

Helen's Christmas Letter

I always try to keep my Christmas letter quite short, but it seems to grow and grow as I remember different highlights of the year – so if you do manage to plough through to the end, congratulations, and thank you so much for your attention! It has been a breathless year, but one punctuated by moments of fun and also peace where God was allowed to break in to the busyness.



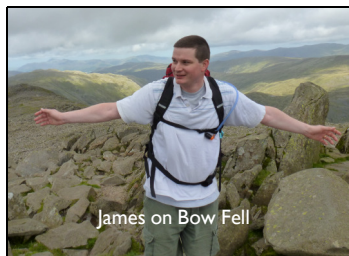
Conducting at While Shepherds
Watched in a day

Working for Christian Music Ministries has consumed the majority of my time this year. These are exciting times for the ministry as we seek God for the future direction. The last couple of years have been dominated by the musical 'Two Sisters and a Funeral', but it seems that over the next few months we are being invited to lead quite a number of music in worship events. This is exciting as we are also in the process of writing a book about worship, provisionally called 'Worship Works'.

The plan is for this book to meet both practical and spiritual needs in more traditional churches that perhaps don't have many resources. I took part in a number of CMM music weeks this year, where I was privileged to train the choir. I also had a few events of my own this year, including a musical in a day event at one of my parents' churches in Port Talbot, South Wales. The visit to Scotland was another highlight, especially as my sister Miriam was on team, and we were able to play and sing together.



Bruges



James on Bow Fell

James and I have had a busy year, so it has been really important for us to get away and take some time for ourselves on occasion. In January we had a long weekend exploring the wonderful city of Bruges in Belgium. The weather was crisp and cold, and the city was at its quietest and best just for us! In September we had a holiday in the Lake District and finally climbed Sca Fell Pike

after a disastrous holiday with swine flu scuppering our chances a couple of years ago. Then just last week we took a few days to do absolutely nothing on Gran Canaria. We'd never been on a package holiday before, so we were a bit apprehensive, but it was a brilliant way to relax, even if we had managed to book into a hotel filled with Scandinavians and Germans!



Sunset on Gran Canaria

It has also been a delight this year to be involved with my choir, the Chanterelles. We used to be a girls' choir based in Leicestershire, but have re-formed as a ladies choir in the last few years. We rehearse three or four times a year, and take part in competitions and concerts. The highlight was taking part in the Cork Choral Festival in Ireland back in May. It is such a prestigious competition it was an honour just to be invited. We came top of all the ladies' choirs, but the eventual winners, the Ateneo de Manila College Glee Club (from the Philippines) were simply astonishing, and well worth looking up on youtube!

Another exciting moment was singing a trio with my sister Miriam and our friend Amy as part of the choir's Macclesfield concert in September.



On Ireland's highest peak

James and I have also been settling into our new church, Saltley Methodist, over the year. James is able to lead worship there most Sundays, and I get there whenever work and local preaching allows. It is quite a small church right on the frontline in terms of mission



Terry and Pauline

in a majority Muslim area, and we had a very exciting Sunday back in May when 3 men originally from Kashmir were baptised. James and I have also been involved leading youth services and a circuit outreach ministry called 'Resonance', which has been very challenging but worthwhile. Alongside this we have somehow found time to be part of the horns section for Jazz Church, based at Shirley Methodist Church, and this included leading an act of worship at Greenbelt.

On Valentine's day this year, we travelled to rural Oxfordshire, where James' dad Terry was married to Pauline. The ceremony was lovely, if cold, and it was nice to get to know some of Pauline's family a little better at the reception. In August my sister Deb had her second baby – a boy named Ioan Peter Benjamin. We managed to get to North Wales to see him while he was still just a few days old, and we are looking forward to meeting him again over Christmas. Last year my parents moved to South Wales, and one of the lovely parts of this year has been co-ordinating our days off and meeting halfway. We've thoroughly explored Abergavenny and Monmouth, as well as Goodrich and Raglan castles.

Thank you so much for all your love and support, and I pray that you all have a lovely Christmas and a Christ-filled 2013.

Helen



Ioan Peter Benjamin