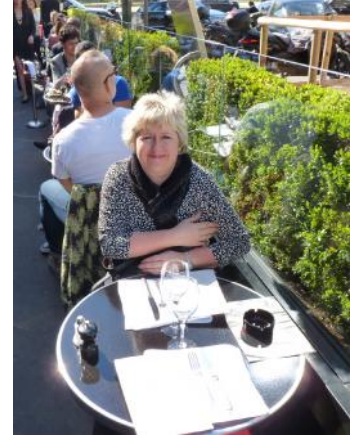




A warm welcome to our 2014 newsletter. We spent Christmas 2013 once again with our family and with Chris's sister Wendy and her girls. This time we hired a barn just south of Chipping Norton in the Cotswolds and spent a lovely week there. For the first time Michael was not with us on Christmas Day as he spent time with his girlfriend Sophie at her mother's house near Poole. Stephanie and Tux flew off on Boxing Day to New York and a cruise down to the Bahamas over new year – alright for some!

We went off in March to Paris for the first time ever and despite Chris's concern that however loud he shouted in English they wouldn't understand him, we got on fine. Unseasonably warm weather meant we were able to dine outside on some occasions and enjoy an open top bus tour. The one disappointment was deciding to spend the whole of our last day visiting the Louvre, only to find it amazingly doesn't open on a Tuesday!! At least it's an excuse to visit again.



For a week in early April Chris went off on an old school trip to Belgium/France, following the exploits of 2 WW1 VC winners and a 3 time DSO winner in WW2. He also took the opportunity to photograph the graves/memorials to many former pupils who gave their lives in WW1. Chris went back again in October with his friend Steve to visit another 50 grave/memorials in an amazing 3 day trip that allowed him to complete his research into all 148 men and 4 masters who gave their lives in WW1 in time for Remembrance Sunday.



Late June saw us depart for USA and Canada for nearly 5 weeks. Michael and Sophie came out for the first couple of weeks which saw us visit Las Vegas and Grand Canyon followed by a long drive to Yosemite, San Francisco and down Big Sur to Los Angeles. While Michael and Sophie stayed on in LA for a few days, we caught the train, spending time in New Orleans, Atlanta, Washington, New York, West Point

and finally Toronto. Despite spending a fortune on beds on board, Eryl is going to take some persuasion to do a long distance train trip again! Along the way we met up with 88 year old Old Framlinghamian Alfred Molson on Houston railway station, Michael Blake in Washington, 39 years after last seeing each other at school, Julie and Steve Horton at West Point and David and Darlene Craig and their family in Toronto, including David's mum Helen who Chris has known since he was in shorts!



Chris has continued to spend many hours every day supporting the local charity, Saltford Community Association, for which he is Treasurer and chair of fundraising – he's continued cooking beef curry for 160 or 300 rashers of bacon for a cafe! He also continues to give his time to his old school in a number of roles, the most rewarding of which is keeping in touch with 600 former pupils who live overseas. Next year, 150 years since the first boys went to the School, Chris will become President, which will involve trips to events around the UK and overseas, including just outside Sydney in April and Hamburg in July. He also organises reunions for his former company and provides lifts for the elderly in the village to a Day Centre. And he still finds time for a few days per month of paid work with the Phoenix Group.

Eryl continues her busy and enjoyable role as an Avon lady as well as doing a wonderful job of running the home. As well as the trips mentioned above, we also went down to Wales in August to stay with Eryl's dad and Janice. We also really enjoyed a meet up in Matlock Bath in September with the friends we met on our cruise in 2012 and enjoyed taking the whole family away for a weekend at Lingfield Park to mark a couple of 30th birthdays and a 28th.



Stephanie (30) is now in her 9th year of teaching and is head of Year 1 at Summerhill Infant School in Bristol. She continues to thoroughly enjoy it and still gets a huge buzz from seeing the children develop significantly during their year with "Miss Essex". She's now been with Tux for over 12 years and we see a lot of them as they have owned a house in the same road as us since 2009. Before you ask there is sadly still no wedding date!!!

Samantha (28) is still working in Bath during the day and at Saltford Golf Club in the evenings/weekend. Her and Neil moved into their new build property in Midsomer Norton the day after Boxing Day 2013 and have spent the year continuing to add design features to their first home, including handmade Roman blinds.



Michael (25) is still living at home with Sophie and until mid year was also working from home! By then, their upmarket online business called Lullabuy (www.lullabuy.co.uk) had outgrown home and they moved to shop premises nearby provided by good friends, David & Sarah. Fingers crossed the business is continuing to grow and provide them with a modest income.

That's about it except to wish you a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. We are delighted to once again be spending Christmas with Wendy and her girls in a converted barn in the Cotswolds for a week.

Chris, Eryl, Stephanie, Samantha and Michael Essex
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