



JILL AND MIKE'S CHRISTMAS NEWSLETTER



Happy Christmas - where does time go when you are retired?? The year has flown by and most of the things on my list of things I want to do are still on the list!! I guess the biggest thing to happen to us this year was when Suki bounced into our lives in January (I think I now know how Pooh and Piglet felt when Tigger arrived in the forest!). She is a Parsons Jack Russell terrier and was about one-year old when we got her from Battersea Dogs Home - so she is coming up for two now. She was taken to Battersea by a family who were getting rid of her because she snapped at their 5-year old child when she was cornered. This meant that she was deemed



unsafe with children and could not go to a family with children, even visiting ones! However we have found that she is fine with children, enjoying playing with them and happy to be stroked etc by them - this is her with the daughter of one of our ringing friends at a ringers party only a few weeks after we got her. What she really hates are postmen and bar staff. She can spot a postman a mile away - and barks her head off at him. In pubs she is happy to Hoover up crisps, beg for chips or just lie asleep under the table while all the customers mill around, but if a member of the bar staff approaches the table to collect glasses, or deliver

food, she jumps up barking and growling at them. It is uncanny because we can't work out how she knows they are staff??

Also on the form was "she likes walks and cuddles" and that she "destroys post"! In fact the destroying post was quite a theme throughout the form - and we soon found this out for ourselves. She jumps at the letterbox and pulls the letters through, out of the postman's hand, and then "kills" them. We were getting a lot of letters and magazines with teeth marks in them! Our regular postman thought it was amusing, but the relief one complained so we have had to put up a letterbox cage. Even so Suki leaps at the door whenever anything comes through or someone knocks, barking madly, and she can reach way above the letterbox to the glass panels in the door. We often find callers standing back on the pavement on the other side of the gate when we open the door!

She chose me as I was walking round the Home looking at dogs by leaping into the air a lot and barking - and then when I put my hand out she licked it and wagged her tail very fast. I thought we would be compatible if she liked walks and cuddles - but the Home insisted on everyone in the family meeting the dog before they would allow us to have her. So 2 days later Mike came along to the Home with me - and she immediately leapt on his lap and licked his ear, so no problems there then! We took her home that day and that evening introduced her to handbell ringing! She seemed to take to it!



I must admit that I found it quite stressful at first when she came home. She barked a lot and I also felt trapped in the house as I didn't feel I could leave her alone, and it is not like a child where you can take them into shops. We were running out of milk and I was getting desperate when I discovered on-line shopping -

wonderful! Sit in the comfort of your own home with a cup of coffee picking things off the shelf, and then someone turns up a couple of days later and all you have to do is put it all away. It was a real life saver at the beginning and now it is just a real convenience and time-saver.

In February we started attending dog-handling classes on a Thursday evening and it was a great relief to start being equipped with some strategies for challenging behaviour etc. We both enjoyed the classes - in fact it was like a support group for me, especially when I saw how badly behaved other dogs could be, and was good socialising time for Suki. Suki is very quick to learn although is easily distracted! When we first got her we were advised not to let her off the lead for 3 months, as she had been very difficult to get back when they had let her off. Indeed, when she got out of the front door during the first week she spent some time chasing the traffic before a neighbour managed to catch her. However at the classes we did lots of work on "recall" and she got very good at it. And now she is fine off the lead - she loves to play with a ball and will chase it and bring it back to be thrown again for hours. In fact I have more of a problem with getting her to stay while I walk away - she is a bit clingy in that respect and gets distressed if she sees me leaving.



We did the classes until they broke up for the summer at the end of July, working up from the beginners to the advanced class where we moved on to clicker training (she was very quick at picking this up) and agility stuff - again she was good at it but got very over excited and barked a lot! I decided not to go back after the summer break. The advanced class was at 9.15 at night which meant walking home after 10 pm, and by then I felt we had both settled down and that there wasn't much more to be gained from them unless you wanted to enter competitions and I wasn't really finding the time to put the work in to the training during the week.

She has learned to walk along with the wheelchair and often hitches a ride on Mike's lap when he takes her for a walk. She spends most of the day sleeping on his bed while he works, and she is now fine to be left for a few hours on her own in the house. What a difference a year makes. Of course she still chews the odd trainer or soft toy if we leave it within reach, and we are on our third lead and harness! - but at least she doesn't chew the walls or carpets! She is very affectionate and loves to curl up to sleep on a lap. She can also jump very high!! She raids bins and scavenges for food given half a chance - which is a real problem in London as the pavements and parks always seem to have the remains of take-aways scattered around. She enjoys playing with toys and although we know it is just attention-getting I am afraid it works with us, and if she runs up to us with a ball or a tuggy-toy we just have to play with her!

We have been taking her ringing with the hope that she would get used to it and sit and wait while we rang. However after a year this seems unlikely. She has got used to the bells, and is ok if she is with me, but she just barks if I try and ring - one of the other ringers has to take her outside for a walk if I want to ring. Mind you she recognises rounds and rushes back to the tower when she hears them. Whilst I love taking her along to the pub afterwards, and having her around, she is quite disruptive to the ringing and is clearly distressed on occasions, so I think I am going to abandon the idea and leave her at home where she will be more comfortable and happy. It will be better for the ringing too!

Well I could bore for England about Suki - but perhaps two pages is enough for now!! Suffice it to say that we both love her and cannot now imagine life without her.

Moving on then - Mike has managed to stay out of hospital all year, and in fact has had his longest stint of being out of hospital since the accident. He still has minor pressure sore problems but they are manageable. He now works full time from home - in bed, cutting down the amount of time spent sitting, which helps - making good use of email and conference calls to keep in touch with his various work projects.

My little job at the church is going well. I did a lot of extra hours at the beginning of the year and equipped the office with new computer equipment, software and broadband, and finally setting up a web site for them (www.ststephensw12.org). I now try to keep my hours to around 5 a week - if only to be fair to my successor! I do 4 hours on a Tuesday at the vicarage and then an hour (or so) at home producing the weekly newsheet and

updating the web site. The hall has finally been sold so from next year I won't have all that hassle of bookings, invoicing etc.

I have also been helping out with the St Mary's, Barnes web site (www.stmarybarnes.org) and am going to be involved in a complete re-vamp. I am trying to teach myself the intricacies of HTML, CSS, JavaScript etc and have been devouring books on the subject from the library. I have some web page authoring software (Dreamweaver) but I want to understand what is going on in the code, if only to outwit it when it doesn't do what I want!

I have set up a little personal web site too (www.geocities.com/jillwigney), just to practice some of the things I am learning etc. I have put a copy of this letter on it, and there are some photos on it, but it is very much in the initial stages and I haven't put any time into designing an attractive home page or site pages yet. So there we are - even more geeky than when I was at work!

I have finally given up hockey this season. I really felt that it was all getting too much of an effort - we stayed up in Division 1 at the end of last season where the matches are very intense and it all gets very serious and unfriendly. However I have stayed on as secretary of the club and attend the social events. I intended to go and watch the odd game, but it is amazing how quickly Saturdays can get filled up with other activities once the commitment to play hockey is taken away. My only exercise now is tennis with Dad once a week, occasional cycling, and walking the dog twice a day. This doesn't provide as much exercise as I thought it would since once we are at the park I amble round kicking or throwing the ball while the dog dashes around like a mad thing. Still it does get me out - I am sure I would be glued to the computer all day if I didn't have to get out with the dog in the afternoons. We do occasionally get some long walks - there is Richmond Park, the Grand Union Canal and the Hillingdon Trail for example - but it means getting in the car and driving somewhere, so not practical for the every day routine stuff.

We both still sing with the Chiswick Choir, and Mike also continues to sing with Cantanti Camerati, although he has given up as Treasurer of both after many years (21 in the case of Chiswick Choir). In March we sang Stabat Mater by Alistair Jones, our conductor. It was very difficult as it was very modern and there were lots of consecutive seconds and sevenths, where all the parts were singing the same thing but one note apart. However I did eventually find myself humming some of the tunes, and the work sounded marvellous when the orchestra was added for the performance itself. At the beginning of this month we did Mozart's Mass in C Minor, as completed by Robert Levin. This had been done at the proms earlier too. I spent a lot of time learning the music with the help of a rehearsal CD, and thoroughly enjoyed the concert because I knew the music so well. This is another great benefit for me of being retired as I now have time to really learn the notes. Next March we are doing The Messiah, as arranged by Mozart. Apparently the choir parts are the same, it is the soloists and the orchestration which is changed, but as I have never actually sung the Messiah it will be a new experience for me.

Piano playing stumbles along. I virtually gave up in the summer because I seemed to be away so much where I couldn't practice that I couldn't make enough progress to make a lesson worthwhile. However I started my lessons again in September and am working on several Grade 1 pieces. My scales and arpeggios are apparently at Grade 3 standard - I just can't play anything!

I went for the usual two weeks to Turkey in June. This time we decided not to go with Tapestry Holidays as they had become too expensive and had moved away from self catering apartments to villas with jeeps - ok if you want to drive around but we didn't want drive, or to be so far out of town and they were also very expensive. So we booked up to go back to the Yagmur Apartments in Gocek, which we had been to a couple of times with Tapestry before they stopped going there. I booked directly with them and then booked flights with First Choice, which is the airline for whom Lorraine, my eldest niece works. I was very nervous that it would all be a disaster, but it was absolutely brilliant. They picked us up at the airport in a posh people carrier - no herding on to a bus for us, then whisked us off to Gocek which





only took 20 minutes. We were greeted by the owners as friends, given a beer and invited to eat with them that evening. The rest of the fortnight was blissful - the apartment was great, the food and shops just as good as we had remembered them in Gocek itself, and the weather was wonderful too. Whilst there I discussed with the Kamil and Yilmaz, the owners, whether it would be possible to arrange a tour to Ephesus etc for Mike and they were very positive about being able to do so. So I booked up to go back with Mike later in the year. Lorraine was one of the air hostesses on our flight home which was great - treating us to champagne and introducing us to the pilot. It just finished it off in style. Interestingly, Tapestry

Holidays went bust later in the year - so perhaps lots of people deserted them like us this year.

Mike and I have managed to get away together quite a lot this year. In May we went on the usual canal boat week with ringing and cycling which Mike organises. Suki came too, fell in 3 times, and thoroughly enjoyed herself. A dog minder had to be factored in to the quarter peal arrangements but I don't think anyone minded and they enjoyed having her along.



In July we went on the Barnes ringing trip to South Wales - getting as far down as St Davids Cathedral, and across to Caldey Island for the afternoon. There were quite a few ground floor rings for Mike - including St David's itself (see photo). We found a dog-friendly B&B just outside Carmarthen (which is where everyone else was based) which was next to a farm - so there were some nice walks straight out of the door, and Suki also enjoyed the beach on Caldey Island - even tried eating the sand!

In August we went on the family holiday, this time to a caravan park in Selsey. We had booked that one because after much research on the internet and over the phone it seemed as if it was the only holiday park in England where you could have a dog and a wheelchair user in the same caravan! There were plenty which took pets and wheelchairs, but not in the same accommodation. Tough call - sleep with the husband or the dog! Our hearts sank when we arrived and found it was the biggest caravan park in Europe - absolutely swarming with people! But the caravan itself was very pleasant and we were in a quiet part of the camp so not too worried by evening revellers. Mike went out handcycling on 3 of the days to get fit for Roving Ringers, while I went on long walks with the dog, and we also did quite a bit of ringing - so ended up not spending quite as much time with the family as we





intended. However it was nice for us all to get together again. Leanne and her friend made much of the night life, and Leanne won the talent competition with her dance routine so had to go back for a weekend in September for the finals. I put into practice a technique I had learned for getting Mike up on to my back so I could carry him up towers which were not ground floor rings. We went to a local practice which was up a short flight of stairs and I got him up there and down again at the end quite easily. I have done it a couple of times since - once at Kingston which has 50 steps - but I usually leave it to a stronger, younger male if there are any around.

We joined the Roving Ringers for the last couple of days of their tour at the end of August - this year the tour was in the Lake District so plenty of hills and lovely scenery. Mike managed to ring at most of the towers, thanks to being carried up towers by willing volunteers. We drove to Furness Abbey and I left Mike there looking round while I then drove to Heversham where the tour was finishing a couple of days later. I then cycled to Arnside and got the train back to Mike, the train journey starting with a stretch of track which goes out across Morecambe Bay which was rather impressive. From Furness Abbey we cycled to join up with the tour at Broughton in Furness. After ringing there we had a 10 mile cycle with hills to the Conniston Coppermines Youth Hostel - which is one and a half miles up a track. Although we made steady progress it became clear that we were not going to make it for dinner - thanks to mobile phones we were able to keep in touch with the rest of the group. So we got a call that the warden of the hostel had volunteered to come out to get us in her car. Trouble was, by the time Mike, panniers, wheelchair and handbike were loaded up there wasn't any room for me, so I had to cycle on my own to the hostel! Still it was a lovely location and free of my panniers it was a very enjoyable cycle and I only had a few miles to go. They kept dinner warm for me so I didn't miss out.

In October we finally managed a trip to Turkey together. This was Mike's first visit to Turkey and we managed to get round many of the usual tourist attractions thanks to Kamil and Yilmaz. Once again we were picked up at the airport in their car - and now that the new Gocek tunnel is open it only took 15 minutes to get to Gocek. We were having a beer by 1.30 pm having left Gatwick at 7 am! We went to Fethiye market on the local bus (about the size of a camper van) and spent all day there. Mike was duly amazed by the sheer size of the market and by the fact that one could spend all day there and not be bored. Then we went on a 3-day tour taking in Pammukale, Aphrodisias and Ephesus. Yilmaz drove us in his car (it was about three and a half hours drive away) and made all the hotel arrangements etc and took us out to eat in the evenings at little local restaurants which he knew. I did get a bit worried when he turned up to breakfast on the last morning clearly suffering from a massive hangover, and was struggling to keep awake during the drive back to Gocek. But we survived! And it was a great trip. I had been to Aphrodisias and Ephesus before, although some time ago, but I hadn't been to Pammukale. It is now possible to hire audio guides at Ephesus which made the visit even more interesting. When we got back we felt we had had enough driving so on the Saturday we went on a boat trip round the Gocek islands. I thought Mike might find this a bit boring, since there are about 4 stops for swimming and nothing much else but enjoy the scenery, but he did enjoy it. We had a nice lunch; there were some Turkish buskers on board who provided music all day, and Mike even got a swim at the last stop - the first time he had swum in the Mediterranean. The boat owners were very enthusiastic about being



able to help Mike in and out of the boat - but a bit of a dead loss when it actually came to it. They pushed him in, but didn't seem to have much idea about how to get him out again - so I carried him up the steps!

We went swimming a couple of times in the pool at the Yagmur - mainly in the evenings as we were out and about in the day time. The staff at the Yagmur were very keen to help Mike get around - pushing or carrying the chair whenever they could see an opportunity. They found an old door which we propped up on the steps to the apartment, which meant we could get in and out without assistance. The apartment was big enough for Mike to get around easily, including the terrace area (the only one there with a big enough terrace in fact). The weather was very good - nice and warm but not unbearably hot and in fact we didn't need any suncream because we were out and about most of the time. Although Lorraine couldn't wangle her rota to work on our flight on the way home, she did ask the crew to look out for us, and she arranged for us to have a complimentary drink, which was a treat.

In September we went up to York for the tri-annual dinner of the Society of Royal Cumberland Youths (one of the bellringing societies to which we belong) and stayed with a roving ringer friend who has a farmhouse, 11 acres, dog (Storm - also a rescue dog), 4 horses and a foal. We had a super weekend going out for long walks in the Yorkshire dales with the dogs, and I also got to help with the foal. We had to bring him and mum in so the foal could have his injection and I held his head and then took mum back to the field. I was in my element. Suki and Storm got on very well - they had to sleep together in the porch which was a new experience for Suki since she usually sleeps on my bed. She complained a bit the first night but was fine the second night. She wasn't used to having so much space to run around in, and was a bit possessive with Storm's toys! Oh yes - the dinner was good too!

We have attended two weddings this year - which makes a nice change from the run of funerals we had last year, plus a couple of 50th birthday celebrations of friends.



Adrian and Helen were married in April - and Mike was an usher.



Liz and Francis were married in July - and we rang in the quarter peal beforehand.

This involved Mike being raised through the trap door in the floor of the ringing chamber on a climbing rope





and then abseiling down again at the end in time for the service.

It was rather amusing because when we arrived at the main door, the vicar saw us and suggested access to the church would be easier round the side entrance, whereby we thanked her but indicated that Mike was going up through the trap door to ring!

We have made a couple of trips to Devon to visit Mike's parents this year - with the added bonus that Suki and I get to go for lovely long walks in beautiful countryside. Mary (Mike's mum) often comes with us - even getting up early to do the 7 o'clock morning one. There is also a very nice long walk along a disused railway line and back along by the River Bovey which Mike can do in the wheelchair, and we have done that one a couple of times now with Suki and Mary. Mary looked after Suki while we went out on our bikes too - they went out for yet more walks. Suki was exhausted when we got home because every time there was a lull in the activity someone took her out for a walk!! Jack (Mike's dad) and Mary have both taken to Suki, especially Mary who seems to have developed the habit of dropping bits of food whenever Suki is around! We are looking forward to spending Christmas with them again this year.

So all in all quite a full year. I really don't know where the time goes given that hardly any of it is spent at work. We take a little longer over breakfast these days - watching breakfast television which I never did before I retired. But otherwise I just don't seem to be able to fit everything in. I have started putting my ringing records on to a database - Mike bought me the software for my birthday last year - but I have only managed to do 2005 and since I have another twenty years to do I think it is going to be a very long term project. I have hardly done any cross stitch at all; I haven't touched my main project which is a picture of Exeter Cathedral for over a year! I have handmade most of my cards during the year, with the help of the computer and stickers etc, which have been well received. Our vicar at St Nicholas, Chiswick, who married us, retired at the end of November after 32 years as vicar of the parish. We rang a peal for him and also attempted a quarter peal of St Nicholas Doubles with a band of ringers all of whom rang on Sundays. We didn't get this but we did ring 1000 changes so I made up a card for him with a photo of the ringers on the front and details of the ringing inside. All the ringers signed it too. It made a very nice memento.

I have taken over responsibility for the Sunday Afternoon Stewards rota at St Nicholas, and I am also just taking over as Membership Secretary for the Middlesex Association of ringers. So I can't see things getting any less hectic next year - just the list getting longer.

All the family are fine and doing much the same things. Leanne has recently applied to a couple of universities to carry on with her dance studies. Amanda has taken permanent residency in Magaluf, although she has given up the beauty salon and is now working in a hairdressing salon out there. So we don't see her as much as we would like.

Well I will sign off now. Hope you have a peaceful Christmas and a Happy New Year .