



deck the halls with boats and nappies tra lalala lala, la-la-la...

...this year was lighter on jubilees, graduations, marriages & medals. On the other hand we enjoyed the patter of two more tiny feet, a chuckle from two more dimples, a soupçon of boats, and frankly industrial quantities of oysters.Yum.

In a year that has been eventful for everyone, **George** and **Juliette's** news - the birth of baby Josie - seems a pretty good place to start. So let's do just that: **Let & George** have had another fab year with the arrival of the youngest family member, **Josephine Lily Rist-Heppell** in September. After a slightly (editor's note: *slightly!!*) traumatic Josie arrival they are now all-but recovered. Josie and Let's maternity days are filled with a chuckletastic whirlwind of baby swimming, sensory fun, singing, signing and rhyming (note absence of the word "sleeping" in there). Whilst George commutes to daily battle on the accountancy front line, Let's teacher genes are being put to good use at coffee and cake mornings with her NCT pals as they swap the latest poo/sick/eugh disaster (L&G note that "who knew so many hours could be dedicated to such gross topics!?" - well, all the parents reading this knew, didn't we?), and of course they all weigh the latest research with a wary eye. Talking of research: L&G are relishing watching each little change. as Josie discovers her fingers, mouth, feet, voice, ATM (oh ok, maybe not quite yet with that one) and, wonderfully for G'parents, heaps of this gets Skyped, Facebooked and Facetimed so that despite the miles between us we do share the fun of those "now moments" pretty much daily.

Despite being on maternity Let has very professionally managed to fit in the occasional article, or Skype conference appearances, for other countries too! (download her free iBook on learning space design!) George is a wonderfully doting and wise dad, and has moved work, same company, closer office. One result of that move being that he can rush home for "tummy time and the evening bath" - probably neither were on his must-do list when last year's newsletter was typed. All three Rist-Heppells seem to be surviving the lack of sleep reasonably well; the big ones self evidently adore their gorgeous daughter, as we all do! Josie's current favourite thing is "reading" a good story (baby books - who knew!); if this seems precocious, then cousin Louis' suggestion of readying Josie's hand-me-down plastic skis for Xmas pistes is certainly premature. He is much taken with his little cousin and ambitious for her!, they Skype. On the other hand as Josie burps, guzzles and gurgles away, she does look kinda suitable for the French bars right now, so maybe Louis is right about being Alp-ready.

The family river launch **Crusader** has enjoyed a blissful summer chugging up and down the Thames and it will be fun to see Josie enjoying the fresh air on board next summer too. Piracy awaits - what fab fun!

Talking of pirates and cousin **Louis** - the family down in Dorset (on the wonderful Isle of Portland) **Melissa, Simon, Amelie** and **Louis** have had a blissful waterside year too! Melissa added a postgrad teaching qualification to her cv. We had a lovely graduation together. She always had creative maths, fab computer science, great craft skills and a loud voice, so no surprise that she is a flippin' good teacher, much in demand.

Luckily our IPACA school on Portland won the race to sign her, so now she is teaching Amelie and a lot of others too. Having to suffer your mum as your teacher is not so bad and Melissa reports more slip ups being called Miss Heppell at home than Mummy in school, phew. IPACA is a stage-not-age school, (hurrah!) so Amelie is storming ahead with her reading and more, without limits (but of course!).

As with Juliette, Melissa has been Skyping into a few global events - most recently live to a mass of architects and planners in Sydney - to show off her remarkable new learning space and its learners, built right next to the National Sailing Academy (where else!) - do please pop over to her blog at <http://oqwest.blogspot.co.uk> for more details. Maybe watch the "A tour of our classroom" video there. Wow.

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Incredibly, little **Louis** is already in Foundation Stage, **really** wanting to read/write at 3, and loves that he can join in with the bigger reception kids as and when he likes. He has mastered the art of riding his two wheeler bike. Following his sister's lead, he started on the balance bike but soon decided he was much better than this and now confidently rides his big bike on his own (if you still need convincing that "balance bikes" are an fab invention - Google 'em). Louis is also a keen swimmer and has inherited an über strong competitive streak, we can't possibly imagine where this has come from! Louis competed in his first proper sailing race this year, winning a medal which he was very very excited about - his first medal to hopefully add to a growing collection. He loved the start of the race and obviously felt very comfortable at sea as he promptly fell asleep mid-race. And that was without rum! He is adorable.

Amelie loves school, and it's mutual!! She's relishing going to ski school again too, in a few days time, to add more badges and to nibble more waffles. Arguably, the light dusting on the waffles may be an even bigger draw than the light dusting on the slopes! Amelie is also enjoying swimming and competes in a number of beginner events - she loves it and reports that her favourite strokes are butterfly and breastwork apparently. Please don't Google that. Amelie is still enjoying ballet and is currently focussing her ballet skills into the school nativity event where she is a Dancing Sheep - with inflatable accessory guitar (but no octopus) - as they do. What with a live Twitter feed and tiny children tweeting at the school's harvest festival, all this sounds very modern, as indeed it is.

After frantic fitting out by grandad at The Anchorage, **Melissa and Amelie** have a shiny new Mirror "TwinkleTwos" which they loved racing in Brightlingsea's Pyefleet Week. this year (they won). The two of them have put the Nationals in the diary for 2014. Meanwhile, Amelie has also acquired a new (to her) Oppie to use with her pals as a beach boat - she is currently suggesting it should be modified as a hydrofoiling one. Simon (who caused this by taking her out on his foiling Moth) told her when she can sail well she can have foils. Amelie drew his attention to her trophies and is waiting (picture tapping feet...)... To be fair she also set herself a summer holiday challenge of trying just about every water sport available and ticked off sailing, paddle boarding, windsurfing, canoeing and kayaking in short order. At six, Amelie is officially polyaquatic...

Proud dad **Simon** has been racing his own foiling Moths lots too, including the Worlds in Hawaii, and his business going well too. As a double Olympic skiff medalist Simon is much in demand for coaching (he's the only one GB has got!) - and insists that he's working **very** hard. Unfortunately Melissa can see his workshop from her classroom and knows precisely when he's working there or off sailing (researching?) - one downfall of living on a delightful but small island!

Meanwhile, up along the coast a way, **Cali and Toby** remain in Brighton, which of course is historically a Heppell family home! So, it is a daily commute on the train for Toby - he reports trying hard not to be "that guy" who whinges about the trains all the time ("*Horried of Hove*"), but is apparently pretty roundly failing. In spite of this Brighton has very much come to feel like home for both of them, as it was for Toby's grandad, and this does not look like changing anytime soon. They are enjoying the busy lifestyle and atmosphere and find weekends chocked full of things to do and see. It is a very cool town.

Toby has moved offices following the purchase of the magazine he writes for last year and now works full-time in London in very swish offices on the King's Road. He is still writing for Sailing Today as his main job, but the move means he is able to work more directly with the publisher's other marine titles, meaning work is more varied (if significantly busier) - interviewing Red Bull Racing's Adrian Newey was an interesting foray into others' sporting technology for example. **Cali** continues to work in the same print and design shop, located snug in the heart of Brighton's pretty Lanes. She's enjoying the work and enjoying being at the heart

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of this bustling area. Cali continues to push for a three hour lunch-break to really appreciate the surrounding eateries there but her bosses are, strangely, unwilling to acquiesce.

T&C have really enjoyed their first full season of RS200 sailing on the scary Shoreham waves, and are they looking forward to summer rolling back round so that they can get their boat again onto the (rather hilly) water and we hope to see them aboard Alice again too.

Carole meantime is in full on Nanny mode. Think Mary Poppins on steroids. Rushing between Portland to staunch the gaps left when a full time teacher and global sailor's work overlap. Then back to Hampton for respite relief and top nanny tips for the new parents there. And she has loved the events, the fun, the sports days, the plays, the walks to and from school, the cycling, the ballet, the shopping and spoiling, the swimming, the visits, the treats and so, so, so much more. As we approach skiing again she is reflecting that this is probably the year when Amelie will comfortably pass her in speed and style and she has already done in swimming (and singing). For Carole pretty much everything above is part of her busy day to day life.

And of course Carole remains our ace navigator on board **My Alice** - we didn't go aground once this year. Last year we were having Alice measured for wheels... Yes, our 1907 Oyster smack **My Alice** has had one heck of a season. As an opener we won the Pin Mill smack event - in 40+ knots of wind, and then we racked up enough 2nds and 3rds for our own podium. Amazingly we also managed to steal the annual oyster dredging trophy away from Mersea Island, to local chagrin, with a massive haul of yum Native Oysters.

We sneaked down to Cowes for the Old Gaffers 50th Jubilee, also sailed in a full gale, and we did rather well in that too. All our team are really loving the challenge of working her up to battle speed - we've so much yet to learn - see her in more detail at www.ck348.com Classic Boat magazine still have her as one of the world's top 200 boats,; to us she is in Brightlingsea's top one. Our faithful old 1939 Brightlingsea One Design **Aina** was back racing again after an Olympic year off and some structural beefing up. She seemed to like it and went rather well.

There has been some shuffling of other toys: Polly the 911 is sold - a rather different replacement racer is planned (!), the RIB is sold and a mean 21 foot smack launch called **Malice** is under construction with a whopping engine. We seem to have a go-kart. The house still has no heating. There are now two lathes. News on all this in 2014.

We suffered terrible flooding up here in December - although the house remained safe - we saw the deepest flood water in memory - and the beach huts drifted off for their own impromptu holidays - we now have new neighbours until a crane can be found to return everyone to their "spots".

Stephen's work continues globally. TV and radio interviews, newspaper coverage, still enjoying the professoring in Bournemouth and Madrid... everyone is fascinated by Learning, from coaches to kids. Stephen spent all of November in Australia and much time in Scandinavia, Spain, China and more.

Wonderful to report that Stephen's projects and schools everywhere are blooming - "you'll never guess what has happened to our kids!" they say excitedly when he goes back and of course he can guess. They are stellar.

So there you go - Stephen is literally writing this "driving home (well, flying anyway) for Christmas", and hoping the M25 for once won't be "top to toe in tailbacks" - but by the time you are reading it some of us at least will be up a mountain enjoying the vast 300+ miles of snowy pistes that are les Trois Vallées in the French Alps - à donf, n'est pas?

