

Wigney Christmas Letter 2009

All is well here. Mike stayed out of hospital again this year which is good news. We were able to enjoy a full week of canal boating, cycling and ringing on the narrowboat Intrepid in May with 10 other ringers travelling from Stourport, via Worcester to Banbury. Next year we are planning to tackle the Manchester Ship Canal and Anderton Boat Lift!

In October we went to Sierra Leone for a week with Mike's choir, Cantanti Camerati. One of the members of the choir is the Deputy High Commissioner out there and she arranged the visit. The choir also collected together over a hundred second hand instruments which were sent out ahead of the visit (or carried by members of the choir on the plane out!). We had a lovely week, and I even got to sit by the pool several times and cross stitch while the choir were rehearsing or doing workshops. We had three cars and a minibus from the High Commission to take us around and the drivers soon became expert at taking the wheelchair to pieces to fold it up and then reassemble it again. Mike's tyre exploded on the first day and we had to ask Lorraine to send another out from UK. Meantime the mechanics at the High Commission managed to make a repair out of an old piece of tyre placed inside the burst one which actually lasted all week. Mike and I stayed with the head of Security at the High Commission compound (he was an ex-army sergeant) and his lovely Kenyan wife and they were very hospitable. I was a bit worried about our safety – both in flying in an ancient helicopter to get across from Lungui airport to Freetown, and generally whilst there, but in the end it was fine and I really enjoyed it. Mike was upgraded on the overnight flight home so was able to recline and get some sleep. They let me go up to first class and sit with him once the plane had taken off as it was not very busy, which was great and very comfortable. We ate extremely well in lots of different restaurants, had a trip to the beach, did a spot on television, and the choir put on two concerts – one of which was a joint concert with local choirs (see photo) which was a wonderful riot of noise - plus they joined the local choir (boys and men) at the Cathedral for Harvest Festival on the Sunday morning – which lasted 3 hours and had 16 hymns! There was even an article in The Times about the visit.



In August we joined the Roving Ringers for 3 days on their annual tour in the Newcastle area. This gave us the opportunity of catching up with some friends, Audrey and Peggy, whom we hadn't seen for many years – and who were also dog lovers who were able to have Suki for us while we were on tour. Audrey used to run the Inland Revenue hockey teams before I did and I have known her since I first joined the Revenue in 1977 as I played in the team then. Peggy used to umpire for my Saturday club side, based at the Civil Service sports ground in Chiswick. They moved up to Great Lumley just outside Chester-le-Street many years ago and we haven't seen them since. We enjoyed a lovely few days with them either side of tour – including swimming in their pool although it was a bit cold outside! And Suki had a great time too – and was spoilt rotten!

At the Roving Ringers Reunion earlier in the year Mike was elected President of the Society for the next three years. This was a surprise – especially as they had put off electing him as Master for as long as possible because they were worried he was too enthusiastic! I guess they have warmed to him. It does mean we now have to carry around a large box with the badge of office and the gavel to all Roving Ringers events.

I went on my usual holiday to Turkey in June with my friend Jayne and had a wonderful time as usual. Jayne and I are getting to know the other Brits who go at the same time and it is becoming very sociable.

Mike was 50 this year and we celebrated with a party and barn dance at the Kew Bridge Steam Museum. We had the big 90-foot beam engine going at the beginning while we had drinks and then another engine going in the main room where we had supper and the dancing. It was a great venue and everyone seemed to enjoy it. It felt just like our wedding reception (10 years ago now!).



In July we had a long weekend with Barnes Ringers in the Shropshire area on their annual summer trip. We were based at a hotel in Ironbridge which was so nice we are going back again this year. Sadly on the Sunday morning while we were away I got the news that my darling Dad had died – so we cut the trip short and rushed back to Camberley, and I seem to have been dealing with the aftershock ever since.



He became ill immediately after Christmas and was diagnosed with a urinary tract infection so he came to stay with me and was put on a course of antibiotics. He seemed to get better but was very tired so they took a blood test and found he was suffering renal failure, so he was admitted to hospital. That was the first time he had been in hospital all his life. He was very confused in there and didn't realise where he was for the first few days, but they eventually got his kidneys back working and he was discharged. However a routine test while he was there led to the discovery that he had myeloma (bone marrow cancer) and so he then started a heavy course of chemotherapy. At one time he was taking 34 tablets a day. He was ok for a few weeks but gradually the tablets began to affect him and he became less able to look after himself and eventually my

sister moved in to look after him for a while. Then on 19 July he came down in the morning and lay down on the sofa in the lounge to wait for breakfast, and went to sleep for the last time. He actually had a heart attack, so in a way it was a blessing as he could have gone through a lot with the myeloma and been very ill for a long time.

We were lucky enough to be able to have a holiday with him in a cottage near Ilfracombe at the end of June, just three weeks before he died, with my sister and two of my three nieces and Dad really enjoyed it. We had good weather too.

I was his sole executor, so while my sister started clearing out his things and doing the house up a bit I started on the paperwork – and I am still working on it although I do now have probate and the house is sold so it is only tying up the loose ends that is left.

I miss him a lot. I put a memorial bench at the tennis club in Camberley where we used to play every week, and where we used to have to sit on a rickety old bench when we wanted to rest between games. The tennis club were very pleased to have it too. I have recently started playing tennis locally with a ringing friend so haven't had to give up altogether.



Mike and I are both still singing with Chiswick Choir and have done Vaughan-Williams' Sea Symphony and Hummel's Missa Solemnis this year, plus an evening of Schubert lieder in German (a challenge for both the choir and the audience!) – and we have joined Goldsmiths Choral Union as extras this Christmas for two performances of The Messiah at the Albert Hall with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra which was a fantastic experience. The applause at the end from a packed Albert Hall was unbelievable. It only involved us in a few rehearsals and it has also been interesting to experience another conductor.

In April the Tower Captain at Barnes stood down after 25 years. One of the other ringers has taken over except for the Friday night quarter peal and practice– so I now organise those. I have never been one for running ringing, but everyone has been very supportive and Mike stands in for me a lot although he did not want to take it on himself as he is already running the ringing at Chiswick on a Monday. I have been ringing a lot of handbells this year and have now scored several peals, including recently one of 20 surprise minor, one of spliced surprise major, one of Kent TB Royal and one of Bristol Major. I think this is definitely the future of peal ringing for me – so much more civilised to sit down inside a warm room for about two and a half hours, with a cup of tea before and after rather than standing for three hours in cold draughty tower heaving on a rope and a ton of bell metal!!



My youngest niece, Leanne, made me a Great Aunt and had a little boy on 14th November – just two days before her own birthday. She had a long labour and was in hospital for 5 days afterwards but all is well with both of them and she is now trying to get housed by the council with her partner so that they can all be together. I cross stitched a cot blanket with panels and finished it off with his date of birth while I was getting updates from my nieces on how the labour was going! Once he was born I added his name and backed it with a fleece lining and was able to give it to Leanne the next day.



His name is Ollie James Arthur Bailey (Arthur was my Dad's name) and his two aunts (my nieces) are over the moon with him.

Amanda still lives in Spain and is doing well as a Restaurant manager, as well as her hairdressing clients, and she now has a new boyfriend. Lorraine came back from her travels in March and has been living with us since then as her flat is still leased out to a tenant. We enjoy having her around and she enjoys cooking so we are often beneficiaries of her culinary delights.

I am still pushing old ladies in wheelchairs as a member of the Pushers Club at the convent where Mike still plays the organ. Suki is an honorary member and we go out on Wednesday mornings provided the weather is nice. I also go and teach handbell tune ringing to Stroke Victims about 4 times a year. This is good for them both for physical co-ordination and for the mental workout – but they can only manage the tune at the moment so I have to write out everything on to a flip chart and use a pointer. Still they enjoy it and always request more sessions when being consulted about the programme of events they would like. I am also still helping out with building some web sites, although have not been able to give this the time I would have liked this year – one of my best friends has been waiting since Halloween 2008 for me to build her a new site although I have helped to update her current one on occasions. I am struggling at the moment to learn how to use Drupal to help the Surrey Association of Bellringers to create a new site too.

Well there are more photos on our web site, plus a write up of the Sierra Leone trip and a scan of The Times Article. Yahoo closed down Geocities during the year so I have transferred Wigneyweb to a new host and now have a domain name www.wigneys.co.uk although I haven't had time to do anything with the site for about two years! I also had my hotmail account hijacked by spammers so have transferred over to using my googlemail address (jill.wigney@googlemail.com).

Christmas will never be quite the same again for me without Dad around and I will miss him a lot, this year particularly. Who is going to buy me Turkish Delight or sneak off to the coffee shop with me for Hot Chocolate and Toasted Teacake now?? I hope you have a joyous Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

Love