

Life in Lockdown

by Christine Bury

In February I began hearing stories of a coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan, China. That was a long way away, it wouldn't affect me. But air travellers spread the disease and cruise ships proved to be excellent incubators. The highly communicable virus spread across the world but still I didn't pay too much attention. I wasn't planning to go abroad and, as I am on the committee of the Emsworth Maritime and Historical Trust, I was busy helping get the Museum ready for our reopening on 4th April.

Events moved fast, though, and as more and more European countries moved into lockdown, it became clear that the United Kingdom might also be affected. We held our first stewards' instruction morning on Saturday, 14th March, just as Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister, announced imminent lockdown when everything except essential services, food shops and pharmacies would be closed.

What did lockdown mean for you? For me those early weeks were characterised by numerous cancellations of much anticipated events and the making of endless lists in which the quest for food and disinfectants predominated. Weddings were postponed, funerals were held without mourners, home working and home schooling became the norm. I soon knew what PPE meant – Personal, Protective Equipment: a new abbreviation had entered the lexicon.

There was a tremendous community spirit and neighbours and friends shared the news about what was available in what shop and who was delivering. We all learned to social distance and wash our hands thoroughly to the tune of two 'Happy Birthdays'.

The weather in those early weeks was fantastic. The sounds I most remember then were of jet washers and lawn mowers. Around where I live everyone seemed to be out in the garden enjoying the sunshine

and doing all the jobs that had accumulated over winter. My family painted the studio, reroofed the shed, ordered in plants and seeds, and resurrected the overwintering geraniums and begonias. Our main venture was the making of a new gravel area in the centre of the garden which meant excavating soil, finding homes for it, ordering and wheel barrowing into position a ton of gravel, and ordering more pot plants.



The refurbished garden; a godsend in lockdown

Online Ordering. That was certainly one of my most significant lifestyle changes. I have always liked looking around before I buy. All that changed when I needed makeup, a new lawnmower, kettle and coffee grinder. It's a fact of life, I think, that appliances die just when you need them most. The advent of a manual coffee grinder led to one of my most memorable moments of lockdown.

I normally use ground coffee but when that was unavailable and I bought some coffee beans, the family thought grinding them would be easy. Not so. It took three people to grind just a few coffee beans. It was a tremendous struggle. Another solution had to be found. We finally remembered that somewhere we had an electric nut grinder, squirreled away some years ago, that was eventually discovered and bought into use. I am sure we were not the only ones who found new uses for old machines.

Ground coffee was not the only shortage. As more people started home baking, some ingredients such as bread flour were in short supply.

Baking was just one of the hobbies that were embraced during lockdown. Recipes were exchanged with friends and neighbours. Knitting, reading, painting, crosswords and jigsaws also proved to be popular pastimes in my family. As well as gardening and walks there were many online activities.

Newsletters popped into my inbox from organisations both large and small. For me the most popular were those from the Havant History Group and the V&A Museum while Goodwood Motorsport provided my son with an outlet for his love of the Grand Prix. There were regular online shows, musicals, opera and ballet, as well as all kinds of virtual educational courses and keep fit classes.

Online technology proved useful in other ways too. One means of keeping in touch with family has always been by regular phone calls and meetings but as face to face gatherings were out my son introduced me and other family members to Skype. I have loved it. I have also embraced Zoom and Google Meet for meetings and virtual talks.

Smiles and nods with neighbours and other walkers was possible even in lockdown. Thursday night clapping for the NHS and other key workers was just one way of greeting one another weekly. The noise was cacophonous and inventive. I nearly jumped out of my skin when a ship's siren sounded from a nearby window one Thursday evening at 8 pm while bells, drums, tambourines, saucepans, even a balalaika, were also rung, banged and shaken.



This aged Covid couple, knitted in lockdown, enjoy an outing

VE Day 75 celebrations on 8th May also bought the community together. In my road, we chatted, feasted and toasted, visited a 1940s style pop-up museum in a front garden, all the time keeping two metres apart.

We watched several VE Day 75 events on TV. Television and radio have proved a boon during lockdown, although sometimes the news has been very grim. By 28th June the figures worldwide for those catching the Covid-19 virus as it was now designated, were 10 million infected people with some 500,000 deaths. However, globally, lockdown measures were causing the numbers of infections to decrease. Restrictions began to be eased in the UK on 4th July.

With the ending of strict lockdown and the gradual easing of restrictions, my longing for a haircut could be realised. It was with great satisfaction that I could also entertain friends in the garden, have a workman inside to do a boiler service, go to the dentist and finally meet some of the family in person. The car no longer had to be started with jump leads as a new battery could be bought. My husband and I had been self isolating as we are both well over 70 and so the shopping has been done by our son augmented with online deliveries. Now we could go to the newsagent, the pharmacy even the supermarket and other shops provided we were masked.

As I write this in early August, there are worries of a second wave of the pandemic, testing is not as widespread as one would like and there is no vaccine as yet. However life is better, my husband and I have taken picnics and walks in country parks, RHS Wisley and various National Trust properties. I have been in a 'social bubble' and shopped locally and in Chichester. I can visit pubs and 'eat out to help out'.

The Museum with its Covid-19 precautions in place reopened on 1st August but not all businesses are yet open, many people have been made redundant, many lives have been lost. Welcome to the new normal.

Stay Alert, Control the Virus, Save Lives