

GOOD-BYE, 2021!

We rejoiced at the end of 2020, an *annus horribilis*. We went blithely skipping into 2021, an *annus horribilior*!

The Epic of ‘*Il Palazzo del Gatto*’ – A Review to Date

It is now over a year since we had contracted a firm of Architects and formally had begun the project of our new house. CoViD-19 had thrown the world into disarray in 2020. In particular, the Architects (there were two plus support staff) had been forced to go ‘virtual’ and so communication between Nam and our particular architect became difficult. We had also started to have qualms about the abilities of our architect as an individual and of the firm in general: what we had taken to be ‘**Enthusiasm**’ and ‘**Expertise**’ started to look more like ‘**Spin**’ but **no ‘Substance’**. **Emails went unacknowledged let alone dealt with**, and as the detailed Building Rules plans trickled in through 2020, Nam had been finding a **huge number of elementary errors**. I had been the sick, silent partner, but I was moved to write a **formal letter to the company insisting on immediate email acknowledgements and a professional level of care and attention to detail**. At the risk of sounding like E.M. Forster whenever he ended a chapter in one of his novels, *we were yet to realize that the “problems” with the Architects had only just begun to germinate!*

But, at the end of 2020, we finally had detailed Building Rules submitted to the City of West Torrens for Certification and Development Approval, and we had a fixed-price contract with a builder (**Aria Homes Pty Ltd**), that was around our budget for the build. We had Building Rules Consent on 28 January 2021, and Development Approval on 3 February 2021.

We also had a lovely, cleared block of land, ‘*La Maison Invisible*’, with an idle trenching machine.



‘La Maison Invisible’, with an idle trenching machine

‘**Domus Impossibilis**’ –

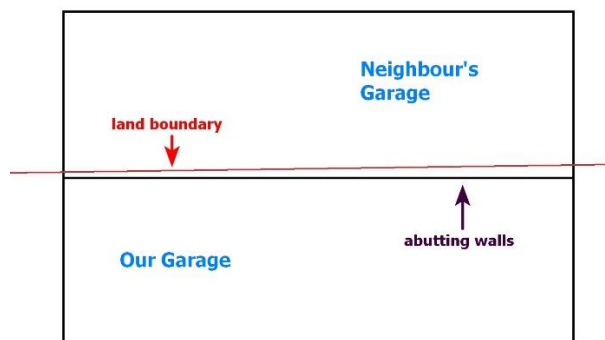
Why an *idle* trenching machine?

When the area was first subdivided in the 1950s, the surveyors would not have even dreamt of the technology of today. Furthermore, I suspect that there was a much more laissez-faire attitude back then. It transpires that our land is not rectangular, but rather **not even one of the four angles is 90 degrees!**

The eastern boundary fronts Taylor Avenue. But neither the northern nor southern boundaries is square with the frontage: they're not even parallel to each other! As you move from east to west along the northern boundary, for every metre you move west, the boundary also drops ~4mm south. It doesn't sound like much, but over the depth of a garage it adds up.

So, if our northern neighbour and we both built our garages on our northern boundary, abutting each other, then they would be at a slight angle to the road. To have them square on to the road would mean that either our neighbour or we, or both, would have to cross the boundary line.

As it happens, our neighbour went a measurable amount over the boundary at both ends of the garage, which is a bit naughty, but we are hardly going to insist he demolish his garage wall!



Schematic picture of the abutting garages (not to scale)

Our architect had had possession of a full set of Survey Drawings in November 2019, showing this encroachment. A **70mm offset** from the boundary for our build would have avoided any unpleasantness.

But no, the architect had drawn up our building plans stating that the build would go to the **boundary**, even though he knew that there had been this minor encroachment. Oops. We had Certified Building Rules and formal Development Approval from the City of West Torrens to build our house ... **to the boundary**. **The boundary, not 70mm offset from the boundary!**

Our builder is a stickler for details – usually an excellent trait for a builder to have – and he insisted that he is only authorised to build our house to the boundary, and there is 70mm of the neighbour's brickwork in the way. Remember the idle trenching machine.

It is now 17 months since we contracted the architectural firm. All we have are detailed plans of something impossible to build, '**Domus Impossibilis**'.

Our architect's panicked call to the City of West Torrens elicited the rather tepid response, "As discussed, you must build to the boundary as this is what was approved. However, we understand the practicalities of the situation, so yes, you must build as close to the boundary as possible." This was enough for our architect to email the Builder and us, "The Planner responsible for Lockleys DA and Building Approval, has subsequently provided his agreement in writing for us to build abutting (sic) to the neighbours (sic) existing garage wall and as a result change the south boundary offset to a 930 nom."

The Builder was assuaged by that, and a signed statement from us indemnifying him and his company against "any legal or financial action or dispute that may arise from the construction being built at an offset of 70mm nominal from the northern boundary so as to build as close to the northern boundary as possible."

In the future, should either party wish to sell their property, then negotiations would be required to redefine the boundary formally with the Land Titles Office. The costs of this (~\$7,000 at today's prices) would probably be shared. The neighbour to our north would however acquire some of our land in this redefinition. This sliver of land, pro rata based on what we paid for our land, would be in excess of \$10,000!!

I plan to be long dead before this debate is held.

'Il Palazzo del Gatto' Riseth –

So, finally, trenching began!



24 March 2021

... and a slab was poured



7 April 2021 (with a bonus water feature)



10 April 2021

... and a structure began emerging!



20 May 2021

From here, Nam and the builder, Steve Jones, and his Builder's Mate, Brian, collaborated excellently, even weaving their way through the CoViD-19 disruptions, supply-chain issues etc. We had contracted the architectural firm to do the Project Supervision. I am not sure what contribution our architect made to this despite the hefty and regular bills – the architectural firm had one department that functioned efficiently!

We almost managed formal completion by the end of 2021, but the saga will spill over into 2022.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) –

In April, I applied to join the NDIS on the grounds of the incapacity caused by my peripheral neuropathy. By the end of April, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), which administers the Scheme, had accepted my application, and I had a funding plan in place by the end of May! Given the enormous scope of the NDIS, I was impressed from the start by how well thought-out the process was. Your application, with supporting medical evidence, must convince the NDIA that you have a disability that meets their definition. In conjunction with an NDIS Liaison, you develop a set of short-, medium- and long-term goals and how the NDIS could help you work towards these. Funding comes in different categories and your plan is very much tailored to your specific case.

I received a sizeable allocation in the category that funds allied health support, specifically **physiotherapy, clinical psychology, and podiatry**. I was able to attend physiotherapy group

exercise twice a week, clinical psychology every three weeks and podiatry every six weeks, and the entire cost was comfortably funded from that category.

I had another category which enabled the employment of cleaners and garden maintenance, to ease the burden on Nam who was already working full-time and caring for me.

In the future, I expect that I'll have cause to seek funding under the assistive technology category.

All things considered, I was very impressed by the NDIS, and of course grateful for the level of funding I was granted.

The Eye of the Storm –

In many ways for me personally, 2021 was the eye of the CoViD-19 storm. Vaccines were on their way; I had my first inoculation in March, with the Astra-Zeneca vaccine. There were strict controls on entry into the state, with quarantine rules for people permitted to enter. There was an extensive test and track process in place. Masking and social distancing recommendations or requirements were widespread. As a result, I was able to go out to events, such as the theatre, that had been in chaos in 2020. I was able to take out a wide-ranging Adelaide Symphony Orchestra (ASO) subscription, and I could attend the centre-piece opera production in the Adelaide Festival of Arts in March.

“A Midsummer Night’s Dream” –

Neil Armfield’s production of British composer Benjamin Britten’s opera, *“A Midsummer Night’s Dream”*, made its Australian debut with an exclusive season at the 2021 Adelaide Festival of Arts, for which the Australian Neil Armfield AO was Joint Artistic Director. I am generally a fan of Britten’s operas, but this was one I knew nothing about.



“A Midsummer Night’s Dream” by Benjamin Britten (Photo Credit: Tony Lewis)

I had been surprised that Britten had tackled this story – it seemed to me to be out of keeping with his normal choices. Alas, in my opinion, I was right, and I did not like the opera much at all. As for the production, the costumes were sumptuous and the special effects eye-catching, but I don’t think Neil Armfield, for all his skills, could compensate for what I believe was a pedestrian opera. Sadly, I left the theatre somewhat deflated.

Pudnanthi Padninthi –

The First Nations people of the Adelaide Plains are the **Kaurna** people. (The pronunciation of 'Kaurna' is deceptive. The initial 'K', an unvoiced guttural consonant, is pronounced as its voiced counterpart 'G', giving /'gɑ:nə/ as the English pronunciation.) The ASO commissioned a Kaurna Acknowledgement of Country, Pudnanthi Padninthi (**'The Coming and the Going'**), that will be performed at the start of ASO concerts. This musical Acknowledgement is a collaboration with Kaurna Narungga musicians and composers Jack Buckskin and Jamie Goldsmith, and orchestrator/arranger Mark Simeon Ferguson. It is a very special way to start ASO concerts.

Longing for Home –

On Friday, 2 July 2021, Nam and I went to 'Longing for Home', a twilight performance of the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra. We were duly masked and sanitized on the evening. The originally arranged conductor could not negotiate the CoViD-19 lockdown maze to attend, and so the indefatigable Nicholas Braithwaite stepped in.

The highlight of the program for me was **Bruch's Violin Concerto No. 1** in G minor, op.26, and it was truly beautiful. Grace Clifford was the soloist and she performed marvellously – wearing a mask for the whole recital! (I read later that it was the first of three violin concertos that Max Bruch composed. It was such an outstanding success that it is often just referred to as the Bruch Violin Concerto. The poor composer lamented towards the end of his life that no-one listened to anything else he composed!) I was so taken with it that I went home and ordered a CD of the concerto being played by Janine Jansen, c. Riccardo Chailly, Gewandhausorchester (Decca, 2006), which also included Bruch's Romance in F major for viola and orchestra, op.85 (see, he did compose something else), and Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto in E minor, op.64.

Birthdays –

Nam celebrated his birthday on the 7th with a family dinner at my mother's home. My sister Judith turned the milestone age of 60 on the 26th and so she is now officially a senior citizen. Adelaide was in a short CoViD-19 lockdown at the time, and so her celebration was delayed and appears later in this edition.

Auld Lang Syne –

I was six years old when my family moved into Fulham, a new suburb in the west of Greater Adelaide. I commenced Sunday School at the Fulham Methodist Church (now part of the Henley-Fulham Uniting Church), and I remained very actively involved in Church activities right up until I moved to England for my post-graduate studies in 1980. The current Minister, Rev. Christa Megaw, spearheaded a reunion evening of the youth from the heydays of the 1970s on Saturday, 10 July 2021, at the Church. It was quite an evening of nostalgia.



The “Youth of the 70s” (with partners)

The Bridge of San Luis Rey –

The centrepiece of the Adelaide Guitar Festival was a clever reimagining by Phillip Kavanagh of the 1927 best-selling novel by Thornton Wilder. The superb **Paul Capsis** narrated the tale in the guise of ‘**Camila Perichole, the greatest actress of her age**’, accompanied by masterful classical guitar players **Slava Grigoryan** and **Manus Noble**. Originally planned for 2020, CoViD-19 lockdown forced it to be delayed a year. Given my lack of stamina these days, I booked two tickets for a matinee, and asked my mother to accompany me as my carer. Fortunately, I picked the first of two matinees: part way through the season ... another CoViD-19 lockdown. (On our way out of the theatre, my mother expressed the opinion that the woman lead looked a bit peculiar. I informed her that “**she**” **was a man!**)

Judith's Delayed 60th Celebration –

On Friday, 6 August 2021, my sister, Judith, finally managed to have her 60th birthday celebration after a short CoViD-19 lockdown had disrupted the original date. A sizeable group gathered for dinner in a private room at The Mile End Hotel. I caught up with some people I had not seen for a while, but the crowd and the fact that it was held in the evening rather drained me.



The Odometer of Life Goes Click –

Another birthday followed shortly afterwards - my own! The odometer of life went 'click' at midnight and I am now 63 years old. I was greeted in the kitchen with a vase of long-stemmed roses - my favourite! It might have been Lily, but I reckon it was the long-suffering Nam Duong. Thank you, my dearest husband! Nam also prepared a slow-cooked joint of pulled pork which went a treat for dinner, with my mother, Joan, and sister, Judith, joining us. Mum brought a wickedly decadent chocolate cake for dessert.

I had had a 21st birthday party sometime back in the mesolithic age, but, when I reached 42, I had a "second twenty-first party" taking over the upstairs of a city pub for a party that was talked about for years! I had rashly claimed that the "third twenty-first party" would also be a blast. But the sins of this and previous lives have caught up with me, and like the '*Picture of Dorian Gray*' life imitated art: an intimate dinner with family was all I could handle. Even so, I fell asleep in the lounge chair at 9:30 p.m.



Birthday Roses from Nam

Liberation Theology –

The Adelaide West Progressive Christianity Group had its monthly Service on 15 September 2021. The speaker was Mario Trinidad. Mario was originally from the Philippines, and in his 20s he went to work as a Catholic missionary priest in the southern coast of Guatemala among landless farmers and small landowners. After less than two years, he was forced to leave due to death threats from the military and the government. He then worked in a *colonia popular* (a neighbourhood in a large metropolitan area) in Mexico City. Mario left the priesthood and married an Australian lady, and until his retirement at the beginning of this year, he worked in Elizabeth South, South Australia's most disadvantaged metropolitan suburb, through the St Vincent de Paul Society. Along his journey, Mario managed to get a masters and a doctoral degree in Liberation Theology and did post-graduate studies in social work. He was a fascinating speaker: he could "walk the walk and talk the talk" with his very hands-on experience and considerable academic achievements.

A Fragile Patient –

Despite three major abdominal surgeries for Crohn's disease when I was in my late 20s, the disease persisted in the rest of the digestive system, and within a year or two had become nasty in my mouth, throat, and gullet. In recent years, this has been successfully controlled

by a high daily dose of azathioprine, an immune-suppressant medication. I was taking a higher dose of azathioprine than some organ transplant recipients take to avoid organ rejection!

My current gastro-intestinal physician told me that it is found that many people, who have fully managed Crohn's disease on immuno-suppressant medication, can cease the medication as they age with no ill effect. The natural weakening of a person's immune system with age can render the immuno-suppression therapy no longer necessary. But first, I should have an [MR enterography](#) to check that there is no hidden Crohn's disease activity or other nasties before removing the immuno-suppressant medication.

Everything was fine on that front, but the radiologist reported some [thickening of the oesophageal wall](#) at the point where the oesophagus enters the stomach. This could just be a quirk of my gut, but it also could indicate a certain level of Crohn's disease activity at that point, or even worse nasties! However, given the total lack of any symptoms that would be related to such pathologies, a non-event was the most likely situation. The only real way of being sure would be to conduct an endoscopy. So, the physician had to weigh up the remote risk of a symptom-less nasty versus the risks associated with the endoscopy procedure. His advice was, given that I'm a ["fragile patient"](#), it was best to do nothing unless symptoms develop.

I was a little taken aback by being called a "fragile patient", but on the upside, we have decided to give a cessation of all immuno-suppressant medication a try – handy in these CoViD-19 times!

Caring for God's Creation –

Back in July, I reported on a reunion of the "1970s Youth" of the Fulham Methodist Church, now part of the Henley-Fulham Uniting Church. I have been in informal communication with the Reverend Christa Megaw, the Church Minister, since then. The month of October was to be designated "Caring for God's Creation". The Service on Sunday, 17th October 2021, was to be "Cafe Church" at The Temple Worship Centre (Henley Beach). The Service is held cabaret-style in the Church Hall and is much more informal than usual. The theme of course was "Caring for God's Creation", in which parishioners were invited to talk about how the local environment had changed, and in what ways they as individuals could help care for the area. Both Henley and Fulham are central to the area known to the Kurna First Peoples as [Witongga, the Reed Beds](#). I had made a roughly 8-minute video of the history of the transition of Witongga following the European invasion. A four-minute edit of my video was played to seed the discussion at the Church Service. Christa informed me that the Service went very well, and there was good feedback on my video. (See my YouTube channel for the full video.)

Blast from the Past –

Out of the blue recently I had an email from one [Elenore Clemow](#). She inquired as to whether I remembered her. I in fact had immediately recognized the name, even though she was Elenore MacDowall back in the day. Years of therapy and still I could not forget!

Back when I was an undergraduate at the University of Adelaide, there developed quite an extensive social group revolving around the University's Square-Dancing Club. Elenore and I had been part of that group.

While I was doing my postgraduate work at Cambridge in England, Elenore and her sister visited whilst on holidays. They were booked into a bed-and-breakfast for a few days. The b&b claimed that guests could come and go 24-hours, but one evening the owners locked the entrance thinking mistakenly that all the guests were in for the night. Knowing that I had a key to a College friend's rooms while he was on holiday, the girls came back to my hostel to get the key and so find a place to stay for the night. At about 2:00 a.m., I was awoken by my landlady, her demented husband and the two girls: their efforts to sneak up to my room had been unsuccessful. I eventually managed to explain the situation to Mrs Challis and she then managed to drag her husband back to their quarters. And Elenore thought I might have forgotten that incident!!

After my return from England, Elenore and I frequently socialized until she met Mark Clemow, and then as Elenore Clemow she moved interstate for many years. Now, four children later, she and Mark are back in Adelaide. So, Elenore came down to Brighton and Nam joined the two of us over lunch at home. There were lots of reminiscences, but [a solemn oath between us that neither Elenore nor I would divulge the other's nickname from the Adelaide University days!](#)

Adriana and Chris –

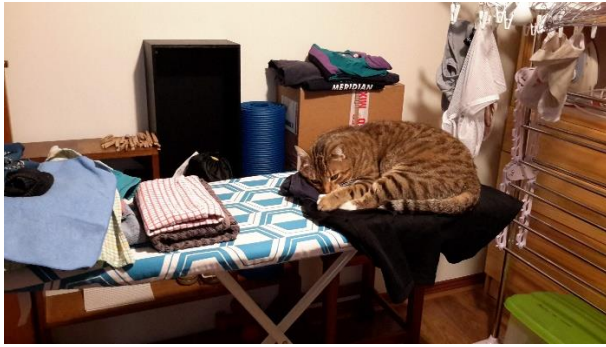
Another friend of mine from those old square-dancing days was [Heather Latz](#). Her friend Adriana and her partner Chris are moving from Canberra to Adelaide and building a new home here in a similar vein to ours. Adriana and Nam have become the best of email-penfriends, exchanging design, and building tips, ideas etc. Last Saturday the four of us met at our new home for them to have a look around and a peer through the windows, and then we had some dinner at a local restaurant.

Social Grinch –

Due to my ongoing health woes, I have been sending apologies hither and thither for various Christmas / End-of-Year functions, as they are too much of a drain on me these days.

Please remember that Nam and I no longer send Christmas cards. [I suggest you print out his page, fold it in half, stick some fake snow to the front and whack it on your mantelpiece](#) – or put it in the bin!

Cat Capers – The section you’ve been waiting for!



Ironing is exhausting work



What can I say?



It's life, Nam, but not as we know it!



He's not going anywhere!



I enjoy helping to pack



But it's very tiring work

Best regards from Lily, Nam and yours truly ...

Alan