It really doesn’t seem almost a year ago that we welcomed home, to the UK, our Australian friends who had been touring Europe in their motor home. After a brief stay with us, we joined them again in Oxfordshire, for Christmas.

We all began the New Year together, quietly welcoming in 2016 at our home in Birstall. Shortly afterwards we said farewell to them all as they journeyed back to Tasmania. Ben’s three godsons now refer to us as the Uncles PEN – a derivative of *P*eter and B*en* and somehow this term has well and truly stuck – hence Pen House. (or in their eyes Pen HQ)

2016 hasn’t been a particularly eventful year for us but fortunately one of good health and celebration of a few ‘milestone’ family birthdays – 50th and 70ths.

Peter has taken on more work than perhaps he should and now travels to Newcastle, twice a month, having taken over the temporary financial control of a footwear factory there. Ben continues to work at Coles Nursery in Leicester as Stock Control Manager.

Easter, this year, found us in Cornwall - a place neither of us had been to for some time. As ever, it was in pursuit of our ancestry hobby and of particular interest to Ben when we visited the Trengwaiton Estate at Madron, near Penzance where his great grandfather had been land agent in the early 1900s. En route home, we visited Ben’s godmother in Plymouth and shared a pleasant day with her enjoying her jovial personality

A few weeks later, we were on the move again and celebrated our 4th Civil Partnership Anniversary, in Dorset, with an evening meal and stopover in Sherborne. We travelled again to Devon and spent time with Ben’s cousin, Christopher and his wife Sallie, in their wonderful house overlooking the river Dart. We rounded off the long weekend with Vivien and Geoff who now live in Paignton. Vivien had worked with Peter for over 21 years during their time within the Chamberlain Group. Together, we visited Buckfast Abbey and the National Trust property - Colton Fishacre - former home of the D’Oyly Carte family. It was great to share and continue friendships.

In June. we spent a pleasant week at Lake Garda, Italy where we shared an apartment with Ben’s mum and dad, sister and boyfriend. The weather could have been kinder but we all enjoyed the break.

You will doubtless recall Peter’s dad died in September 2015. In memory of all ministers who had died during the year leading up to the Annual Methodist Conference, Peter and his sister Carol attended the Conference memorial service at Westminster Central Hall, in July. The event was preceded by lunch followed by the service. It was a moving occasion where ministers names were read out and all remembered.

We took our main holiday together in Bavaria. We flew to Zurich and took a train to Lindau on Lake Constance. It is a fascinating island town and well worth a visit if you are ever in the area. Peter had taken his mum and dad there in 1986 so was interested to return. From Lindau, we hired a car and made our way to Fussen, via Lichtenstein and the north western tip of Austria. We wanted to see the fairytale castles of Ludwig of Bavaria at Neuschwanstein.. We left the car at Garmisch-Partenkirchen where we enjoyed a day and using the cog railway took in the highest spot in Germany - the Zugspitze. Our journey ended in Munich with a few beers in the famous Hofbrauhaus.

One advantage to Peter of travelling to Newcastle is he has been able to visit his sister Ann more often. In October, both of us travelled with his sister Carol and family to the christening of Peter’s great nephew Ronnie Isaac Arthur who was born shortly after Peter’s dad, Arthur died last year.

Ben has continued to excel at his cycling and in September did the London to Brighton run in aid of British Heart Foundation. His mum, dad and our friend Jeanette were on the Marine Parade to welcome him back at the end of 54 miles! On a bitterly November day, Ben and Jeanette did a duathlon at Rockingham raceway. Jeanette ran 15 kms either side of Ben clocking up 35k on his bike.

We haven’t used our motorbikes as much this year but continue to enjoy the odd ride out. We have explored a few new antique centres and still continue to enjoy jaunts to garden centres, places of interest and visiting friends - many scattered up and down the country.

Next year, we are looking forward to some more travelling. South Africa is scheduled for early May. Ben’s Dad was born in South Africa and the family plan to retrace some well known places and visit friends. We plan to take a European holiday with Peter’s sister and family after his elder sister’s wedding in August. Over the bank holiday we are thinking about a bike trip to the Loire Valley, France with our two friends James and Jeanette and then finishing the year with Christmas in Australia with our friends who live in Tasmania.

Over the years, we have both returned home to our families at the Christmas season and I think we both had the habit of reading the cards and messages sent to our parents or the ‘family’ from many distant parts or people we had known as children. I (Peter) know my folk received a printed letter from many which kept them in touch with people, their families and offspring, events, comings and goings and some with a light hearted spark. This is our 5th annual letter and if they do nothing else they reminds us what we did from year to year.!

We both hope all is well with you and your families and wish you a very happy and peaceful Christmas and all the best for 2017. For those of you further afield than Leicester we would be delighted to see and welcome you should you be passing through or nearby.

MERRY CHRISTMAS