



# Christmas Letter 2023



It's another sunny Sunday morning in October, as I begin to write this year's Christmas letter. Edward has an online Origami session scheduled for this afternoon... it's designated as the '[Birmingham Group](#)' but people attend from all over the UK and other parts of the world (mainly from the USA).

We're still surrounded by disco equipment, following a very successful [Halloween themed event](#), held at the local cricket club, to raise funds for a centrally located AED. Both children and parents entered into the 'spirit' of it, with a selection of skeletons, witches, wizards, ghosts, ghouls, monsters of various kinds, and even a ghostbuster! The resident's association added another £225 to the fund, and I'm pleased to say that we have now reached [our target](#).

We've been unusually busy this year, with computer builds, upgrades, and fibre broadband installation advice, for friends and family. But don't worry, if you do opt for fibre, you can still hang on to your old landline, if you want to.



In February, my sister (Elaine) celebrated a 'significant birthday', and I was kindly invited to join her and her family for lunch at the Ritz. It was certainly a lovely occasion, albeit tinged with a little sadness (due to the absence of our partners).

The 'boys' invited me to join them for a day at Alton Towers in March (before their season tickets expired) and at the end of the month we travelled to Milton Keynes for Edward's spring origami convention. Edward had arranged to host one of the special guests, [Paula Versnick](#) (a lady from the Netherlands), so we were able to show her some of the local sights, as well as visiting

Bletchley Park (home of the WWII codebreakers). The convention was a great success, thanks in no small part to Edward's meticulous organisation.

This year, the NT supporters' group that I belong to, celebrated 50 years. During this time, they've raised over £100,000 for Shugborough (our local NT property and estate). I've recently become more actively involved with the organisation, giving talks on [Technology](#) and the influence of [ska and reggae](#) on British pop music. Edward gave a talk on [origami](#), followed by a practical session, and we also organised a [local walk](#) around Stone.

In addition to bike rides, this year, one of my ex-BT 'cycling buddies' suggested that we could complete the '[Stone Circles Challenge](#)' (a network of footpaths that circumnavigate the town). We did it in 4 stages, and discovered some 'interesting' footpaths along the way, some of which were not well maintained, so it was certainly a challenge at times, but well worth it.

In August, my aunt (Jessie) from Canada, came to stay with us for a couple of weeks. She visited friends and relatives, did some shopping and local sightseeing, and then stayed with Elaine for a further 2 weeks.



Earlier in the year, Elaine kindly invited Edward and I, to stay with her, at her apartment in Antibes, so on 1<sup>st</sup> September, we travelled to Chester, and early the next day travelled to Liverpool, then flew on to Nice.

Edward discovered that there was a [waterpark](#) open on the Sunday (the last day of the season), so that was our first outing. There's a regular train service along the coast, so getting about was really easy. We did lots of swimming and snorkelling in the sea, explored local cafés, bars, craft shops and restaurants. We walked around



the harbour and the old town, visited museums, galleries, the cathedral and the market. On one particularly hot day, we walked around the [Cap D' Antibes](#) and back via Juan-Les-Pins (12 miles). It's hard to believe how much we managed to fit in to just a week! Most evenings, we sat out on the balcony, at Elaine's apartment, and watched the sun go down over the mountains and the harbour... perfect!

On our return from France, we had just a week to prepare for Edward's autumn origami convention in Hull. Edward wasn't quite so actively involved this time, but there was still plenty to do.

In October, we decided to take ourselves to Blackpool, to see the lights and spend the next day at the pleasure beach. I believe we went on every rollercoaster there, including the original 'Big Dipper' and of course 'The Big One', where my beanie hat blew off (over a hotel roof somewhere) on the first drop! Edward was keen to revisit 'Valhalla' as it was a new ride when he first went there on a school trip, some 20 years ago, and it had just been [revamped](#), with some new effects. He left it until last, as he said there's a good chance that we'd get wet. So, I put on my waterproof coat, and we joined the queue. We didn't get wet... we got absolutely soaked! My top half stayed dry, but the seat on the boat and my feet were underwater within seconds. Needless to say, we won't be going on that again!



Richard came with us on the Blackpool trip, as Victoria doesn't share his enthusiasm for rollercoasters, and both 'the boys' took some stunning pictures of the sunset as the lights came on.

Richard and Victoria holidayed in Madeira again this year, but in June this time. I'm pleased to say that Richard now has a full-time job with BT, looking after broadband customers. His application with Openreach appeared to have stalled, so he opted to make his CV available to the whole of BT, and was snapped up in no time. With his customer service skills and technical know-how, he took to the job 'like a duck to water'! But he still does the odd evening shift at the Swan, every now and then, just to help them out at busy times.

I'm about to start putting together a picture, and a music round, for our [Christmas Quiz](#), which is the next fundraising event for the residents' association. Ed and I have just upgraded the website that we maintain for the [Blue Diamonds Square Dance Club](#). And, I've just been asked if I'd be willing to take over the publication of the twice-yearly newsletter, for the NT Supporters group... so I'm not going to run out of things to do, any time soon!

Unfortunately, my hope for peace in 2023 hasn't been realised, and things don't show any signs of improving in the near future, but we mustn't get too disillusioned. If you watch or listen to the news, you'll notice that most of it is bad news, with perhaps just one good news item at the end. In reality, there's lots of good news every day... it just doesn't get reported.

So, all that remains, is for me to wish you and your family a Happy Christmas and all the best for 2024.

*Nigel, Edward & Family*

P.S. For a PDF version of this letter, go to: [holmelee.co.uk/xmasletters](http://holmelee.co.uk/xmasletters).