



# MARTIN

## NEWS INTERNATIONAL



*Incorporating*

**MAYO!** MAGAZINE

*And*



## Christmas 2019 Special

Welcome to this year's Christmas Edition  
For once we start with some good news

### LYN AND DAMIAN'S WEDDING

Lifelong friend, one time flatmate and sister to even lifelonger friend Kevin was married this year.  
Drummer in a band, Damian, is the lucky guy.

Long may it last.

It was also a chance to catch up with some friends but not enough time to do it properly.



### THIS YEAR'S CONSTRUCTION PROJECT

Amazingly, nothing was built or repaired this year!

The patio, that has been put on hold until my leg is better as this was the cause of it in the first place, so no point making it worse.

The leg is almost better - doing stretches and exercise is working well at the time of going to press so hopefully, come the better weather, the project will restart.



## JONATHAN

In the mean time, Jon has filled in by rearranging his room and moving his pc into it.

This has meant a room full of stuff being shifted out into a space nowhere big enough for it and being sorted into dump, keep, charity piles slowed by the inevitable "Awww, I remember that".

We also found a box of ceramic frogs that nobody really knows where they came from.

Jon has also quit college, ditched his girlfriend, found a whole new bunch of friends - really nice lads and seems a whole lot happier. Until we mention the subject of jobs, that is.

No, we have no idea what he is going to do, either.



Jon enjoying being 18

He also turned 18 this year so had the obligatory celebration with his friends and the obligatory hangover and the obligatory "I'm never doing that again". This was reinforced a few weeks later at the Glenlivet Distillery during our Scotland holiday.

## Summer Holiday Time - No idea where to go now

This year, at the last minute, we decided to go abroad - **Scotland**.

None of us had been there for ages, Jon hadn't been at all

In short, we left it to the last minute and plumped for wherever there was space with WiFi.

It turned out to be near Oban on the West coast for a week then in Aviemore - a bit further north - for another week.



Cottage in Oban



Jon gets his own room

The holiday got off to an auspicious start when, on the overnight stay in the Carlisle Premier Inn, we checked into our room, I went to the loo and broke the flush handle. I don't know my own strength ! Luckily they had a spare room.

The next day saw a mystery warning light come on and the front windscreen washers stop working - the rear one had stopped few days before and I hadn't had time to sort it out. I'd had an AA man look at it after he had sorted out my non-functional rear lights that had needed a call out on the motorway the night before which resulted in a 3 hr wait and car transporter home. He reckoned it might have been a blocked pipe.



However, the warning light was not mentioned in the handbook so I put two and two together and thought it might be the washer bottle empty warning light. So I filled up the washbottle and Hey! Presto! Working washers. We still had the warning light so, via the magic of mobile internet, we googled it and it turned out to be low tyre pressure - which was a surprise as they all looked OK and it hadn't warned me of a flat tyre a few months before. Investing 50p in the air machine resulted in pumped up tyres - which were a few psi out - and no warning light. Hoorah!

The weather was a bit mixed, it was Scotland after all but the rain kept the midges down.

We went for a scenic drive along Glen Coe and on a sunny day we went to some stone circles at Kilmartin - possibly my ancestral home! Or a warning to stay away.

A long time ambition to see Eileen Donnan castle was achieved - very long drive, about 3 hrs each way but worth it.

Another fine day meant a walk which exercised my poor leg, as it needed to be and I kept telling myself it was doing me good.



Eileen Donnan Castle



Aviemore cottage

Then it was time to move to **Aviemore**

The weather was, again, a bit mixed.

We did a drive to Loch Ness for some monster hunting but came away empty handed.

A sunny day resulted in a walk around the local loch so more "improving" of my leg.

Another fine day saw out on a boat dolphin watching.

The main difference between dolphins and the Loch Ness monster is, apparently, dolphins do exist.

We had the same result as monster hunting.

To drown our sorrows we took a tour of the Glenlivet whisky distillery. That definitely existed. The sampling started off at the 65% alcohol sample then worked its way down to the drinkable product.

Jon is, apparently, teetotal by now so all the more for me, which was poured into my "drivers kit", a box of three empty small bottles that could be filled with the samples so drivers can enjoy them later. Which I did.

Finally, in a desperate attempt to prove animals do exist in Scotland, we visited the local "Highland Wildlife Park" to see such local fauna as polar bears !!! Actually very good, quite hilly, my leg was done some more good.



Jon saving Chris from the Loch Ness Monster

## THE KIT CAR

The tarpaulin has been renewed.



## CHRIS' STUFF



It was the **Big 60** this year - but you didn't hear it from me.

We had a quiet meal with her best friend and husband and spent a day looking at the Chihuly Glass exhibition at Kew gardens. This is the second time he has exhibited there and it is fantastic. We went back later with her friend for a second look.

Chris is still working happily in the school office wrangling their finances into some sort of order and still wrangling our garden into some sort of order by putting flowers in it.

Chris' mum also had a big birthday this year - her 90<sup>th</sup>

We had a family gathering much to her bemusement

"why is everyone here?"

"It's for your 90<sup>th</sup> birthday"

"I'm not 90, you are pulling my leg"

## OTHER STUFF

This year's harvest was much different to last year - I now have a garage full of cooking apples. We have just finished the last of the tomatoes, runner beans, pears and eating apples.

I also had a bit of a surprise. I could see some grapes uneaten by birds so I went out with a small bucket to pick them. An hour or so later I had 5 buckets full of grapes.

This resulted in a small panic and a lot of activity. I had no where to store them so had to process them - crush them and put them into demijohns and start brewing. I needed some more demijohns so had to get some out of the attic and bottle their contents.

Consequently a 5 year old bullace wine and a 20 year old blackberry wine were bottled along with some extensive sampling. Both surprisingly nice, not a given with my brews.

So I now have about two gallons brewing nicely, which is about 12 bottles worth.



**Happy Christmas all.**

13 Elton Ave  
Greenford  
Middx  
UB6 OPW

0208-422-3236  
lmartin@greenbee.net





# MARTIN

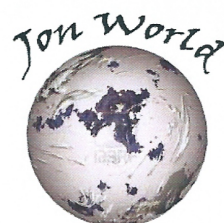
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Once again we start with the bad news.

### Les' Mum

Sadly, my my mum died in March this year.

Not one to go quietly she chose the time when my brother and his wife were on holiday in Mexico so the care home had to contact them there.

We had a power cut - the rain storm was threatening a substation and rather than have it explode they turned the electricity off.

Consequently, we were running on candles, no internet or cordless landline and naturally the mobiles needed charging.

Luckily we have an old style phone near the computer and that works off BT electricity so that is how we got to know.



### THIS YEAR'S CONSTRUCTION PROJECT



Before



After

As my leg is still not working properly, thoroughly confounding the specialists, it is difficult to bend down so I needed a project that I could stand up and do.

Luckily the ex-coal bunker-cum-outside storage required a new felt roof.

The years of pigeons and squirrels running across it had taken its toll.



As usual, it is never that easy.

The planks had warped so had to have a batten across them to flatten them down, which naturally had to be applied underneath, which meant bending down....

I also found where the mystery leak happened - recessed mortar on the brickwork made nice channels for the water which also rotted the wood underneath and so that had to be replaced and the mortar levelled off. New, extra strength felt and waterproofing should see it OK for at least the next few weeks, may be even years.

As for the patio, that has been put on hold until my leg is better as this was the cause of it in the first place, so no point making it worse.



## JONATHAN

The first year of college was passed well enough to go into the second year and now the subject of university raises its ugly head. In short nobody has any idea what is going to happen - whether he'll get the grades, whether he will make up his mind what to do, whether he'll take a gap year.

He has a new girlfriend - they have been together a year now, so not too "new". She is on the same course as him.

## Summer Holiday Time - No idea where to go now

This year, with mum's passing, we no longer needed to go to Chesterfield and so were wracked by indecision. We couldn't go abroad as we haven't got passports.

In short, we left it to the last minute and plumped for wherever there was space with WiFi.

It turned out to be near Bala in North Wales and also back to a cottage in the Lake District we have used before.

In North Wales we visited Portmeirion where "The Prisoner" was filmed.

We also visited waterfalls, visited a castle and did walks, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and dryness from Jon.



Portmeirion





Left - Jon just before he went clambering over the waterfall behind and returned with very wet feet and still had to walk a couple of miles back to the car. His feet healed within a few days.

A lot of our time in the Lakes was spent driving down a variety of country roads to avoid the jams on THE stretch of road that connects everything. Normally it is clear but a variety of accidents and road works meant 4 days out of the seven it was blocked. Still, it meant a chance to avoid colliding with a variety of large vehicles along roads too narrow for them that we would otherwise have missed.



Our Lake District cottage

We went on walks and a boat trip and did not climb any mountains this time a) due to my leg and b) due to Jon's feet.

## Weekend in The New Forest

We decided to scatter mum's ashes at Salisbury crematorium where dad's ashes were scattered. We took the opportunity to have a weekend in The New Forest with my brother, Jim, and his wife, Jenny and spend some time revisiting old haunts and generally reminiscing. We also visited Ringwood Brewery as you can't do these things without alcohol being involved.



## THE KIT CAR

The tarpaulin has been renewed.

## CHRIS' STUFF

Chris is still working happily in the school office wrangling their finances into some sort of order.

She has also continued wrangling our garden into some sort of order by putting flowers in it. Consequently it now looks like a proper garden with colour and stuff.

Her mother is becoming more frail so we are spending more time with her which is not easy as she is 50 miles away but these things have to be done.

## OTHER STUFF

This year's harvest was hit by the lack of rain in the London area so very few apples, runner beans and potatoes. We did have a lot of blackberries but that might be because we were out looking earlier in the year than normal. Sloes, Elderberries and Bullaces were used from last year's crop. The fig tree took advantage and put on a growth spurt along with several dozen ripe figs, our best crop ever.

Happy Christmas all.





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### KEITH NEALE

Sadly, my friend and former work colleague, Keith Neale, passed away.

We worked together for several years at Swift Adhesives and he organised most of the subsequent reunions.

His funeral was one of those reminders that I am an adult as his wife asked me to say a few words.

"Why me?" I thought as I usually sit at the back giggling at inappropriate jokes.

"Oh, yes, I was his boss as well as friend" I remembered.

Time to put the Big Boy Pants on.

Luckily I spent so much time sweating over the speech that it was engraved in my memory as I forgot my notes on the day.

The world is a poorer place for his passing and many a bird now remains untwitched.

### THIS YEAR'S CONSTRUCTION PROJECT



This year it is the front patio.

Something I'd been dreading more than the kit car.

Over the past 60 yrs this had sunk in the middle, slabs had come loose and generally become a hazard to life and limb.

My work with the fence and general slab laying theory had led me to believe there would be mostly gravel and rubble underneath.

"All I had to do was" re-level it and re-lay the slabs which, as the picture shows, came up quite easily.

What the picture also shows is the unexpected 2 inch (50mm) thick concrete bed that had cracked and then sunk along with those slabs that were still clinging on like limpets.

Yes, as I dreaded, this was another of "Those Jobs" but it was too late to back out as I had made the cardinal error of "starting".

Several plans went through my mind - like laying gravel over it - but Chris wanted a portion as a flower bed and eventually ladders would have to be used to paint the outside of the house, neither of which went well with gravel.



New block paving did not fit with the levels and to do so would mean breaking up the concrete. The bank balance ruled out getting someone in to do it. So, the final plan was to level it up with concrete and reuse the old slabs and lots of mortar. All of which would be hand mixed due to time and space limitations.



As we can see - it is slowly being put back together at the rate of about 3 blocks per day as each one has to be trimmed of old mortar and wire brushed before being mortared into position.

And allowing for my body to still be working the next day after the first 6 bag section of concrete put me out of action for a week with sprained back muscles.

Currently (end of November) it is on hold due to strained thigh and knee. The thigh is due to the patio, the knee will be explained later.

Work is not allowed on Sundays due the neighbour promising physical violence as it was his only day off each week and the

hammering and banging was interfering with it.

## IF IT'S MAY IT MUST BE CHESTERFIELD

But not this year - Jon's GCSE exams started soon after the Bank Holiday so we stayed home so he could revise and attend revision classes run over the holidays.

## JONATHAN - Former Sports Superstar

He has been out of action the whole year due to a hip injury and pressure of exams.

The exams worked out well enough to get a place at the local 6<sup>th</sup> Form college where he is doing a BTECH in science - essentially a combination of Chemistry, Physics and Biology "A" levels in one qualification.

He felt this was a better option than staying on at his old school's 6<sup>th</sup> Form and so far it has proved to be a good choice.

He was also voted the Course Representative for his year so if anyone has any problems with the college they go to him and he takes it up with the authorities.

Should prove interesting for all concerned.

## Summer Holiday Time - Not where we expected

This year, as Jon's exams would be over and there would be a gap before starting 6<sup>th</sup> Form we thought we could spend a few weeks in Canada, by way of a celebratory treat, and still get a week in Chesterfield to see mum.

Then Jon comes home and announces he would like to do the National Citizenship Scheme where, for £30 being subsidised by the government, he gets a week Adventuring - camping, zipwires, orienteering etc, a week learning a skill such as acting, photography etc and two weeks doing community work all of which "would look good on my C.V." OK, fine, no Canada then.

Hey, maybe we can go to Chesterfield by ourselves whilst he's at camp. Maybe have another week away by ourselves somewhere, too....

Well, when I say "week at camp" it turned out to be 4 days so goodbye "week away"

Eventually we decide on the 4 days he's away and a quick zap up to Chesterfield, stay in a hotel, see Les' mum and a small break for us. Oh, the plans of Mice and Men.....



The week leading up to the first session Jon goes down with some bug we initially thought was Glandular Fever, which would have scrapped the whole deal.

It turned out not to be that and he was getting better but would he be well enough?

After consultations with the organisers we settled for sending him on the scheme and if he got worse then we come and collect him.

As it was only an hour up the road that would be no problem if it wasn't for the small fact that we were due to be 4 hours up the road and not readily available.

So we decided to cancel the hotel - which we did with an hour to spare otherwise we would have lost our money! Consequently, Jon has a great time and we twiddled our thumbs - which probably explains why I weakened and did the front patio.

### So, did we ever get to Chesterfield?



Yes we did - in October  
We stayed at a surprisingly handy cottage as it looked further away on the maps.

Luckily the weather was kind and dry on the days we took mum out to our usual haunts of Chatsworth Gardens and Cresswell crags.

We even tried a new place - Clumber Park.

We often hire bikes and go cycling there but it was a first for mum.

It's flat, picturesque lake with birds and decent cafe so all good.

We also went for a "short" (5 mile!!) walk around the local reservoir which had a surprising amount of "up" for a flat lake.

### A SAD FAREWELL TIMES TWO

Firstly, after 16 years of faithful service the Volvo died.

It started with an intermittent misfire which eventually became permanent and traced to the coil pack expiring.

The vibrations seem to have been the final straw for the gearbox, which lost 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and reverse. Add this to a few

other known faults and an upcoming MOT and we decided to call it a day with the potential bill being about ten times what the car is worth.

A trip to the local CarGiant resulted in the purchase of a 3 yr old Toyota Verso as the only manual petrol engine car with enough space for mum's wheelchair that we could afford.

This is where the strained knee comes from.

In between my car dying and getting the new one I had to drive Chris' Aygo a lot.

The clutch operation is more of a stamping movement rather than the laid back push of the Volvo.

Unused muscles shrieked in complaint and are still moaning at present.

Secondly, after 7 years faithful service, our pc died.

Luckily not all at once so it could be cajoled into backing up the data which saved me a lifetimes work of reconstructing it all from the incremental backups!

We are now enjoying (?) the delights of Windows 10 and trying to stop it sending everything into the ether!





Jon has also cajoled us into buying him a laptop "for school work"

We took advantage of some "Black Friday" deals to get a lower mid-range one we couldn't otherwise afford.

Unfortunately it turns out to be more powerful than his main PC and runs his games better.

So much for school work!

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## OTHER STUFF

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Consequently it now looks like a proper garden with colour and stuff.

Her mother is becoming more frail so we are spending more time with her which is not easy as she is 50 miles away but these things have to be done.

After last year's fruit famine, this was "feast" - a garage full of apples, say 40kg, and a freezer full of sloes, elderberries, blackcurrants, bullaces.

We even had a couple of dozen ripe figs.

We have a stack of boxes full of jam and still the freezers are full as the runner beans excelled themselves, too.

**Happy Christmas all.**