



2014

Brentwood in Essex is where BT has one of its main office buildings. I happen to be here, because I'm working with a colleague, designing some training to accompany the launch of a new learning management system, as part of a big HR transformation project... It's not the sort of thing that I find terribly exciting and call me cynical if you like, but having worked for BT (in its various guises) for so many years, I can't help but think 'haven't we been here before?'

Health-wise, it's not been a great year for the younger members of the family... Richard's had some gastric issues, which culminated in an endoscopy to treat a condition apparently caused by Crohn's disease. Fortunately, things seem to have settled down again but he'll need regular check-ups from now on. Edward was not able to go to the USA again this year as planned, so decided to go diving in Spain instead... He's on a cocktail of drugs at the moment, to quell the pain from a prolapsed disc at the base of his spine. Whether his injury was caused (or exacerbated) by diving, we can't be sure, but we do hope that he doesn't have to wait too long for the surgery that is now required to fix the problem!



On the jobs front, Richard was making good progress at work, heading up a team that dealt with mobile network issues... That is, until Phones4u were forced out of business! Fortunately, he managed to secure a portfolio sales job for a couple of weeks and continued with his part-time job at the pub. The good news now is that this week, he started a new job with a company based at Keele, that supply and fit vehicle tracking systems. It seems that he was headhunted (along with his former manager) by this US based company because of his technical and managerial skills. Job security seems virtually non-existent these days. On a personal note, I'm just grateful that retirement is not too far away!

Edward finished his degree this year, graduating with a 2:1 in Electronic Engineering and is now working for Capula, (the company where he did his placement year). They've provided him with a special chair, etc. to help him to cope with his back problem, so at least he's reasonably comfortable and financially independent now (despite the painful back).



In January this year, the boys went ice skating on a temporary ice rink at Trentham Gardens and we started to use the family calendar that Edward presented to his mum for Christmas. Instead of a picture for each month, there was a place for photographs (not provided!). It's only when you try to find 12 photos (to represent all the things that we did last year), that you realise just how much we managed to fit in!

Alison continues to work at school / nursery and goes on regular training courses to keep her certifications up to date in Paediatric First Aid, Food Hygiene, Safeguarding etc. We continue to be involved with the social group of friends from Bakewell Drive (where we lived when we first came to Stone) and join in with monthly quizzes, organise local walks, etc.



In April, Richard and Laura went on a short break to the Lake District and both boys went to Alton Towers for their annual adrenalin fix! In May, Edward took his final exams and exhibited his Final Year Project (a 'Binary Coded Decimal Clock') at the Staffs University 'GradEx', prior to his graduation in June (and another trip to Alton Towers).



In July we went to Trentham Gardens for Edward's graduation ceremony, held barbeques for Edward's diving club and also 'Bakewell Friends', before going on holiday ourselves to Madeira.



This was our second trip to our friend's (Diana and Bill's) lovely apartment. This gave us the chance to see parts of the island that we hadn't seen on our first visit, as well a re-visit places that we enjoyed when we were there 3 years ago. We also covered everywhere from the southeast tip, to the northwest part of the island. Journey times are much reduced now, due to the numerous tunnels that are gradually replacing the roads, which cling perilously to the mountain sides. We also followed a couple of 'Levadas' (irrigation channels) that carry water from the mountains to the hillside crops. The first walk was 'easy' and the second 'moderate'... according to the guide book at least! The picture may tell a different story!

In August we went over to Chester to see Elaine and family and took afternoon tea at Weston Hall, which was a post-graduate celebration for Edward and also our 30th wedding anniversary.

In September, Richard and Laura went to St Ives, for a spot of Cornish 'glamping' and we went to see 'War Horse' at the Regent Theatre, Hanley. I've been working in London quite bit, so Alison and I were also able to see 'The Commitments' in the West End over the summer. This was followed by 'Jersey Boys' in Hanley again in October, with Edward (the singing was superb). So, I guess you could say that I've had my musical fix for now.



Also in October, we managed to squeeze in the 'last walk of the season' with our Bakewell Friends group. Alison and I visited some National Trust properties southeast of Birmingham, staying for a couple of nights in Redditch. Edward visited an 'Engineering & Design Show' in Coventry and the 'BSAC Annual Conference' / 'Dive Show' at the NEC... Fortunately, he manages to get to most places using public transport, as plans to take his driving test have been put on hold, at least until after his back problem has been sorted!

November went off with a bang (well several actually), in our back garden and again when the Christmas lights were switched on in Stafford... The fireworks are let off from the roof of the shopping centre, so Alison figured (with Edward's limited mobility at the moment), that the best place to view them would be from the top floor of the car park. And it seems that she was proved right! ☺



The weather has been incredibly mild, throughout autumn (no jacket required), which was great, because we were able to get the garden sorted out for the winter (trees and shrubs pruned, compost distributed etc.). However, the temperature dropped on 1st December to almost zero and although we've enjoyed some nice sunny days, Winter is definitely here now!

Last Friday, we started the Christmas celebrations with a trip to the New Vic Theatre, to see 'Uncle Eric's Christmas Party'. We've been on a number of occasions in the past, so consequently we knew what to expect... A dodgy storyline, plenty of cringe-worthy jokes, audience participation (avoid the front row seats at all cost) and of course, some great music from the 60's and 70's!



Finally, as always, we hope that you are able to enjoy Christmas with your family / friends and have a prosperous and healthy New Year. We look forward to hearing your news.

Kind Regards



Nigel, Alison, Richard & Edward