

Andy and Mel write

Having thoroughly enjoyed our narrow boat trip last year, we once again ventured out in a group of 5 adults and 1 dog this time tackling the famous Grand Union Canal south of Birmingham. The boat was bigger than last time (so less ducking) and we once again relaxed at a leisurely 4mph enjoying the scenery. The locks were mostly close together (including a "staircase" of 7) and the canal included 2 long dark tunnels. We found a pub to eat at each evening where we enjoyed sampling local brews – Old Hooky winning our most palatable ale of the week award. We had an interesting stopover on our way home at historic Warwick Castle.

Later in the year we spent 4 days in the Cotswolds. Mum had enthused about the beautiful countryside and particularly Westonbirt Arboretum, which we visited at exactly the right time of year as the leaves had turned golden and a vast array of autumn colour met our every gaze. We stayed in a farmhouse annexe down an unmade track past a field with friendly horses in it; so friendly in fact that they blocked our exit on the last day – we'd still be there now if something hadn't distracted them. Our accommodation was near Tewkesbury where we visited the abbey and, as somewhat of a contrast, a haunted pub with a history going back over 400 years.

During our summer break we spent 2 days in London riding The London Eye on a beautiful clear day with stunning views over the capital. We also went to The Tower of London seeing the crown jewels and listening, fascinated, to the tour given by a Yeoman Guard. We also went to The Palace of Westminster (the houses of parliament), which included both The House of Commons and House of Lords as part of another interesting tour.

In February Mel's sister and husband

Terry celebrated the arrival of their first child, Tyler and at the end of our fortnight's holiday in August we attended his baptism at St. George's, part of the parish of Christchurch. Mel is his Godmother. He is lively, very entertaining and already a handful for his rather tired (but happy) parents. We have thoroughly enjoyed baby sitting on several occasions and look forward to sharing Christmas with both Tyler and Courtney.

Our major DIY project this year has been the kitchen. We joined a back room to the kitchen area to make a kitchen/diner. This involved demolishing our very solid breakfast bar, erecting French doors and tiling a 17 square metre floor space. Professionals installed the new kitchen and appliances although we undertook the rest of the work ourselves; Mel's parents have also been a great help. We took a long time finding the right wall tiles and so these won't be completed until the New Year. We are extremely happy with the results... on to the next room!

Andy and Mel's uncle Barry went to Southampton's St. Mary's football stadium to watch England play their first competitive international in the city for over 80 years. Barry is a season ticket holder for Southampton and Andy sometimes gets to use his seat if he can't go, so if anyone wants to offer Barry free accommodation when Liverpool or Arsenal are in town....

Mel continues to be very busy at the florist and Andy has been involved with several projects at work this year. Andy still has time to help with the local Parish magazine and is overseeing a new-look for the January issue as we write.

Andy and Melanie Clayton

**E-mail: andy@claytonfamily.org.uk
Web site: <http://www.claytonfamily.org.uk>**

Fiona & Colin write

When we wrote last, we'd been waiting since approval to adopt in May and hadn't heard anything more. Finally, in November we received a letter about a possible match with a little girl. We had an interview with her social workers and saw photos – so cute! We then had panel again for the 'match' to be approved and finally met Courtney on 21st December last year! We had several meetings with her, including an outing to 'Monkey World' and she moved in for good on the 11th January.

Was there life before Courtney? Probably, but it's a pretty hazy memory. We do seem to recall sleeping in till 9am on weekends. Now, a little girl clambering over the bed, leaning over and giving a kiss wakes us up. We wouldn't swap that for anything!

When Courtney arrived 10 months ago she was 4 and a bit (celebrated her 5th birthday 16 September). Because of her poor start in life she is developmentally delayed and was assessed then as being at the 30 months level. Since being with us, she has made remarkable progress and is now (apart from her speech) at the 4½ year level in most things.

Courtney started school in September and has settled well, making new friends and being asked to lots of parties. She is well liked and popular! Her teachers are excited by the progress she is making and comment that they notice changes daily. Educationally, she needs some support in the classroom and is monitored by the special needs team – speech and language therapist, educational psychologist, community paediatrician.

Her personality is strong-willed, determined and very demanding of attention, but also affectionate with a good sense of humour. She loves the outdoors

Continued on back page...

Kathy and Nick write

Jan. Despite promising to pursue further education Jeremy decides it's not for him and goes into hibernation. He takes to his bed early one morning and remains largely nocturnal until October !! Tim, as last year does not go to school. Our Rover is green.

Feb. Other than a brief visit to Christchurch, February is largely uneventful. Kath begins a diet. Jem is rarely seen. Tim still not at school. Rover still green.

March. Most of our parish went to the consecration of Fr Keith, our former Vicar, as Bishop of Richborough, in Southwark Cathedral. Tim was not in school, so he came too, however Jem slept through the whole day. On Palm Sunday Nick sang the narrators part in The Passion. This is the biggest solo he has had since leaving Llandaff Cathedral choir in 1972 ! It seemed to go well and he deserved his couple of pints of Bass afterwards. Second car green.

April. This month saw Kath beginning to act up! This means she is carrying out the work of a higher grade to cover a vacancy. As we write she is still acting up and enjoying the responsibility. We took part in a quiz at the club~ and won. Jem makes his first public appearance of the year to help. Tim doesn't go to school. At the end

of the month Nick and Kath visit Paris for a long weekend.... Whilst in Bristol Tim and Jem organise wall to wall 24 hour parties in their absence... kids eh ?? Second car still green.

May. Kath continues to shed pounds, Nick continues to waste pounds, Jem sleeps. Tim doesn't go to school. He is also between girlfriends~ the former re-enacts Fatal Attraction and boils his pet guitar !! Second car a green Rover.

June. Kath goes to Lords to watch the last Benson and Hedges cricket final. Towards the end of the month Jem and Tim attend the Glastonbury 'pop' Festival at Worthy Farm. Tim is in his element, loves it, becomes a hippy and still doesn't go to school. He does however attend an open day for City of Bristol College and applies to return to mainstream education in September. Jem decides he doesn't like the colour green and writes off the Rover, allegedly swearing to avoid a pussy cat !! Kath's 40th birthday party is a groovy affair~ a themed 60's evening. Tim gets thrown out of a local pub dressed as a hippy.

July. Kath plays a lunchtime organ recital at St Stephen's Church in the city centre, which is well received. Tim has a new girlfriend. Jem decides to get a job, but sleeps on it. The second car is now a RED Rover.

Aug. This month saw us on our annual holiday to Highcliffe. Beforehand Kath and Nick take day trips, including a visit to Gloucester Cathedral. Jem and Tim join for varying times, sleep and girlfriend commitments allowing.

Sep. The family take part in another quiz at the club ~ win again. (on a tie break). Nick, Kath and Jem drive to Croydon for Nick's sisters wedding. Jem decides he doesn't like red as a car colour and writes off the second car in a few months! At the month end the kids go for a youth club weekend; in a reversal of the April weekend Nick and Kath drink all the cola and trash the boys bedrooms. Tim starts college. Jem signs on. The next Rover is white.

Oct. Kath and Tim go to Birmingham to watch Coldplay. Jem has first job interview... and gets it !! Starting in November. Tim completes 6 weeks at college without missing a day, and gets very good marks. He is taking 5 GCSEs in a year, which should enable him to start A levels next year. White Rover still intact.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New year to all.

Kathy and Nick Gibbs

E-mail: nickath@blueyonder.co.uk



Above: Kathy's 40th Birthday party in July 2002

Continued from inside page...

and is a very active little girl—enjoying walking and exploring- her boundless energy and enthusiasm for most things keeps us on our toes!

Courtney loves music (especially classical!) and attends a local music centre weekly. She has a powerful singing voice (opera singer in the making perhaps?) and also loves playing percussion. She really enjoys the music in church and exploring old churches! She has visited the Priory a few times now, and visited All Saints (where we married). Every church we drive past is "My church", "Me come" so we intend taking her to the Priory Christingle service and the All Saints Crib service at Christmas!

As a family we have watched Colin go gliding ("Daddy flying. Me do it"); visited a Theme park where we all had to go on all the scary rides because Courtney loves them!

(Swinging ship 7 times – mummy was green!) Bournemouth Oceanarium- ("ooh, sharks – me cuddle!") and trips to the beach and the New Forest etc.

In June Colin and Fi went up to Nottingham for Colin's graduation – he is now MCIPS – while Courtney stayed with Nannan. July saw Courtney partying the night away at Kathy's 40th – she is a real party animal (what will she be like in 10 years time?). In August we got a kitten (our 17 old cat Tallulah was put down in February) who has joined Misty (who adopted us) so we are now a 2 cat family. Courtney gets on well with them both but especially with her kitten, Smokey.

Currently the legal side of things is still not settled as her birth parents are contesting the adoption. This means going to court to give evidence. There is a possibility that they could win and we would lose her, but it is unlikely. We're longing for it to be finalised so we can get on with being a family.

Fiona and Colin Mosling

E-mail: moslingfamily@ntworld.com



For the latest news, photographs and contact details for the family see our web site at <http://www.claytonfamily.org.uk>

Mrs J Clayton

This year my cup has been filled to the brim with the advent of Courtney into our family (see Fiona's contribution). She has brought much joy into our lives. As Fiona works part-time once a week I have Courtney all to myself for a few hours: to begin with she spent Wednesday mornings with me until starting school in September and now it is every Monday afternoon until January when she will attend school fulltime each day. She has also slept over on two occasions. We have great fun together and I am glad no-one can see me as I join in dancing about the lounge with her or crawling about on all-fours whilst engaged in some game! We also enjoy rambling, together with Sally, although "rambling" is not perhaps quite the right word as Sal sets a cracking pace We do, however, manage to pause from time to time to study the natural world such as slugs, snails, wildflowers, pebbles, etc., My news has, I know, been completely "Courtney-orientated" but I am still engaged in various pursuits and life is never dull. My thoughts will be with old friends at Christmas and, to revert to the Courtney theme, this special time will be made even more so with this little person to share the day with us.

Joy writes

December 2002

See inside page for news from Melanie and Andy, and Kathy and Nick



Season's Greetings