



# From Beyond The Pond



2024 Edition

The Mallinsons, Orillia, Ontario, Canada

## Dear All,

This winter so far has been the snowiest for several years. In early February, we had a fall of 20 inches of lake-effect snow that affected a narrow band of country with Orillia in the centre of it, and which caused a 60-vehicle pileup on the bypass. Our snowblower was very busy, and the piled snow on the front lawn reached seven or eight feet high.

2024 was pretty calm, and I was thinking that there would not be much to report. However, looking back through our photos, we did have a few highlights.

## David and Sue:

For David, the first half of the year was busy with Leacock Medal activities. Apart from handling communications and public relations (not my forté) and thus sending out calls for submissions, long and short list and winner announcements, I found myself responsible for obtaining a banner to hang across the stage and a large Medal facsimile for our Gala weekend. In addition, I made a stand for the large Medal, and Sue and I put together a large rack for the storage locker where all the paraphernalia for the Leacock Medal are stored, and purchased a number of storage containers.

Our Gala Weekend at which the winner is announced was very successful, but again involved a lot of work for board members in planning and organizing it.

Sue's volunteer work at the Sharing Place food bank on Thursday morning continues. The number of people experiencing food insecurity is growing, and this is definitely reflected in the number coming to the food bank. Sue's work is in the preparation and packing of ready-to-eat meals that are given out to 'members' and other local agencies. In the course of the morning, they prepare up to a thousand meals. A video they made of

the packing line shows everyone moving at high speed putting meal components into containers.

We continue to hike with Sue's CFUW group, though Sue is no longer leading the hikes, but keeps busy with her two book clubs and lunch with retired teachers each month.

Some of the highlights of the year were:

- A trip to England in March for Sue and me to attend a 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary reunion dinner of St. Peter's School. The event was held in a pub in Wetherby, not too far from Harrogate where we stayed in the B&B run by my cousins Tim and Jenny Chester.

There were only 11 people there from my year, of whom I had seen only 4 since leaving school. Remarkably, there were three of us there (Haydn Biddle, Peter Semper and me) who first started at the school 70 years ago in the small ten-bed boarding house for new pupils. Peter had come up from the south for the occasion, and treated Sue and me to a splendid afternoon tea at Betty's prior to the dinner.

I was a little disappointed with the reunion because there was not time to talk to everyone and catch up with them.

- While staying at Tim and Jenny's, we enjoyed a hike by ourselves alongside the River Wharfe at Bolton Abbey (the photo on the left was taken above The Strid), and a dinner with the Chester family at the White

Swan in Ampleforth, where Helena and Rebecca go to school. We also met up with Alastair and Katie and their family at Harlow Carr Gardens in Harrogate where we enjoyed a stroll through all the early flowers and rhododendrons where George and his cousins enjoyed the outdoor play equipment. James Chester also dropped by.

- In April, we visited Sue's friend Bonnie and accompanied her to a friend's place near Colbourne where we experienced the total eclipse of the sun on a cloudy day. It was amazing to hear all the frogs in a nearby pond all start peeping when the sky became dark. Bonnie's husband Andreas had gone south to the States with his



astronomer friends and ended up dashing from one state to another to ensure they could view the eclipse through a clear sky.

- At the end of May, James persuaded us to spend a weekend in Niagara Falls with his family. Apart from viewing the falls from the top, and underneath in the "scenic" tunnels, we played black-lit mini-golf and visited the interesting decommissioned hydro-electric power station next to the river. Niagara Falls is a very popular location, with some magnificent views of the falls, but, as a holiday destination it has attracted all kinds of rather tawdry entertainments.
- In July, we visited the Canadian Canoe Museum in Peterborough with Bonnie Bird and Andreas Gada, and Stuart Burkholder. Stuart's wife Margaret is a friend of Bonnie's and Sue's from their university days, but sadly Margaret suffers from Parkinson's Disease, and is now in a nursing home. The Canoe Museum exhibits craft from all over the world, but mostly Canadian historical canoes, including one owned by Pierre Trudeau, father of our recent prime minister.
- Also in July, Sue, Rebecca and James' family all attended the Mariposa Folk Festival in Orillia, with my role being simply to drop them off at it and pick them up again later.
- In August, Rebecca, Chris, James, Elsa and Aiden took the two canoes for a trip down the Big East River near the cottage while Sue and I hiked in Arrowhead Provincial Park next to the river. They spent all day on the river, seeing a bear at one point, and we all got wet in a rainstorm when we picked them up near the park gates late in the day.
- In late August, Sue and I attended a pow-wow with friends at the Rama First Nations Reserve, enjoying the very colourful costumes, and the miscellaneous stores and food outlets.
- At the beginning of October, we had a pleasant visit from Bert Neyrinck and his wife Helena. Bert was the Belgian student who stayed with us for three months back in 2016 when he was on a carpentry work term here. He met Helena on a rock-climbing holiday, and they got married a couple of years ago. She is trained as doctor, as well as completing her PhD and is now doing an internship in the Netherlands where they now both live. Their visit took place at the end of a trip to western Canada and the Rockies, where Helena had been working on a farm for the summer.

### Home and Cottage:

- Last year, ten years after we installed solar panels on our roof, the City of Orillia contacted us to point out that the building permit had not been closed off. This was because we had fired our contractor, getting another one to finish the job, and the permit somehow fell through the cracks. We had to contact the engineer who oversaw the job, discovered that the contractor had not

replaced a roof truss properly, and that it had to be done again. Over the course of several months, at great expense, we had to get a carpenter to finish the work with the engineer visiting twice and finally approving the new truss. Very frustrating!

- On opening up the cottage in the spring, Chris made us a delicious meal, but the smell from the oven was repugnant. It transpired that a mouse had made its nest in the insulation of the oven and had died. This meant that the stove had to be thrown out, but fortunately our neighbor, Steve Kearns, had a good used stove in his shed and sold it to us for a minimal amount.

At Christmas, Rebecca and Chris came a couple of days earlier, and James and family were going to come up on Christmas Day. Well, I tested positive for Covid on Christmas Day so James, Elsa and Aiden cancelled their plans. Sue and Rebecca caught it a few days later but Chris dodged the bullet. However the turkey was cooked and served on the day with me isolated in the bedroom.

### James, Elsa and Aiden:



James, Elsa and Aiden had an eventful 2024, beginning with a trip to Portugal in March to celebrate Elsa's dad Andrew's 80th birthday. It was a family affair with her brother Vince's family coming too. They rented a villa on the south coast in the Algarve for a week before Elsa, James and Aiden took another week to drive from Lisbon to Porto. Highlights included seeing dinosaur footprints and a breathtaking climb up to the Castelo dos Mouros in Sintra. The trip ended on a sad note with the death back home of James' longtime feline confidante Bandalero. Fortunately, Rebecca was with him in his last moments.

Aiden continues to grow quickly and somehow be even more full of beans. Seven years old and in grade two he's a very social and chatty kid who seems to bound easily into friendship with everyone around him. Perhaps natural territory for mom, but a little mystifying for dad. Current



interests are downhill skiing and snow in general which cause a rising glow and vibration to rise out of some depth within him. Dog Man and Asterix have also found a firm place in his imagination as does any opportunity to bounce, craft, explore, be upside down, or wrestle with dad.



Elsa became an ardent investigative journalist in June when the Ontario government suddenly closed the much beloved Ontario Science Centre on short notice and suspicious pretenses. Elsa's very thorough analysis of an engineer's report and subsequent auditor general's reports garnered significant media coverage and for a while she was appearing regularly on TV, radio and print news media. She even got a thumb's up from the mayor in a City council debate on the issue! Sadly, the government has persisted in their efforts to move the OSC to Ontario Place, so Elsa's efforts have shifted to support preservation and repurposing of the existing building as a landmark piece of architecture. Outside of activism, Elsa continues to contact dance, buy weird/fabulous clothes and run Canada's premier architectural magazine.

James had a much less glamorous 2024, spending much time disputing with contractors the application of waterproofing on a children's hospital addition in Ottawa. When not in the mud, James has been very focused on his Tai Chi practice, which he now believes is a potential

solution to most problems, including disputes about waterproofing, if he'd only work up the courage to suggest it on site. He's also taken up life drawing again and has become more involved in his local meditation community.

### Rebecca:

In last year's letter, we mentioned that Rebecca had been promoted to a full-time Program Manager position at the City of Toronto. While in that role in 2024, she focused on implementing the first year of the City's new energy and water reporting bylaw for large buildings, which involved coordinating the activities of a team of four in order to execute an outreach campaign and provide building owners with support to ensure they were able to report to the City successfully. In her leisure time, Rebecca continued her aerial silks practice, but was only able to perform in one student showcase in 2024 because the circus studio where she practices suffered a catastrophic flood in May and needed to be re-opened in a new location. Rebecca's November performance in the new studio can be viewed here: [Practice](#) and [Live](#). (Rebecca prefers the practice video)



After 5 years of diligent masking and hand sanitizing, Rebecca finally caught Covid-19 in Orillia on Christmas morning (from an un-named source). Bizarrely, unlike the rest of the family, her chief symptoms were prolonged nausea and vomiting, which left her severely dehydrated and necessitated a trip to the emergency department to have anti-nausea medication and a large bag of saline solution administered intravenously. She is now completely



recovered, but it made for possibly the least pleasant Christmas break in memory.

### Chris:



Chris has been hard at work on his latest game and released it in August last year to a limited audience, with the full launch coming up before this summer. So far it's been well received but it's a bit of a stressful project due to the big companies he's partnered with and the way they each run as a business. But how bad can making video games be, right!

His business does have its perks too, which took him to a conference in Lake Como, Italy in September, as well as Vilnius, Lithuania - which he said is a surprisingly great city with plenty of nice architecture, history and food, and is very walkable. He'll likely travel for business this year again, perhaps to visit his business partner in Indonesia - which would only be their second in-person meeting in 10 years.

Chris' adorable dog Lyon is the apple of his eye and they continue to have adventures together, including playing in the waist-deep snow in Orillia when they came to visit over the Christmas break.

Of course, in world affairs life is being made difficult for us in Canada and elsewhere by the deranged orange-haired buffoon to the south of us who has lied and cheated his way through life and somehow, as a convicted felon, has persuaded slightly less than half of the electorate (in the popular vote) that he was the right man for the job. The future looks difficult with him pursuing his far-right agenda, and we can only hope that he does not do too much damage and that democratic values ultimately prevail and make America sane again.

As with last year, we wish everyone a belated Merry Christmas and an enjoyable 2025.

*David, Sue, James, Elsa, Aiden, Rebecca  
and Chris.*

### Pix

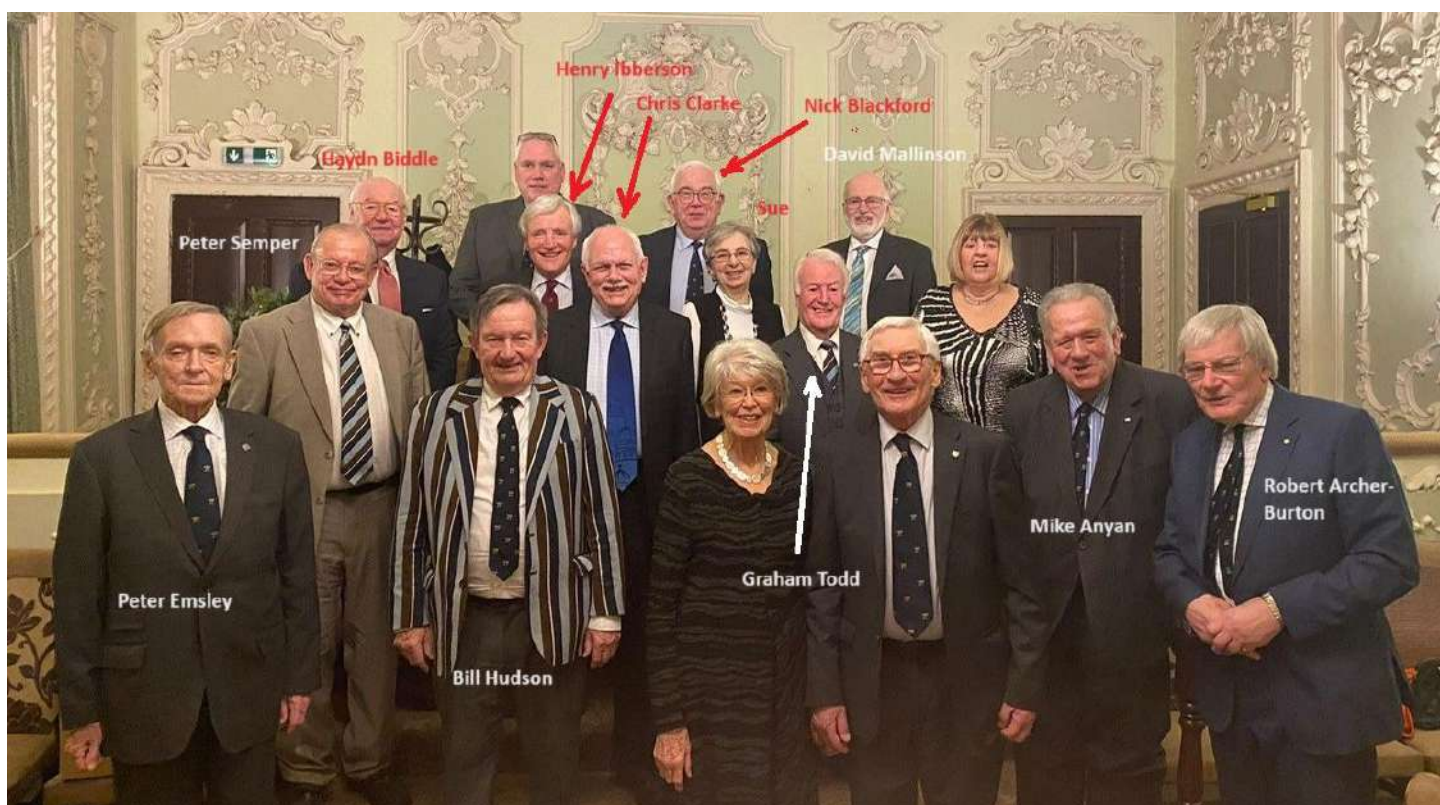


Canoeing the Big East River





1955

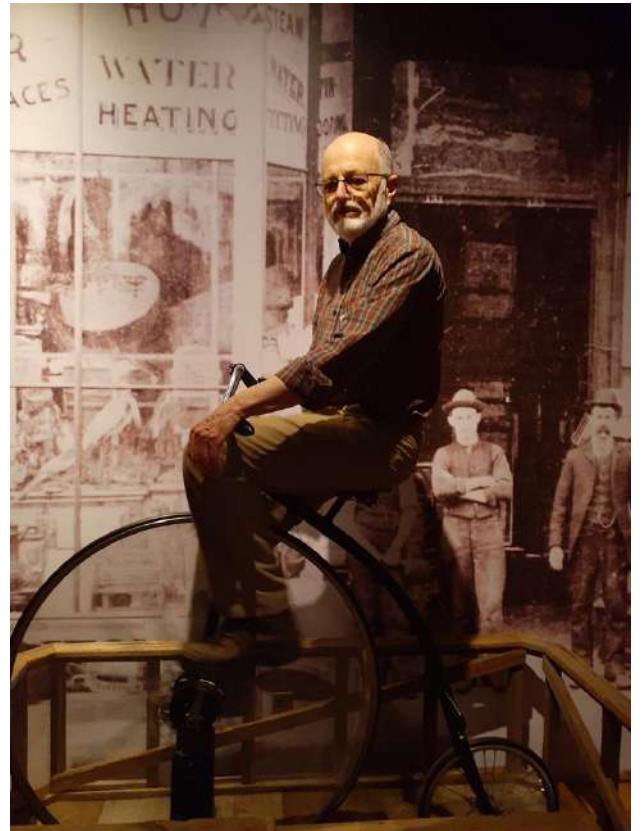


Reunion 2024





At Niagara Falls



Simcoe County Museum



At the Mariposa Folk Festival



Some of the snow we have had this winter



<--Delightful visit from  
Helena and  
Bert Neyrinck

Visit to a local  
brewery on a  
snowy night -->

