

MELLO!

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Special Edition
Some considerable time after
Christmas 2015

The Squid Row Special

Another Special One-Off Edition

2013 marked the publication of the final annual edition of Mello! but, as regular readers will know 2014 saw the publication of a one-off special – the Cheltenham Reader's Special Edition. That could have been the end of it but, such were events in 2015 that the editorial team decided to mark it with another special edition. However, unlike all previous editions, this one is being published in the untraditional month of February. As to the title, you'll need to read on and know a little bit of Spanish to work it out and, giving credit where it's due, it was David's sister Christine who coined the name Squid Row. We hope that some readers may even spend time on it.

ERRATUM

The reference to Pelicans in the picture in last year's edition (reproduced below) was, of course, incorrect.



Long legs, long necks, pink, hooked bill without massive pouch, habit of standing on one leg. That'd be a pelican, yes?

REVIEW OF 2015

The year started with a couple of trips to Guildford to board out Rachael's loft. There was an ulterior motive of course: once the loft was boarded out the vansful of Rachael's stuff still hanging about here at Springwell Towers could finally be re-united with the owner. The mission was successfully accomplished though getting there had its hairy moments, like getting the old and long redundant Elson water tank out of the loft. It was bulky and difficult to handle (particularly when stepping backwards, through the loft hatch and onto the loft ladder). It was also very heavy, even after chopping it into two with an angle grinder. The final result though has been worth it, though. An almost

palatial, boarded out space suitable for storage, Scalextric or model railway layout and anything else the modern young woman might wish for.

The start of the year also finally saw the sale of 21 Court Road, the former family home of David's parents, brother Stephen and sister Susan. It did, however, require almost full refurbishment (everywhere except the bathroom) to get it sold.

Also on the house selling front, we finally managed to sell the 2 bed terrace we've had on the market in the aptly named village of Pity Me for nearly two years. Things might be booming property-wise in London and the South East but it is still hellishly grim up north. The sale price was a miserable £3k more than we paid for it in 2004, despite spending a considerable amount on improving it over the years. David's top tip for estate agents: when that 60 plus year old walks into the office telling you he (or she) is thinking of putting their pension money into buy to let politely advise them to do one and accompany them to the door. We've encountered several first time buy-to-letters and without exception, they are never going to buy anything to let.



We didn't show our buyers these before and after shots of David's handiwork repairing the effects of a leaking hot water cylinder on the wall.

The main event of 2015 on the property front has been the acquisition of a 3-bed semi-detached villa on the urbanisation of Los Calamares in Playa Blanca at the southern end of Lanzarote, complete with sea views and a glimpse of Fuerteventura across the rooftops.

With sister Christine, we went out for two weeks at the end of February having first contacted three local estate agents with a list of the type of thing we were after and a list of properties we'd like to look at (yes, Janice's many hours spent watching *A Place in the Sun* on daytime TV have not been completely wasted).



Outside what subsequently became our new home

To cut a not very long story short, an offer was made and accepted, a solicitor appointed, power of attorney signed in front of the notary and NIE numbers obtained. After ordering building, plumbing and electric surveys the sale completed at the end of May. David and Janice went out for a couple of weeks in June to get acquainted with our new home. This was followed up by a much longer stay from October to December when we were joined at various times by brother Stephen, sister Christine and elder daughter Rachael. At the time of writing we can't wait to get back out there.



Our visitors in Lanzarote: siblings left, daughter right



May also saw Janice reach the milestone of the official retirement age for teachers. Although, she hasn't been able to work through ill health for the last decade, this milestone finally saw her reaping the benefits of nearly 30 years of contributions to the Teacher's Pension Scheme. At the same time David abandoned any continuing pretence of self-employment and formally severed his freelance research associateship at Durham University, even resigning from the Operational Research Society where he'd been a member man and boy since his postgrad days in Lancaster.

Summer saw the usual whirl of activity associated with the property business with the main event being yet another new boiler installation: this time replacing the electric storage heaters in a 1 bed flat. The kitchen was replaced at the same time and a fitted wardrobe was taken out and refitted to create space for the boiler. Note to Ofgem: a competitive market in new gas connections ain't going to work when participants

simply sub-contract to the incumbent operator (Northern Gas Networks) and add their own profit margin on top of the incumbent's published price.

Once the Summer madness was over and all the students were finally back and settled in for 2015/16 we packed the van and set off on a road trip to Lanzarote, via Guildford, Portsmouth, ferry to Bilbao, stops en-route in Salamanca and Sevilla before the second ferry from Huelva (about 30km from the Portuguese border on Spain's Costa de la Luz) to Lanzarote. The first crossing was calm, the second anything but. A couple we met who'd been doing this trip annually for the last 15 years said it was the worst they'd ever encountered. Janice was very seasick and the less said the better about the state of the cabin by the end of it.



Van packed at the start of the road trip

When not hosting visitors, our first stint at living rather than holidaying on Lanzarote was largely spent enjoying the sunshine and sorting out furniture. As is common, we'd bought the house complete with furniture and contents. Whilst that has some upsides (like having a bed to sleep on when we first arrived), most of the furniture has been, is being or will be replaced. Quite a lot of time was spent trailing around the furniture shops and a new bedroom suite has been purchased and a very fancy sofa is currently being made in Spain. We have also had our dining furniture shipped out, though had left for Durham by the time it arrived. Not too much damage according to the agent we entrusted to take delivery, though at least one dining chair will need its leg sticking back on when we get back, apparently. David did go and see a bit of local football (Spanish fourth tier) and is now a fan of *Los Rojillos*.



Local derby US Yaiza vs UD Lanzarote – what a magnificent backdrop - the dales with palm trees!

RACHAEL

Everything appears to have been well in Rachael-land over the past year. She has taken up serious running, achieving a time of 1:55 in the Great North Run (whilst dressed as Wonder Woman!), 1:49 in the Great Birmingham Run and 4:03 in her debut marathon in Warsaw. Well done!! Makes your scribe out of breath just thinking about it. She also spent most of her bonus on a rather serious racing bike and 2015 saw her compete in her first triathlon. On top of all this she is still playing water polo for Southampton Sirens. Rachael also acquired a new beau named Pete at some stage during the Summer and that appears to be working out well.



Rachael complete with fish 'sculpted' in stones. Taken in the crater of the Montana Roja, above Playa Blanca
ALISON



Alison at work. Jet-ski on its trailer hooked up to the quad bike, ready for taking from boathouse to beach...

Alison continued her association with the RNLI and again picked up some work training groups of schoolchildren in water safety earlier in the year. This was followed by a third season as a beach lifeguard at Sunderland, though this time with supervisory responsibilities



...and there she goes. (Jet ski hidden from view by a thumb, doh!)

August to December saw Alison working for the Pennine Camphill Community, a residential college on the edge of Wakefield for young people with learning disabilities. Alison's role was to help run one of the 5 houses providing residential accommodation and to mentor students. Alison has also acquired a new significant other during 2015 and this also appears to be working out well. In Alison's case it is a belle not a beau and she's named Lucy.

AND FINALLY

We hope this special edition of Mello! finds you and yours happy and well. Had we written it in time, we would have wished you all the best for Christmas and the New Year. We offer these wishes retrospectively or, if you prefer, we're getting them in early for next December because, who knows, this could be the last ever Mello! With love from David, Janice, Rachael and Alison.



On the terrace at Squid Row – Cheers!