

2011 – a year of change

Draft Annual Christmas Newsletter

Family

Bullwer - Andrew collected wood from a yard in Cadeby with John for completing their summerhouse and for access ramps to enable Mary to move around in the garden. These were completed over the summer, but sadly never used, as Mary died suddenly in July, taking us all by surprise. We had expected her to “go on for ever”. Andrew is not as weepy as he was this summer. He was able to visit mornings and evenings when Mary was poorly after Easter, and when she returned home from hospital. John is slowly adjusting to a new phase of his life.

Orlebar - We fitted a wardrobe in Lez’s parent’s spare room, providing much needed storage space, and Andrew helped them paint the front of their bungalow.

Home

As the thaw came, so the builder finished the pointing. Then the mess was just ours! The thaw didn’t burst our frozen outside pipes as we had feared. We have a water meter, and on our side of the meter there was a leak. It was eventually repaired in December by Severn Trent. John has been here for several workparty days, initially with Mary and latterly alone. Together we have replaced the loft ladder, fixed the side gate, replaced the woodstore doors, added handrails to the stairs and shelves in an alcove in the living room. Andrew has put the “old” loft ladder into the roof space next to the kitchen. One of our neighbours has replaced a fence that has been falling down since we moved here – in a vain attempt to keep his dog “in”. The new fence is very smart and shows off our newly tidied garden to the full. The lawnmower is currently “eating” sparkplugs and has reached the end of its working life. The woodburning stove is also showing its age, with broken glass and a burned through throat plate. Andrew has de-algaeed the garden furniture and secured all the external cables to the wall. We have had plumbers fix a leaky tap, remove redundant hot water piping and stop an annoying bone-jarring water hammer.

Cats

Both cats are still with us. Jack is now about 17 years old, and sleeps most of the time. He is deaf, has a broken tail, has lost much of his weight – he really is a small cat - and has his advancing kidney failure under control with medication. Jilly is the junior at about 15 years old. She has decimated the local shrew population (but enjoys looking for them!), and now has very stiff joints. She spends as much time in warm places as she can.

Study

Andrew has now finished his latest Open University course. He now has letters after his name. Lez is continuing her personal development with the Open University, completing her management course in 2012.

Away from Home - Holidays, Days out and Fun Stuff

We have visited the (National Trust) workhouse at Southwell.

We had our annual holiday in a cottage which we shared with Lez’s parents at Walton in the Welsh Borders. Andrew walked part of the Offa’s Dyke path.

We have visited several gardens this year, including Hergest Croft Gardens, Hampton Court (Herefordshire), Barnsdale Gardens and Knossington Open Gardens. Our garden is still not to a high enough standard to open to the public, but is now looking much tidier.

We also visited lots of tea rooms, including the 3 nearest to us at Northfield Farm (near Cold Overton), Gates Garden Centre (Cold Overton) and The Potting Shed (Rutland Village at Ashwell).

The CiCLE Classic Cycle Road Race passes the edge of our village and this year Andrew was able to watch *le tour* and the accompanying circus.

Lez had a wonderful week in Eastbourne and recharged her batteries whilst Andrew was cat sitting and looking for work. Having taken the maximum 10 days not looking for work earlier this year, he is not allowed to stay away from home until next May.

We have attended 3 (free) concerts at Oakham School. We saw Ceri Dupree, King and I (a second visit for Lez) and 42nd Street at Curve Leicester. All were booked when we had money!

Cars and Bikes

Both cars have been expensive this year. The Volvo has had many parts replaced because they had worn out or corroded away. The Smartie has had the turbocharger replaced and we have replaced (worn out) the rear tyres twice in a 12 month period. Andrew was plagued with punctures after he had the rims replaced on his MTB (mountain bike), but currently all the tyres are co-operating. Andrew has cycled to Borough Hill to enjoy sunsets, and regularly cycles to the ROC observation bunker at Cold Overton.

Andrew

The job at the bookshop was made redundant in March. He was generously given a radio alarm clock and a B&Q voucher, still to be spent on the house. We have so far bought several rolls of loft insulation, awaiting fitting. He had planned to use the time to produce picture frames, but plans changed, and he has spent many “happy” hours looking for work and visiting JobCentrePlus. Currently he is cleaning at the local pub three mornings a week. As well as spending time with Mary and John (and latterly John), he has worked outside tidying up the garden and has cut up all of the remaining piles of wood which were piled under tarpaulins around the garden. Most of this has heated our house, and he is regularly gathering pallets to cut and burn. This is helping to use less kerosene, saving our monthly expenses. The house is now much cleaner and tidier, and he has peace of mind, despite not having a full time job. He is benefiting from attending Oakham Baptist Church and St Peters C of E here in the village. Because he is still looking for work, we received an “Operation Rudolph” food parcel earlier this month. It was a pleasant surprise!

Lez

Lez has taken over looking after our finances, and is much more up-to-date than Andrew ever was! We now have monthly meetings and can make joint decisions. Lez is now the principal bread earner, making Andrew a kept man! She enjoys long walks into Leicester City Centre during her lunch break. For now, she is with Leicester City Council as a manager. Her job there has been constantly under review for several years now. She recently relocated her office within Leicester as her building is falling down – sadly a common refrain for the Council.

Technology

Andrew’s desktop PC failed in July, but most data was archived, and he is currently using a legacy desktop machine brought down from the loft. Andrew discovered trying to get a mobile broadband signal in rural Wales when you don’t know the location of the hotspot is at best a challenge and at worst non-existent.

Health

Andrew has had a flu jab again this Autumn, and has only had 1 cold since.

Getting Organised, Resolutions and Plans

We have plenty of insulation in the loft in sealed rolls, waiting to be fitted.

With our love and best wishes

Lez and Andrew