

Jill and Mike's Christmas Newsletter 2019

It's that time of year again—doesn't time fly. Life is still treating us well—we celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary this year and Mike's 60th birthday. He organised a party for just over 50 family and friends at the local pub—which put on a good spread and kept the drinks flowing. It was lovely to see many people there whom we hadn't seen for some time, many of whom had travelled quite a distance. You realise how old you are getting when your friends say they are being picked up at the station by their son—whom you still think of as a toddler!!



Mike came back from the annual Intrepid canal boat ringing trip with his left leg hugely swollen and badly bruised—but it took the NHS two weeks to discover it was broken because he also poured boiling water down the same leg and the burn turned septic. They were so busy treating the cellulitis that they dismissed his protestations that he thought he had broken his leg, and it was only when the swelling went down a bit and it was clear that he could move his leg in all sorts of directions below the knee that they decided to x-ray it. He had broken both his tibia and fibula just below the knee. He ended up in plaster for several weeks—they sent him home with his leg sticking out at 90 degrees but nothing to support it. So he fashioned himself a support from a plank of wood, and screwed some brackets on at the end to keep the leg on it. It didn't stop him ringing!

He got the plaster off three days before we flew out to Leipzig for four days to join the Bristol Choral Union for a couple of concerts. They have the same conductor as Chiswick Choir and so Mike and a few others went along as extra singers. I didn't do any singing but enjoyed the trip and the concerts. He had to wear a brace, but at least it allowed a slight bend so he was able to sit in the plane seat ok. We took the plank with us! Our luggage only arrived 24 hrs after we did, so our first trip out from the hotel was to the local Primark to buy a black shirt for the concert! We had a free day on the Saturday and spent virtually the whole day at the famous zoo—it covered a huge area (67 acres I think) and there was a lot of walking involved but it was really good and we saw a lot of interesting animals including snow leopards. We also had time to visit the Bach museum—there was a room where you could sit with headphones on and listen to any (or all) of Bach's work. I spent quite a lot of time in there as I was beginning to flag! Fabulous.



Suki and I have spent quite a lot of time in Devon—I have been going down on the third week of each month to coincide with a regular handbell peal attempt, and also managed a fortnight extra in May (while Mike was on Intrepid) and a week in June and August with Mike. In June we were both volunteers at the National 12-Bell Striking Competition which was being hosted by Exeter Cathedral. We donned our blue volunteer polo shirts and Mike did a couple of stints selling souvenir glasses whilst I did a stint on the tea and cakes stall. It was a lovely hot sunny day, and we were able to enjoy wandering round the



Bishop's private gardens which had been opened up for the occasion. To top off a lovely day Exeter won!

In August we were hoping to scatter Mary's ashes, but it was too wet to get the wheelchair up on to the moor so we have deferred that until next year. We went to one of the local country shows which had a climbing wall there. So Mike decided to have a go to see how far he could get using only his hands. He got quite an impressive way off the ground.

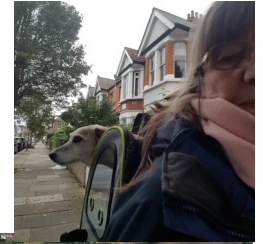


The Roving Ringers tour went to Lincolnshire this year—Mike and the group were based at Thurlby while Suki and I had a nice little barn conversion cottage 8 miles away in Carlby. We had a lovely week walking and cross stitching. I also managed a visit to my Aunty Jean in Holbeach, whom I hadn't seen for well over 10 years. It was great to see her again and we had a good catch up. She and Harry seemed to have an endless supply of Smacko dog treats which pleased Suki! I had lent my bike to one of our friends who was going on tour for the first time, and it was written off in an accident with a car which pulled out in front her. So I had to get a new one. It is a Dawes Karakum—built for touring although I don't think I am any more! It has 27 gears (of which I have used about 5 at the moment!) and has a sprung saddle and rather strange butterfly handle bars which I am still trying to get used to. I have used it a few times to cycle over to Barnes for bellringing practice—by the far

the quickest way of getting there at the moment as Hammersmith Bridge is closed for the foreseeable future. I hope to get more use out of it when the weather gets warmer and drier and the evenings get lighter. Hopefully we will get some insurance money to cover the cost—but we are awaiting the outcome of the claim which is being brought by our friend and have no influence over the timetable or outcome.



Suki covered herself in green paint by rolling in it after Acton carnival. It wouldn't come off with white spirit or water and in the end we left it to grow out naturally. It is nearly all gone now but there are still some stubborn patches, especially where she has virtually no hair. She has suddenly got old in the last few months, and her arthritis is now very obviously causing her discomfort. She doesn't want to walk very much and when she does she walks very slowly and does a lot of sniffing along the way. I have reluctantly stopped taking her on my 6+ mile walks with Maryanne in the Chilterns because she is just not up to it any more. It seems very strange walking without her. I have now got a rucksack to carry her in—which I have mainly used to take her to the vet's, but the dog minders found it useful when taking her out for the day with their dogs and children and even found quite a novel way of transporting her in it.



We didn't have a family holiday to Butlins this year. Instead, John went over to visit Amanda for a few days and then came to London where we all met up for a family meal on Dad's birthday. Amanda and the kids flew over for a few days and stayed with us. It was great to have us all together again, this time including Mike and Iffy, but somewhat noisy! I also went over to Majorca for a few days in November and stayed with Amanda. We had a good day out at the Aquarium in Palma and I enjoyed just spending time with them.



We had a nice trip to Hereford with the Barnes ringers in July—the hotel was not very disabled friendly and the staff seemed a bit dispirited, but it was a lovely area and I spent many happy hours cross stitching while Mike was ringing.

I completed a few cross stitch projects this year—an 80th birthday card for a friend, a birthday sampler for another friend, and I finally finished off the Winter Wolf which I had been given to finish by someone at the convent who was no longer able to stitch. I only had the background and the metallic threads to do when she gave it to me several years ago, but the metallic thread was very difficult to use and I kept losing heart. I am really pleased now it is finished and hanging on the wall—and the light catches the metallic threads making it sparkle so it was worth it in the end. I am now working on an extract from the Bayeux Tapestry which I have had for many years but again lost heart because it was so fine and intricate. I have made some good progress with it this year and am really enjoying doing it now.



Mike still sings with both his choirs and will be singing Messiah with Goldsmiths at the Festival Hall this year. I am going along to the rehearsals to enjoy the singing of it, but have not been able to get a place for the concert—they don't need many guest singers now that it is at the FH rather than the Albert Hall and they are massively over-subscribed for altos. I continue to do a few classes at the local gym—and will probably need to up my game now that I am not doing the walking with Suki I used to do! We are busy practising Carols on handbells for the Carol service and then the residents of the convent, Mike has two concerts and we shall be singing in the church choir for the carol service—then off to Devon for Christmas for some peace and quiet!

