

FRENCH HOUSE – MAY 2017

Thursday 27 April

Left a very frosty garden on a beautiful sunny morning for a calm Newhaven crossing and a pleasant journey onto St Ellier in our new Discovery Sport.

The house looked clean and dry and first things first Rick put a match to the fire that Don had prepared. Within minutes we were coughing and spluttering as the house was filled with smoke. While the fire was dying down Rick stuck the broom handle up the chimney to see if he could unblock it. A tissue that he threw on came flying out in bits and alight. I had to chase it all over the kitchen putting it out. He found some chimney brushes in the cellar and had his first go at chimney sweeping. We've only ever had the chimney swept once before when Gaby organised it. Down came loads of soot and twigs that the birds had deposited. I then spent ages trying to clean off the layer of black soot that was everywhere. Excitement over and there was even time left to watch an episode of Born to Kill.



Friday 28 April

A bit of a sunshine and showers day.

Isabelle came to tell me that sadly her husband Pierre, our neighbour who bought our Granary, died of lung cancer last November. It was a short illness, only two months but a shock as he was only 68. We're feeling a bit mortal, so if we are going to be able to meet our objective of getting a bedroom and bathroom in the loft area we had better get on with it as you never know what's around the corner. Isabelle has always left it to Pierre to talk to us but she really tried hard this morning and I managed to understand a lot of what she was saying. I gave her a big hug and said how much we will miss him. The sale of the Granary has made such a tremendous difference to our ability to get the house sorted.

This visit Rick is hoping to run the electrics, hot and cold water and waste to the loft area. After working out the materials needed we set off to Brico Depot. The electrics on our tow bar weren't compatible with the trailer so we had to get an adapter which means another trip to Alencon tomorrow to get the long stuff.

We stopped for lunch at La Boucherie – a bit expensive for what you get. The toilets were clean and modern but didn't seem to have a door. I worked out that there was a sliding one between the wall but it wouldn't lock. Being desperate I had to go whatever and of course there was no paper. Much the same at Le Clerc where the lunch hit my bottom in a bit of a hurry – must have been a bit of gluten somewhere. Rick said the urinals were also a bit strange as if he had been about 2 inches shorter (height not length) he wouldn't have been able to lop it over ! (He's well endowed).

Saturday 29 April

Early start for us today as we took the trailer to Brico Depot to purchase the sewage and plumbing pipes. Monday is a Bank Holiday here as well so we need to get stocked up. Rick made a start by knocking through a hole to take the pipes through the garage and workshop wall. Of course you always encounter problems on the way such as blowing the fuse when using the powerful drill and drilling through the concrete (very hard) ceiling to attach the support straps.

I spent the rest of the day weeding the gravel and made a start on the garden opposite. All the time spent last year clearing the gaps between the boundary above the wall has paid off. I'll have another go at clearing what I can and spray weed killer to keep it under control. Can hardly stand up my back aches so much.

A lad of about 11 or 12 was wandering about the village looking at the names on the postboxes. He asked me if I knew a Madame B something. About two to three hours later there was a knock on our door and the same but very tired boy said he was lost and could he use our wifi. I left him at Gaby's, who didn't know the person he was looking for but would try to sort him out. We couldn't understand how he got to the village as there are no buses or trains nearby. He was very polite and could speak a little English. I wonder why the people he was supposedly visiting were not out looking for him.

Two pieces of good news. The new people in the house by our garden further down the road have been mowing it. Also, they now have an all weather table tennis table in the Boules area.



Sunday 30 April

Heavy showers and quite a bit colder.

In the morning I played at being a Domestic Goddess – cleaned all through, did a couple loads of washing and had a leg of lamb in the slow cooker. In the afternoon I became Rick's plumbing apprentice. A lot of the time was spent getting fixings on the hard walls. He's made good progress

with holes now and cut through the lounge floor and ceiling.

Monday 1 May

Cold with showers and hailstones.

Twenty years ago today we were all on the ferry watching Tony Blair who had just got a landslide election victory.



Remember the Ferrari in the garage



How the kitchen looked



We all remember the lunch at the cafe



A few years later – that awful geyser



A visit with Mum and Pete



A letter from the mayor complaining about the state of our garden called for some action

It's been 20 years and we are well on our way to completing our objective of having a bedroom and bathroom and recreation area in the loft. When this is ready we must all come over again to celebrate ! Bon Anniverserie

Tuesday 2 May

Dry and a bit warmer

Trip to the tip and can't say I was sorry to see the old kitchen door go along with loads of other stuff. We replaced the gas cylinder at the Indian supermarket which has reopened in Carrouges. Then it was off to Alencon to get more plumbing bits, enough to keep Rick busy for another couple of days. We had a nice lunch at the Italian Restaurant behind La Bourcherie.

Rick's struggling with the time zones, he wants to get up and go to bed on British time but eat and shop on French time. I don't know where I am but he's a bit frustrated that most of the day has been taken up shopping.



Plumbing and Electrics round the garage

Wednesday 3 May

Overcast and still chilly

Had an enjoyable visit to the market in Carrouges where bought some delicious local cheese and paella that made for a lovely lunch. Also, got some coal as we need something to boost the heat output. I don't have a particular project this time and I am getting cold and lethargic hanging around and being Rick's gofer. Lydia is having a wonderful time in Portugal, Jen says the beach is beautiful.

A Parisian couple with a daughter of about 10 have today completed their purchase of the Vicarage opposite. They seem very nice, and are going to use it as a holiday home. Gaby got us to sign a petition objecting to a windmill farm (four windmills, I think) by the radio mast. She found the family that the lost boy was visiting but was shocked that his step mother just abandoned him in the middle of nowhere. They are still trying to find a buyer for Martine's house and the house next to John's up the hill is also up for sale as the owner has died. The English teachers opposite have bought some of his land to extend their garden. Gaby doesn't think Pierre died of lung cancer, she thinks it was something that went wrong after an operation on his pancreas. The black lady neighbour has had another baby boy. Gaby's dog is recovering from an operation to remove some stones he had swallowed.



Finished plumbing in workshop before I replaced the lagging

Thursday 4 May

No rain- 14°

The Duke of Edinburgh announced his retirement in the Autumn.

Two trips to the Agriculture shop in Carrouges for plumbing bits. Rick has finally finished the drainage and hot and cold water feeds to the loft. He's also put a pipe from the water heater to the end of the garage to take the drips. I've been very busy too: insulating the water pipes and replacing

those that were lagged with a kind of cotton wool. It wasn't as easy as I thought it would be and I've still not completely mastered the mitre joints. I've cleaned and sorted the workshop and garage which included clearing the gully around the edge of the garage. I was absolutely filthy so much so that Rick had to brush me down before he would let me go to the Agriculture shop with him. When we got back from there I planted geraniums in all the pots. It was wonderful to wash my hair, shower, put on clean clothes and sort my nails out.



Corner of lounge before being boxed in



Reached the loft at last!!!

Rick has worked very hard every day so we celebrated finishing the plumbing with a bottle of Cava.

Friday 5 May

Had the television on all day listening on and off to the local election results – Conservatives have done well. Corbyn still talking it up though. We went to the Super U at Pre en Pal, it's a really nice supermarket as it's not too big and everything seems fresh. It only takes about 15 minutes to get there. We bought a plant to give to Isabelle and some table tennis bats.

The countryside is beautiful, very green with fields of rape in full colour but the villages are grey and a bit depressing. There are so many houses and buildings in complete disrepair, some just shells which is something we rarely find at home.

Initially we got in a bit of a muddle trying to run the electric cable through the tubing but then I had the brainwave of laying it out in the road. It's brilliant now as they have a wire already threaded through the tube that you attach to the cable, not like the old times having to use a coat hanger. Rick busied himself running the cable through the workshop, garage, lounge and up into the loft. I put weedkiller back and front and all along the garden borders. Had mussels for lunch. Once again everything takes longer than expected and we are starting to race against time. We may stay an extra day to give us a day off. Rick started to box in the pipes in the lounge but ran out of time. We did break off for a short time to try out the table tennis bats which was great fun.



Saturday 6 May

Raining on and off all day. Hope it's fine at home for Rachel's Hen Party.

Last night after a snooze in the lounge Rick got second wind and finished off boxing in the pipes and putting the first coat of filler on. He finally got to bed at 3.20 am but it gave us time to give the box a few coats of paint before we go home.



Before and after

Another trip to the tip. We treated ourselves to lunch at the hotel near Ciral. and then onto Pre en Pal to buy a gateaux for Gaby and one for Les and Beryl who are looking after our seedlings at home. The Himalayan Blue Musk climbing rose, which we moved to near the French kitchen window, has taken really well.

We took the plant to Isabelle and she asked us to stay for coffee. She says the house is too big and

she looked so very lonely. Pierre's photograph was on the table. Next time we must take a dictionary as it was hard going but I really want to practice my French.

Caught up with Gaby and Yves. Rick wanted to know if we could increase our electric supply. It appears they have the same amount of power as us and it isn't a problem but Gaby will ask EDF for an estimate to upgrade. Gaby seems to think that Pierre died from complications after a routine operation.



I adapted my old dining room curtains and the bedspreads are courtesy of Julie and myself

Sunday 7 May



Home at last.

Rick is going to write a report on the loft. Sometime after Rachel's wedding and when we are back from our Baltic Cruise we will need to have a meeting to discuss the next phase:

Things I can think of:

Do we need to go to the height of the ceiling or do we form a loft area.

What do we do about the stone wall, do we make it a feature or cover it with plasterboard etc,

Do we use steel partitioning or the usual wooden framework.

The next challenge is to form a landing which will involve partitioning, doors, ceilings etc. We need some help with ideas as to how to go about this. Does any of you have a tower or a nail gun?

We are really looking forward to moving on with the loft area especially as we are getting **older and slower** so the sooner the we get it done the better.

