



Christmas 2004

sorry, but it's the Heppell's Christmas Newsletter from [Brightlingsea](#) again; you asked for more photos... so here they are... Past editions: www.heppell.net/christmas and, alarmingly, people visit the site! Some of you need to get out more...

Somewhere in storing this the images got displaced... sorry! but here's the text anyway:

Anyway... lawks a mercy, what a year it has been. It all started so well. Skiing was wonderful and a fortnight gave just the right break as various children and boy/girlfriends came and went to the Three Valleys. No injuries, loadsa snow. A new first for France's mad safety laws (or lack thereof) was firing rockets out of the restaurant window from our used wine bottles on New Year's Eve, whilst still seated at our table! But good fun, relatively few fatalities and the skiing was blissful - thigh deep powder and relatively quiet slopes.

After that things fell apart a bit really: Cracker (our Oyster 37) was already back in the water for the new season and needed weighing for her racing certificate. As she was lifted up by the crane, the crane broke and she was dropped into the water, but from 3 metres. Horror! There was damage and she was whisked out for inspection. It wasn't pretty and she spent 5 months, all summer, in a shed being repaired. In a kind of insurance hell the actual blame proved to be quite elusive to place (it wasn't our fault though!) so that in the end none of this was very cheap either, but the new Cracker emerged ladled full of epoxy and carbon fibre and redesigned layout below decks and she not only looks gorgeous with a new interior, but when she just made the last race of the year the whole set-up felt faster and stiffer than ever before. But the summer was completely lost. On the bright side, the sails didn't get much wear & tear, which saved a few thousand pounds to help with the repairs!

But it wasn't just Cracker: Stephen and Carole's NZ passport (dual citizenship) paperwork required medicals and Stephen's medical revealed a whopping lump on his thyroid. Panic. Stephen was rushed in, the lump was rushed out, and ten days after the "discovery" came the news that it was entirely benign (phew!) and nothing to worry about. But despite the hospital having a quite decent wine list the op. took months to recover from and he still has a croaky voice as vocal chords get used to straightening out. General view all round was that the new much quieter Stephen was an improvement, but the voice is coming back so this is a temporary respite only. On the encouraging side, it turned out he wasn't getting fat and wheezy as a result of being older, it was simply "the lump" and now he is less fat and hardly at all wheezy. We count this as a win! It was though, a long ten days and started Stephen thinking about what he wanted to do next with his life. More of that later.

Things come in threes. We had no sooner got Cracker back afloat, with Stephen up and sailing again, than the engine of our big RIB blew up. I think by then we had become resigned to it being just one of those years. The house, bike, cars, etc etc never got a look in, but unlike last year the summer was not full of sailing, only a lot of watching. Cowes as a shoresider is a lot less fun than Cowes as a sailor. We only lasted two days there.

Juliette has moved along the Thames a touch, from Fulham to, er, Fulham again: bigger, posher flat, a garden, less floods. She and George (they are now engaged!! - send congrats to her email) have added a cat which seems to have been acquired from some kind of cat asylum. Or maybe we have just forgotten what a kitten is like. Their kitten (1) will be visiting the family cat Magic (18) this Christmas, we are trying to prepare him with old episodes of Dactari on the satellite channels, but he has no idea of what awaits. Oh dear. Juliette has enjoyed freelancing, seems to be making money, is clearly much in demand and highly valued. But, as we thought last year, she is considering where to go next with her career. Even teaching has been mentioned; who knows. Watch this space. Social-whirl highlight for Juliette was probably Ladies' Day at Ascot. She has a new bike too and her dodgy back seems to allow a bit of peddling to Richmond Park from time to time. She has even sailed with us on Cracker, as has George, all of which shows real promise for next year. When this was read to her (for editorial control) she said it mostly sounded a bit domesticated, so lodger Nick suggested that we should also mention her dedication to excessive boozing and her rather posh shiny new black Ford Ka (although clearly not both at the same time).

Melissa has had a stormin' year. Settled into life as Picture Editor at Yachts and Yachting magazine, and now commuting from Brightlingsea, she has poured herself into her 470 sailing with crew Bex (www.heppell-marriott.co.uk). They have trained, been coached, competed, prepared, trained, been coached, competed, prepared... and as of December are ranked No. 1 women 470 sailors in the UK!! This means they now get grants to help and after Christmas will be training in the warm waters off Palma. The #1 spot must help with the eternal search for sponsorship. Not a bad life though... and the Worlds next year in San Fransico... Mmmm. They spend a lot of time in the National Sailing Academy at Weymouth and the gym - all cold remedies are now banned and the house is a medication-free-zone. Luckily wine is not banned yet. Melissa' and Bex's sailing has taken them all over - Kiel Week in Germany was a highlight. Since both of them are gorgeous they seem to get a lot of help from the boys, regardless of nationality. The only downside is that we now have three 470 dinghies with about 2 million sails to store, fund and preen. Bex and Issa have sailed on Cracker this year, not that there was much sailing to do on her, but we hope they can fit some more into their Olympic campaign - we need them!

Toby is in some danger of graduating. His time in Southampton has been triangulated between hard work (in short bursts) for his degree, sailing in the 49er and chatting to the police about his disappearing assets as first his flat and then his (soft-top) jeep were burgled (twice in the Suzuki's case). Depressing really, and helps us all appreciate Brightlingsea. The police caught one of his burglars with DNA testing though, which was quite exciting. Toby and Rick's sailing has gaps in it due to Toby's degree work, but in the intensive bits they are going quite well. They enjoyed a week racing on warm and windy Lake Garda and for once have had less extreme weather when it mattered this year. Like all the Cracker crew and the family, Toby put in time on boat repairs and he managed to fair and sand the whole keel, all three and a half lead tons of it. Hence the extra speed doubtless. The Suzuki jeep is now home to become a coastal runabout for Mum and Dad and Toby is now looking for a big estate car (anyone out there got one?) for towing and sleeping in. Toby's girlfriend Cali (who is lovely by the way) is with us for Christmas morning (another stocking!) as Letty and George will be. The seven of us might all go for a sail!

Mummy Carole has been won over by Melissa's regular trips to the gym and is now there as a regular too. Oo er. No arguing with her now. At work she is currently busy with a wonderful project partnering the Victoria and Albert Museum and Channel 4. For this "Every Object tells a Story" project she even has a black London cyber-Taxi in construction that will chug around the UK collecting people's stories about precious objects and images of their own objects too. Carole is still travelling a lot as well (cos she's becoming quite an e-celebrity), including New Zealand again last September.

In an inspired moment, Carole decided that, since it had been thirteen years since our last non-sailing-or-skiing holiday (we'd had 3 days in Vienna) the way the year had been going a holiday wouldn't be a bad idea. Finding a work gap was tricky and it only really left one option that left and returned at the necessary times: a last-minute internet booked holiday to Tunisia which turned out to be wonderful. Warm, quiet, grandest of grand hotels, nearby marina, cheap good wine and a two day trek into the Sahara by 4x4 all made a magical break. All this and french cooking!! Heaven! (Melissa notes: they must be getting old!) Over Christmas Carole and Stephen are sailing Cracker up to St Katherine's marina, next to the Tower of London. Characteristically they have a host of work related parties scheduled on board, but also Melissa is staying aboard for her Y&Y stint at the London Boat Show (cheap hotel!) and has a whole posse of pals aboard for the various New Year races around London. Let's hope they don't bring fireworks on board, one lost year was enough.

Stephen has, despite the lump, been all over the planet again - from Jordan to Valencia, but at least he's in the business seats on the planes. Keynote lectures all over the place - January will see him in Thailand and Hong Kong, December was Berlin and Fontainebleau as well as some virtual conference openings by video in Australia and so on. He is doing more and more architecture, more work on the future of TV, more on phones, writes a Guardian column, sees a lot of ministers in Whitehall (the memoirs might be interesting!!..), . But the hospital visit made him think a bit and he has decided to step down from leading the 100 strong lab after 22 years. Not to retire, just to do less university admin and more of the fun, creative stuff that he loves. University life seems too much about counting and not enough about creating these days; it's a national crisis. Stephen sits on a few boards (non exec) but as the developing world moves into new technology there is lots to be done and Stephen's new work includes a role with Unesco, amongst other things. The news of his new role is not properly announced but he seems to be already awash in consultancy and writing offers, so starvation is not an immediate likelihood. He is hoping to find time for that long promised book, but we'll see. More news next year! He remains an emeritus prof. but is also a prof in Bournemouth and Norway too!

Although sailing was a bit thin on the ground this year Stephen did manage to get in a full on Louis Vuitton match race on an America's Cup boat in Valencia with Larry Ellison et al, on Oracle BMW. Stephen was hosted on the ex-Onassis yacht Christina O (check out the website! <http://www.christina-o.com>) while he was there (oh, and they won the race, of course!!). He came back with a long list of ideas for Cracker ("what we need is another \$125m..."). Oh dear. But we might go for the grey shirts.

How's your year been? We do love to hear from all of you. It's not been much of a year for peace and goodwill around the world has it?, but seeing the crowds at our 'lab project kids' annual event, as kids from all over the world showed off their digital video work in the V&A last week to an audience of VIPs and parents, it did suggest that there is some hope for the future. As the kids from Tasmania beamed in chattily by video and the Protestant and Catholic kids from Belfast sat laughing side by side you felt, maybe, that the world needs to be in their hands as quickly as possible.

It was a wonderful end to a slightly wobbly year. We all wish you a peaceful and worthwhile 2005.

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