



Ehrwalder Straße 9  
D-82467 Garmisch-Partenkirchen  
Germany  
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The inches of new snow that have just arrived are a cheerful reminder that Christmas is nearly upon us. It is a joy to try to surface from a year, which has mostly been happy but a times has seemed desperate, to wish you and your family a happy Christmas and all the best for the New Year.

The happiness was found in the family: the important event was young Timothy's christening in Düsseldorf. He is growing vigorously and he and his sister, Sarah, are the foci of Stephen and Conny's lives. In June our three families organised a weekend for everyone in Bamburgh in Northumberland to celebrate our fortieth wedding anniversary. It was apparently one of the few good weekends of the summer in those parts and full use was made of it in shovelling tons of sand to build castles against the incoming tide and in visiting Lindisfarne and the Farne Islands. It was wonderful to see all three families together, really enjoying being together. It is a bit sad to think how rarely it can happen.

The other two families are thriving: Michael and Nicola have bought an old house in Banchory and have had the builders in for most of the year renovating it. The three boys, William, James and Charlie, revel in the amount of space and are proud of the "secret passage" in the house. A Labrador puppy has now joined the family which adds to the general bedlam. Fiona and Felicity, Paul and Rosalind's daughters, are just as active and enthusiastic as their parents. Fiona has graduated to a new school and is a keen violinist, playing in a string ensemble; Felicity plays the violin at church and the recorder at school. All three families are prospering in their jobs and seem, luckily, to be unaffected by the turmoil in the foreign markets.

We ourselves have taken some lovely holidays (not without some excitement!): a week of culture and walking in Sicily (Peter bitten by a stone fish), three weeks in South Africa (lots of sightings of animals but nothing bit us there; presumably the insect repellent worked); and a week boating on the Canal du Midi (Pat ended with badly bruised ribs). The skiing however was limited to just a few weekends.

We have also had a number of nice excursions in connection with work, one to Budapest where we sat in a hot pool in the middle of a wood in the pouring rain (imagine getting changed!) and one in the snow under the Eiger, where one of our groups gave us a totally unexpected party together some nice presents to mark our forthcoming retirement.

We have been to operas, concerts and plays in places as far apart as Aberdeen, Washington, Verona and Riga. And by chance we also saw the *Tempest* at the Victoria in Stoke. It was the last performance to be directed by Peter Cheeseman and, as we were enthusiastic supporters of the Vic. from the very beginning, it was nice to be in the house for such a pleasant and characteristically modest occasion.

In March we ran our fifth symposium which was attended by five hundred colleagues and friends. Patricia has been editing and preparing the two volume, two thousand page, proceedings for publication for most of the year since then. Our project is running very well

Tel: int-49-8821-73981

Fax: int-49-8821-925955 (on request)

e-mail: p.borrell@gap.baynet.de

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and, with our impending retirement, we have learned how much we are valued which is most heartening.

But the secretariat moved to Munich. You may recall that my former Director decided that he would not accept the grant to run the secretariat and asked us to move. The German Government went to some trouble to secure the secretariat a new home at a research institute in Munich so that we could continue to run it. While I formally changed my employer in January, the secretariat remained in Garmisch until the end of April to allow us to run the symposium, before physically moving to Munich. We then lived out of cardboard boxes for a couple of months before moving into a lavish, newly-renovated and furnished suite of offices on the south side of the city. In addition I acquired two new colleagues who have turned out to be very friendly and helpful.

Unfortunately, while everything has gone well, it has not been an easy time. My last months in Garmisch were clouded by lack of staff and an unhappy atmosphere which culminated, after an extremely successful symposium, in my former director threatening to sue me for the remarks he thought (wrongly) I made at the symposium dinner while making a presentation to my former secretary who had retired as a result of the changes. Happily the atmosphere in Munich is excellent but I soon discovered that it is a most incredible bureaucracy which, unfortunately, I am not patient enough to tolerate in a kindly way. The general situation, added to the 90 km each way commuting and the amount of work that Patricia has been doing, has taken a very real toll on both of us. But we had decided in May that, having set up the new office and got everything running, we would retire at the end of January and we can now hardly wait for the day to arrive! An excellent successor has been found so I have the extra pleasure of leaving everything in good hands.

So, are we coming home? Well we are staying on in Garmisch for a bit and will probably return to Newcastle in the Autumn. However this is not quite certain since it is very nice here and we now have a number of friends whom we are reluctant to abandon.

And what, we are often asked, are we actually planning to do in our retirement? The speculative answers are: sleep, or read, or write a book, or visit Pitcairn Island, or start a consulting business, or buy a boat, or surf the web, or build a model railway, or learn to cook (Peter), or re-start the Oslo embroidery, or explore the Italian hill towns or even visit all the friends to whom we send Christmas cards. We don't really know but a truthful answer we can give is: whatever we end up doing, what we are looking forward to most is the pleasure of being able to do just one thing at a time!

So provided we can get through the next month or so (a very real proviso), we are looking forward with some excitement to a complete change in our lives. Meanwhile we hope that we shall see you in the near future (this may be the last chance to visit us in Garmisch!) and once again, we offer you our hopes and best wishes for the future.

