



# Jill & Mike's Christmas Newsletter 2015



We started the year with a visit to Sam and Amanda in Majorca, just after Bethany's first birthday. We stayed at the Vistasol hotel in Magaluf—where I had stayed previously and which was just about the only one open in January—and walked in to Son Ferrer each day to where Amanda and Sam live. It is about a mile along a well made path by the road—but of course Mike was determined to find the shortcut across country one day—which looked like somebody's farm to me so I stuck to the road and inevitably arrived about 20 minutes after he did! Although there were no particular adaptations for the disabled at the hotel, it had a lift and the apartments were quite spacious, so it was fine for Mike—we even managed to make use of the hotel pool (indoor) one morning and had a pleasant swim. Amanda and Sam took us to the caves at Drach—Mike was unable to go down the caves as there were steps so he waited for us up top. There were some impressive stalactites etc but the main emphasis seemed to be on getting everyone to walk down as quickly as possible to an amphitheatre at the bottom by an underground lake on which boats were rowed past with musicians playing Pachelbel's canon. We also went on a bus tour of Palma and had lunch at the Hard Rock Café, and spent some quality time with Amanda and Sam and Bethany. I enjoyed it so much I went back in April on my own and stayed with Amanda—still before the start of the season but there were lots more cafes etc open and people in the hotels and lying by the pools. It was of course much warmer too. Amanda had started back at work at a seafront café, and I had a lovely meal there one evening—looking out over the sea with a beer, and a steak which came with a red hot rock on which I had to cook the steak myself. It was delicious. I was amazed to find when we went back to Amanda's car at the end of the evening that the main street (The Strip) was heaving with drunken tourists and unbearable noisy. I had been completely unaware of it down by the sea front. It was warm enough for us to have a barbecue in the garden, and to get the paddling pool out for Bethany.



At the end of January Mike went on the Barnes Winter Ringing Outing which had been organised to be all ground floor towers, so he encouraged the other wheelchair ringers he knew to go along too. We think it is something of a first for 3 wheelchair ringers to ring together at the same time!



Suki has had something of a difficult (and expensive) year regarding her health- in January she had x-rays and was diagnosed with severe arthritis for which she now takes daily tablets. In June she got an infected foot and had to wear a bootee to go out. The antibiotics she was given seemed to clear it up, but then she got an infection in her other foot and then in August she started getting skin infections all over her body. I took her to the vet and he suspected cancer, so she had to go in and have biopsies taken. It was an anxious and worrying 5 days waiting for the results, and Suki was very ill, but luckily she got the all clear and after some more blood tests was diagnosed with late onset allergies—and now takes Piriton daily too. It took a long time for her to get back to her normal self, but I am pleased and relieved to say that she is ok now, if looking a little older and greyer these days.

Mike is still singing with both Chiswick Choir and Cantanti Camerati, both of whom are now under new conductors. He has also joined Goldsmiths Choral Union as a guest again this year for Berlioz Grande Messes des Morts at the Albert Hall. I gave up the Chiswick Choir when the previous conductor, Alistair Jones, left in June. I felt it would be unfair to expect a new conductor to put up with me missing rehearsals when I am in Devon. We did B Minor Mass in March—and I put a huge amount of effort into learning the music this time so that I would enjoy singing it, which I did tremendously despite virtually losing my voice a few days before the concert. Then Alistair's final concert was Messiah—which I now know really well, so that was hugely enjoyable to sing as my last concert with them. The new conductor (Hilary Campbell) is a professional conductor and also a teacher of singing technique—the first concert under her auspices was a selection of French music including Durufle Requiem which I went to and I was impressed by the improvement in the choir's sound.

Mike and I also sang the first part of the Messiah with the church choir for the Advent Carol Service, and we are of course doing it again with Goldsmiths this year at the Albert Hall with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Suki and I have continued to go down to Devon on a regular basis, to see Mike's mum and to have nice walks on Dartmoor. At the beginning of the year I engaged the services of a cleaner and gardeners. The cleaner is a treasure—she goes in a few days before my arrival each month, and ensures the house is beautifully clean, and smells nice and fresh, when I get there. The gardeners have not proved to be such an asset—they started alright and dug over all the ground

(which is clay so quite a challenge) and planted a few plants, but they haven't been back since July. They blame the weather and pressure of work, but I think I will have to look for someone else next year. Jayne was at the house for the summer—which was great as it was like having a holiday every time I went down. We did lots of things together, including taking the bus from Bovey to Exeter—a big adventure! I used my Freedom Pass (yes I became a fully fledged state pensioner this year) which worked and thus saved me the £7.50 fare. Very useful to know. I was given several boxes of embroidery threads by one of the sisters at the convent who can no longer do cross stitch because she has swollen hands. I spent many happy hours sorting them all onto bobbins and into thread boxes. I am still trying to finish a snow wolf for her but it is really slow going as I have to use filament thread, which is even more difficult than metallic. Mike came down at Easter and the August bank



holiday week, and over 5 days in July we hosted the Barnes Ringers Summer Trip.

Mike organised all the towers and lunchtime pubs. Most of the ringers stayed at a local pub in Bovey High Street, although we had 5 staying with us. We had a fish and chip supper at the house on one of the evenings—which I actually ducked out of once I had collected the food as I had to go to handbell rehearsals! I have enjoyed ringing tunes with the Moretonhampstead handbell ringers again this year, and have attended several rallies and competitions with them. They always seem to find space for me, even though they now have a full complement. Last Christmas we went to Tracey House, where Mike's mum now lives, and gave a small concert for the residents.

I have also continued to ring method on handbells both with bands in London and with a band in Exeter, and at the end of the year notched up my 400th peal (90 in hand). Mike meanwhile has continued to do a huge amount of tower bell ringing and organising. He organises one or two QP days a month, plus the Intrepid canal boat tour and the Barnes ringers annual summer trip. Rovers tour this year was based at the Redfield Centre in Bucks (no dogs allowed). Mike cycled about 200 miles in the week, and by the end of the week was keeping up with all but the fastest cyclists. Suki and I booked a room in a cottage nearby, but I wasn't particularly happy there as there were other people coming and going which caused Suki to bark a lot and there were a lot of rules and regulations, including banning her from the kitchen after the first day which made cooking an evening meal difficult. It was during this week that I had to take her to the vet in London with the cancer scare, so we cut the booking short and I stayed at home for the latter part—going out to meet Mike occasionally at the end of the day to take the wheelchair back to the centre for him so he didn't have to tow it.



The Intrepid tour this year went from Nether Heyfield to Slough and back, and this time I just did the first week on board and then left Mike to it. This worked really well for both of us. He did a lot of driving in the second week which he enjoyed tremendously and had someone sleeping in the bunk above (my bunk) who was willing to get up early and carry him to the back to get the boat going nice and early each day. Suki and I did a lot of walking along the canal towpath, including the whole of the Slough arm, and I enjoyed the trip all the more for only having to do one week. On the second week Suki and I went out to meet the boat several times — parking somewhere and walking along the canal path to meet up with it and then boating back to the car. This was great fun—and then I could go home to warm house, nice shower and big comfy bed! On one day we did the Aylesbury arm this way—a distance of about 6 miles and a really nice day out.



The annual family holiday to Butlins took place in July—this time we treated ourselves to staying in the on-site hotel which was something of a luxury. We had a really good few days, and have decided to go for a whole week next year as the time flies by so quickly. Amanda, Sam and Bethany were unable to come this year but they came over in October



for Sam's sister's wedding and we all met up in Manchester for the weekend. Amanda is expecting another baby next June,

I am now back in touch with my uncle (mother's brother) after a gap of about 30 years! He is 80 and had his leg amputated below the knee in May and has been housebound ever since. Carolyn and I went over to have a clean up for him before he came out of hospital, and since then I have been over once a week (when I am in London) to run errands for him and generally help out. He has a friend who checks on him on a regular basis, and he has become an expert in the art of online grocery shopping! He does however very much miss being independent. At the beginning of December on a nice sunny day he was finally able to get out—he got down the steps from his house using the handrails that had eventually been put up by the council, and then I brought the wheelchair out and pushed him. He twice met people he knew and was able to have a chat to them, and he got to the barbers for a much needed haircut, to the post office and to the shop. It was the first time he had been out of the house except to get in to an ambulance since May.

We lost our beloved dog minders in October when they moved away—the silver lining being that they have moved to Dartmouth so we can still go and see them (and their two dogs who are Suki's mates). I am bereft and still haven't sorted out a replacement. They loved Suki like their own dog, and even took her away on holiday one weekend to Devon—dropping her off with Jayne on their way back to London as I was on my way to Devon the same day. They also used to do our garden in London and again I don't know how I will replace them.

I did Jury service in August—that's the second time I have been called up. I was selected on the first morning, the trial finished on the Wednesday afternoon and we deliberated until Monday without coming to a verdict. We were then dismissed, and then told we could go home as we wouldn't be wanted again. So it wasn't all that onerous, except I would have preferred to have sat around in the waiting room reading a book than be cooped up arguing and debating with the same 11 people for three days going over and over the same ground. Still at least I have done my civic duty (again!).

I have recently started doing a bit more exercise. I have been thinking that walking Suki, at least in London, is not very aerobic at all as she stops and sniffs so much, so I decided when I left the choir to do something proactive on Tuesday evenings when Mike is at rehearsals rather than just sit and watch TV. So at the beginning of the term I went up to the new pool in Acton to go swimming. I discovered that as an old age pensioner I could get swimming, and any of the other classes/sessions at half price and that there was a programme for the over-50s. So I now do Zumba and a Fitness class twice a week when I can. I will either get fitter or fall over with a heart attack—or at least it feels like that in the Zumba. I still go walking in the Chilterns with Maryanne on a regular basis too.

Mike got a new car this year—he gets a new one every 3 years on the motability scheme— another Mondeo estate but with an on-board computer and satnav which is taking some getting used to. I am still very happy with my Fiesta but am thinking of getting a 4-door in the new year after Mike's mum (Mary) got trapped in the footwell in the back of my current two-door version trying to get out! After much shoving and pushing we finally manhandled her out, but it is not something I would like to repeat.



At the beginning of December Lorraine and I went to Butlin's Skegness for the weekend for the Great British Folk Festival. I think Lorraine was one of the youngest people there! I really enjoyed it. We saw lots of bands, but the highlight for me was Steeleye Span on Sunday evening. We were very lucky to get really good seats with a good view—and joined in lustily with the chorus of "All Around My Hat"!!

We are spending Christmas week in Devon as usual, and Mary will come home for Christmas Day and have lunch with us. It is a nice quiet peaceful time after the hectic round of singing and ringing that leads up to it.



Mary with oldest friend June

Suki on holiday



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