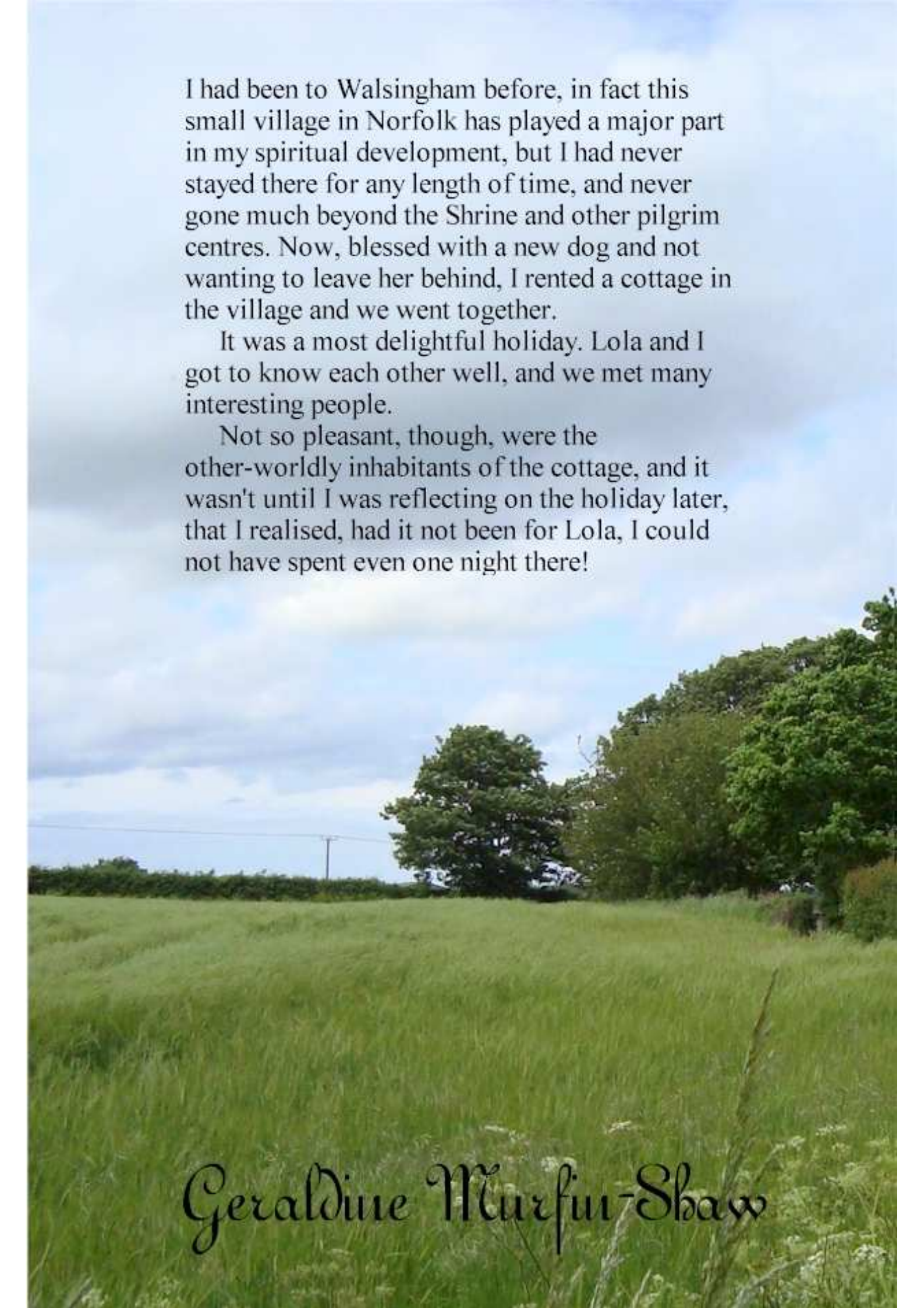


A Haunted Holiday



A landscape photograph showing a vast green field in the foreground, with a line of trees and a utility pole in the middle ground. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on the upper portion of the image.

I had been to Walsingham before, in fact this small village in Norfolk has played a major part in my spiritual development, but I had never stayed there for any length of time, and never gone much beyond the Shrine and other pilgrim centres. Now, blessed with a new dog and not wanting to leave her behind, I rented a cottage in the village and we went together.

It was a most delightful holiday. Lola and I got to know each other well, and we met many interesting people.

Not so pleasant, though, were the other-worldly inhabitants of the cottage, and it wasn't until I was reflecting on the holiday later, that I realised, had it not been for Lola, I could not have spent even one night there!

Geraldine Murfin-Shaw

A Haunted Holiday

I decided on a 'staycation' this year, not from any ethical reasons, but because I have not had Lola, my new dog, very long, and I thought it best not to leave her so early in our relationship. She is a 'rescue' dog and had quite a few problems when I got her in March. Anyway, I thought it would be fun to holiday with a dog - I never have before.

So I started looking for a holiday cottage. Where would I go? Norfolk is nice. I looked at dog-friendly cottages but could not make up my mind. Then I thought, why not search for Walsingham? That after all is where I would most like to be. To my surprise, there were plenty of cottages there.

You can pay a tremendous amount for this type of holiday, but I wanted something around the £350 mark. I found one for not much more, but by the time I had paid a surcharge for the dog (in a dog-friendly cottage?) and a 'booking fee', it was nearer £400. I had paid the deposit before I looked at the 'terms and conditions' and found it anything but dog-friendly! Dogs not allowed on furniture or beds. That meant I needed to take sheets to cover the settees and my own bedding to replace theirs, since my dog both sits and sleeps with me. (I found later that some places are a lot less 'friendly' even than this, one said dogs had to be confined to the kitchen, and I was told (but did not see it myself) that sometimes it is stipulated that the dog is kept in a cage! So beware, if you're thinking of taking your 'best friend' along.

Day 1 - Friday 8th June - Travel

Lola behaved perfectly on the way down. It was a long journey, but broken up into short legs (like hers!). We left Steeton station on the 9.26 to Leeds, and it was trains all the way until we reached King's Lynn, when the only option was bus. This was more difficult, and Lola very tired by then. The first driver objected to her on the seat, but when I pointed out she was on my coat, he relented. She was cuddled under her raincoat, which she had consented to wear, having finally realised what it was for.

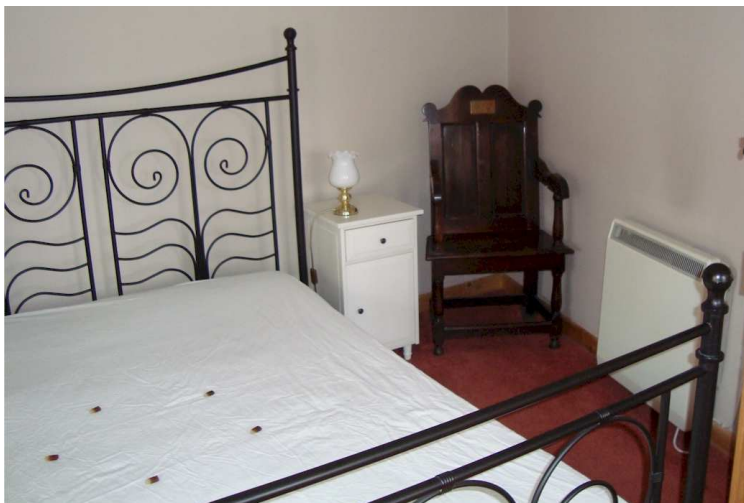
Had to wait some time in Fakenham, so managed a quick shop,



but I need not have worried - no one had mentioned it, but the cottage was right opposite a huge Farm Shop, housing all kinds of regional delights, home made food and the best quality of everything. Almost as good as being in Germany! The agency are

missing a trick not to put this as one of the attractions. Another plus was that the bus dropped me exactly outside my door. Had a bit of difficulty getting in - one key, two locks. No instructions as to which one, and the key fit both. Neither would open at first, eventually one relented.

Dog-proofing the cottage was the nightmare I expected it to be, Lola determined to sit on the settees before I could get the sheets out to cover them. Took her, me and the luggage into the kitchen where there was nothing she could destroy, removed all the clothes from the bag as sheets, bedding etc were at the bottom. Got the settees covered then went upstairs, lashing her to the rails at top of stairs while I did the bed.



The Haunted Chair

There was a small bedroom at the top of the stairs, bare wooden floor and sparse iron bedstead. At the end of the corridor, past the bathroom, was a much bigger room, light and airy, with

windows on two sides, both looking out over the garden. I loved it til I turned round and saw the chair in the corner beside the bed.

When I get instant reactions it is like the flags going up on one of those ancient cash registers - I worked one when I was a teenager and had a Saturday job in Woolworths - when you hit the £1 key, a flag sprang up with £1 written on it. Well, it's something like that in my head - ping! the key is hit and the flag goes up - 'Haunted Chair' it said. There was no question of sleeping in that room - unless - maybe I could move the chair and put it in the other room. I lifted it out but the space it left behind seemed more sinister than the chair, so I left it. We slummed it in the garret room for the whole holiday. Never mind, all we wanted to do was sleep, we weren't having any parties!

First, though, I had to fix the haunted room. Now I knew why I had picked up that packet of Gummis in the shop in Fakenham. They were horrible, so I had not eaten them. They must have been kept too long, or in bad conditions. But they contained cola bottles - Wolf's favourite. I took five of them and made a pentagram on the bed. Asking Wolf to take care of things, I shut the door.

Nightmare Scenario



I already knew there was a mess of wiring in the sitting room, having studied pics of the cottage on the internet (*see left*). Lola chews through wires, so that had to be dealt with. There were three lamps which I removed and stored in the haunted room, then managed to tidy up what was left, concealing or covering wires I couldn't remove.

I felt extremely nervous going to bed, and had to leave the landing light on. It was very bright, but there was no way I could do without it. I filled my head with positive thoughts about how good the holiday was going to be, and fell asleep.

At 3.30am I was woken by a Voice calling my name - interestingly, it called my new name (as of 1.1.2004). It quite clearly said

“Murfin-Shaw, G - not GB.” I woke up to find Lola had got off the bed and was standing in the doorway, wanting to be let out for toilet purposes.

Went back to bed and it was 9.15 when we woke again. That’s the time Lola always got up when she first came to me. I thought it must be the time they opened up the kennels in a morning.

Note - must find out who GB Murfin-Shaw is!

Day 2 - Saturday 9 June

Had a leisurely breakfast while Lola played on the lawn with a



mad toy she found out there and which she loves. After breakfast went and picked up poo - there seemed far more than Lola could have done. Went to dustbins, and noted lots of stuff in the grey bin that should have gone in the green. Since they appear to be going to hold me entirely responsible for anything that goes wrong, somewhat worried, as the

instructions say the bins will not be emptied if inappropriately filled. Didn’t feel like sorting out someone else’s rubbish, so decided to make a list and report it to Kett (Country Cottages).

Had a hot bath (there is no shower) with Lola in the room, since I dare not leave her to her own devices, then went across the road to the Farm Shop. Looked at their cooked items which I had not seen last night – bought a slice of quiche with olives (which did not come home with me), a steak and ale pie, piece of locally smoked mackerel, more bread and milk. Had lunch and sat around, reading a bit, went out at 3.

Amazing day! Started by visiting the Little Sisters house - this has always been one of my favourite places in Walsingham, and on other visits I have always made sure I go round there for meditation. But that was not going to be possible with Lola



in tow. I tied her to the gate, then saw one of the Sisters had come out. She invited me into the kitchen! What an honour, this has not happened before. I did not see the little Nun I talked with last May, and whom I liked very much. I did not ask about her as I did not remember her name. They may change over I suppose, or she may have been out.

I met three Sisters. They were Sister Theresa from Widnes, Sister Clare from Belgium and one from Ruanda, her name sounded like Masseline, can't be sure. I didn't stay long because of Lola, she could have come in, except that Masseline didn't like dogs. But she hasn't minded being tied up outside the shops, and has been much admired and praised for being so good!

The Sisters were interested to hear where I came from and what I intended to do. They were helpful in advising me how to get to Great Walsingham and said there was a barn with shops and tearooms, where they liked to go.



We set off in the direction they said, past some beautiful almshouses, and shortly turned right into a narrow country lane lined with trees, the verges full of brightly coloured flowers. It was a beautiful day - not exactly warm, but not raining either. The trees round here are magnificent and make it such a pleasure walking along the lanes. Lola behaved very well on the lead.

Saw a sign for Open Studios, an artist exhibiting his work. Went up the path to have a look. Nice enough chap but couldn't relate to his work and didn't know what to say to him about his pictures – they didn't do anything for me but I

wanted to be positive and encouraging, and it's too awful to say nothing. So after looking round I told him which was my favourite, but really it was a case of the only one I could relate to in any way. It provoked an interesting discussion, as he talked about his art and the landscape and was clearly inspired by living here. He told me



how beautiful it is in winter, which few people get to see, and a lot of his landscapes are winter ones.

On my way out I saw a fossil stuck in what looked like a large piece of paving. He was delighted I noticed it, fossils are his passion. He said he brought it back from

Berlin! I said it looked like a fossil fern, and he agreed he had thought that too, but then some clever dick had spoiled it for him by telling him it wasn't a fossil at all, the patterns had formed where some drop of water had penetrated the rock, then spread outward in fractal patterns.

"Oh well!" I said to him, "to people like you and me, that is a fossil fern. We do not want to know that it is made by water. Too boring!" He agreed with me.

I asked if it was possible to make a living by art, he said it paid some of the bills, but not all. As I walked on down the lane, I saw that he had a great deal of land attached to the house, looked like he was growing organic food, and he had hens, so he probably scratches a living from the soil (literally).



Just down the road was the breathtaking church of St Peter, with its incredibly ancient pews, and the stone pavings on the floor all sinking and haphazard. Loved it.

We crossed a ford in the road and at the top came out next to



the village green. Opposite us was the Russian Orthodox Church, formerly a Methodist Chapel. I have a great love for the one in Little Walsingham, in the converted railway waiting room, where I

once left my body for five hours. Now that was something the C of E never did for me!

After a romp on the village green we found the barn conversion, a complex of little, arty shops and studios as well as the café. I don't know what it was made me go in the artist's studio, there was something in the doorway that drew my attention. A brightly coloured scarf I think. I did not want to create a problem by taking Lola in, so I stood at the door and peered inside. A chap at the back of the room was talking with two possible patrons. I loved the work inside, so much blue, and big, light blue skies. Then a picture on the side wall caught my eye, it was beautiful, dark blue background with starlike flowers, Monet style. I simply had to go in and look. After gazing at it for a while I headed back to the door, but then I was stopped again by a Green Man carving, exquisitely done, and wondered if the artist were pagan.

At that moment he called to me, can't remember what he said, but he had seen me looking at the 'Monet' picture and wanted me to see more of it, taking it down off the wall and bringing it into a stronger light so I could see how the colours changed. I loved it and he was so open and natural that I did not feel the usual embarrassment I have when someone tries to sell me something and I know I am not going to buy it. We got talking about his pictures and then we both noticed Lola staring at something not there and I don't know how it came about but within minutes we were talking about ghosts and ley lines and white witches and my books and his problems at being ripped off by someone who is handling his paintings.

Then he took me through a gap in the wall and into his studio where there was a chokingly strong psychic presence. I have been

in places before where I have encountered this choking, suffocating feeling, and always before I have left immediately. But this time I stayed and faced it, and gradually it subsided.

He wrote down my name and said he was going to google me, and I ended up offering him a tarot reading if he needed it. He immediately asked the price, which I hadn't even thought about, and I told him there was no charge. I told him, it's not about money, especially at my age. After all, it costs me nothing.

His name is Gary Haigh Smith. He works with his wife Clara du Cann.

Walked out of the village along a country lane - these lanes are so quiet it's a pleasure to walk on them. There is hardly any traffic, and when a car does come Lola gets herself onto the grass verge and lies down til it has passed. Asked a passing couple where the road led, it was going to Wighton, and a look at my map told me I would have to return along the main road from Wells, which would not be pleasant, so I turned back.



On the green I met some people arriving at the Russian Orthodox Church for a service starting at 6. It was then half five. I did not really want to hang around for a half hour, but they were such nice people, and wanted so much for me to see their church and experience their service. It was nice to have people to talk to, though Lola stole the soft toy of a

three-year-old girl and made her howl. The mother got it back off Lola, I have no idea how! I know I have never been able to make her give me anything! A mother in defence of her young has the strength of a tiger, and Lola must have known it! I said I would take Lola down to the ford for a drink and come back.

The service was not inspiring, though it was nice to be part of it, and Lola was good and sat on the floor. Until the priest came round shaking incense over everyone. That made her sneeze, and then begin to choke, so we left, walking back to the village by an alternative route. I felt really tired, but hearing singing from the Anglican Shrine we went into the garden and sat on the edge of the

fountain, near where the doors are always left open. Lovely to have the smell of incense floating out on the air.

Then back to Hope Cottage and ate the steak and ale pie from the Farm Shop. My! If that is a taste of their food I will be eating it every day.

Finished writing this at 10pm. Lola has been crashed out on the sofa all evening apart from a couple of bursts with the mad toy on the lawn.

Day 3 - Sunday June 10



I must confess to feeling nervous last night when it was time for bed. Lola too seemed reluctant to climb the stairs, and by her body language told me she was determined to spend the night on the settee. I carried her up the stairs and put her on the bed. After she ran back down four times I reluctantly shut the door at the bottom of the stairs.

I definitely knew I could not do without the landing light, though normally I cannot sleep with a bright light on. I concentrated on thinking positive thoughts, but I was uncomfortable with minor aches and pains and it took a while before I could sleep. At one point I felt a cold force trying to advance on me but I addressed it firmly, calling up all my gods and the four archangels, even down to Aradia and Kernunnos, and remembering I was *coniunctio*¹ and powerful, it receded.

There were two incidents in the night – the first was (in my sleep) the sound of a young girl crying – I cut her short, dismissing her and telling her not to bother me, I was not going to get involved. The second was hearing a sound coming out of my own mouth, a low, growling sound. I have had this before and I have two theories about it. One that it is the expulsion of breath as the body relaxes and goes into deep sleep, the other that it is an entity beginning to take control of the voice. Again I commanded the entity to leave me alone.

¹ *coniunctio* - I am joined with my Shadow. This was revealed in a dream interpretation before I left home

It seems as though I have been here for ever, or for a very long time. Time seems to be expanding. When I woke up yesterday morning, still in half sleep I was trying to work out what day it was, and thought it must be Monday. It was Saturday morning, yet



I felt I had been here much longer. The cottage *is* peaceful, now that the door is shut on the haunted chair/person. Strangely, that part of the house is newer than this, where I am now, the sitting room, and the bedroom above it are the original house, which would be tiny. They will have their own ghosts I presume, and the ghost in the other bedroom is definitely attached to the chair, which should be got rid of.

It raises the question of whether staying in a holiday cottage is ever advisable for a psychic. Maybe I should have asked about otherworld phenomena - but the owner is never going to admit to it! Perhaps one should stick to the same cottage, once one is used to it. I am happy here and Lola likes it, she has spent most of the morning so far lying in the sun in the back garden. And the price is right.

In the instruction manual there is a note saying book direct next time, this will save the Rev Amos his agency fees and hopefully he will not demand such an extortionate amount up front. The Rev seems a reasonable fellow, we had a phone conversation the first night when I could not get the back door to lock. Very friendly and affable.

Food is going well. The agency omitted to mention the excellent Farm Shop opposite the house - to my mind this is the best selling point. To be able to purchase prepared dishes at a reasonable price (considering what a restaurant would charge) and be able to



eat them in the comfort of one's home from home, is what makes this holiday. Wolf would have absolutely loved it. On one of our cycling holidays, he demanded to return home when he found we could not get decent food!

He had longed to show me the South of France, where he had spent happy days in his youth, motoring down from Germany with friends. I know that the whole of France is on holiday in the month of August, and that they probably descend on the Med resorts in their hordes, but we certainly did not expect that almost every restaurant in the area would be closed the rest of the year! We went to Narbonne in June and nothing open. Every hostelry we passed was shuttered and boarded up. We ate a midday meal at a small café in one town we went through, and were served something called 'Bavette' which was not an experience we wished to repeat. Disappointed, we went on our way.

Arrived at the campsite at Sigéan, on the coast, we found an onsite café (shut) and a small shop selling hardly anything. We pitched the tent and went to look for somewhere to eat. Across a motorway we found a type of service station, but it had more the appearance of the old-fashioned transport catts one used to find in this country, basic to the point of dirty, full of rough and ready (bordering on disreputable) types who eyed us up as though we were some kind of prey. The only thing on the menu – Bavette.

Back in the tent, which was pitched on ground so hard it was like sleeping on someone's drive, and where the toilets were so far away we had to take the bicycle to get to them, Wolf was totally despondent – the only time I have seen him like that. Wolf's main characteristic was the evenness and sunniness of his disposition. Totally philosophical, nothing much got him down and he could rise above anything. If he ever felt depressed or down, I would not know about it, as his habit was to take himself out of the picture until he regained his equilibrium.

On this occasion, though, he either could not or was not prepared to hide his feelings. "If I can't get a decent meal," he said, "I want to go home. Ring Bolero² and see if we can go back a week earlier." This would not be the first time we had done this sort of

² Bolero Bus, now European Bike Express, takes cyclists and their bikes onto the Continent

thing. He was as flexible as I was, and neither of us minded cutting a holiday short when the omens ganged up on us.

Day 4 - Monday June 11

This morning I got on the phone to Kett with a long list of complaints. This is not me and I hate doing it. I aim always to be bright, positive and encouraging. But this had to be done, since if I *don't* report what's wrong, there is the chance I could be blamed for it at the end of my stay. Worst thing that has happened, and which absolutely necessitated my ringing up, regardless of the other problems, which are in the main trivial, was that when Lola and I returned home last night, after an evening walk, we almost did not manage to get in the house. Standing outside, trying the key repeatedly, I told myself that when I *did* get in I must be sure to put the Vicar's number into my phone, so that if I am ever standing outside and really *can't* get in, at least I can ring him and ask him to arrange alternative accommodation for the night! Which shows you the extent of my positivity, as I refused to believe that on this occasion I would not gain entry.

The key has been difficult from the outset, the first time I arrived was frustrating, as there are *two* keyholes, both of which the key fits, and no one had said which one it was. Eventually I managed it, but it has presented problems on numerous occasions.



Well, I got in eventually, but on putting the key into the lock on the *inside*, it jammed, and now cannot be turned one way or the other, plus the key will not come out. So that is curtains for the front door. At least the door was locked, so security was not an issue.

It was about 9pm and I thought first of ringing the Vicar (who is in London) but then reflected that Kett would be back in the office in the morning, and not knowing who I was supposed to contact in an emergency, decided to leave it over and ring them next day. Plus the rest of the things that are wrong.

This done, Kett are going to ring the Vicar and they said (bit *laissez faire* I thought) 'could I continue to use the back door until they could get it fixed'. I then pointed out that when I had gone to

bed last night I had realised that this was actually a fire hazard, and that if there were a fire in the kitchen, as my only means of exit, I would not be able to get out, and I also pointed out that all the windows have secondary double-glazing, which cannot be removed and I would not be able to exit that way. Kett, in some surprise, asked ‘upstairs as well?’ and I said yes, there is no means of getting fresh air, apart from the bathroom window which could be left open. (I realised I have no idea what type of windows are in the large bedroom, since I cannot go in there due to the Ghost – ie haunted chair. If these windows are not sealed, Kett is going to think my remarks odd!)

Other problems are:

soot in hearth;

hairs in bath plughole;

wrong items in grey bin;

crumbs in top of fridge seal;

bathroom heater not working;

no instructions on which bin to put out when;

clock in sitting room needs new battery;

mop bucket wringer section broken;

two of the knives in the knife block (plastic) have been driven right through and are wedged in whatever is underneath and cannot be pulled out;

no ‘welcome pack’ ie fresh milk, bread, tea, coffee as stated – (pointed out there is plenty of food in the cupboards, a bottle of frozen milk and frozen bread in the freezer, but this is not exactly a welcome pack as stated).

Said I realise most of these complaints are trivial, but that I did not want blaming for any of them, hence felt I must report them. Said I had had a good clean up last night and no soot in hearth now.

Kett promised to contact the owner to see if he can arrange someone to come and look at the front door. I think my remarks about a fire hazard will have put a bomb under their ass, where otherwise they probably would not have bothered. They don’t want an incinerated corpse on their hands, and a grieving family to compensate!

They wanted to know if I could leave a key somewhere, but I said if the workman can tell me when he is coming I will be here, as he could have difficulty finding his way to the back entrance

(and negotiating the stiff door), they said this would not be a problem but I said it is okay as it is raining and I am not bothered about staying in.

On the plus side, had a brilliantly peaceful night with no nerves (apart from the fire hazard nerves – I thought ‘at least it is a relief to worry about something in this world, instead of the other’). Though I had not wanted to go up to bed at all, there seems such a demarcation between the downstairs and the upstairs, maybe because I keep the door to the stairs closed all the time, so decided this time to leave it open. Still had to leave the landing light on, not brave enough to go with the lamp idea. Found I had got into bed with my microfleece pants on without realising it, worried about the fire, thought I should go down and turn the cooker off at the mains in case I had left anything inflammable near it, didn’t, and must have fallen asleep instantly! Woke at 4.30 with both Lola and I wanting the toilet, then we both went back to bed. It was 8.16 when I got downstairs the second time. Think leaving the door at the foot of the stairs a good idea, though I was worried Lola might leave me and sleep on the settee. However this did not happen.



I have to keep checking on Lola as she has discovered the amateurish wooden ‘beading’ round the edge of the hearth – and removed it, taking it to her couch to chew at leisure. Thank God I got there in time! That explains the first (small) piece I found her chewing yesterday, and

could not work out where it had come from. Now she has removed two substantial portions from round the hearth – and I note to my horror that this beading extends all along the skirting boards of both rooms!

Cooking lunch – another excellent beef pie from across the road, my system told me yesterday ‘too much pastry’ as I had at that point had one pie Saturday evening and one quiche Sunday lunch – hence could not face another pie last night, had 2 fresh free range eggs and two slices of bacon – cholesterol eat your heart out!

So will give pies a rest after this. See they do lasagne, a possibility, or there is the fish and chip shop, though attached to a pricey restaurant, god knows what that will cost!

Monday evening

Feel so sleepy here! Spent most of the day waiting for something to happen about the door, and nothing has. In the end thought I would go walk Lola around the village, as we were both getting stir-crazy. If I took my mobile phone with me, I could be back here within ten minutes at the latest.



Preparing to go out, I found that the key to the back (patio) door could not be inserted far enough on the outside to lock it. Had another struggle with the front door (stuck) key – second today, and managed to shift it. Door will now lock and unlock, though often with the appearance

that it is not going to do so. Phoned Kett to tell them of this development, also that I was going for walk. Got ‘Sandra’, who knew nothing about it, so had to go through the whole rigmarole again. On walk, ‘Simon’ rang me. He said reason they had not phoned back was that they had not heard from the Vicar. Neither have I. Shame, he was so friendly when I rang him the first night. If Kett has given him the full list of complaints he is probably hurt or annoyed. Once again that feeling that the British do not complain. Not all his fault, his cleaner obviously doing the minimum, getting the beds changed and ignoring everything else. Where people should be grateful to you for pointing out what is going wrong, instead they are resentful and turn against you. English again.

I cannot stay in another day, unless the weather is bad again, which the forecast says it will be. I did not mind today, and have felt sleepy all day.

Think Lola wants to go out.

... *later*



Lola and I had a nice walk, out the village from the shrine and up to Gt Walsingham, then back down the lane with the ford to St Peter's church and back into the village, only took 45mins so we took another walk around the village.

Earlier, on my afternoon walk, I met another person to talk to. Anne, a tall, silver-haired lady about my age, who was also walking a dog. She was very friendly, asking me was there 'anything I wanted to know'. I said yes I wondered if there was a mobile hairdresser as my hair really needed sorting out. She recommended the hairdresser opposite me here, at the farm shop. But I explained I could not leave L in the cottage and it was not fair to expect her to sit outside a long time. She then offered to look after her in her garden and invited me in to look.

Wonderful old house and extensive cottage garden out the back. She has travelled a lot, been to India when she was 60, wants to go again. Inherited the dog from the woman next door who had a stroke and had to move near her daughter. She also paints and has a studio in her house.



She says the house is haunted but it does not seem so now, it was when she first moved in. No doubt made her peace with the spirits or asked them to move out. She ran an 'equestrian centre' at one time, whatever that is – posh term for riding school? Sounds more like somewhere horses perform! I may call on her again, but I am minded to go back to the Barns at Gt

Walsingham and have another chat with Gary, who was most interesting, and I loved his paintings.

Everyone here is friendly, spoke to ladies in two charity shops today, everyone has time to 'stop and stare', a bit like Ireland, there is no rush or bustle. And everyone seems calm and relaxed. I'm sure they can't all be, but that is the impression I get.

Went and walked round the gardens of the Catholic hospice, where I was last year. Identified my window. Felt homesick for the place, looking in thro odd windows here and there, wished I was part of that again. Yet I did not feel fully at home until the Irish arrived.

The track I walked on yesterday, the old railway line, was



excellent, and according to the map goes all the way to Fakenham. It would be good to walk there and get the bus back, but Wells is the place I ought to go. However saw a signpost to the Creakes, so if tomorrow not brilliant, may walk to N and S Creake.

Going to bed now, always a bit apprehensive of going up there.

Tuesday 12 June – evening

You wouldn't believe, would you, on a quiet country cottage holiday such as this, that so much is happening that I can't keep up? I continue to be amazed at the friendliness and openness of the people I meet here.

Had a bit of a disturbed night, hadn't really had enough exercise yesterday but it had been a day of feeling sleepy, and then not being able to go far, even had I wanted to, because of the man and door situation. No one came and no one phoned. But the door is working again, with difficulty as before. There were many strange noises in the night which did not help, and then I became aware that the hot water cistern in the bathroom was actually boiling, and I don't know how to turn it off.

What with everything, up at 3am with Lola to toilet and decided to have a cup of tea. Up again at 7.30 but back to bed. Then she kept barking on and off – too many times, in the end I thought I better get up to see what was going on – and there was a man in the back garden. Realising he must have come to mend the door, I let him in. He said he had first come round at 6am! Well really, did he expect anyone to be up at that time.

He was a lovely man, so happy and smiling all the time and looks as though he really enjoys life. He seems to be on his own and is thinking he should leave Walsingham 'before he gets really old'. I do think this a mistake, as he seems to have such a place in this community, he is involved with the shrine, and seems to be odd job man for lots of people, knows all the priests and so on. He says he came from Cambridge but does not want to go back there as he had a happy relationship with a woman (presume woman) who died five years ago. So he thinks that would be a mistake. He is off up to Pickering tomorrow, after seeing a new priest be installed. I would so like to go to this, but how, with Lola. Every time I take my attention off her, she eats bits of the floor. So I would not dare leave her here, and cannot leave her outside the shrine a long time.

So had quite a chat with Barry, who sat with me while I had brekkers and had a coffee. He will be back from Pickering Sunday and said he will see me before he goes. Funny that he wants to leave (because he is old) and I want to come here (for the same reason). Told him about Anne I met yesterday, and he says Anne lives in one of the estate houses, which are for rent. I must ask if there is a possibility of renting from the estate, hadn't thought of that.

Did bit of shopping at Spar and then got the 12.05 to Wells. Almost forgot the main purpose of my visit, to find a cash point, and I had already started wandering down that fascinating little

main street when I suddenly realised I had no money! Turned round and soon found a Barclays, which announced it had no tens, so had to get 60 instead of 50. Will probably need it any way.

Almost down the bottom of the main street and looking for the little kiosk kind of place where I bought the amazing crab sandwich last year. Did not find it, but began chatting to a couple sitting at a table on the pavement outside a cafe. Lola instigated it as usual. Asked where they were from, Sheffield, so I said I had relatives that way and was telling them about Dad and the Murfin-Shaws. They knew Norton Woodseats. Can't remember how it came about, but I mentioned I am Gemini. The man said he was too, and that his birthday was on Thursday! I said, "14th?"

"Yes," he said, "that's right".

"That's my birthday too," I said, and he said,

"No, you're kidding! Are you serious?" So wasn't that a coincidence. Told them all about the books and they wrote my name and website down and said they will look me up. They are fans of the fish and chips in Walsingham, so I said to knock on my door if they come over. Also told them about the installation tomorrow morning, the wife is Catholic (beautiful heart-shaped face, chin pointed like a pin) and Sheffield Man said she will go to the ceremony while he walked the dogs (two Bedlingtons).

Walked down that funny street where I walked last year, then out along the sea wall quite a way, more than a mile. Coming to the beach huts area, not allowed on there with dogs, someone told



me you have to make a detour inland, through the woods, and

come out the other side. Anyway, decided as found I was at the Holkham Estate, to walk down Lady Anne's Drive, and perhaps find my way across the estate and then across country home.

Seemed a long way, but through forest all way, and Lola able to be off lead. Eventually came to gates of Holkham Hall proper,



and there was a tea van. Some people had told me there is a pub in the village (another half mile) where you can get food, but stopped off for a cup of tea and a small flake, and then decided to go back the same way as it is such a nice walk, and I really wanted to get some fish in Wells.

Walked back much quicker than out, which is always the way, from the gates to Wells took me 1hr 15, whereas outward took 1hr 30 (not much diff). Got the shopping okay – prices in their supermarket quite high compared with at home, but cheaper than Farm Shops! I got £60 from the hole in wall, and have spent £20 of it. And that was only on food. I could not afford the wine in the supermarket, prices ridiculous, so had the lavender beer that I bought a few days back.

Lola has been exhausted since we got back. She had a great time.

Some of the sky pictures today were brilliant. I cannot see what I took as I have forgotten the thing for downloading pics into the computer – oh and the bloody thing that is supposed to download from videocam does not do it – I cannot transfer the films into this computer – maybe I should read the handbook!



Wednesday June 13 – birthday tomorrow!

This does not seem like a holiday. I think I will have a sense of being let down when I get home. Not that I'm not enjoying it – it's wonderful, but it's not a holiday! It's too much like being at home, and holidays to me mean some wonderful adventure with my bike in Germany or France, being scared out of my wits most of the time. A real challenge.



I've got a bit of a sniffle which I think is hay fever. And today's catastrophe is – the oven does not work. Also I bought a frozen pizza this morning. Not to have today, I had the fish – the expensive sea bass I bought for 6.50 per portion. I put it in the freezer last night to stop it deteriorating. I bought some frozen chips which I thought I would start in the frypan in oil then put under the grill, fry the fish in butter and cook some peas. So I stuck the frozen fish in the microwave set at 'defrost'. After some minutes a smell of cooking informed me that the fish had boiled in its bag. Half of it anyway, the thin end. So I cut that off and put it on one side, added some

lemon, put the thick end in a dish and continued with the defrost button.

Meanwhile I had got the instructions out, put on the grill and waited. And waited. And waited. The grill did not work. Mindful of the pizza, I then tested the oven. That does not work either. I phoned the rev who was either not in or not answering the phone. I will try him in the morning, and if no joy, ring Kett.

This afternoon I defrosted the freezer, which gave me great satisfaction and it looks so nice and clean inside now. I had to drag both fridge and freezer out to get at the power supply to turn it off, and found afterwards that I could perfectly well fit them both properly under the worktop, not sticking out as they had been (and rocking about).

This morning we were up early, half five, and not really slept properly after that, till got up at 7.30. Went to village shop (spar) then set off just before 11 to go to the shrine to see if we could see any kind of procession for this new priest. Yes I did. Listened outside for a while then we walked over to Gt Walsingham by the pretty way, past the old church, and Lola found a field path near the houses which we followed and came out much further on the



road, near the ford. Ate some sandwiches on the green, chatted to an old couple on electric bikes, I teased them about cheating, then the woman told me the man was 85! I said I thought he definitely qualified for the electric bike and congratulated them.

Went to Gary's studio in the barn, he was not there, but a miserable woman I took to be his wife was. Yes she was. Not a barrel of laughs. Went to the cafe for coffee and some wonderful cakes, bought a lemon meringue pie which was not, it was a lemon tart with a meringue on top, all hard and nasty. I had a word with t'chef afterwards and said how disappointing I found his tart, looking forward to sinking my spoon through lovely soft meringue and had to break it up with a knife! Asked if he had cooked them separately as did not see how he could bake the meringue that hard without destroying the tart. I was right.

Walked to Wighton up a lovely narrow quiet road, only saw one car, let Lola off most of time. The clouds were increasingly building up and looking for the path across to Holkham thought it



was really preparing to throw it down and decided to walk back same way, such a delightful route. So we did and got home 3.30 which was quite long enough – in fact Lola protested when I took her out for another walk at 5.30 and kept demanding to be taken home!

However we persevered and were coming back up the main drag when I noticed a little 'curio' shop I had not noticed before, and it was open though it was after 6 by then. I looked inside and no lights were on, a man was there, so I said, "oh you are not open". He said that yes he was open till six but was just locking up. Well, goodness knows how it happens, how any of it happens in this magical place, but I found myself deep in conversation with him on metaphysical subjects. He knows Artist Gary and suspect



he is the priest Gary said he had walk round with him. This guy was a priest but quit. I had noticed what looked like a host-holder-thingy in his window – he gave it its correct name which I have forgotten, but he said no it was not one of those it was a reliquary, for putting saints relics in. I asked did it have a bit of saint in it? No, but he also sold those! Incredible! I have to go back and see what bits of saints he has got! He told me about the last anchoress, he saw her after she died, one of the few people to go in her dwelling, and he said all the walls were shining like they had been painted with gold. A very holy woman and the sister of Norman St John Stevas no less! Weird! He said he has only told two other people in his life about it. I told him I was a witch, same as I told Gary, isn't it weird how I keep having to tell people this? Anne too. It just seems to crop up, or I get in a position where I need to say it in order to explain something I am saying. I said I must go back and chat with him again. His name is Paul. He shook my hand.

Reading Maud's book about Jung, which turns out to be a teach yourself book, but excellent, as it puts everything clearly and concisely, and one needs a book like that when grappling with the long tomes that Jung has written. The book mentions that there is a man who took on all Jung's ideologies and tried to make a

coherent whole, a system of psychology, out of them, and that Jung was very glad about this. Neumann he was called.

I am beginning to see that the ‘unseen female companion’ who is in so many of my dreams *must actually be my Shadow* – which seems quite remarkable, as the Shadow is supposed to be some scary, dark or negative thing. Yet I don’t see who else she could be, unless I come across some other archetype that describes her. I have tried searching on tinternet for ‘unseen female companion’ or ‘shadowy female figure’ but got nowhere, or else got Shadow. If this is what she is, then it would seem I am totally integrated with my Shadow, as she goes everywhere with me as a silent companion, never threatens or obstructs, and in fact often helps. It will be interesting to see what comments I get on that from ‘Carla Young’ or the professor at Leeds.

Thursday June 14 – my birthday

Just trying to work out what year it was when Wolf and I first went to Neukirch and it was my birthday on a Thursday that year – it was Ascension Day – or was it the Ascension of the Virgin Mary? Anyway, whatever, it was that marvellous parade at Sankt Peter which Erika took Wolf and me to. So when was my birthday last on a Thursday?³ In my head I can’t get an answer that seems right.



Took the bus to Wells and once again walked out along the long straight sea wall, and down into the picnic area, but found the path that goes directly back to the beach – it is not to avoid the huts, but only the

lifeboat station. We climbed up some wooden steps and the view from the top was breathtaking – more steps down the other side and we were on this great, wide beach stretching as far as the eye could see, at the end one tiny strip of sea, and then the great wide

³ 2001



blue sky. Lola went mad, running miles in huge circles, and I just wanted to walk forever.



Eventually I made for the dunes, as it was a cold wind off the beach and I had brought a packed lunch. Would you believe there was a white polystyrene fish box waiting for me to sit on it? Quite a big one, room for me and my food to spread out.

After sitting a little while I figured there should be a path off the beach and up into the forest, where walking should be easier and more sheltered. And yes there was one, right opposite where we were sitting.

It is magical in the forest, such huge trees and a singing, sighing sound all the time as the wind rustles through the tree tops. Again, I just wanted to walk.

We finished up back at the picnic place, and I took the long straight track which I was sure led right to Wells, and which a man told me last time did not, and only went to a caravan park, though I could clearly see it on my map going all the way. It must be the old railway line, straight as a die and stony.

We walked back into Wells and got a few essentials before coming home, the bus dropping me at my door.

When we came in the house the whole atmosphere felt different, due I am sure to the card from Diana. Encouraged by this, L and I went to the big bedroom to see whether it would be possible to sleep there tonight. No it won't.

Had a cup of tea and brief rest then went to the Farm Shop to get something to drink for tonight, and a pot of cream. Came back and the damn door would not close! I could see no reason why, and looked for some small stone or other that was preventing it closing, but could find nothing. Tried to close it four or five times, and was down on my knees brushing underneath the door with my fingertips when I heard a voice saying 'Hello' and it was Gary the artist! He said he walks the circuit when he can – the one L and I walk, out the village one way and up to the Green at Gt Walsingham, then back the other. Always down the little lane with the ford and the old church and not much traffic.

He had called in at the hairdresser to ask him if he knew where Hope Cottage was and no, he did not, then he sees me! I told him the door would not fit and neither of us could make it, so I put the chain on. He wanted to see the Haunted Chair and did not like the atmosphere upstairs at all, even less in that room. I told him it was only the chair and not the room. Will leave a letter for the Rev Colin!

He did not mention a reading and neither did I, having just come in and not feeling I wanted to do it just then. He asked was I coming back next year and he would see me then! Dearie me!

I told him about meeting Paul last night and he told me Paul has an amazing wall painting on the back wall of his shop – a painting of Henry 8 done in his reign, depicting him as a stag, and something about the local man who painted it. He said it was not known about till 1990 when the bathroom flooded and the plaster

downstairs was damaged and had to be removed, then they found this painting behind it.

God how amazing! Now I definitely have to go back to his shop and see this, as well as the Saints' fingernails and so on. Spooky or what! This place is so crammed with psychic energy, which only coming to the Shrine you don't get to see. Crawling around in the woodwork are all these strange characters with a story to tell.

As Gary left he said, 'What did you do with the door? It fastens'. There was nothing wrong with the door now. Thinking about all this, I knew I had to ring him. There is no way that door did not stick for a reason.

I rang him and pointed this out. I said,

"The door did not stick for no reason. I think you have to have that reading."

"What if I find out something I don't want to know?" he said.

"Oh, I wouldn't dream of persuading you if you don't want one," I said, "so you don't want it?"

"I don't know, I might," he said.

"Okay," I said, "but if you do, we need to arrange a time. Or maybe I could come up there. It might be more effective."

Lola is the problem. But if we do it in the kitchen there is nothing she can destroy here.

I wish I could see the pictures I took today, but I have forgotten to bring the downloading bit for the camera. It is okay, there is no way I am going to take over 300 photos, and I have the charger, which is what matters.

I wish I were not so shy of using the videocam. The last time we were at Wells Lola found a red balloon and played with it on the shoreline, and today racing through the sand would have made a wonderful movie.

Friday 15 June – sunny but the forecast is bad

Well not such a good night last night, whether it was Gary's remarks about the upstairs I don't know; I had no problems getting to sleep at first (after the usual setting up shields – I also took Diana's card upstairs since it seemed to have had such a good effect on the rest of the house), but Lola got up just after 2 to go to the toilet, and I could not seem to settle after that. I had such a feeling of foreboding, then I seemed to visualise a terrible black

thing, animal-like in nature but with a human face, that crept in through the door. This entity was so overwhelmingly evil that it made my skin crawl. I tried to rationalise it away, but then I began to have cold shivers all over my back and down my legs, increasing in intensity each time they returned, and I decided to get up and wait for daylight. I can usually sleep more easily when the light returns, which I reckoned could not be long. It was about 3 when I went downstairs and possibly 3.45 or 4 when I returned to bed and slept, getting up again just after 8. Strangely, during the 'black dog' episode, Lola remained in bed upstairs and did not come to join me! This I found somewhat reassuring. Also she stayed in bed this morning quite a long time before deciding to get up.

Today I am thinking to have lasagne from the farm shop, I am sure it will be delicious. Yesterday's sandwiches of liver pate and preserved red pepper (both bought at farm shop) were excellent, together with egg and lettuce left over from day before. Nowt wrong wi' that!

The beach was so splendid that I think I will go there again. The 12.05 is now my favourite bus! Coming back yesterday there was not a soul on the bus but me, whereas the previous time there had been a long queue. I remarked on this to the bus driver, asking 'where have they all gone' and his reply, a knowing curt laugh (after the manner of William Brown), seemed to hint at inner knowledge I did not have, as though there were a 'Village of the Damned' influence.

Had a nice phone call last night (well no, she had a nice phone call from me) from friend Rita. Around 9pm received a text from her saying she just remembered what day it was, and happy birthday. On impulse I rang her. She sounds jolly cheerful, laughing all the time. I find that delightful, and most encouraging. Seems the two of us are still the same, finding much amusement in life. She told me her bro Lionel has to go for tests today for bowel cancer. The NHS sent him a 'test kit' through the post, to test himself for whatever is fashionable with them at the moment, and he came out positive. I immediately asked Rita how he knew they were not lying, that they just wanted people to experiment on. She said that had occurred to her, as he is in perfect health with no problems. But he is going through with it and she said she was not going to interfere with his judgements, though she thought the

same as me, and like me, she has already decided that if she is ever told she has the Big C she will refuse treatment. I told her about George Melly, who died not long back, and he refused treatment and went on giving concerts up to the end.

Talked for ages, thinking well it is my birthday and I will just buy another £5 of credit if I use all this up – but at the end of the call I still had £2.86 left. So calling is not that expensive.

Well the sun continues to shine in spite of the dismal radio 4 forecasts, it is Norfolk after all, the driest part of the country (another good reason for coming here).

I must go to the shop, 10.30 now, and will call at Paul's to see this marvellous painting. Maybe I can video that and him talking about it? Leave Lola outside or she will eat the bits of the saints.

Saturday 16 June

If I could, I would have gone home today. Felt last night had had enough, and really couldn't face going upstairs to sleep, so brought mattress down. Quite a feat with the narrow ceilings, bend in the stair and a rail across the top. But managed it. Half thought of leaving it behind settee in morning and using it each night that is left, but this morning heaved it all back up again, largely to see if I could. It was far more difficult than coming down, of course, working against gravity rather than with it.

Did not spend a good night. Had had a couple of hours sleep from 4 till 6 so guess that shortened my need of sleep. But it was well after 2 and on the way to 3 before I dropped off, to be wakened at 6. Funny thing was, Lola has been getting me up twice in the night for toilet when we were upstairs, first around 2 or 3 am, and then again at 6 or 7. Couldn't believe that last night, when it would have been so easy to let her out, she never once asked. Then remembered that she does not ask me to go out in the middle of the night at home. Draw your own conclusions on that one. Something beginning with 'g'.

Tonight will be back upstairs in bed, but one good thing, have managed to unlock the secondary double glazing on the stairs outside the bedroom, and let air in. Also have pulled the bed further away from the back wall and nearer the door. We will just have to slug it out again tonight.

Yesterday was a weird day. Couldn't seem to get motivated to do anything. At last decided on a beach walk at Wells and went for

the 2.05 but didn't feel at all like I wanted to go. Left the bus stop before the bus arrived and decided on a walk to Snoring, by a path that turns off at the fork in the road where you take the right fork to Houghton St Giles where the Slipper Chapel is. However Lola had



other ideas. She wanted to go to see Anne when we got to her cottage and had to be dragged off eventually. Dogs are funny. They like to return to places where they have been. Soon realised walking on this road was actively dangerous, took a wrong turn, ending up at the church but this proved fortuitous as they had a second hand bookstall (choose your own book, leave the cash) and among the usual inferior brood I found a book by Gavin Maxwell which is fascinating reading. He is a brilliant writer. I never read his 'Tarka the Otter' but now I may. This is something of a sequel, something of a 'come clean' – I admire his brutal honesty, laying bare everything including his shortcomings. It has also taught me that it is okay to write about bad things happening (if you express it the right way) as I did not at all mind reading through excruciating bad luck and disappointed plans, descriptions of where he went wrong through his own misjudgement, fanaticism or stupidity, and even the gruesome details of his accident and subsequent surgery (which also went wrong, but at least he did not have to have the amputation he feared). I am only wondering when the gloom will lift, but am hooked, riveted.

What I found hard to stomach, in face of his concern, indeed obsession with the welfare of his otters, was the way he felt it okay to fire ‘300 rounds’ into the side of a basking shark, and then decided this would be a fine way to revive the Scottish economy, killing innocent creatures and draining their livers of valuable oil. (Whether he planned on using any other part of their anatomy was not clear). And the way he could sit in a restaurant in Greece and watch crabs being roasted live on a griddle – and not leave. Strange man.

On the morning shop, found Paul’s shop closed, but as it was after 12, I decided he had probably gone to lunch, and being the man he is, I guessed this would be a two hour break. The village absolutely dead today. But the silence in the main street is amazing. Worth bottling. When I think what I am going back to, and those dreadful kids down the road, about which I have to do something, I almost wish I could stay.

Since Lola and I did not get the 2pm bus, we found ourselves walking down the main street, purportedly on our way to Snoring, and saw Paul was open. He was not in a very good frame of mind, seeming flustered and ill at ease. Whether with me, or something else, do not know, but feel easy in my relationship with him, and not bothered if he has a problem with me anyway! He may be regretting the frank way he spoke to me the other night, and I did wonder if he had perhaps a small drink taken that day, and was more relaxed than he was normally (conversely, he could have been suffering a hangover yesterday – he was complaining about having had to go to London the day before, saying he had to go once a year – for some religious thing, didn’t catch what). Whatever, he was not a happy bunny.

I had said when I entered the shop that we were on our way for a walk, so he did not think I had come to bore him for an hour or more! The shop is tiny and neat, with not much that would interest me. I should say he is a man who knows his stuff, that his stock is eclectic and appeals to the discerning collector. I should imagine he has a clientele of ‘followers’ who call regularly to see what he has.

He kept glancing nervously at Lola, and I asked him if he wanted me to take her outside and tie her up, but he said no, she was fine, but why didn’t I get her a lead at the pound shop? I would guess he is Libra or Virgo, picky and fussy about images

and ‘what people think’. I mentioned Gary and the synchronous door problem, but he was not ‘taking on’ – his mind obviously elsewhere. I asked about the wall painting Gary said he had, and he motioned to the side wall (I had only looked at the back, which was blank) saying ‘it’s there!’

It was quite dim and obscure, and frankly not worth photographing, as it would have looked like those illustrations in Von Daniken books, they look like nothing on earth, yet have so many claims made for them, none of which I can usually see. I asked where was Henry 8 in the picture, and Paul pointed to a tiny face at the top right, it did look a bit bloated like Henry. I asked what the ‘feathers’ were for, and he said they were not feathers, but saffron crocus – now believe me they looked nothing like crocus and everything like feathers. At the lower end of the picture there was a part that had survived better than the other, and looked to be painted on wood rather than plaster. Here I could clearly see a hare (I think it was) which he said was Henry, being chased by a hunting dog, which Paul pointed out had its mouth closed, so it was not hunting Henry, only chasing him off. A huntsman was following on the left. He said ‘Henry destroyed Walsingham and Walsingham destroyed him’. I asked how that was, and Paul said the chaos he brought to the country, but I think also, Henry cannot have been a happy man, with all those wives and getting rid of them all the time. Not exactly a stable home life.

I said to him to call round if he fancied a chat, he said he well might, but that most evenings were spent searching on the tinternet – ah hah! So that is where he gets (some of) the stuff!

Paul is a complicated man. Maybe he is the one needs a tarot reading.

It is now 11.26 and still thick cloud and not warm at all. We need to go out or we will be bored out of our tinies tonight. I am planning a new walk to Holkham which looks easy to find. I can then walk thro the estate and out onto the beach, or if I have had enough, it appears the coachhopper comes through the village – and will continue straight on here apparently.

Saturday evening

Had an excellent walk, though slightly worried at times whether I was going to make it. The map is now proving helpful – I thought I had lost my map reading skills, but find I have not, and that I can

even see the map without my glasses, which is better than having always to find them and put them on. Having said that, the route disappeared at one point, a man I questioned was of the opinion that the farmer had ploughed it up as it went through his field. I intend to phone ordnance survey, who make the maps, and report this. It looked as though Lola and I would have to make a detour some way down the truly awful main road (Fakenham-Wells) which is narrow, without footpaths and down which cars hurtle at terrifying speed. Already she is nervous about cars passing, and even on the quiet roads we had been walking thus far, she gets up on the grass verge when she hears one coming and lies down till it passes. She did not want to go down this road at all and I had great trouble persuading her. I thought we were both in danger of ending up as roadkill, like the too frequent pretty grouse we had seen today.



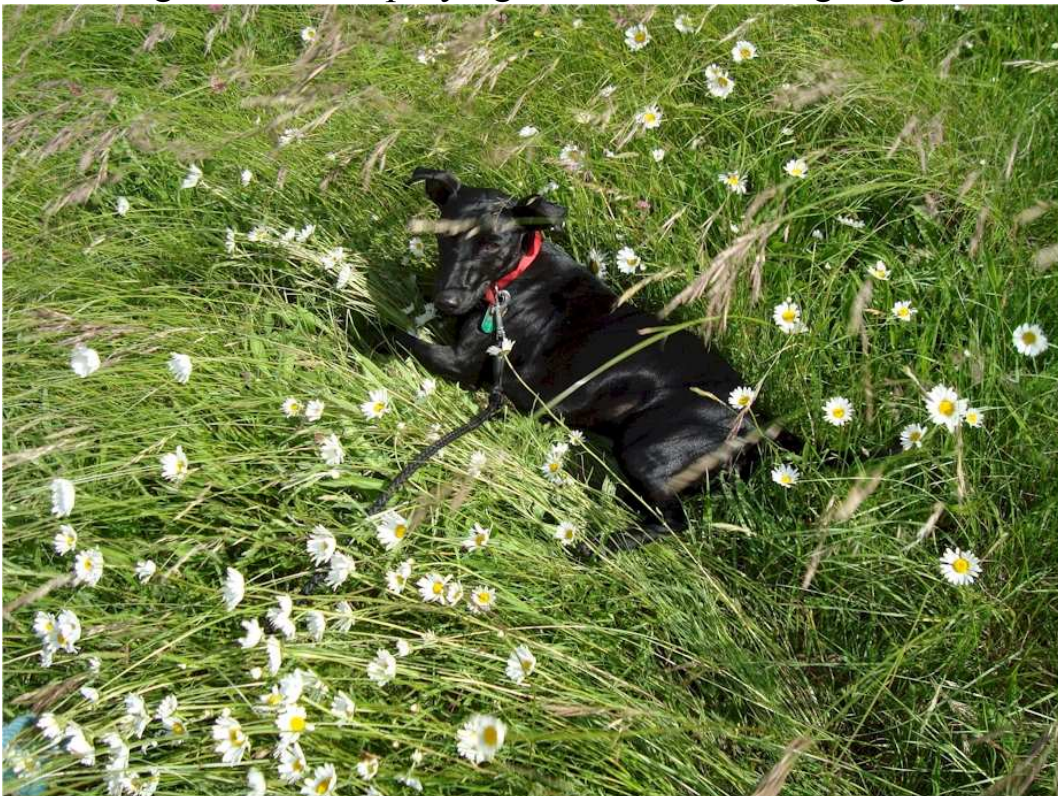
The map showed another path lower down, which should eventually either join the track (if any of it existed) or by taking a sideshoot off it, another quiet road into which the track should eventually lead. But the man I asked (an employee of the works through which the track ran) said that led to the disused airfield – so what? Lola spotted this road and wanted to go down it, but a big notice said private no admittance. I tried to get her to go further down the main road but she would not, so in the end I thought, what have I got to lose, we will try the airfield and if we get nowhere we can come back. She was happy with this, and following the map we took the offshoot (since I did not know how much of the track the farmer had ploughed up) and found ourselves once more in a quiet country lane.

Not much further on Lola was getting really tired, so I decided the next time she lay down in the grass we would stop and eat lunch. So we did, and sat quite a long time on the grass verge, not the most dignified or picturesque location, but needs must. Soon after that we arrived at the triumphal arch of Holkham, to be met by a notice saying we could not come in. There was a

communication system which I rang, determining to say I had walked all the way from Walsingham and wanted to go through the park. A woman came out and told me to put Lola on a lead. Seems we are allowed to walk through. A long straight path led to an



obelisk, very boring, and the grounds were nothing to look at, only meadow grass. Lola kept lying down and refusing to go on.



We made it to the obelisk in half an hour, then started to descend towards the house and a lake. Not far beyond that, a little



truck which I had seen earlier, stopping at the obelisk as we walked up to it, came towards us. I held out my hand and he pulled over. I asked could we hitch a lift.

“Where are you going?”

“To the Victoria,” – the woman had said that was the first place we would get coffee – and is right at the end of the park.

“Sorry, I only go to the courtyard,”

“Where is that?”

“Just over there. Why do you want to go to the Victoria? Are you parked there?”

I told him we had walked from Walsingham, had been walking four hours now, and the little dog is tired and keeps lying down. He takes pity on me,

“I’m just going to the Walled Garden to see if anybody wants to come back. If there’s no one there I’ll take you to the Gates. I can’t take you to the Victoria, as we’re not allowed to go outside the Gates, but you’ll be right next to it. I’ll catch up with you.”

He was as good as his word, and we had a little chat as he drove us down. He was touring with rock bands until this year, but

said it all got too much, he was only home for 50 days in the whole year, and there were so many other things he wanted to do. So now he has this little job, but apparently that's not the end of it. He told me they had no idea how to do things at Holkham, and he was trying to generate some new life in them, hard because they didn't want to change 'the way they had always done things'. He gave me his card – he has set up his own company –

“Ian Heffernan, Norfolk Stately Home Tours” – oh this card has no website on it, but I remember he said it had 'gone live' this week – if I put his name and details in I should get him. Email: norfolktours.mail.com. Address: 6, Walker's Close, Burnham Market, Kings Lynn PE31 8 EP, and there is his office and mobile numbers.

He looked such a happy man. I remarked on it, and said that in fact most people I had met in Norfolk were happy. Except Mrs Clara du Cann of course. (Gary's wife).

So with his help we arrived at the Victoria at half four to see a bus just pulling up at the stop. Gary had told me they ran every half hour to Wells.



Had coffee in the Vic, which has incredibly ancient fittings. Superb coffee, real shot of caffeine. Barmaid went gaga over Lola. Got the bus okay 5pm but had to hang about an hour in Wells. Still, better safe than sorry. Lovely day.

Sunday 17 June – 6.24pm

Wonderful night's sleep! Lola only woke once, at 11.30 when a gaggle of people passed in the street, talking – only talking, but it is so quiet here that the sound of it is huge in the silence. Oh well! Tomorrow, home to the dirt and noise and chaos that is Nelson, instead of this idyll of tranquillity.

When I was letting Lola out I saw there was a message on the mobile – Diana had tried to phone me twice, she would be worried. Hastily I dashed out a note to her – in bed, asleep, speak tomorrow.

Up at 7.15 feeling refreshed for once, and into the cleaning before 9. Diana rang about 9.30, luckily catching me in the kitchen where I was cleaning the incredibly dirty vacuum cleaner filter – like to leave things *better* than I found them! Yes she had been worried when I told her I had slept downstairs the night before, and she had sent an Angel to watch over me in the night, and in addition had appealed directly to Mary of Walsingham to guard me. Certainly worked! I had fallen asleep quickly, after setting up my banks of roses and other flowers in the doorway, extending out into the corridor, (visually not literally) which I have done on several nights, at the same time telling whoever is living in this house that their problems are not mine, I am on holiday and not here to help.

Sunday buses being different, had planned to leave on the 1.25 to Wells, to walk once more on that glorious beach, but first needed to buy a couple more packs of food for Lola, and visit the farm shop again. Set off to do this at 12. Found my legs ached more than somewhat, and Lola kept lying down in the grass, as though conveying to me that yesterday had been quite enough, and she was not in for another marathon walk today. It is a long trek out from the town to the beach in Wells, and perhaps it was better to rest so that is what we did, playing with the Mad Toy I bought her yesterday, a bit more reading of Gavin Maxwell's book (which still has not cheered up, and now I do not think it ever will – the gloom has definitely gone on too long), and a sleep in the afternoon, waking with a start – oh did I oversleep, what time is it, but no it was not Morning, but still afternoon.

The sun was shining and quite warm out there, so sat on the top step while Lola played with the Mad Thing and barked angrily at me because I would not chase after her – a pointless quest.

Suddenly a Poem swept over me – milestones on a long, white dusty road, not stone, but People – as though waiting for me, but forever beyond my reach. I did not go back when there was Time, and now they are swept away by Time's Ever-Rolling Stream (which sweeps all its sons away). The sadness of old age, when you realise you Can Never Go Back.

Milestones on a Dusty Road

You think they're all back there waiting for you; you think there's a past you can walk into; as though you were a Bit Player who went for a break – Mousy Webb at the King's Head in Bingley, his trumpet held high over his beer belly, sweating and blowing, while Brian Preston, behind him, bangs the drums and winks – not at you, not at anyone, it is a nervous tick – Brian, who takes his holidays in Youth Hostels, where he and his wife have to sleep in separate dorms – “It is a holiday, after all” he says, laughing his snorting laugh. And you, who think Sex is Everything, cannot imagine how that would be. “Anyway, how are you?” he says, changing the subject because, as always, it embarrasses him to talk about himself.

Norman, Keeper of Brownsea Castle, big and hearty, striding the lawns that run down to the sea, laughing at the new intake of ‘grockles’ – a local term he loves – arriving in their coats, which they will never need, and which will hang in their closets until they leave again for the Frozen North – Liverpool, Edinburgh – whichever John Lewis store they came from.

Bert Maggs, wheezing Welshman with diseased lungs, tending whippets on his smallholding in Essex, where my brown-eyed daughter was born – 51 years ago now, but seems like yesterday as I lay on that bed, pulling on a rope the Essex midwife tied to the iron frame, advising me not to take gas and air, telling me it would make me sick. And the small creature, when she arrived after three days straining, undersized due to there being No Money, and my having once lived for a week on a box of broccoli a neighbour left on the doorstep, and a few eggs from the chickens that scraped around Bert Maggs' door.

A long way . . . come a long way since then . . . but I can see them all standing there, like milestones on a winding road, that could be revisited . . . if we had the means . . . if we had the time. . .