing nothing in particular. Helen has managed to finish her book but Julie and I can't get into ours.



Helen's beef stew was wonderful and was our last supper together as we leave for the ferry tomorrow lunchtime.

Sunday 10 May



Lovely weather so we put some old furniture outside for anyone to help themselves to. Rick and Don made the cover for the loft opening and Julie worked on cleaning the bathroom grouting with bleach and a toothbrush. At lunchtime we left for the ferry but made the mistake of going through the centre of Dieppe. It was packed with people celebrating VE day and most of the roads were closed off.



Don, Helen and Julie spent the afternoon in an activity centre in the forest near Bagnoles, another must for us next visit. We are hoping to make that quite soon as we would like to do the cosmetics on the opening – edge of ceiling, panel back of staircase, build a bookcase in the gap between the back wall and the staircase platform, fill in the old loft hatch and complete the skirting board.

This has been a great visit and what an achievement ! The staircase has opened up loads of possibilities for the loft and hopefully will add something to the house value. Also, it was great fun to all be there together, we were just missing George and Caroline but they are visiting the house at the end of the month. I am sure they will be pleased with our progress especially as we are now remotivated and are looking forward to our next visit.



Julie and Don tripping the high wire!