

Christmas 2001



Sorry, but it's your annual Heppell Christmas Newsletter from Brightlingsea
for those of you new to this, or with little else to read, find the old ones from www.heppell.net/christmas

Another year, still the same old newsletter, now institutionally late for the post... but, lots to tell and what else will you read on Christmas day with no newspapers (probably anything but this, in truth). Since our friends seem to be largely a pretty disorganised bunch too we now rely on the arrival of a batch of similar newsletters to alert us to the final posting date before Christmas; it is clearly that time now, so here we go, in haste:

Summary (for busy readers): it has been a pretty good year: Juliette (Letty) is in work, Melissa has graduated, Toby is through A levels successfully and at University, the lab has gone from strength to strength, sailing has been special, we have a new boat (not a dinghy!) and the cat has got fatter (and he's not the only one).

So, to details: this was a special sailing year, so much so that we actually managed to find time for it. Toby and crew Rick are looking suddenly very together in their 49er (and the sailors amongst you may have caught Toby's Yachts and Yachting article about top Mirror sailing - he retired from Mirrors after leading the national rankings for two years.) 49ers are fearfully expensive - two carbon masts already - and Melissa's custom built new 470 should be arriving about now from New Zealand (Carole was out there a month or so back and popped in to see all was proceeding well) and the BOD was in the water early enough to be fully tuned for the annual Pyefleet Week battle which was spectacularly windy (we like it like that); Toby, Melissa's boyfriend Alex and Stephen triumphed counting four firsts (best winning result for decades) and were suitably smug for weeks after; it was all jolly close with four boats overlapped at the finish of the first race after nearly two hours. On the windiest day a couple of genuine force nine gusts propelled our (un-reefed, yikes!) BOD over the finish line as the second placed BOD behind was tossed in the air, wrecked and inverted with its mast driven vertically into the bottom of the Colne as it came down, quite a feat with a 30 foot mast! Our BOD won a few other things too this year, Grandad would have been proud of us. We have now sold all the Mirrors, still have a Europe and Hornet too, but in

August were (fatally) invited (by the NZ Minister of Education) down to the America's Cup Jubilee Regatta at Cowes. We were captivated (partying with the Team NZ gang helped a lot) and on our return searched for a yacht to race finally settling on a gorgeous Oyster 37 (designed as a racing One Tonner) which is now making the 49er racing look cheap (the masthead spinnaker is about the area of Wembley). Oh dear! Best of this though is that Carole is much taken with life afloat, racing in this kind of style, and we are even sailing



round to St Katherine's at the Tower of London for our annual London computer show in January. Brrrrrrr, must fix the heater before then!

Juliette (22) has blossomed in her role as PR person for a mental health trust in Surrey and has accumulated an amazing amount of experience - from organising Events, through to co-ordinating their new New Media. As a "child of the silicon revolution" she, of course, also dashed off a wonderful new Internet site for them only to find this was supposedly the work of a whole gang of people. Undaunted she did the Intranet too. She lived for a while on her own in Croydon, blessed peace after student life in a house that seemingly was never home to less than about 100, but now she is sharing in Tooting, but with boyfriend George (see left) still in Portsmouth. She even moved in on Carole's sister Doreen for a while - a bit like having a tornado pass through your house presumably.

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Melissa (21) has graduated after a hectic year at UCL where she tried to fit into two and a half terms all the work she didn't do whilst sailing in the previous two years. Some of her final work was quite stunning; it made her parents quite proud to see such creativity (not that in all those years of architecture she produced anything vaguely resembling a building, of course). Have a browse around her website if you have a spare moment over Christmas and some bandwidth. She graduated unsure of what she wanted to do (apart from sailing 470s, naturally) and has done all sorts of freelance work including a website for the DfES exploring the architecture of new school

buildings. She has now a much clearer view of what she has enjoyed most (2D design) and is getting serious about a permanent job (it was missing the office parties that put her off freelancing. Melissa is shaping up to be quite a sailor and we are waiting to see how she will do in the new boat on the Olympic circuit next year. Goodbye leisure time, hello training, but at least she'll see plenty of Toby in his 49er!

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Toby enjoyed his two years at Sixth Form College and his tutors spoke rather well of him. He was a bit of star in his Drama final piece too (all very wired with multiple screens and goodness knows what else) he ended up running a seminar for the staff



on how he did it! Toby had some good Uni offers but reviewing the courses nearer to his final acceptance decided (rightly) that they were not quite offering what he needed, so he (bravely) chucked in the offers and took his A level passes into clearing having identified just two courses that combined Creative Writing with performance and so on. First phone call (Portsmouth) snapped him up and he is blissfully enjoying the "perfect" course, and sailing too. He has even managed to find a "big band" to play the trombone in. Perfick! Only slight downside is that his Land Rover is (still) waiting for a new engine.

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Carole's seniority in the lab and her national stature have been reflected in some interesting travel this year including New Zealand. Her projects go from strength to strength and she wanders in and out of Whitehall with aplomb. Best of all for Carole though has been getting back into sailing after years of shorebound watching and towing boats around. She has ended her tenure as Commodore of the Mirror Class and is now decked out in GoreTex oilies and getting very interested in navigation, which of course is very geeky these days what with all the instruments talking together on a common data bus and so on. Next year we have scheduled in some tough races in the Oyster but intend a little bit of cruising too. Sailing at night is especially new and fun for us.

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Grandma had a checkered year and the many friends in her address book will now be getting this newsletter too (welcome!). In mid summer Grandma was having the time of her life, out in the family launch (Millie) and being carried up the East Mersea shore for a bar-b-q (Melissa's 21st bash), even driving her little battery car around the paddling pool at Brightlingsea. But by Autumn, as the doctor put it, her get up and go had got up and gone and she relied more and more on her carer Beryl until just getting from chair to bed became too big a task for either or both of them. This went from worry to crisis in about three days and we needed to find a good "home" for her quickly before her health, and esteem, became too damaged. Net result was a bit of mercy dash to Glasgow (with Bertie the Budgie on board) to a home near David and his family. As we write she is in and out of hospital and really not herself at all. She misses Dad but has wonderful reminiscences to share in her more cogent moments: David and Pat's number is 0141 959 2204.



Stephen's year is as hectic as ever, work, boats, family, house (still unfinished), motorbike (still unfinished)... but it is all hugely enjoyable; global travel has now become a matter of course although he still sits by the window and looks out and dreams a bit as he flies. The media continue to be kind (a warm Financial Times profile a week or so back for example) and best project moment was probably seeing all the Summer School children presenting their video collages at the Victoria and Albert museum - stunning work. Apart from the sailing (worst moment was having to swim under the new boat during its "delivery" voyage to free a large bundle of floating rope from the prop) and the rather successful BOD season, Stephen also managed to sneak a bit of skiing this year (on Whistler mountain in Vancouver, between work), but sadly won't have time to join the kids on their various slopes over Christmas. He has however bought new skis (posh titanium/carbon carvers) so the slopes are clearly not yet safe from his unstylish

descents.

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That's it for now. Our small hope in this troubled world, is that the family and communities in our lives, yours too, might reach out and offer a little glimmer of hope of how things might be.

Enjoy a peaceful Christmas.