



Jill and Mike's Christmas Newsletter 2018



I hope this finds you well, and that 2018 has been a good year for you. Doesn't time fly! It seems no time at all since I was composing last year's letter. What a gorgeous summer we had - the heatwave seemed to go on for ever and I spent many a happy hour sitting in the garden.

As expected, Mary (Mike's mum) passed away on 13th December last year - were fortunate to be able to have the funeral before Christmas so it wasn't hanging over until the new year. Mary had written down her wishes for hymns and readings and even a potted history for the eulogy! It was very easy to organise, even from a distance. She was well known at the church and there was a good attendance - with refreshments afterwards in the church hall provided by the Mothers' Union.

We weren't alone at Christmas however as we took in a "lodger" for a few months - a ringing friend (Peter) from London, who had moved back to the Bovey area to work in Newton Abbot and needed somewhere to stay while he found somewhere to rent. It was fun to have him around - we rang some handbells and he even took a turn at cooking supper. He effortlessly carries Mike up church towers too.

Mike continues to sing in his two choirs - but we have had to give up singing Messiah with Goldsmiths at Christmastime as they no longer do it in the Albert Hall, but in the Festival Hall which has no room for Mike to sit with the other tenors. He was considering leaving Chiswick Choir, after 40+ years, because the new conductor wanted him to sing bass. However after a couple of concerts, which he really didn't enjoy, she has allowed him back in to the tenor section so all is now well. They have just done Haydn Nelson Mass and Faure Requiem to a capacity audience - they were turning people away at the door which is unheard of! Cantanti Camerati also have a new (young) conductor - I have missed quite a few of their concerts this year because they seemed to clash with my trips to Devon but Mike says he is very good and is enticing some (much needed) younger people in to the choir.

I have managed to get down to the house in Devon quite a lot this year, at least once a month and often for longer than a week. Jayne stayed there again during the summer, and we concentrated on getting the garden into shape this year. We have dug out all the flower beds in the back garden (with the help of some strong young men!) and put down a ground cover sheet covered with bark which should hopefully keep the weeds more under control. We have also built a rockery in place of the fish pond. We have also had a permanent ramp built to the front door which make access much easier for Mike.

Mike still does a huge amount of tower bell ringing, as well as teaching and organising outings. I have continued with my handbell ringing with bands in London and Exeter. I am planning a regular peal attempt on the third Wednesday of each month with the band in Exeter in 2019, and will plan my monthly Devon trips around it.

Roving Ringers Reunion this year was in Exeter which was handy for Bovey - we went down the night before and actually made it to the first tower (Crediton) on time for a change.



In May it was the annual Intrepid Canal Boat trip (organised by Mike) - Suki and I did the first week only - Mike stayed on for a second week. We were supposed to set off at noon on the Saturday, but we had to wait for the boat engine to be repaired and eventually got away at 5 pm on the Monday. We had a deadline of getting the boat from Heyford Fields in Northamptonshire to Northwich by noon on the following Saturday and had already decided to cut out all the ringing to get there on time. Then the following day the engine died and we had



to wait 5 hours for the boat repairers to come out and fix a hose which had split. The following day the engine died again - luckily we were able to pull the boat to a nearby boatyard and they identified a fuel line fault and got us on our way again. Then the next day Suki got off the boat without anyone noticing (she thought I had got off and had gone to look for me). I ran (well jogged) back along the towpath for nearly 2 miles before I found her with a kind man who had seen her running around on the road and had been trying to find her owner. She didn't have her collar on because she had been on the boat! The boat turned round to collect us and that put us further back. However we did manage to get to the handover point on time - boating from 5 in the morning to 8 at night every day, but everyone was up for the challenge and it was tiring but fun. Suki and I walked for miles along the towpath each day, and we both slept better at night than usual because I was able to sleep on the sofa in the lounge (rather than on the top bunk above Mike) and Suki could sleep next to me.

In July the Barnes Summer Trip (organised by Mike) went back to Thornham Magna in Suffolk for a second year. I thoroughly enjoyed myself NOT ringing, but sitting in churchyards cross stitching, sightseeing and having a pub lunch every day. Peter, Mike and I got up early every day to ring handbells before heading off to the first tower - the beautiful weather meant we could sit outside and ring.



In August Mike went on the annual Roving Ringers Tour (organised by him) which was based at the Youth Hostel in Leominster. I rented a lovely cottage just outside Leominster on a quiet farm - it had a particularly nice conservatory with stunning views across the fields to the Malverns, where I sat and did my cross stitching in the afternoons. Suki and I did a lot of walking, particularly round the estates of the many National Trust properties in the area. I was near enough to be able to transport the wheelchair to some of the towers if they were a long distance away, to save Mike

from towing it. Mike and I also took on the catering for the tour at the last minute - the menus were provided and I just did a huge order online which was delivered by Sainsbury on the first night. Much better than pushing two trolleys round a supermarket and then loading and unloading it all to and from the car.

The family Butlins holiday was at the end of August - this will probably be the last one (although I said that last year!). It is becoming very expensive and also more difficult to get everyone together. Leanne and Amanda now have families of their own, Lorraine has been living in Majorca too this year and both she and Amanda find it difficult to get time off at the height of the holiday season. However it is lovely to get together and watch the children enjoying themselves so much. John took some of them out to a wetlands centre in Arundel for the day and we also went to Chichester for a visit. John took us all out to dinner to celebrate what would have been Dad's 91st birthday.



I went to Majorca for a week in November to visit Amanda and Lorraine. Amanda opened her own salon in Magaluf this summer, but it was a very poor season for everyone and she reluctantly had to close it. She has just started a job with EasyJet at Palma airport in their customer service team which is a permanent all-year job. Lorraine gave up her UK jobs, and her room at the convent, and went out in March to work in a bar for the summer, but decided to stay and has jobs in a couple of restaurants/cafes lined up for the winter and has rented an apartment in Magaluf.



I have completed a couple of cross stitch projects this year (as you might imagine with all the cross stitching I've been doing on the ringing trips!). I did a baby afghan for Aidan (even though he is now 18 months old and has started walking) with his name and date of birth. The other project was a kit I had picked up in a charity shop of 4 sheltie dogs. I made it up into a lap tray - I wasn't sure how it would work but it turned out really well.

I still enjoy lots of walking with Suki - in Devon we are spoilt for choice and we go up on to the moor whenever we can, but have lots of other lovely places to walk within easy distance. Back home I have to drive a bit further to get the nice scenery. We go out regularly to the Chilterns - I have a friend who lives in Amersham (Maryanne) who leads walks for Ramblers, and she organises our walks on a regular basis with a view to adding them to her portfolio. I have also been out to the Surrey Hills and the South Downs with Diane, a friend from school days who lives in Steyning, and to the Petersfield area with friend Gill.

So we carry on much the same from one year to the next - we have the usual frantic run up to Christmas with handbell carols, Carol Service, Cantanti concert etc and are only able to get away to Devon on Christmas Eve - once there we can breathe a sigh of relief and have a quiet week to ourselves (it really will be just the two of us this year). Mike is ringing all day on Boxing Day and we have some handbell sessions planned, but otherwise it will be jigsaws and cross stitch for us.



With our very best wishes for a peaceful Christmas and a happy New Year.

