



Christmas Letter 2018

It's a sunny Sunday in mid-November and therefore a good time to start the annual Christmas Letter. As I begin to write, Alison is out in the front garden tidying things up ready for the winter and Edward is having an early lunch before going off to his origami meeting. Yesterday, we met up with Richard and Victoria in Stafford for the annual Christmas lights switch-on and fireworks. This event also featured a live band ([Dancing Queen](#)), who put in a very credible performance doing covers of classic 70s soul in their first set and ABBA in the second. The sound was particularly good for an outdoor event, with clear vocals and thumping bass. Needless to say, as soon as I heard the bass line, I recognised each song straight away!

So, nothing too unusual in the run up to Christmas you might think, apart from the fact that I don't need to go to work tomorrow (or any day for that matter), having taken advantage of a paid leaver package at the end of April. I'm now officially retired and as most retired folk seem to say: "I don't know how I ever found the time to go to work".



Over the summer, I spent some time helping Edward to create the casing for his MSc project (designing and building a 'UV Exposure Unit' for making printed circuit boards)... and proof reading his 66 page report! Due to ongoing health issues, his studies ended up taking longer than anticipated, however the hard work paid off. Edward was awarded an overall Distinction, so as you can imagine, he's well chuffed, as indeed are we.



Ed and I have since continued to master our use of the table saw and router, by making a pair of 'mini subwoofers' to add to our disco setup. I intend to put them to the test in January, when I turn 60 (can you believe it). Speaking of turning 60, we were pleased to be invited to Tracy's birthday celebration in October... It was good to catch up with old friends from Nottingham.

Last week, we went to Attenborough for Remembrance and will go back there again at Christmas. In the churchyard, there's a new memorial to the people killed in the [1918 explosion](#) at nearby Chilwell.

Our friends, Diana and Bill, moved house this year, to a bungalow in a village near Lincoln. They've done a complete 'Grand Design' on it, to make it more suitable for their needs. It was still very much 'work in progress' when we saw it back in August, so we look forward to seeing them again at the beginning of December, in their new home. Such is the frequency of our visits to Nottinghamshire and beyond, that our poor old Mondeo (due for imminent replacement) seems to find its way down the A50 all on its own.

Alison opted to finish providing teaching cover at her school this term, so now works solely as a Teaching Assistant. The advantage of this, is that she no longer has to do prep and marking (in her own time) and is able to draw a small teacher's pension. Currently, she's still working 2 full days and 2 half days per week, but is hoping to work a little less next year. The school has a new head teacher, a lady who previously worked at the associated middle school. She also has responsibility for another small first school in Oulton (just down the road). It's early days yet, but hopefully things will improve under new management.

Watching the recent programme 'School', on BBC2, makes you realise that it's all about managing budgets these days. The series features the CEO of a multi-academy trust, in charge of 7 schools in South Gloucestershire, faced with the task of saving £1.8m for the second year running... He was interviewed on breakfast TV this morning and said that he felt uncomfortable watching the series (he's no longer in that role), but I suspect, not as uncomfortable as the teaching staff, whose hard work was rewarded with a pay cut! And then you wonder why it's so difficult to recruit people into the teaching profession.

Richard gained a promotion at his company this year and is now a National Account Manager. It's a demanding job, but one that he seems to enjoy. It's been a busy year all round for him, as he and Victoria also moved from their spacious apartment near Leek to a more convenient, but smaller apartment in Stone town centre. The only problem, is the huge amount of stuff that you tend to accumulate in a short time... So, some ruthless sorting was required, along with some additional temporary storage space at Mum and Dad's!

In April, Elaine and John kindly invited us to join them at their apartment in Antibes for a few days. It was nice to see the 'Cote d'azur', which is an area of France that we've not visited before. We've also been on a couple of short UK breaks, visiting NT properties and other attractions including Blenheim Place* and RHS Wisely, but the really geeky highlight for me, was visiting Bletchley Park*... I went there on a BT training course many years ago, so it was good to reminisce. BT are sponsoring a new exhibit in the spring, so we're planning to return next year.

*You can go back to both places for free, within a year.



As I'm sure you'll agree, summer in the UK has been exceptional this year (the hottest since 1976), so we've been able to enjoy eating al fresco a good deal of the time and visiting gardens in the local area. The heat/drought has taken its toll on a couple of plants in our garden and quite a few goldfish in the pond. Fortunately, the goldfish multiply each year, so I guess it's just natural selection.



It's also been a good year for cycling. Over the summer, I've been able to get out most weeks with my ex-BT colleagues. Having more time during the day, means that we've been able to venture further afield, including an enjoyable excursion to the Manifold Valley and the Tissington Trail, (on the Derbyshire/North Staffordshire border).

Sadly, Aunt Blanche died this year. She will, of course, be much missed by her family at this time. I have happy memories of years gone by, spending many a Boxing Day with the Holmes family in Ruddington, where we were always made very welcome.

As always, we look forward to hearing your news and wish you all a *Happy Christmas* and a *Prosperous New Year*.

Nigel, Alison, Edward, Richard & Victoria

P.S. If you want to view a PDF version of this letter (with working hyperlinks), you can download one from: www.holmelee.co.uk/xmasletters/2018.pdf (just change the year if you want to view any of the older ones).