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It is astonishing to find that Christmas is here again with the opportunity to send our best wishes to you and to write to you again. We are happily still thriving having had an excellent leave in Germany and now we have the prospect of having all our family in the country again, at least for a short while.

By the time you get this, Paul and Rosalind will be back from the United States, having had what appears to be a splendid time in California. Their pictures show a hedonistic life of sport, travel and pleasure - but coupled with lucrative hard work and, on both parts, vigorous community and conservation activities.

Stephen has oscillated between Milton Keynes and Germany which has given him the opportunity to keep up his friendships there and to visit us several times. His Company has been taken over by its German partner and this has given him promotion and the prospect of travel much further afield which he is looking forward to.

Meanwhile, Michael is in Paris with his Company having finished his time in Peterhead and Aberdeen. He has a lovely flat there and he and Nicola seem to be making the most of living in a splendid city. Nicola is now Clerk to the Justices in Bexley Heath which I suppose is not far from Paris, in modern terms!

We went back to our previous flat in Göttingen in April and renewed all our old friendships with the people in and around Jurgen Troe's hospitable group. I did more computing than chemistry there and Pat had many frustrations with her laser experiment but we both learned a great deal which we are trying to put to use here. As before we were able to travel a lot, having no garden to look after or chores to do, and we visited as far afield as Konstanz in the south and Schleswig in the North. We visited East Germany as well and, after our now usual fuss with the authorities there, ended up staying, unusually, in a private house which was most interesting and worthwhile. We also went to Sweden to visit Lars, whom we met last autumn when he spent a few weeks at Keele. We also had a nice holiday there in a cabin in Värmland together with Melanie from Keele.

Together with our two tutors we worked hard at the language and ended up fluent (Pat) and moderate (Peter). We are continuing here but evening classes are not the same as being there.

It was nice to come home and find our house had been beautifully looked after by Warren Brown and his family who were on leave from Los Angeles. It was lovely to see everyone again but a bit of a shock to be tramping round student rooms and doing fire drills.

The mood here has changed marvellously with much more optimism than a year ago; it is amazing what the new VC has accomplished. There is of course a price in terms of attitudes (everything must "pay" now) and conditions but unfortunately we cannot expect to be comfortably free from the outside pressures. Things are actually looking a bit brighter for universities here on the financial side but there is no real let-up in the paucity of funds nationally for science, particularly because of the improvident and almost corrupt way in which the Research Councils order their priorities. The contrast in attitude and scale between here and Germany is startling.

I have chosen this particularly inauspicious time to run out of money and students but our work (Pat's and mine) is going well and we should pass through this lean patch in good order. Also we have some futher excitements to look forward to since I have decided to give up being Postgraduate Warden here and we expect to move off campus in the spring.

In closing, let me say a most sincere "Happy Christmas and Good New Year". We would love to hear what is happening to you if you have a chance to write.

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