

Festive Times

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The annual Christmas newsletter from the Smiths of Woking and Wadebridge, which after much deliberation we have decided to publish just in time for Christmas 2012

Continued Stories (1)

You may have noticed that we are still “of Woking”. Our plans (mentioned last year) to move to Cornwall in 2012 were delayed somewhat, and we are now looking at the first half of 2013. This is not the fault of the builders, who finished the loft extension more or less on time, cleared up the snagging list by the end of January and rectified the few emergent faults after three months. Nor of the solar power firm, that came at the end of January and efficiently installed twenty solar panels.

We originally tried to have solar power installed at the end of 2011, but the Government unexpectedly brought forward its deadline for the 43p feed in tariff the very day we were to sign a contract, and we couldn't get the work done in time. In the new year, the solar companies dropped the price of their panels, trying to make them still attractive at the new tariff of 21p. We did a few calculations and went ahead. Then the Government lost a case in the courts and had to reinstate the 43p rate, so we ended up with a cheaper installation and the higher tariff. Best investment of the year.

We have been moving things around at Treforest. The family bedroom in the extension is now Diana's study. Kevin took his sledgehammer down to remove a built-in dressing table (nailed to the wall, it was, nailed!) and splashed white paint over the blackened, mildewed mess that it had been concealing. Diana is keeping a narrow bed in her study, dressed with cushions like a sofa, and she can often be found reclining on it with her laptop. She doesn't have a lot of choice; she doesn't have a desk there yet.

Kevin has a temporary little desk in his new study at the top of the house, as far from Diana's study as it is possible to be whilst retaining the same postal address. It is, however, on a different Wi Fi network, since one router cannot reach all parts of the house. He has moved his comics collection in as well.

We are now making complicated plans to move the contents of studies in Woking to the equivalent rooms in Treforest, and move unwanted beds from Treforest back to Woking to make the studies look more like bedrooms for when we start the selling process.

Countdown

Diana is in the last months of her stint as County Councillor, since she will not be standing again next May, owing to Cornwall's being a bit far to commute to council meetings in Kingston. It'll be nine years since she won in a by-election. Her on-line serialised novel, *Thirteen Months*, has reached month thirteen, but the final chapter demanded to be in two parts, so at the time of writing “September (2)” is still awaiting publication. Read it all here:

dianasmith.mycouncillor.org.uk/thirteen-months/.

Or Google “Thirteen Months” and look (at the time of writing) down to the fifth entry.

Continued Stories (2)

Ellie and Joe got the keys to their house in Oxford last year, but didn't move in fully until January, having redecorated it and filled available niches and wall space with IKEA wardrobes, chests and shelves. No doubt you are expecting the usual IKEA horror stories, but apparently everything went together easily and they had no problems. It looks good, too. With the house sorted, Ellie bought a car, a little Citroen she called ‘Penfold’, because it just does look like the brave assistant to Dangermouse.



She continues to work at the Structural Genomics Consortium, bending proteins to her will, and has found other academic work in the University, including giving a lecture to post-grads. Joe survived successive takeovers of his firm and has ended up (for now) working for IBM, from home, with staff reporting to him from China as well as London.

Keeping Up

Kevin maintained connections with Shell through the SOGs network, an entirely unofficial subset of the Shell Pensioners Association. We “Shell Old Gits” meet to talk about the old days and how glad we are not be there any more, to eat a free lunch in the Shell staff restaurant, and to drink much beer. Kevin’s old department, which moved from Shell Centre to Canary Wharf at the end of last year, then disbanded completely, so it’s a bit difficult to pop in to to see his colleagues in work now. He just relies on them to keep going and maintain the value of the pension fund and the shares.

There were also two Orielandelphians dinners, one with friends and family in April, to which Diana and Ellie also came, and one in September, for which Kevin was President. Sounds grand, but what it means is “organiser”. His main contribution this year was to donate three bottles of vintage port (Sandeman’s 1981) which were part of a case he won in an accountancy newspaper competition thirty years ago. They were well received – and he still has three bottles left.

Diana and Kevin hosted a “Pieria” reunion in June. This was a group of young writers which first met in 1973 and continued to meet about four times a year in one or other of their homes for ten years. At the start, we were “prospective and part-time professional writers of science fiction” as the first invitation had it, and chose the name because there were nine of us, one for each of the classical Greek muses who lived at the Pierian Spring. Over the years we improved, until most of us were making their living from writing in one form or another. At that point the mutual support and encouragement that Pieria provided was no longer needed by its members and it just sort of ... stopped.

Until this year when Kevin attempted to find a date and a place when everyone could get together. In this, he was not wholly successful, even starting in January, since every conceivable date was booked by someone for something, but about half the people managed to get together in Woking, and successfully reminisced, and regretted the absence of the others.



Mind the Gap

Tris, with fellow Oxford psychology friend Lexy, co-created a mental health education activity pack for use in schools [available free on this web site:

www.mentalhealtheducation.org.uk]. It was launched

under the auspices of Woking Mind at the Surrey History Centre in January, attended by many mental health professionals and volunteers and Woking MP Jonathan Lord (Con). After that, it got difficult for Tris health-wise (as some of you will know), but things are starting to look up again now and she had a splendid 24th birthday party in December with family and friends from Oxford, Woking and Durham.



I Want to be on Holby City

After Kevin’s successful foray into the world of surgical interventions last year, he decided that he had enjoyed it so much, he wanted more. There was this shoulder that had been playing up, and the legs that ached after a fifteen minute walk, and as for the feet... don’t ask. So the shoulder was operated on and he is doing physio with lengths of coloured elastic bands. The feet (or foot, for the moment) needs an injection, and it is possible that this will alleviate the legs as well. If not, there will be more scans – MRI, ultrasound, he’s had ’em all and doesn’t care.

Surfer Dudes

Diana, Kevin and Tris have bought wetsuits. This is so we can go surfing any time we like, when in Cornwall (the suits live in Treforest and won’t be coming to Woking, on account of the distinct lack of good waves on Goldsworth Park lake). And since we are tough, hard surfer dudes, we go surfing in September and October and November (but not December – are you crazy?) We are getting quite slick at it now, not just the surfing but the logistics. Di and Tris change at home and travel in the car ready suited, with the boards in the back (body boards, that is, not the standing-up Malibu type). Kevin drives and puts on his wetsuit once there, stashing the car key securely in his swimming shorts. Is it worth going into the sea in November, do I hear you ask? Isn’t it cold? Well, that’s what the wetsuits are for. And when you catch a wave just right and ride it into the shallows – dude, there’s nothing like it.



That’s all from Diana and Kevin. We wish you a merry Christmas and a great 2013.