

A Christmas ~~Carol~~

David, Janice
Rachael and Alison

The Girls Alison followed in the elder one's footsteps and produced a good crop of GCSE results: 10 As, 1 A* and a B (in English Language). The school presented Alison with some problems choosing A Levels by putting PE and Politics in the same option block and, perhaps to the surprise of some, it was Politics that won the day, joining Sociology, History and Psychology as the chosen subjects. The homework workload seems substantial but progress so far has been good, though sport is now taking up much less time and certainly nothing like the 15 hours a week training that British Water Polo are now expecting. Whether Alison continues playing at this level remains to be seen though in June she was part of the Youth Squad's training camp which was held at the Dutch national training centre and played against national teams from the Netherlands and Canada. With Rachael she continues to play in the Women's National League for Harrogate Shortwalkers and the team continued its onward march, gaining promotion to Division One for the 2005/06 season. At the time of writing (and this is being written on the poolside at Millfield School in Somerset during a national league weekend) the team looks like it will do an Everton and just maintain its position in the top flight. Away from school and pool, Alison had a week's work experience in a local primary school which she really enjoyed and during the Summer temporarily entered the labour market behind the counter of the local Domino's Pizza.

Rachael completed her Year-in-Industry at Rolls-Royce¹, gaining a Certificate in Management Studies and a prize from the local FE college which bought her a nice Radley handbag along the way. The Y-in-I programme also brought Rachael a new boyfriend, Nick, who is currently doing an Engineering degree at Nottingham and living in the same hall of residence that your humble scribe lived in over 30 years ago. Rachael has started her Engineering degree at Cambridge and is having a bit of a tough time settling in. However, competitive as ever, she's got herself into the starting seven for the University Water Polo team (which will get her a half-blue) and against intense competition has got into the University Air Squadron where she will be taught to fly by the RAF. Before she goes back to Cambridge, complete with new bike, she is off to Spain with the University water polo team on a short tour.

Her Ladyship Janice finally hung up her chalk duster and formally resigned from her teaching job in January after 27 years. Although much better than she was, the recovery from the post-viral syndrome illness is still far from complete: this and the sheer awfulness which teaching has become were the key factors in her decision. However, although officially classed as "workless" by the Government (which is a step down from "unemployed") she has been far from idle. Two further properties were added to the portfolio during the year bringing the total to eight. Janice is currently busy straightening out the last of these. If you measure wealth by the number of toilets or washing machines that you own, then Janice is on her way to becoming an extremely wealthy woman. Personally, I'd settle for some profits rather than juggling the cashflow of an ever expanding business, so number eight might be the last for a while (though October did see us in the Algarve on holiday looking in estate agent's windows).

Your Humble Scribe David is still working for the regional observatory (and, no, it's still got nothing to do with the stars), got its website launched at the beginning of the year (www.nerip.com) and has just completed the great work of the State of the Region Report 2006 (unofficial title "It really is grim up North", find it on the website). Her ladyship claims this turned him into Mr Even More Grumpy though he counters it was the strain of retiling bathrooms, performing 10,000 other property repairs and generally not ever having a moment to spare that was the cause. Much weekend time was spent visiting various swimming pools during the year as the consort to the president of the county swimming association. The swimming galas brought back memories of the kids competing a few years ago; the diving was enjoyable; as for the synchronised swimming – best not to ask.

We hope that 2005 has not been unkind to you and that 2006 will be good to you and yours. With love and sincere best wishes from the four of us here in Durham.

¹ Useful fact number 347: According to Rolls-Royce folklore, the hyphen between Rolls and Royce is a tribute to the man who first introduced Rolls and Royce together.