

MY TRAVEL DIARY

The weekend before my August 16th departure was a family reunion. Paul and Donna came down on the Thursday and Andrew, Kirsten and Beau arrived at midday on Saturday. Matt, Ashley, Axel and Taya came in that afternoon for an informal dinner. It was great to see Beau, as I hadn't seen him for several weeks, and he has grown so much. It was great to see everyone together.

Sunday morning I was feeling a bit wonky, so went to the Emergency Department of the hospital to get some more antibiotics. In the afternoon it was fortunate that Andrew and Kirsten were still there to help set up the global roaming on my mobile. A few dramas in the process.

Monday morning we left for Sydney where we stayed in the Pullman in O'Riordan Street, near the airport, just up from the Stamford where ADFAS conferences are held. The stay was a freebie with our Accord membership, and we got an upgrade when we checked in. A very nice room. We had a very pleasant dinner with a celebratory champagne and a nice bottle of pinot grigio from Orange. Carol had a pork cutlet and I had a rump steak in a red wine jus – one of the nicest pieces of steak I have had. Finished off with sorbet and ice cream. Very enjoyable.

However, I was dismayed to find that my emails were playing up that evening. While I could still receive, they wouldn't send.

HONG KONG

Day 1 – Tuesday 16th August SYDNEY → HONG KONG

As my flight the next morning was a 10.05am departure we had to make tracks to the airport about three hours beforehand. We caught a shuttle bus to the airport which Carol caught back to the hotel. Much easier and cheaper. The airport terminal was chaotic but I managed to get through check-in and grab a coffee before I headed into the departure lounge. The plane took off at about 10.30am and lunch was served not long after. My meal was supposedly lamb – I have my doubts, however, as I'm not really sure what it was. Nevertheless, it was washed down with a small bottle of bubbly which made it more palatable. A Weis bar and a hot stuffed bread roll before landing comprised the rest of the menu.

I dozed for a lot of the flight, but didn't sleep, as I enjoyed listening to my music on my ipad. Arrived in Hong Kong about 4.30pm local time, and went through immigration and customs without a hitch, not like entering Australia.

When we arrived it was raining, overcast and humid, with lots of cloud and mist. I was picked up by a transit bus and delivered to the hotel, the Salisbury YMCA, near the waterfront opposite Hong Kong Island. On the way from the airport, which is located west of the city proper, it was fascinating to observe the massive infrastructure everywhere in such a confined space for so many millions of people. Expressways, bridges everywhere, as water is a major feature of the landscape. The traffic moved fairly quickly until we got into the city when it was peak hour. I was the last to be dropped off on the transit bus so managed to have a good look at downtown Kowloon in the process.

The hotel is comfortable and in a good position not far from the Kowloon waterfront. I went for a walk after unpacking and took in the sights. By then it was after 8pm, but all the shops were still open. As I had eaten on the flight, I wasn't overly hungry, so had a McDonald's meal rather than indulge in a Chinese banquet.

I was further frustrated that evening to find that emails were still being problematic, then I lost access to my Yahoo account which I created for my trip. There is no way that I can access it now, as it continually seeks my Australian mobile number, which is hibernating, as the emergency reference. So I have had to create an alternative email using hotmail/outlook. I have too many emails and passwords. I am sick of technology. Good while it works, a pain in the arse when it doesn't.

Day 2 – Wednesday 17th August: HONG KONG

This morning I went for a walk around the waterfront. I was dismayed to find that while texting and phoning work on my iphone, the internet didn't. I eventually resolved that issue by contacting IT support via Australia. No doubt it won't be the last IT hassle which I experience. All so frustrating.

By the end of the afternoon I was worn out from walking around Kowloon. It was wet and muggy, as it's the northern hemisphere summer still.

It is so interesting to observe the Hong Kongites/Kongians going about their daily routine. I am still gobsmacked by all the luxury shops, particularly for watches. Talk about overkill. Plus in Kowloon there are hawkers on every corner trying to sell you watches and handbags or to make you a shirt and a suit. Some of them are very persistent.

Apparently the red and white taxis are for Kowloon – they are colour coded for other areas.

My hotel is a remodelled art deco building – comfortable and conveniently located.

It is fascinating to note the old and new when an old style Chinese junk sails past you, with the skyscrapers of Hong Kong Island in the background.

I found it interesting that a Hong Kong 711 store sold quite different products to those in Australia, and also had a range of wines, some in large bottles, some in small bottles, and quite a few Australian labels.

I have also found the people in Hong Kong to be friendly and polite.

Day 3 – Thursday 18th August: HONG KONG

This morning I went to a nearby hotel to meet my tour group for an extended town tour. There was a mixup, as I was not on the list, but that was fortunately soon resolved. There were a variety of nationalities, a lot of Kiwis and an American, a pleasant group and we chatted a lot during the tour. We saw a bit of the town while doing the hotel pickups. Then we went to Aberdeen which had once been a fishing village. Fishing still occurs, but less and less so. We then went on a sampan tour around Aberdeen harbour which was fascinating. A lot of people live on boats, some of which didn't look particularly seaworthy. A derelict looking junk could be moored next to a massive sleek multi-million dollar cruiser.

Next stop was a jewellery showroom where there was high pressure to buy; there were as many salespeople as there were tour members lurking all over the place. Then we went on to Stanley, to stroll around the markets, which are not my thing. Next stop was the Peak, the highest point on Hong Kong Island, from which you get the most amazing views. We came back down in a precipitous cable car and were then dropped back to our hotels. By then it was raining and being very tired, and a bit affected by the humidity, just dozed in the hotel lobby for several hours until my bus transfer arrived. A nice clerk at reception recharged my phone for me, as it was out of juice. First of many lessons to be learnt!

Unfortunately the bus left before the start of a laser tour on the harbour front, which happens every night in summer, but on the way to the airport we could see Hong Kong's tallest building perform its own light show which was fantastic.

There is a subway at HK airport to transfer you to distant gates, which gives you an idea of its size. This airport has been in use since the late 1990s. My Lufthansa flight to Munich took off just before midnight.

GERMANY

Day 4 – Friday 19th August: HONG KONG → MUNICH → HAMBURG → BERLIN

We made good time with tail winds and arrived in Munich at around 5am local time. I didn't sleep, but watched a few movies. I was seated next to Marco, a young engineering student from northern Italy who had been doing some practical work in Shanghai – he was heading back home. We chatted a bit, as he spoke good English, but as it was getting late he slept most of the trip. After takeoff we were served a meal which was sizeable, and although I had eaten at the airport I nevertheless tucked into dinner. Lufthansa food was a step up from QANTAS, and the breakfast served before landing was also surprisingly good.

Munich airport is huge but very confusing, and I'm sure I covered several kilometres looking for immigration and luggage which I discovered I didn't need to retrieve, as I had a connecting flight to Hamburg. I eventually got to the right spot and the plane took off for Hamburg at 8am and we arrived at 9am. Although I went through immigration and a security check, there was no customs check, so I went straight down to the subway and headed into Hamburg railway station, where I registered my Eurail ticket and reserved a seat on the next train to Berlin which was due to leave in 5 minutes. There was no down escalator to the platform and lugging my heavy suitcase down a steep flight of steps I nearly fell head first.

The seat was first class, a pleasant trip, with a waiter. A nice sunny day and interesting to watch the passing landscape through Mecklenburg to Berlin. Flat, forested farming country, not heavily populated, few animals, so obviously cropping is the mainstay. Saw lots of wind farms on the way. We went through few towns, with a few brief stops closer to Berlin.

My arrival in Berlin at 12.36pm was, however, eventful. As I was about to go up an escalator, a man pushed in front of me, the reason for which I was soon to find out. As I approached the top of the escalator the man in front of me fell over and I fell on top of him. Consequently, a man behind me fell on top of me. I did not realise then that they were in cahoots and in the ensuing chaos the man behind me picked my pocket and relieved me of my wallet which contained (I thought) 800 Euros (\$1,200 AUS), my credit and debit cards and numerous other cards which would be of no use to them. I helped the man in front of me to get up and he hurried away without saying as much as 'thank you' and looking very sheepish – I now know why. He and his partner in crime, whom I never saw, soon disappeared before I realised that I had lost my wallet. I had an instant meltdown, but soon collected myself and found a police station in the railway station and reported the crime, although I realised that there was nothing they could do. The policeman who interviewed me told me that there are at least 50 incidents per day in the vicinity of the central railway station alone. There are numerous beggars in Berlin now. Silly Angela Merkel will regret her open door policy. I suspect that the pickpockets were gypsies, judging by their appearance.

Fortunately, my hotel was nearby and I was able to book in and to recharge my phone and to gain internet access, and get online to start the process of contacting the bank. I spent hours ringing NAB to cancel my cards, and that was a nightmare with failing email addresses, failing internet banking and incorrect contact numbers. I finally managed to cancel the credit and debit cards, move the funds out of my travel card account, and retrieve my pin number for my secondary debit card which I had retained in my luggage, fortunately. However, I soon found that, due to a technical glitch, I couldn't immediately access the funds via the second debit card. Great! And of course it was the weekend by then in Australia and some services are limited out of office hours and everyone passed the buck. In the end I lodged a complaint and informed the poor fellow in Melbourne who copped an earful from me that I was going to sue NAB for thousands. Not happy with NAB. I was left with very little cash and no access to money for a while, so I thought that I might have to join the gypsies begging at the railway station.

I was feeling very second hand, still wearing Thursday's clothes and unshaven, so I tarted myself up, went to explore the facilities of the railway station, which is massive and a shopping complex in its own right. I also went back to the police station to report that after checking my internet accounts the amount lost was only 400 Euros (\$600 AUS). I spoke to the same policeman who was such a nice bloke, very helpful. Back to the hotel for an early night, as I hadn't slept since Wednesday night.

Day 5 – Saturday 20th August: BERLIN

Had a good night's sleep, understandably, and awoke to a bleak, rainy day. The day soon cleared, however, and the sun came out, so I set out to explore the city, on a budget mind you, determined to not let my misfortune overcome me. I had a great day, with my first stop at Berlin's historic Reichstag, burnt down by the Nazis in the 1930s. You have to register for tickets to visit the interior, sometimes days ahead and there was a queue a mile long, so I didn't bother, more's the pity. Nearby is the Brandenburg Gate, symbol of the Berlin Wall and Communist suppression, at the head of Unter den Linden, Berlin's equivalent of the Champs Elysées in Paris. It was once a grand street but there is a great deal of reconstruction going on, including the rebuilding of the royal palace, a fabulous project, and restoration of the opera house and the library. Such a cultured city and very cosmopolitan. The languages I could hear. So many tourists, lots of bikes and bike taxis. And a few alternative means of transportation, including several horse-drawn carriages. The one I liked best was the party bike, with several people seated in a circle, pedalling and propelling the bike, with a driver steering at the rear. Needless to say, they had a drinks trailer!

During the day I was frequently accosted by begging women asking if I spoke English and pushing notes at me to give them money. No sympathy from me.

When I returned to my hotel I had received two uplifting emails. The first one was from the police telling me that my wallet had been found and handed into the station police today, with everything bar the cash. The second one was from the services department of NAB telling me that they had rectified the glitch in my internet banking. I was relieved to find that I now had access to cash again and happy to retrieve my wallet and its remaining contents. I checked my insurance to find that the minimum replacement for lost cash is \$200, but that's better than nothing, and Carol said that she had let Glen (my travel agent) know what had happened. I have a copy of the police report so that I can lodge a claim when I get back.

Day 6 – Sunday 21st August: BERLIN AND POTSDAM

Today I decided to go to Potsdam to visit the magnificent palaces of the Hohenzollern kings of Prussia. I wish that I had made an earlier start as the train trip to Potsdam, west of Berlin, took longer than I had expected. When I got to Potsdam station there was no signage at all, so I set off walking. I wish that I had asked about buses, as it was over 3 kilometres to the first of the many royal structures which I encountered that day. Nevertheless I got to see a bit of the town which has a lot of heritage buildings. Potsdam was a garrison town servicing the palaces in a huge English style park. There are many palaces and villas of varying sizes, and numerous small retreats used by royalty to escape court etiquette. Firstly I visited a delightful small villa, Charlottenhof which surprisingly has a lot of rooms, all interlinked with no hallways, and built in the Greek style on two levels. I was familiar with this building and eager to see it, as it has quality interior decoration and Biedermeier furniture which I admire.

Then I visited the New Palace (Neues Palais), built by Frederick the Great, which was over the top in rococo grandeur. It is a massive structure with two grand matching service buildings in front. It was particularly interesting to see the bedroom of the last Emperor and Empress of Germany. Poor Augusta

Victoria, the Empress, was completely dominated by her bombastic husband, a grandson of Queen Victoria. Augusta Victoria died in 1921, not having coped with the recent suicide of one of her sons and the loss of her status as Empress after the downfall of the monarchy.

The next building was a true architectural gem – a totally whimsical building in the Chinese style, which was all the rage in the eighteenth century. Called simply the Chinese House, it was a dining pavilion, and is thoroughly delightful.

Running out of time, I merely visited the exterior of Frederick the Great's retreat, Sans Souci (called 'without a care' in French). I will go back another day to see numerous other buildings.

Day 7 – Monday 22nd August: BERLIN

My poor feet were feeling a bit second hand after my trek around Potsdam yesterday, so I decided to do a round city bus tour (Stadtrundfahrt) of Berlin to put everything in perspective. For only 20 Euros, you could get on and off during the day as often as you liked, which I did several times. I saw a lot and took some reasonable photos from upstairs on board the bus. I started from outside the central railway station (Hauptbahnhof) and the tour proceeded in an anti-clockwise direction around the city.

My first stop was Friedrichstrasse, near the intersection with Niederkirchner Strasse, where Checkpoint Charlie, one of the main crossing points between West and East Berlin during the Cold War, was located. The former checkpoint cabin is still located in the middle of the street. While West Berliners and others could enter and exit East Berlin, East Berliners could not leave East Berlin. Once the wall went up, hundreds were killed in assorted escape attempts. Actors dressed in military uniforms today will stamp a border pass at Checkpoint Charlie, at a cost no doubt. I also visited a museum nearby – Mauermuseum or Wall Museum – which actually didn't feature a great deal on the wall at all. The majority of the exhibition was about Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who smuggled lots of Jews out of Hungary towards the end of WWII and then disappeared through Soviet duplicity. His fate has never been confirmed. However, one item which attracted my interest was a 1960s model VW which had been adapted to smuggle people in the front undercarriage – people would do anything to escape the bleak fate of life under a totalitarian Socialist/Communist regime.

My next stop was the Gendarmenmarkt Square with the magnificent early C19th Konzerthaus by noted architect Schinkel which is home to Berlin's orchestra. It is flanked on either side by (almost) matching domed churches. As 75% of Berlin was destroyed during WWII much of the city's buildings are new, but with much reconstruction and restoration as well it is hard to distinguish old from new.

I next alighted at the stop outside Berlin Cathedral, opposite the reconstruction of the royal palace, and feeling peckish, had a Wurst roll – a barbecued pork sausage with ketchup and mustard. Delicious, and only \$2. I had had one of these sausages on my walk on Saturday, when I could only afford a budget lunch. The sausage seller had a heavy mobile barbecue strapped to his front with an umbrella overhead, and does a roaring business. I am sure by the end of the day the poor man needs chiropractic adjustment.

Next was a river cruise on the Spree which meanders through Berlin. The cruise gave you a fascinating and different perspective of many buildings, especially in the government sector which is adjacent to the Spree. Many buildings are built right on the river bank. The commentary was in English and German and gave you a really good overview of Berlin. During the Cold War, the river was part of the boundary between East and West and unfortunately many people were shot swimming across the river. Many elaborate bridges from different periods cross the Spree. During the cruise the girl doing the commentary pointed out the

Friedrichstrasse railway station which is adjacent to the river. During the Cold War the station was in East Berlin and it was one of the border crossings from West to East.

Day 8 – Tuesday 23rd August: BERLIN → POTSDAM

I went out to Potsdam today, twice. The woman at the ticket office told me Platform 13, and being somewhat dubious asked a railway official if the next train on Platform 13 was going to Potsdam and he assured me it was. I could see no platform board listing all the stops when the train appeared and I duly boarded. On the way out I recognised a few buildings which had caught my notice on the previous trip and felt assured until we reached two stations with the name Potsdam at the front that I wasn't familiar with. I alighted at the next stop, which looked like a scene from WWII, a desolate looking run-down village with an unkempt station. I waited 20 minutes for the next train back to Berlin, feeling very feral. When I got back to Berlin, however, I noticed another train to Potsdam was leaving from Platform 16, where I had caught the train the last time, so I hopped on it and arrived safely in Potsdam, 1 and ¾ hours after I had originally set out. I caught a bus to Sans Souci Palace, to find the tours for the main part of the palace were all booked out until the afternoon, but managed to squeeze in at 14.40. While waiting I did an audio self-guided tour of the adjoining guest wing which was simply stupendous. It had originally been constructed as an orangerie – a place to store potted fruit trees in winter – but as Frederick the Great had so many guests, the Orangerie was converted to cater for the overflow. It can't have been too comfortable, with soaring ceilings and massive rooms, but it was only used in summer. Every room had a different decorative scheme, all as elaborate as each other in Frederick's favourite rococo style which consists of twists and curves, nothing straight. All of the rooms were connected with each other and the bedrooms were accessed from the outside on the garden front. The bedrooms had alcoves to house the beds with curtains to keep in the warmth and for privacy.

The main part of the palace was just as ornate with all the rooms similarly in file, called 'enfilade' in French. It was possible to look along the massively long building from one end to another, as all the connecting double doors were aligned. The bedroom and study of Frederick the Great had been redecorated by one of his successors, but some of his original furniture was still there, including the reclining chair in which he lived towards the end of his life and in which he died. He suffered badly from gout and could hardly breathe when he died.

All the rooms had magnificent fireplaces with ornate mirrors, most placed so high that you couldn't see in them, but they were mostly used to reflect light from through the window or from candles. The room that I liked most was the last bedroom visited which featured painted and carved fruit arrangements and animals and birds affixed to the wall. All whimsical, pure and absolute frivolity.

The palace was overcrowded during the visit and the poor staff were frantic telling foreigners mainly not to stand on the parquet floor, not to lean on or touch the walls and furniture, and not to take photos with flashes. You also had to pay extra to take photos and wear a visible wristband, which I was happy to do, as I got some stupendous shots.

Day 9 – Wednesday 24th August: BERLIN

Today was what I would call a housekeeping day, as it was my last day in Berlin. Nobody can trash a hotel room in as short a time as me, so there was a lot of sorting to do of clothes, belongings and paper work. I went to the Ticket Office (Reisezentrum) in the railway station (Hauptbahnhof) and booked my ticket to Prague for the next morning, and then caught a tram to a laundromat which was very conveniently located directly opposite the tram stop. A nice young bloke helped me start my load of washing, never having been

to a laundromat in my life. I must admit that the Germans are very polite and helpful and appreciate when you make the effort to communicate in German. In turn I was able to help some young Australian blokes in the laundromat a short time later. There are Aussies all over Berlin currently.

I went back to the Reichstag to see if I could get a ticket to visit the interior but unfortunately there were none available for today. I was really disappointed, as the glassed dome (not original) is apparently spectacular. I revisited the Brandenburg Gate which became a symbol for German unity during the Cold War, as it was marooned in a no-man's land once the wall went up in 1961. It is hard to imagine the euphoria when the wall went down in 1990, almost without warning and unexpectedly, and German reunification occurred. The chariot atop the gate, called a quadriga, was stolen by Napoleon when he occupied Berlin in 1806 and taken to Paris. It was brought back to Berlin in 1814.

I took a few humorous photos today: opposite the Reichstag there is a booth promoting Madame Tussaud's and you could pop into a booth and have your pic taken next to a very good likeness of Angela Merkel, the current German Chancellor. I also got a very clear photo of an unoccupied party bike. I'm very tempted to import some of these to Mudgee – could be a goer.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Day 10 – Thursday 25th August: BERLIN → PRAGUE

A leisurely morning as my train didn't leave until 11.03am, and knowing German trains it would be on time. I was at the wrong end of the train when it pulled in and I just managed to get on board as the door was closing. I had a single window seat facing the engine and with a shared table, although no one sat opposite me. There was a group of women in their 40s obviously going to play up somewhere, and as soon as the train departed they were popping champagne bottles. They chattered constantly and loudly all the way to Dresden, which was about half way, then as soon as we left Dresden they decided they were going to really party. A loud ghetto blaster was turned on, and they started singing and dancing in the aisles. That was too much for a man behind me who got up and told them off, and said that they should go back to second class where they belong and that he had paid for a first class ticket to travel undisturbed. His wife then joined in and told them that they all stink: "Sie stinken". I thought there was going to be a brawl, but fortunately the women settled down and behaved themselves, well sort of!

I had noticed during several train trips within Germany that there were numerous small garden allotments, like in England, beside the railway tracks where people could grow flowers and vegetables, and enjoy the sunshine. German city residents are primarily apartment dwellers, so they obviously relish their allotments. Many of them have little sheds on them as well. Some are immaculate. I managed to get one photo in today when the train wasn't speeding.

The countryside all the way from Berlin to Dresden is, like from Hamburg to Berlin, fairly flat, wooded, and monotonous. South from Dresden to Prague the train follows the Elbe River which meanders through hilly to mountainous country which is very picturesque. Lots of castles on hillsides and attractive villas. Some of the best building sandstone used in Germany comes from Saxony, the region around Dresden.

I found Prague to be full of historic buildings, but a downside is the historic cobbled footpaths and streets which are not hospitable to suitcase wheels. My trip from the station to my hotel was unfortunately uphill and quite a struggle. With tram tracks everywhere and very wide streets, it is perilous to cross any street in Prague, as Prague drivers are all Peter Brock wannabees. Unfortunately, a lack of street signs at intersections made it difficult to determine my location, and it took ages for me to find my hotel.

The Hotel Beranek is old-fashioned, but spacious and comfortable, and well-equipped, with KFC and Macdonalds just over the road.

Day 11 – Friday 26th August: PRAGUE → KONOPISTE CASTLE

This morning I bought a ticket to Benesov u Prahy, an hour's train trip south of Prague, from the grumpiest ticket seller who was as tall as she was wide. When I asked from which platform she gave me such a ferocious look that I slinked away. I then asked a young man at an information desk, the second grumpy person I had encountered in the space of one minute, who yelled "SEVEN, SEVEN". I just made it to platform 7 before the train departed. Admittedly trackside environments aren't the best, often being neglected and industrial wasteland, but the journey to Benesov u Prahy was not attractive.

Benesov is where Konopiste Castle is located in southern Bohemia, a part of the modern-day Czech Republic. The castle goes back in parts to the 1300s, with many additions and renovations over the centuries. My interest in Konopiste Castle lies in the fact that it was owned from the late 1880s until his tragic death in 1914 by Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

I have written a booklet and prepared a lecture on the Archduke's visit to Australia in 1893, during which he went on hunting expeditions to Narromine and Moss Vale, shooting numerous birds and wildlife which were treated by a taxidermist and taken back to Vienna: kangaroos, wallabies, koalas, platypus, pelicans, parrots galore – all very politically and ecologically incorrect today of course. He was a great collector and Konopiste is literally chock full of paintings, sculptures, hunting trophies – his kill total was over 250,000 items – pottery, books, nicknacks. He was particularly interested in other cultures and was a very well-educated man, although he was often portrayed as a boorish stupid oaf, and arrogant too, although he didn't suffer fools and had a short temper. He was, however, a devoted family man, and had one of the happiest of royal marriages. His wife, Sophie, was not of royal blood or rank, and that was a huge issue with Franz Ferdinand because of the way Sophie was treated by his family, the Habsburgs.

His three children, for whom Konopiste was their principal home, were literally the first orphans of WWI. They were expelled by the new Czech government after WWI and were not allowed to take anything when they went into exile in Austria. All of the family's private possessions remain in situ and include the blood-stained uniform and dress worn by their father and mother when they were shot at Sarajevo in 1914.

When I arrived I spoke to a girl at the ticket office about my research and told her that I had a digital copy of my booklet to give them. I met Helen, one of the managers, and Pavel, a young tour guide, both of whom spoke English. They were thrilled with my offer, so Pavel gave me a private tour with English commentary, going into parts of the castle not normally seen by visitors. Pavel's English was excellent and he was very knowledgeable about the castle which is an absolute maze on several levels. The exterior of the castle is fairly austere, and the interior is at times dark and forbidding, but the contents were simply stupendous. Unfortunately, I was not able to take any interior photographs. However, I did manage to photograph one preserved kangaroo paw in a display cabinet in an exhibition. I also visited a gallery in a former orangerie which was devoted to Franz Ferdinand's extensive collection of items – a few thousand – associated with the legend of St. George and the Dragon: paintings, sculptures, jewellery, glassware, objets d'art etc.

I am going back to Konopiste again tomorrow to do two tours which will cover some areas of the castle which I didn't see on my tour with Pavel.

Day 12 – Saturday 27th August: PRAGUE → KONOPISTE CASTLE:

An early start this morning to get back to Konopiste Castle for the first of two tours. The grumpy lady was there again, but fortunately I avoided her in the ticket queue. When I got to Konopiste I was informed that I would have a complimentary guided tour in English at 11am. While I waited for the guide I photographed peacocks and a wedding party in the grounds.

The young guide, Anita, was delightful, and spoke excellent English, and we covered a lot of rooms which I hadn't seen yesterday. Consequently by the end of the tour I had seen all of the rooms accessible to the public, about 120 of the 200 rooms in the castle.

During the tour with Anita I received a call from Matt telling me that his dog, our beloved Trig (almost 14 years old) had passed away. I managed to hold myself together for the rest of the tour and when we finished I went to a quiet corner of the garden and sobbed my heart out. Although I was expecting it, I was devastated. Born in December 2002, we got him as a two month-old pup in February 2003. Although he was Matt's dog he lived with us for a few years and was very attached to us.

Prior to his death Franz Ferdinand had been one of the richest men in Europe, because he had inherited the fortune and possessions of a distant relative, the last Duke of Modena in Italy. Fabulous paintings, furniture and a priceless collection of rare antique guns and weapons and armour were therefore brought to Konopiste from Italy, many going back to the 1500s.

Many famous people stayed at or visited Konopiste and it was interesting to see where the last German Emperor slept just before Franz Ferdinand's assassination. Konopiste was only one of many castles and palaces owned and lived in by Franz Ferdinand, but it was the one that he and his Czech wife and their children regarded as their family home. Unusually for royalty at that time, Franz Ferdinand and Sophie were very involved and loving parents. It is interesting to see photographs of them as a family, for the affection is always evident, not like stiff old King George V and Queen Mary who were their contemporaries and were the most uncaring and detached Victorian parents.

After he bought Konopiste in 1887 Franz Ferdinand undertook vast renovations and modernized the castle's facilities, installing plumbing with toilets and bathrooms, central heating and electricity. He was a very progressive and modern man.

After lunch I visited the formal rose garden which I couldn't find yesterday in the capacious grounds. In Franz Ferdinand's day, there were 8,000 rose bushes, and a herd of gardeners to tend them.

The contents of Konopiste are amazing, especially the hunting trophies, countless thousands of antlers, all meticulously recorded where and when they were shot, as well as many stuffed animals and animal skins either on the walls or floors. Even Franz Ferdinand's little daughter Sophie's first trophy, small antlers scored in 1903, when she was barely 2, is mounted on the wall. This was a hunting estate after all. Looking at the exterior more closely, I decided it is really more interesting than I thought with a variety of ancient windows, doors, carvings, gates etc.

I was in need of a nanna nap after my return to Prague, and on my way out to dinner at the hotel reception booked a day tour of Prague for tomorrow. Talk about good value. 1,100 Czech crowns, or about \$60AUS, for a six hour tour, a river cruise and lunch included! Everything in the Czech Republic seems to be dirt cheap, with about 18.5 Czech crowns to the \$AUS and about 26 Czech crowns to the Euro. I hardly seemed to have spent anything since my arrival. Dinner tonight in a restaurant next door to the hotel was a huge serving of steak and dumplings swimming in a delicious cream and cranberry sauce – a traditional Czech dish – and a huge beer, all for 205 Czech crowns or about \$11AUS. I know where I'll be having dinner for the next two nights – better than KFC or Maccas across the road and at the same cost.

Day 13 – Sunday 28th August: PRAGUE

This morning I was picked up at the hotel at 9.05am by a driver in a minibus and delivered up to Prague Castle where the group was to meet our guide. I hadn't seen much of Prague until today, apart from my walk from and to the station. Absolutely magnificent architecture, all on a grand scale and painted in so many rich colours, from the medieval period and from the baroque period (C17th and C18th) which have miraculously survived wars, fires and floods. When we met our guide she told us it was a walking tour which no one seemed to have previously known – we had all thought it was a coach tour. However, it was actually better, as you got to see more than you would through a coach window. The guide, Helena, was great, very witty, and very knowledgeable.

A great slab of central Prague, the older parts, is listed as a world heritage site by UNESCO and from what I saw today that is thoroughly justified. What a rich, sophisticated city it is today, thanks to the past. Tourism

in Prague is a huge part of the Czech economy and tourists were out in force today. We started at Prague castle, which is the largest palace complex in the world. Situated on a hill above the west bank of the Vltava River, the castle has dominated the city for centuries and has been constantly expanded and renovated. Prague is also a city of magnificent churches, but it was also the centre of religious strife for centuries between Protestants and Catholics, and I asked to see the famous window in the castle where some Protestants threw some Catholic officials out the window in the 1600s. This was a scandalous event called the “defenestration of Prague” and the guide was most impressed that I knew about it. Despite a drop of some 16 metres, they survived and escaped. In front of Prague Castle it was fun to see open tourer cars which are modern recreations of assorted famous marques and which service the tourist trade.

We then walked down several hundred steps to the old town below; we were all grateful we weren't doing the reverse trip! We then visited the interior of the church of the Infant Jesus, which has a famous statue which people venerate and come from all over the world to see. I was chastised by an old lady for not taking my hat off inside! The interior was simply stunning, and was the only interior that time allowed on the tour. After the church we saw a famous graffiti wall which started in the latter years of Czech communism. The police would paint over the anti-communist slogans daily, but the next day more would appear. Now the graffiti is permitted, and it constantly changes – very colourful and an expression of public art.

We then went down to the river bank where we saw flood levels recorded on the wall of a building. Devastating floods in the early 2000s reached first floor level in some parts of Prague, but measures have since been taken to avoid such disasters. We then had a river cruise for an hour which was quite pleasant.

After the cruise we walked across the Charles Bridge, Prague's oldest bridge (early 1300s), now pedestrian only, where you could have a caricature drawn. Some of the ones I saw were brilliant. There is also a statue half way across which, legend says, if you touch its base will either bring you good luck or bring you back to Prague. The old town on the east bank was very busy, being a Sunday and still at the height of the tourist season. We got to the town square just in time to see an historic astronomical clock strike 2 o'clock. The clock dates back to the 1400s, and all the apostles revolve around two small doors above the clock which is still amazingly accurate and is also a calendar and seasonal clock.

We then had lunch in a restaurant in a cellar which was quite pleasant and good value for the price of the tour. I had potato and mushroom soup and goulash. After lunch we visited the Jewish quarter nearby which had originally been a walled ghetto. The Czech Republic now has only a small Jewish population of some 6,000, as the Nazis exterminated about 85,000 Jews during WWII at Theresienstadt concentration camp north of Prague. There are several synagogues remaining in Prague, although most are now museums of Prague's Jewish history.

Surprisingly my feet stood up to the medieval footpaths and streets which are mainly cobbled. An extra OH&S issue is, however, the tram tracks. It was a great day in a truly magnificent city which I would recommend to anyone to visit.

That night I went back to the restaurant next door to sample another Czech dish: lamb with spinach and gnocchi, washed down with another huge beer and a very palatable glass of house chardonnay.

Day 14 – Monday 29th August: PRAGUE

This morning I headed off to the station to reserve a seat to Vienna for tomorrow morning. Fortunately there was a separate desk for international travel, so I avoided the grumpy lady. The woman I dealt with was very pleasant; indeed, the vast majority of people I have dealt with during my stay in the Czech Republic

have been very helpful. Another exception was the shonky taxi driver who took me back to my hotel the long way yesterday afternoon, as I discovered when I looked at a map later.

I then went up to Wenceslas Square, one of Prague's grand avenues, and walked down towards the Old Town, enjoying a coffee on the way down. I ended up back at the Old Town Square where I had been yesterday, and soaked up the atmosphere. There must have been tens of thousands of tourists there, all waiting for the next chiming of the Town Hall clock. I filmed it again but my film would not be a candidate for the Cannes Film Festival. Bit wobbly and crooked.

The vibrant atmosphere in Prague is really quite amazing. I just love the colourful painted and decorated facades of buildings in Prague which is also very much geared towards outdoor dining and drinking. During my walk I noticed a sign promoting a concert tonight at 8pm in a fantastic baroque church, St Nicholas. Several pieces being played are some of my favourites: Charpentier's "Te Deum", Mouret's "Rondeau", Mozart's "A Little Night Music", and Dvorak's "Humoresque" (Dvorak was a Czech composer); also pieces by Bach and Gershwin, so looking forward to that. Prague is a very musical city, and many churches are used for concerts, as they have perfect acoustics.

Lunch was from a roadside diner on the way back to the hotel: A barbecued lamb sausage in a roll and you help yourself to ketchup, mayonnaise and mustard, in whatever combination. I had all three. The Czechs seem to like their sausages as much as the Germans. Like the Germans they are very keen on gelato – stalls everywhere.

In the evening I set off down to the Old Town again for the concert and had dinner in Wenceslas Square, named after Good King Wenceslas who "looked out, on the feast of Stephen, when the snow lay round about, deep and crisp and even". Dinner was a roll of tender freshly-roasted pork with gherkin and sour bread, simple but delicious, served with two mustards. An American fellow next to me had a huge slab of pork on his own mini spit.

The church, which features a grand interior and a huge Bohemia crystal chandelier, was full by the time the concert started at 8, with a brass performance from the organ loft: two trombones, a French horn and two trumpets. Following was a fugue by Bach which was a dirge and rather tedious, so it was a relief to get back to the brass again which was always entertaining. I loved the Gershwin medley, all known favourites: "I Got Rhythm", "Summertime", and "Fascinating Rhythm". I relished the fact that we had gone from the C17th with Bach to the C20th with Gershwin in this magnificent baroque church from the early 1700s. It was a thoroughly memorable experience made more enjoyable by perfect acoustics.

AUSTRIA

PRAGUE → VIENNA : Day 15 – Tuesday 30th August

As I didn't think my Aldi suitcase would survive another trip on Prague's footpaths and streets, I caught a taxi to the station to catch the 10.52am train to Vienna. The four hour trip was comfortable and time passed quickly, with a few stops along the way that I must find out more about, such as Brno (Brünn in German) and Breclav, although none of them looked inviting from the railway precinct. We passed through flat farmland with hills in the distance virtually all the way.

Upon my arrival in Vienna I managed to land another dodgy taxi driver who took a rather circuitous route to the hotel. Don't trust a taxi driver in Europe!

However, I should have screened the hotel more. Very basic. No fridge and no air conditioning, and it is quite hot in Vienna. I spent the afternoon at a laundromat, so I haven't had a very exciting introduction to Vienna. A cheap Chinese buffet for dinner.

Day 16 – Wednesday 31st August: VIENNA

This morning I set off into town to explore. Fortunately, my hotel is located relatively close to the city centre and I had a coffee and some pastries on the way. As I was walking past the State Opera I was approached by a fellow in C18th costume touting tickets to a Mozart and Strauss concert, so I booked a seat for tonight. Should be another fantastic musical experience in a world class concert hall. Looking forward to that.

I walked on to St Stephen's cathedral, a huge Gothic structure with an elaborate interior. Bloody tourists everywhere who kept getting in the way of my pictures! Like Berlin and Prague, lots of horse-drawn carriages.

Next stop was the Hofburg, a massive palace structure which was the centre of power of the ruling Habsburg dynasty for some 600 years until the fall of the monarchy in 1918. Like Prague Castle, it was added to over the centuries and is an absolute rabbit warren. Some 5,000 people still live and work in the Hofburg. I purchased a combined ticket to see the former silver, gold and porcelain collections used by the Habsburgs at the Hofburg, the Sisi Museum, and the former imperial apartments. Sisi was the childhood nickname for the Empress Elizabeth of Austria (1837-1898), the wife of the Emperor Franz Josef I. She was the most beautiful woman of her day, renowned for her long hair which she wore in unusual styles and studded with jewels. She was the Princess Diana of her day, and ending up being stabbed to death by an anarchist in Geneva. Sisi hated court life and used her poor health as an excuse to escape Vienna and to travel. She was devastated when her only son, Crown Prince Rudolf, shot his mistress and committed suicide in 1889. She subsequently wore black for the rest of her life. Sisi still has goddess-like status, not only in Austria but all over the world. She and the Habsburgs are big tourist attractions for Austria, even though the Austrian government banned the head of the family from entering the country until relatively recently.

We were allowed to take photos in the silver, gold and porcelain exhibits only, but that exhibit was absolutely mind boggling. Some of the collection is still used for state dinners by the government. The porcelain I found the most beautiful and it photographed better. Some of it was 300 years old. The exhibits ranged from gold and silver settings for important state and family occasions, with one gold table centrepiece over 30 metres long, and simple white porcelain with the two-headed eagle, the Habsburg family

crest, for family dinners. Some of the more elaborate porcelain services took several years to create. Most were commissions, but some were gifts, such as a magnificent French service given by Louis XV of France to the Empress Maria Teresa, mother of Marie Antoinette, the wife of his grandson, Louis XVI. One service with tragic connections was an oriental set commissioned by the Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, younger brother of Emperor Franz Josef I. He was shot by Mexican rebels before it was finished.

The Sisi Museum was next and was a chronological history of the troubled life of the Empress. It was staged in a series of rooms before the imperial apartments, and included a recreation of her railway carriage, and copies of her fabulous jewels and dresses.

The imperial apartments were grand and impressive, but very appealing, and all unified by a common decorative theme: white painted woodwork with gold trim, red damask material hung on the walls, white painted furniture with gold trim and red upholstery. All told I visited over 70 rooms in the palace and the audio commentary was very good. I recognised many famous paintings during the tour, including the magnificent painting of Sisi by Winterhalter in 1865. A memorable visit.

Back to the hotel for a nanna nap this afternoon, then back into the city for the concert. I had a nice glass of pinot grigio on the Kärtnerstrasse, a very suave shopping street, and headed into the opera house at 7.45pm. The lobby was packed and chaotic. Usherettes in C18th costumes showed us to our seats. I was in the back row of the balcony, but it was a good view and the acoustics were fine. The only thing that spoiled the show, despite being told that you weren't allowed to take photographs during the performance, were people holding up bloody phones and cameras and taking bloody photographs during the performance. Bloody rude and distracting. Most of the pieces were well known, but the audience got into the swing of things, at the conductor's urging, to clap along with parts of the rondo "Alla turca". The evening finished up with "The Blue Danube" by Johann Strauss junior, very appropriate in Vienna, and "The Radetzky March" by Johann Strauss senior, one of my favourite marches. The latter is also one that encourages audience participation with clapping. What a magnificent evening in an historic venue!

Day 17 – Thursday 1st September: VIENNA

First official day of autumn in Europe, but the weather is still quite hot. Into the city again to see what I can see, so to speak. I went back to the Hofburg and booked an afternoon tour of the Spanish Riding School. I was too late for a morning workout session and unfortunately I am busy tomorrow morning with an appointment; I would have loved to have seen the horses in action. In the interim I went to the Treasure Chamber of the Habsburgs next door. It was a very confusing exhibition in the room layout and as many of the displays were fragile textiles the lights were dim. Nevertheless, you were allowed non-flash photography, but I deleted a lot of shots as they weren't good quality. The displays were mindboggling, but there were too many vestments and fabrics, although they were amazingly well-preserved, considering some of them were allegedly 1,000 years old. The Habsburgs were very Catholic and had lots of religious artefacts, relics, statues and sculptures etc. The coronation regalia for the Holy Roman Emperors and the Austrian Emperors was interesting, but what I was most thrilled to see was the cradle which belonged to the King of Rome, Napoleon's son by his second wife, the Habsburg Archduchess Marie Louise. After the downfall of Napoleon in 1814 Marie Louise brought her son back to Vienna where he lived until his premature death in 1832. One of the first exhibits, a collection of old keys to the Hofburg, was also fascinating. Each key was highly crafted and a work of art in itself.

The tour of the Spanish Riding School started in the majestic performance hall which features three massive chandeliers. The young guide, Hannah, was lovely, and very entertaining. She explained the evolution of the Lipizzaner horses which were imported from Spain hundreds of years ago, when the Habsburgs also

ruled Spain and South America. The horses were eventually bred at Lipica (Lipizza in Italian, from where they got their modern breed name) in modern-day Slovenia. That territory was lost by Austria after WWI and the horses were transferred to Piber in Austria, where they are bred today. At the end of WWII General Patton ordered the rescue of the Lipizzaners from slaughter by the Russians and had them evacuated from Czechoslovakia, where the Nazis had taken them, to safety in Germany. A Disney movie, *Miracle of the White Stallions*, was made about this.

Only stallions are used in the performances which are held in the Hofburg itself, right in the middle of Vienna. They are trained for several years and at about the age of 12 they start performing, and may keep performing until their late 20s. Lipizzaners live to a great age on average, and today there are six main sire lines.

We were then taken to another wing of the palace to the stables to see the horses. A mixture of whites, greys and dapple-greys, although they are all born dark and gradually change to white. They were magnificent creatures and it was thrilling to get close to them, although touching and photography are not permitted, but they weren't the slightest bit fazed by our presence. We then saw the tackroom, with the bridles and saddles, which are individually made for each horse. Each horse has two saddles, one for practice (in blue) and one for performance (in white, and covered with a red cloth in the tackroom), which are mounted on a bracket with a carved horse's head on the end. As we left the stable courtyard I couldn't resist taking a photograph of one of these magnificent Lipizzaners through the glazed panel from the adjacent arcade.

Afterwards I went to find the Palais Montenuovo at Löwelstrasse 6, near the Volksgarten, which belonged to the Empress Marie Louise's grandson, Alfred, 2nd Prince Montenuovo, and where he died in 1927. A few doors down is the massive Liechtenstein embassy. Over the road is the Sisi memorial.

Day 18 – Friday 2nd September: VIENNA

Today I had an appointment with Dr Eva Ottlinger of the Hofmobiliendepot, which is a storage and restoration facility for furniture which came from the imperial palaces in the Austrian-Hungarian empire. I had been referred to her by Schönbrunn palace after I had made enquiries about my research on one of my lecture topics, the Duke of Reichstadt, Napoleon's son. I had also mentioned my research on the Archduke Franz Ferdinand which seemed to arouse interest, so I sent a digital copy of my booklet on Franz Ferdinand to the Hofmobiliendepot and also showed Eva a printed copy. Eva spoke excellent English and seemed interested in my work and thought that it may be a suitable theme for a future exhibition or booklet. It was good to touch base with her for future liaison. She showed me through a few of the restoration workshops, and then allowed me access to the permanent displays which I was able to photograph. Many of these items were of museum quality and if they had been in a palace setting I would not have been able to photograph them. Seeing all these items was an unexpected bonus, as I hadn't expected to see so much. Highlights were a collection of footstools, a table inlaid with stones from the different parts of the Habsburg empire, a charming doll's house version of the Emperor Franz's study, a painting of Crown Prince Rudolf and the bed in which he shot his mistress and committed suicide, and a corner collection of furniture which was used by the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. I also photographed the standard C19th Austrian dining chair, white painted and upholstered in red, to be found in official buildings and Austrian embassies all over the world. An interesting morning.

I had lunch nearby on the Mariahilferstrasse, one of Vienna's main thoroughfares, and walked back to the hotel, where I tried for some hours to fix my computer which has started exhibiting some issues. This morning, when I turned it on, the left click button wouldn't work on the task bar, either with the mouse or

the touch pad. Consequently, I could not activate the Start button or gain access to the internet which, with all the shoddy behaviour of Yahoo and Microsoft blocking emails because I am logging in from a foreign location, has further downgraded my ability to communicate. Technology has been a nightmare since leaving Australia, as my iPhone often doesn't work, the iPhone recently deleted Personal Hotspot, so that I cannot jumpstart my iPad, and I can't get the hotel WiFi on my iPad, so it is completely useless. Fortunately, the computer desktop works OK. I managed to circumvent access to the internet, so the computer is 99% operational. It's all a salutary lesson on how reliant we are on technology. Great when it works, but it's frustrating when it doesn't.

Day 19 – Saturday 3rd September: VIENNA

Early this morning I walked into the city to buy a 2-day hop-on hop-off pass with six different routes. The best and quickest way for me to move about the city at will. I then caught a bus immediately to Schönbrunn Palace, the Habsburg summer palace on what was once the outskirts of Vienna but which has now been consumed by the growing metropolis. It is an enormous pile with vast outbuildings. I did the long tour of the state and private apartments, but being the weekend it was overrun with bloody tourists getting in the way of my photographs. Unfortunately, no photographs are permitted of the interior. Another rabbit warren of rooms in file with a network of secret passages behind and in between for servants to move about and also to feed wood into the vast Austrian porcelain stoves from behind, so as not to disturb the occupants of the rooms. Splendid rooms, furniture and paintings. Particularly interesting and poignant was the room where the Duke of Reichstadt, son of Napoleon, died in 1832. His bed is still there and the room features a marble statue of his recumbent death pose.

I next visited the Wagenburg, the carriage museum of the Habsburgs. Some fascinating items in there, from sedan chairs to the hearse used for the funeral of the Emperor Franz Josef in 1916. I was thrilled to see the delightful child's carriage of the King of Rome, as the Duke of Reichstadt was known in his early childhood, ordered by his father at his birth. Two merino sheep were especially trained to pull the carriage. It was brought to Vienna when Napoleon fell from power. Unfortunately, it was in a glass case and it didn't photograph well.

The garden front of the palace is more interesting, with long avenues drawn to a focal point such as a fountain, statue or a monument.

I hopped back on the bus and three stops further on hopped off at the Belvedere Palace, now an art gallery; from the late 1800s until his death in 1914 it was the Vienna home of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his family. The palace contains a few international pieces, but mostly features Austrian painters with whom I wasn't familiar, apart from Gustav Klimt. There were some fantastic bronze statues of various animal heads mounted on slender poles interspersed around the pond on the entrance front. They are a modern installation but not sure whether they are permanent. What I did love inside were a collection of bronze human heads with peculiar facial expressions. They were brilliant, done in the C18th by an erratic artist. I got into trouble for photographing a few. I couldn't resist.

An exhausting but thoroughly enjoyable day. Covered several kilometres within Schönbrunn alone!

Day 20 – Sunday 4th September: VIENNA

Back into the city this morning to use the second day of my hop-on-off pass. Yesterday I took the Yellow route, and this morning I took the Red route, switched to the Blue route, then finished with the Red route back to the Opera House. I managed to see a fair swathe of Vienna, especially the new parts, and the

Danube river and Danube canal. I thought outer Vienna was very drab and dirty, compared to the older parts in the city centre which are elegant and colourful. Both trips were worthwhile, as I am running out of time in my stay in Vienna.

Next stop was the Kaisergruft – the Imperial crypt – underneath a Capuchin church, where generations of Habsburgs and their consorts are buried in massive and ornate lead coffins which are works of art. They will inevitably run out of spaces, as the Habsburgs are still breeding profusely, but they may have to limit spaces to the current pretender and his closest family members. The most prominent tombs were a trio: the Emperor Franz Josef in the centre, his wife Elisabeth (Sisi) on the left, and their son Rudolf on the right. C20th coffins are simple wooden coffins, with the most recent burial being Crown Prince Otto (1912–2011), eldest son of the last Austrian Emperor, Karl I. Karl died in exile in 1922 on the island of Madeira, where he is buried; his widow, the ex-Empress Zita, lived on until 1989, dying at the age of 96, and she is buried in the crypt.

I was fascinated by the plain coffin of the Empress Marie Louise, second wife of Napoleon and mother of the Duke of Reichstadt. She was all by herself on one wall, perhaps because she disgraced herself by bearing two illegitimate children to her lover, Count Neipperg, while Napoleon was still alive. She married Neipperg as soon as Napoleon died, and after Neipperg died married yet another lover, Count Bombelles.

Next stop was the Jewish Museum of Vienna. The Jews have had a sorrowful history in Vienna, being persecuted and expelled on more than one occasion, the most recent of course before and during WWII, beginning with the German invasion of Austria in 1938. Vienna had one of the largest Jewish populations of any city in Europe prior to WWII; today there are only about 6,000 from diverse Jewish backgrounds. There had always been a strong anti-semitic trend in Austria, still very prevalent today, yet the Jews had played such an important role in the social, political, economic and cultural life of Vienna and Austria. Many Viennese Jews who survived WWII refused to return to Vienna; some went to Australia. Vienna's most famous Jewish citizen in an international sense was noted psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who managed to escape Austria in 1938, with the help of one of his wealthy patrons, Princess Marie of Greece, née Princess Bonaparte, who was married to an uncle of Prince Philip, later Duke of Edinburgh. While many of his family also managed to escape, Princess Marie was unable to save Freud's four elderly sisters who all perished in camps.

The exhibitions looked at how shameful Austria has been in facing up to the extermination of its Jews, the contribution of Jewish people to the entertainment industry in the USA, the history of the Jewish population of Vienna and a collection of wonderful Jewish religious and sectarian objects which survived the Nazi era, when synagogues were destroyed and Jewish possessions pillaged. I found a lot of things didn't photograph well behind glass and with obtrusive cabinet and overhead lighting, but I did take a few of interest: an ivory and silver torah pointer with a hand at the end, used by the rabbi to point to the scriptures on the scrolls; an interesting silver table centrepiece; and a colourful cup with a picture of a Jewish hospital in Vienna in the early 1800s. A very interesting museum.

On the way back to my hotel I passed the most wonderful Art Nouveau subway station entrance. Vienna was one of the places where this style of design in furnishings, art and architecture began in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

Day 21 – Monday 5th September: VIENNA

I walked into the city this morning for an appointment with Ildiko Cazan-Simanyi of the Weltmuseum which is located in the most recent wing of the Hofburg, and a huge building in itself. The Weltmuseum

building is undergoing a renovation and is closed for a year, so I met Ildiko in the library around the back. The museum now owns a lot of Franz Ferdinand's items from his world tour of 1893. He was a collector of all and sundry, but loved everyday objects of different cultures. The museum staged an exhibition in 2014, the centenary of his assassination, of items from his world tour which would have been interesting to see. Ildiko generously gave me a copy of the rather weighty exhibition catalogue. Apart from his hunting catch in Australia, Franz Ferdinand bought local collections of birds, birds eggs and fossils etc. He had several castles and palaces throughout the Habsburg Empire, however, to house his sundry collections. Ildiko also brought out a file of assorted papers relating to his two weeks stay in Australia in May 1893 and I was allowed to go through it and photocopy and photograph anything I liked. I found some very interesting information to incorporate into my Franz Ferdinand lecture and booklet.

Afterwards I decided that I would head to Demel's pastry shop in the Kohlmarkt to sample their wares, but the weather turned nasty and as I had no umbrella, I decided to head back to the hotel during a break in the rain. As this was to be my last day in Vienna, I had to go to the laundromat for the afternoon, and then attempted to repack my suitcase which is bulging at the seams.

Day 22 – Tuesday 6th September: VIENNA → ARTSTETTEN

I headed off early to the station to catch a train to Pöchlarn, via St. Pölten. Pöchlarn is the nearest town to Artstetten village, where Franz Ferdinand's castle is located. Artstetten castle is now owned by his great-granddaughter, Princess Anita von Hohenberg, and it is open to the public with a museum in parts of the castle. I had been invited to have afternoon tea with the Princess and was looking forward to meeting her.

At the station I was able to book my Eurail ticket from St. Pölten to Munich, when I bought my ticket to Pöchlarn. I caught a bus from outside Pöchlarn station to Artstetten, in frightful weather, and then it was a laborious trek up a steep hill to the hotel in light rain. I then found that you had to book in at the hotel down the hill! Fortunately, I was able to have access to my room early to recover before visiting the castle which is next door, but up another steep hill.

Princess Anita was having the former President of Austria to lunch today, so I asked for her offsider, Brigitte, who wasn't there, but the ticket lady spoke to her via phone and I was given free access to the museum and an audioguide. I spent a few hours in the museum which is very interesting. The castle is ancient in parts, by no means grand, and quite homely. Lots of family photographs, paintings and possessions. It was and is still very much a family home where Franz Ferdinand and Sophie were the most devoted of parents, unusual in royalty in those times.

There was a room devoted to Franz Ferdinand's world tour which particularly interested me, and I was thrilled to see numerous boomerangs on display in a cabinet. I was fascinated by a huge piece of paper which tabulated all his shoots from the 1880s and 1890s. He was very methodical and kept records of everything.

I was given the key to the crypt where Franz Ferdinand and Sophie are buried. Franz Ferdinand had planned the crypt as he wanted to be buried with his beloved wife who, because of her lesser rank, could not be buried in the imperial crypt in Vienna.

At 4pm I met with Princess Anita, who speaks excellent English, and is an absolute card, and two of her sons and her daughter. She doesn't spend much time at Artstetten now, having handed over its management to her daughter, Alix, who is married with three children. She now lives with her second husband, an Austrian count, at his castle in Styria.. We went upstairs for afternoon tea, past marvellous ancestral portraits to a bright yellow salon full of antiques and family photographs – her mother, the late Duchess Elizabeth

of Hohenberg, was a Princess of Luxemburg and thus she is related to most royal families in Europe. The porincess was very casual, and her gorgeous long-haired Dachshund busily chewed on a bone on a Persian rug while we chatted. She is quite passionate about correcting wrongful impressions and interpretations of Franz Ferdinand, as he is still very much misunderstood more than one hundred years after his death. She was interested to hear of my other projects and it was worthwhile making the contact with her and visiting Artstetten to meet her. I also met with her assistant, Brigitte, with whom I liaised about the visit.

The only downside is that there was no restaurant open today in the village of Artstetten. I had no breakfast and no lunch, so I had to catch a taxi down to Pöchlarn in search of sustenance and catch a taxi back.

GERMANY

Day 23 – Wednesday 7th September: ARTSTETTEN → MUNICH

A huge smorgasbord breakfast was available at the lower hotel this morning. Various cold meats, fruit, cheeses and bread rolls, followed by sweet cakes with rich home-made jams. You could also have bubbly, but as much as I am partial to said liquid I decided not to partake. I caught a minibus down to Pöchlarn, just in time to catch the train to St. Pölten where I then caught a direct express to Munich. You have to make sure that you are in the right carriage in Europe, because this train was partitioned at Salzburg with the front part going to Bregenz. A nice sunny day and enjoyable to watch the gloriously green Austrian countryside, particularly around Salzburg, where mountains dominate to the south. I could almost see Maria von Trapp skipping down the hillsides.

My hotel in Munich is quite close to the main railway station, with no perilous hills to climb, but it is alas in a rather seedy red light district with lots of strip clubs and sex shops. It is 10.15pm now and I hope that the noise dies down if I'm going to get any sleep!

Day 24 – Thursday 8th September: MUNICH

I had a good night's sleep, as the room was well insulated with the window closed. Up early this morning to go to the tourist office in the station to get myself organised for the next two days. I booked a guided tour in English of Dachau concentration camp for this morning, and a tour to Neuschwanstein and Linderhof castles, both south-west of Munich, for tomorrow.

The Dachau guide, Stefan, a German university graduate who specialised in German WWII history, was excellent. He had a very strong American accent and he was extremely knowledgeable, and extremely blunt about the atrocities committed at Dachau. Our group of 9 – Americans, Canadians, Irish, Kiwi, an English-speaking Dane and me – caught a train and a bus to the camp. I teamed up with the Dane, a nice young bloke, who was very interested in Australia (Crown Princess Mary etc) but seemed rather fearful of all our ferocious man-eating/killing animals. I delighted in telling him that they – sharks, crocodiles and snakes – all have a preference for tourists!

Dachau was the first camp set up by the Nazis as soon as they came to power in 1933, and was the only one which existed for the entire period of Nazi rule until 1945. It became the model for all later concentration camps. It was run by the SS who lived in beautiful villas in a residential suburb adjacent to the camp; these villas are now part of a police training facility. For many years Dachau housed political opponents of the Nazis, then gradually people whom the Nazis wished to eradicate: Jews, gypsies, the mentally ill, criminals, Jehovah's Witness followers, and homosexuals.

You enter the camp through a set of iron gates which contain the words **ARBEIT MACHT FREI – FREEDOM THROUGH WORK**. People in these camps were used as slave labour, but very few survived or found freedom. To say the least, the camp was an eye opener. All fairly pristine now, and attractive with mature trees and well maintained buildings and gardens. The administration buildings have all survived, but none of the 32 barracks survive. After housing refugees in the post-war period they had deteriorated to the extent that restoration was unfeasible and they were demolished in the 1960s. However, two barracks have been faithfully reconstructed. We were taken through the administration buildings which have lots of visual displays and text. You could easily spend a whole day there. Items that stand out were the desk used to register new arrivals, a task which, ironically, was done by collaborating inmates. Collaboration created an environment of mistrust, all part of the Nazis' evil psychological warfare. Also,

there was a whipping bench, used liberally for the most minor infractions of rules. The Nazis, who had a passion for detail, had an intricate system of coloured shapes for inmates' uniforms to indicate the reason for incarceration.

We then moved outside to the roll call ground where there are several memorials, including a large modernistic iron sculpture representing the tangled heaps of bodies found by the Americans when they liberated the camp. The father of one of the Americans in our group had liberated Buchenwald concentration camp.

Next was one of the barracks, with tiers of bunks on three levels, although no straw mattresses were present. Facilities were minimal: fountains for water and no privacy in the toilets. The whole aim was to dehumanize, something which worked well, as a lot of people died in Dachau from disease, malnutrition, suicide, and also despair.

Between the barracks and the crematoria are chapels or memorials for various religions, all built since the 1960s: Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Russian Orthodox. The crematoria were out of sight of the barracks and when people were taken over there they were told that they were being relocated to a better place. First their clothing was removed for delousing (and reuse), then they were told they were going to have a shower – false showerheads were placed on the walls, although there are currently none present. They were then herded into the shower rooms/gas chambers, and afterwards the bodies were removed by prisoners to storage rooms until they were cremated. All rather chilling, as you progressed through the building. Near the most recent crematorium is a Jewish memorial garden, with an inscription: “NEVER FORGET”.

Although our trip was rushed, it was great having Stefan take us through. I have bought a detailed photographic book to read at my leisure. The most chilling fact about Dachau is that it was by no means the worst of the concentration camps!

Day 25 – Friday 9th September: LUDWIG'S CASTLES

I boarded a luxury double-decker coach opposite the station for a trip south-west of Munich to visit two of the castles of 'mad' King Ludwig II of Bavaria. Munich is the capital of the German federal state of Bavaria which used to be a kingdom from 1806 until the end of WWI in 1918. Ludwig II, king from 1864 until his suspicious death by drowning in 1886, was a lover of German history, architecture and music and all of these passions came together with the building of Linderhof and Neuschwanstein in the 1860s to the 1880s. Bavaria is one of the most picturesque parts of Germany and we went through glorious countryside on a nice sunny day, past green pastures and immaculately neat farms and villages.

First stop was Linderhof, a wedding cake extravaganza in a spectacular setting in a valley, with towering mountains in front and behind. Ludwig was a great admirer of the French king Louis XIV, and this castle is a tribute to him and other French kings. It is only two storeys, with the king's rooms on the first floor and the service rooms on the ground floor. The interior is lavishly decorated with mirrors opposite one another projecting a sense of space into infinity; in the days of candle light this was also a way of enhancing light in a room. The elaborate chandeliers in Bohemian crystal or Meissen porcelain are stunning, and even side tables and wall fixtures are in porcelain. Hidden and secret doors and a table which could be raised from the kitchen below to the dining room above allowed Ludwig to avoid servants. He was a solitary man who avoided company and was nocturnal in his habits, getting up at 4pm and going to bed at dawn. Very few people were invited to Linderhof.

The interior tour did not allow photographs, but we had a young English-speaking girl as our guide who was very good.

The grounds of Linderhof are also lavish, with the ubiquitous pond and fountain which I was lucky enough to photograph when it was briefly in action. There are many smaller pavilions in the grounds but regrettably our time at Linderhof was minimal.

Next stop was the village of Oberammergau, which is famous for staging a passion play every ten years. In the 1600s the black death was sweeping through Europe, and Germany in particular, and the inhabitants of Oberammergau made a vow to perform a play recreating Christ's death and resurrection, if god spared the village, which he evidently must have done. A very picturesque place with balconies and windows groaning with flower boxes and several houses featuring exterior murals, one of which told the story of Little Red Riding Hood.

Last stop was the village of Hohenschwangau which has two castles. Hohenschwangau castle, built by Ludwig II's parents, was a favourite childhood home of Ludwig who shared his parents' interest in mountain hiking and touring the Bavarian countryside. Once he became king at the age of 18, he was determined to build a grand medieval German castle high on a mountain at the other end of town. Called Neuschwanstein, it was never completed on the inside. In 1886 he was declared insane and was incarcerated in another family castle. A few days after this occurred Ludwig and his doctor were found drowned in the Starnberg Lake; it is still not known precisely how they were drowned; as Ludwig was a strong swimmer, some have proposed murder, some suicide. After Ludwig's death building stopped and his castles were opened to the public to pay off his enormous debts brought about by his building program. During WWII the Nazis stored a lot of stolen art from the rest of Europe in the many empty rooms at Neuschwanstein, as it was considered safe from bombing.

I took a shuttle bus part of the way to the castle – thank god – and walked first to the Marienbrücke, an iron bridge crossing a gorge which gives you a superb view of the castle. I then trekked the rest of the way to the castle gate. Be warned, if you ever visit Neuschwanstein, that a lot of walking and hundreds of steps inside the castle are involved.

We saw about 15 rooms on the ground, third and fourth floors, all decorated in a medieval style with huge murals of German myths and legends which relate to the operas of Richard Wagner, of whom Ludwig was the major patron. The colours and the decoration were amazing and were in fact designed by a theatre set designer. Our exit took us down to the kitchens on the ground floor which is intact and was quite modern for the 1880s when it was built. I loved the scaled model of the castle which was on display near the kitchen and exit.

Ludwig's building projects allowed him to escape from his royal responsibilities into a fantasy world of the past. Today, however, his buildings bring in a huge income to the government and the people of Bavaria through tourism.

Our bus tour was well organised, and with about 70 passengers and several stops and long walks that is no mean feat. Our tour guide, Monika, was excellent and gave us a detailed history of the castles and Ludwig on the way there and back.

Day 26 – Saturday 10th September: MUNICH:

Off for a Stadtrundfahrt (round city tour, hop on/off) today. I chose the long route, which didn't quite go as planned. Instead of going from Stops 1 to 12, the bus first went to Stop 8, then Stop 9 – Nymphenburg Castle, where I hopped off. Nymphenburg was a summer residence of the monarchs of Bavaria from the 1600s until 1918; although in substantial parklands, the palace is now totally surrounded by the city of Munich. The palace is enormous and has been added to by successive rulers of Bavaria. Although Bavaria no longer has a king, the present head of the former royal family, Duke Franz of Bavaria, still lives in one of the many wings of the palace. He is also the heir to the Stuart claims to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland. He is not married and has no children, while his younger brother, Max, has five daughters. Max's eldest daughter, Sophie, is married to the Crown Prince of Liechtenstein, and her children will ultimately inherit the Stuart claims.

Visitors can only inspect the first floor – called the piano nobile or the noble floor, where the most important rooms are – of the central section and two connected side wings. Typical of arrangements in palaces, all rooms were connected – enfilade – to create an effect of depth, but there were lots of hidden and secret doors, rooms and stairs for the servants. The central section contained a magnificent reception room which soared through three levels, with a minstrel and observation gallery at one end; this room looked onto both the entrance and garden fronts and is flooded with light. The decoration reflected the different successive styles of various monarchs: Baroque, Rococo, Neoclassical and First Empire, with the last two being more restrained but no less grand.

Mad King Ludwig II was born in this palace where his grandfather, King Ludwig I, had one room which contained paintings of the 36 most beautiful women of the early 1800s. One of them, the fiery dancer Lola Montez, was notorious as King Ludwig I's mistress and his liaison with her ultimately forced his abdication in 1848. Lola visited Australia in the mid 1850s and even came to Hill End, near Mudgee. Ludwig I's marriage in 1810 was the cause of much celebration which became known as the Oktoberfest, due to start in Munich next week.

In the grounds of Nymphenburg there are several small retreats no less lavish, often featuring blue and white Delft tiles and the 18th passion for Chinese-style decoration: the Amalienburg, the Badenburg (bathing pavilion) and the Pagodenburg. Unfortunately, these three gems were kilometres apart, with intervening canals to be crossed and lakes to be circumnavigated, so I covered a lot of territory by the end of the day.

There was nothing decent to eat at the palace cafe and the returning bus to the station was delayed by a traffic jam and a demonstration and consequently we missed several stops of the tour. Yours truly was starving by the time I got back to the station stop, but it was nevertheless yet another enjoyable day in glorious summer-like weather.

Day 27 – Sunday 11th September: MUNICH

A very lazy day after two fairly exhausting days of trekking. I did a bit of administration and then did some washing and ironing, the latter with the smallest ironing board I have ever used and an iron which is so hot it is a lethal weapon.

On a stroll this evening to Macdonald's for dinner around the corner (for an economical rather than a culinary experience), I ran the gauntlet of hookers and hookahs. Voluptuous buxom strippers on doorsteps greet you with "Hello, komm rein!" (come in), while a nearby Middle Eastern restaurant, which spills out

onto the footpath, serves its clientele hookahs (a big bong-like smoker); the sickly-sweet aroma (for want of a better word) of the contents of said hookah makes you wonder what they are smoking. The neighbourhood is very Middle Eastern and African, with many beggars. It was interesting to note, for the benefit of my brother-in-law, Paul, that sex shops are closed on Sunday. Munich is a very Catholic city.

Day 28 – Monday 12th September: MUNICH

Last day in Munich, so time for a town walk to take in some of the most historic parts of the city. Firstly, I went to the Post Office to post off home a horde of books, booklets and brochures that I have accumulated in the past 4 weeks. I was served by a very grumpy male attendant who would rival the grumpy lady at Prague railway station. However, so many people I have dealt with in a variety of situations have been more than charming and helpful; it's just a shock when you encounter the opposite.

I then walked down to the Marienplatz, one of many town squares that are focal points in Munich. It contains the flower-bedecked Gothic-style town hall which has a clock with moving figures; I have not seen the clock in operation, unfortunately. Incidentally, town hall in German is "Rathaus" which, given the reputation of local councils in Australia, sounds an appropriate name, but the word "Rat" comes from "raten", the verb "to advise".

Munich is a city of churches, often very close to one another, but, as in Australia, there are many different Christian denominations. While there are some Protestants in Bavaria, it is a Catholic stronghold. Consequently, some of Munich's churches are particularly lavish. One I visited, St Michael's, is a late Renaissance church on the exterior with a lavish baroque interior. It was badly damaged by Allied bombing in the latter years of WWII but has since been restored. The crypt of the church contains the remains of many members of Bavaria's former royal family, including mad King Ludwig II, the castle builder.

The church also contains an impressive marble memorial by Thorvaldsen, one of the greatest sculptors of the day, to Prince Eugene de Beauharnais, son of the Empress Josephine and stepson of Napoleon. For political reasons, the handsome and intelligent Eugene was married off to Princess Augusta, the eldest daughter of the first king of Bavaria, Max I Joseph. It was, however, a very successful and happy marriage. After Napoleon's defeat, Eugene and Augusta lived in Bavaria where he died in 1824, aged 42, leaving Augusta heartbroken. Their caskets are also in the crypt.

The marriages of their children, who became Dukes and Duchesses of Leuchtenberg, connected the de Beauharnais family to the royal families of Sweden, Brazil, Portugal, Wurttemberg, Hohenzollern, Russia, Baden, Oldenburg, Norway, Belgium, Luxemburg, Yugoslavia, Denmark and Greece. Eugene had inherited most of his mother's art collection which was eventually taken to Saint Petersburg when his youngest son married a Russian Grand Duchess. The Leuchtenberg family became Russian for the next few generations, and their fabulous art collection, including many of Josephine's items, was nationalised by the Soviets after they fled Russia in 1917.

I then walked down towards the Residenz, the city palace of the kings of Bavaria. The Residenz grew out of a medieval castle and each monarch of Bavaria seemed to make changes or additions in a variety of different styles. The majority of the palace is now used as museums, with some of the former royal apartments open to the public. The exterior of one section is unusual in that, from a distance, it appears to be of lavish construction in the detailing, with columns and elaborate stonework. When you get up close you realise that it is all painted. Most unusual.

The former adjacent royal garden, the Hofgarten, is now open to the public and I sat for a while in a charming classical rotunda where a middle-aged man played *Ave Maria* on a guitar. The acoustics were perfect and his performance delightful.

A lot of streets in this district are pedestrian thoroughfares, and the city today was packed with tourists and locals alike. Lots of street performers, drawing on footpaths, juggling a soccer ball, or figures painted in silver standing immobile. I had to laugh, as just before I took a photograph of the latter, a girl passing behind him felt up his posterior and he broke into a giggle, but he quickly regained his composure.

As in Berlin and Vienna, lots of restoration works on old buildings which makes a decent photograph impossible.

Day 29 – Tuesday 13th September: MUNICH → STUTTGART

Caught an inter city express, 1st class, to Stuttgart this morning. Very smooth comfortable ride. Although I had a window seat, unfortunately I scored a pillar between two windows. The people in front of me pulled down the shade so that I couldn't see out unless I twisted my head. The bastards! And the people opposite them did the same – the bastards – so I didn't get to see much of the scenery. We stopped briefly at Augsburg, Germany's third oldest city dating from Roman times, and Ulm, which has a cathedral with the tallest spire in the world. Ulm dated from medieval times and 80% of the old city was destroyed by Allied bombing in WWII.

My train stopped at one of the most remote platforms at Stuttgart central station with one of the shonkiest surfaces I have yet encountered. Like the rest of Stuttgart it is undergoing a desperately-needed makeover: scaffolding everywhere, with pedestrian detours, and massively wide streets that take 10 minutes to cross with four sets of lights. My hotel was further from the railway station than I thought and it sounded suave in the advertisement. Although it is comfortable enough, it is basic. Hotel rooms rarely have fridges in Europe, nor air conditioning. As the weather is still very hot, and unusually so, those are necessities.

After a nanna nap, I strolled into the city centre, which is a vibrant place with some impressive public buildings, but inappropriate modern constructions nearby and very inappropriate advertising signage. I am surprised at the lack of street signs everywhere in Europe – very confusing. What surprises and shocks me the most are the number of smokers – everyone in Europe smokes, and disgustingly the streets are littered with butts which the beggars scavenge and recycle. Grotesque!

The railway station is a very severe concrete building finished with a rough stone veneer that was completed in 1928. It was damaged by Allied bombing during WWII, although a fake structure built nearby apparently deflected some of the bombing. I was surprised to notice a vineyard on a hill beside the station right in the city centre. Stuttgart is apparently unusual in incorporating traditional vineyards within the city boundaries, and the region is noted for its wines.

A lot of Stuttgart was bombed during the war because it was and still is a major industrial centre, and historically the home of Mercedes-Benz. Stuttgart was the capital of Württemberg, a kingdom from 1806 until 1918 which expanded and prospered by being an ally of Napoleon. However, King Frederick I, the first king of Württemberg, was forced to marry off a daughter, Catherine, to Jerome, Napoleon's charming but debauched younger brother. The present Bonaparte pretender in France descends from this marriage, as Napoleon left no surviving legitimate sons. Now Stuttgart is in Baden-Württemberg, one of the states of the Federation of Germany.

The former royal palace, an enormous and impressive structure, is in the centre of the city and next to the old royal castle. The palace was badly damaged by fire through bombing in WWII, leaving a burnt-out shell. Controversially, it was rebuilt in the 1950s, although the interior was not restored. The former palace gardens are now a very popular public space which feature several fountains. During my walk I passed by a statue of King William I, the son and successor of King Frederick I, who built many of Stuttgart's grand buildings.

Day 30 – Wednesday 14th September: STUTTGART:

A most anticipated day – a visit to the Benz museum. The Stuttgart region is where man's love affair with the internal combustion engine all began in the 1880s when Carl Benz, Gottlieb Daimler and Wilhelm Maybach all started tinkering with early prototypes. The latter two were closely associated and worked on various early forms of the automobile, but strangely they never met Carl Benz, even though the two companies later amalgamated in the 1920s. Robert Bosch, who invented the spark plug and whose firm still produces numerous car parts, was also much associated with Stuttgart. Stuttgart is also the home of Porsche, and there is also a Porsche museum in Stuttgart.

I started the day with a town tour and we were given an audio commentary of Stuttgart's history and development going back to the 900s. Its development really got underway with industrialisation in the 1800s and it has been a national centre for industry since. Württemberg has long been a centre for education and social development, with industry having a benevolent attitude towards its workers. We drove through a wonderful suburb full of workers' houses from the late 1800s which were very advanced for the times.

I hopped off at the museum – stop No. 4 – a very modernistic structure which was opened in 2006. You start the tour of the museum up on the top floor which pays brief homage to the horse, the predecessor of the car, and then is devoted to Benz, Daimler and Maybach and all their early inventions. Their inventions were so advanced for the times, and were used not only for the automobile, but to propel boat and rail engines. An interesting timeline traced the lives of these three important inventors.

One of the early Daimler customers was Emil Jellinek, a prominent Austrian businessman. A keen car racer, he eventually dealt in Daimlers and had Daimler create a racer named after his daughter, Mercedes, whence the name after the eventual merger of Daimler and Benz.

Gradually, you work your way down through the decades, and on the ramps down there are visual displays which discuss social changes through the years, affecting both Germany and the world. By the time you get to the bottom you have covered a few kilometres. When I reached the ground floor I realised that I had somehow missed displays as there were many models I hadn't seen, so I went back up again and worked my way down. Circumnavigation in the building is rather confusing, as there are two exits from each major level. I always went to the left and therefore had missed many permanent displays. Consequently, I covered a few more kilometres, but I am so glad I revisited, as I would have missed some gems.

The contents of the museum are just gob-smacking, without exaggeration. The most immaculately-restored and rare models you can imagine. Some of the models from the 1920s and 1930s are unbelievably enormous, yet they were daily drivers for socialites, royalty and movie stars. I was thrilled to see Emperor Hirohito's 1935 armour-plated limousine, as Carol had given me a scale model of same a few years ago for my collection of model Mercedes. This limousine bore a chrysanthemum crest on the two back doors, a crest only used by the Emperor. A similar model standing next to Hirohito's belonged to Kaiser Wilhelm II of WWI notoriety during his exile in Holland after the war. He had the three-pointed star on the radiator replaced with his family crest.

I kept changing my mind about which was my favourite model, and I still can't make a decision. So many that I covet. A red 1935 model 500 K Spezial Roadster was a contender, with such elegant flowing lines. A 300SL gullwing was a delight to see. The late Arthur Brackenrig of Mudjee owned a gullwing for many years. One also rarely has a chance to see a 600 Pullman, but there was a black one on display. The late Kerry Packer had one, and the children of Mudjee businessman, the late Lloyd Foyster of Goree used one as a paddock basher, so I have been told. An interesting vehicle was the 1980 model Popemobile, built for the visit of Pope John Paul II to Germany and subsequently used by him on many trips.

Of course, I got a little nostalgic when I stood in front of a 220S fintail ("Heckflosse" in German), as I owned one from 2003 until 2010. I have owned a number of Mercs over the years:

1. 1977 450SEL - gold
2. 1988 300E – charcoal grey
3. 1963 220S - silver
4. 2002 C180 - black
5. 1998 C180 - silver
6. 2004 C180 - silver

But probably what I really would like in my Christmas stocking is a 230SL Pagoda, but I will probably have to be content with a ride in one that belongs to a Mudjee friend, Drew Stein.

There was no restriction on photography but lighting left a bit to be desired. Some exhibits were inadequately lit, while others were swamped with light which created too much reflection. The poor security people were working overtime with foreign visitors who blithely ignored instructions not to touch vehicles.

The Daimler-Benz company was compromised by its forced co-operation with the Nazi regime and was heavily involved in armaments and war equipment manufacturing. The Stuttgart works were destroyed from bombing during WWII but the company rose again from the ashes to become the industrial powerhouse it is today. The company also used slave labour during the war for which it has apologised and paid reparations.

In the afternoon I resumed my bus tour through the hills around the city centre which lies in the valley of the Neckar River, the same river on which Heidelberg is situated. It was fascinating to see up close the vineyards within the city's boundaries.

Day 31 – Thursday 15th September: STUTTGART

This morning I bought a ticket to Reims, the capital of the Champagne region, via Strasb(o)urg and Champagne-Ardenne station outside of Reims. I have used up all my Eurail options of 3 countries and 5 trips, so it was a bit of a shock to have to pay for a train ticket. I head there tomorrow, Friday.

I then caught train to Ludwigsburg, north of Stuttgart, which was a town that grew up in the early 1700s around a hunting lodge of the Dukes of Württemberg. The town suffered no damage during WWII and it has preserved its quaint C18th atmosphere. The hunting lodge grew into one of the largest and most impressive baroque palaces in Germany, based around a huge courtyard and set in magnificent gardens. First I explored the gardens which were quite impressive, with both formal French gardens and English landscape areas. In the process I covered several kilometres, as the gardens are very extensive. At one stage I was so intent on taking photographs that I didn't notice a sprinkler beside me and got drenched!

On either side of the garden front of the palace are two rustic pavilions, each one of a different design and used as retreats by the royal family for relaxing and reading.

Pumpkins are in season everywhere in Europe, and there is currently a pumpkin fair in the grounds with hundreds of varieties and shapes on sale. Beyond the pumpkin stalls I noticed a small pleasure palace – Schloss Favorite – some distance from Ludwigsburg palace, but as rain threatened this afternoon I did not venture to see it. More's the pity, as the rain didn't eventuate.

Ludwigsburg was a bit like Versailles under Louis XIV to XVI in that it served as the unofficial capital and residence of the court of the Dukes of Württemberg; eventually Stuttgart became the residential capital of the later Kings of Württemberg. I booked two tours – the king's apartments and the queen's apartments. This covered the first floor, or piano nobile, with all the principal rooms. The guide on both tours was Wolfgang, a man in his 70s who was terrific, very witty, although his accent reminded me a lot of General Burkhalter from the 1960s TV show "Hogan's Heroes". He had lots of wonderful stories about the debauched dukes, especially Duke Carl Eugen who had numerous illegitimate children. As he had red hair, whenever a red-haired child was born in Ludwigsburg, it was presumed to have been fathered by Carl Eugen. He apparently gave special blue slippers to his mistresses so that he could keep track of who he had slept with. Wolfgang also pointed out an interesting painting of Württemberg's first king, the giant King Frederick I – 7 feet tall and 200kgs – where his eyes and his left foot follow you no matter which side of his portrait you stand. There were similar illusions on ceilings, especially one which appeared to be curved but which was in fact flat. There are over 600 rooms in the palace, with the original furniture from the C18th and C19th – some magnificent and rare pieces. Unfortunately, we were not allowed to take interior photographs, although I did take a few inside of the grand stair on the way out.

By no means of exaggeration, I also covered several kilometres inside the castle on the two tours. As the second tour, of the king's apartments, was only a small group, Wolfgang took us into part of the warren of small servants' rooms behind the grand rooms. The contrast was considerable, small and dark rooms, but they were infinitely warmer and cosier, as it was difficult to heat some of the big grand rooms with ceilings 7 metres high. Seeing these rooms was a real bonus; although I enjoy the grand rooms, I found it interesting to see how the two classes lived side by side. A wonderful opportunity to see one of the great palaces of Europe. One of my favourite sights of the day was a scale model of the courtyard side of the original hunting lodge.

FRANCE

Day 32 – Friday 16th September: STUTTGART → REIMS

My German train left Stuttgart 9 minutes late, which made a change of trains at Strasbourg a bit tenuous, as there was little time between trains. When we arrived at Strasbourg, I bolted off the train, hurtled along the platform and down the stairs to find the departures board. Fortunately, my French train was leaving from Platform 1, which was close to where I was. Crisis averted. Both trains were a TGV, which travel at about 180kph. This time I had to travel 2nd class but honestly there was no difference. The train stopped at a special new station outside of Reims, called Champagne-Ardenne, which is used by high-speed trains, and then commuted by a smaller train into Reims city station.

My hotel is only a short walk from the station, and is quite quaint. There is a noisy bar and brasserie on the floor below me, but no sex shops or strip joints anywhere. The room is quaint, straight out of the 1920s. It could be a tart's bedroom, but it also looks like Mother's bedroom in "Allo Allo", although I haven't discovered any British airmen in the wardrobe yet. There is a partitioned-off toilet booth in one corner and an ensuite shower and basin. There is a minimum of power points in the room, so my laptop is running off the battery atm. But it will do me and it is in a central area and ultra cheap, compared to Stuttgart which was very expensive. Madame the concierge runs the brasserie and she is very nice.

After dumping my stuff at my little bolthole, I headed out for a reconnaissance of the birthplace of Madame la Veuve Clicquot whose life story I am documenting for a lecture. On my walk I came across buildings which I recognised from my research, such as Madame Clicquot's old house which is now a museum. The nearby cathedral, where the kings of France were traditionally crowned – the last one in 1825 – stands out anywhere in town. Like many buildings in Europe it is undergoing restoration and the front is encased in scaffolding. I was intrigued by several of the cathedral's fantastic gargoyles, massive lead or tin creatures with ferocious faces to scare off evil spirits and, more effectively, to direct water away from the stone foundations. I was also amused by a statue above of the doors, where a female figure has a happy (ie drunk) look on her face.

I also appreciated a door knocker on an old house which was cast as a hand.

I also came across the Hôtel du Marc which is a mansion built by a partner of Madame la Veuve Clicquot in the early 1840s. It has been restored as a corporate guest house by Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin, now part of the huge Moët-Hennessy-Louis Vuitton agglomeration of luxury products. The Hôtel du Marc, which I will visit on Tuesday, although possibly only the exterior, is across the street from Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin headquarters. I am very peeved, however, that Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin did not invite me to stay at the Hôtel du Marc! lol

This weekend is heritage weekend across France, where free entry is possible for numerous historic buildings. It will probably be chaos, but I shall try to see as many venues as possible, if I plan my days carefully.

In the evening, as there was no dinner served downstairs, I went in search of a restaurant. Several blocks away I found a nice-looking restaurant that offered a reasonable set-price 2 course menu. I had rare grilled lamb chops with vegetables which was simple but delicious, and the closest I had had to a home-cooked meal since leaving Australia. Dessert was a pineapple and mango panacotta. The meal was scoffed down with two glasses of champagne, of course.

On my walk back I came across the Town Hall floodlit and highlighted in the French national colours, red, white and blue. The city looks even more elegant at night.

Day 33 – Saturday 17th September: REIMS

Unusually, I slept in this morning and then headed out to book a seat on a wine tour of the countryside for this afternoon. I then visited the interior of the cathedral. What a massive structure and how amazing that they had the ability to build such large structures in the 1200s. The cathedral was badly damaged by German gunfire in WWI and then further destroyed by fire. The Germans briefly occupied Reims during the war and then retreated nearby, Reims is in the Marne River valley which, along with the Somme River valley, was where a lot of WWI fighting in France took place. There are no pews in the cathedral, instead featuring rows of rustic chairs with rush-woven seats affixed together in fours. Many of the windows were destroyed in WWI, and some of the replacements are relatively plain. Ironically, a German-born window designer, Imi Knoebel, has made three sets of modern stained glass windows with fantastic colours in a jagged configuration and of an abstract design – the windows are quite striking and each set of three is different. There is one set of three windows designed by noted early C20th artist, Russian-born Marc Chagall. The windows are predominately blue, and are story windows, like a traditional stained-glass window. They are better appreciated in sunlight, but unfortunately the day was overcast and the colours were not seen at their best.

I discovered that my drunk lady from the previous day's posting is in fact quite famous. She is known as the "Smiling Angel" and was decapitated during a German bombardment in 1914. She was restored to her position on the north portal of the west facade in 1926. She became a symbol of how French culture/heritage was being destroyed by German barbarism. It was touching to see a plaque honouring 1,000,000 Allied soldiers who died in France in WWI, including 10,000s of Australians. My paternal grandfather's older brother, my great uncle John, died somewhere in northern France in WWI; I must endeavour to find out where, when and how he died.

Outside the west front of the cathedral facing the town square, are two historic plaques embedded in the pavement, one in French and one in German, commemorating the reconciliation in 1962 of traditional enemies, France and Germany. I am horrified that people walk over these significant items.

At 2.30pm a group of some 24 people, minus 4 who didn't turn up, set off on our wine tour, with English commentary on a few significant sites along the way. Despite a wet and bleak morning, the afternoon turned out fine. We headed south of Reims and first drove through Mailly-Champagne, where there is a big grower's co-operative, then on to Verzenay and Verzy, where Madame Clicquot had a holiday house which is still a corporate guest house for Veuve Clicquot. We backtracked to Mailly-Champagne, stopping at an old mill on a hill which has been restored by the G. H. Mumm champagne house for corporate entertaining. The mill was behind Allied lines in WWI and was used for observing the Germans to the east. In the immediate area of Reims there is intense cultivation of vines on every available plot of land, and the vines are planted in rows tightly spaced. Rose bushes are planted at the end of rows to signal any infestations.

We drove through several more small villages at breakneck speed in narrow streets – a bit hairy on occasions – stopping at Rilly-la-Montagne for our wine tasting at a small family-owned champagne house, Yves Couvreur, whose family have been making wine in Champagne for 12 generations. Madame Couvreur took us on a tour and explained how their 7 hectare vineyard is managed. They have two cellars, one underneath the other, and it was fascinating to go down to see their storage and production processes. It was also interesting to see how the vineyards surround the villages. As it is autumn, they were busily harvesting everywhere.

Madame had made some pastries for us to have with our champagne which was very nice. Unfortunately, no fridge in my tiny room meant I could not really purchase a bottle, and I have no room in my luggage.

During the tour I got chatting to two Australian women sitting in front of me. About my age, Helen and Judy were old schoolfriends, and knew Mudgee well. They are regular travellers and from what they said they were fairly cashed up and ready to party. Helen had her credit card stolen while she was in business class on a flight from Australia to Dubai. No cash taken, just the card which they could rejig. And in business class too!

After returning to Reims, I visited the former Archbishop's palace which was open for the heritage weekend. A grand building next to the cathedral, it holds many items associated with the coronation of the kings of France. Unfortunately, interior lighting was either too poor or too bright, or strong daylight reflected on items in glass cases. My camera's battery had given up the ghost yet again, and I had to resort to my iPhone which is far from satisfactory; I need to have my SLR with me as well.

Day 34 – Sunday 18th September: REIMS

A rather wet and dismal day outside, but I ventured out for another town trek and was fortunate to see the day improve throughout the day to brilliant sunshine. I headed first to the Cimetière du Nord (the North Cemetery) to look for the tomb of la Veuve Clicquot, whose life and family I am researching. The cemetery was established in the late 1700s and there now appears to be little space left unless you have a family mausoleum or plot. There were numerous divine little mausoleums built in the style of Greek temples or Gothic churches and, like many cemeteries worldwide, some are neglected and in bad repair. I did a tour of the entire cemetery, and came across the mausoleums of two well-known champagne-making families: the Delbeck family, into which Madame Clicquot's niece, the bizarrely-named Balsamie Barrachin married, and the Roederer family, owners of one of the great champagne marques.

Finally, I came across what I was looking for. Madame Clicquot's mausoleum, that of the richest woman in Reims if not in France at the time of her death, was not as grandiose as I was expecting, but appears to be in good order, although none of her descendants have any connection now with Reims and the Veuve Clicquot company. Unlike many of the mausoleums in the cemetery, hers contains no tablets in the interior but, unusually, does contain an altar and a cross. The inscriptions to the other members of her family interred there – her father and mother (Baron and Baroness Ponsardin), and her wastrel son-in-law and daughter (Count and Countess Louis de Chevigné) – are inscribed on an exterior side wall. The great lady is on the other side, with a more recent addition: Mme Henri Desplanques, née Anne de la Morinerie. I was later to discover that Anne was a granddaughter of Balsamie Barrachin, and therefore a great-grand-niece of the Veuve Clicquot. I was intrigued as to why she was interred here with her more illustrious relative and not with her husband, who is apparently nearby, or with the Delbeck family, also nearby.

I then took a walk along the Boulevard Lundy, one of the grand streets of Reims, containing some mansions and the headquarters of several champagne houses, including Jacquart and Louis Roederer. I then visited the massive Town Hall which was open for heritage weekend. It was started hundreds of years ago and expanded over time, and then burnt down during WWI, leaving only the exterior walls; the interior was rebuilt anew.

In the afternoon I visited two houses in which la Veuve Clicquot lived as a child and later in life. Her father's mansion, the Hôtel Ponsardin, one of the grandest in Reims in its day, is not normally open to the public, so it was fortunate that I happened to be in Reims for the heritage weekend. It was built in the restrained classical Louis XVI style, and hosted Napoleon on more than one occasion. We only visited a

few of the rooms but were allowed to take photographs of the interior. Unfortunately, the house has been compromised by uncomplimentary neighbouring constructions.

I next visited one of the oldest houses in Reims, the Hôtel le Vergeur, which was owned by la Veuve Clicquot for many years. Constructed partly in timber but mostly in stone, it is now a museum devoted to the history of living in Reims. While the street exterior is a little bizarre, the courtyard side is much more interesting and rich in Renaissance features. It was badly damaged in WWI, but was faithfully rebuilt. Unfortunately interior photographs were not allowed.

Day 35 – Monday 19th September: REIMS

A clear cool day, fine for walking, so I set off to the Tourist Office to book a one-day pass which includes a free one-hour tour. As I had missed the first tour I went over the road to the Fine Arts Museum, housed in an old seminary – a very grand building in desperate need of steam cleaning. Pigeons and pollution are creating havoc with the old buildings in Reims. There was an exhibition of some very good Art Nouveau furniture and decoration, and a special exhibition on ‘Mother and Child’ with some charming portraits and sculptures. The permanent exhibitions upstairs had some fine paintings, and I was taken by a very grand equestrian portrait of Louis XIV. Mind you, any portrait painted of him had to look grand. There were a very extensive collection of paintings by Corot, an early Impressionist who painted landscapes galore, but they are usually quite small. I was surprised that there was no painting of la Veuve Clicquot in the museum, but there was a large bust of Madame la Veuve Pommery, another famous champagne widow who did well.

The one hour tour of Reims was quite informative, although we only covered the historic city centre, going past a few of the major champagne house corporate headquarters: G. H. Mumm, Taittinger, Veuve Clicquot and Pommery. Near Pommery is a garden suburb built in the 1920s as workers’ accommodation. The houses are semi-detached and all slightly different and are quite charming. The champagne industry in Reims has always been benevolent towards its workers.

After the tour, I revisited the cathedral as it was a better day than last Saturday and I managed to get some better interior shots, especially of the blue Marc Chagall windows which are just stunning.

I then made my way to the former headquarters of Jacquart champagne, which is near my hotel and which I had spied from the bus, which has the most amazing Art Nouveau front, declared a national monument, with a fantastic doorway and friezes of the champagne process along the top.

Later in the afternoon I went in search of a bookshop, and I couldn’t find much on Reims at all, even in the tourist office. On my search I did find an interesting old church, not far from the cathedral – St. Jacques (St. James) which is in fact older than the cathedral. It suffered damage during WWI and its windows are relatively modern and abstract, not religious.

Tonight I have to prepare for my visit to Veuve Clicquot HQ tomorrow which I arranged from Australia.

Day 36 – Tuesday 20th September: REIMS

This morning, while about to depart for Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin HQ, I received a phone call from downstairs to tell me that someone was here to pick me up, which I wasn’t expecting. When I landed downstairs, I was surprised to find a chauffeur-driven black Mercedes limousine was at my disposal for the day. The chauffeur was a nice young bloke who was intrigued by my visit to Reims and also that I was from

Australia. Everyone wants to visit Australia; even the young girl at the Tourist Office yesterday wanted me to take her back home with me when I told her where I came from.

My chauffeur deposited me at VCP HQ in the Rue du Temple, where I met Isabelle Pierre, a lovely lady on the VCP heritage team, and we hit it off fairly well. We had a good chat and I showed her my Powerpoint presentation on the Veuve Clicquot. She has promised to send me a number of graphics for use in same, and has corrected any errors in my timeline. She then showed me the archives room and I was able to photograph a few interesting articles which pertained to Australia going back to the 1850s. She even showed me a special Bicentennial Australian vintage package produced for 1988, as Australia is VCP's tenth largest customer. VCP is very conscious of history and tradition and has a huge amount of material in the archives. She gave me a copy of a very interesting pictorial book on Madame Clicquot and she will be an interesting contact to have, and I am happy to send her my research when finished, as apparently I had discovered things of which they weren't aware. She then took me over to the Hôtel du Marc, the corporate guest house, which is a very elegant house set in lovely grounds which had been constructed in the 1840s by Madame la Veuve Clicquot's partner Edouard Werlé. Although we weren't able to see inside it was a great experience.

My chauffeur then delivered me to the VCP cellars, where I had to be frisked and empty my pockets onto a table as a counter terrorism measure. I made the fellow on the gate and the chauffeur laugh when I said that I was glad that I had taken my sex toys out of my pockets and left them at the hotel. I was then introduced to my personal guide, Vincent, a really top bloke, who has worked for VCP for 4 years and was previously in the hotel industry as a sommelier. He took me down 77 steps into the crayères (chalk cellars) and explained the history of VCP and a bit of the champagne production process, including the riddling process which involves getting the sediment in the bottle towards the neck by upending it. The sediment is then removed by a freezing process, called *dégorgement* (disgorgement), before recorking. There are miles of these chalk cellars under Reims, which have ideal conditions for storing and aging wines. Some of them go back to Roman times, as chalk was used a lot for buildings and roads. They were also used as a refuge for the inhabitants of Reims during the WWI bombardments.

Vincent also showed me a bottle of Veuve Clicquot champagne on display in a specially-cooled cordoned-off area which was one of some forty salvaged a few years ago from an 1840s shipwreck in the Baltic Sea and was still quite drinkable. VCP have placed a number of bottles in a cage in the same place to be salvaged in several decades to see how they withstand similar conditions.

We then went upstairs to a swank private guest reception area with a 1950s retro fridge that daughter-in-law Kirsten would love and a games room furnished in the VCP corporate colour (orange/yellow), including a table and chairs by legendary avant-garde interior designer, the late Andrée Puttmann, with whose work I am familiar. There we had a tasting of the standard Veuve Clicquot yellow label range, and a Grande Dame 2006 vintage, both heavenly, but made from different grape combinations. The tasting culminated in sampling the rosé champagne and then finally a rosé champagne cocktail with sliced ginger and ice in the general guest area. My God. I told Vincent it was like an orgasm! Best drink I have ever had. An explosion of flavours! Almost legless by this stage, as all servings had been fairly substantial, especially the rosé cocktail, which was served in a humungous glass. I bought a few souvenirs at the shop and was then delivered back to my hotel for a desperately-needed nanna nap.

VCP certainly looked after me very well and I will forever treasure my visit. I will have to endeavour to recreate Vincent's orgasmic drink.

Day 37 – Wednesday 21st September: REIMS → PARIS

I forgot to mention yesterday two tips that Vincent told me about opening a champagne bottle. You unscrew the wire twist, and it should be only six times. You hold the cork firmly and then twist the bottle, and the cork should pop easily. I tried that this evening, albeit not with a bottle of Veuve Clicquot, which is not in my travel budget, and it worked perfectly.

This morning I caught a direct TGV (train grande vitesse/high speed train) which took only 45 minutes for the trip from Reims to Paris. Jean René, my landlord, met me at the platform and then took me via the subway (le Metro) to the apartment. By now it was lunchtime and the streets were crowded. You know you are in Paris when you see elegant people, elegant shops, everyone at a sidewalk cafe quaffing food, wine and coffee, and pastry shops, bakeries and restaurants everywhere. Food is very important to the French. The district where I am staying is called Montorgeuil, known for its foodstuffs and markets.

Jean René showed me the workings of the apartment, on the fourth floor of 27 rue Saint Sauveur, a pedestrian street in the 2nd arrondissement (district) of Paris. It was quite a struggle with a heavy suitcase up to the fourth floor, but the apartment is charming, however, and is situated in a C17th building with timber-beamed ceilings. Jean René and his wife bought the apartment years ago for their daughter to live in while she was at university and have since kept it for holiday rentals. On the way to the apartment Jean René bought a baguette and we had a quick simple lunch of sausage, goose liver pâté and tomatoes washed down with a glass of Beaujolais. Very civilized.

It was a joy to unpack and put everything in a cupboard or a drawer and settle in. I will be very content in my little garret. It has a window looking onto a courtyard and is well-lit and ventilated. The sofa/bed is very comfortable, and I have unlimited wifi. It is great to have a fridge, as hotels often don't have fridges in Europe, nor tea/coffee facilities. It was heaven to have a cup of tea this afternoon and also to be able to have ready access to a washing machine, instead of trekking to find a laundromat.

Jean René had also pointed out a nearby supermarket, so I went there this afternoon to get a few basics. I was intending to cook to economise, but there is such a vast range of pre-prepared foods it is not worth the trouble. And what a range of foods! For dinner I ended up with a very nice microwavable chicken tagliatelle for less than \$AUS2. I must get some fruit, because I have really missed eating fruit. I never want to eat KFC or McDonalds again!

I did notice some luscious pastry and cheese shops, and they could be my downfall. After losing several kilos in the past five weeks, I could put it all back on again quite easily. However, if I keep walking at the rate I have been walking, hopefully not. Several kilometres every day hasn't really been a challenge, and the weather in France is cooler now. I find walking is the easiest way to get around and you see some gems along the way.

Day 38 – Thursday 22nd September: PARIS

I woke up late at 9am after a disturbed night with loud music, if you can call it that, emanating from an apartment downstairs. It was thumpa thumpa thumpa crap. How can people be so inconsiderate! It was still going at 1am at least, then I must have fallen asleep.

By the time I was respectable it was after 11am, so I thought that I should head out to explore on my first full day in Paris. My first posted photograph shows a typical late C19th Paris building. On the ground floor is a shop, on the first floor professional offices (doctor, dentist, lawyer, accountant etc). The remaining

floors are residential, and the ceiling heights and the size of the apartments decreases the further up you go. Many were built before lifts were invented. Small lifts were often installed later in the stair well. Right up in the attics were rooms which were often occupied by servants of apartments on the lower floors. These are now little bedsits or studio apartments, like mine, although some still belong to an apartment. There is often a store room in the cellar for each apartment, and many have a concierge.

There are so many people in Paris, but they all seem to spend their time, no matter what hour of the day, in eating or drinking at cafes. The traffic in this district is chaotic as it is so old with narrow streets, most of which are one-way and the French drive at break-neck speeds, yet I have not seen an accident or anyone bowled over. Plenty of honking though. And the French will park anywhere they think they can get away with it. I was, however, almost bowled over by a man on a scooter who must have been in a hurry, as he drove off the road behind me and onto the footpath as far as the next corner, and pushed in.

My apartment is west of the district known as the Marais, an old aristocratic suburb which became unfashionable after the C18th. The grand mansions remained, however, and were divided into apartments, shops and workshops. Many have since been restored as museums, are government offices, or are privately owned. I walked past many that I recognized from my studies of the great houses of Paris – some absolute gems. The typical Parisian mansion (*hôtel particulier*) was based on a private street facade of service buildings with a massive and impressive central gateway and a courtyard with more service wings on either side and the house at the far side of the courtyard. Behind the house was a private garden. These mansions often took the name of a prominent owner and were known as the *Hôtel de* (family name).

When I was visiting Princess Anita von Hohenberg at Artstetten Castle in Austria a few weeks ago, she definitely recommended a visit to the Museum of Hunting and Nature (*Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature*), which is situated in the Marais in two neighbouring mansions. So it was my first port of call today, What an amazing place. Son Matt and grandson Axel would love it. Stuffed animals and birds galore from every continent and fantastic paintings and furniture, all furnished as if it was the home of a collector who lived there. The museum is in fact owned by a private foundation financed by wealthy collectors. One unusual piece of furniture must have been for guests whom you did not wish to linger, as the sides and backs were made from antlers! There was the most fantastic collection of hunting guns made of precious timbers and carved and inscribed in mother-of-pearl, ivory and precious metals, some of which belonged to very famous people. You could spend days there, as one room had glassed drawers full of hunting souvenirs. My favourite exhibits were two life-like majestic lions with the most beautiful faces, as well as a fox cheekily ensconced in an armchair.

The museum also looked at man's association with the dog, horse and bird which were used by man in the hunting process, whether out of necessity for food or for leisure. Being such a doggy person I loved the dog displays. The falconry section was also interesting, presenting how different types of birds were used in various ways to hunt and retrieve for man. Hunting for pleasure reached its peak in the C19th. Since then, with more and more species facing extinction, such hunting has declined. As hunting was a royal or aristocratic prerogative much of the museum's collection was high calibre. This museum is a 'must see' for anyone visiting Paris.

I then reached the Place des Vosges, one of the most historic and elegant areas in Paris. It is a huge square which was an exercise in town planning in the late 1500s/early 1600s. All houses in the square had to follow the same basic exterior design. Ultimately the square consisted of some 26 mansions where, over time, many famous people lived. I am doing a lecture on this space, so will spend more time there during my stay. A plaque here sadly reminded me of the district's tragic past. The Marais was, until WWII, a Jewish quarter, but shamefully most French Jews, with the collaboration of the French Vichy regime, were turned

over to the Nazis who sent the majority to death camps. This plaque especially remembered the children from the local school who died in death camps.

Day 39 – Friday 23rd September: PARIS

Off to the Picasso Museum today, located in another enormous and very grand mansion in the Marais called the Hôtel Salé. When Picasso died in 1973 he left a very valuable estate worth billions, because he lived into his 90s and was such a prolific painter. He had kept a lot of his own paintings, and also acquired a lot of valuable paintings by other artists, including Old Masters. However, his family life was messy, with wives, mistresses, ex-mistresses and children, both legitimate and illegitimate. Consequently, after his demise there was a huge bunfight amongst his heirs. Because he lived and worked most of his life in France, the French government also wanted its share of the loot.

My personal interest in Picasso comes from a person I met a few years ago. English lecturer for ADFAS, Tony Penrose, came to Mudgee a few years ago to give a lecture on his mother, famous model and photographer Lee Miller. Tony and his young son Josh stayed with Carol and I when we were still living in Oakfield Close. Tony and Josh were very easy and pleasant guests. Before WWII Lee Miller had been a mistress of Picasso, but she and her second husband, Sir Roland Penrose, remained good friends with Picasso and they frequently visited one another. Tony looked upon Picasso as an honorary uncle and Picasso even made toys for him which he still has; Tony owns a portrait by Picasso of his mother. After Picasso's death Tony's father, Sir Roland Penrose, who was a biographer of Picasso as well as a major patron of the Surrealists and a painter himself, helped sort out the Picasso collection (paintings and sculptures) to see who got what, and the government's share eventually went towards the collection in the Hôtel Salé. About five years ago, when the museum was having a refit, the contents came to Australia and I saw the exhibition at the Sydney Art Gallery just before Tony came out to Australia. It was fantastic, and I wasn't a big Picasso fan until then. His work underwent enormous changes in style and content, but the 1920s was a period when you could easily recognise what his work was without scratching your head. I sound like a philistine, but I don't want to struggle to interpret an artist's work.

However, when I got to the museum and had already paid I was informed that the ground and first floors were closed for the installation of an exhibition, and that only the second and third floors featured Picasso's works. And no discount! I was interested to see one of his early works, a nude (woman, of course) done when he was only 20 in 1901, and very much an Impressionist piece, and also a self portrait done in the same year. I also liked his later colourful works, such as *Portrait de Marie Therese* and a much later abstract landscape *La Baie de Cannes*.

Despite the limited display, it was still worthwhile to see what was there, and I found the building attractive, although it has been for the most part gutted to provide large spaces, accommodate lifts and disabled access. However, the flow was poorly planned as there was no direction to help you understand the chronological development of his art. Overall incredibly disappointing, and I thought that it would be a high point of my visit to Paris. The Sydney Picasso exhibition was far bigger and much better signed, and superior in every respect. Although I did see some works here that I don't recollect seeing in Sydney, it was a fairly lacklustre display in general.

I then went to the nearby Musée Cognacq-Jay, situated in another old mansion. Entry to this museum was at least free! It is essentially a museum devoted to the art of fine living and decoration in the France of the C18th. The collection was started by a couple who owned one of the big department stores in Paris in the C19th. Both generous philanthropists, they gave their collection to the French nation and it came to the Marais in the 1980s. The contents consist of furniture, paintings, sculptures, ceramics and objets d'art, all

of a very high quality, particularly a Polish-style bed with a round canopy. Some of the furniture was made from rare timbers with inlays that would have taken years to make, and were by the great cabinetmakers of the day. One room was devoted to the idealisation of childhood and innocence which was charming. An enjoyable visit.

This evening I went to my supermarket close by to drool at what is on offer. There are supposedly food markets nearby on the weekend, so they will be interesting to peruse.

A big day tomorrow, as I am off to the countryside southeast of Paris to the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte. The building caused the intense jealousy of Louis XIV who was livid that anyone would build grander than the king, so he threw the owner in jail for life and confiscated his possessions. I am doing a lecture on the château and will meet one of the sons of the owner next week. Tomorrow night the château and grounds are lit by candles from dusk. Should be fantastic.

Day 40 – Saturday 24th September: PARIS

Another lazy morning, ironing shirts, before I headed off to the magnificent château of Vaux-le-Vicomte. I caught the metro (subway) to the Gare de l'Est (East Station) which is as big as Sydney Central station, but there are another 6 big stations in Paris servicing all directions out of Paris. Then I caught a train to the town of Verneuil-L'Étang to catch a shuttle bus to the château. The train and shuttle service is only new this year but is a boon for bringing visitors who otherwise would have found it difficult to get to the château without a car. There were thousands of people there today, especially families, mainly because it is the second last candle-lit evening of the year.

Vaux-le-Vicomte is absolutely stunning. Because of it Louis XIV subsequently built the palace of Versailles south-west of Paris so that no one could rival the king. Buildings until the time of Vaux were mainly in brick with stone trim, but Vaux was all stone. One-up-manship. The whole thing about Vaux is perspective – looking at a focal point in the distance, across ponds and canals and lakes and garden beds, with symmetry in both buildings and gardens being very important. It is possible to stand at the entrance gates of Vaux-le-Vicomte and look through the entrance hall and the salon behind to a statue over one and one half miles away in the garden beyond.

I was truly gobsmacked to finally see what is the grandest privately-owned residence in France, if not in Europe. Even the stables and service buildings are grand and are mini-châteaux in themselves. However, the family no longer live in the château itself, as it is very much open to the public; they live in a converted part of a former service block which is more practical and cosier accommodation. The owner is Count Patrice de Vogüé, who has handed over the management to his three sons, twins Alexandre and Jean-Charles, and Arsenio. His Italian wife, Cristina, is a Colonna, one of the grandest of Roman patrician families.

You enter the estate via one of the former service buildings which has a shop and a restaurant opening onto a courtyard. This area was evidently lowest-ranked in the hierarchy of estate buildings as the finish was fairly rudimentary; the more public facade of the other side of the building, which looked onto the stable courtyard, was more elegant and constructed in brick with stone trim, but again befitting the lesser status of a service building.

I visited the interior of the château straight away, self-guided with audio commentary, upstairs and downstairs over several levels and using numerous staircases, grand and not so grand. A rabbit warren, as was common in such houses, with many hidden little rooms and passages which were used by servants.

You can literally go from the attics down to the cellars where the original kitchen is located, replete with a stuffed wild boar on the table. There are still wild pigs and deer in the nearby woods.

I also went up through the roof through a series of twisting narrow stairs to the walkway around the dome on the top of the château, from where you get breathtaking panoramic views of the grounds.

In 1847 the château was abandoned by the owners, the Choiseul-Praslin family, when the 5th Duke de Praslin murdered his wife in the family mansion in Paris. A film was made in 1940 about this event, which caused a huge scandal at the time, called *All This and Heaven Too*, starring Charles Boyer as the Duke and Bette Davis as the governess/mistress, the alleged reason for the murder.

Count Patrice's great-grandfather, wealthy industrialist Alfred Sommer, bought the château from the Choiseul-Praslin family unfurnished and in a ruinous state in 1875. He restored the château and the garden at enormous cost. An inventory of the original furniture helped him to buy suitable or similar pieces and paintings when he refurnished the château. Pieces of interest furniture-wise are a dear little child-size Louis XV armchair in front of a fireplace in one of the upstairs bedrooms which, I was later assured by Alexandre de Vogüé, was actually used as a footstool, and two marble tables ordered by Nicolas Fouquet, the builder, for his office; these tables have never left Vaux-le-Vicomte. However, all of the contents are of exceptional quality, and especially in the king's bedroom with its grand fenced-off bed.

Not to be missed was the coach house which has some high quality restored C19th carriages of varying types, some of which belonged to famous people.

There is always something going on in the grounds of historic buildings in Europe. That afternoon, there was a Chinese fashion shoot with a model clad in some very skimpy frocks.

Around 6pm the staff started to light thousands of candles inside and in the grounds. It was fantastic to see the candle light grow brighter as night approached. Unfortunately, a lot of my night photographs did not turn out well on either of my two cameras, and it was too dark to check the settings. There is a very pukka restaurant in one of the outbuildings beside the château where you could dine outside on the terrace and watch the lights – a bit out of my budget!

At about 8.30pm an illuminated spectacle of large inflatable white stallions took place on the garden terrace. A person as the two rear legs pranced around to music in a rehearsed routine, delighting everyone, especially the hundreds of children present. Gradually they settled down and children approached to pat them, then they laid down and gradually the operators deflated and gathered up the material and decamped to loud cheers and whistles. It was just wonderful. Although I took a rather shonky video for a few minutes, I didn't manage to get any decent photos, which was a great pity. It was so dark in the crowd and I couldn't see the camera settings! LOL.

At 10pm I caught the shuttle bus back to the station, then the train back to the Gare de l'Est in Paris, and the metro back to my neighbourhood, arriving home just before midnight. What a wonderful day! I took about 600 photographs – quite a few have been deleted, however. That's the beauty of digital photography. You never take a shit photograph!

Day 41 – Sunday 25th September: PARIS

A late start to the day, as I had arrived back at my apartment very late the previous evening. By the time I had breakfast, it was almost lunchtime. I then wrote up my diary for the previous day and then had to process the circa 600 photographs that I had taken with my two cameras. The shit ones went first, then I

had to sort them into categories, as I wish to use these photographs for my presentation: interior, exterior, gardens, outbuildings etc. That took the rest of the day, but my body needed down time. I have now been on the road for almost six weeks, and I think this 66yo body has held up fairly well, all things considering.

Day 42 – Monday 26th September: PARIS

Today, I decided to head to the river. My apartment is on the Right Bank of the Seine River which cuts Paris into two. I walked down the Boulevard de Sébastopol to the river – French streets have such wonderful names, and many of them are named after battles. Sebastapol is a Russian city which was the site of a battle in the Crimean War in 1855 when, oddly enough, Great Britain and Napoléon III's France were allies in a war against Russia. Queen Victoria's best friend was the Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoléon III. Great Britain and France have been allies since the defeat of Napoleon I in 1815 and Great Britain went to France's aid, at great cost, in both WWI and WWII. How things change.

When I reached the river I was opposite a building known as the Concièrgerie which was a rather grim prison in pre-Revolutionary days. The Concièrgerie, where Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were imprisoned before they were executed, is situated on the larger of two islands in the middle of the Seine River in the middle of Paris. The larger one, the Ile de la Cité, contains the cathedral of Notre Dame, started in the C12th. What a magnificent building, and so much history associated with it. There was a huge queue to access the cathedral, and as much as I hate queues I joined this one. Fortunately it was very fast moving. I got some wonderful photos of the interior, and especially of the windows which are very ancient. The north and south transept rose windows and the west narthex rose window are enormous and especially colourful. Despite Paris being invaded many times in its history, Notre Dame has always escaped damage. It underwent a major restoration in the C19th.

There was the ubiquitous scale model of the cathedral, but all of these stupid bloody tourists kept standing in front of MY photo opportunities. The nerve! I enjoyed the painted wood carvings and some very fine large paintings which you don't normally see in a cathedral. I liked the magnificent lofty western entry doors with an overabundance of ironwork.

Probably the most significant event in modern times that took place in Notre Dame was the coronation of Napoléon as Emperor in 1804. *The Coronation March* by J. F. Lesueur is a very grand piece of music. I will take my ipad and my earphones and listen to it in the cathedral, just to recreate the atmosphere.

Today the Ile de la Cité contains a lot of government, police and justice buildings. I noticed a strong but subtle police presence on the island, including two mounted policemen. This is understandable, considering how prone Paris has been to Islamist attacks in recent years. I also noticed on the island fencing has been made available for people to attach a padlock which is a tradition supposed to bring you back to Paris. I also saw this tradition on a bridge in Prague.

I then walked over to the smaller island adjacent, the Ile Saint Louis, and on the way encountered numerous Chinese fashion shoots of wedding dresses, as I saw at Vaux-le-Vicomte on Saturday. I also noticed a series of parking bays where you could recharge your electric mini-car. The French are very innovative.

The Ile Saint Louis is probably the most expensive real estate in the world. Over the years many famous people have lived on the island and plaques are mounted outside buildings to tell you who lived where and when, but this is common all over Paris. The old mansions on the island are now divided into apartments and each one is worth millions. Of course, many of them have spectacular water views and are so central to the city. Many Parisian people who live in apartments ride bikes, scooters or motorbikes, and park their

cars in leased garages elsewhere or at a friend's or relative's place in outer suburbs and only use the car to go on a long trip.

On my walk back to my apartment I discovered a cheap barber with no appointments. Earlier I had walked past several that cost 60 Euros (nearly \$100) for a styled cut, shampoo, blow dry and a facial – no thanks!

Day 43 – Tuesday 27th September: PARIS

Today off on another trek, again in the direction of the Seine, with the Louvre as my destination. The Louvre, famous the world over as a museum, started off as a medieval fortress, although there is nothing of that left except in the foundations which were revealed a few decades ago. Over time, various monarchs constructed various sections of what became a palace. In the mid 1500s, Catherine de Medici, wife of King Henri II, built a palace on the site of former tileworks (tuileries) west of the Louvre and which she called Les Tuileries, a bizarre name for a palace. Subsequently, both the Louvre and the Tuileries were expanded, especially under the Emperors Napoléon I and III in the C19th.

During the reign of the latter (1852-1870) the Louvre and the Tuileries were finally linked up to form a closed space on four sides. The Tuileries and parts of the Louvre were used as the imperial palace and the Tuileries gardens were the palace gardens; now the gardens are accessible to the public. In 1870 France and Prussia went to war which France lost and the Tuileries palace was burnt down by revolutionaries. Fortunately, the Louvre was saved. The two end pavilions of the Tuileries survived, but with damage, and were rebuilt, while the rest of the palace in between the two pavilions was sadly demolished. Even though the Louvre is an enormous building, it is bursting at the seams, and in recent years there have been moves to rebuild the exterior of the Tuileries, to restore the historic space of the Louvre. This would allow much-needed additional exhibition space. I think this project has considerable merit.

Inside the Louvre courtyard, east of the site of the Tuileries, are two interesting structures: the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel is a smaller-scaled version of an arch built by Napoleon before he built the great Arc de Triomphe on the Champs Elysées. I. M. Pei's glass pyramid is a very modernist structure, completed in 1989 to handle the huge volume of pedestrian traffic into the Louvre and redistribute it to exhibits within through a vast underground lobby. It attracted huge controversy, but it has been very successful; it is simply a modern addition to a building that has been added to for centuries. Although I am not a fan of modernist architecture, this pyramid is a brilliant juxtaposition. I love it.

Unfortunately, it was a Tuesday and museums in France are bloody well closed on Tuesdays. Who forgot? So I took myself off for a walk to the Left Bank and found a few interesting buildings, such as the Musée d'Orsay which was formerly a railway station. I noted a poster for a fabulous exhibition on Napoléon III's Second Empire which is opening in October while I'm still in Paris. I have an affinity with Napoléon III as he died on my birthday (9th January) in 1873! LOL. Because he lost a disastrous war with Prussia and went into exile in England, the French have never given him his full due for how he changed France. He is the one who rebuilt the Paris which we know today and also oversaw France's industrial revolution. He is the only French monarch not buried in France. Interestingly he had a few hits and misses with his foreign policy, but he is largely responsible for the unification of Italy in the 1860s. He is also the reason why New Caledonia is French.

While I had a snack lunch outside the Musée d'Orsay, I was entertained by two jazz musicians. On the way back to my apartment, I took an alternative route. I just love walking the streets of Paris, an architectural feast, and so many interesting sights, and unusual people.

Day 44 – Wednesday 28th September: PARIS

Today I went back and did the Louvre, or I should say the Louvre did me in! LOL. Somewhat exhausted here, as it is a two kilometre walk there and back. At least a kilometre in the serpentine queue to get in. Then the building is about a kilometre long, and I did several laps on different floors of both wings. I had to be selective in the end, because there is just too much to see, and I doubt that I saw 30% of exhibits.

Once you get down into the huge underground entrance lobby under the dome you realise what a brilliant concept the dome is. It illuminates with natural light a space which needs to handle tens of thousands of people every day. It was bursting at the seams today.

I started with an historical exhibition which showed how the Louvre evolved from a castle to a palace over the centuries. It was interesting to see that the foundations and the moat of the old castle are still intact in part and well-preserved under the museum and are exposed for viewing. And of course there was the ubiquitous scale model of the building which was illuminated on the interior– very schmick.

I managed to see a few of the “most famous” exhibits, such as the Venus de Milo, the Winged Victory of Samothrace, and the Mona Lisa, but it was hard to get a decent picture at times, as people literally hog the good vantage spots. And reflective glass or lighting sometimes doesn't help. One also has to be very careful these days of bloody selfie sticks getting shoved in your face. Worst thing ever invented. I have not taken one picture of myself next to a monument or painting on this trip. Why should I spoil the photograph?

I have seen so many statues and so many religious paintings, enough to last me a lifetime. I didn't get to see the paintings of the Napoleonic era or the Impressionists, periods I really love, so I may have to go back. I did get to see the furniture displays from the early 1800s to 1870 in the Imperial and Royal apartments which are so lavish. These rooms are set up in the wing constructed by Napoleon III in the 1850s and are furnished as the Tuileries palace was before it was burnt down. The rooms are enormous and just crammed with furniture to accommodate the many guests that the Emperor Napoléon III and the Empress Eugénie had to entertain. There are two wonderful portraits of the Emperor and Empress by the noted C19th celebrity painter Winterhalter.

I was eager to see what was left of the French crown jewels, housed in the magnificent Gallery of Apollo, but the majority, alas, had been sold in the 1880s by an anti-monarchist republican government. It is tragic that these national treasures were sold out of spite and have been lost forever. Two famous diamonds, the Sancy and the Regent, both of which have interesting histories, were on display, but neither photographed well. However, I did get a reasonable photograph of a beautiful emerald and diamond necklace given by Napoleon to his second wife, the Archduchess Marie Louise of Austria. The Regent is currently valued at \$US48 million and is said to be cursed. Predictably, my camera battery packed it in just as I reached this room!

Day 45 – Thursday 29th September: PARIS

Today was another washing day, which takes forever, as the washing machine in the studio seems to have 1,000 cycles that I can't bypass. I also spent a bit of time working on a Powerpoint on the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte, as I was going to revisit tomorrow to meet one of the sons of the owner. He is now snowed under, so I have changed our meeting to 11th October.

I have been in touch with the Nissim de Camondo museum which I will visit next Thursday. I have researched the rather tragic story of a wealthy Jewish banker, Moïse (Moses) de Camondo, who lost his

only son, Nissim, a pilot, in WWI. During WWII, his daughter Béatrice, son-in-law and two grandchildren were deported to Auschwitz in Poland where they all perished. Irène, the wife of Moïse, had been painted as a child by Renoir, and my story concentrates on this painting, called 'Little Irene'. The painting was pilfered by Goering during the German occupation of France in WWII and later retrieved by Irène as her daughter's heir. She is alleged to have wasted the inheritance in the casinos of the French Riviera, but I have since doubted this assertion. The museum, a fabulous mansion full of C18th French furniture of the highest calibre, is dedicated to the memory of their son, Nissim.

I am also going to the Australian Embassy on Tuesday for afternoon tea with the Ambassador, Stephen Brady, who is interested in all my French research. The Australian Embassy is a large multi-storey building designed by Australian architect Harry Seidler near the Seine on the Left Bank, and near the Eiffel Tower. The building houses the embassy offices, the ambassador's residence, and all the staff.

Tomorrow I will consider going to the Hôtel des Invalides, where Napoleon is buried, and lots of interesting places nearby, such as the Rodin Museum.

Day 46 – Friday 30th September: PARIS

I set off this morning for the Hôtel des Invalides, a giant military hospital built in the 1600s by Louis XIV for his veteran soldiers, and with all the wars he fought during his long reign there were plenty of those. Parts of the building are still used as a military hospital, while the vast majority is a military museum. The building is on the south or left bank of the Seine, facing the river. Although I could have walked, it was easier to take the Metro and to get from A to B in Paris, even over a long distance, requires only one or two changes, and only costs you one ticket (about \$2)

Being a very old building, parts of Les Invalides are currently being renovated, but I especially loved the design of the dormer windows on the front facade. They are designed to look like a knight in armour. At the rear of Les Invalides is a great domed chapel which contains the tomb of Napoleon. I also liked the ubiquitous model of the domed chapel on display. Napoléon's son, the King of Rome (or Napoléon II), two of Napoléon's brothers, Joseph and Jérôme, and a nephew, are also buried in the domed chapel, as well as several marshals and famous military men. Napoléon, of course, died in 1821 on the remote island of St. Helena in the middle of the Atlantic, but in 1840 his body was brought back to France and he was buried with great pomp in Les Invalides. The King of Rome died in Vienna in 1832, but he was brought by Hitler, who was a great fan of Napoléon, from Vienna to Paris in 1940. His sarcophagus was initially placed next to his father, but he is now buried under the floor in a small alcove behind his father and underneath a statue of his father.

For a Napoleonic buff such as me, today was a marvellous experience, so the camera was working overtime. Everything in the domed chapel is on a huge scale. Napoleon's sarcophagus is massive, and is first viewed down in the crypt from up above. This was in order to make people bow their heads in his presence. You can go down to the crypt, where the King of Rome is also buried, but you cannot get close to Napoléon's sarcophagus. This is a very hallowed spot to the French.

There is another older church behind the dome chapel which was the one used by the soldiers. I sat in there for half an hour listening to a harp recital by a young girl; of course the acoustics were perfect for such a performance.

I then went on a tour of some of the displays. I particularly enjoyed the mounted cavalry displays from the C19th; the interactive military musical instrument displays, mainly brass and woodwind – I was very taken

by one instrument that was like a trombone with a serpent-like head; the scaled models of cannons and infantry vehicles which were exquisitely made and which you can appreciate more in reduced scale; and the thousands of ancient toy soldiers in wood, paper and metal, some of which are enormously rare and valuable. I had a field day getting lots of pictures of Napoléon's famous marshals, most of whom were made dukes and princes.

What a great place which I can thoroughly recommend. Again, of course, I only saw a fraction of exhibits. A well-stocked bookshop next attracted my attention, then I had a very healthy lunch package (chicken salad, fruit juice and an almond tart). I am finding that I can't get through a French sandwich these days – they are half a baguette and packed with ham and cheese etc.

I then headed off to the Rodin Museum, which is almost next door in the rue de Varenne. That was a major mistake! The closer I got to the corner of the rue de Varenne I realised something was happening. I have never seen so many black Mercedes in one place and black-suited men, some looking particularly officious and all with headphone walkie talkies. I thought that the President, the Prime Minister, or perhaps a visiting head of state must be nearby (the Prime Minister lives in the Hôtel Matignon in the rue de Varenne). The footpaths and the streets were packed, and so I thought it might be a political demonstration. However, to my horror I then saw a Mercedes emblazoned with "Paris Fashion Week". Oh my God. This is not a week for John to be in Paris. (I can just imagine Carol laughing as she reads this!) Suspecting potential foul play I then pushed my way through the crowd to the entrance gates of the Hôtel Biron, a fabulous mansion which houses the Rodin Museum. And what did I see? The entrance barred by security and all these anorexic floozies strutting like drunken ostriches in the way that models flounce, going in to the Hôtel Biron WHICH I INTENDED VISITING TODAY. How dare they! Consequently, I emitted a loud "naughty word". So when I was offered a free fashion week giveaway bag by a young girl, I thought, why not. Good shopping/carry bag. I then called it a day and headed back to my apartment. I know frock-making is a big thing in Paris, but it certainly doesn't interest me. I checked the Rodin Museum website when I got back, and there was a brief notice to say that the museum would close at 1pm today (not for refurbishment, which I could have handled, but for FASHION WEEK, not!). It pays to check.

In one of the Metro passageways on my way home there was an orchestra of about 12 men from what could have been Georgia or the Ukraine playing some very loud stirring music. The spontaneous music performances in Paris are marvellous.

Day 47 – Saturday 1st October: PARIS

Many of you might not think that a cemetery is a place to visit on an overseas trip, but the cemetery I visited today, and will have to revisit, is well worth a visit. Père Lachaise cemetery, in the inner eastern suburbs of Paris, was dedicated by Napoléon in 1804, and it now covers some 44 acres. A steep hill rises to the northern part of the cemetery which features a vast and perplexing complex of roads and alleys. The cemetery is, in fact, a big tourist drawcard, as many famous people, both French and international, are buried here: writer Oscar Wilde, singer Edith Piaf, mime Marcel Marceau, actress Sarah Bernhardt, and musician James Morrison just to mention a few. There are artists, composers, poets, politicians and soldiers galore.

Although the cemetery is bursting at the seams, burials still take place here, with a tendency to cremation, but there are few plots left. Many families in the C19th undertook the construction of family mausoleums which allowed for multiple burials over time. Built in a variety of architectural styles, these can be 1 x 2 metres, or enormous structures, depending on your wealth and status. Some are mini Gothic (pointed window head) or Romanesque (curved window head) chapels, some are Greek temples, some are like mini

castles. Sadly now, many are neglected and in disrepair, as the cemetery is now over 200 years old. You will see similar grandiose mausoleums in the older parts of Sydney's Rookwood cemetery.

Intensive tree planting in early days is now having considerable impact on the foundations of many tombs and several recent stumps indicate where lopping has been necessary. Many trees are massive, particularly oaks, which are currently shedding their sizeable acorns and splitting upon impact with the ground with a loud thud. One acorn just missed a young girl near me on one occasion, and she let out a scream that would have been heard all over the cemetery.

Families allied by marriage were sometimes buried together, and if the deceased had an important position, a title, or a coat of arms, these were always included on the tomb/mausoleum. Famous people invariably have a bust (head) on top of a tomb, so I soon learnt to inspect any with a bust spied from a distance.

In the northern part of the cemetery there are numerous memorials to the French victims of Nazi terror in the death camps of Dachau, Buchenwald, Oranienburg, Sachsenhausen, Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, Mauthausen etc. A particularly sad memorial is one to the passengers of an Air France flight from Rio which crashed into the Atlantic in 2009, killing all 288 on board. Although there were three pilots on board, the two most senior pilots were sleeping when the plane got into trouble.

I noticed two people photographing a grave off the beaten track and upon investigation found it to be of Marcel Marceau, the famous mime who entertained millions with his character Bip. Of Jewish ancestry, his father died in Auschwitz in 1944, while Marcel had been a Resistance fighter during the war. The tomb is unpretentious, like him as a person, and although the text is now difficult to read, the Star of David on the headstone reminds us of his Jewish ancestry.

I particularly enjoyed finding the tombs of, or memorials to, figures from the Napoleonic era, including several of his marshals whose portraits I had photographed on Wednesday at the Hôtel des Invalides, such as Suchet, Duke of Albufera.

Day 48 – Sunday 2nd October: PARIS

I thought that I should venture back to the Rodin Museum today as the day is pleasant and I can catch the Metro almost to the front gate. The museum is located in the Hôtel Biron, a fabulous 1720s mansion in the rue de Varenne which, ironically when it was built, was regarded as being in the country; now it is in the centre of Paris. Outbuildings have come and gone, but amazingly the mansion has retained its original garden which covers several acres. The building has had a chequered history and in the 1800s it was used as a girls school by an adjoining convent which also built a church on the corner of the rue de Varenne in the grounds, seriously impacting on the curtilage of the Hôtel Biron. This building now houses the gift shop and ticket office. The church was forced to sell a lot of its school buildings in the early 1900s by government legislation and the mansion was leased to a number of tenants – artists and writers – and in 1908 Rodin, by then a sculptor of international renown, came to live there. He soon indicated a wish to give his extensive personal collection of sculptures and valuable art collection to the nation, provided that the collection all be housed in one place, the Hôtel Biron. This offer was accepted and the building was acquired by the French government. Everyone else was evicted and Rodin continued to live there until his death in 1917. The Museum was opened in 1919.

There was a sign in the ticket office apologising to the public for the erection in the garden. Oh, oh. Fashion Week! Sure enough, upon investigation, there was a marquee of massive proportions on the lower lawn, with vast sections of the garden and several garden sculptures consequently inaccessible. It will take them

the best part of a week to dismantle the marquee and ship out all their paraphernalia. As further compensation, however, they did offer a free audioguide, but mine frequently didn't work and then the battery went flat.

There are numerous bronze sculptures in the garden, being a more durable substance, including many well-known ones: "The Thinker", "The Burghers of Calais", "The Gates of Hell" (huge and an awesome three dimensional piece). It was very frustrating trying to get a decent photograph at times as people would hog a prominent position and not move, or take bloody selfies or their horde of rels would take pictures in turn! Bloody tourists! I move in, take a photo, move away. One has to be considerate of others, but most TOURISTS are oblivious! There, had my whinge for the day.

The house is devoid of furniture and quite a few of its major decorative features were removed long ago during the convent school period, but the mansion still has the air of a very grand and stylish house. Interestingly, some of the decorative features sold have been traced, bought back, and re-installed. The rooms, lit by huge windows, show Rodin's artistic progression roughly from the 1860s (downstairs) until his death in 1917 (upstairs) and it is just amazing to consider his prodigious output, as some works would have consumed 100s of hours. Some work was collaborative, with apprentices, but essentially it is all his own work, and what a genius he was. A master of movement and facial expressions. Rodin worked in a variety of media: clay, plaster, marble, and bronze, and bronzing was often only done with successful works. Not all of his works were well-received, though; like many artists, Rodin was innovative and always pushing boundaries, and this wasn't always accepted by the artistic establishment. Late in life he did a sculpture of Honoré de Balzac, a great C19th French writer and a very untidy man who wore a variety of cloaks. Rodin did numerous studies of his head with dishevelled hair that are inside the museum which I think are brilliant. Alas, his final sculpture was rejected and the sculpture was sent into storage and only cast in bronze many years after his death. Interestingly, it is now regarded as one of his most brilliant works.

"The Burghers of Calais" is based on a true event in the Hundred Years War in the 1400s between England and France when Edward III of England laid siege to Calais for a year. Due to starvation, six leading citizens surrendered themselves with the keys to the city to save it from destruction but expecting their own execution. Edward III spared their lives for their heroism. It is truly an epic piece, which needs to be viewed from all four sides, unlike many sculptures.

"The Gates of Hell" is awe-inspiring. This work was commissioned for the entrance to a Decorative Arts Museum that was never built and Rodin continued to rework the design for some 37 years. There are many smaller castings for this complex work inside the museum. Unfortunately, the best photograph which I took which highlights the three-dimensional aspects of this work, also features some stupid bloody tourists who would not get out of the way!

My favourite piece of all was called The Wave, which shows several figures about to be engulfed by a massive wave, very reminiscent of Japanese wave painting. In onyx and bronze, it is a superb piece, and only relatively small, as many of his works were. Unfortunately the only photograph I took of this work does not adequately reveal its attraction.

I was especially surprised that Rodin also painted extensively, and I was impressed by a painting and a sculpture of his father, plus a group of six landscapes. Rodin also collected extensively, owning many Impressionist paintings by the likes of Renoir, Van Gogh and Monet, who were his contemporaries – probably acquired by a swap, or for a song; these are on exhibition in the museum, so they were a bonus treat. In addition Rodin was an obsessive collector of antiquities, some of which are on display. One room

is furnished as when he lived there in somewhat disorganised chaos when, in his later years, he had open house.

After a quick lunch at the garden cafe, I took a stroll around the neighbourhood, photographing the grand gates of the great mansions of the rue de Varenne and the rue de Grenelle (very posh areas). Many of these mansions are now government ministries or embassies or ambassadorial residences.

Day 49 – Monday 3rd October: PARIS

Today I ventured to the Musée de l'Orangerie which is located in the Tuileries Gardens just near the Place de la Concorde where the guillotine was set up during the French Revolution. In the style of a long Greek temple, the Orangerie was built in the early 1850s as storage for orange trees and delicate plants which needed nurturing through France's harsh winters.

The Orangerie is noted as the home of Monet's water lily series, 8 enormous panels which are exhibited on curved wall spaces in two rooms. I was lucky to get any reasonable photographs as the selfie crowd and their hordes of rels were there. People would stand right up close for ages, oblivious to the fact that people don't want them in their photographs. The poor guards were working overtime telling people not to get too close. I had to be careful of my mutterings, as Paris is full of Aussies, Poms and Yanks. Bloody tourists!

I was initially a bit disappointed in the Monets but the more I looked at the paintings the more I became entranced by Monet's subtle colours, although blue is the predominant colour in all paintings. Some of the paintings could not be fitted into one photograph because of the length and a room full of people. However, the panels need to be seen personally to be appreciated.

The Waterlilies cycle was a huge work which took Monet some twelve years to complete, shortly before his death in 1927, when the panels went to the Orangerie.

What I found quite interesting was a private collection of 125 paintings housed in the basement which had been donated to the French state by a glamorous widow, Domenica Guillaume-Walter, in memory of her two wealthy husbands, art collector Paul Guillaume and architect and businessman Jean Walter respectively. In the 1950s she was embroiled somehow in a murder attempt on her adopted son, and some say that the donation was a way of her getting off the hook. However, her first husband, Paul Guillaume, has always intended to donate his collection but gave Domenica discretionary power. Domenica allegedly had somewhat shady associations with the Nazis during the German occupation of Paris in WWII.

The works are representative of the Impressionists of the late 1800s and modernists of the early 1900s. There were numerous wonderful Renoirs, a beautiful river scene with boats by Monet (Aigremont), a very appealing landscape by Sisley (Le Chemin de Montbuisson à Louveciennes) and a passable Cezanne landscape (Paysage au toit rouge); I was, however, a bit disappointed by the Cezanne and Matisse paintings in the collection.

I did discover in the collection two artists unknown to me whose works I really enjoyed: André Derain and the Russian Chaïm Soutine. Paul Guillaume was an art dealer who was the broker for many of Derain's works in the 1920s and 1930s when he was at the height of his fame, thus he had the pick of Derain's works. Derain's subject matter was very versatile and his works were very clear and colourful. I'll have to see if I can pick up one of his works at the flea markets. LOL. As for the poor Chaïm Soutine, his paintings well represent his twisted soul and brain, but I loved his colour and the vibrancy of his work.

There were also great works by Utrillo (another tortured soul), Modigliani and Rousseau, and surprisingly a number of paintings by Picasso from the early 1900s and the 1920s. In the 1920s Picasso reverted to his realism period when his paintings looked like paintings. I saw several from this period in the Sydney Picasso exhibition and was really stunned. The ones here were also great.

The Guillaume-Walter collection is probably worth circa \$US2 billion, and is typical of the incredible philanthropy of artistic collections that have long been a tradition in France.

I enjoyed my visit to the Orangerie, and one thing for which I will give a big tick is the lighting throughout. More than adequate but not intrusive and allowing great non-flash photography.

After a healthy Caesar salad lunch, I then walked over the river to the Left Bank to the Assemblée Nationale (Parliament) which looks over a bridge to the Place de la Concorde, and then down to the Musée de la Légion d'Honneur which I thought was open, but it is shut on Mondays and Tuesdays! And I thought that I had checked.

Day 50 – Tuesday 4th October: PARIS

Before I begin today's posting I would like to mention one photograph which I forgot to post yesterday and will post first today. On my way back to my apartment, I encountered the Georgian/Ukrainian orchestra again, and stopped to listen to them for a while. They are just so good, strong deep voices in incredible harmony.

Today, I caught the subway to Bir-Hakeim Metro, just near the Australian Embassy, where I was to have morning tea with the Australian Ambassador to France, Stephen Brady, a very pleasant, interesting and knowledgeable man. We had quite a lengthy chat before he had to leave for his next appointment with the French Prime Minister, Manuel Valls, at the Hôtel de Matignon, the Prime Minister's official residence in the rue de Varenne, down the street from the Rodin Museum. Stephen says he is always gobsmacked when he visits official offices which are all located in grand mansions with grand furniture.

I had sent Stephen a copy of a booklet that I had prepared for one of my lecture topics for ADFAS about Australia's first royal visitor: "The Visit of the Prince de Condé to Australia in 1866". This wealthy 20yo French Prince was on a private world tour for health reasons, and once he arrived in Sydney his royal status attracted a lot of attention and he became a favourite of the media and society. He was in Sydney for about six weeks before he fell ill and died. A well-liked young man, everyone who had met him was devastated that he died so young and so far from his family in England. Sydney determined to give him a grand funeral, probably the grandest held in the town to date. His body was embalmed and sent back to England where his family was living in exile. Several years later, with a new regime in France, his body and that of several other family members were repatriated to France in 1875. His devastated parents, the Duke and Duchess of Aumale, ultimately lost all of their seven children; consequently, the Duke left his château of Chantilly and his huge art collection to the nation.

Stephen is fascinated by the story and tells everyone about it, although nobody in France seems to be aware of it. Stephen has even been to visit the prince's tomb at Dreux, near Chartres. He indicated that he would tell the Prime Minister about the story. I left him a copy of my booklet, as I had previously only sent him a digital copy on a thumb drive.

We had photos taken on the terrace, and Stephen said he would put his photo on the Australian Embassy Facebook page.

Before and after my interview I inspected an exhibition on the life and architectural career of Harry Seidler, who designed the Australian Embassy in Paris in the 1970s. The building has a residential section and a working section. The Ambassador's residence is on the top floor of the latter, and is huge, with stunning views. On display in the exhibition is a scale model of the Rose Seidler House which Harry Seidler designed in Australia for his parents, and is a favourite of my daughter-in-law, Kirsten.

There was also a display model of a large extension to the Sir John Monash Australian war memorial at Villers-Bretonneux in the Somme, NE of Paris, which has, regrettably, significant associations with Australia in WWI.

Then it was off to the Eiffel Tower which is virtually next door. A beautiful sunny day and I went right up to the top by lift and then down to the second level. Spectacular views of an amazing city from a magnificent structure, including a few good shots of the serpentine Australian Embassy, and a great shot of the Arc de Triomphe which was actually quite some distance away. The photos taken from the Eiffel Tower also reveal the sensible planning approach in Paris, with many buildings 6 to 7 stories high maximum, and skyscraper development limited to newer areas outside the C19th city.

Completed in 1889 for a world exhibition, hysteria ensued about the Eiffel Tower, this hideous structure which would surely fall down. Royalty and celebrities flocked to ascend it and instead of dismantling it, as was the original intention, it is still there today. It is the iconic symbol of Paris, recognisable all over the world.

Day 51 – Wednesday 5th October: PARIS

Continuing on my museum spree, I visited two museums today. Firstly I went to the Musée d'Orsay on the Left Bank of the Seine, formerly a railway station which retains its late C19th exterior wedding cake decorations with a modern interior. For some 20 years it has been a museum of nineteenth century art, so it was the perfect place for "Spectaculaire. Second Empire. 1852-1870". The Second Empire was the reign of Napoléon III and his consort, the Empress Eugénie, which had previously been dismissed as trashy and lacking substance, sort of like the Kardashians. There is, however, no real comparison to THOSE DREADFUL PEOPLE! The purpose of the exhibition is to show that, although it was a flamboyant period, it was also a period of great talent and advances in France in the cultural, social political, scientific and engineering fields.

Few people would realise the role that the Spanish-born Empress Eugénie had in building the Suez Canal. The whole concept was French-based and financed, and the engineer, Ferdinand de Lesseps, whom she strongly supported, was her mother's first cousin. Consequently, the honour of opening the Suez Canal in 1869 went to Eugénie. It was one of the most glorious times of her life when she was again at the centre of world attention. Her life turned to great tragedy within ten years with the crash of the Second Empire in 1870, the death of Napoléon III in 1873, and the tragic death of her only son, Louis, at the hands of Zulus in South Africa in 1879. Unfortunately, like Marie Antoinette, she was identified in France as 'that foreign woman' and made responsible for all of France's failures. Cherchez la femme!

Unfortunately, no photographs were allowed in the exhibition which had some famous paintings of the era and some stunning photographs, sculptures, furniture and jewellery.

After seeing through the exhibition which I greatly enjoyed, I looked at the rest of the museum. I did enjoy the huge wooden section of the Paris Opera House which was the architectural marvel of the Second

Empire. I could not get a clear full frontal of the Opera House, as the usual INCONSIDERATE DICKHEADS were out in force again today.

Essentially I found little to appeal to me on the ground floor, but the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists upstairs were something else. Some very recognisable pieces and some that I wouldn't have attributed remotely to the painter, including "La buveuse d'absinthe (The absinthe drinker)". It is in fact an early Picasso painting (1901) and I could have easily thought that it was a Toulouse-Lautrec, who painted similar down and outs. I also enjoyed the collection of Van Goghs, including his self-portrait painted late in life and which I last saw in Paris 41 years ago. I was moved then by the anger expressed in that painting and still am. I also enjoyed seeing a few pointilists on display.

I loved the enormous (circa 7 metres wide) over-the-top former station clock which is still in situ. Also interesting is the small-scale model of the Statue of Liberty in New York. The Statue of Liberty, an amazing piece of French engineering, was a gift from France to the American people to seal the bond between France and America.

I then went over the road to another Museum: the Musée de la Légion d'Honneur. The Légion d'Honneur is France's highest award/honour and goes back to 1804, when Napoléon started his First Empire. The HQ is located in a magnificent C18th mansion, the Hôtel de Salm-Kyrburg, and it presents samples of how the honour has evolved over the years and also looks at various other honours presented by major world countries, all beautifully presented. Some of these orders go back to medieval times, like the Garter and the Bath in England, the Golden Fleece in the 1400s etc. Some of these displays didn't photograph well under glass and with reflective lighting, so suitable photographs weren't possible.

However, immediately upon entering the museum, I noticed an interesting painting depicting the award of a Légion d'Honneur to an American, Mme Brown. I realised that this was the famous "Unsinkable Molly Brown" of musical and film fame. Her name was Margaret Brown, and she was called Maggie, not Molly, but that's Hollywood for you. She survived the sinking of the Titanic in 1912, and undertook huge work in France to assist the war effort in WWI, for which she was given the award in 1930. She died in 1932. Google her, as she was quite a character.

Tonight I was feeling very tired and also noticed that after losing so much weight my stomach was in fact bloated and hard as rock, which I found perplexing.

Day 52 – Thursday 6th October: PARIS

I woke this morning drenched in sweat, something which alarmed me as the evening and the morning were not particularly hot. I was acutely aware that night sweating was one of the symptoms of lymphoma and which I had experienced on both occasions with my lymphoma. When I googled symptoms of non-Hodgkin lymphoma I was shocked to notice that I had every symptom, except one – swollen glands. I had experienced sudden weight loss, extreme fatigue, loss of appetite, bowel changes ... A feeling of terror overwhelmed me that my lymphoma had returned, but I had to go to my appointment at the Musée Nissim de Camondo; although I did not feel like going out I headed off, more to distract myself from what I had self-diagnosed.

The Musée Nissim de Camondo is located at 63 rue de Monceau in the exclusive 8th district of Paris. Anyone who was anyone in the C19th built a mansion here bordering the Parc Monceau. It remains a wealthy and leafy area, but is mostly populated with large and lofty apartments today.

Two banking brothers of Jewish origin from Turkey came to Paris in the 1860s to extend their banking and business interests at which they had been spectacularly successful. Abraham and Nissim de Camondo were made counts by the new King of Italy for discreetly lending him money to unite the Italian peninsula which, before 1870, had been a polyglot of states. Abraham's enormous mansion is at 61 rue de Monceau and is now occupied by corporate offices. Nissim's mansion was demolished in the early 1900s to enable his son, Moïse (Moses) de Camondo, to construct a recreation of an ornate C18th villa, with the Petit Trianon at Versailles as his model. This would allow him to appropriately display his extensive and exquisite collection of C18th furniture and decorative pieces. The C18th was a period with which he was obsessed and he became very knowledgeable about it and was one of the great collectors of C18th decorative art. However, the house was laid out so as to accommodate C20th living, with all the most up-to-date conveniences: electricity, phones, lifts, garages, and a total separation of service, reception and family areas. Some rooms were designed to specifically fit panelling from demolished houses. All the joinery, floors finishes and iron work are of high quality.

The house and its contents were presented to the French nation in 1935, as a result of tragic events which I have touched on before. Moïse married wealthy heiress Irène Cahen d'Anvers, had two children by her and they ultimately divorced after she ran off with another man whom she later married, and divorced! As a young girl Irène was the subject of a portrait by Renoir which is the focus of my interest. Irène was never associated with the house, however, as it was built after the divorce.

No sooner was the mansion finished in 1913 than WWI broke out the next year. Son Nissim, a dashing lieutenant, was ultimately killed in a plane crash in eastern France in 1917. Moïse intended to leave his house, collection and his bank to Nissim, but all that had changed. Greatly mourning his beloved son, he sold the family bank, retired from public life and concentrated on refining his collection which he decided to give to the French state after his death, after making adequate provision for his daughter Béatrice.

Béatrice was not at all interested in the collection, being obsessed solely by horse riding. She married into another wealthy and prominent Jewish family, the Reinachs. As mentioned previously, WWII saw the demise of Beatrice, her husband Léon, and children Fanny and Bertrand in Auschwitz.

This beautiful house, exquisitely designed with many nooks and crannies, grand rooms, vistas and hidden doors looks like a three-storeyed house from the street. However, on the eastern service side, where the rooms are small and with low ceilings there are in fact seven levels with the attics. Inside it is much bigger than you think. Each room is crammed with many fantastic pieces by master craftsmen and today would be prohibitively valuable. There are so many reception rooms that you begin to feel very confused after a while. The porcelain room, also used as a small dining room, featured a stunning dinner service.

You can visit the kitchen in the basement which has two humungous stoves. Fabulous. Very Downton Abbey.

In the afternoon I went up to the attic to meet the archivist, Sophie Le Tarnec, a lovely lady, who was very helpful and a good contact for me to make. I gave her a copy of my research which she will edit, and I will meet up with her before I return to Australia and have a further look through the archives. Another fabulous experience.

By the time I got back to my studio I was absolutely exhausted, although it had not been a particularly tiring day. I fell asleep on the sofa for several hours.

Day 53 – Friday 7th October: PARIS

I was so fatigued today that I did not leave the studio. Fortunately I had enough supplies, not that I had an appetite. I slept for a lot of the day, obviously needing rest and recuperation, for which I'm long overdue. Otherwise washing, ironing and reading.

I emailed my landlord to enquire if he could recommend a local doctor. He didn't know of one and suggested that I ask a pharmacist in the rue Montorgeuil.

Day 54 – Saturday 8th October: PARIS

Although I was somewhat depressed at the state of my health, I decided that I had to get out. I asked a pharmacist about a doctor and explained my concerns about a suspected return of lymphoma. She pointed out a nearby medical centre which was now closed but which would be open early on Monday morning.

Today's excursion was to the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire du Judaïsme in the historic Marais district, not far away from my studio. Concentrating on Jewish history, art craft and religious practices, primarily in France but also in Europe in general, it is frightening to consider how persecuted the Jews have been over the centuries, here as in Prague and Vienna and elsewhere throughout Europe. Dispersed from their homeland, they were forced to wander (the diaspora) until they found a haven where their talents were welcomed; the process of migration would begin again if a new ruler was anti-Jewish or renewed religious bigotry occurred. The Jews have been regularly expelled from England, France, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Eastern Europe. Ironically a few hundred years ago they found a haven in the Islamic Ottoman Empire (modern day Turkey). Pogroms, or wars of genocide, were common in Russia for centuries.

In the early 1800s Napoléon welcomed the Jews to France, a policy which had been set in motion some ten years prior to his rise to power. He realised that Jewish business and banking acumen would re-establish a France which had been debilitated by extended wars. Consequently, a sizeable and prominent Jewish community was established in France by the mid 1850s. This community also became involved in the political, cultural and social life of the country. The wealthier Jews tended to be Ashkenazy Jews, from western Europe, while many of the poorer Jews were Sephardis from the Mediterranean. The more recent influx of Jewish migration to France in the late 1800s and early 1900s were from Russia and Poland.

The museum, located in a historic mansion, the Hôtel de Saint Aignan, which was built in the mid 1600s, is centred around a large courtyard. This quarter of Paris was an intensely Jewish sector prior to WWII when it hadn't yet been rediscovered and was very run-down (like Sydney's Paddington). When the mansion was acquired by the City of Paris in 1962, it was still occupied by Jewish refugees from eastern Europe and was a rabbit warren of workshops and residences. The bizarre structure which I encountered in the courtyard was one of the elements of the pre-1962 period which has been retained as a symbolic reminder..

I was surprised that only one small room on the ground floor was devoted to the C19th → pre-1962 era of the quarter. It featured only a few photographs and enlarged copies on linen of the deportation notices to death camps of several inhabitants during WWII when the local Jewish population was totally decimated. This was a shameful period and I thought that more should have been devoted to it.

The rest of the museum rambled over the two upper floors in roughly chronological order from medieval times. A return to Jerusalem and the homeland during the diaspora was a very strong element in art, depicted by the three-dimensional maps of Jerusalem in a glass case, and in writings.

Because of the expulsions in the 1300s France has few old remnants of Jewish civilization. Some fragments of tombstones were found in what was evidently a Jewish cemetery in Paris and these are on display. There were lots of Torah scrolls and some fascinating Torah cases and a huge amount, probably far too many, of Hannukah candle holders. Highly ornamental silver is frequently used in Jewish rituals. I did enjoy the numerous models of synagogues, but they were all from Eastern or Northern Europe. There was a lovely painting of Rachel Felix, a noted C19th actress who was Jewish. She had children by Count Walewski, an illegitimate son of Napoléon I, whose grave I have visited in Père Lachaise cemetery.

I was also surprised that there was no mention of the huge contribution made to the banking industry by prominent Jewish families, such as the Rothschilds, and little was made of the Dreyfus affair in the later 1800s when France was divided by the alleged guilt of a Jewish soldier accused of spying for Germany. The poor man was a scapegoat and was eventually found not guilty.

I really found today exhausting, having to frequently sit down during my tour of the museum. I collapsed on the sofa when I returned to the studio.

Day 55 – Sunday 9th October: PARIS

A tour of the neighbourhood was on today's agenda, part of my plan to get me out of the studio and stop getting depressed about my condition. I am always in a hurry to get to a Metro station that I haven't actually spent much time locally. I am well-served by two Metro stations which easily connect to others, so that is handy.

On 4th December 1851, on a nearby corner barely ten metres away from my building, a Monsieur Dussoubs was shot while he was rebelling at Napoléon III's grab for power. The large house shown on the corner was where he was shot. My building, No. 27, is very narrow and only two windows wide, but with 14 apartments over various levels.

To my brother-in-law Paul: this is also a red light district with quite a few sex shops, lap/pole dancing bars and strip clubs. But like Munich, they were closed today (Sunday) while all the workers were in church! And the district is awash with exotic hookers, of every nationality.

Not far from my studio I found a small primary school in the Rue Saint-Denis which has a sad tale. It featured a memorial plaque to 140 Jewish children from the neighbourhood who were sent to death camps during WWII. There are also signs all over Paris indicating where someone was shot by the Germans during the occupation.

I walked on up to the Porte Saint-Denis, a massive sandstone gateway built in the 1600s by Louis XIV to celebrate his own military glories. The old city fortifications, which dated back to medieval times, have now gone, but a few monumental gateways remain. Porte Saint-Denis and the Porte Saint-Martin, barely 500 metres away, were primarily used as a means of collecting tolls as people entered the city.

I then walked north-east up to the Place de la République, which features a symbolic statue of the virtues of a Republic (in France, always represented as a female), then headed south, back towards the river, to see the Centre Pompidou. This very avant-garde (back then) modernistic cultural facility was opened in 1977 and was named after the French President Georges Pompidou, de Gaulle's successor, who had commissioned it. It is all glass and exposed pipes on the outside. An interesting building but it looked a tad tired. Modern art is not my thing, and there were extensive queues (my pet hate), so I didn't linger.

The rue Montorgueil, off which my street – the rue Saint-Sauveur – runs, is lively at any time of the day. People are still enjoying the beautiful balmy weather we are having, but I'm sure the French would sit outside and eat and drink in sub-zero temperatures, and at any time of the day. I had a gelato from a firm that has been in business for 250 years: a bakery/pastry shop whose photograph I have posted.

I actually walked a fair distance today, much to my amazement, but was fatigued by the time I got back to the studio. The 87 steps were a struggle, requiring a stop on each landing.

Day 56 – Monday 10th October: PARIS

I took myself off to the medical centre in rue Réaumur at 8.30am and managed to obtain an appointment with a doctor at 9.45am. Cost was 23 Euros or about \$35 and paid in advance, much the same for a doctor's visit in Australia. I saw Dr Tran, a nice Vietnamese woman doctor, who spoke a bit of English, but we spoke mainly in French. I read a list of all my symptoms and told her of my history and she was rather concerned, so she ordered a blood test and an echograph. Unfortunately, I had eaten breakfast that morning, although minimal, and would have to wait until Tuesday morning for the tests, as they both require fasting. Fortunately there are pathology and radiology services in the same practice, so it was a one-stop shop, and all virtually on my doorstep.

I then went home and contacted Carol and confessed my predicament to her. She was understandably a bit shell-shocked and eventually told Andrew and Matthew. I spent a lot of the day on Facebook, messaging Carol and Andrew. As much as I am not a Facebook fan, it has been a bit of a lifesaver with failing and blocked emails, enabling me to keep in touch with family and friends.

Day 57 – Tuesday 11th October: PARIS

Off to the medical centre again at 8.30am for my tests. I thought that I should get the blood test done first, as there would probably be a bit of demand for that during the day. It took a while, but I was finished by 9.45am and then went to have the echograph. I had had these done at Orange a few times during Round 2 of my lymphoma. The technician commented that he could find nothing abnormal, confirmed by the printed report, which was pleasing, and lifted considerable weight off my shoulders. Unfortunately, I will have to wait until 5pm Wednesday before I can pick up my blood test results.

I came home to message Carol and Andrew the encouraging news and then headed out for a short tour. I caught the Metro to Place de la Concorde, that huge paved area between the Tuileries gardens and the Champs Elysées, Paris' main drag. It is a quagmire of fencing and a deconstruction zone as a massive marquee was being dismantled. I don't know what event took place there, but corporate events are posh affairs in Europe. Unfortunately, marquees and restoration zones will often ruin a good photo.

It was a bright sunny day and a bit hazy, so photographs of the Place de la Concorde were not ideal that afternoon anyway. In the middle of the Place de la Concorde, formerly the Place Royale until the Revolution of 1789, is a 3,000 year old Egyptian obelisk, the Obélisque de Luxor, gifted to France by the Khedive of Egypt. It was erected in the Place de la Concorde in 1836 by King Louis Philippe. The Place de la Concorde is notorious for other reasons, as public guillotining occurred her, including those of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette. The women of Paris used to bring their knitting and reputedly dropped a stitch whenever a head fell.

Facing the Place de la Concorde and the Seine River are two symmetrical buildings dating from the 1700s. The one on the right is a government ministry, while the one on the left was a series of private mansions,

including the Hôtel de Crillon, initially a private aristocratic mansion, then Paris' most exclusive hotel; the Crillon is currently undergoing a major renovation, hence the considerable canvas-clad intrusion into the Place de la Concorde. Gough Whitlam loved staying here!

I then walked up rue Royale which divides the two buildings, passing one of Paris' most famous restaurants, Maxim de Paris. This is the quarter of luxury shops – jewellery, watches, fashion, perfume – and famous brands could be seen in abundance. Due to construction work, it was like orienteering to cross the road to get to the church of La Madeleine, built in the style of a Greek temple. Quite a stunning but dark interior, but ineffective lighting discouraged photography. The exterior is undergoing restoration work, so exterior photographs were compromised. These bloody old buildings!

I then headed to the Place Vendôme, one of the most superb planned urban multiple dwellings from the early 1700s. A vast space in the centre is divided on a north-south axis by two symmetrical five-sided buildings which contain a number of private mansions, long converted to apartments with exclusive shops and artisan workshops on the lower floors. The Paris Ritz is located in the Place Vendôme. One of its most famous residents was Coco Chanel, the couturière. Now she was an interesting “lady”, and actually was not a very nice person, fraternising with the Nazis during the German occupation in WWII. She had some very unsavoury lovers, including the nasty 2nd Duke of Westminster.

The Ritz is notorious for being owned by Mohammed al-Fayed and was where Princess Diana and her son Dodi were staying on that fateful night when they left the hotel, both to be killed only moments later. The hotel has only recently re-opened after a four year refit.

Chopin lived in an apartment in Number 12, Place Vendôme, where he died in 1849, and his funeral was held at the nearby church of La Madeleine.

Jewellery is big time in the Place Vendôme, with two of Paris' oldest jewellery firms being located here: Boucheron and Chaumet. I was told off by a Chaumet employee for venturing down into a courtyard and taking a photo of the grand entrance. Mean-looking Middle Eastern security men understandably outnumber tourists here in this neighbourhood. No prices on items in the window. If you need to ask, you can't afford it!

In the centre of the Place Vendôme is a tall column erected by Napoléon in 1810 in honour of the Battle of Austerlitz and featuring a statue of Napoléon. Over the years, various statues on top were removed and replaced according to regime changes. During a revolt in 1871 the column was dismantled, but was soon after rebuilt.

Again a lot of restoration/construction work here which impairs photos. There would be big business in Europe in general in scaffolding hire.

On my way back to Concorde Metro station I passed by a window for fashion company Fendi. I couldn't resist a photo of the outrageous apparel on the model. Not sure whether it's a coat or a dressing gown.

Day 58 – Wednesday 12th October: PARIS

Today was a do-nothing-much day, as I was becoming more and more stressed about the blood results. Unfortunately, I had to wait until 5pm to pick them up from the medical centre. During the day I chatted on Messenger on Facebook a lot to Carol and Andrew. Paul, Carol's brother, had turned up in Mudjee in the afternoon (not really sure what day now because of the now 9 hour time difference). I decided that I

was going to make a nice home-cooked meal for a change, instead of having a microwave dinner – I should have stuck with the microwave dinner! I bought some tins of tuna in tomatoes, added some onions and grated cheese, a pre-packaged béchamel sauce, and added lemon juice. Unfortunately, I frizzled the top and although the mixture was nice it was a bit overpowering. My gourmet tuna pie didn't agree with me during the night. Not sure whether to risk the leftovers.

When I picked up the results I made an appointment with Dr Tran to discuss all the results – unfortunately not until Friday morning, at 9.30am. I went back to the studio, photographed the results to send them to Carol. There were a few boldface items, either above or below the desired range, but then I realised that page 2 was on the back of page 1. Whoa! **Boldface** everywhere. My heart sank. I sent the bloods to Carol, but by this time it was 2.30am in Australia. After I did some translations, we both ultimately concluded that the results may not be as bad as they appear.

Day 59 – Thursday 13th October: PARIS

Overnight Carol had been in touch with my haematologist/oncologist, Doug Lenton, who had a similar view to us. He thought it OK for me to stay in Europe, but to do things on a reduced scale. I may well be suffering from simple burnout, as I was fairly gung-ho for several weeks. I will see what the doctor suggests tomorrow and also request a script for Maxalon, as I have been feeling slightly queezy for the past week or so, even though I am eating minimally. I chatted briefly to Carol on Messenger, and then decided to go out for a short excursion. Not feeling overly-energetic though.

Paris is a city full of museums of all different sorts, although the vast majority are art-based. Many were funded by the generous donation of private benefactors who had been passionate collectors during their lives. The Musée Nissim de Camondo, probably my favourite, is one of these, but there are quite a few of this calibre where both the collection and the house in which it was showcased were donated. The Musée Jacquemart-André is a definite must-see, because it has not only a fabulous collection but magnificent furniture too, principally C18th.

Edouard André (1833-1894) was born into a wealthy Protestant banking family and from his youth started to accumulate an art collection. A close supporter of Napoléon III, he was involved with the Rothschilds in paying France's reparations enforced by Prussia after the disastrous Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. If Germany thought it was badly done by with war reparations 50 years later at the end of WWI, it was all due to the greed of that treacherous and deceitful Prussian Prime Minister, Bismarck, who set the scene for WWI with his ferocious demand for reparations from France in the Franco-Prussian War after skilfully making France appear to be the aggressor. Bismarck was one of the most dishonest and duplicitous characters in European history. Interestingly, his family is in meltdown currently, as the heir, whom his father wishes to disinherit, is a drunkard who has assaulted his mother, and another dissolute son committed suicide. Nice family!

As a single man Edouard André built the enormous mansion on the exclusive Boulevard Haussman which he completed in 1875. He did not meet his future wife, Nellie Jacquemart (1841-1912), an accomplished artist, until 1872, when she painted his portrait; they did not marry until 1881. Their mutual love of the arts led to the collection seen there today, augmented by Nellie's acquisitions of oriental pieces after his death in 1894. As the couple had no children, they determined that the collection would go to the nation after their deaths. The site and its contents are worth billions in today's terms.

The house has an extensive frontage to the Boulevard Haussmann, but the main level of the house is one level up, reached by a return carriage loop to a courtyard behind the house. The street level housed vast

service areas. There are numerous reception rooms of varying sizes where Edouard and Nellie could entertain guests, and they entertained lavishly. The wintergarden, along the western end of the house, has a magnificent double spiral stair, and is next to the lofty music room which has a gallery running around it and which features a bust of Edouard by Nellie. Edouard and Nellie's apartments are still furnished the way it was when they lived here over 100 years ago, reminding us that it was a private house showcasing their collection.

Edouard and Nellie were passionate about Italian art, especially Venetian art and a few rooms upstairs are devoted to this passion. Otherwise their paintings are mainly by well-known French and English artists.

Nellie was a keen interior decorator, and the house is essentially as she arranged it with C18th pieces, with adaptations for museum and conservation purposes. She seems to have had a liking for mechanical desks by prominent cabinetmakers that had hidden springs, secret compartments, extensions and fold-out sections.

Many of the rooms featured photographs of what the rooms looked like during their occupation. Symmetry, of chairs, vases, statues etc, was a very important element of French interior decoration.

In addition, in a suite of exhibitions rooms on the first floor of the east wing, there was an extensive Rembrandt exhibition. It was unfortunately very crowded and in a series of small spaces and although I went through the exhibition I didn't linger, as you really couldn't appreciate the paintings in such confined and crowded spaces.

Day 60 – Friday 14th October: PARIS

Off to my appointment at 9.30am with Doctor Tran. There were lots of patients waiting to see various doctors and one man who impatiently paced up and down for about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour nearly drove me mad. Doctor Tran could not make any definite conclusions from my blood tests and scan, but she was keen to do something about my abdominal discomfort, fatigue and energy levels. I mentioned that quite a few believe that I am suffering from 'burnout'. She has prescribed MeteoXane tablets (2 x 3 times per day) for my stomach; Melaxose (a nice-flavoured paste in the morning upon waking) to help with bowel obstruction; and Renueryl (after meals, a small bottle each day), a food complement and energy booster for seniors, in a variety of flavours. I have started on all of these medications today, and they weren't overly expensive. I have enough to last me until I return to Australia, except for the Renueryl (which is heavy and not for my luggage). I also bought a cheap set of digital scales which I will leave in the studio. I am keen to see what I weigh. I might get a shock one way or the other.

I felt fairly tired today and snoozed several times. I went out to get the one unfilled script (Renueryl which had to be ordered in) and did some shopping. I am keen to keep fluids up and have orange juice, cranberry juice, lemon cordial, cold water and milk. Not drinking much wine. I had a very pleasant lemon tea last night before bed, so that might become customary. Very much into lemon flavoured things at the moment.

I must say that the Medical Centre staff have been excellent: doctor, receptionist, cashier and technicians have all been lovely to me. The cashier greeted me by name this morning. Lol. I am so lucky that this one-stop-shop is so close.

Day 61 – Saturday 15th October: PARIS

I woke up feeling OK but very tired, as I had woken a few times during the night; at least no sweats. I thought I would venture out again this morning for a few hours, so I decided to head to the historic Marais district adjoining my district, this time by Metro, as I want to avoid excessive walking.

Anywhere in Paris is so quickly accessible by the Metro, with only one line change for today's trip to the Marais, and in particular to the Place des Vosges, that magnificent piece of early 1600s town planning – a whole square balanced by (seemingly) symmetrical buildings. As I had found out from my previous visit a few weeks ago, and even more by today's visit, the symmetry is deceptive. The reasons for this are due to the fact that all the buildings were not built in one fell swoop, and over the years various changes, albeit minimal, have been made to the facades. Despite the varying years of construction, there were still rules to be observed about the uniform facades and heights and materials used. The buildings nevertheless have considerable cohesiveness and the differences are not generally noticed by the average passer-by. Only fussy architectural aficionados like myself notice these subtleties. The greatest changes, however, have occurred internally, but unfortunately the interiors of most buildings are not accessible to the public. Each building has a large carriage entrance leading to a rear courtyard, so each building is more substantial than you would think, and over several levels. Many parts of various buildings have also had mezzanines installed, particularly on the first floor which has very high ceilings. The ground floor entrance doors feature a variety of designs and in varying states of repair.

Alighting from the Metro at Bastille station I was intrigued to notice that the station is actually on a bridge with a very panoramic view of a canal leading off the Seine. Nearby is the Place de la Bastille where the much hated Bastille prison, a medieval castle, was stormed at the start of the French Revolution. Long disappeared, its site now features a monumental column, the July Column, commemorating the events in July 1830 which led to the overthrow of yet another hated French king, the autocratic Charles X, younger brother of Louis XVI and Louis XVIII. Charles X had learnt absolutely nothing from the revolutionary and Napoleonic eras and deserved to be deposed. His branch of the Bourbons is now extinct in the male line. A junior branch of the Spanish Bourbons now lays claim to the throne of France in the person of a great-grandson of Spanish Fascist dictator, General Franco.

I then walked down the Rue Saint-Anthoine and was pleased to discover a church which I would otherwise have sought out: the Temple du Marais. It started life as a Catholic church, was deconsecrated during the Revolution, and then became a Protestant church, which it remains today. It is the burial place of Nicolas Fouquet, the builder of the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte. During WWII the great organ of the church was used as a hiding place for Jews in the neighbourhood.

I then entered the Place des Vosges, originally called the Place Royale, on the southern end of the square via the Queen's Pavilion. I thought that some dreadful alterations had been made to the facade of the Queen's Pavilion before you enter the Place des Vosges. Taller than the rest of the buildings in the square, it is matched by a similar building on the opposite (northern end) of the square, the King's Pavilion; the latter is one of the oldest buildings in the complex. I was intrigued to notice a section of the arcade vaulting near the Queen's Pavilion had lost a slab of masonry, revealing the original 400 year-old lath-and-plaster above.

Different patinas, textures and colours in the brickwork and stonework reveal different construction dates, and there is a considerable range in the ironwork on the railings of the French doors and windows, again suggesting different construction dates. Except for the two central north and south pavilions, which are five bays wide, the standard building was four bays wide; some buildings, however, are six or eight bays

wide. Essentially the odd numbers are on the left or western side of a north-south axis, while the even numbers are on the right or eastern side.

A few buildings retain the original small multi-paned glazed panels in the French doors and windows. The third floor level features four dormer windows, invariable two large ornate stone-dressed windows in the centre flanked by a smaller stone-dressed dormer on either side. While the two central dormers are almost universal around the square, there is a great variety of the smaller dormers. A fourth level featuring small rudimentary dormers would have been used for housing servants. A lot of windows retain panelled shutters on the interior; none of the buildings have exterior shutters.

The ground floors of all buildings generally have a commercial use today, although a school and a synagogue occupy a few buildings. The King's Pavilion is now a hotel in parts. One building, occupied in the C19th by famous French writer and poet, Victor Hugo, is now a museum in his honour.

I was pleased to find that an artist who paints miniatures on enamel was there again today and I bought several more of his works. Then I visited the bookshop in the Hôtel de Sully which adjoins the NW corner of the Place des Vosges. This building, a fabulous C16th mansion, is the headquarters of the French museums organization. A fabulous array of books and a fabulous building. A window at the rear which has gone awry attracted my attention.

Although still a work in progress, I am working on a history of the Place des Vosges and its architecture. Some interesting people have lived here over the years, including the exotic dancer, Isadora Duncan, and her lover, Paris Singer, one of the heirs to the Singer sewing machine fortune. Poor Isadora was beset by tragedy in her life. Her father, step-mother and half-sister drowned in 1898 when their ship, *SS Mobergan*, hits rocks and capsized off the coast of Cornwall. She had two illegitimate children, Deidre, and Patrick, the latter by Paris Singer; both children drowned in 1913 when their chauffeur-driven car rolled into the Seine. Isadora herself had a tragic end in 1927, when she was strangled by her scarf which became entangled in the wheel of an open tourer in which she was a passenger.

Day 62 – Sunday 16th October: PARIS

A few family birthdays today: daughter-in-law Kirsten, brother-in-law Paul, and sister Anne. I think I managed to send greetings to all of them for the day.

Today was a bit of a downer. I just felt so tired all day, that I didn't even venture out of the studio. A bit of diarrhoea didn't encourage me either. When I felt up to it I coordinated my database on the Places des Vosges.

Day 63 – Monday 17th October: PARIS

Although not feeling brilliant this morning I decided that I needed to get out and tick some items on my 'to do' list. After doing a load of washing, I headed out.

Today's excursion was to the Arc de Triomphe district in the exclusive 8th Arrondissement. Property values here would make Sydney's Point Piper prices seem like slum tenements. In a fairly elevated position on the Place de Gaulle-Etoile, twelve broad avenues lead out of the huge circular space surrounding the Arc de Triomphe. The best-known and most significant of the twelve avenues is the Avenue des Champs-Élysées which leads down to the Place de la Concorde. The perspective down the Champs-Élysées, through the Place de Concorde, the Tuileries Gardens and on to the Louvre is quite spectacular. The Champs Élysées

has been narrowed since I was in Paris 41 years ago and the already-wide footpaths on either side are now extremely expansive, allowing for more intrusions by restaurants. High fashion, exclusive jewellery, car show rooms, expensive hotels – they're all here on the Champs Elysées.

Arising from Charles de Gaulle-Etoile Metro station I first had to fathom how to get across to the Arc de Triomphe. There are no crossings and you would risk your life trying to cross the road. I wasn't going to go up to the top, as there are 284 steps to climb, a bit beyond me these days, but I did want to have a closer inspection. Then I discovered an underpass. Inscribed all around the interior of the arches are the names of France's great marshals, generals and soldiers, and also many of the battles in which they fought. Lots of very familiar names to me from Napoleonic times. Although the concept was Napoléon's, it took many years to construct from 1806 to 1836. When Napoléon's body was brought back to Paris from Saint Helena in 1840, his body passed under the main arch. Nowadays there are numerous brass plaques in the paving under the arch commemorating the fallen in a variety of different wars and battles. I found it disrespectful that people just walked over them, especially women in stilettos. I would go out of my way to avoid walking on something so sacred. Underneath the central arch since 1920 is the tomb of France's unknown soldier, with a perpetual flame, and this is where France's Armistice Day celebrations occur, and all other important national commemorations. A brass shield in front of the tomb of the unknown soldier commemorates Allied (British, ANZAC, US etc) involvement in WWI.

During the Second Empire Napoléon III rebuilt much of central Paris and twelve large mansions were built around the circle of the radiating avenues. Many of the streets are named after Napoleonic battles or generals: Avenue Carnot, Avenue Hoche, Avenue de Wagram, Avenue d'Iéna, Avenue MacMahon, Avenue Victor Hugo, Avenue Kléber, Avenue Marceau. The Avenue de la Grande Armée, leading on from the Champs-Elysées, is especially wide, and it continues on to the modern business district of Paris at La Défense. The Avenue Foch is probably the most expensive residential district in Paris, if not the world. The current socialist candidate for mayor of Paris wants to build public housing on the Avenue Foch, causing apoplexy amongst its well-heeled inhabitants.

I then ventured down the Avenue d'Iéna in search of a couple of historic mansions which are part of my current research. At the corner of the Rue Bassano and the Rue Georges Bizet and looking a little jaded, is the former Hôtel Cahen d'Anvers where, along with other fabulous works of art, a Renoir painting called "Little Irene" used to hang. I have mentioned elements of its interesting but tragic story previously.

Over the road is the Place des Etats-Unis, or United States Square. With a considerable desire for revenge at losing Canada to the English in the mid C18th, the French were overly keen to assist the rebellious colonials in the American colonies to throw off the British yoke. Since the days of Washington, Jefferson (who lived in France for many years) and Lafayette, there has been a strong bond between the Americans and the French. This square is a recognition of that friendship, with a statue of Washington and Lafayette at one end.

During the latter half of the C19th wealthy Jewish bankers built fabulous mansions here. One, the Hôtel de Bischoffsheim, became the Hôtel de Noailles, when a Bischoffsheim heiress granddaughter married into the aristocratic de Noailles family. A fabulous avante-garde eccentric, Marie-Laure, Vicomtesse de Noailles (1902-1970), lived a very exotic and indulgent life among the literary and artistic set of Paris for decades. As a mature lady she was much taken by a student rebellion in Paris in 1968 and wanted to go and join their cause, which she did, in her chauffeur-driven Rolls-Royce. Her mansion, at 11, Place des Etats-Unis, is now the headquarters of Baccarat Crystal. If she intrigues you, google her. She was one of the grandes dames of the C20th. My English friend, Tony Penrose, knew her well, as she moved in the same artistic set as his parents.

I was disturbed to notice two young Roma (gypsy) children, a girl about 8, and a boy about 4, wandering about unsupervised. They would not have been natives of THIS neighbourhood – boy, I was way out of my league here, let alone them. The boy then approached me and persistently asked for money. There is a huge problem in Paris, in fact all over Europe, with whole families of Romanian and Bulgarian Roma pickpockets constantly in search of their next victim.

Many of the fabulous mansions in this district have been divided into apartments or are now corporate headquarters. The odd one may well remain a single family residence.

It is sometimes confronting to read plaques on buildings which refer to events which happened inside or outside the building during the German occupation in WWII. While the Cahen d'Anvers mansion was used as an outreach of Drancy camp, where Jews were kept before being transported to death camps, 42 Rue de Bassano nearby was used by the Gestapo to torture prisoners.

Day 64 – Tuesday 18th October: PARIS

Today I partially retraced my steps of the other day when I visited the Place de la Concorde and the church of La Madeleine. I turned left down the Rue du Faubourg Saint Honoré, some of the most expensive commercial real estate in the world. All the great French perfume and fashion houses have outlets here. Security men lurking everywhere.

My interest wasn't in these places, but some of the great mansions which are located in this street. The Hôtel Pillet-Will is now the Japanese ambassador's residence, but behind the service buildings on the street the Japanese built a modern building – only an embassy could get away with demolishing an historic building – but this is not visible from the street.

At No. 33 is the former Hôtel Perrinet de Jars, at one stage a Rothschild mansion, and since 1920 the HQ of the Cercle de l'Union Interallié, one of France's snootiest private clubs.

At No. 35 is the British embassy and at No. 39 is the British ambassador's residence, the C18th Hôtel de Charost. This residence was bought in 1803 by Napoléon's youngest sister, the nymphomaniac Princess Pauline Borghese, and was transformed into one of Paris's grandest homes by her. After the fall of Napoléon in 1814 Pauline sold the house and most of its furniture to the Duke of Wellington for use as the residence of the British ambassador to France. The Queen of England has stayed here several times. A very grand house still and it has a substantial garden at the rear.

On my way back down the street I got into trouble with the police when I was about to take a photo of the British Ambassador's residence. A policeman was on guard outside the embassy next door and when he noticed me he blew his whistle and came charging over the road with his machine gun. I nearly needed to change my underwear, as I thought I was going to be arrested as a terrorist. I explained to him that I was an Australian tourist and that I had asked the police if I could take photos of the President's palace up the street, and they said it was OK. But he wasn't going to allow me to take any photos. Little did he know that while walking up the street I had already taken a photo of the British embassy and residence, so he hadn't been very observant, but I didn't think it wise to point that out!

No. 41 is the Hôtel de Pontalba, which dates from the 1850s. It was built by Baroness de Pontalba, a wealthy Creole from Louisiana who married into the French aristocracy. Her father-in-law, the old baron, was enraged that he couldn't get his hands on her entire fortune, so in 1834 he shot her four times, then shot himself. She survived, he didn't. Not surprisingly, she divorced his son. She completed the house in

1855 and lived there until her death. The house was altered by the next owners, the Rothschilds, and was used as a German officer's club during WWII. It has been the American ambassador's residence since 1948, and has had some noted occupants: Sargent Shriver, JFK's brother-in-law (1968-1970); the most colourful and perhaps the most notorious was that great tart, Pamela Digby Churchill Hayward Harriman. Née the Hon. Pamela Digby, daughter of the 11th Baron Digby, Digby, Pamela's first husband was Winston Churchill's only son, Randolph, a drunkard. Pamela soon ditched him and moved on to several of the world's most powerful men. It would actually be easier to list those with whom she didn't have an affair. The late Duke of Windsor once asked at a lunch in Paris in the mid 1950s which Rothschild was having an affair with Pamela. The long-suffering Baroness Elie de Rothschild piped up: "That would be my husband". Pamela's third husband, Averell Harriman, left her very comfortably off and she was one of Bill Clinton's biggest financial sponsors, so guess who made her American Ambassador to France in 1993? Good old boy Bill! She died in office in Paris in 1997. Pamela was sued by her stepchildren for mismanaging the Harriman estate. Google Pammy, she's an interesting "lady"! The residence also has a substantial garden at the rear.

No 55 is the Palais de l'Élysée, the official residence of President of the French Republic since 1873. Originally called the Hôtel d'Evreux, it belonged to Napoléon's younger sister, Caroline Murat from 1803 to 1808. The palace is a very large building and with all its associated service buildings takes up an entire block. It also has an extensive garden at the rear.

I then went back to the Place de la Concorde and the Place Vendôme for some better photographs. I was surprised to see two lots of public art installations had appeared in the Place Vendôme within a few days – a group of stark white-painted trees and a group of big rudimentary stone figures. I thought they were both fantastic, fitting in with the surrounds and contrasting with each other.

I then strolled along the Rue de Rivoli, adjoining the Louvre, where all the souvenir shops are, to do some shopping.

Day 65 – Wednesday 19th October: PARIS

Back to the Place des Vosges to finish off my research there and to take more photographs. A closer examination of the buildings revealed all sorts of intricate differences, with most mansions being 4 bays wide; one, however, was only 3 bays wide, some were 6 bays wide, one was 7 bays wide and one was 8 bays wide. A handy clue I read in a guide book to the Marais advised looking at the iron railings on the windows, indicating a common construction date and common later ownership. The ironwork is beautiful, with several different designs, some more ornamental than others. While most windows feature a keystone above, several houses are without. A few houses have unfortunately been over-restored and some need some TLC. However, archival photographs reveal that much earlier in the C20th some of these buildings were in a deplorable state.

In my post of a few days ago, I should have stated that a hotel is adjacent to and beside the Queen's Pavilion, not the King's Pavilion. The Queen's Pavilion was not built by the royal family, unlike the King's Pavilion which was built by Henri IV; it was a private speculation built to match the King's Pavilion.

After finishing at the Place des Vosges, I went for a stroll along the Rue des Tournelles, which runs parallel to the eastern side of the Place des Vosges, to see the street frontage of the synagogue which backs onto the Place des Vosges (No. 14). The synagogue is the building which contains a clock and belltower on the roof. This synagogue was fortunate to survive WWII intact, as this was a very Jewish neighbourhood and many synagogues in France were desecrated or destroyed by the Germans.

Autumn has finally arrived in Paris, after a late and elongated summer. I have noticed a big difference in the trees in the central garden of the Place des Vosges compared to when I was first there 3 weeks ago. Now they are turning a golden yellow and shedding their leaves.

I walked back to the studio via the Musée de la Chasse et de la Nature, to pick up an extra English copy of the pictorial guide of the museum for Matthew. I am still concerned about getting appropriate presents for Andrew and Matthew. Females are easier to buy for.

Day 66 – Thursday 20th October: PARIS

Today I went over to the Australian Embassy to pick up my booklet on the *The Visit of the Prince de Condé to Australia in 1866*, a story with which the ambassador is much taken with. It is the only printed copy of that research which I have with me and I would like to take it to Dreux and Chantilly with me next week.

The weather was a bit bitter today, and as I am warding off a cold presently, I decided to have a day inside sorting out my research on Père Lachaise cemetery before I go back to take more photographs. I have found out lots of juicy gossip about some of the inhabitants, even the ones who weren't famous. Time well spent, as it will make my grave search a lot easier.

A few nights ago, I tried the hamburger bar in my street. I had a beef burger which was very nice – quite a different taste, with Middle Eastern flavours. The serving was far too big, so I only had half and had the other half last night. Tonight I had fish and chips from the restaurant next door. Quite nice again, but again a large serving, so I only had half and will have the other half tomorrow night. I am still amazed at the size of the meals which I see people consuming at the sidewalk cafes, and especially at lunchtime.

I hope to get to Versailles tomorrow, although the weather is predicting rain. I am only interested in the Petit Trianon and Marie Antoinette's hamlet. I visited the main palace in 1975 and would find it too overwhelming.

Day 67 – Friday 21st October: PARIS

I headed to the Gare Saint Lazare this morning to catch a train to Versailles, which has three train stations. I went to Versailles Gare Rive Droite (Right bank station), which seemed to be miles from the palace. There was a huge crowd at the main palace which I had seen many years ago and I really wanted to see the two smaller palaces in the grounds – the Grand Trianon and the Petit Trianon – used as retreats, and Queen Marie Antoinette's farm village.

I caught a little train to the Petit Trianon, well worth the money, as it was a considerable distance from the main entrance. The Petit Trianon was built in the 1760s by Louis XV as a present for one of his many but favourite mistresses, the Madame de Pompadour. As mistresses go she wasn't too bad, as she was always discrete and respectful of the long-suffering wife of Louis XV, Queen Marie, a Polish princess. One of Madame de Pompadour's successors, the Countess du Barry, was hated by the populace and Louis XV's family; she got her just desserts, being executed during the revolution.

The Petit Trianon is a house is of a compact and ingenious design, five bays wide on each side, built over three levels into the side of a hill so that the ground floor can only be seen on two sides; however, as often happened in European architecture, one side of the building contained a cosy mezzanine floor, sandwiched in between the first and attic floors. These small rooms, with low ceilings, were often much more

comfortable than larger rooms with lofty ceilings. Unfortunately, I didn't find out until today that the mezzanine and attic floors are only inspected on pre-booked guided tours, otherwise the house can be inspected at leisure. That was very disappointing.

As Louis XV's eldest son had predeceased him, his son's eldest son was heir to the throne. In 1770 this grandson, aged 15 years, married the 14 year old Archduchess Marie Antoinette of Austria, a daughter of the Empress Maria Teresa. After the grandson succeeded as Louis XVI in 1774, he gave his wife the Petit Trianon estate as her bolt-hole from the rigours of court life. Here only came those people she wished to entertain. She made some changes to the interior of the building, including installing interior mirrored shutters in her bedroom which were operated from the ground floor level. This was so people couldn't peek into her bedroom.

The stair hall is impressive, taking up a surprisingly large amount of space. The service areas of the house, of which there seems to be an endless number, are sparsely and simply furnished, yet the principal rooms in what was supposed to be an informal house are indeed very grandly furnished. The most stunning room, in my opinion, is the music room – exquisitely furnished. That the house is in such a good state of preservation today with many original items is due to the fact that the Empress Eugénie, wife of Napoleon III, took a great interest in Marie Antoinette and the Petit Trianon and tracked down and purchased same. Eugénie was lucky not to share Marie Antoinette's fate, but she had to flee into exile in England in 1870.

In the grounds there are numerous structures, all to be appreciated in a long perspective from the house, and all even further away from the main palace. This was where she could live informally, without ceremony. There is a theatre, dining pavilions, temples, a grotto, and then furthest away is the Queen's village, with numerous rustic buildings where she could play idyllically as a milkmaid. The queen's house in the village is currently being restored and was concealed beneath a Dior corporate canvas casing.

Autumn is really showing its colours at Versailles this season, as the Petit Trianon is set in an English-style landscaped garden with meandering paths and NO SIGNAGE. I got lost a few times, and while it was raining. LOL.

I then walked next door to the Grand Trianon which is essentially a single-storeyed palace in marble and stone. On a much grander scale it was built by Louis XIV, great-grandfather of Louis XV, not long after he started building the main palace at Versailles. Both Trianons and the main palace were pillaged during the revolution, but much of the furniture has come back because it was all stamped and several inventories exist. The Grand Trianon is in two wings and has some very grand rooms and some very grand furniture. It was a favourite residence of Napoléon I and his family, and it was used later in the 1800s by King Louis Philippe and his family. Many of the rooms have changed functions over the years, but most of the furniture is in the Empire style – fairly square and oversized, but magnificent. General de Gaulle, when President of France, liked to use the Grand Trianon as his country retreat, and there is currently an exhibition of his use of one of the wings.

Day 68 – Saturday 22nd October: PARIS

Today I headed out of Paris again, this time to Emerainville-Pontault-Combault south-east of Paris. The owners of the studio which I am leasing in Paris – Jean-René and Annick – were kind enough to invite me out for the day and I arrived before lunch. One of their daughters had lived in Australia for a while and they had visited her there in 2003; it was interesting looking at the album of their visit. Jean-René also showed me several of his art sketchbooks – he is a very talented artist, mainly in water colours. Lunch was

delicious: artichokes in dressing, coquilles Saint-Jacques (scallops), mushrooms and pasta, followed by a cheese platter and fruit. Very enjoyable.

After lunch we went to visit the château de Champs-sur-Marne, a very grand C18th country estate nearby. It had quite a few notable owners and residents before being bought in 1895 by Count Louis and Countess Louise Cahen d'Anvers, members of a wealthy Jewish banking family. Avid collectors of C18th furniture and objets d'art, they spent several years restoring the house and filling it with appropriate period furniture, all of the very best quality. The house was inherited by youngest son, Count Charles Cahen d'Anvers, who presented to the French State in the mid 1930s; the government bought the contents. It has on occasions housed visiting heads of state to France, but it has long been a museum open to the public.

Currently there is a display of period costumes placed in with the furniture which, although complementary to the period, detracted from the presentation. But it is a living museum, with changing exhibitions; that day there was also a kids' dressup day in period costume based on the Fables of La Fontaine. One room contains tapestry work on the chairs which are based on different fables.

My favourite room is a corner room on the ground floor which is painted in chinoiserie style. China was all the rage in Europe in the C18th and every chateau had a room decorated in a European rendition of a Chinese room.

Interesting portraits of Louis and Louise Cahen d'Anvers by Leon Bonnat are displayed in the music room upstairs. The view over the gardens from this central room are breathtaking, drawing the eye to two water features in the distance.

We then went for a stroll in the garden which is in full autumn colours. The gardens had been restored for the Cahen d'Anvers family by the great Achille Duchêne who also worked at Vaux-le-Vicomte. Jean-René and Annick told me that there is a disease destroying hedges throughout France, much like the elm disease Australia suffered in recent years, and unfortunately Champs is also affected. The grounds comprise some 85 hectares.

As we were leaving, an interesting situation developed at the front gate. There were several Middle Eastern bridal couples all jostling for space for photographs in front of the chateau. There was chaos as the bridal cars blocked the street, and the château management wasn't happy at all. We thought we should decamp before a fight developed.

The specific interest which I have in this house is that the eldest daughter of Louis and Louise Cahen d'Anvers, Irène, was the subject of a painting by Renoir, 'Little Irene', a charming painting which, however, Irène and her parents didn't like. I am doing a presentation on this painting which has a tragic history. It eventually passed to Irene's daughter, Beatrice, who perished with her husband and two children at Auschwitz in WWII. Plundered by Goering during WWII, it came back to Irène who sold it. Irène was married briefly to Count Moise (Moses) de Camondo, the founder of the Nissim de Camondo Museum in Paris which is in memory of their only son, Nissim, who was killed in WWI.

Champs is an absolutely glorious place! Thank you Jean-René and Annick for your hospitality and company today.

Day 69 – Sunday 23rd October PARIS:

I slept in until 11am this morning, so it was just as well that I had nothing planned for today. By the time I had breakfast, it was brunch, at noon! I evidently needed the rest, so today was a well-earned day of recuperation, as this coming week will be fairly hectic, as the days gallop away towards my departure, and there are still quite a few places on my visiting list. Tomorrow (Monday) I am going back to Vaux-le-Vicomte, and I still need to visit Dreux, near Chartres, south-west of Paris, where the Prince de Condé is buried, and the château de Chantilly, north-east of Paris, which was rebuilt by his father, the Duc d'Aumale. Last but not least is the Empress Josephine's château de Malmaison which has many associations with Australia.

Day 70 – Monday 24th October PARIS:

A cold rainy day when I set off for the Gare de l'Est to travel out to the château of Vaux-le-Vicomte for the second time. The train left a bit late, but still arrived at Verneuil-L'Etang early, so there was a bit of a wait for the château bus, which was a bit late.

The château was initially shrouded in a bit of mist when I arrived, but fortunately the rain had stopped and I didn't need an umbrella at all during the day. My appointment with Alexandre de Vogüé, the eldest of twins and of three sons of Count Patrice and Countess Cristina de Vogüé, the owners, wasn't until 2.00pm, so I went through the house again at a more leisurely pace, and practically had the house to myself, not having to contend with a myriad of tourists. The light was softer, not as glary as the occasion of my first visit, and it will be interesting to compare today's shots with those of four weeks ago. I also concentrated on photographing some of the marvellous painted surfaces on doors, interior shutters and panels under windows. My favourite room is a small corner room, the games room, which every respectable château had, where all the surfaces are painted. The dining room is also a lavishly painted room.

There were a few changes compared to the previous visit. The trees were turning, of course, but a small animal farm had been installed in one of the courtyards, and restoration work had started on the ceiling of the Salon of the Muses, one of the State rooms on the ground floor. The restorers were working behind a perspex frame so that you could watch their conservation work in progress. Alexander's job at Vaux-le-Vicomte is promotions and fundraising, so he tours Europe and America promoting the place, giving talks and signing books.

After lunch and a visit to the shop, I met Alexandre in his office in one of the former outbuildings. A very nice, easygoing man and although I was prepared to speak French we slipped into English. I showed him the presentation I had prepared on Vaux-le-Vicomte and he offered to find some suitable photos for me where they were lacking. He is more than happy for me to help promote Vaux-le-Vicomte in the Antipodes.

A pleasant relaxing day in the French countryside!

When I got back to my studio I decided that I should have a home-cooked meal for once, so whipped up a chicken mustard casserole with pasta, and fortunately made enough for two meals. This is only the second time I have actually cooked in Paris since arriving over four weeks ago – the first time was a tuna bake which lasted three meals.

After dinner I rang Prince Jean d'Orléans, son of the Count of Paris, pretender to the French throne, whose ancestor, Louis-Philippe I, was the last French king (1830-1848). Jean d'Orléans lives at Dreux, near Chartres, where his family mausoleum is located. I am particularly interested in the tomb of one of his

distant cousins, the Prince de Condé, who died in Sydney in 1866, while on a visit. Sydney gave him a huge funeral, and I have produced a booklet about his life, his visit to Australia, his funeral, and the travels of his embalmed body around the globe. He was transported back to England and then reburied at Dreux several years later. It is a sad but fascinating story.

So, tomorrow (Tuesday) I shall head to Dreux, about an hour by train south-west of Paris.

Day 71 – Tuesday 25th October: PARIS → DREUX

At 9am I headed off to the Gare Montparnasse, on the Left Bank. It is humungous, over several levels, and was very confusing. I eventually got a ticket which wasn't a standard ticket to allow you to pass through the barrier, so I had to find an information office where I was told that I needed to have a smaller barrier ticket as well, which I obtained. I only just made it onto the 9.58am train to Dreux.

The day was foggy and cloudy, not pleasant at all, but by the time I got to Dreux just after 11am it had cleared a little. There was no signage to the Royal Chapel but from looking at a map yesterday I had a fair idea where it was. I asked a few people along the way for directions, but they had no idea. When I got to a central square with some interesting old buildings, I rang Prince Jean and he gave me directions. He found me along the way, and we headed up to the citadel, where the chapel is located and where he lives, by climbing a perilous and seemingly never-ending spiral stair. The former castle of Dreux, which in parts go back to the 900s, was demolished a few centuries ago, and the base of the old keep and several towers remain. There are many interesting buildings from a variety of periods on site. Jean, his wife Philomena and four children live in a 1700s house next to the old castle site on which there is now a small mock C19th castle. Jean's office is in a small tower in front of their house.

After meeting Philomena, Jean took me on a tour of the Royal Chapel and the site, which covers about 6 hectares on the summit of a hill overlooking the town of Dreux (20,000 inhabitants). The view from the hill is quite spectacular. The Chapel is much larger than I had envisaged and is quite an amazing structure with a magnificent interior. Before the French Revolution the property belonged to the Duke of Penthièvre, a member of a junior branch of the Bourbon royal family of France, who was the maternal grandfather of King Louis Philippe I. He built a small chapel to house the tombs of his branch of the family and it was rebuilt by his daughter, the Duchess of Orléans, to house the Orléans family, another branch of the royal family, as well. Her son, who became King Louis Philippe I, rebuilt it again in the 1840s to the form that it is today, in the neo-Gothic style.

There are several levels inside: the upper level is for services, the next level down is mainly for King Louis Philippe, his wife Queen Marie Amélie and their children, daughters-in-law, grandchildren and their spouses, while the crypt is primarily for more recently-departed family members. Most, but not all, have an elaborate sculptured marble figure representing a likeness of the deceased on the top of a marble sarcophagus.

The domed ceiling of the chapel has a magnificent stained glass centrepiece and, along with the numerous side windows, the stained glass, all produced at Sèvres in France and designed by some prominent craftsmen, is the true glory of the chapel. The colours are some of the most striking I have seen, with magnificent contrasts of light and shade. I was about to ask Jean about one of the faces in a window when he answered my question. His ancestor, King Louis-Philippe had cheekily had his own face inserted in one of the windows – the figure on the extreme right in the windows with six figures!

We then went on a tour of the estate which has some magnificent trees and there are of course many autumn tonings. It was interesting to go down into a labyrinth of tunnels which King Louis-Philippe had installed when he rebuilt the chapel.

I then had lunch with Jean and Philomena who are a delightful couple. She has an Austrian mother and a Spanish father, but they both speak perfect English, so it was easier to speak in English. Philomena had been up all night with their youngest daughter who was sick, so I felt guilty intruding. Baby Joseph, the same age as my younger grandson Beau, sat merrily in a stroller and smiled away at me during lunch. A real charmer. Lady, the 14yo Newfoundland, also took a shine to me.

Jean showed me some family albums and interesting books, including their wedding album. Their wedding was held inside the race track at the château of Chantilly. At 4pm Philomena kindly drove me to the station to catch a train back to Paris. Yet another interesting day in the French countryside and I greatly enjoyed Jean and Philomena's hospitality and company.

Day 72 – Wednesday 26th October: PARIS → MALMAISON:

Today I headed off to visit Malmaison, the home of Napoléon and Josephine, on the south-western outskirts of Paris. Today was going to be a bit of a travel challenge, as I would have to deal with trips on the Metro (subway), the RER (the outer suburban railway line) and a bus, and then return, and not get lost. A bit of head-scratching along the way at an overabundance of confusing signage, but I got there and back without mishap.

Malmaison is a C17th house which was in a bit of a parlous state when Josephine bought it on impulse in 1797 while Napoleon was on his Egyptian campaign. He wasn't overly impressed when he returned to discover that she had bought the house, but he grew to love Malmaison on which Josephine lavished so much attention. It was a favourite family home, rather than a palace, of which they had several at their disposal as First Consul and Emperor. Napoleon, an obsessive worker, reader and writer, always found Malmaison a relaxing place. Josephine soon established an English-style garden and sought exotic plants and flowers, recruiting many people to purchase seeds and plantings for her. She constructed expansive hothouses and started propagating rare species which she sent to the rulers of Europe as gifts. Even through the many years of war with England, Josephine always managed to be supplied by English seed sellers.

Like many French châteaux Malmaison is essentially only one room deep, although over four levels, with the end pavilions containing more rooms in depth and containing the stairs. Such a house is called a 'maison lanterne', as it allows plenty of light into a room on two sides. Josephine had architects and decorators in a couple of times for makeovers to transform it in to the Egyptian and neo-classical house it is today.

Although Josephine had a son and a daughter – Eugène and Hortense – by her first husband, Alexandre Vicomte de Beauharnais, she had no children by Napoléon who divorced her in 1809 so that he could re-marry and produce an heir to his Empire. His second wife, the Austrian Archduchess Marie-Louise, was a great-niece of Queen Marie Antoinette, and by her he had his only legitimate son, the tragic King of Rome.

After the divorce Josephine was allowed to keep Malmaison and the title of Empress. Josephine died in 1814 and all the original furniture and the house was sold by her daughter-in-law in the late 1820s. However, a lot of it has been traced and brought back or replaced by identical or similar pieces, based on an inventory done after she died. Much of her great art collection was taken to Russia by her grandson when he married the Russian grand duchess, Maria Niocolaievna, and it remains in Russia today, having been nationalised in the Russian revolution of 1917.

What is of interest to Australians is Josephine's affinity for Australian animals, birds and plants. The Baudin expedition to Australia of 1802-1804 took back a large numbers of Australian species which ended up in the gardens of Malmaison. Josephine had kangaroos, emus, black swans, parrots and numerous plants which all thrived there, and she also cultivated a huge assortment of old-fashioned roses. She commissioned the botanical artist Pierre Redouté to paint many of these – all exquisitely done.

As is common these days, restoration work was underway in a few of the prominent rooms in one wing: the music room and Josephine's fabulous red-tented bedroom in particular. Consequently, that wing was fenced off on the exterior, detracting from photographic opportunities.

Unfortunately, the château closes from 12.30 to 1.30 for lunch, and there was no facilities nearby, so I did without lunch. I went on a tour of the grounds until the château re-opened, and continued my tour upstairs. As usual, my camera battery gave out before I finished the tour, and my iphone isn't up to scratch with dim interior lights.

A lot of the upstairs rooms are now exhibition spaces, with a fantastic collection of well-known paintings, wonderful Empire furniture and personal effects of Napoléon and Josephine on display. Josephine's love of flowers carried into her porcelain collection, with dinner sets painted with flowers and plants at Malmaison.

Through the marriages of Josephine's grandchildren she is the ancestress of most of the monarchs of modern-day Europe. Most of Josephine's jewellery went to her eldest granddaughter, Josephine, who became Queen of Sweden, and many of those fabulous jewels remain with the Swedish royal family today.

A beautiful garden and a fabulous house to visit, even if you aren't a Napoleonic fan like me.

Day 73 – Thursday 27th October: PARIS

A very lazy morning, with washing on the agenda first, and I needed to wait until it was finished to hang it over the bathtub. I fell asleep on the lounge, so I had a late start to the afternoon's activities.

This afternoon I wanted to go back for another look at the Musée Nissim de Camondo, a beautiful early C20th mansion in the C18th style in the rue de Monceau which in many respects has a tragic history. The name commemorates Nissim de Camondo junior, the only son of Moïse de Camondo, who died in a plane crash in WWI; Moïse's only daughter, Béatrice, and her husband and children all perished in Auschwitz during WWII.

Today was a different and softer light to the first day I visited, and it was also in the afternoon, thus I was able to take some quite different and stunning photos, even with no flash (the standard rule throughout European museums). I also concentrated on some of the particularly fine pieces of furniture, especially desks made from a variety of rare woods by several master cabinetmakers – only the best in this house! I also spotted quite a few items which I had overlooked before: a lovely little bust of a young girl, and a child's armchair, in red velvet.

Although there weren't many people there today, there was ONE WOMAN who was habitually in the way of numerous photos I wanted to take. I began to get paranoid that she was doing it on purpose! I hope she didn't understand English!

The museum currently has a special exhibition of the dinner service in its collection, based on a series of bird drawings done in the C18th. The table was set with portions of the service, with a green border and the most exquisite hand-painted detail of birds.

It is always interesting to note the grandeur of the main reception rooms and the starkness of the service areas of the house, such as the butler's pantry near the dining room, and the kitchens in the basement.

Before I left I went up to see Sophie, the archivist, who has an office in the attic in the old linen room. Sophie has been good enough to edit my booklet on "Little Irene", the painting by Renoir. She has set me straight on several issues, and it appears that poor Irène wasn't the dragon she is portrayed as on the internet. There is so much incorrect information out there about her and regrettably little about her generally. Sophie is happy to assist me with any enquiries and photo requirements, and I will send her a copy of my completed work. Such a nice lady. Sophie also has put me in touch with an Italian Ph.D. student who is researching Irène's family, the Cahen d'Anvers family, and we have been in touch and can perhaps assist one another.

Tomorrow, I head off to the magnificent château de Chantilly, about an hour north-east of Paris.

Day 74 – Friday 28th October: PARIS → CHANTILLY

Today's trip is my last trip out of Paris before starting the trek back to Australia via Singapore next Wednesday. My destination is the château de Chantilly, a famous estate north-east of Paris which had been developed by the powerful aristocratic de Montmorency family. The estate, along with many others, passed to an heiress who married into the de Condé family, a junior branch of the Bourbon royal family of France. This fabulous inheritance, along with the de Condé family's own enormous wealth, made them a force to be reckoned with. They were actually richer than the king and often were opposed to the king's rule and ideas. Chantilly was not that far from Paris, and had expansive forests with an abundance of game: deer, boars and birds, so it was always a popular venue for royalty and nobility who enjoyed the hunt.

An old castle was on site until the Revolution of 1789 when the de Condé family went into exile, the estate was confiscated and the castle was demolished. A Renaissance mansion built by the de Montmorencys, remained, and also the fabulous C18th stables, built on a colossal scale; the French aristocracy was very fond of horses and often built extremely grand stables. After the fall of Napoléon in 1815, the Prince de Condé, known as the Duc de Bourbon, had all his confiscated estates returned by King Louis XVIII, the younger brother of the executed Louis XVI and his distant cousin.

Unfortunately, the Duc de Bourbon was the last of the de Condé family, as his only son, the Duc d'Enghien, had been kidnapped and executed by Napoléon in rather dubious circumstances. Ultimately he decided to leave his enormous fortune, the largest in Europe at the time, to his godson, a younger son of his kinsman, the Duc d'Orléans. In 1830, in suspicious circumstances, the Duc de Bourbon was found dead from hanging, and his heir, an 8-year old boy, the Duc d'Aumale, came into his inheritance, which of course include the Chantilly estate. That same year, the Duc d'Orléans became King of the French, not King of France, after a revolution saw the departure of King Charles X, an autocratic nincompoop, from the throne.

As a young man the Duc d'Aumale started to repair and develop the Chantilly estate, but another revolution in 1848 saw his own family forced into exile. He sold Chantilly to a bogus company and when there was another change of government in 1870 which allowed his family back into France, he regained control of the Chantilly estate again.

His life had endured numerous tragedies while he was in exile. Six of his children and his wife died prior to 1870. His eldest son, the Prince de Condé, died in Sydney in 1866, as I have previously mentioned. His only remaining son, the Duc de Guise, died in 1872, leaving him bereft, the only survivor. Henceforth he focused all his energy on rebuilding Chantilly. Adjacent to the old de Montmorency mansion, he built an enormous Renaissance Gothic castle, built on an angle and also surrounded by a vast moat. With his vast wealth he continued to assemble paintings, documents, books, porcelain and objets d'art which were all on display at Chantilly, and where they remain today. A very learned man with a passion for history, he wrote numerous books and was elected to the Académie Française, one of France's greatest honours. His impressive two-storeyed library is extensive, and the Chantilly collection of paintings is the largest in France after the Louvre. He built a charming little chapel on an angled corner which contains a pedestal on which stands an urn containing all the hearts of the different Princes de Condé, including that of his own son who died in Sydney in 1866.

The interior is decorated in an eclectic style, typical of the C19th. Some rooms are Renaissance in style, some are Gothic, some are rococo (elaborate gold trimmings). I particularly loved two rooms, one large and one small, done in the *singerie* style, that is decorated with monkeys doing mischievous things. The house is essentially a memorial to the glory of the de Condé family, to whom he owed his fortune. With no heirs, he left the estate to the Institut de France with some very strict rules. Nothing must ever be moved or taken from the château.

The gardens at Chantilly had originally been laid out by André Le Nôtre, who designed the gardens at Versailles and Vaux-le-Vicomte. In the grounds there are numerous outbuildings, with the most fantastic being the stables, where I saw a dressage demonstration in the afternoon. The stables also contain a Museum of the Horse, established with the support of the Aga Khan who lives nearby and who is a great racing fan. Next to the stables is the Chantilly racecourse where many elite races are run. Prince Jean and Princess Philomena, with whom I had lunch the previous Tuesday, had their wedding reception in the middle of the race course at Chantilly.

The contents of Chantilly are simply staggering, all the result of a lifetime of collecting by a very cultured man. The place is set in a visually stunning location, at no matter what time of the year you visit. In the gardens there is an abundance of statues, but I particularly loved the statues of the Duc d'Aumale's hunting dogs near the main entrance.

I came across the sad portrait of the tragic Duchess d'Aumale, painted the same year as the loss of her son, the Prince de Condé, who died in Sydney. She died of tuberculosis in 1869, never having recovered from his death. Unfortunately, I couldn't view his portrait by the same artist, as it was in a room closed for renovation.

Both cameras unfortunately died on me today, and I am also disappointed with the quality of photos on my SLR which is being most unco-operative.

Day 75 – Saturday 29th October: PARIS

I woke up at 10.45am and it has been a slow day since, sorting out what I have to post off to Australia in boxes on Monday. Might have to take out a mortgage to pay the postage, I think, but I can't possibly fit everything in my luggage. I brought way too many clothes with me.

I am posting more Chantilly photos today. My SLR battery was flat and wouldn't download to my computer last night, so I had to re-charge. Once I did download them, I had to delete at least half, as the camera

wouldn't focus – I have had this problem before. I am lucky that I salvaged the ones that I did, but they're still not as good as my little pocket-size Nikon which is brilliant. I'm ready to ditch the Canon SLR, after having major troubles with two Canons.

Day 76 – Sunday 30th October: PARIS

I woke up this morning to discover that the clock on my computer had put itself back an hour – the end of daylight saving in Europe. Although I occasionally read a few French headlines when out and about and on the internet. I was nevertheless expecting it to happen soon.

Today I went back to Père Lachaise cemetery, a few Metro stations away, to take more photographs of celebrity graves. Anyone who was anyone in the old days was buried here. It is tightly packed and in parts sad to see all the crumbling and neglected mausoleums and graves. The trees are in full autumn tonings and there are leaves everywhere. It is All Saints' Day (Le Toussaint) in a few days, so there were huge crowds visiting their relatives' graves, and a lot of people doing a bit of maintenance on graves. It is the custom to put chrysanthemums on graves on All Saints' Day and there are huge pots of chrysanthemums all over, and also many planted in the gardens of the chapels, of which there are several throughout the grounds, and also of the crematorium.

It was an unusually warm and sunny day today, perfect for a cemetery visit, but unfortunately not necessarily for photographing tombs and graves; either too much sunlight or shadows falling across part of the focus area. I managed to buy a plan of the cemetery at a newspaper kiosk nearby, but the map didn't necessarily correspond with reality, as the scale was a bit distorted. There are numerous roads, many of which are not named and each section or block (often irregular shapes because of the landscape) is numbered. Even if you know the section of a tomb/grave, finding it amongst thousands of others was at times challenging. I was lucky to find most of the ones I was looking for, but disappointing to miss out on some interesting ones.

Some of the ones I took today are: (1) Felix Faure, President of France in the late 1800s, died in the Elysée Palace while having sex with his mistress. (2) and (3) Rock star Jim Morrison, died in Paris in 1971. This grave attracts a lot of foreigners. It is difficult to find. (4) The De Lesseps family tomb. Ferdinand de Lesseps was the engineer who built the Suez and Panama canals. He was a cousin of the Empress Eugénie. (5) and (6) Frederic Chopin's grave. I was expecting something far grander for Chopin. (7) Memorial to the Kellermann family, Dukes of Valmy. The 1st Duke was one of Napoleon's marshals, and this was one of the grandest memorials I saw in Père Lachaise. (8) The grave of the family of René Lalique, the jewellery and glassware designer, with a fabulous crystal insert. (9) Chinese grave, with food offerings for the departed. (10) Garden bed of chrysanthemums. (11) Over-the-top grandiose tomb of the Duke of Morny, illegitimate half-brother of Napoléon III and a grandson of the Empress Josephine. (12) Tomb of Count Walewski, illegitimate son of Napoléon by his Polish mistress, Countess Walewska. (13) French composer Georges Bizet, best known for his opera 'Carmen'. (14) Grave of French writer Marcel Proust, and his family. I wrote a thesis in French on him in 1980 for my Bachelor of Letters (Litt. B) degree.

This is only the tip of the iceberg!

Day 77 – Monday 31st October: PARIS

Another restless night has left me rather tired for the day. I made enquiries at a nearby post office about sending parcels back to Australia, and returned later with some 14kgs of books and brochures which I packed into two boxes. There was a lady there who was very helpful and patient and we eventually sorted

out the most inexpensive method. However, I have still ended up with an over-abundance of stuff, and will have to send another parcel. I trust that the post office is open tomorrow, as it is a public holiday for All Saints' Day.

The rest of the day, I did washing and housework.

Day 78 – Tuesday 1st November: PARIS

A slow start to the day, my last full day in Paris. Very sad to leave this marvellous city, but it is time to head back to Aus for some normality and a slightly slower pace. As happened the last time I was in Europe, I am going home several kilos lighter, mainly due to all the walking I have done which I wouldn't normally do. Only occasionally did I indulge in French pastries and I haven't been eating big meals or snacking, or drinking much plonk.

First task for the day was more washing to last me through to getting home. Then I went to the post office, alas too early, as it wasn't open until midday. When I went back I was served by a nice young bloke who remembered me from yesterday and complimented me on my French, which was very flattering. So parcel No. 3 was dispatched.

In the afternoon I headed to the rue de Rivoli, beside the Louvre, which has numerous souvenir shops. On the way to the Metro I stopped at an old tramp/beggar with a cute little dog, whom I had often noticed in the same spot, and gave him all my spare coins, which amounted to a fair sum. I told him that I was leaving Europe tomorrow and that I didn't need the change any more, wished him luck, and told him I thought his dog was cute. His face lit up as I gave him the money in a bag, and I walked away in tears. I'm a sucker for dogs. Always will be. There are lots of beggars in Paris, but I took a shine to this old man and his dog.

On the way down the rue de Rivoli, there was a young beggar with six young puppies in front of him. I know it's a ploy to tug at your heartstrings, but it sure worked and I had to give him some money too. I will probably have a sleepless night worrying about the fate of those dear little puppies!

Well, I shopped till I dropped in the rue de Rivoli and then began to panic that it wouldn't all fit in to my suitcase. I thought that I had better have a trial pack and only leave out tomorrow's essentials. Fortunately, everything fitted in perfectly, and the suitcase is still considerably lighter than when I arrived in Europe.

Jean-René, the owner of the studio, will call in to see me in the morning and in the afternoon I will catch trains out to Charles de Gaulle airport. I fly out in the evening to Frankfurt in Germany, and make a connecting flight to Singapore for a two-night stopover. I won't be posting for a few days, possibly on Friday from Singapore.

SINGAPORE

Days 79 & 80 – Wednesday 1st November and Thursday 2nd November: PARIS → FRANKFURT → SINGAPORE: (Posted from Singapore)

Woke up early to finish off the housework before Jean-René arrives at 10am. He duly arrived on time and we said our farewells, and he asked me to sign the Visitor's Book. I was delighted to be presented with three water colours by Jean-René, a talented artist whose sketchbooks I had seen the day I visited his house for lunch. They were sketches of parts of the interior and exterior of the magnificent chateau of Champs which we had all visited after lunch. I am thrilled that he has given me these treasures, in fact, I'm very touched.

Next job on the agenda was a hair cut. Just a short walk away is a good cheap men's barber where I had my hair cut when I first arrived in Paris. Then back to rue Saint Sauveur to finish packing. At 1.30pm I set out for the Gare du Nord to catch an outer-suburban train to Charles de Gaulle airport. There were numerous station stops along the way, mostly poorer working-class sections of Paris and at times I was the only Caucasian in a carriage of many people! Paris, like Sydney, has huge ghettos which are no-go zones. Sad. I was also shocked to see a station named Drancy, for it was here that there was a prison camp for French Jews run by the Vichy French during WWII. Béatrice de Camondo, her husband Léon Reinach, and their children Bertrand and Fanny, were interned here before being transported to Auschwitz, from where they never returned.

Charles de Gaulle airport is huge, but fortunately, there are 3 terminals and it was rather quiet that afternoon. I had to wait a while before I could check in, and at 7pm we were able to go to the gate lounges. Frankfurt was only a 55 minute flight and we were served a rye sandwich to keep the wolves at bay. Frankfurt airport is enormous, and we were bussed from the plane to the terminus, and then there was a 2 km walk inside Terminal 1 before I got to Gate 68!!! My seat was in a small Economy-class section upstairs behind Business class. A curtain was drawn so that we plebs couldn't observe the nobs being served Veuve Clicquot. LOL. We took off just after 10pm, and flying east we would gain time. Dinner was a nice fillet of chicken with vegetables, both in rich sauces. I knew that I probably wouldn't sleep on the plane, so I thought that I would get sozzled instead, and had liberal servings of Henkel Trocken (a German champagne-style wine). In the end the steward just refilled my glass without asking.

After dinner I watched the "Absolutely Fabulous" 2016 movie which was quite funny. I have never really watched the series, but every man and his dog was in this one. The storyline was ridiculous, but there were some funny incidents with Edina and Patsy and some good one-liners. By the time it ended everyone had gone to sleep but me in my section, so I thought that I should try to join them in the land of nod. Needless to say, the plonk didn't help me sleep, so I was rather disoriented by the time I landed in Singapore at 5pm local time.

I was picked up by a driver at the airport, which I greatly appreciated, and delivered to my hotel, the Ibis, which is in the centre of town. A very comfortable room with probably the most comfortable bed I have experienced this trip. The driver was a very nice Chinese man who was a fountain of knowledge about Singapore. The airport is about half an hour's drive from the airport at Changi, notorious for its POW camp during WWII where many Australians were interned and where many died. I was impressed by the approach to the city which is very garden-conscious. Pots of flowers everywhere, and with rain most days of the year everything thrives.

Photos posted today include a typical old Art Nouveau metro station entrance, and some scenes of my neighbourhood. L'Atelier du Sourcil deals exclusively with eyebrows, Big Fernand makes great burgers, there is my favourite pâtisserie, and my building. Lastly, a couple of shots of parts of the 87 steps of the stair which, on occasion, I climbed 5 times in one day. After six weeks' residence, I can now justifiably claim 'to have lived in Paris for a while'. LOL.

Day 81 – Friday 4th November: SINGAPORE

A lazy start to the day, fortunately, still being a bit sleep-deprived. Originally I was to do a city tour this morning, but it was booked out, so I switched to the afternoon tour, which actually suited me better in the end. I was picked up by a driver in a Mercedes (I'm getting used to that LOL) and driven to old Chinatown to meet the bus. Our guide was Linda, a multi-lingual Chinese lady who I took an instant liking to, because of her quirky sense of humour. Interestingly, this tour company also did my Hong Kong tour, and the spiel was the same. However, the poor woman was a bit frustrated by the lack of responsiveness of members of the group, but she and I got on well. She gave excellent commentary on the scenery, but also on socio-economic and historical issues pertaining to Singapore, including her own family background and her own family unit. It was very interesting to see and learn how a typical Singaporean family lives and functions.

Most Singaporeans live in apartments/flats, and many in public housing, but the city is very neat and, as I mentioned before, is very garden-conscious, with cascading greenery down the sides of buildings and many rooftop gardens. New detached skyscraper hotels and apartments are also now linked by glazed walkways. The architecture here is very interesting, with considerable green requirements and expectations for new developments.

We went past quite a lot of colonial-era buildings – the old city hall, the old Supreme Court, the old port, the Anglican cathedral, the old police station, Raffles Hotel etc – before going down to the water front, from where we observed some interesting and spectacular buildings, including a very different group of three linked towers, on top of which is suspended a submarine/boat-shaped structure with a roof garden restaurant and observation deck. This amazing edifice really stands out in the city. The nearby dome-shaped concert hall is an interesting building too.

Next stop was back to China town which has lots of vividly-painted colonial era buildings with shops on the ground floor and multi-family residences above. Linda told us what life was like in one of these old buildings when she was a young girl growing up in the 1950s. We also visited an interesting temple which is actually home to three religions: Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Singapore is very much a religion and race tolerant society, and they all seem to respect each others' beliefs. Pity the rest of the world wasn't more like that.

Next stop was the Botanical Gardens which are well worth a visit. The plantings are varied and very dense, as everything flourishes in a wet and humid climate; incidentally, it was fairly humid today, as this is the start of the wet (monsoon) season, and Singapore is located just north of the equator. There is a large selection of orchids in the garden and the oohs and ahhs were frequent and the cameras were clicking constantly as we toured around. Some spectacular colours of all varieties, many of which I am unable to recognise. Ideally I would have loved to have spent more time there. We toured through the nearby Beverley Hills equivalent of Singapore – housing here is very expensive.

Last stop was Little India, on our way back into the city, where the senses were overwhelmed: marvellous aromas, bright colours, and Bollywood music, and a huge offering of food and floral stalls. We were then

delivered back to our hotels. A very enjoyable tour and afternoon. The last photo posted is in Little India, with our tour guide, Linda, in the bottom left corner.

Days 82 & 83 – Saturday 5th November & Sunday 6th November: SINGAPORE → SYDNEY:

A lazy morning after a restless night, with a late checkout before my departure this evening for Sydney. The morning was rainy, as is typical at this time of the year in monsoon season, so not conducive to sightseeing. A friend, Elizabeth Ganguly, had suggested that I simply must sample a Singapore Sling at Raffles Hotel, so off I went just after noon to Raffles Hotel which was only a few minutes walk away from my hotel where I had left my luggage. Raffles is a huge complex which takes up an entire city block. It is easily Singapore's, if not Asia's, most famous hotel, where the rich, famous and notorious have stayed or drank and cavorted over the last 150 years or so. It is located in the old colonial section of the town and is a charming building based around a series of courtyards. I didn't see the whole of the vast complex, but from what I did see it is a beautiful building. They also have an exclusive shopping arcade in the complex and a wonderful Raffles Hotel souvenir shop.

I found the Long Bar upstairs where the Singapore Sling was invented many years ago. Gin-based with fruit and fruit juices, the Sling was designed for women in the days when women weren't supposed to consume alcohol in public. All tables have a large hessian bag full of fresh peanuts in their shells, the perfect accompaniment to a rather sweet and potent drink. Although I don't usually consume alcohol in the middle of the day – but often a lot of same later in the day – I thought, what the heck, this is a special occasion. Mind you, at \$36 Singapore (or \$32AUS) per Sling, I would only be having the one! I was gobsmacked to see the bartender making them in batches of twenty at the bar, and while I was there for an hour savouring mine, I watched him make several batches. The place is a goldmine; maybe I should open a Singapore Sling Bar in Mudgee! A fascinating experience.

Feeling very merry after my Sling, I went back to the hotel to wait for my shuttle bus to the airport for my Qantas flight home. Our departure was slightly delayed, and I enjoyed the chicken salad meal served, although dessert was a rather dry and 'underwhelming' fruit slicey thing, for want of a better description.

I watched three movies during the flight. Being a doggy person and never having seen "Red Dog", I chose that first. Bad decision! Never watch this movie unless you are alone and have a full box of tissues. Fortunately, most people were asleep while I watched this one and didn't see me as a blubbing mess, but it really brought me undone. If you haven't seen it, it is an absolute gem, and with some great music. Movie #2 was "La Môme", about Edith Piaf. What a dreadful life this iconic woman had. Sadly, I didn't have time to see and photograph her grave at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris. Movie #3, which I saw after breakfast was "Bad Moms" which, although it sounded dreadful, was actually quite funny.

We landed in Sydney at 6.30am, and I cleared immigration and immigration and customs with no problems. Having been a big fan of "Border Security" for some years, I was fearful of being interrogated, stripped searched and having everything in my luggage scrutinised, not that I was smuggling any contraband. However, I went through the "Nothing to Declare" door with no customs officials in sight and straight out into the terminal. There to greet me were wife Carol and our eldest grandson, 4 year old Axel, which was an unexpected and delightful surprise. He was very hyped up to see his Papa after an absence of 12 weeks and had a "Welcome Back" balloon tied to him. It was a big experience for him to come to the airport and he charmed everyone, especially in the brown Akubra he got for his 4th birthday from Granma Cheryl and Pa Rob.

We then went to catch up with son Andrew, daughter-in-law Kirsten, and 6 month old grandson Beau at Newington Armoury restaurant by the Parramatta River where we had brunch. Axel had a play in the fantastic park nearby before we headed back to Mudgee. Later that afternoon son Matthew, daughter-in-law Ashley and granddaughter Taya came in to see us. It was great to catch up with all my immediate family in the one day.

So pleased to be home and to relax after the most fantastic and memorable of holidays, an unforgettable experience!