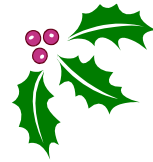




## 2002 Christmas Newsletter from: Bridget, Malcolm, James & Matthew



**2002** has been a busy year, with three holidays, some major plumbing, and activities with our local Methodist church and theatre club.

Although living in the Chiltern Hills has many attractions - the leafy woods almost behind the house, the breath-taking view of rolling hills only half a mile away, and the stunning Autumn colours along many of the roads - we do miss the sea. We have instead adopted the Grand Union Canal as our cobweb blowing space. The Wendover arm reaches out to us only 15 minutes away, and the main branch is a little further on at Tring. As there were no events in the village to celebrate the Golden Jubilee, we went instead to the Tring Canal Festival, where the boys had a brilliant time making t-shirts and badges, and enjoying a boat ride on the canal.



*Canal walking at Wendover*

Now that it's free, we decided to take the boys to the Natural History Museum in London, which went down quite well, although James was rather thrown by how realistic the animated dinosaurs were. He decided that he much preferred the skeletons.



*Dippy at the NHM*

Shortly afterwards we discovered that we had a branch of the Natural History Museum practically on our doorstep. The Rothschild Zoological Museum at Tring includes stuffed polar bears, monkeys and Matthew's current favourite, lemurs.

Another favourite local haunt is the Railway Museum at Quinton. There are regular steam train rides, plus a wonderful ride-on miniature train layout.



*Quinton railway museum*

In June we had a week in France. We flew to Nice instead of the three-day drive that we'd previously taken, and carefully chose a campsite with a railway station, bus stop, and even a Marineland and Butterfly Jungle within walking distance. The mobile home had a vertiginous view of the river! We were lucky with the weather, sandwiched between two unusually wet spells. James took a little while to get used to the swimming pool, but by the end of the week couldn't get his clothes off quickly enough to jump in and play with his new dolphin. We were lucky enough to meet up with my school friend Susanne and her two children during the week, and an extra treat for the boys was the train ride to Menton.



*Malcolm & Matthew at Camping du Pylon*

In August we had ten days in Ireland. Again, the sun smiled on us, and we had only a few spots of rain the whole holiday. We had a day in Dublin, enjoying an open-top bus ride and a trip to Dublin Zoo, and a couple of days in 'Grandma's' hotel in Monaghan (James was convinced his Grandma owned the B&B we stayed in, as she had free run of the kitchen, having worked there half a century ago.) It was lovely to catch up with aunts, uncles and cousins. The boys enjoyed Uncle Gerry's 'Teletubbyland', riding Ryan's bike, and playing in the close with Christopher and Nathan and their friends.



We spent the remaining week of the holiday on a farm in County Fermanagh's Lake District, near Enniskillen. James still talks about the cows and the tractor, and Matthew remembers throwing bread for the chickens and the cow banging its head on the feeder to get extra feed.

Robert, Jean and 9-year-old Emma made us very welcome, and a return visit could be on the schedule in the future. Who knows, in a few years they might even want to drive the quad bike!



Our final holiday this year was a short break at Centerparcs. Malcolm's mum, dad and sister-in-law joined us for a day, which was a particular treat for the boys.

***Happy Christmas and a Joyous 2003 to you all***



*Matthew on the beach in Ireland*

Malcolm is still working for O2 in Hammersmith, and I confess it took me until October to realise that he's spending most of his time at work on games! No, he's not plugged a play station into his laptop, he's managing projects with the aim of getting customers to download games onto their mobile phones.

Malcolm is sometimes allowed out to bang bits of wood together when the local theatre club needs a set constructed, and he runs their website.

Rashly, I auditioned for the PTC panto this year, and will be appearing as third villager from the left (with lines) in January.



I'm still teaching yoga to my adults, and I'm contemplating setting up a children's yoga class next year (but probably with older children than the four-year-olds I had a try-out with.) I still carry out a monthly software review for 'Health and Safety at Work', and they've just published my first two-page article (on how to choose safety related computer-based training, for those of you interested).

Matthew is enjoying two mornings a week at nursery, and January will see James in his first school uniform as he starts at the local infant school's early years unit (half days). You'll have to wait for next year's newsletter for his first day at school photo!



*Matthew with Grandad, Andrew, in Ipswich*