

Dear friends,

Last year my Christmas newsletter ended with looking forward to a 6 week visit to New Zealand during December and January with James. We had an amazing time. We hired a camper van and travelled around the South Island for the first few weeks. Highlights included penguins and sea lions in the Catlins national park (we were excited when we saw the first sea lion, but then realised that they were everywhere!), kayaking on Doubtful Sound, cycling next to the incredibly blue Lake Tekapo, and some days in the sunshine on the golden beaches of Abel Tasman national park.



The van beside lake Pukaki



Arriving at our first lodge on the Routeburn Track

Once we had said goodbye to the van, we spent the rest of the holiday on two long distance walks – the Milford Track and the Routeburn Track. Considering the Fjordland national park is one of the wettest places in the world (9000mm a year at Milford Sound) we were blessed with the most stunning weather. It was a brilliant climax to the trip.

James and I did get away for a couple of other holidays later in the year, but they were short due to having used up our annual leave! We visited St Ives for a few days and then in September we had a week in a static caravan at the foot of Ben Nevis near Fort William. We did climb Ben Nevis, but the route we chose (over the arête) was quite scary at times for me – and even more for James. If you see him, ask him about it!

It has also been lovely to meet up with mum and dad fairly regularly. On my days off we sometimes 'meet in the middle' between their home in Neath and mine in Birmingham. We've explored Raglan Castle, Hereford, Gloucester and Cheltenham this year, as well as enjoying nice walks in the Wye Valley. Sometimes my sister Miriam comes along too – she's getting married in 2015 to Tim. Hooray!



The arête. The real terror was in getting to this point...

Work with Christian Music Ministries has been busy once again. The book Roger, Annie and I wrote in 2013, *Worship Works*, has been taken up



Enjoying spending time with Deb in Bangor

and used by a number of congregations, and we have travelled to quite a few places to lead *Worship Works* days. I've taken part in days in locations as far apart as Barrow-in-Furness, St. Austell, Snape, Oxford, Rhyl and Birmingham! One of the highlights was visiting my sister Deb's church in Bangor. It was great to see her, as well as Jon, Bethan and Ioan. They also visited me while I helped to lead a Jerusalem Joy week at Beechwood Court in Conwy. It was also lovely to have my friend Amy on the CMM team that week.



Training the choir at Lee Abbey

One of my favourite parts of work with CMM is being able to train choirs. I led 'Jerusalem Joy' in a day at my parents' church in Port Talbot. I also trained the choir for 'Apostle' at Lee Abbey this summer, and a choir of over 100 singers for our special 'Apostle and an orchestra' day in September. We also recorded a new CD in June – the third part of 'The Roger Jones Hymn Collection'. I'm really proud of the contribution I made to the recording, and I look forward to May and June 2015 when we will be recording a completely new musical.

I have also been working on the internet presence of CMM, with Twitter feeds, Facebook pages, Youtube channels and blog posts. Do check them out – the Christian Music Ministries Facebook page is a good place to start. My other big project has been editing and formatting a biography of Roger written by Graham Allan, due to come out in late spring 2015. It will be a challenge to be finished by then, but I'm sure we'll get there.



Helping to lead a Worship Works day in Yorkshire



Jazz Church - they occasionally let me sing!

Beyond CMM it has been a privilege to be involved once again in the band for Methodist Conference, and also Jazz Church this year. I am slightly less out of my depth in the world of jazz than I was, but still have a lot to learn. I now have a flugelhorn to play too – it will have its Jazz Church debut at our Jazz Carol Service next week.

If you have made it this far in my letter, thank you for your perseverance! It has been a good and busy year, and one where I know God has been with me, even though so often I haven't been looking for him. My hope and prayer is that next year won't just be full of events, but will be saturated by the love of God, the grace of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit.

God bless you this Christmas.

Helen



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James in the Jazz Church horns section

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