

Howard's Year - 2010

Work.

I continue to be Chief Operating Officer at the London Internet Exchange, and as it dominates my life, I'll cover it first. It was a pretty full year at LINX and the various workish extra curricular activities.

The year started finally arranging the move into our new Peterborough office. Through



an excellent agent, I'd negotiated a cracking deal on a new office giving us half as offices and half as meeting rooms, comms room, kitchen etc. Unfortunately, the promises regarding the heating/cooling system proved empty, and we had a fairly bumpy time as it simply didn't work. But by the end of the year most people are beginning to appreciate it.

I'd also allowed myself to be volunteered to chair the UK's telecommunication emergency planning exercise, as the scenario for 2010 was Internet based. Although I'd been on the planning committee for this in earlier years, I'd not had the job of actually organizing the exercise, and while it was a team effort, I spent much of the year having to push things forward. The exercise proper was in November and passed off well, but wasn't without problems - we were holding it in the Emergency Suite at the Dept for Business (aka BIS), a huge government building that sprawls along the South of Victoria St in

Westminster. As the exercise reached a significant point, the whole building was evacuated and we found ourselves along with about 5,000 civil servants milling around in front of Westminster Abbey.



Luckily the "small fire" was controlled and we were able to go back just in time for the next conference call in the exercise. But that wasn't the end of the disruption, as this was the day of the major student demo against the increase in university fees (the day the fire extinguisher was thrown from the roof of the



Tory HQ and their windows were broken down). When we finished the exercise the building was in lockdown (it was the govt

dept responsible and so was under siege and had its own cordon of shield bearing police!) . So we had to kick our heels for an hour or two until it was deemed safe to leave the building.

In between those, I fitted in a further year of assessing for the BQF's National Excellence Awards, which took me to Belfast for a week.

At LINX itself it was an "interesting" year with a couple of personnel problems which I'd never encountered before, and resulted in two staff leaving us. In the process they managed to consume an awful lot of time working out how to (legally) deal with the situations. I took on some extra work as a result of one of these departures and worked 5 days a week for the first six months. At the end of the year two of my fellow managers also jumped ship, which has caused a level of extra work, but luckily not much of that was by me.

In October I clocked up my tenth year at LINX and now have a certificate to prove it! More tangible will be a trip to a Champagne House in France which I hope to arrange soon.

Home

It was nice to have got all the work of the house extension behind me. So we spent Christmas at Heathside enjoying the space. There's still work to do, though.

But now the spare rooms are finished I can be (and was) hospitable again if you're passing through.

Jean bought me a brace of pigs (fibreglass, not live) as a housewarming present and for



the tail end of the summer they took up residence under the apple tree.

Not that the road was quiet, as my new neighbours gutted and extended their house in a very similar fashion to me. So it was several months of builders' vans blocking the road, and noise made working at home less pleasant than normal. But that was completed late summer, so all's now quiet.

Away

We managed to get away for some holidays in the year.

We started by taking a long weekend by Eurostar to Brussels. Definitely, a mistake!



Late winter in Brussels is very cold and it's not a great city to wander round in the cold. I did get

to tick off another underground railway and tram system, though.

And soon after I got to tick off Manchester's trams and what now is an unrepeatabe experience of the Wrexham and Shropshire Railway – as it's just closed down. The reason was that our friend Charles Bockett-Pugh was a contestant on Countdown, so I went up to Manchester and spent a day in the audience to watch him – lose unfortunately. It was interesting to see them pack an entire week's



Countdowns into one day – including their celebration of the 5,000th edition.

Other UK trips were in late summer to the very pretty Manifold Valley where Jean and I

shared a National Trust cottage with Mary and Laurie Hardwick. Just down the river from our cottage the water disappears completely underground and doesn't appear again until several miles downstream – except when it's in flood. The rest of the time the river bed is completely dry.

And in December, around my birthday, Jean and I went for a weekend by train to



Penzance, staying in the Egyptian House, a rather flamboyant Landmark Trust property. It was very relaxing going down by train, but First Great Western do

seem to regard Cornwall as a second class country.

We were back on track with canal trips too, spending a week over the October half term weekend with Chris and Carolyn Anstey on the Rochdale Canal. As canals go, the Rochdale is very hard work as there is not enough water and after the restoration maintenance has been rather slack.



Passage over the summit is limited to four boats a day and you need to book in advance. As it turned out, it was only our boat and another boat we'd paired up with

that wanted to do the summit, so it wasn't a problem. However, whilst waiting overnight in the pound below the summit lock – quite a short pound – the water level drained quite substantially leaving us dangling from the bank. At about 4am when I felt I was about to be tipped out of bed, I dragged my jeans on over pyjamas and went out and untied the boat to let it drop down to be horizontal again. Little did I know that shortly before, the other boat's occupants had been tipped out of bed! Clearly they needed lee cloths on the canal boats.

We also got to France a couple of times. In September to visit the Jones's in Cressin-Rochfort and the second on a booze shuttle to Calais.

We decided to take a pretty route down to Mej and Glenda – but didn't expect the sat nav to suddenly take us into Belgium and Luxembourg. It had its advantages, as petrol's very cheap in Luxembourg. On the way back we were similarly diverted into Switzerland, but that could have been a problem as the boot was full of wine from Savoie. Luckily the customs were unmanned in the direction we were travelling. A further, but planned, diversion took us to some very nice Alsace caveaux and a vintners' cooperative.

The trip to Calais in December was more eventful than intended. It was the day that unseasonably early snow arrived. We were delayed outwards by two hours – only getting lunch by the restaurant staying open after 2pm (in France!) As lunch is half the point, it



would have been distinctly disappointing to have missed out. By the time of the return, Surrey and Kent were firmly in the grip of the snow and as we went along the M20 and M25 it just got worse. We ended up taking

2½ hours to drive the 10 miles along the M25 from the M23 junction to Leatherhead. In the other direction lorries were abandoning progress completely and parking on the hard shoulder for the night.

We ended the year by escaping the snows of the UK for the relative warmth of the Middle East. Our third Noble Caledonia cruise took us from Larnaka on Cyprus to Syria, Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan, including a passage through the Suez canal. The trip finished with a coach journey from Aqaba to Amman via

Petra -. On the way we seemed to visit the most breathtaking places – one would have been enough to make the trip, but all of them! So I'll fill this last page with some of the fantastic sights.

Of course that journey is all the more interesting seeing what has gone on there (especially in Egypt) in the four weeks since we've been back. My picture of the Sphinx and the Pyramid of Cheops would have a tank in the foreground now.



Howard Fisher, Feb 2011, y2010hjf@locomotive.com