

Christmas Letter 2010



Witney, Oxfordshire, was once famous for blanket making and is also the place I have returned to this week, to finish delivering some training that I started earlier in the year. Since being TUPE'd back to BT from Accenture, almost a year ago now, I have spent quite a bit of time on the road, designing and delivering training, mainly for Openreach engineers. This time, I am training engineers to install and maintain the equipment that provides 3G capacity for mobile operators, in order to meet the ever increasing demand for mobile broadband. As a matter of interest, watching one short YouTube video on a mobile device, uses as much network capacity as would be required to send 500,000 text messages!

Last weekend, Alison and I went back to Nottingham. As an infrequent visitor to the city these days, the changes are more apparent... One thing is for certain, with all the tram lines, pedestrianised areas and parking restrictions, I wouldn't like to have to fix faults with customer's phone lines these days! We also went to Attenborough, as we do at this time of year for Rememberance. It's something that I have done since being a Cub Scout and it seems even more relevant now than it did all those years ago, with young people the same age as Richard and Edward losing their lives or coming home with horrific injuries from modern wars. On a lighter note, we stopped off at Hilderstone village hall on the way home to take part in a square dance. Yes I know, it seems a strange thing to want to do, but it certainly keeps your brain active, gives you a bit of exercise and above all, it's good fun! I used to watch the square dancers on a Thursday night at the, now defunct, BT Sports and Social Club in Yarnfield, when I first stopped on site before moving up to Stone from Gedling... Who would have thought that 14 years later I'd be joining them!

In March, we visited an exhibition of the "Staffordshire Hoard" at the Potteries museum. Although not totally cleaned up at the time (still traces of mud here and there), it was certainly impressive (as £3M hoards of Anglo-Saxon gold go)... I daresay metal detector sales have gone up recently! You may remember I mentioned that my Uncle Ray passed away early last year... Sadly my Aunt Shirley followed around a year later, having never really adjusted to life without her partner! Fortunately they were able to celebrate being married for 50 years before Ray became too ill and I do have many happy memories of going to stay with them as a youngster in the school holidays.

I still do a few gigs with the "Stonewashed Blues Band" (as their soundman). The lead singer has retired from work now, having moved back to his native Harrogate, so we travel up there occasionally to entertain the locals. Unfortunately, on a trip up there in May, our keyboard player Tim, received a phone call to say that his wife Jan had been taken ill and sadly died. Alison was able to go to the funeral on my behalf, as I was unable to attend due to work commitments. Apparently it was an upbeat affair, although obviously tinged with sadness, but I do think that it is important to remember the good times!

In July, we went to Oxfordshire for the weekend with Alison's old Culham College friend Diana and her Husband Bill. On Saturday, we attended the Biennial College reunion... Alison was one of the last students to qualify before they closed it as a Teacher Training College and re-opened as an International School. Its use is changing again (becoming an Academy), but at least it is being retained as an educational establishment, rather than being converted into luxury flats! Alison's old chemistry lecturer died just before last Christmas so his daughter dedicated a bench in his memory, after arriving in George's old Rover car (still going strong after all these years!). July was quite a busy month all in all, with Richard's girlfriend Laura's graduation, after gaining a 2.1 in Fine Art. We went up to Huddersfield to see her exhibition along with those of the other students (interesting... although slightly off the wall, in some cases). Edward went to Nordagutu in Norway with his scouting friends, climbed Mount Nara and slept under the stars (although it never gets totally dark at that time of the year)!

Speaking of Edward, he enjoyed his gap year, visiting his friend in Whitehaven a couple of times (coinciding with the Maritime Festival on the second occasion) and working voluntarily at his school as a part-time lab technician/teaching assistant. Whilst there, he was able to take the opportunity to use the school's resources (including a recently acquired laser cutter) for some of his own projects. In September, he started his Electronic Engineering course at Staffordshire University. He seems to have made a good start, having opted to stay on campus in his first year. He's joined the local SCUBA Diving club and seems to be making good progress with his studies. He comes back each weekend, as he's kept his job at the local garage and of course, he brings home his dirty washing (which incidentally, he is made to wash himself!)

Richard is now working for npower, but very few jobs offer long term contracts at the moment, so he's still looking to secure something more permanent, eventually. At the beginning of September, he and Laura spent a week camping in Widemouth Bay (Cornwall), having just bought themselves a new, larger tent and stove. In October Laura bought tickets to visit the Grand Designs show at the NEC, which they both found interesting (especially the £17,000 shower with built in hi-fi and steam room).

Alison keeps busy with her ladies groups (NWR & WI), visiting various places, including Port Sunlight (well worth a visit apparently), she also helped to raise funds for a local hospice by taking part in a sponsored walk, organised by her nursery. She still works voluntarily at just one school now and supplies when required, mainly for the year 3/4 teacher that she helps each Tuesday. When not doing any of the above, Alison runs the home and organises our social life. During the summer break, she invited her cousin Geraldine over for a couple of days, we have also been to visit her in Gedling, helping with a few gardening and DIY tasks in her new bungalow. My sister Elaine also came over for a couple of days in August and likewise, we have been over to Chester, returning with several bags of apples from their orchard. Our own apple tree has produced a very good crop of really nice eating apples this year and has just had its annual prune... Just the willow tree to do now!

We went on various short breaks and day trips ourselves throughout the year. After returning from a church trip to Wells, and then finding myself working in the Bristol area, I decided that it would be a good idea to return and spend a few days exploring. We managed to squeeze quite a bit in, marvelling at Brunel's engineering (Clifton Bridge and S.S. Gt. Britain), joining in with the Harbour Festival activities and looking at the NT's Gothic restoration at Tyntesfield. On the way home, we spent a day in Bath, visiting the Roman Baths and the Abbey. Alison was also able to join me on a couple of my business trips this year: Bothwell (near Glasgow) and Witney. On each occasion, she was able to tour the local area during the day, fit in some shopping and then join me for a meal each evening.

This month we went to Stoke Film Theatre to see "Made in Dagenham"... It certainly captures the mood of the late 60s with good complimentary music, starting with Desmond Dekker's "Israelites" and finishing with "You Can Get It If You Really Want" (with other great tracks in between). Hardly a blockbuster, but well worth a look if you see it in the DVD bargain bin!

<http://www.paramountpicturesintl.com/intl/uk/madeindagenham/>

Well, that's most of our news... I hope you didn't find it too boring!
All that remains is, as usual, to wish you and your families
a Happy Christmas and Prosperous 2011.

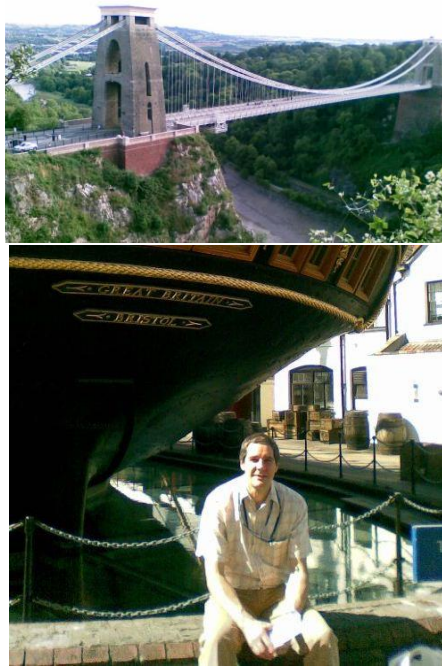
Kind Regards

*Nigel, Alison,
Richard & Edward*





Wells Cathedral



Clifton Suspension Bridge
Nigel and the SS Gt. Britain



Romans Baths & Abbey



The top of Mount Nara (Norway)



Hilt Fitting from
the Staffordshire Hoard
(including mud!)



Whitehaven Harbour

Richard
& Laura



Alison & George's Old Rover

