

Christmas
2025

2025 has been An interesting year for the Derbyshire branch of the Chisman family. Some happy times, some stressful times, some reflective times, and a lot of time with various family members. We saw Ireland, Zurich, Florence and Rome, and enjoyed **most** of it. :-)

So a good year for us, and we hope for a **Merry Christmas**, and a happy and prosperous New Year for ourselves, and for all our readers.

O Romeo. Romeo, Wherefore art thou ...

Just when I needed to find a birthday present for Henrietta, the program for the Royal Opera House dropped through the door. There, two days before her birthday, was Romeo and Juliet, the ballet. Henrietta loves ballet, particularly with top flight companies, and the Royal Ballet is nothing if not that, so I bought two tickets. And there, sadly, the everything-went-well part of the story comes to an end.

It started when I came to book the train tickets - all the trains on that Saturday from our local station had bus replacement services part of the way. So did all the trains from our next nearest station. Then I thought of the line from Birmingham and that was fine, but getting to Birmingham was a pain. However, I had a brainwave - go from the NEC, Birmingham International. Perfect. It's an easy drive from Ashby, no bus replacement service, and Avanti offers (expensive) first class tickets with the promise of bacon butties and assorted other hot goodies for breakfast. So, I gritted my teeth and coughed up.



Then, somewhat nearer the date I came to book a spot in the station car park - and all the pre-bookable spaces were gone. Disaster. The only other place to park anywhere near there is Birmingham Airport, which is easy to get to from the station but the car park for the day was £64! After an hour or two of despair (I literally couldn't think of any other answer) I tried again and this time pre-bookable spaces at the car park were available. Why the change I have no idea, but probably a computer somewhere was to blame.

So, on the day we were good to go. We parked the car, got on the train, and found our reserved seats. However, the much looked-forward-to breakfast failed to appear. The best they could manage was two cups of cold coffee. Dispiriting. Not an inspiring start.

But, having got to London, things looked better as we popped into Prêt for a sandwich before heading off to Covent garden. We had great seats, and though neither of us, for different reasons, were expecting over much from the ballet, the first act was stunning, absolutely wonderful, and we both loved it.

The curtain came down at the end of Act 1 and everyone went

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The Knowle Farm Newsletter

How Not to See Rome.

(Clue: That's not us
in the photo)

As soon as I had the opportunity I stopped and got out Mrs Google to see where we were and how best to get back. Well. Best didn't really cover it. The **ONLY** way back involved two major traffic intersections, and a kilometer and a half of flat-out dual carriageway. In Rome. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon. On a golf buggy.

I would like to say we set off undaunted, but I was about as daunted as it gets, and Henrietta had started praying.

In September we had a few days in Zurich, Florence and Rome. There was a lot of train and bus travel, much of it crowded, and a great deal of walking round old buildings, so for the last afternoon, I thought we'd do something rather more peaceful.

Rome has a lovely large park - the Borghese Gardens - and because it's so large, you can rent a golf cart to get round and see it all. Which I did.

We found the man renting the carts and after rather more faffing about than seemed really necessary, off we set.

Unfortunately (you knew that was coming didn't you) after about 20 minutes I got "taken short" and we had to rush to a loo. Fortunately this didn't end in disaster, but we failed to take it as the sign from the Gods that, with hindsight, it clearly was, and off we went again.

We had a little map, which I was following, part of which involved actual road, with buses and stuff, but it was quiet and no problem. Then we turned off the road and went up to some buildings which we wanted to see but somewhere, something went wrong - I'm still not quite sure what - and we found ourselves on a one-way road out of the park.

We negotiated the two major intersections, and were doing our best (about 20mph) along the dual carriageway section, being hooted at by buses, cars and motorbikes, when I noticed a section of the instrument panel (such as it was) that seemed to be a red square with only the right most side alight. Could this be the battery indicator? Yes, I feared it was, and it was down to a single blob. How long had it been a single blob? How much longer might it remain a single blob? What on earth would I do if the battery gave out. I didn't need the additional stress, but that's life on a golf buggy in Rome I guess.

Happily we got the cart back to the starting point, but I'm still checking my credit card for fines because I have no idea how many traffic violations we made or how many laws we broke.

In fact, it was a good 2 hours before a) my adrenaline went down, and b) Henrietta stopped praying.

When in Rome

When we are away, Henrietta likes to attend Mass on a Sunday, and it's my job to find a suitable Catholic church. Sometimes this is easy (Ireland) and sometimes it's difficult (India) but I didn't anticipate any difficulty in Rome, although it was a travel day and we wouldn't arrive until afternoon. Sure enough, 500 yards from our flat was a church offering an English Mass at 6 p.m.

So just before 6, we walked down to the church where I left Henrietta and headed home to read the paper.

I went down again 45 minutes later to find that there had been no service. No service? It appeared that no priest could be found to conduct the Mass. No priest? In Rome? There are a dozen in every café. Very silly.

Henrietta's son Aaron compared this to being unable to find a casino in Las Vegas.

Lost Marbles

When we are away, I connect my phone to the TV to watch stuff and I did this when I visited Auschwitz.

On my last day, I went to a restaurant round the corner for dinner, returning to the hotel around 8 and I set the TV up to watch an old episode of Morse.

Just over an hour later I decided to watch the last bit in bed, so I started my "going to bed" ritual of putting my phone on charge, but I couldn't find it. Anywhere. And a hotel room is not large. Panic. Assuming I'd left it, I shot back to the restaurant, but it was closed. More panic. Back to the hotel receptionist who established that the restaurant would open the next morning before my flight so I would be able to pick it up then. Resigned to a bad night, I went to bed and pushed the button to watch the end of Morse! Watch TV! On my phone! It was on the windowsill behind the curtains all the time. Oh dear. Serious marble loss.

Grandchild Management

Before I met Henrietta, I had a very manageable 2 lovely granddaughters, and to make life a little easier, they were twins, so only one birthday, age, school year etc. to remember.

Then I met Henrietta, who had 6 lovely grandchildren - and no twins. So all different birthdays, ages, school years, etc.

Then her older son (and his wife) produced another lovely grandchild. Another birthday, age, school year, etc.

Then Henrietta's younger son married Dan, a lovely lady who came with yet two more lovely grandchildren. Not twins. So two more different birthdays, ages, school years, etc.

So at the time we got married I had gone from one set of twins to a total of 11 grandchildren, with 10 different birthdays (my twins still had the same birthday), 10 different ages and school years to remember, which is proving quite a task.

I have a spreadsheet, of course, but the trouble is that all 11 insist on getting a year older every year, mostly on different days.

This, of course means that they also change school year regularly and trying to keep track of who is doing what exams, taking a year out, traveling the world, and all the other things that grandchildren do, is difficult.

If only one of them would get older each year, taking it in turns, I could keep track, but as it is I struggle.

So, grandchildren all, please take this as an apology for never knowing exactly how old you are, what year you're in at school, or what, if any, exams you are doing, how many more you have to go and what your specialties are.

Having said that, I would like some credit for being able to remember all your names - at least most of the time.



Romeo...(Continued from page 1)

off for an ice cream, but when the time came for the second act things didn't go too well. To cut a long story short, they couldn't get the curtains to go up, so after 40 minutes they had to cancel the rest of the show. So much for Romeo and Juliet.

We had arranged to meet Henrietta's younger son and his wife for a quick birthday meal before heading back, but we were now an hour early. Fortunately there was a pub right next to the restaurant where we were booked, so a pint filled the time nicely.

We had a great time with Aaron and Dan and a lovely meal. We got back to the station, on to the train, and as we set off a nice lady presented us with a cup of tea. Hot this time, so things were looking up.

However in a final twist, the train was a bit chilly, which I had anticipated by bringing a cardi each in the back pack. However, what I hadn't anticipated was that when I got them out Henrietta's water bottle had leaked and soaked them both.

So, definitely a day to remember, but not necessarily for the right reasons.

Comings & Goings

The surprise arrival this year was the mother-in-law's tongue (*dracaena trifasciata*). It has been sitting there doing nothing for the last 28 years apart from sticking Henrietta every time she goes near it - which means she hates it. But - we took down a nearby tree this year, Jenny, our trusty gardener carefully pruned the dead bits, and lo and behold, the hated plant sprang into full, beautiful blossom.

The sad disappearance was occasioned by my 82nd birthday.



The end of my house has a glorious Virginia creeper all over it, but me getting up a ladder every year to keep it from climbing all over the roof gets people more and more worried. So this year, a couple of old school friends came up and I went up the ladder for the last time - we took the whole lot down. Sad way to celebrate a birthday but probably the safest option.

The Travel Section

Ireland

Two years ago we did a trip round the northern coast of Ireland, starting from Belfast, along the north coast (Giant's Causeway), Donegal (beautiful), and down the Wild Atlantic Way to the mouth of the Shannon, where one of Henrietta's sisters lives.

This year we decided to complete the round trip by covering the south coast. I started from www.theirishroadtrip.com a web site which proved to be an excellent guide. We took the trip at a slower pace than the writer, but starting from Dublin we headed south, and followed the coast as nearly as we could all the way round to the mouth of the Shannon again, then inland to Limerick, on to Henrietta's home town of Mountmellick, and finally Dublin for the ferry home. What a trip it was.

We saw castles, churches, beaches, lakes and rivers, many of which we crossed on tiny ferries. We saw lighthouses, ancient settlements, old prisons, staggering views, vast black cliff faces, we rode Ireland's only cable car, we heard Irish music, we ate mountains of fresh fish, and of course, drank some Guinness

(although I discovered in Cork and Kerry that, to my surprise, I prefer Murphys to Guinness when it's on draught).

We drove just short of 1,500 of the loveliest miles I can remember - many of them up GUM roads (Grass Up Middle). We particularly liked County Cork where, at one point, we were driving along one side of a valley, and across the other side was a tableau of lush Irish green, dotted with tiny white houses and little fields. It looked like a child's toy landscape - just gorgeous. And as we travelled, we met up with most of Henrietta's siblings which is always a pleasure.

On the way back we had one final bit of excitement. As we were entering Holyhead port the ferry captain announced that they had received a Pan-Pan call - a small boat in a non life threatening emergency - and we were the nearest vessel so had to attend.

We made our way to a small sailing boat that appeared to have lost its rudder and as we waited (we were too big to go in close) two lifeboats and a helicopter came and there was much activity, but before anyone was rescued, left them to it and made our way to Holyhead and home.

Not For Everyone

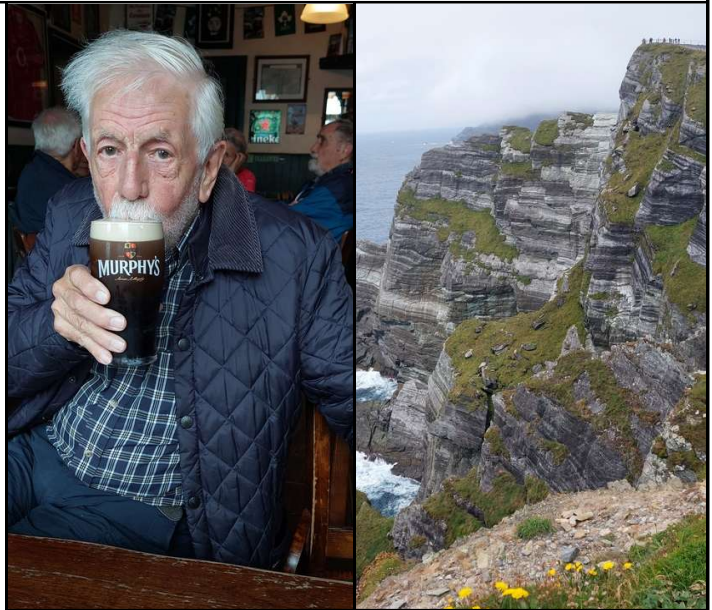
In October I visited Auschwitz, the concentration camp where a million Jews were killed in the second world war. A bit heavy for a Christmas news letter you might think, but then I thought it might be a good idea, at this time of goodwill to all men, to remember just where all the hate we see around us at the moment will lead if it's allowed to run its course.

I had a guided tour which lasted two hours and I struggled for a word to describe it. I can't use "disappointed", how can you use a

word like that in a place like Auschwitz? I felt that I would have liked more time. It felt a bit rushed. But then I thought, they get up to 8,000 people a day there and it's probably better (for humanity) to have 8,000 people see it in a slightly rushed way than 2,000 see it in more depth.

So although I didn't get as much of a feel for the place as I might have liked, it prompted me to get a book about how the camp came to be set up, and the mindset of those who cared so little for the people who died there.

It's not for everyone, and it can be quite emotional, but it is worth visiting.



Some One Liners.

Interviewer: Can you explain these gaps in your résumé?

Me: Yes, they separate the words so you can read them more easily.

Laughing with friends over dinner is not a sideline to life; it is the whole point. Charlotte Ivers. Sunday Times 4th May.

I don't want to brag, but I just completed a jigsaw in two weeks, and the box said 2-4 years. Attributed to Donald Trump.

Obesity tables should be shown as pie charts.

I asked the dentist how often I should floss. "I always tell patients, just floss the teeth you want to keep," he said.

Why are they average speed cameras? Why not invest a bit more and get some really good ones? And, average speed cameras are mean. (Maths joke)

After seeking dietary advice, a 75 year old man was asked, "what food can cause grief and suffering for years after eating it?". After some thought the man said, "Wedding Cake."

I decided to sell my Hoover ... well it was just collecting dust

I just deleted all the German names off my phone. It's Hans free.

I was almost the victim of a scammers phone call. They said I'd won a competition and could choose between an all expenses paid trip to America to see an Elvis tribute act or £20,000 in cash. I had to press one for the money, two for the show.

I went out on a date with a simile. I don't know what I metaphor.

A polar bear walks into a bar and says to the bartender "I'll have a rum and coke." The bartender asks, "What's with the big pause?" The bear shrugs. "I was born with them."

What do you say to a Llama that loves picnicking? Alpaca lunch.

If you see an Apple Store get robbed, does that make you an iWitness?

If you're not great at poetry, then best leave it to the prose.

Q. What's the difference between an optimist and a pessimist?

A. A pessimist's in full possession of the facts.

I recently read about a motorcyclist with a message on the back of his jacket - if you can read this, my wife's fallen off.

"The ring is apparently worth \$1 million — and, as you would expect for that level of folding cash, it's simply humongous. It's of a size where it stops looking like a diamond and simply resembles a Fox's Glacier Mint stuck to a pipe cleaner."

A thought on Evolution.

When God made man, she stood back, looked at the result, thought a bit, and said "I can do better".

AI Worries

An AI person said to me: "don't worry about AI, after the internal combustion engine, millions of farriers, ostlers and stablehands retrained as car workers and unemployment actually reduced." But what if this example miscategorises us: what if we're not the people here, what if we're the horses? They ended up as pet food.

Economics

I had a monthly water bill that suggested my annual bill would be just over £2,000. I therefore did some work to reduce it, and a subsequent monthly bill suggested a much lower annual figure of just over £1,000. Henrietta's response to this news was "Well, what shall we spend the £1,000 on?"

Language

On our recent trip to Italy, Henrietta noted that I speak Italian very well, the accent is great, the hand movements perfect, it's just that I don't have any actual **vocabulary**.

She observed "you know all the music but none of the words"

A Dad Joke.

I sent my granddaughters a dad joke—"what's the difference between a sock and a camera?"

This was the answer I got from one of them:-

1. Cameras are used to make art, socks are worn while making art.

2. Cameras capture memories, socks capture sweaty feet smells.

3. Cameras are often held by hands, socks hold your feet.

4. The word 'camera' comes from a meaning of a dark chamber, the word 'socks' comes from the meaning of light slipper, so there is difference in dark and light

5. Cameras will break if stepped on, socks are meant to be stepped on

Not the answer I was expecting, but full marks for imagination.

The dad-joke answer is, of course, one takes five toes and the other takes fortoes.

Optimism

I've just turned 82, and I bought a 3 year rail pass. :-)

Tweet of the Year

People's capacity for turning dogmatic stupidity into political movements never ceases to amaze me.

Swifties

Caitlin Moran, writing in The Times, on Taylor Swift's engagement ring:-

"The ring is apparently worth \$1 million — and, as you would expect for that level of folding cash, it's simply humongous. It's of a size where it stops looking like a diamond and simply resembles a Fox's Glacier Mint stuck to a pipe cleaner."



Walmart had to remove 50,000 milk cartons from their store.

The labels have to be changed from "Open here" to "Open at home"

The Grinnin' Bear



My grandson made the mistake of telling me I was being overdramatic so I just changed the WiFi password. We'll see who's overdramatic in about 5 minutes.