

Christmas Letter 2015



It's late-November, with Christmas just a few weeks away, yet we still have our hanging baskets and planters in flower... I daresay we'll get a frost at some stage and winter, when it comes, will arrive with a vengeance, but no sign yet. For once, I'm not working away at this time of year... Having completed the last phase of the big HR transformation project, that I've been working on until August this year, I'm now using up a week's leave to catch up on a few jobs around the house.

Some sad news... Aunt Margaret (my father's sister) is no longer with us and of course, we also learned of the tragic events in Paris and Mali. Our thoughts are with my uncle Denis and families who will obviously be finding life very difficult at the moment.



Here, there've been a number of changes over the past year. Richard's 8-year relationship with Laura ended and he now shares a flat near Leek with a new girlfriend (Victoria). He seems to be enjoying his job and is kept very busy, both at work and looking after his new home. Edward is back at university, studying for an MSc, having been made redundant by Capula... He received the notice whilst off work, recovering from his back operation! The good news is that the operation on his spine appears to have been successful and he's now pain-free... The not so good news is that he seems to have developed a gluten intolerance (Coeliac). We suspect that he may have had the condition already (as he's always needed lots of sleep), but it seems likely that the strong drugs he needed to take (before the operation) haven't helped. Alison has been kept busy at her school recently (which now has a new head teacher and is due to become an academy next year). In the last week or so, she's been

covering for the reception class teacher, who's gone off with stress! And, she still works half a day at her nursery... The owners are in the process of selling the business, so things could change there too. It seems that change is the only certainty in life!

The year started with me travelling down to London frequently with work (although I did manage to squeeze in a visit to the BT archives and the BT tower) and a series of hospital appointments for Edward, as arrangements were made for his back surgery in February... His op was at Rowley Park Hospital, carried out by a leading spinal specialist (and fortunately paid for by the NHS). In March, I was asked to be 'sound man' with the band again, for a charity gig that they'd organised (in aid of 'Help for Heroes')... They've added some more new songs to their set list (both original and covers), released a 2nd CD! (<http://stonewashedbluesband.webs.com/>) and I've just been asked to help with another couple of gigs... Not expected to hit the big time anytime soon, but you never know. Speaking of 'aged rockers', I wish we didn't have to suffer Rod Stewart still... He's never had a great voice but personally I think his latest efforts are simply awful! I suppose if I was a multi-millionaire and people were still willing to pay to hear me sing (croak), I might take a different view?



In April, we met up with Elaine and family for a meal in Nantwich, which was nice, as (due to leading busy lives) we don't get to see each other that often. Alison went to see 'A Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time' with her cousin Geraldine (apparently it's highly recommended) and the book is certainly a good read. In April I met up with my colleagues (mainly retired now) for the start of the evening bike ride season. We average 30 miles a time, taking in some lovely Staffordshire villages and of course, a nice pub on the way home. In May, Alison took Edward to Stafford Gatehouse, for an evening with Gervase Phinn (I couldn't go because I was working in London)... He writes amusing stories about his time as a schools inspector in Yorkshire (www.gervase-phinn.com/). I did however, manage to join her at the Gatehouse the following week to see Jasper Carrott, which turned out to be an

evening of totally inappropriate, but never-the-less very funny jokes, plus lots of good music and singing from some great performers (www.jaspercarrott.com/live).

In June, Edward went with Alison to see the 'Piano Guys' (he discovered them by chance on YouTube - www.youtube.com/user/ThePianoGuys) in Nottingham... Even Alison was impressed by their 'unusual' live performance.

The early summer weather was relatively dry for the annual Shakespeare production at Stafford Castle ('Much Ado About Nothing') and Stone Carnival... We're keen to hold on to the green space in Stone where the main event is held. It seems that there's a constant battle to 'develop' on green space, whether it's shops, houses, retirement homes, wind turbines or HS2! It's not that I'm totally opposed to development, it just needs to be done in a way that doesn't spoil the character of the place (and not solely motivated by profit!).

In July, we met with Elaine and John again, plus my Aunt Blanche and cousins that I've not seen for ages (or ever in one case) at my cousin Paul's wedding to Kathleen. It's always a pleasant surprise to be invited to a cousin's wedding (when you're in your mid-fifties). The main interest in Paul's life has always been Notts County FC, but it seems that he's prepared to restrict his interest to just match days now! Apparently, he met Kathleen when she accidentally got on the wrong bus... Who says that there's no such thing as fate! Anyway, it was a lovely day in Ruddington and we wish them every future happiness.



As the summer progressed, I continued to work on the bathroom (a total 'rip it out and start again' project that I began in March)... Here we are in November and I'm under pressure from the project manager (Edward) to complete it this week! In July, we held our usual summer barbeque for the 'Bakewell Friends', went on a church trip to Southport, viewed the local (Aston) gardens (dodging the showers!) and spent another pleasant day with Elaine & family, that included a visit to Chirk Castle.



We've not been on a holiday as such this year, as I've been busy with the bathroom, plus Edward and I helped a plumber friend to replace our entire central heating system! The house had an old boiler when we moved in, so I put my faith in British Gas to keep it running (bad choice!)... As it turned out, there was nothing really wrong with the boiler (apart from being old and inefficient), what their 'skilled engineers' had failed to diagnose, was a worn-out pump, a dodgy motorised valve and a hot water tank coil that was allowing water to leak into the central heating system. Needless to say, I'll put my faith in my local plumber friend to do the servicing from now on!



Anyway, back to our holidays (or lack of)... We did manage to get away to Yorkshire for a few days in early summer and again just before the schools went back in September. Edward had arranged to deliver a class at a British Origami Society convention in Colchester (<http://www.britishorigami.info/>), so we decided to



combine the two events. We've certainly made good use of our National Trust membership this year, taking in such places as Fountains Abbey, Melford Hall etc.

Alison still keeps in touch with her old friends in Attenborough, attending the odd social event organised by the church there, but as the years go by, of course, there are less people that she knows from her youth. We still get to (and sometimes arrange) quizzes with our 'Bakewell Friends', although I've not arranged many local walks this year. We're also actively involved with our local square dance club and we've actually managed to attract two more potential members recently via our website (<http://bluediamonds.holmelee.co.uk/>), which is no bad thing, considering that our oldest member is in her 90s!

We're definitely going to the Rock 'n' Roll panto again this year at the Stafford Gatehouse, as it never fails to entertain. However, my musical fix for this year so far, has to be seeing 'Jools Holland and his Rhythm and Blues Orchestra' on 5th November at the Regent Theatre, Hanley (an early Christmas present from Alison)... It certainly went off with a bang! Jules is such an enthusiastic, knowledgeable and talented musician, that you can't fail to be entertained. Guests included Ruby Turner, plus Pauline Black and Arthur 'Gaps' Hendrickson from 'The Selecter'. So we were treated to some Ska music plus a tribute to Rico Rodriguez (<http://www.joolsholland.com/>).



Well, I guess I've rambled on again long enough for another year... And besides, I need to get on and finish that bathroom! So, I hope that you can enjoy Christmas and the message that it brings. As always, we look forward to hearing your news.

Kind Regards



Nigel, Alison, Richard & Edward