

Andy and Mel write

Over Easter weekend we joined Mel's Uncle, Aunt (Barry and Brenda) and their nephew (Phil) on a narrowboat travelling on the River Wey in Surrey from Godalming to Weybridge and back. The boat was fitted with all mod cons, although (as its name suggests) was very compact. Being a public holiday the weather was traditionally poor and the first night was akin to sleeping in a deep freeze. Luckily we got the heating working after that and combined with a barrel of ale we took with us conditions improved considerably for the remaining 2 nights.

The five of us (plus Barry and Brenda's West Highland Terrier, Leo) enjoyed many adventures on our four day voyage negotiating locks, pubs, complex river junctions, pubs, other waterway users and, of course, pubs. At one stage, with just a few hours of daylight to get back to base, we got firmly lodged on a cunningly hidden sandbar and no amount of pulling, pushing, tugging or shouting would shift us. After a few minutes (during which the heavens opened and we all got soaking wet into the bargain) another narrowboat arrived and eagerly agreed to ram us off our unwanted perch. Great fun! In June, Mel celebrated her 30th birthday and to mark the occasion we took a 5 day city break to the Czech

Republic capital city of Prague. The country was behind the Iron Curtain until the early 1990's and has remained virtually unspoilt by western influences since, although the ubiquitous MacDonalds restaurant is already in residence. The city itself is divided into 5 areas - we stayed in the New Town, but spent separate days in the wonderful Old Town, Jewish Quarter, Little Quarter and Hradcany/Prague Castle. The history and sights of Prague cannot be praised highly enough and we do not have the space to talk of the many things we saw. If you have access to the internet you can read more about our stay and see photographs by visiting www.claytonfamily.org.uk.

On our return from holiday we held a summer barbecue, also for Mel's birthday. We were pleased to be able to welcome friends and family to the celebration. On Mel's birthday itself her Aunt arranged for a stretched limo to take a group of us for a drive around the area. This summer our latest project was to replace old wooden windows at home with modern PVCu double glazed units. It makes quite a difference to the look of the place. Due to the expense of this we spent our main summer holiday taking day trips from home. Of particular note was a visit to The Eden Project in Cornwall (www.edenproject.org.uk) which comprises of grounds and two giant domes or "Biomes" containing plant life from all over the world The Tropical Biome

alone is as high as 19 double decker buses and took us 3 hours to walk round. The owners use only natural methods to grow their plants—even more amazing when the site of the project was originally a tin mine!

August saw us reach a milestone 5th Wedding Anniversary—has it really been that long? Speaking of Milestones we visited a fascinating "living museum" of that name in Basingstoke in October (www.milestones-museum.co.uk). The building holds many relics of living in the 1870's and 1940's giving an insight into how times have changed so much in little over 100 years.

As Autumn turns to winter we are already being bombarded with "commercial Christmas" and plan to starve ourselves ahead of the many meals to come.

Andy is thoroughly enjoying his work as a Senior Software Engineer and this year launched an in-house Helpdesk he has programmed entirely himself. November sees the release of the next version. Mel is very busy as a florist, with the Christmas rush not far away.

Andy and Melanie Clayton

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Kathy and Nick write

January: Saw the New Year in at Highcliffe. Later in the month we went to a murder mystery night at the vicarage. As with last year's event by the end of the evening we couldn't remember, or care, who the murderer was. Tim didn't go to school (remember last year's newsletter?).

February: After making an alcohol-induced bet based on a football result between Bristol City and Kingstonian in the FA Cup Nick's shoulder length hair had to come off! However, £150 was made in sponsorship for the local hospice. Kids don't recognise him. Kath thinks its great. Nick says it's bloody cold and reveals countless hidden chins (as beard trimmed too). Reaching the age of 17 Jeremy hits the roads as a learner driver. Kath's car is written off. (Nothing to do with Jem!). Tim didn't go to school.

March: After putting up with draughts for too long we had the windows in the front of the house replaced with double-glazed ones. It's so quiet and warm; we should have done it years ago. The double-glazing cuts out 75% of Jem's extraneous 'learning to blow the car engine up' noise, which he gets from the new Rover (to replace the one wrecked last month.) Tim didn't go to school.

April: After saving up his pocket money, robbing a post office and gambling heavily Jem purchases a gallon of fuel as his contribution to the learn to drive cause. Parents overjoyed by this magnanimous display of largesse. He also took and passed his Driving Theory Test. Only the practical

to go now—be afraid, be very afraid. Tim didn't go to school.

May: The highlight of the month was a Curry night pre-booked for 20 people from Nick's office with assurances of a separate room to eat in. The only cloud on the horizon was the lack of curry. The venue having sold out before we had a chance to order. Spaghetti on toast later on at home was small consolation. Jem invests in a new radio/cd player for the Rover with a very LOUD sub-woofer; he assures us this makes him drive well. New double-glazing cuts out 65% of Jem's low rumble. Tim didn't go to school.

June: Noise Abatement Society serves restraining order on Jem's sub-woofer. Neighbours move somewhere quieter (like Heathrow). The Who want to borrow speaker for gig later in year. Kath and Nick help out with Nick's Dad's choir at St. Thomas Exeter for an Ordination service. Tim didn't go to school.

July: Jem takes first driving test and comes second despite driving at 80 mph down the Keynsham bypass and playing the music very loud. Puts in for another test immediately. At the end of the month we all went to the Glastonbury Pilgrimage. In complete contrast we went over to Cardiff's Millennium stadium to see Robbie Williams in concert.

August: Tim went to school, but it was the holidays (I think he knew this) so came home again. Jem came a close second again in his second driving test. The examiner was unimpressed with the handbrake turns and wheelies down the Bath Rd. We all went to

Mums, won a pub quiz etc.

September: Jem passed his driving test at the third attempt. To celebrate Kath drank too much and had to be given a lift home, by Jem. How we laughed. This meant he was able to drive himself and Tim over to the Youth Club camp at Viney Hill in the Forest of Dean. Once again they had a marvellous time with plenty of outdoor pursuits. Fr Keith our local priest is made Bishop elect for Richborough. Kath changes section at work to a job with more responsibility. Tim didn't go to school.

October: Went to the Colston Hall having won Michael Macdonald tickets on Radio Bristol. Great concert. Halloween party in the local club. Nick and Kath dressed as Mr And Mrs 'Old Nick'. Tim went to school for a showdown with the Education Welfare Officer, his Year Head and psychologist. Expected bloodbath avoided as Tim manages to hold his own in this exalted company and negotiates some work to do at home as well as exploring the possibility of starting at college in the New Year. Watch this space.

November: *Planned.* Bazaar at church. Trip to Kenley for Josh's (nephew) confirmation. Both cars spend many hours (and pounds) in the garage.

December: *Planned.* We will be spending Christmas Day at home and then visiting the family over the holiday period.

Kathy and Nick Gibbs

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With love and best wishes for Christmas and the coming year from Joy, Kathy, Nick, Fiona, Colin, Andy, Mel, Jem, Tim (and Sally)



Fiona, Mum and Sally on holiday 2001

Fiona & Colin write

During the first part of the year our major focus was on the adoption assessment process. After writing our own submissions (both over 5,000 words each) we then had a number of interviews with our assessment officer. We ended up feeling we were under a microscope! It was hard work and quite traumatic in places but we survived and finally went to panel (judgement day) on 9th May. The wait to hear if we had passed or not was pure torture. When Fi took the phone call and the news was "yes", she went around for the next few hours in a total daze saying, "I don't believe it!". I think after so many years of "NO", it was quite a shock to hear a "YES". We then had to wait for official confirmation (as they could have changed their minds!) and were very relieved to get the letter

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November 2001

Joy writes

The highlight of my year was a week's holiday in the Cotswolds in September with Fiona, Colin - and Sally. We stayed in a small village, King's Stanley, in a cottage converted from a barn. We found an ideal spot to walk Sally each day, namely Coaley Peak 788 ft above sea level with a spectacular view across to the River Severn and, with the aid of binoculars, the Tynedale Monument and the Brecon Beacons. We visited the ancient Roman city of Cirencester, spent a considerable and most interesting time walking round the Corinium Museum which houses Iron-age relics, beautiful Roman mosaics, jewellery and domestic items excavated in the area. One day we visited the remains of a Roman villa and another the little town of Stow-on-the-Wold which has the original "stocks" on the village green. We all, including Sal, enjoyed a long walk in Westonbirt Arboretum spread over 600 acres (needless to say we didn't walk that far!) which has one of the world's finest collections of trees and shrubs. We returned from holiday much refreshed with special memories of lush green countryside wonderful views and the thought that there are still places of old-world charm and tranquillity tucked away in little corners of England. I am still engaged in various occupations and activities - baby-sitting, Bible study group, taking Sally "walkies" and to see Arthur once a fortnight, tea with friends, I enjoyed Col-in's birthday party and Mel's birthday barbecue. A few weeks ago Fiona and I went to Forest, we spent the afternoon at our local museum. We were intrigued to discover that one of the relics, a Roman brooch, had been found in Ridgelifield Gardens some years ago and I am now much more alert when digging the garden - who knows what treasure I might find!

Kath, Nick and the boys took me out to lunch on my birthday as they do every year. On 14th December I will be going to a local restaurant as usual with the Church Support Group for a pre-Christmas lunch and Andy, Mel, Fiona, Colin, Collin's mum and Arthur will be here on Christmas day for dinner. Kath, Nick, Jeremy and Tim will be staying for a few days over new year.

Mrs J Clayton

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2 weeks later confirming that we have been approved to adopt one or two children aged 18 months to 8 years. We then spent the summer redecorating and reorganising the house. So the 'nest' is just about ready—all we need are some 'chicks'. We have no idea when the call will come, but we know that God knows whom our children are and we trust Him to look after them while we wait.

Other news. Colin celebrated his 40th birthday in April and Fi had a wonderful time scheming! He had a surprise birthday meal on the Friday evening, followed by a surprise visit on the Saturday from some friends who we hadn't seen for a while. These same friends took him for a surprise Sunday lunch after which I said that all his surprises were finished—a complete lie because we then 'popped in' on some other friends and Colin had his really big surprise birthday party!

Fiona and Colin Mosling

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Fi had such fun organising the whole weekend and would thoroughly recommend planning surprises for people as it is such fun! Oh well, Colin has 3 years to plan his revenge on Fi!

Colin has almost finished his 3 year course in Purchasing and sits the final exam in November so he is studying like mad at the moment. Then he will have some letters after his name. I think he has quite enjoyed it and can see himself finding something else to study in the future! Fi continues with her studies in counselling skills and should finish the course by the summer.

We went away with Mum and Sally at the beginning of September and had a lovely time. The Cotswolds are a beautiful part of England and we hope to revisit sometime as we feel that we only scratched the surface. See more in Mum's bit!

Newsletter continues inside with news from Melanie and Andy, and Kathy and Nick

