

Christmas Letter 2021

The weather is unseasonably mild for the second week in November. I usually trim our conifers early in September, but this year, I didn't manage to get them done until October. However, I needn't have worried about frosts... the trees are showing no signs of shedding all of their leaves anytime soon and we've only just taken down the hanging baskets. I daresay colder weather will be with us soon enough, so let's not complain (it snowed the following week).



This time last year, we were making regular trips to Birmingham, where Alison was being treated for her Neuroendocrine Tumour (NET). Although the treatment seemed to be helping, we were concerned about her swollen abdomen... a specialist explained that Alison's liver had become enlarged due to numerous lesions, which were caused by the NET. Sadly, intervention at this point was unlikely to improve things, so imagine how we felt, when palliative care was recommended as the best option. Needless to say, this wasn't the Christmas present we were hoping for!

Having got over the initial shock of Alison's prognosis, in the days that followed, we had many long conversations and decided that we needed to try to make best use of our time together. In some ways, we've been lucky, in that we've had that time, so here's what we've done over the last year...

On Christmas Eve, we had a delivery of all sorts of useful stuff, organised by the Occupational Therapist. At the time, we thought that we didn't really need devices to raise our settee or perching stools etc. but over time these things have become essential to continue with anything like a 'normal' life. Suffice to say, we had a happy family Christmas, albeit scaled back a bit due to Covid. We saw in the New Year in the usual way, although it was a somewhat quieter affair (no parties this time). Likewise, we celebrated our birthdays with a Zoom call! Fortunately, Alison was able to continue with her injections at home, instead of us having to travel to Birmingham.

As things started to open up a little, we were able to enjoy a bit more of a social life (subject to Covid restrictions of course). Friends were able to visit and we were able to venture out to local restaurants (initially dining alfresco). Getting vaccinated, was somewhat liberating. We've all been double jabbed with AstraZeneca, with no real ill effects. I think it's a shame that the possible side effects were exaggerated so much by the media, especially when it was developed here in the UK, on a 'not-for-profit' basis. The alternatives were of course, developed in the USA and Germany. They too can have potentially dangerous side effects, and can't be stored as easily, but have made huge profits for the drugs companies that developed them (call me a cynic if you like)! We all had our flu jabs last week and next week we get our Covid boosters, which will be Moderna or Pfizer-BioNTech this time (it was Pfizer). Apparently, combining different vaccines is supposed to give greater protection.



In June, when it was safe to stop in hotels again, we travelled to Lincoln to visit our friends Diana (Alison's old college friend) and her husband Bill. It was nice to venture out and likewise, they have since been to visit us in Stone. Having proved that we could travel successfully, it gave us the confidence to venture a little further afield. So, Alison and I travelled to York, to meet up with Jess (Alison's teacher friend) and then revisit the coast and NT properties in the area ([Fountains Abbey](#) and [Beningbrough Hall](#)).

On one day, we travelled from York, across the moors to Whitby, then back down the coast via Robin Hoods Bay and Scarborough to Filey, where we stopped for Fish and Chips at [Inghams](#), before travelling back to York. It was nice to visit these places again, although Whitby is a little difficult to negotiate with a wheelchair (especially over steep cobbled streets)!

Edward continues to host his regular online origami sessions, as well as attending and teaching at online conventions, both here and in the USA. He often 'test folds' and validates instructions for new origami models and is credited in a number of publications... This usually results in a free copy of those books, to add to his already extensive origami library! Most recently, he reviewed a new [modular origami kit](#). Precisely folded geometric shapes are his speciality.

Richard and Victoria managed to get away over the summer, for a break in Weston-Super-Mare and enjoyed seeing the sights in the area. Richard has been really busy working at the Swan pub in Stone, especially since Covid restrictions were lifted and he's now virtually running the place. He was successful in his application to join Openreach (in a civil engineering capacity), for the rollout of fibre broadband, but the training is costly, so he needs to wait until there are enough people in the area to start at the same time.



After a break of almost 18 months, we were able to resume square dancing at [Blue Diamonds](#) again in September. Obviously, we do things a little differently now, to make sure that we stay safe, but all seem pleased to be back. Alison has been able to come along on a couple of occasions, she's not able to dance, but has enjoyed catching up with everyone.



In October, Edward and I finally got to see [The Magic of Motown](#), (after being cancelled twice previously due to Covid). In some ways it was worth the wait, although it's a shame that Alison wasn't able to come with us. They are a talented act, with both singers/dancers and musicians who were able to recreate an authentic Motown sound, with a stage show to match. They covered a good selection of classic Motown songs, as well as a couple that you don't hear so often... I particularly enjoyed ([Ain't Too Proud To Beg](#) and [Shop Around](#)).

Richard works most weekends, so he often comes over to see us on a weekday. On Monday this week, he joined us for fireworks in our back garden... Not quite as impressive as an organised display, but still good fun and finished off nicely with a few sparklers, hot dogs and jacket potatoes.

I've managed to get out cycling on a number of occasions this year, initially just with Richard, then with my ex-BT 'cycling buddies' again over the Summer. Alison needs more support these days, so I'm not able to join them for all-day rides at the moment, but Edward and I manage to get out and about when we can, even if it's just for a walk around the estate or doing the weekly shopping.

In our spare time, Edward and I have been building a website for the 'Aston Lodge Residents Association'. It's in its infancy at the moment, but we're particularly pleased with the [Nature page](#), which has some nice photos of birds, plants, moths and butterflies (supplied by a naturalist who lives on the estate).

To say that this year has not been the easiest of years, is a bit of an understatement, but we've been shown great kindness by friends and family. We're also very grateful for the excellent support we've received from health care professionals, District Nurses and the [Douglas Macmillan Hospice](#).



We hope you have a Happy Christmas and wish you all the best for 2022.

Nigel, Alison & Family

P.S. For a PDF version of this letter, to view/download, go to: www.holmelee.co.uk/xmasletters.