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Dear all,

- 2017 has been less eventful than 2016, but busy and rewarding. We started the year on a walking holiday in Madeira, with spectacular fireworks round the bay of Funchal at midnight.
- Margaret celebrated her 70th birthday in July, with a BBQ and family gathering at the Ashby de la Zouch home of Paul's brother. During the year, we have also shared celebrations of various 'noughty' birthdays of family and friends.
- We marked our 40th wedding anniversary (ruby) with a few days in the beautiful city of Venice. The city even laid on a historic regatta down the Grand Canal to amuse us!
- Paul is showing no signs of being bored with retirement. Indeed, his LAMPS software archaeology project has not made much progress due to lots of travel, music events etc. He passed a milestone in November, when he got his bus pass, though he doesn't get his state pension till next year.
- He now has the dubious honour of being Chairman of our French Twinning Association. After 19 very successful years it is becoming difficult to recruit new members in either country. There was not enough support this year for a visit from here to Le Vaudreuil but a contingent came from France for a weekend, with the highlight being a Ceilidh and hog roast.
- The two of us went to Le Vaudreuil for a weekend to join the annual Rando (walk) - this year in the footsteps of Victor Hugo. En route we decided to see a bit more of Kent by visiting Hever Castle (Anne Boleyn), Rye and Hythe - not a direct route but well worth the detour.
- Following Margaret's foray to A&E with Atrial Fibrillation last year, her travel insurance company, Direct Line, refused to insure her again. Saga accepted her but charged an arm and a leg for travel in Europe alone so her travels have been confined to European countries.
- In Portugal we walked parts of the Via Algarviana. In Greece we walked the islands of Tinos and Andros and, thanks to a ferry strike, had the chance to visit Athens. In Croatia we walked near Baška Voda - a stunning beautiful coastline and a magnificent mountain backdrop.
- We have also explored England - e.g. Norfolk, Suffolk, Shropshire (plus Ironbridge) and the Cotswolds (two days it was too hot to walk so we visited National Trust properties instead).
- Paul not being inhibited by medical factors, went to Sri Lanka for two weeks in February - a fascinating country rich in culture and wildlife, although he doesn't need to see any more Buddhist temples for a while. His next solo holiday will be Iceland in July, as Margaret is not keen on volcanic terrain and lack of trees.
- We have again taken interesting courses with U3A. Margaret did a class on Italian Cities which included the opportunity to go to Florence with visits to Siena and Pisa. Her favourite class this term is 'Just Vegetating!' Paul has failed for a second year to get into Beginners Latin (class full), so is doing Beginners Ancient Greek instead!

Enjoy your Christmas wherever you are, and have a happy and successful year in 2018.

Paul & Margaret