

## Chapter 8

### A New Millennium and A New Start: 2000 to 2006

Publication of a Report on Disability Issues - Access to Churches -  
University of Lincoln Project - NHS Trent Committees - New Health Challenges - Sam  
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#### Publication of a Report on Disability Issues:

I mentioned at the end of chapter 6 that I produced a detailed report with the title of *"Comments on the Effectiveness of the Voluntary Sector on Disability Issues in Lincolnshire: 1989 - 1999"*. It was published in January 2000 and had a wide distribution, including copies to all MPs in Lincolnshire, Lincolnshire County Council, Lincoln City Council, all Lincolnshire District Councils, and with additional copies to all of the voluntary sector organisations referred to in the report. There was a good response to the report and additional copies were later delivered to the University of Lincoln and to the Central Library in Lincoln for their reference libraries. Because of its lengthy title, any future mention will refer to it as the *"Disability Report"*.

#### Access to Churches:

One of the immediate results of publishing my *Disability Report* was quite unexpected. I was invited to attend a Church of England *Lincoln Diocese Disability Advisory Forum* in January 2000, where the aim of the day was to explore different ways of making people with disabilities feel welcome in churches. That forum was a brief introduction into what was to become a new and interesting project for many years to come. Subsequently, I was invited to be the disability adviser to the *Lincoln Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) for the Care of Churches*, where I was to give advice on the Disability Discrimination Act and also on improving access to the 650 churches in the diocese of Lincoln. The DAC met once a month for formal meetings as well as additional visits to churches to help them resolve proposals to make improvements. As well as giving advice to the DAC, I was also asked to visit individual churches, when requested, to discuss how they could improve "access for all" and to explain the implications to them of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). The DDA was introduced in 1995, but it came into force in three distinct phases. The first phase came into effect in

1996, when it became unlawful to discriminate against anyone just because they had a disability. For example, people could no longer be refused admission to a restaurant just because they had a physical impairment. The second phase was introduced in 1999, when, if there was a physical barrier preventing a disabled person from receiving the normal service, then an alternative way had to be found to provide that service. The final phase came into effect in 2004 when all physical barriers were to be removed, "where reasonable". Unfortunately, "where reasonable" was a fairly loose phrase as it depended on each individual's interpretation. The thinking behind the law was that if I thought that there was unreasonable access to a particular place I could take the owner to court and a judge would decide whether or not the existing access was reasonable. The disadvantage was that most of us would not be able to afford court action, particularly against wealthy landlords.

My approach when talking to churches was to tell them not to concentrate on what the law said, but to think about why we wanted to make everyone feel welcome within our Christian community, and at our meeting places, by making them accessible to all. "Access for all" included all types of impairments, including visual, hearing, mobility and learning. That approach usually worked, because most people then saw the access problems from a totally different perspective. Between March 2004 and July 2006, I visited over 400 churches in the Diocese of Lincoln, at their invitation, to give guidance on how accessibility could be improved. A very high percentage of the churches dated back to medieval times, before access for all was even thought about. It was a wonderful experience meeting such a variety of interesting people and with every church being unique; it also gave me an opportunity to explore places in my home county that I had never even heard of. In the majority of places visited, we found that alterations could be made to improve access, without necessarily being extremely expensive. Although there were no general funds for access improvements from the government, most parishes found ways of raising the money themselves, by various fund-raising initiatives. Another new experience for me, after being a member of the congregation of St Germain's Church, Scothern for nearly ten years, was when I was asked to fill the vacant post of Secretary to the Parochial Church Council. That also kept me very busy for the next four years.

## University of Lincoln Project:

Another effect of my *Disability Report* was to be closely involved with a project by the Community Operational Research Unit (CORU), at the University of Lincoln. The first recommendation in my report was *"That CORU be authorised to research more effective ways of improving communication and real involvement between Local Authorities and the voluntary sector on all new building projects to ensure proper access for all"*. There appeared to be a "tick-in-the-box" attitude from the Local Authorities when voluntary groups were regularly asked for comments on disability issues but then the authorities appeared not to listen to, or to act on, their comments and recommendations. The purpose of the project was to focus on how to improve the effectiveness of Local Authorities consultation with voluntary disability groups.

The CORU project was led by Dr Rebecca Herron and the scope of the project was increased from a Lincolnshire county level to become a National survey, at the request of the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), based in London. It was an interesting project and we produced detailed questionnaires that were circulated to appropriate people within Lincolnshire, and nationally to a list of organisations produced by RADAR. After carefully analysing the results, a detailed report was produced by CORU and circulated to all those concerned. In addition, Dr Herron and I were invited to give a joint presentation at Westminster, to the *All Party Parliamentary Disability Group*, on 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2001, which was favourably received. At the end of the presentation we were thanked by the chairman and one of their Lordships stressed that the government should learn from our experience with the national project. He stressed that in future the government should make a point of really listening to, and acting on, what the people said and not just "consulting" with them. It was a good comment, but we wondered whether it would really make a difference in the future.

## National Health Service (NHS) Committees:

In September 2000, I was invited to join the Trent NHS Modernisation Council, as a lay member. The Trent region covered South Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire

and Lincolnshire. A few months later I was also invited to join the Lincolnshire Modernisation Council (NHS) and, subsequently, other NHS committees. The purpose of the Trent Modernisation Council, and the other committees, was to investigate ways of implementing *"The NHS Plan"*. The plan was outlined in the government's 144 page booklet, published in July 2000, which stated that the government intended to put patients and front-line staff at the centre of the NHS. Initially, the Trent Modernisation Council seemed to work well, but gradually it became increasingly bureaucratic and many lay members were convinced that they were merely being "used" to support or endorse decisions that had already been made by the government. It certainly felt like another case of "tick-in-the-box" for consultation!

That feeling came to a head when we were asked, at very short notice, to comment on a government booklet titled *"Involving Patients and the Public in Healthcare – A Discussion Document"*, published in September 2001; responses to the publication were to be returned by the 12 October 2001. The first that I knew about the booklet was when I received a telephone call inviting me to discuss the contents of the booklet at a meeting in Derby, the following week. I agreed to attend, providing that I received a copy in time to study it before the meeting. The following morning twelve copies of the glossy 28 page A4 booklet arrived! The first few pages were very encouraging, but it went rapidly downhill after that. I had a most uncomfortable night thinking about it, and began to doubt my own reactions. Therefore, the next morning I decided to circulate the twelve copies to a cross-section of six men and six women, varying in ages from 25 to over 65 years, and asked them to complete a simple questionnaire, based on the contents of the booklet. They were also invited to add any additional comments if they so wished. I appreciated that they were all busy but stressed that I needed a response within a week, if possible.

To my surprise, I received ten out of the twelve replies, with apologies from the other two people. What amazed me was the depth of their feelings and the amount of additional comments that they all added. With no prompting from me, they all agreed that the proposals - for numerous new committees - were far too complicated and bureaucratic and that the proposals were certainly not what they were looking for as NHS patients. I

then produced a report ready for the meeting, summarising their responses. I still wondered whether I was out on a limb, but it didn't take long to discover that the vast majority of c300 other delegates had exactly the same feelings. When I arrived at the meeting I was annoyed to find that the agenda for the day was not based on discussing the content of the booklet, but was on how we were to implement the contents! After raising that point with the director, she apologised and said that the original agenda had been vetoed by "The Centre" in London and that London had produced the new agenda for the day, which she had been told must be used. The whole morning was then taken-up by two young men from London, whose task appeared to be to "sell" the proposals to the meeting. The members at the meeting felt very strongly that if this was a real "Discussion Document" then the Government representatives should listen to our responses and report back our feelings to the Minister. Their reaction was not encouraging, as they said that they had been told that they must find ways of making it work.

Copies of the various reports and comments were then forwarded to the Minister, from individual members, and we trusted that the organisers of the seminar also fed-back the feelings of the meeting. The next thing that we received was a letter, dated 16<sup>th</sup> of November 2001, from Hazel Blears MP, the Under Secretary of State for the Department of Health, thanking us for our responses and stressing how the whole process of listening had been very real and constructive. She then seemed pleased with her enclosed 24 page A4 glossy booklet "*Involving Patients and the Public in Healthcare: Response to the Listening Exercise*". Unfortunately there were certainly no positive indications that anyone had been listening to our comments in that final document. Moreover, I'm amazed at how quickly the responses from across the country had supposedly been taken on board, the new report drafted, the report finally agreed, printed and then circulated – all within one month! Perhaps one could be forgiven for thinking that the report had already been at the printers before the responses were even received or read.

There were numerous meetings of the Trent Modernisation Council, with additional sub-committees, but none of those meetings were held in Lincolnshire. The final Modernisation Exchange meeting, held at Derby University in July 2002, was attended by over 450 delegates drawn from a large area which included Birmingham, Derbyshire, Essex, Lincolnshire,

Rutland, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, and South Yorkshire. I was extremely unimpressed with that final extravagant "show", which seemed to be a very noisy PR / party event. Although there was a choice of over 50 workshop sessions during the day, the ones that I attended were carefully stage-managed and it is difficult to see what good they achieved. As lay members we were given the opportunity to have our final say about the effectiveness of the Modernisation Council with a "Question Time", facilitated by Jennie Murray (the BBC Radio 4 Presenter), but that was on the last session of the day, when most delegates appeared to have gone home. To sum up, the Trent Modernisation Council appeared to be yet another major "spin" event and I dread to think how much the whole project cost and what the Council actually achieved, other than to endorse Government policy decisions that had already been made.

#### New Health Challenges:

Although Phyl was still struggling with constant pain in her right shoulder, we had a short break for a week to the Lake District in March 2000 and then came back in time for the interior of our bungalow to be completely redecorated. The logistics for preparing the bungalow for a repaint needed careful planning so that John, the decorator, could start work as soon as he arrived each morning. Our wonderful neighbours, Pam and Allan, would appear each evening and move the furniture from one room to another so that John could start painting as soon as he arrived; he soon named Pam and Allan as "the furniture elves". We then had new fitted wardrobes built into the bedrooms, with much improved access for both of us. We also ordered two large single beds, with electrically operated tilting mechanisms to help with our mobility, which we then pushed together to make a giant King Size bed. In July 2000 Phyl was eventually admitted to hospital to have an operation to replace her right shoulder, where she stayed for a week.

On the day that she was due to return home there was a hold-up when I went to collect her because the Occupational Therapists (OT) insisted that they had to have a home visit before she could be discharged. Therefore, I had to leave Phyl in hospital and returned home for the OT's assessment. Unfortunately, the whole thing became a fiasco as they insisted on leaving a complicated device to heighten a dining-room chair so that Phyl

could sit in it during the day. I explained to them that she would never sit in that chair, as she had her own comfortable, electrically-operated arm-chair, but they wouldn't listen. In the end I gave in, collected Phyl from the hospital and, after the district nurse removed the staples from Phyl's new shoulder a couple of days later, we returned the "chair-raising device" to the hospital. Although the awful pain had gone from her shoulder, Phyl was still having difficulty using her right hand for simple things like eating, washing her face or combing her hair. She mentioned it to the surgeon and then had another simple operation to remove some bone from her right elbow, but that didn't help much. For the next six months we were travelling backwards and forwards to Lincoln hospital, two or three times a week, for physiotherapy on Phyl's shoulder and elbow. Eventually, she got used to using her left hand to eat with, instead of her right, and we developed a combined routine with daily washing and dressing, so that we were soon back to normal.

Phyl's knees were still extremely painful and so we stayed at home most of the time and caught up with lots of reading. We had a dreadful job trying to make an appointment to see the orthopaedic surgeon, as we had to go through Phyl's rheumatologist; all that we seemed to get from him were more delays and excuses for no action. Eventually, I did manage to speak to the rheumatologist who made an appointment and agreed to meet us at the orthopaedic consultant's clinic on a specific date. When we arrived at the clinic the orthopaedic surgeon didn't know why we were there and assumed that Phyl had returned because of a problem with her new shoulder replacement; there was no sign of the rheumatologist and there were no notes about his referral for her knees! You can probably imagine my reactions, but the surgeon was wonderful and he calmly asked to see Phyl's knees. He instantly agreed that both knees were in a very poor condition and asked her if she had any objection to him replacing both knees at the same time, to which she readily agreed. Phyl was finally admitted to hospital in May 2003, on the third attempt, after the usual last minute cancellations, to have both of her knees replaced. It was a traumatic forty-eight hours, but eventually everything calmed down and Phyl was soon out of bed and exercising her two new knees. Although the pain had gone, there were still fairly significant mobility problems, particularly when trying to bend her new knees.

Since taking early retirement I had been receiving treatment for Basal Cell Carcinomas (BCCs). In March 2003 I became a long-term out-patient for regular treatment at Lincoln County hospital because of multiple, recurring BCCs. A few months later I was referred to the Nottingham Queen's Medical Centre, where they confirmed that I had a BCC on my left lower eye lid, which would be removed using local anaesthetic. Unfortunately, there was a long waiting list for the operation and it was twelve months before the operation took place. The delay was caused because of the shortage of technicians in the path' lab who were to analyse the BCC as it was removed. They could tell from their tests whether some of the BCC still remained in the patient and, if so, the surgeon would then remove more BCC tissue. That procedure continued until the technicians confirmed that the whole BCC had been removed. Although it was a time consuming procedure, the rationale was that only essential tissue was removed from the patient. Apparently, the technicians did not work directly for the NHS, but were contracted-in when they were needed. The consultants had repeatedly appealed to the government for additional funding for the technicians so that they could clear the backlog of skin cancer patients. Eventually, the hospital was given the full funding that they had requested, but they were told that they had to spend it within the month or return the money. As it was impossible to clear the backlog at such short notice you can imagine the frustration to both the surgeons and to the patients.

A year later, my turn came and I was in and out of the operating theatre in Nottingham for most of the day, with the technicians analysing the removed tissue each time before I returned to the theatre to have more tissue removed. Towards the end of the day I noticed a cluster of surgeons in a huddle and then they came over to talk to me. They apologised and explained that the BCC had been far more invasive than they expected and that it had entered the fat, muscles and nerves around my eye. The only solution was to remove my left eye the next morning! My hardest task was in knowing what to say to Phyl on the telephone, as she was still at home thinking that this was just another simple operation under local anaesthetic. It was a long night, but there is no doubt that prayers helped and the quietness of the ward gave me time to think and to keep events in perspective. Our son Michael travelled up from Cornwall the following day, after Phyl told him what

had happened, and he brought Phyl over to Nottingham to see me, the day after the operation. It was a drastic outcome, with the eye-ball, eye-lids and all of the muscles being removed from the socket. The eye socket was then packed with ribbons of material made from sea-weed, to help with the healing process, and a large dressing was placed over that side of my face. I returned home a couple of days later and the wonderful district nurses visited each day to change the dressings, with regular follow-up visits to the Queen's Medical Centre at Nottingham during the following months.

It was at one of those follow-up appointments that the surgeons diagnosed a similar BCC in the corner of my other eye and within a month I returned to have it removed. Although it was hoped that it would be a much simpler operation this time, I had been booked in to the hospital for three days as a precaution. The procedure was to be similar to before, under local anaesthetic, but this time a graft was to be taken from my right upper eye-lid to cover the area where the BCC had been removed, between the corner of my eye and my nose. I made sure that I was to be kept fully informed of the options as they proceeded, as I certainly did not wish to loose my remaining eye. On the first day there were much longer pre-op tests than before and after those had finished I had a visit from two well meaning people, which I could have done without. A blind lady with her guide-dog and her carer asked if they could come and talk to me before my operation. They then started to explain that I should not worry about loosing my other eye because being completely blind wasn't the end of the world. That certainly wasn't the news or conversation that I needed at that critical time and I carefully managed to change the subject and then thanked them for their visit. I'm sure that they thought that they were helping me – but they were wrong! This second operation was fairly straight forward, completed under local anaesthetics, and the surgeon stitched the skin from my eyelid in two pieces to cover the hole left by the removal of the BCC. The follow up visits to Queen's confirmed that all was going well. Eventually, after several months, the dressings on my left eye-socket had to be changed only three times a week, so then I attended the GP's surgery for that treatment. Although I was told that the socket would heal in about three months, it eventually took over a year to do so. We were due to visit Australia, to see Phyl's sister, the month after my first operation but obviously that had to be cancelled. The

next problem that we encountered was that I couldn't drive, and Phyl hadn't been able to drive for several years because of her arthritis. Our friends and neighbours in the village were very supportive, but I missed my independence. After discussing it with the eye surgeon I applied to the DVLA and, after a few months, I was given clearance to drive again. Initially, we went out around the village on Sunday mornings and then gradually ventured further into Lincoln as my confidence and adjustments to using a single eye grew. Within about a year we were almost back to normal, whatever that was.

A few months later I was suffering with a painful shoulder and a right hand that wouldn't work properly. Eventually, after waiting for about a year for an MRI scan, the problem was diagnosed as being cervical spondylitis, and the cause of the pain and immobile hand was because of a trapped nerve from my spine. However, the consultant then confirmed that they could do nothing about it. They do say that variety is the spice of life. In the meantime, several months after my shoulder pain and immobile hand first appeared, I had a nasty fall and landed on my bottom with a severe jolt. I managed to climb into my wheel-chair and, to my surprise and delight, found that the pain in my shoulder had gone and that my hand was working properly again. Now I could get back to painting again.

#### The Sam Scorer Art Gallery, Lincoln:

I mentioned earlier that Sam Scorer had invited me to visit a derelict building in Drury Lane, Lincoln, which he was thinking of converting to make a new, accessible Art Gallery. The building was in a dreadful state and in the past it had been used as a milk distribution centre, a motor car repair garage and as a storage unit. The building had a very narrow street-frontage, with large wooden commercial-vehicle entrance-doors, but it had a good depth. To cut a long story short, Sam virtually demolished the original building and replaced it with a modern art gallery, which was eventually registered as a Charitable Trust. I was invited to become one of the founding Trustees at a meeting in Sam's house in January 1998, just before the gallery was built. We were keen to encourage the public to visit the gallery and made a point of making everyone welcome, with no admission fee, to see high quality exhibitions of work by local artists. Sam wanted the paintings exhibited to be

from living artists and he strongly encouraged very large paintings, as he said that it was easier to paint small ones! He also had a burning ambition, right from the start, to have an exhibition of paintings in his gallery from the Tate Gallery in London, but that was much easier said than done. His argument was that the paintings in the Tate were owned by the nation, with huge numbers stored away in their vaults where no one could see them. He argued that we had just as much right to see them in Lincoln as the people who were fortunate enough to live near, or be able to visit, Tate Galleries in other parts of the country. It was a long and hard battle, with many hoops to jump through, but eventually he won and he selected ten paintings for his exhibition "*Tate Unseen*", which was a huge success. He also produced excellent colour catalogues to commemorate the month-long exhibition.

The biggest problem that we encountered, in the early years, was in building-up public awareness of the gallery. Although the gallery was only about fifty yards from Lincoln's thriving tourist attraction, centred on Castle Square, it was in the relatively small back-street of Drury Lane, with very little passing traffic or pedestrians. However, we then started a "Friends of the Gallery" scheme and, as the word gradually got around, the number of friends started to increase. Eventually, after a couple of years, regular visitors started to attend the exhibitions, which usually changed every two weeks. We also managed to persuade Lincoln City Council to erect an official tourist sign-post in Castle Square, and to include the gallery on their tourist maps, for which we were grateful. As the word continued to spread the gallery soon became pre-booked by artists, several years before their exhibition dates. Sam had planned to celebrate his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday by having a display in the gallery, with sections for each decade of his busy life; sadly, he was admitted to hospital a short time before that event and he died shortly afterwards. During his last weeks he knew that he was quite ill, but he insisted on the party going ahead as planned. It was a good party, and although we were sad, it was a wonderful way of celebrating Sam's achievements. Unfortunately, his wife Anne died the following year but we were grateful to his son Paul, who supported the Trustees request to rename the gallery as the "Sam Scorer Gallery" and to carry on running it under the previous agreements that we had with Sam and Anne.

### My Paintings:

As explained earlier, I visited Monet's Garden in Giverny, near Paris, several times and have produced many paintings of his house, lake, bridges and gardens. There was one particular painting of Monet's bridge that Phyl and I both really enjoyed, but someone bought it when it was first exhibited. In subsequent years I learnt from that mistake and Phyl was given the first choice before I offered to sell any of them. Lack of wall space helped to keep that to a reasonable scale, but we also had a tendency to buy other artists work, so there was always a stack of paintings stored in cupboards, ready to be hung when we felt like a change. I had a real urge to paint a larger version of my original "*Monet's Bridge*" so I set to work in early 2000 and, later that year, then entered it into a national open competition run by "*The Artist & Leisure Painter*" magazine. I made a determined effort to keep my painting more "free" than the way that I usually painted and I also painted the large frame in similar colours and textures to the painting. I was quite pleased with the result. The painting was hung in the "*The Artist & Leisure Painter*" finalist's exhibition and I was delighted when I found that I had won the first prize: the Winsor & Newton award of artist's materials, worth £500, which gave me a chance to stock up with more paints, brushes and a large roll of canvas. Over the next few years I exhibited at other galleries, including the Usher Gallery in Lincoln, Lincoln Castle, the Sun Café in Lincoln, Boston, Gainsborough, Grantham and Old Bolingbroke. Sometimes they were one-man exhibitions, but at other times they were with groups of artists such as the *Lincolnshire Artists Society* and the *Nadin Group*. I was also on the Management Committee of the Lincolnshire Artist Society for three years and co-ordinated an in depth analysis of the society's members. My sixth one-man show was held in the Sam Scorer Gallery, for the first time, in September 2003 - with over forty paintings on show.

I also took part in the annual Lincolnshire event "Art-on-the-Map" for the first time in 2003. That was a new way of getting the public to meet artists, by inviting them to visit the artists in their own studios and hence in a less formal way than organised exhibitions in galleries. About a hundred artists took part each year, spread across the county, and their studios were open for four consecutive weekends in May / June. Catalogues with details

of each artist, together with one example of their work, a map and contact details, were circulated in a glossy brochure before each annual event. One of the ideas was to take the “stuffiness” out of art and to let the public meet the artists as “normal” friendly people, with a chance to browse through old sketch books and to see works in progress. Naturally, artists had to commit themselves to Art-on-the-Map about six months in advance, so that catalogues could be printed and distributed before the event. We were warned not to pull out of the event once the catalogues had been sent for printing because people could be travelling a long way to visit the studios and would not be pleased to then find them closed. We were a little hesitant about taking part when the project first started in 2000, but our artist friends eventually persuaded me to take part and we were pleased when we did join the scheme. However, we were pushing our luck for our first opening, in 2003. Phyl's operation to replace both knees was postponed three times and she eventually arrived home, after the operations, the night before our first opening day! With wonderful help from our neighbours, Pam and Allan, we set-up the extra tables, etc., in the garage and prepared my studio and the rest of the exhibition space in the bungalow. In the end we coped very well, and it was worth the effort, with lots of very friendly visitors.

After losing my left eye I found that I couldn't paint for nearly two years, but also found it very difficult to sit and do nothing. Therefore, after several weeks thinking about it, I started working on this autobiography, which kept me busy for most of the next year-and-a-half. Eventually, the urge to paint returned, but I was still finding it quite difficult to get started. To spur me on I signed up for Art-on-the-Map again, knowing that I would need to have some new paintings to display. Initially, I found that it was difficult to co-ordinate my hand and eye, as judging the distance from the tip of the paint brush to the canvas was hard to determine. I would make several attempts to make a mark on the canvas, but nothing happened; I would end up with a splodge of paint in the wrong place! I then decided to try painting some simple geometric designs on small canvases and to concentrate on using a range of blue and red paints. After a while things improved and I enjoyed producing something quite new and abstract. Later on, I decided to join the four canvases together to make a single painting, which worked quite well. About six months later I returned to painting landscapes, but still

enjoyed producing occasional abstract work, still experimenting with colour. In the summer of 2005 I attended a Master Class on colour, in the Lincoln Usher Gallery, and found that very stimulating. The following year, in 2006, I enjoyed another Master Class for a week, at the Usher Gallery, on etching – something quite new to me, but now I had an excuse to ask strangers “if they would like to see my etchings”!

#### New Wheelchair Holidays:

Because of the constraints mentioned above, we restricted our holidays to simple ones for a few years. We had two short breaks in 2000; first to visit Reg and Joan at Irton House in Cumbria in March and then a short break to Norfolk in November. The following year we returned to Cumbria in February and made family visits to Cornwall in May and December to see Michael, Alison and our grandchildren. We also had a short trip to Spain to see our other two sons, David and Stephen in October 2001. In 2002 we returned to Cumbria in March and had three family visits to Cornwall, in April, July and October.

Our visit to Cornwall in July 2002 was a real turning point for us as it was the first time in fourteen years that we found truly wheelchair accessible accommodation in Cornwall. The new bed-and-breakfast business was set-up, developed and managed by a charming family, who lived on a farm. Colin and Caroline Northover bought Treganinny Farm, which is just a few miles west of Truro, and converted many of the outbuildings to turn them into wheelchair accessible accommodation. They also built a large dining room for breakfasts and an adjoining conservatory for the use of guests, with marvellous views over the Cornish countryside. The farm is set on the top of a hill, surrounded by woods, and the private track leading up to the farm through the woods sets the imagination running. Our granddaughter Senara, on her first visit, wanted to know if bears lived in the forest! We have been returning there several times each year since we discovered it and hope to do so for many years to come. We returned to the farm in Cornwall in April, July and November 2003 and had a quick break to Cumbria in October – we now had two favourite bolt-holes at opposite ends of the country. Sadly, late in November we had a short visit to Northern Ireland for the funeral of Aunt Nora, the last of her generation and a great loss to us all.

We had planned to visit Phyl's long-lost sister, Josie, in Australia during September 2004 as we were feeling ready to be more adventurous again, following Phyl's successful knee operations. Prior to that, we returned to Cornwall in February and June, with another short break in between to Reg and Joan in Cumbria. We also decided to take up an offer from our friends - David and Shirley - to join them for a week in Mallorca during May. It was the first time that we had visited Mallorca and our hotel was on an isolated beach in the north-east of the island, which we enjoyed. We hired a vehicle for the week and David kindly did the driving around the island, looking for birds of the feathered variety. Although the weather was poor with rain and gales, particularly in the mountains, we did have a few sunny days and the bird-watching, particularly in the nature reserves, was excellent. That brief week confirmed our mood for more adventurous holidays. Unfortunately, in August - just a few weeks before we were due to fly Australia - I lost my left eye and the holiday had to be cancelled. Within a few months I began to recover from the loss of my eye and, after checking with my doctors and the Driver's Vehicle Licensing Agency, I started to drive short distances again.

We hadn't seen our sons or the Grandchildren for sometime, so we decide in June 2005 to drive down to the farm in Cornwall again. However, having the confidence to drive around sleepy Lincolnshire was quite a different proposition to driving more than 700 miles on the return trip to Cornwall. Therefore, we decided to break our journey to have dinner with our friends, John and Cath, who now lived in Sidford, near Exeter, before driving on to Truro. As it happened, we arrived at John and Cath's house in plenty of time and we could easily have carried on to Truro without another break. Nevertheless, it was good to have a long chat with them and we enjoy a delicious dinner before setting off at about 7.00 p.m., which gave us time to arrive in Truro before dark. What we forgot to anticipate was the late setting summer sun, which made driving west extremely difficult, particularly with only the one eye. Another lesson learned the hard way! On our next trip to Cornwall, in November, we drove straight there, but drove back via Suffolk so that we could meet up with our eldest son David; a very long drive of over 1,000 miles, but worth it.

#### Australia 2005:

By now we were both feeling better and ready for a long break away from home, so we decided to resume our plans to visit Phyl's sister Josie in Australia. Phyl was keen to visit without too much delay, particularly as we had to cancel our visit for the previous year and Josie's husband Frank had been unwell for some time. Josie and Frank had immigrated to Australia forty years earlier and Phyl had lost touch with them until fairly recently, so there was a lot of catching up to do! As I was under doctors orders to stay out of the sun we agreed that the best time to visit Australia would be during their spring, or our September. Josie found a suitable wheelchair adapted holiday cabin on a camp-site next to Lake Illawara, near Wollongong, and about fifteen minutes drive from their house, so we booked it for the whole of September.

Having booked our base-camp, the next major decision was how to get there. Most people that we spoke to stressed the advantages of breaking the very long journey to Australia by staying for several days en-route at places such as Singapore, Thailand or Hong Kong. However, after much thinking about our combined mobility restrictions and the logistics of disembarking from the aircraft, collecting luggage, transferring to a hotel and then a few days later booking out of the hotel and back into the airport, we decided against that option. The thought of sitting on the aircraft for about 24 hours was not pleasant, but I reasoned that it would be no worse than sitting at home for that length of time if we were really ill. I find that relative way of looking at things helps me with decisions. In the end, we booked our through-flight with British Airways / Qantas, with a short refuelling stop at Singapore where we had just enough time to get off the aircraft to go to the toilet, before flying on to Sydney. Our plans for the previous year had been to stay near Josie for a couple of weeks and then to visit Ayer's Rock, followed by a week in the Cairns area. However, we decided that on this visit we would remain in the same place for the whole month and relax with Josie and Frank.

That was a good decision and we soon settled into a daily routine. I would get up early each morning and take a bird-watching route in my wheelchair to the shore of Lake Illawara and then on to the beach

overlooking the Tasman Sea before returning through the trees and scrub-land to our cabin. Josie would then pick us up and either take us home or on a visit to a new local location for a few hours. When we returned to the cabin at the end of the day I would do another circuit of my morning route. I had done my homework on the birds that I might see before we left England, so there was always something new to look for; it also gave me the chance to do some drawing and painting. We had one day in Sydney, when Josie's friend Kerrie kindly chauffeured us, and it was all that we expected and more. The Opera House was stunning and the setting in the harbour was unique. It was sad to think that my brother Mervyn had helped with the building of the Opera House and that he had died so young in his motorbike accident. I also had a couple of hours in the Sydney Contemporary Art Gallery, which I thoroughly enjoyed; many of the paintings and exhibits are still as clear to me today as if I saw them yesterday – a good sign of quality, in my opinion, whether it is figurative or abstract.

On our days out with Josie, and sometimes with Frank, we visited Jervis Bay and Morton National Park to the south, Fitzroy Falls and the rain forest in the mountains to the west, Nan Tien Buddhist Temple to the north and many other locations along the beautiful coast and the inland hills. We also had time to enjoy Frank's impressive collection of cacti and to discuss his interest in poetry. During our holiday I saw over 75 different species of birds as well a dolphins and a Southern Right Whale, breaching off the beach near to our cabin. It was a wonderful introduction to Australia and the overwhelming memories are of the friendliness of the people, endless empty golden beaches, blue sea and lush blue / green vegetation. The towns and villages all seemed to be so clean and tidy with lots of open space, but there is an abundance of that in Australia.

When we reluctantly returned home I wondered what we could possible do to thank Josie and Frank for their hospitality. In the end, I decided to make a small book of paintings, photographs and poems as a reminder of such a memorable visit. I first thought of the idea when visiting an exhibition, with Frank and Josie, of hand-made books in the Art Gallery at Wollongong. I had never made a book before, so it was interesting to learn the secrets of bookbinding, etc. I decided to make two copies; one for Josie & Frank and a copy for ourselves. That also encouraged me to try making

more books in the future, including the proto-type for this one.

#### Cumbria and Northumberland:

In March 2006 we had a very wet week back in Cumbria with Reg and Joan, as we had not been able to visit them the previous year. Phyl was still having trouble with climbing steps so she decided to try a course of private treatment with a physiotherapist, for several months. We also used a four day coach-tour with the *Friends of Lincolnshire Museums and Art Gallery* as a practice for our next big adventure. The four-day coach trip was to Northumberland where we explored Bamborough Castle, Lindisfarne, the Farne Islands, Paxton House and the open-air museum at Beamish. It was a very busy four days, with wonderful scenery and excellent company. We had visited the Farne Islands about thirty years earlier, when we were both more mobile, but decided to try it again. Boarding the boat wasn't too difficult, as we were helped down a steep concrete ramp and then lifted into the boat before sailing to the other end of the harbour to pick up the remainder of the party from the steep harbour steps. It was an enjoyable trip around the Inner and Outer Farne Islands, with all of the usual breeding sea birds and numerous seals. However, by the time we returned the tide had gone out and we couldn't reach the ramp where we had boarded. The next thing that happened was two young men helped Phyl up the steep harbour steps and four more lifted my wheelchair into the air, with me still in it. They then carried me up the steps at shoulder height, with me facing the sea, but I could feel myself tipping forwards as the pair at the back grew more tired as they approached the top of the steps. I don't think that the Health & Safety Executive had ever been approached for their views on that method of transfer, but we did eventually arrive safely on the quay-side, but I don't think that I will try it again!

We had been wondering for some time whether to either have a holiday in North America, as wheelchair access was likely to be much better in that part of the world, or whether to try a cruise holiday on a large ship. Neither of us felt strongly about visiting the USA but we thought that Canada might be interesting. We had heard various comments from people who had been on cruise ships the larger ships sounded as though they might suit our mobility needs. We visited our local travel agent to discuss the options and

finally agreed on a combined package of a one week coach tour through the Canadian Rockies, followed by a one week cruise along the Alaskan coast.

#### The Canadian Rockies:

In July 2006 we flew from Heathrow to Calgary and stayed overnight in the five-star Palliser Hotel, built in 1904, where we met our tour director at a cocktail reception. Unfortunately, there were several steps up to the entrance, but the staff lifted me up them in my wheelchair. The next day, after briefly exploring central Calgary, we were about to board the coach when the driver asked if we would like to use the wheelchair lift. He explained that he had just collected his brand new coach and that he hadn't yet used the lift, but he was keen to see how it worked. We were delighted, as it was so much easier than shuffling up and down the steps on my bottom, particularly in wet weather, and Phyl found it so much easier than climbing the steps. The lift was very discretely built into the side of the luxurious coach, about half-way along its side, and there were no obvious signs where it had been fitted. After that very pleasant surprise, we then set off across the Canadian prairie and through the foothills to the Rocky Mountains.

We followed the Bow River, passing through Canmore, and arrived in Banff where we stayed overnight at the five-star Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel; an impressive European-style castle resort hotel, built in 1888. Banff was a very pleasant town, surrounded by spectacular scenery, and we had half a day to explore it on our own. As it was a bright, sunny day we decided to have our lunch beside the Bow River, with wonderful view of Cascade Mountain. The following morning we visited the Bow Falls before setting-off along the Bow River Valley to Lake Louise. On the way we had wonderful views of an impressive Elk, standing by the river, with Castle Mountain as a backdrop. Our next stop was at the Lake Louise Ski Resort, with an exciting trip up the ski-slope, after stripping down my wheelchair to fit it into the gondola. From the top of the ski-slope we had a dramatic view of the surrounding area and of Lake Louise, many miles away at the far end of the opposite valley. From there we drove past Mount Temple to the Valley of Ten Peaks, which for me was one of the highlight of the day. The ten peaks surrounded the Moraine Lake, which was incredibly atmospheric. We

regularly heard the crack and rumble of avalanches, which alerted us to watch the spectacular sights, high-up in the mountains. Between watching the avalanches and admiring the scenery we were entertained by a pair of chipmunks, scampering between the rocks and the tree-trunks lying at the edge of the lake. Chateau Lake Louise was a stunning lakeside chateau, built in 1890, and named after Queen Victoria's daughter Princess Louise. We stayed in a large, attractive room with a balcony overlooking Lake Louise, with the glacier towering beyond and above it. The dinner in the evening was a treat and afterwards we walked around the gardens and lakeside, watching and listening to a Great Northern Diver, or Loon, that was fishing for its supper.

The following morning we set off for the Icefield Parkway, which was a very good quality road running between spectacular views of icy peaked mountains, glaciers and lakes. We had a slight detour at the start of the day to Kicking Horse Pass and to the spectacular waterfalls that had carved a natural bridge through the rocks. We also had excellent views of two Black Bears, a mother and her well grown cub, feeding by the roadside. From the coach, along the Icefield Parkway, we had good views of Hector Lake with the Naputik Icefield as a backdrop, before studying the Crowfoot Glacier and then crossing Bow Pass. I had been surprised at the lack of birds seen so far and was looking forward to passing the Waterfowl Lakes, next to the road, but they also appeared to be empty. Our next major landmark was the Saskatchewan Crossing, followed by the Saskatchewan Glacier, Mount Athabasca and Mount Kitchener. There had been quite heavy rain in the mountains during the week before our visit and we also had rain and mist after leaving Lake Louise. We had just passed Panthar Falls when our coach stopped suddenly and we watched a huge mud-slide come down the side of the mountain towards us. The mud looked just like very coarse concrete being freshly pored out of a massive lorry. Our driver, Greg, then drove quickly away as the mud-slide flowed across the road behind us and he was quickly on the radio to warn the authorities of the hazard. Later on we heard that the road had been blocked for several hours until it was cleared; that had saved us either a major diversion or a long wait until the road was made accessible again.

A few miles later we stopped for a trip on the mighty Athabasca Glacier. Phyl and I were directed to a small van to take us to the specially designed glacier-vehicle. They managed to push my wheelchair up the ramp and into the van but, unfortunately, Phyl couldn't get into the passenger seat because of her knees. However, they were very enterprising and soon found a garden-chair for Phyl to sit in before tying it down in the back of the van with ropes; we now had an extra passenger seat in the back! We were then on our way to the main vehicle, which resembled a massive fire-engine specially designed to travel on the glacier, which had a lift for my wheelchair and for Phyl. The weather was still variable when we arrived and on the way up to the glacier we were in thick, low cloud. Once we were out on the ice we noticed quite a breeze and from time to time the fog cleared completely, giving wonderful views across the glacier and up to the dramatic, overhanging Andromeda Glacier. It was a new sensation using my wheelchair on the wet, rough glacier surface and occasionally I needed help to avoid the small crevasses and wheel-spin!

When we resumed our coach trip we headed north to the Sunwapta Falls, with the ridge of the Endless Mountain Chain to our right. About twenty miles before we reached Jasper, our next overnight stop, several of us opted to take an additional, unplanned, excursion. We then disembarked from the coach, while the remaining sensible ones, like Phyl, went on ahead to our overnight accommodation. We were then carefully briefed and put on additional waterproof anoraks before climbing aboard our inflatable white-water raft which was to take us to Jasper. It was another new experience and, luckily because of the recent heavy rain, the river was in full flow hence making the rapids not quite as rough as they could have been with less water. It was peaceful, for most of the time, and made a much appreciated change from the coach drive on the road. Once again, I was surprised at the lack of bird-life as we travelled along the river, although we did see a few birds, including a Pileated Woodpecker – similar to our European Black Woodpecker. We arrived at the Jasper Park Lodge just in time to get dried-out, warmed-up and dressed for dinner, which we were all more than ready to enjoy. Both Phyl and I thought that the Jasper Park Lodge was certainly the best accommodation that we stayed at while in Canada. We had a large bedroom with an en-suite in the main building; the remainder of the group

stayed in individual, luxurious cedar chalets built in the park amongst the mature trees. The Jasper Park Lodge complex was surrounded on three sides by a lake. The next morning I decided to go for a long walk in my wheelchair, before breakfast, so that I could really enjoy the peace and tranquillity before getting back onto the coach for another long drive. There were wonderful views across the lake to the forests and to Mount Edith Cavel and the other surrounding mountains.

All too soon, it was time to be on our way again, with a short visit first to Jasper town centre and to the Maligne Canyon. About fifteen miles west of Jasper we crossed the Continental Divide, on the Yellowhead Pass, with dramatic views of the lakes, forests and mountains. We had a short break near Mount Robson, the highest peak in the Canadian Rockies, at almost 13,000 feet. Surprisingly, that far north, we also watched two minute Calliope Hummingbirds feeding on the nectar of colourful flowers. As we left the mountain pass we headed south-west, towards the ranching region of Kamloops, where we stayed for a few hours at the Hacienda Caballo for an enjoyable break and a magnificent barbecue. There were several acres of landscaped park, with lakes and horses, where we relaxed and once again enjoyed the exercise in the fresh air and sunshine while watching an osprey fish for its dinner. The barbecue comprised beef steaks, salmon and chicken, followed by a mouth-watering selection of deserts.

After a very pleasant break we moved on to a basic hotel in Kamloops for a nights sleep before travelling through more rugged mountains and then into the fertile valley of the Fraser River. This was an agricultural area, as well as the home of timber and logging industries. Later in the afternoon we arrived in Vancouver, with a sightseeing tour of the city, including the natural rain forest in Stanley Park and the shores of Burrard Inlet and Coal Harbour. Our overnight accommodation was in the Pan Pacific Vancouver Hotel, in the centre of the city and overlooking the harbour. It was an excellent location, allowing us to easily explore the city after dinner. The following morning, after breakfast, we set off for the Canadian / USA border at Blain, en route for Seattle where we were to join our cruise ship for the Alaskan half of our holiday.

## Alaska:

By mid-day we had embarked on the Sun Princess, which was to be our travelling hotel for the next week. As we had never been on a cruise before we were not quite sure what to expect; that was one of the reasons for choosing just one week. After booking-in we soon found our cabin, which was as good as we had hoped for. With a little help from our steward we soon rearranged the furniture so that I could get around more easily in my wheelchair and so that I could also get out through the patio window onto our balcony. The lounge area had a comfortable settee and chairs, coffee table, fridge and TV as well as plenty of storage space for our clothes. The large bedroom area was curtained-off from the lounge. From the bed-room there was a tiled en-suite with lavatory, hand-basin and walk-in shower; unfortunately, there were no grab-rails but with difficulty we managed to cope.

Access throughout the ship was very good, although there were often queues for the large lifts between the decks. There were several dining-rooms to choose from, but we opted for formal dinner each evening, at the same table set for eight people; our six dining companions were all Americans. Although there were variety shows in the theatre each evening, we only attended one, but we did go to most of the nature talks in the theatre. Having used North Sea ferries regularly, we assumed that the background noise and ventilation system might have been a nuisance. We also thought that there might have been a potential problem in my wheelchair with the movement of the ship. However, there was virtually no back-ground noise, the ventilation system was excellent and I never experienced any problems when manoeuvring around the ship. Towards the end of our cruise we were told that our Captain's ship was normally the QE II, but the Sun Princess was a larger ship. We joined organised land-tours each time that we disembarked during the week. Although the ramps from the ship to the quay-side were sometimes quite steep, help from the staff was always available and all except one of the coaches on the land-tours had wheelchair lifts. We were surprised one day when the driver of a coach with a lift apologised, because the coach was over twenty years old! Apparently, attitudes and access on disability issues in the USA are good because the governments had to respond to the problems of the huge

numbers of disabled Vietnam War Veterans. In contrast, we have yet to find a brand new holiday coach in England that has a wheelchair lift fitted as standard, although we have started to see one or two during our most recent travels in Europe.

We spent the first day at sea, sailing north along the Inside Passage of the Alaskan coast, towards the town of Ketchikan. That gave us the opportunity to unwind, after the hectic week of travel through the Canadian Rockies. It also gave us a chance to explore the ship and its facilities before having an excellent dinner in the evening. The following morning, after a good night's sleep and a hearty breakfast, we disembarked to explore Ketchikan on a four hour town and country tour. Although Ketchikan is known as Alaska's "First City", because it is the first major community travellers come to as they travel north, in reality it is only a fairly small town on an island and it originally developed from an Indian Tingit people's fishing camp. During the gold rush, in the 1900s, fishing and timber industries were also established in Ketchikan and as those industries grew it made this Inside Passage port Alaska's fourth largest city. By the mid 1930s, Ketchikan had named itself "The Salmon Capital of the World" and by 1936 the city packed more than 1.5 million cases of salmon. After a brief tour of the town we visited the salmon hatchery where an Alaskan Native interpreter explained the life cycle of the salmon and the reason for the hatchery, which was to release and reintroduce salmon into the river.

We then visited the Totem Heritage Centre, with its collection of ancient totem poles, where we were given an interesting talk on the origins and reasons for the wonderfully carved poles. Ketchikan's first people, the Tingits, are master carvers and there are numerous examples of their craftsmanship to be seen in their totem poles, canoes, masks and cooking implements, richly decorated with traditional designs. The most famous of those crafts are the totem poles, which sit in front of Tingit homes and serve much the same purpose as family crests do in Europe. Totem poles identify the clan of the mother, but they are also carved to commemorate important events, or to tell a story. After our four-hour tour we returned to the ship, ready for our evening dinner.

The following morning we woke-up to find the ship cruising in the Tracy Arm and, although the weather was overcast, we had clear views of

the mountains rising on both sides of the fiord. About 400 years ago a glacier sat at the mouth of Tracy Arm depositing large amounts of gravel and rock, producing a moraine bar which can be seen at low tide. The ebb flood of water into Tracy Arm has carved a narrow opening in the bar through which ships can now navigate to reach the deeper waters of up to 1,000 feet. The tremendously steep fjord walls, hanging valleys, waterfalls and glacially polished rocks were memorable. Gradually, as we moved closer towards the Sawyer Glacier, the quantity and size of the ice flows increased and the different shapes and the depth of the blue colour in some of the large icebergs was amazing. I was still surprised at the lack of bird species seen, but we did see two Harbour seals and several Bald Eagles sitting on the ice flows. Unfortunately we had to turn back before reaching the glacier, possibly because another sister ship entered the narrow fjord, and we then headed for the entrance bar and re-entered Stephen's Passage en route to Juneau, through the Gastineau Channel.

After disembarking at Juneau we spent the afternoon in the town. Juneau was the capital of Alaska, with a population of only c30,000 people, but its total area of 3,248 square miles makes it one of the largest towns in the world. It was named after a gold prospector from the 1880s called Joe Juneau, who eventually found large gold nuggets "as big as beans", leading to the development of three of the largest gold mines in the world. By the end of World War II more than \$150million in gold had been mined. Eventually the mines were closed and replaced by the business of government. We had spectacular views of Bald Eagles in Juneau, probably attracted by the fishing industry, before joining a tour to visit the famous Mendenhall Glacier and the adjacent visitor centre. As we were about to leave the glacier we had a special treat when we saw a Black Bear cub, feeding in the top of a fir tree. From there we moved on to Auke Bay where we were to enjoy one of the highlights of our holiday.

We boarded a modern, high-speed catamaran for a wildlife tour of Stephen's Passage, between Admiralty Island and Douglas Island. Within about twenty minutes we had excellent views of a young Humpback whale, with its mother, leaping out of the water. We had been briefed by our guide as we set off that we would almost certainly see Humpback whales, but that they did not breach in their northern feeding grounds! He then had to explain

what this one was probably doing; he thought that the mother was coaxing her youngster to jump out of the water as a way of it developing its muscles and lungs now that they had reached the rich feeding grounds. The whales migrate to this area during the summer to feed on the sea-rich krill, after fasting in the winter and then calving in the tropics. It seems amazing that these huge mammals, up to fifty feet in length, feed on such tiny shrimp-like creatures which measure only about two inches in length. However, their huge mouths scoop-up the nutrient rich water and then eject the sea-water through their baleen filters before swallowing the krill. We can start to imagine the size of their mouth and the density of krill when realise that the Humpback whales consume as much as a ton of krill and small fish per day during the summer. That intensive feeding is needed to build-up huge reserves of blubber and the layer of fat then stores the nourishment that the whale will need in autumn, when it returns to warmer waters to breed. After watching the pair for some time we moved on and found another six Humpback whales, in various places. They were usually first detected by seeing their water-spouts, but several were lying on their backs hitting the water with their huge flippers, while others crashed their massive tails onto the surface of the sea. The reasons for splashing were thought to be either as signals to each other, or to stun small fish. The other exciting encounter was with a group of four Steller's sea lions, with their huge necks and shoulders. Although the adult males were over ten feet long, and weighed over 1,200 pounds, the females were extremely agile when climbing out of the sea onto the marker buoys. Once again, the bird-life was sparse, but we did see three Pelagic Cormorants and a Marbled Murrelet. We returned to the ship just after 8 o'clock in the evening, in time for a quick freshen-up before a late dinner and a good night's sleep.

The next morning, after transiting the historic Lynn Canal, we woke up as we were pulling into Skagway. Before disembarking we had an early breakfast, for what was to be another very busy day. Skagway takes its name from the Skagway River, which is a Tlingit Indian name for "The home of the North wind". It was the gateway for the thousands that flocked to the gold fields of Alaska and the Yukon during the gold rush. The first known resident in the area was Captain William Moore, who settled at the mouth of the Skagway River in 1887 after discovering the White Pass route into the

Yukon. He then staked a claim for 160 acres, as he predicted that gold rush to the Yukon was inevitable. In 1896 gold was discovered on the Klondike River and the gold rush started. Sadly for Moore, he was soon overwhelmed and evicted as the population exploded within months; by 1898 it had increased to 20,000 people and Skagway became Alaska's largest town. Although it boasted that it was the shortest route to the Klondike, it certainly wasn't the easiest. Early prospectors had the option of taking either the White Pass route, through the Coast Mountains, or the shorter but steeper and more treacherous Chilkoot Trail. Within two years the gold yield fell drastically and the miners, with the supporting population, quickly shifted to new finds. Just over one hundred years later Skagway had dwindled to less than 1,000 residents.

As we left the town our coach started to climb the Coast Mountains, but the sky was grey and the clouds covered the mountain tops. When we reached the top of the White Pass Trail the weather started to brighten and the clouds lifted to give dramatic views. The road was close to the route of the White Pass Scenic Railway, which climbed 3,000 feet in about twenty miles of steep grades and cliff-hanging turns; not a bad engineering feat for 1898! As we dropped down from the summit we started to pass into Canada's rugged wilderness, with mountains, lakes and rivers. We had a few breaks along the route and eventually stopped at the Native village of Carcross, once known as Caribou Crossing, beside Lake Bennett. We had an excellent bar-be-cue lunch with some of the largest and tastiest chicken legs that I've ever eaten; perhaps the fresh air and exercise helped. After a long and tiring day we had a good night's sleep and then spent the next day and a half at sea, travelling south towards Victoria, back in Canada.

Initially, we headed south through the Lynn Canal, Chatham Strait and Cape Ommaney before entering the North Pacific Ocean, then past the Queen Charlotte Islands and Vancouver Island, heading for Victoria. I hadn't realised that the Pacific Ocean was named by the Portuguese navigator, Fernando Magellanese, better known to the world as Magellan, on his voyage to the New World in 1520. While crossing the Atlantic to America, Magellan had to deal with gales, bad weather, hunger and mutiny. When he entered the Pacific he found that the great body of water was placid for many days of sailing; therefore, he named it El Pacifico "the peaceful one". Little

did he know that the Pacific covered one third of the world's surface and that it gave birth to terrible storms and waves unequalled in any other body of water. We also were fortunate and had equally placid weather which gave us the opportunity to relax and enjoy the facilities on the ship, including our second formal dinner on board.

Victoria was founded in 1843 by James Douglas of the Hudson's Bay Company, but it was first known as Fort Victoria. By 1858 Vancouver Island was a British colony and Victoria was its capital, although at that stage it wasn't much more than a tent city and a base for c25,000 prospectors on their way north to the Fraser River gold fields. When Vancouver Island was incorporated with mainland British Columbia, in 1868, Victoria became capital of the entire province and its current population is about 335,000. The city is certainly attractive, with many gardens and charming houses, giving it a very British feel. We enjoyed our coach tour of Victoria before setting off for the famous Butchart Gardens. Robert Butchart was a building entrepreneur, involved with the early development of Victoria, and he had his own limestone quarry. When the quarry became exhausted, his wife Jenny decided to develop it into a spectacular garden, as it was quite close to their home. The gardens were first opened to the public in 1904 and the 50 acres include a sunken garden, rose garden, Italian garden and a Japanese garden, with over a million plants on display. Naturally, as it was developed from a quarry, the gardens were not on a single level, but the paths were very well laid out and of good quality so I had no problems getting around in my wheelchair. As a bonus, after working hard to get up some of the hills, there were some excellent "whizzes" back down again! After a very enjoyable day we returned to the ship for our last dinner and a good night's sleep.

As they say, all good things must come to an end and on our last morning we arrived back in Seattle where we disembarked, after cruising for nearly 2,100 nautical miles. We then took a guided tour of the city. That tour gave us a chance to kill a few hours, including a trip to the top of the modern Space Needle, next to the unique metallic sculptured music centre. Seattle is a modern city, known as the "Emerald City" and the first settlers landed as recently as 1851. It has hosted two World Fairs, in 1909 and 1962, and it is the birthplace of two modern international giants, Boeing and Microsoft. After

our tour we opted to go straight to the airport rather than calling at the hotel for a coffee break. We were the first people to book in for our flight and were delighted when we were asked if we had any objections to being upgraded from World Traveller Plus seats to Club Class, which we willingly accepted. Our taxi was waiting for us when we landed at Heathrow and three hours later we were back home enjoying a cup of tea and looking forward to a few relaxing weeks to recover from our most recent adventure!

### Munich, Bavaria & the Austrian Salzkammergut.

In August 2006 Phyl and I decided to join a trip to Bavaria and Austria, which was to be based in Munich. The one week holiday was organised by *"The Friends of Lincoln Museums and Art Gallery"* who had also organised the four-day trip to Northumberland in the Spring; there were about forty of us in the group. We joined a private coach from Lincoln to Birmingham and then flew to Munich, where we made our base for the week in the Maritim Hotel, which was in easy walking distance to the centre of Munich. The hotel was very pleasant and surprisingly quite, considering that we were so near to the centre of the city. There were two main themes during the week, as well as normal sightseeing and talks: first, the castles of King Ludwig II and second, the art galleries in and around Munich. While we were touring Munich we had a Bavarian guide, who spoke excellent English. I had stayed in Munich several times when I was working, but I had never had the time to explore it properly. What I found really interesting from our guide were the details and visits to places associated with the Nazis in the 1930s, as no Germans that I had met before had ever mentioned that topic. It was all done very factually and professionally, with no sense of denial about that awful period of history. Our guide also told us that there were no copies of Hitler's *"Mein Kampf"* in any public libraries in Germany and very few references to that period of history, which confirmed my experiences of living in Germany for seven years.

After a coach tour around the city we ended up with a walking tour of the Altstadt (old town) and our guide also gave us an impressive introduction to the Alte (Old) Pinakothek Art Gallery. It was founded by King Ludwig I, and now includes over 800 European paintings ranging from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. She then gave detailed commentaries on selected paintings,

which included works by Lucas van Leyden, Albrecht Durer, Albrecht Altdorfer, Rubens, Van Dyke, Raphael, Titian, Rembrandt, Velasquez and El Greco. Later in the week I visited the adjacent Pinakothek der Moderne, which was also very good. Within that museum there are four different areas, from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, displaying art, works on paper, architecture and design. The design area included furniture, cars and ceramics; the architecture area had 3D designs for most of the past and future Olympic stadiums; the works on paper area included wonderful copperplate engravings; finally, the art area appeared to have works by most modern painters. There was also a third adjacent museum; the Pinakothek Neue, which exhibits about 400 works of art chosen from its 4,000 paintings and 300 sculptures from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; unfortunately, I didn't have time to visit that one. I could easily go on, but will resist the temptation! However, I do strongly recommend either visiting Munich or, for those who can't go there, visit the Pinakothek websites.

On our second day we were introduced to some background information on the well known King Ludwig II, of Bavaria. He is sometimes referred to as *"Mad King Ludwig"* because of the extravagant castles that he built and the peculiar life style that he led. Around 600 books have been written about this extraordinary character, so I will keep my description of him very brief. He was made king of Bavaria, at the tender age of eighteen, when his father died in 1864. He shunned public life and appeared to live in a fantasy world, which was almost certainly encouraged by the 12<sup>th</sup> century Royal castle of Hohenschwangau, where he spent most of his childhood and subsequent years, and also by the friends that he kept, including Richard Wagner. He spent the family fortune on building three spectacular castles, amongst other things, which many would argue kept numerous builders, artists and craftsmen employed instead of going to war, as the rest of Europe appeared to be doing. Was that so mad? However, there is no doubt that he was extremely eccentric; who else would demand elaborate dining rooms, in two of his new castles, where the table would appear, fully set, through a hole in the floor so that he could dine alone and not even see the waiters! Moreover, who else would have attended Wagner's operas regularly, insisting that only he, the King, was to be in the audience and then shouting for more rain or louder music during the performances? Towards

the end of his life Ludwig was certified as being insane, although he was never actually examined by those certifying him. He was then secretly arrested at Neuschwanstein and put under house-arrest in Berg Palace; one evening he went for a walk around the lake with his doctor, never to return. He and the doctor were later found dead in the Starnberger See, but the cause of death was never determined. Subsequently, the family have refused to have his remains examined so the intrigue goes on, which certainly does no harm to the Bavarian tourist industry, with millions of people visiting his castles each year!

We visited all three of King Ludwig II's new castles, or palaces, during our week in Munich. Within a few years of becoming king he had started to make plans to build the fairy-tale castle of Neuschwanstein, on the opposite side of the valley to his old castle of Hohenschwangau. It wasn't possible to go around the castle in my wheelchair, but as you heard earlier, we had already visited it with our children in the 1970's, and again in the 1980's, when it wasn't quite so busy with tourists. This time we enjoyed kaffee & kuchen in a hotel and I sketched the castle while we waited for our colleagues to do the exploring. There is no doubt that Richard Wagner had a very strong influence on the design and decoration of that extravagant building. Ludwig decided to build two more palaces, after visiting Paris and the Palace of Versailles. Work started on the Linderhof Palace, in Munich, in 1874 and it was finished by 1879; it was the only one of the three projects that Ludwig saw completed. His third major project was building a replica of the Palace of Versailles, called Herrenchiemsee Palace, complete with formal gardens, on an island in the Bavarian lake of Chiemsee. The details and the craftsmanship in all three buildings have to be seen to be believed, but after a while the decoration, with their intricate carvings, porcelain, glass and gold, were almost overbearing. From there we took another boat trip to the island of Frauenchiemsee and visited the oldest Benedictine convent in Germany, dating back to 782. We had wild mushrooms for lunch and a chance to escape to much more simple architecture and decoration!

The next day we visited Salzburg and the Salzkammergut, the Lake District area of Austria, where Phyl and I could revisit past holiday places such as the village of St. Wolfgang. Salzburg was very busy, so I opted to sit on the Mullner-steg Bridge, over the Salzach River, to sketch the old castle

and town below while the rest of the party explored the town centre. On our way back to Munich we stopped in Oberammergau, famous for its woodcarvings and its ten yearly series of Passion Plays. Our sixth day was spent in Munich, doing our own thing, which was the highlight of the holiday for me. First of all, I visited the *Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus*, with its stimulating collection of paintings from the *Blau Ritter* (Blue Rider) group, formed in Munich in 1911. I must admit that I knew very little about the Blue Rider group of German painters before that visit, although I knew of many of the artists and their paintings, such as Wassily Kandinsky (1866-1944), Franz Marc (1880-1916), Gabriele Muntz (1877-1962) and Paul Klee (1879-1940). There were over forty of Kandinsky's paintings in the gallery, ranging from *München-Die Isar*, painted in 1901 to *Parties Diverses*, painted in Paris in 1940; the latter one reminding me more of Paul Klee's style. However, the majority of his paintings in the exhibition were from the period 1907-1911. It was fascinating to see how his style evolved over the years, particularly when comparing the paintings close-up and by quickly moving backwards and forwards between the different styles. Possibly my favourite, if I had to choose one, was *Das bunte Leben* (Motley Life); the last of Kandinsky's early cycle of poetic pictures painted in 1907 but intriguing to see the textures and colours close-up.

Of the sixteen paintings by Franz Marc, his *Blue Horse 1* is possibly the best known, but for me his *In The Rain* and *The Birds* were the most exciting. In about 1911 Gabriele Muntz bought a house in the small town of Murnau, in southern Bavaria, where she was joined by Kandinsky, as well as other members of the Blue Rider group. Although we had a holiday in Murnau, about twenty years earlier, we weren't aware of the Blue rider Group at that stage. Gabriele's sixteen paintings in the gallery ranged from a detailed figurative oil of 1906: *Avenue in the Park of Saint-Cloud*, to those of the much simpler pre-Blue Rider period, such as *Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin*, also from 1906; a style which she then continued to use. The fifteen paintings by Paul Klee surprised me, as I wasn't aware of his different painting styles which ranged from figurative drawings in charcoal with pen and ink, to oil landscapes and pointillist type work such as *Cliffs by the Sea* painted in 1931 and to his *Botanical Theatre* of 1934 in oil, watercolour, brush and pen. Alexei Jawlensky (1864-1941) had a variety of styles in his fifteen

paintings and the difference between his *Portrait of Hedwig Kubin* in 1906 to the dramatic *Portrait of the Dancer Aleksandor Sakharov* in 1909 is startling. Of the fifteen paintings by August Macke (1887-1914), which were all bright, fresh and colourful, his *Zoological Garden 1* of 1912 intrigued me the most. As you may have gathered, I really enjoyed that visit to the Lenbachhaus and I can highly recommend it.

On our last day we booked out of the hotel by mid-morning and decided to spend the four hours before we needed to go to the airport by visiting the Buchheim Museum at Bernried, on Lake Starnberg south of Munich. The Buchheim Museum housed the collection of Lothar-Gunther Buchheim, who was a painter, author, publisher and photographer. The legendary core of the collection is the work of Expressionism, predominantly by the artists' group "Brücke" (1905–1913). We stopped for a quick lakeside lunch in the small town of Starnberg before arriving at the Buchheim Museum for a three hour visit. The coach stopped in the car-park at the top of the hill, overlooking Lake Starnburg and the Buchheim Museum. We started to walk down the wide tarmac path leading to the museum, which was lined with trees, charming ponds, pagodas and works of art fashioned out of wood and metal. We paused for a moment to gauge the steepness of the hill, just in case it would be too difficult for me in the wheelchair on the return journey. As I had been on much steeper hills during the previous week, and with much more difficult surfaces to negotiate, I decided that it wouldn't be a problem.

About one-third of the way down the hill I noticed a metal-grating crossing the path and instinctively slowed down. Unfortunately, I didn't see the small gap in the grating and the front castor of my wheelchair dropped into it, bringing my chair to an abrupt halt. However, my momentum carried me on and I shot out of my chair, landing on my head and right shoulder. Luckily, we had a few doctors and nurses in our group and they soon had me bandaged-up and then wheeled me to the bottom of the hill. In the meantime someone had called for an ambulance and I was quickly assessed and taken to the hospital at Tutzing. I explained to the doctor that our coach would be passing the hospital on its way to Munich airport in about three hours time and that I would be grateful if I could be able to join them.

The members of the hospital staff were excellent and soon put five stitches across the cut over my right eye, treated and covered the grazes on my head, cheek, shoulder and both knees. They then confirmed that my left knee was not broken and, after x-rays, that my right shoulder was not broken either. However, there was serious soft tissue damage to the rotator-cuff on my shoulder and my arm had to be immobilised with a sling until I got home. With minutes to spare, I was ready to leave just as the coach arrived and four of my fellow passengers managed to lift me in and out of the coach. It was an uncomfortable flight home, but even more uncomfortable sitting on the floor of the coach from Birmingham to Lincoln. To sum up, it was a wonderful holiday in Munich, with memorable visits to Ludwig II's castles, the Alte and Moderne Pinakothek Museums, the Blau Ritter collection and, for very different reasons, vivid memories of the Buchheim Museum which I didn't manage to see!

#### A Three-week Stay in Hospital

Eventually we arrived home at about two o'clock on the Saturday morning and, after spending ninety minutes trying to negotiate the toilet, to spend a penny, I managed to get into bed for a few hours, but with very little sleep. When I tried to get out of bed to go to the bathroom in the morning I realised that I couldn't move and rang the emergency medical services to explain the problem. They told me to hang-up and to ring 999. When the paramedic and ambulance staff arrived they carefully assessed me and said that I needed to be moved into permanent care immediately. To cut a long story short, I spent the next three weeks in a recuperation ward at the John Copeland Hospital in Gainsborough. The main problem, as I was already a paraplegic and now having only one functioning arm, was that I couldn't transfer between my wheelchair, bed or lavatory without suitable lifting equipment. The staff in the hospital were excellent and did all that they could to help me get my independence back again. There was an effective team of nurses, physiotherapists and occupational therapists. A home visit with the occupational therapist revealed that I needed additional grab-rails, in the ensuite and the bathroom, and a new shower chair; those items were quickly installed so that I could return home. It then took another nine months before I could start to use my upper arm and shoulder again. That put a stop to my painting once more, but it also gave me a chance to return to this

autobiography, after a gap of nearly a year, and to work on the final drafts, in addition to updating this last chapter and the annexes. We had a quiet Christmas at home and decided to wait and see what the next year was to bring, without making any specific plans.

### Plans for 2007 and Beyond

In March 2007 I decided to concentrate on building a web site to display my paintings and drawings, under an initiative developed by Art-on-the-Map, Lincolnshire County Council and the European Regional Development Fund. Because I was still having difficulty lifting my right arm, I also started working on mono-prints, more dry-point work and, for the first time in about twenty-five years, on lino-prints. I also worked on paintings for the Nadin Group annual exhibition as well as "Works on Paper" for the Lincolnshire Artist's Society annual exhibition, both to be held in the Sam Scorer Gallery in Lincoln. Looking to the future, I also booked a two-week period for my next solo exhibition, in the Sam Scorer Gallery, for September 2009.

In April we had a short break in Cornwall to see Michael, Alison and the grandchildren, as we hadn't seen them for a long time. That was the first long drive since my accident eight months earlier and it also gave us a chance to catch up with news from Barry and Val as well as from Caroline and Colin, at Treganinny Farm. When we returned to Lincoln it was time for the annual BTO Breeding Bird Survey. This was the fourteenth consecutive year that I surveyed the tetrad that I had been allocated, twice each Spring, and so I decided to take an overall look at what had been recorded over those years. Surprisingly, considering that the majority of the survey plot covered two large Council House estates in the north of Lincoln, over forty different species of birds were recorded and half of those were seen on every one of the twenty-eight visits. In addition to that project, I also decided to join a new BTO survey of Lapwings on specific plots of land, identified by the BTO, and in co-operation with farmers. My survey plot was in the nearby village of Wickenby and three pairs of Lapwing were seen displaying on the plot during my first visit, on the 8th of May. Other birding highlights included a pair of Montagues Harriers successfully breeding just south of Lincoln, a pair of Peregrine Falcons nesting on the main tower of Lincoln Cathedral - giving spectacular flying displays in June and, back in our garden in June, in

addition to all of the usual garden birds, we were pleased to find a Cuckoo, Green Woodpecker, Goldcrest and Tree Creeper.

Perhaps 2007 gave us the first real evidence of the consequences of global warming. A Song Thrush sang in our garden every morning throughout the winter, April was very hot, May was unpleasantly cold and June was the wettest ever recorded, with major floods in Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, including minor flooding in Scothern and the nearby villages. In June we had a short break at Thoresby Hall Hotel, in Nottinghamshire, with an enjoyable visit to the Patchings Farm Art Centre annual Art Festival where we caught up with lots of old friends. However, we had to return home early from Thoresby Hall as I was not well, due to a reaction from ongoing skin cancer treatment and a persistent cough. July was the start of a much better phase, where I managed to complete two oil paintings in time for the Nadin Group annual exhibition and a second version of this book, hand-bound, ready for the Lincolnshire artist exhibition which had the theme, "works on Paper". I also secured a place on a one week Master Class on landscape painting, with the emphasis on Lincolnshire's spectacular skies and clouds, with painting trips to the fens and the coastal area near to Boston.

### Scothern

I started this book by describing my home town of Sleaford, where I lived for my first fifteen years. Therefore, to end this story it seems relevant to briefly describe Scothern, where we have lived for the past fifteen years and from where we have no intentions of moving! One of the first things that visitors usually mention is how quiet it is in our bungalow and in the village. Although there are six roads leading into the village, they are all minor roads and we have very little passing traffic. Scothern lies mid-way between two major roads in the county; the A46 from Lincoln to Grimsby and the A158 from Lincoln to Skegness.

The early history of the village goes back to at least the Domesday Book, when St Germain's Church was mentioned, in 1086. One of our stained glass windows in the south chancel wall depicts St Germain, but interestingly the name at the bottom of the window is spelt as "St German". I found a similar window, also with the same name, in the Lincolnshire village church of St Germain in Thurlby in 2002. As both windows were installed just before the first World War, I wondered whether that resulted in the name

being changed from St German to St Germain, as an example of political correctness just after that war! Not many people seem to have heard of St Germain, but St Patrick was one of his pupils. He was a 5th Century bishop from Auxerre in France. In 494 A.D. he helped the Britons to repel a raid from the Picts and Saxons; he died in 448 A.D. As you can imagine, there have been many improvements and changes to the Church over the centuries. In 2000, because it was in very poor condition, it was agreed to conserve the 16th Century Flemish panel painting of the "Adoration of the Magi", housed in the reredos over the altar. The painting was moved to the Hamilton Kerr Institute, at the University of Cambridge, for the conservation work. In the meantime, I painted an identical sized panel with what I thought the original painting may have looked like. The composition of the painting was identical to an engraving by the Flemish artist Hendrick Goltzius (1558 - 1617). When my painting was finished 500 letter-cards made from it and they were sold to raise funds towards the conservation of the original painting. In addition, with the agreement of the Archdeacon, my painting was housed in the reredos for the next four years, until the original was returned.

I mention that our village was small, which is a blessing as many local villages have expanded dramatically and are now surrounded by large housing estates. In our case, according to the 2001 Census, the resident population of Scothern was 892, living in only 353 households. However, it is a thriving community with active Anglican and Methodist Churches, the "Bottle & Glass" public house - with a good restaurant - and a Village Hall with a sports field, all in the centre of the village. The Scothern Chorale, currently with about 40 members, held three concerts a year in St Germain's Church for over twenty-five years. There is also an active Amateur Dramatics Society "The Scothern Players" who perform at least once a year in the Village Hall. In addition there are successful Football, Cricket, Tennis and Indoor Bowls Clubs, as well as W.I meetings, yoga and tap-dancing classes. Younger members of the community are served well with the Ellison-Boulter CofE Primary school, as well as activities for pre-school children. There are also a Mothers and Toddlers Group, Scothern Kids Club, a Scout Group, Brownies and Rainbows.

In our opinion, what is more important than all of the above activities are that we have found nearly everyone that we have met in the village to be

really friendly and helpful. There could be a tendency to exclude "outsiders", particularly for anyone moving into a small village with no previous connections, friends or relatives living there. That has certainly not been our experience in Scothern, which is why we have no intentions of moving anywhere else. It is difficult to know how to end this story of my fairly ordinary life, other than to say that it has been an interesting and busy experience and we are thankful that we have met so many wonderful people. We have also found that whatever problems have come our way, there have always been people who have greater difficulties than ours. Finally, there is no doubt that our simple Christian faith has helped to sustain us.

## Chapter 8

### A New Millenium and A New Start: 2000 to 2006