92,Elmfield Avenue, Birstall, Leicester. LE4 3DF December 2015

As we look back and reflect on the year 2015 we are both reminded that it has been one where our ‘family’ have been much in our minds - especially for Peter.

We were both in Sheffield spending the weekend with Ben’s sister when we learned the sad news of the death of Peter’s uncle – Rev Alan Merritt on 1st March. The weekend and its events stimulated two interests that we both share. The first was our love of visiting antique shops and venues. We were in Sheffield to tour the antique quarter of that city. Thoughts of family gripped us on the Sunday following the sad news and Peter was reminded that his own dad was ordained in Sheffield and it urged us both in a quest to rekindle our interest in our respective family’s ancestry.

Peter and his sister Carol, took his father to Devon for the funeral and was pleased to be with the wider Merritt family on that day.

At Easter, we both enjoyed a four day ‘ancestry hunt’ in Wiltshire. In early March, we both spent some time re visiting our family trees. Our searches surprisingly led us to find that our ancestors had lived within five miles of each other in the towns of Erlestoke and Market Lavington in the 19th century. Peter was astounded to find that the Merritt family not only came from Market Lavington but that the local museum had quite a history dedicated to them. He contacted the curator who on Good Friday opened the museum and gave us a very colourful insight into the Merritt line. We not only saw the family bible of 1758 but had tea with another descendent of the ‘Merritts’.

It was a joy to share this information with Peter’s dad when we ended our Easter weekend with him in Weymouth. It was particularly so as on 1st September, Peter’s dad Rev Arthur Merritt also died and the family met once again. As with all families, in the course of time, it closed an era. Both brothers had faithfully served the Methodist Ministry for many years.

Our Australian friends saw in 2015 with us in Leicester and in the second week of January set off in their motorhome for the continent. They will return to us in mid- December after a fantastic journey. Ben and I flew to Prague, in July, and after a pleasant weekend there we took a train to Berlin. There we hired a car and drove to the north east of Poland where we joined them on the coast for a week. It was great to spend time with Rob, Shelley and the boys and enjoy the rustic polish campsite.

Although not on the exact date, this year, we celebrated the third anniversary of our civil partnership on the Italian Coast. We visited Pisa and Florence and took the train to Venice for the last couple of nights before flying home.

Ben had an operation on March 5th to correct misalignment of his collar bone (from the accident in 2013) so we did not get back to our biking activities much before mid- June. We did however enjoy a few rides out and a lot of antique shops by car ! Ben has now moved on to cycling and now the dark nights are here can be found static riding in the garage causing him to steam up the windows and get quite wet through !

On December 10th we will mark ten years since we first met – how time flies ! We now look forward to joining our Australian friends for a quiet Christmas in Oxford and both wish you a very Happy Christmas and all you wish for in 2016.