

The Fourth Estate 2015

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FREE AT LAST!

After almost 49 years with his nose to the grindstone John has finally retired and we're determined to make the best of his freedom while we still can. And with Noelene also a "lady of leisure" the first thing we're going to do is spend six weeks with the fandamily in sunny South Africa and see England no doubt get hammered by the Yaapies in the 2nd test match!



That Sweet Little Boy?

Well, yes — most of the time! Now 5½ he's doing well at school, swims usually twice a week (though STILL won't jump in) and has probably the largest collection of Lego in Bolton.

He's a keen gardener, especially when it comes to harvest time and loves helping grandma Noelene to cook. He's even got his own set of knives (thank you Thorsten and Michaela!). But he ended the year as Mr. Spotty Jack — yep, he's just getting over a not too bad dose of Chicken Pox!



Talking about Gardening

With more free time than she knows what to do with (??)

Noelene has been Queen of the Green Fingers this year with a great harvest of caterpillars, aphids, bindweed....

Actually we had wonderful crops of all sorts of beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, cabbage, onions, amazing garlic and much, much more. I mow the lawn (but very well!)



Another Fine Erection!

Finally Noelene has the barbecue and kitchen she has always wanted - and I suppose I have to admit that they are pretty good, though it took me 18 years to remember where everything went in the old kitchen! One day the house will be finished - but I couldn't say when (or if!).



Looking Back

When he wasn't chasing after Mum, Dad spent most of World War II in India, what is now Bangladesh and Burma and a few years ago I scanned some photos he took in Calcutta/Kolkata. On my last work trip to India recently I followed in his footsteps and photographed the same places as he did more than 70



years ago, including the Victoria Memorial (above), St. Paul's Church and the Art Deco Metro Cinema. It was an amazing experience for me and I have to say that I did feel just a tinge of emotion, standing on the very same spots that he had all those years ago (what ME, emotional?!)

On, on, on...

No long distance footpaths again this year, though an awful lot of walking with a leaflet bag over the shoulder! But Graham, Julie and I made a start on the linked Douglas Valley, Ribble and Hodder Ways through Lancashire and into the Yorkshire Dales - to be done gradually over the next year. And, now I'm a FREE man, all sorts of possibilities open up. I'm "owed" the St. Cuthbert's Way and the Southern Upland Way (the Scottish coast to coast) beckons. Now son-in-law Carl wants to do the English Coast to Coast cycle route on a tandem (that's him on the back)!!



Places and Faces

From now on life is ONE LONG HOLIDAY! But 2015 was a little more traditional. At Easter we helped Mr. & Mrs. T. celebrate a very auspicious wedding anniversary in Bilbao with a host of Basques and a mob of Brits.

Last year I wrote that "in July we'll be celebrating Ed Miliband becoming PM on a boat in the Norfolk Broads" Oops — well, one of those eventualities came to fruition and, together again with Mr. and Mrs. T., we did the "hello sailor" thing for a week and what a wonderful and spectacular seven days it was.



Finally and unexpectedly, we tacked 10 days on to one of John's work visits to India and spent a superb time starting in Mumbai and Mahabaleshwar then touring around the north of the country - Delhi, Agra, Jaipur and travelling to Shimla on the brilliant "toy train". Yes, a "curry or two" was consumed and Noelene had cookery lessons from two fantastic chefs, including the Head Chef of the Oberoi Hotel in Shimla, a wonderful man.

Not the Best of Times!

As you know we are usually pretty positive people but earlier this year, trying to run the MP's office AND her general election campaign was just too much for Noelene and she had a breakdown. Thankfully by getting away from work and the campaign, by exercising physically, gardening, relaxing mentally and counselling she is much, much better and will hopefully be 100% in the coming year.

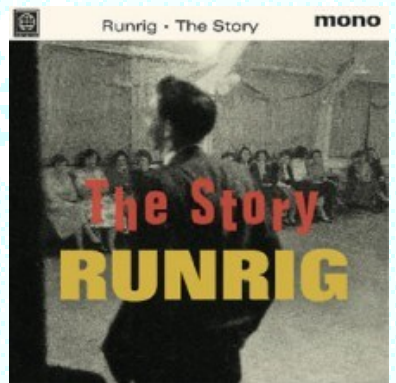
In Bolton West we really did "fight the good fight" in both the general and local election campaigns but with a majority of just 92 it was always going to be a hard job and our excellent Labour MP, Julie Hilling, lost by just over 800.

But on the bright side, John stood in a more winnable local election seat and got almost 2,000 votes, unfortunately still 600 short. But he's already started campaigning for next May!



Zounds, No Sounds?

What with "electioning", John running around all over the world for work and David Gilmour's five nights at the Royal Albert Hall selling out in five seconds it's been a very barren musical year for us. But we've booked to see the superb Runrig again early next year and who knows what will turn up as 2016 wends its merry way!



Sorry No Cards Again!

As usual we didn't send Christmas cards last year and donated what we would have spent on them to BRASS (Befriending Refugees and Asylum Seekers) <http://www.brassbolton.org> to help the destitute refugees and asylum seekers in Bolton and we're doing the same this year. Why not help too by either donating to BRASS yourself or by giving to another deserving charity?



Want to Read More?

Yes, we've run out of space again but there is much, much more on our new Fourth Estate website - www.23fourth.org/2015. Our love, best wishes, a very happy Christmas, a peaceful New Year and we look forward to keeping in touch, or even seeing you in the flesh in 2016.