



Christmas Letter 2017

It's Sunday 12th November and I'm on the train, travelling down to London... but not to deliver training for a change, I'm actually going to attend a two day workshop myself on ['Storyline'](#), which is one of the tools that I use for developing online learning packages. After yet more rationalisation this year (AKA staff cuts), I'm one of the few people left on our team that still knows how to do this sort of thing, so I thought I'd take the opportunity to hone my skills (a bit of personal development, you could say).

Earlier today we walked into Stone, to join in with the [act of remembrance](#) that takes place each year in Granville Square, at the top of the High Street. It was good to see so many organisations represented, paying tribute to the people that made the ultimate sacrifice to defend our freedom. It was a clear blue sky and the bugler managed to hit most of the right notes, whilst bravely attempting to play the last post. It's quite thought provoking, when you consider that it's almost 100 years since the end of the First World War, yet as we head towards Christmas, 'Peace on Earth' seems to be as far away as ever.



We met up with Richard and Victoria in the town and they spent the rest of the day with us. We see quite a lot of them really... Even though they both work hard and lead busy lives, they still like to come over to visit us whenever they can. They 'tied the knot' on 25th August at [St Mary's RC Church](#) in Leek, with a reception afterwards at [Westwood Golf Club](#)... Before honeymooning in Madeira, courtesy of our friends Diana and Bill, who kindly let them stay in their lovely [apartment](#) as a Wedding present. Richard successfully managed to keep their destination a secret, until they reached the airport. Needless to say, they had a wonderful time.

Edward is heading towards the completion of his MSc. He's currently studying his final module, with just the project to go. It's been a long haul for him and although we've still not totally identified the source of his health issues, we are gradually eliminating things. Apart from his university studies, he's also been kept busy with his diving club in recent months... Planning a second diving trip to Malta and organising an event to celebrate the club's 50th Anniversary. And,

although he's just stepped down from his position as Social & Publicity Officer, he continues to look after [the club's website](#) and helps out in many other ways. In recognition of his services, the committee have just presented him with an award (for the second time in the last 3 years). He still does his origami, of course, attending [BOS](#) conventions this year in Bradford and Stratford-upon-Avon, where he helped to organise the model exhibition and taught a session. As this was also their 50th anniversary, Edward had the chance to meet the four special guests, who are famous in the origami world... Or so he tells us! He also enjoys going to local monthly origami mini meetings in Birmingham, whenever he can.

Alison is still working at [Christchurch First School](#) 3½ days per week, although the effects of being part of a Multi Academy Trust are now being felt (and not necessarily in a positive way)! We've both spent the last few weekends in the garden, doing the final bits of pruning on the willow and apple trees, tidying up and salvaging what we can from the hanging baskets, ready for next year.



I bought Alison a [Bonsai kit](#) last Christmas, with seeds for 3 different tree species: Acer, Silver Birch and Pine. The seeds were duly planted in the pots provided. However, despite following the instructions to the letter, we now have 3 small pine trees, but neither of the other species! Oh well, we still have some seeds left, so better luck next year perhaps?



This has been a busy year for everyone, in many ways. Knowing that we'd be busy in August, Alison and I took the opportunity for a half term break in Madeira at the end of May, which was very nice (the picture is of [Monty Palace Gardens](#), above Funchal). In June, I took the brickwork out below the window in the middle room (prior to having French windows fitted) and by July, wedding preparation began in earnest (being measured for suits, checking out the reception venue etc.) In August, my cousin Jane and her daughter Abigail visited the UK and stayed with us for a few days... It was good to catch up.

As the Wedding date approached, activity ramped up considerably, with everyone finalising arrangements, making sure that everything was in place for the big day. Edward worked with me on the music and created the seating plan, table names, place names, orders of service and other signs. On the night before the wedding, Diana and Bill helped to set up the reception room, fitting chair covers and all manner of other decorations, whilst Alison worked late into the night arranging flowers into bouquets for the bride and bridesmaids... On the day, everything went according to plan, Bill stepped in as usher with Victoria's brother Nick and I acted as both Chauffer and DJ. The day proceeded perfectly and a wonderful time was enjoyed by all.



In September the disco gear had a second outing for Edward's diving club's 50th Anniversary. Thanks to his careful organisation, it turned out to be a really good event also, with an entertaining after dinner speech from BSAC's National Diving Officer – [Sophie Heptonstall](#). We've also been over to Nottingham a couple of times, recently for an entertaining quiz and harvest supper (organised by Attenborough Church) and again to see [Texas](#) at the Royal Concert Hall... That was an enjoyable evening too, although as Alison will

testify, Charlene Spiteri, whilst being a great singer, is also prone to being a bit of a 'potty mouth' when addressing the audience in between songs. When only one or two people stood up to dance during the first song, her response afterwards was "what's the matter with you lot, are you glued to your flipping seats" (or something very similar!)... Needless to say no one dared to sit down from then on.

We met up with Diana and Bill again in October, when they came over for a [Saturday square dance](#), organised by our club's caller, at a local village hall. This turned out to be a good evening too. So that just about brings me up to date with our news... I'm on the train again, back to Stone this time, with about 20 minutes of the journey to go, so I'll sign off now with the usual seasonal wishes to you and yours:

Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year.

Nigel, Alison, Edward, Richard & Victoria

P.S. If you want to view a PDF version of this letter (with working hyperlinks), you can download one from: www.holmelee.co.uk/xmasletters/2017.pdf.

