

# News 2003

## ***JANUARY***

We finished 2002 and started 2003 with our traditional Murder Mystery Party on New Years Eve. Struggling to find a game that allowed for 4 females but only 2 males we eventually came across one on a website. The evening was a great success, with everyone living up to their part.

A few days later we were in Gloucester to celebrate Uki Christmas. Rob & Maria had to work on Saturday and Sunday but were able to drive up on Sunday night to join us. A quiet Christmas Eve, with Daria & Gill doing most of the preparation for the meal but this year under the watchful eye of Daria's mum (last year she was in hospital all through the celebrations). If you are unaware of all that is involved read our account of last Christmas - little changes a year on.

On Christmas Day we joined a large group carol singing at houses locally, this time using the cars available to visit homes further out in the suburbs. A thoroughly enjoyable time, finishing off at the club.

For Daria, the big event in January was the arrival of her new office. With many different evening classes to run, her OU Maths degree still in progress, and her reluctance to dispose of anything, a study has long been a necessity. With Maria vacating a bedroom for a couple of years, this had proved a suitable location, but now she is back we had to find an alternative. After considering several alternatives we decided on a summer house style log cabin, on a corner of the garden. Insulated, with electricity, heating and connection to the house computer network (and so the internet), our main problem now is getting her back in the house.



*View from the garden - eventually the outside will be painted ivory coloured.*



*View from the backdoor*



*Tony sealing the inside*

## ***FEBRUARY***

A frustrating month for Tony. Trying to improve his fitness level post Christmas he was doing some exercises one Monday evening (prior to the usual Tuesday 5 - a - side game) when he felt a slight ache. Working through it seemed a good idea, until next morning when he could hardly move - let alone walk!! He had pulled the muscles connecting his pelvic bone and back. Two weeks at home and no footie for the whole month. He even had to decline a ticket for the Saints v Man Utd game.

Mid month we travelled back to Gloucester for a family meal to celebrate Sam's 65th birthday. We had to rush back as Tony had a job interview with Bank of Scotland on Tuesday, which didn't work out in the end, but still had some preparation to do.

Half term saw Daria and the girls head off to Snowdonia for a couple of days. Maria had intended to do it as a day trip - until we pointed out that it is about a five hour drive each way.

## ***MARCH***

After weeks of preparation and careful consideration of the right wines to choose, Red Nose Night is upon us. Two years ago Daria & one of wine students, Angela, combined to organise an event which raised £500 for Comic Relief, The same duo again staged a wine & food evening with quizzes and games on March 14th to see if they could match or beat their previous attempt.

With the theme this year centring around Big Hair, the evening was colourful with many of the 64 guests coming with specially prepared hairdos (or were they wigs?), and everyone seemed to have a great time. As before we had our share of last minute panics, ran out of time to do all we wanted and ended up totally exhausted - but hopefully having raised hundreds of pounds.

Maria went off to Ireland for a few days with her friend Kit, discovering the delights of Irish pubs - the music but not the Guinness!

## ***APRIL***

April seems to have flown by. Both girls birthdays have come & gone - Natty celebrating hers with a sleepover with friends and then ice skating, Maria taking most of us (Natty was too young) to a pub in Southampton to see one of her favourite musical acts.



*Natty on ice*



*Maria - going to a party as a hippy*



Natty spent the week leading up to Easter with her friend Natalie & family on a canal trip in the Stratford area. Not to be outdone, Tony & Daria also went on a canal holiday - Venice.

The break started with a hunt in Sussex for a pub showing the FA Cup semi final on large screen TV. Heading for the hotel booked for the overnight stay close to Gatwick, it was essential for Tony that he see the match - as Saints were certain to go through. (27 years ago, he was at their last semi final & then spent a memorable evening (or early morning) with one of the then Saints players & friends in a pub in Fareham. He had been

boasting that he had gone to the same school as this player, although in the year below, and then bumped into him later that same night.)

We found one not far from where Tony used to be based when at Regional office - a large room with one man on his own, a group of lads playing pool or darts, and loads of empty tables and chairs. Needless to say, when the first goal went in it was clear to all that Tony was a Saints fan. From the way the other man walked away disgruntled at the end of the match, he was probably a Watford fan.

Happy with the result, even a delay caused by the Italian pilot's strike (which meant we didn't need the overnight hotel after all) didn't spoil the atmosphere. Venice was marvellous, our apartment superb, small, comfortable and right in the heart of one of the nicest areas of the Grand Canal. The delay meant we only had two whole days to explore the area, but we used the waterbus to good effect and travelled to a couple of the more important small islands using this service.

Our only gripe was that the last night we were there was very warm and we had not thought about taking our anti mosquito plugs (foolish really as you tend to associate mosquitoes with water). Halfway through the night we were both woken by the high pitched buzzing as one flew over us, followed by the sting as it made contact. Tony had spotted one earlier in the day, resting on a white lampshade. As he tried to gently flick it off to a darker surface, the thing had exploded, leaving a dark red stain that we then spent ages trying to remove. Switching on the light in the early hours revealed several little shadows dotted around the light coloured walls, and one on the white net curtain. After a further delicate flick had transformed a patch of curtain dark red, it was obvious that a more subtle approach was required if the owners were not to be greeted with something looking like a Quentin Tarrantino film set on their return. Fortunately a search of downstairs cupboards revealed a can of spray that sorted the problem.

Apart from this, and getting hopelessly lost one night, the only other incident of note was a major fire on our first day of the Molino Stucky building. We first became aware of it at about lunch time when we heard a familiar sounding police siren coming from a speeding boat flying across the lagoon as we looked out from St Mark's Square. A dark cloud of smoke seemed to be coming from where our apartment was - had we turned the iron off? Fortunately for us it was just a bit further away, unfortunately for the residents of Venice it was a large building and when we passed by at about 6.00 they were just finishing their attempts to put it out.

However our magical couple of days ended, we headed back to England for a quiet Easter, where the good weather everyone had enjoyed for weeks was coming to an end. Quiet, because Natty was still away and Maria & Rob were either working or out with friends.

## **MAY**

Not a lot happened in May - well OK, Rob had a birthday but that was right on the last day of the month. Exams & revision seemed to dominate otherwise.

## **JUNE**

Always a busy month. It kicked off with our Annual attempt at the Round the Harbour race (well 3 out of the last 4 years). This year Roman joined Rob, Shell (Rob's girlfriend Michelle), Tony & Natty (who joined halfway). The day got better as it wore on, although there was a strong breeze off the sea at times. The early cloud soon disappeared and it was another very sunny day. This year we all finished just on time, despite changes to the start & finish points causing confusion.

The following weekend Tony & Daria took off for Dublin for a short break. Among the highlights were the Musical Pub Crawl that Maria had been on earlier in the year and a tour of the main sites from the 1916 Revolution, conducted by friends of the Pub Crawl team. The latter was on the Sunday afternoon and was the perfect follow up to our trip to the Abbey Theatre the night before to see O'Casey's "The Plough and the Stars".

Plenty of walking, partly because although our hotel was billed as only a "10 minute walk" from the Centre, they neglected to mention that this had been measured by the All-Ireland Speed Walking champion just before they had set the world record!! We never did the journey in less than 30 minutes.

We must have clocked up many miles over our three days there, as we seemed to cover every inch between the main city centre sites, from the quayside to the Guinness Warehouse and several journeys a day back to our hotel in Rathmines. Needless to say we also tried to do some family history research but didn't progress much further.

We certainly found Dublin nightlife different - we would frequently head back to our hotel well after midnight to find everything still in full swing and carrying on for several hours. It was clear that despite various signs banning stag/hen parties, much of the activity on Friday & Saturday night, especially in Temple Bar, was based around just such groups over from England.

June is also the month when our summer wine evenings start and we were really lucky that the weather was excellent for so many of them.

The third weekend is also a focal point, with a party in Gloucester for Roman & Esterina (Daria's mum), whose birthdays occur then, and our wedding anniversary. Another pleasant evening weather wise meant the barbeque outside was a great success but by Sunday the weather had turned very humid and it started to rain just as we prepared dinner. As there were so many of us the only possible place for us all to fit in was the gazebo we had brought up for the night before. So we set about putting up the sides to keep the rain out when there was an almighty explosion and at first we thought the thunderclap was so loud it had shattered light bulbs. Phil, Maria's boyfriend, was shaking. He had been just clipping the Velcro strips of the wall together over the metal frame when the bang had occurred and we next thought that lightning had hit the gazebo itself. It was only when we saw the people from the house behind get a ladder out to inspect their roof that we realise that had been hit, only feet behind the gazebo - and what we thought had been the sound of glass breaking was due to pieces of brick falling down as a fist size hole was blown in the wall. Fortunately apart from Phil being badly shaken, there was no other injury and the weather cleared in time for us to go ahead with the meal.



*Gill & Daria distribute cake*



*Roman cuts the cake he shares with his mum*



*Daria & Tony with their surprise anniversary cake*



*The damaged roof visible on the house behind*



*Clearing up - you can see how close the house behind is.*

## ***JULY***

The busy social life of summer continued, with trips to Titchfield Open Air theatre filling the few gaps between wine evenings. The glorious weather continued, although one barbeque and one theatre evening did catch the very few rainy days in the month.

For both Tony & Daria job changes were confirmed Tony had been trying to move internally within the Halifax following his sideways move the year before and it was looking as if he would have little choice but to look outside the company for a new role. Fortunately a job in Southampton with the Bank of Scotland (same group, different brand) that was very similar to a role he had previously done came up and he was successful, starting in September.

Likewise Daria had not been enjoying her teaching assistant role for several months, and had already started to work part time for Roy at the Wine Cellar. There was a chance to increase her hours giving here the opportunity to leave school behind at the end of the summer term.

Maria too had increased her hours up to full time at the home where she worked.

## ***AUGUST***

As the summer parties draw to a close and Tony left the Halifax after 29 years, ironically from the branch where it all started, it was time for a holiday. We knew we would struggle to get everyone anyway for a lengthy holiday so we went for a one week break for all in Galway, Ireland, with Daria, Tony & Natalie spending a further week roaming the south & west of Ireland, while Rob & Maria returned home.

## ***SEPTEMBER***

Straight back from holiday and straight into a new job for Tony - having travelled overnight from Ireland to Wales, we travelled back via Kenfig so that Tony had a chance to explore the site which gives us the name. That meant arriving home in Fareham at 5.00 and Tony having to be out again by 7.00 to head north for Chester, as his introduction course started at 9.00am next day.

Back to School as well for Natalie and college for Rob. Daria also had only a brief respite before starting her evening classes, now expanded to include maths, making one every weekday night. Not only that but there was still her OU exam to prepare for in

October, which meant she had to miss our trip to Gloucester for the baptism of Alfie, Louisa's son.

Rob started driving lessons.

## **OCTOBER**

After a month of travelling up and down the motorways to Chester most weeks, Tony was beginning to settle in to his new job. Daria took her exam, which we hope is her last.

The half term break saw Tony, Daria, Maria & Natty head up to Gloucester for a few days. It also allowed more time to work on our wine production.



*The grapes are under net to keep the birds off*

*Ready for picking*

*Daria begins the harvest*

*They are all in*

*About 20lbs of grapes, now that stalks have been removed*



*Tony hand crushes them*



*A full demijohn - we haven't properly pressed them yet*



*We borrow mama's press to complete the task*



*It's not as easy as it looks*



*Not much juice left now*

## **NOVEMBER**

Another month that has passed quickly. Maria & Phil went to France for the weekend but it was closed (well - all the shops were on Sunday, their only full day there). Daria & Tony - and then Natalie went to see Miss Saigon at the Mayflower.

We also finally sold the Galaxy that had given such good service - 144000 miles worth.