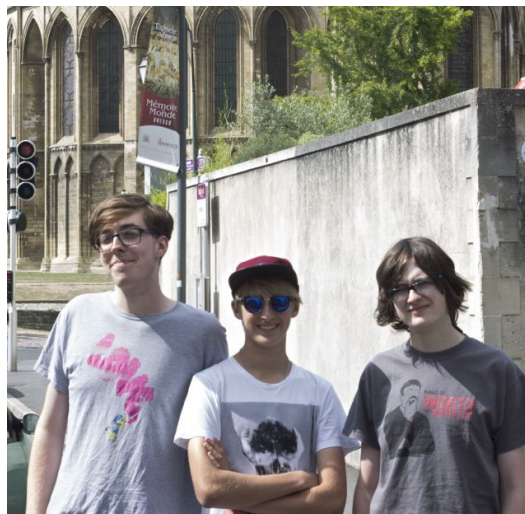


Another year; another newsletter. Some things never change – Christmas 2014

1. We are not ready for Christmas yet, but are trying (very trying). Somewhat hampered by illness this year.
2. We note that as usual, some of you are so ready for Christmas that you have erected your Christmas tree, bought and wrapped all your presents, baked your home made mince pies, iced your Christmas cake *and* sent all your Christmas cards. All this by 7th December ... are you mad? You know who you are!
3. Christmas is coming ready or not! (not ready)
4. Thoughts of 2014 and hopes for 2015 are swimming around our heads – let's hope a coherent newsletter emerges.

Well it's been a good year with many blessings along the way. The family home still seems quiet with $\frac{2}{3}$ of available boys away at uni. Joseph and Daniel finished their first years and started their second, studying History and the History of Ideas at Goldsmiths in South London and TV & Film Digital Post Production at Brighton (Hastings Campus) respectively. Joseph reached the ripe old age of 21 in March and we went out for a family meal at a far too trendy restaurant, Daniel joining us over Skype later to sing along to happy birthday. Joe is off to Antwerp and Amsterdam just before Christmas, but will be back in time to join us in Somerset for the big day. Daniel turned 19 in August whilst we were on holiday (more about that later). Dan has been involved in a film start up project called Metal Castle (look it up on the internet if you want to support them, but it's a comedy about a group of fantasy metal band members forced to live in the real world) as well as being part of his Christian Union. James meanwhile, almost 16 and in Year 11 at school is deciding what to do for 6th Form. This year he had to choose a project for school and he decided to start a business (Shadow Clothing) designing, marketing and selling t-shirts. The project culminated in an evening showcasing the projects and we felt very proud of him.



Phil – I've just passed twelve years with my job at Root6 (my longest ever employment!) and although it's been a busy year we haven't had any large projects; several small ones and lots of training which I like doing. In September I had a trip to Norway to visit a new manufacturer but thankfully no extended stays in Manchester this year! Been so busy I haven't seen any bands; hope to rectify this in 2015...

Sarah - Still working as a school secretary at a small primary school in Mill Hill, a job I love. My colleagues are lovely, the children often bring an element of humour to the day and the parents are great (on the whole), although there are still one or two I am aiming to get a smile out of before the end of the year. Outside of school I am continuing to study French with my friends (elaborate meal, French conversation, plus reading/translating a book together) and Phil and I still run a home group (more food ... this time combined with prayer and laughter). Amazing birthday treat this year ... Phil took me to see War Horse which I loved so much. I was so immersed in the story that I was unable to speak all the way home on the tube in case the tears started again.



Summer Highlights

Once again James and Sarah went to Soul Survivor Stafford with a motley collection of mums and teenagers. The mums, ostensibly there to provide the food and a stable base for the teenagers, quite enjoyed themselves. There may have been four, rather mature, elven princesses on the last night when you were supposed to come as a character from a film series ... but then elves don't age as fast do they?

Our family holiday (yes all the boys came along again) was spent in

France, a week in Normandy, just a 5 minute walk from Omaha Beach and a week in the Périgord Noir (think rivers, castles, medieval villages, prehistoric man and walnuts). Normandy was warm and quite beautiful, especially enjoyed the D-Day landing beaches, swimming in the sea and the Bayeux Tapestry. Further south, the Périgord region, was not as warm as expected, but nevertheless we enjoyed the beautiful villages, markets and food and had a more successful attempt at kayaking than on previous holiday – no capsizing this time! The holiday was particularly memorable as we celebrated our silver wedding anniversary while we were away. The five of us enjoyed a magnificent meal on a restaurant terrace, overlooking the River Vézère.

Kitchen Capers

Ever since we moved to our house some 17 years ago, our early 1970's kitchen has needed a revamp. 2014 was the year when this eventually happened. As I write we are sitting in a beautiful, glossy cream creation, with inbuilt appliances, softly closing cupboards and enough plug points/computer data input points for even Phil to be contented. It is so lovely and we are grateful to have made it through the six weeks of upheaval, including a week of walking over a stool/plank obstacle course, over gas and water pipes and a dirt floor, whilst carrying bowls of washing up water, so that the floor could be lowered. Our fantastic builder Tony calmly presided over the chaos and brought beauty and order.

Barcelona

October half term we went on a short break to Barcelona to belatedly celebrate our 25 years of marriage. This was the first time Phil and I had been on holiday together, just the two of us, since we had had the children. It was amazing! The weather was hot and sunny, the B&B beautiful and romantic and the city more than we had anticipated. We enjoyed all things Gaudi, especially the Sagrada Família, a building which took our breath away and moved us deeply. Other highlights included an evening concert at the Palau de Música Catalana (another stunning modernist building) and cycling along the seafront. We did have a gooseberry with us though. Reception Class's Paddington Bear needed his photo taking next to a variety of famous landmarks, so that he could report back to the children. This led to a rather unfortunate incident when we were taking his photo on the beach, discovering in the nick of time that it was a nudist beach, populated by elderly men. The marmalade sandwich came in very handy.



All I want for Christmas ...

Philip – a few nice lie ins, some delicious food and a glass or two of sweet sherry.

Sarah – time with the family (no major arguments please), chocolate, a new jigsaw puzzle, twinkly lights and a sprinkling of snow.

Joseph – a chance to hide and work on his essays/a chance to hide from his essays.

Daniel – the chance to eat some proper food, someone else to do the washing and maybe another new and unusual musical instrument.

James – for my hair game to be “on point” and for more people to buy t-shirts from my Shadow Clothing range.