



# Jill and Mike's Christmas Newsletter

Can it really be that time again. I just don't know where the time goes. Mike and I have had an uneventful year - with many of our usual activities. Mike decided to go part time this year and now works 5 hours a day (in theory) which in practice means that he works full days but feels justified in taking time out during the day to organise ringing events and occasionally taking time off to go on a ringing outing or other jolly! He organises quarter peal days, quarter peal mornings and peals once or twice a month, and also organises the Barnes summer trip and Intrepid canal boat trip. He seems to be constantly surrounded by maps and Association Reports—and in his element! He rang his 2000th quarter peal on tower bells this year and his 500th from a wheelchair!

My first trip this year was a long weekend at the beginning of February in Olhao on the Algarve in Portugal to celebrate a friend's 60th birthday (Maryanne). I travelled over on the Friday night with another friend, Monica, and together with Maryanne we went out on Saturday for the day to do some sightseeing in Faro. The weather was bright and sunny and we were able to eat lunch al fresco although it was a bit chilly out of the sun. We also went to visit Maryanne's parents, who had taken an apartment in Olhao for a few months, and had coffee with them. We stayed at the hotel where on the Sunday Maryanne had arranged for us all to have lunch. The restaurant was in the hotel grounds and unfortunately at 1 pm, when we were all supposed to walk over in our finery, it absolutely lashed it down with rain. So Maryanne and her parents were looking out of the restaurant windows at all the guests in the hotel lobby looking out of the windows at them! Eventually we made a dash for it and were then settled for the afternoon. The lunch was superb and there was plenty of champagne and wine to help it along too!



In March Mike and I went to visit Amanda and Sam in Majorca for a long weekend. We were lucky with the weather—again bright and sunny although chilly out of the sun and in the wind. At that time they were renting a house in Son Ferrer which had been adapted for a wheelchair user so it was very easy for Mike to get in and move around. We had a lovely time—we went to Magaluf to experience the bars and restaurants there and see where Sam works, we went to the beach where Sam and Mike did a spot of fishing, we drove up into the mountains, and we went to see and



walk round Palma Cathedral. In the evenings we watched films on their home cinema and went out to eat (and drink!). And of course I had my highlights done!

Mike had been reading "Between a Rock and a Hard Place" which is the story of the canyoneer who had cut off his own arm after it had been trapped by a rock fall, thus trapping him. On one of the evenings we watched the film "127hours" - being the film of the book—which was really good and made extra interesting by having read the book first. It was quite cold in the evenings but Amanda dished out duvets and we snuggled beneath them to watch the films. Amanda and Sam have since moved out of that house and now have a smaller apartment to themselves nearby, still in Son Ferrer.

In May we went on the usual Intrepid Canal Boat Ringing, Cycling and Boating trip and as seems to have become customary Mike and I (and Suki) did nearly two and half weeks again. We met up with JJ, who owns the boat, on the Wednesday evening and set off Thursday morning from Stourport picking up the usual Intrepid band of ringers on the way through to Saturday. Then spent a week boating to Northampton via Coventry. Unfortunately the schedule was thrown a bit when we turned on to the

Oxford canal at Hawkesbury on Tuesday evening to find that the following day the Waterways Board were going to be demolishing a bridge some 2 miles down the canal and the canal would be closed while they did it. So early in the morning Suki and I walked down to the bridge and I managed to talk to one of the contractors who said they would be finished by mid-afternoon at the latest. The decision was made that the ringers would cycle off to the towers for the day and hopefully the boat would be able to catch them up once it could get through. JJ, Mike and I boated up to the bridge, only to find by the time we got there that they had made a pig's ear of it and the bridge had collapsed into the butty boats sinking them. It took them all of that day and the next to remove the bricks from the butty boats and re-float them and we eventually got away on the Thursday. The ringers didn't fancy cycling even further on the Wednesday so everyone had a rest day. Just as well for Suki who had sore paws by then from all the walking we had done—and didn't she play on it when we were at locks later in the week and there were plenty of people around to give her sympathy.



Once we were away we boated until 10 pm that day and got the boat going at 6 am the following day and by noon we had caught up the schedule—only to have a lock-out (ie the person letting us in to the tower didn't show up). So then we had time in hand!

On Saturday it was all change and a new team joined Mike and I and the boat to take it back to Stourport. They were all ringers—two of them very experienced with canal boats (David and John) and two relative novices (Tony and Gill). Without JJ on board it was rather a different experience and unfortunately John had to go home early on as he was ill—although he did rejoin us later in the week. This left David (and Mike) as the source of all knowledge for the rest of us crew! Luckily I had helped JJ replace a thermo-coupler in the boiler the week before so I was reasonably expert at getting the boiler lit and hot water going—even when it was reluctant to do so. We had some problems with the rudder coming out of its socket and at one time David was in the canal stripped to his underwear to fix it—beyond the call of duty.



Turkey in June was great as usual—although tinged with sadness as it was probably the last time Jayne will be able to come for a while. She and the company in which she was a director have come to a parting of the ways and she has yet to find a job. For the time being she has rented out her house and gone off to India to do voluntary work in an Orphanage which is amazingly brave of her. Hopefully there may come a time when she can join me again but next year will be all change. We did all the usual things—Turkish Bath, Boat Trip,

Fethiye market on the bus and just had a brilliant chill with lots of cross stitch and reading by the pool. Can I just put in a plug for the Yagmur Apart Otel in Gocek. It is a great place—the people are really friendly and would do a good discount if you mention I recommended it to you. If you just want a self catering base with a lovely pool, good service, and close to town and restaurants it is absolutely ideal. Thinking ahead I decided to fit in another week in September on my own before committing to two weeks next June. I was a bit nervous about doing it all on my own, but it was great. I ate out each night—I know lots of the restaurants and



waiters so it was easier than being somewhere strange. The weather was unseasonably hot and I just did absolutely nothing for 7 days. I read 5 books and made a really good start on my cross stitch of the Bayeux Tapestry, which is very fiddly and uses lots of different colours. I felt very comfortable staying there on my own—and I have already booked flights etc for 2 weeks on my own next June. I now leave a bag out there almost permanently with spare clothes, toiletries etc which really helps with the baggage allowance. You also see the same people staying there year after year—it's like meeting up with old friends.



In July the Barnes Ringers annual Summer trip went to my old stomping ground and was based at Market Harborough—at the same hotel at which I have my Christmas lunch every year with the ladies I worked with at Kettering Tax Office! We had a great 4 days and it was interesting to hear other people on the trip say they hadn't realised Northamptonshire was so pretty! Mike relied on friends to carry him up some of the more inaccessible towers! There is a report and photos on the Bellringers web site ([St Mary Barnes > Groups > Bellringers](#))

In August we joined the Roving Ringers part way through tour—arriving on Tuesday evening at Manchester Youth Hostel and then cycling about 25 miles a day finishing up at Chester—with a formal dinner at the end at the hotel in Sealand. Mike is in his third year as President and will be standing down at Reunion in February next year (so I won't have to remember to take the President's badge and gavel to every meeting after that).

Mike and I spent a weekend in Bonn in November—it was bitterly cold and I wasn't really prepared for it having only gone with hand luggage. Mind you it was clear and sunny—just a bitter chill. Mike had been in Bonn for a week working and I flew out on the Friday to join him and we took in the sights on Saturday in Cologne and in Bonn on Sunday. We spent a long time in Cologne in the Minster there, which included attending noon prayers where we got to hear the bells and the organ, and then on to the Chocolate Museum. On Sunday morning we went to mass in Bonn Minster where we heard the bells and organ there. We were especially lucky as the mass setting was Schubert's mass in D. We then went on to the Arithmetic Museum and spent the afternoon there before our evening flight. We were upgraded to business class on the way back and enjoyed a meal and extra leg room. Mike's wheelchair went off to baggage reclaim, but at least the baggage handler supervisor made them go and get it and bring it to the door of the aircraft.

We have both continued to sing with Chiswick Choir and this year I took over responsibility for the web site—just a case of updating it as necessary. We sang Mozart in the Spring, a selection of songs in the Summer, and at the end of November we did Brahms Requiem, plus For the Fallen by Cyril Rootham which hadn't been performed for nearly 50 years we think. We had his grandson join the choir for it, and a couple of granddaughters of Laurence Binyon (who wrote the poem) were in the audience.

Mike also continues to sing with his other choir, Cantanti Camerati, and we recently had several of them to lunch to practice handbells for the forthcoming Christmas Concert. They are doing Hallelujah Chorus on handbells this year—it even sounded vaguely familiar by the time they had finished rehearsing!

Mike and I are going to be singing Messiah again at the Royal Albert Hall. Last year the bass soloist went indisposed at the interval and all the men sang the bass solos in the second half as a chorus—most of them presumably sight reading it. They had great fun and relished the opportunity to sing "The Trumpet Shall Sound", and "How Shall the Nations".

Lorraine is back living with us which is lovely —she gave up living in a room in Brighton and has been with us since, although she often stays in Gatwick with friends if she is on early shift the next day, especially now that she has a second job in a pub in Gatwick on some evenings. Leanne and Ollie seem to be doing ok—I don't see all that much of them but I keep in touch. It was Ollie's second birthday recently and we all got together at Carolyn's for a pizza lunch and CBBCs TV!



My brother came up to stay for the Royal Wedding in April—both he and Lorraine went up to London to be part of it all whereas Mike and I preferred to stay home and watch it on TV. I recorded it—and John and Lorraine watched the whole thing that evening! We took advantage of his visit to get together for a family meal on the Saturday at our favourite restaurant (Thai) just round the corner.

My handbell ringing has come on a lot this year. I have rung 12 peals, mainly of surprise major with one of Treble Bob Royal. I have also had a huge number of attempts at 41 Surprise Minor but so far success has eluded us and we have put it to one side for a while to ring the surprise major which is easier to score. I am still enjoying handbells much more than tower bell ringing, which causes me quite a bit of pain in my wrists and arms if I do too much of it and I don't go on any quarter peal ringing days any more. I hardly rang on the Rovers trip because the cycling also takes its toll on my wrists. I have some supports to wear but haven't yet found any I can actually ring in which help. I found it very difficult to cope with Intrepid as well, and again did as little ringing and cycling as possible. Still luckily the handbells seem to be ok.

I am still doing my little job as Parish Administrator at St Stephen's, Shepherd's Bush. It continues to be something of a challenge to get everything done in the 5 hours a week I am supposed to work, but I am happy to do some of it in my own time later in the week. I go walking in the Chilterns as often as I can—and found myself leading a group of about 35 Ramblers one Wednesday when Maryanne had to drop out as leader the night before as her mother had been rushed to hospital after a stroke. It was a bit nerve-wracking—I had been on the walk with Maryanne the day before but hadn't really memorised it as I would have done if I had known I would be leading it. Most of the group were very nice and helped me when I needed it and everyone came up and said thank you at the end which was lovely. I have been with that Amersham group once before and in fact have recently joined the Ramblers in the hope of going with them more often, but they are not terribly keen on dogs and I think if I wanted to go with them again I would have to keep Suki on a lead which would be a shame. The web site is very helpful though and there is a walk finder where you can specify a dog-friendly one so I will keep looking and maybe go occasionally with the Amersham group when Maryanne is going.

Well I had better sign off. Hope you have a great Christmas and a happy New Year.