

December 2019

This year we have managed two brief breaks away from Cambridge, with help from members of the family. In March we spent three nights in Norfolk, renting a house with Richard and Rachel. In September we had three nights in Suffolk, renting a house with David and Margie. On both occasions we were able to get to the coast and see the sea, one of our main objectives. Elizabeth also fulfilled her wish to see a kingfisher! Also with help from family, Elizabeth was able to attend the service and gathering to mark the closing of Barnes Close, the Christian conference centre near Birmingham where we met and where we held our wedding reception. It was good to meet up again with old friends and celebrate the good work that's been based there. The work of training young people will be carried on by a collaboration between two Christian organisations who are buying the centre.

In the early part of the year John was able to come off the painkillers but has not been able to regain the level of mobility he had before his accident in 2018. As a result we have had to withdraw from all of our regular activities apart from church.

In March, Elizabeth stood down as an Elder at church, but she has continued as a member of the Worship, Discipleship and Spirituality Group, one of our congregation's working committees. Most recently, this has involved her in not only hosting a series of housegroup meetings for Advent (which we have done together for a number of years now) but also co-leading it with another member of our congregation.

Family-wise, there are various items of news. In June Sophia was born to grand-daughter Ruth and Mark in Birmingham, a sister for Harvey who is now 3. Robert, youngest son of Richard and Rachel, graduated with a Masters in Engineering. Jonathan, youngest child of Helen and Colin, has now qualified as a solicitor. Elizabeth's eldest niece Anna (older daughter of Robert and Sarah) was married to Alex, in Spain, where they both live and work.

In early October we had a very special visit from a group from the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan, including eight pastors from the Paiwan people, into whose language John helped to translate the Bible in his younger days.

As we have reported previously, our church is now called Downing Place United Reformed Church. The church building on Downing Place (formerly St Columba's, where we worshipped) is currently being remodelled so, since Easter, we have been using our partner congregation's building, which has been bought by part of the university. We expect to return to our permanent base in autumn 2020. One of our two part-time ministers will be leaving at the end of April to take up the post of General Secretary of the URC. Nigel Uden, our other minister, continues as Moderator of the URC General Assembly until July. So another challenging year lies ahead for us all!

We hope that you are well and send you our best wishes for Christmas and for the coming year.

John and Elizabeth Whitehorn