

Rachael and Alison

Rachael (18, left) and Alison (15, right) have both had a good year. Rachael's academic success has continued. An offer from Cambridge at the start of the year was followed by hard work (and the occasional hangover) and then onto the nerve racking process of the A Level exams themselves. The results were, of course, the predicted A's all round and the place to read Engineering has been secured. Currently, Rachael is part way through her gap-year. She applied to the Year In Industry programme and is currently working at Rolls Royce in Sunderland. Be warned though, the jokes about company cars are wearing thin.

Alison's prowess as a water polo player continues. Again she was successful in gaining a place at GB Water Polo's academy camp over the summer and in September moved up into the Youth Squad. Currently much time is spent training and the frequency and intensity of GB training looks set to increase and will present some challenges in balancing social, academic and sporting life. Alison is now in year one of the three year treadmill of GCSEs, AS and A Levels and the results of the mock exams have been encouraging. Alison reports that the post-GCSE "no more maths" party is at an early stage of planning but it is expected to be a very large celebration.



Property Empire Expands

2004 has seen two further additions to the Mell property empire. A two bedroomed terraced house was acquired in the early part of the year and has undergone a substantial programme of renovations which are now complete. The air was blue, though, on the day David discovered that after fitting the kitchen, the newly purchased appliances were 2 cm taller than the gaps left for them under the workbench. Nice one B&Q. The problem was compounded by the recently tiled walls which were securely jamming the 8m of worktop firmly in place. An angle grinder and a good supply of grinding wheels eventually solved the problem but the dust and sparks were not for the faint hearted.

The second acquisition, just completed, is a two bedroomed sixties flat. This requires a modest amount of work and brings to six the portfolio of properties (excluding Springwell Towers).

Jobs – Its All Change in Durham

After nearly three years of house husbanding and property development, David returned to the world of paid work in September. The suitcase of money presented by Cap Gemini Ernst & Young (*editor's note: since rebranded yet again*) at the end of 2001

was eventually starting to run out. A foray into further education teaching during the year underlined that not much has changed since Tom Sharpe penned the Wilt books. A call from a recruitment consultant "I've got this strange job and I think you might be suited to it" eventually lead to David becoming the Knowledge Manager for the regional observatory.

This has nothing to do with astronomy. The observatory's role is to improve knowledge of the North East region and to help inform public sector policy, particularly that of the regional development agency. Although its early days, readers should look out for www.nerip.com sometime in February.

The quacks eventually gave Janice's continuing illness the name of post-viral syndrome. This has kept her from work throughout the year and there is little sign of significant improvement as yet. Assuming that the HR Department at Hartlepool LEA finally get their act together, it looks almost certain that she will resign her teaching post in the New Year.

Merry Christmas, Readers

We wish all our readers a Merry Christmas and hope that 2005 brings you good luck and good fortune. With sincere best wishes

David, Janice, Rachael and Alison