

Christopher's 2017 Christmas Greetings and Newsletter

Dear friends,

Greetings from Tucson, Arizona! Here is my 2017 newsletter for the last 12 months. I spent Christmas 2016 and most of 2017 in Tucson, during which time there was quite a bit of excitement, both positive and negative, and made a visit to the UK from early October to the second half of November.

During most weeks I go to several fellowships around Tucson, but on my way to one in early April I suffered an unprovoked and vicious attack in the public street. It was early evening and was still light, and I later presumed that this was an attempted robbery. I called the police who arrived and arrested the culprit, but I learned later that while I was on my way to hospital in an ambulance the culprit was released. I needed some immediate treatment in the emergency ward, and made several visits to a plastic surgeon over a period of a couple of months, as well as seeing a specialist for an injured elbow. Fortunately no surgery was required and I fully recovered. My insurance covered most of my medical costs with the criminal compensation scheme for victims in Tucson covering the rest.

In doing some on-line research of my own, I discovered that the culprit had been in prison several times for various offenses, including attempted kidnapping, and had been released from his last prison term just over 6 months before attacking me, so it was astounding that he was released after my attack. No further action could be taken as the culprit was at unknown locations, but I had been told by the prosecution that he may well be picked up later for some other offence. This is exactly what happened, as in November while I was away in the UK I heard that the culprit was in custody, then subsequently heard after I returned to Tucson that he is on remand on a \$10,000 bond for felony robbery. I hope to get more information on Friday 29 December 2017, the last working day of 2017.



That was the negative news, now the positive news. El Cinco de Mayo (5th May) is a big fiesta celebrated in many parts of the USA of Mexican origin, but in the USA has taken on a significance beyond that, and is associated with Mexican-American culture. St. Philips Church in Tucson celebrates this every year in early May with a picnic with some traditional Mexican food being served, as shown here on the left.

Later in that month my middle brother John was making a business visit to the USA, and combined this with paying a visit to Tucson for one and a half days, during which we did some sightseeing. In particular we drove up Mount Lemmon and visited the Desert Museum, with. The picture on the left is both of us with John in the left on our way up

Mount Lemmon, and the picture on the right is John in the Desrt Museum



The weather was particularly nice during John's visit to Tucson, it was brilliantly sunny and quite warm during the day, but not particularly hot by Tucson standards, as for most of May temperatures were below normal, as otherwise it can get quite hot. The real heat in Tucson starts in June when temperatures are usually above 40° C.

After various delays I decided at last to visit the UK in the autumn and see members of my family, which was the first time I was over in the UK since 2014. I booked a flight in early October via Los Angeles (LAX) to London-Heathrow with



Virgin Atlantic for the transatlantic leg. However, when I arrived at LAX there was no plane. I was redirected to the British Airways check-in counter at a different terminal. My youngest brother Michael was expecting me to arrive with Virgin Atlantic. While at LAX I found a WiFi hotspot and sent off an email about my changed schedule, and in the mean time he found this out. Fortunately, my arrival time was not that much different, and he met me at Heathrow and we drove to his house in Winslow, Buckinghamshire. On the way I picked up a hire car, and thanks to his wife Joanna who works for Enterprise, I got a big discount. Incidentally, driving around the English countryside on the left in winding lanes with high hedges in all weathers ranging from sunshine to fog and drizzle is quite a challenge.



I stayed with Michael and Joanna for nearly three weeks and most appreciated their hospitality. Michael has a couple of motorbikes, and proudly showed me one of them, which is on the left here. The blue car in the background was my hire car with a 6 speed manual gear shift.

While in Winslow I attended one of the meetings of an Alpha course being held at Buckingham Parish Church. I also paid a short visit to John's older daughter Louisa, her husband Paul, and their two daughters for dinner one evening. On the right is me with my two grandnieces, with Ella in the dark shirt on my right and Sophie on my left.

John also has a younger daughter, Heather, who lives with her husband Tim and her daughter Shannon in Scotland. Unfortunately I did not have a chance to see them, which was a pity.



Because of my relative proximity to London, I took the advantage of taking the train there to give an informal astrophysics seminar at University College London, where I met for the first time in about 40 years an old former fellow student of mine from the University of St. Andrews in Scotland.

I then went to stay with John for the remainder of my time in the UK. He is sometimes in a small village in Norfolk, and sometimes in Gosport on the south coast of England near Portsmouth. We alternated between both places, but most of my time was spent in Gosport, courtesy of John and his partner Julie, who has a nice house there and provided lots of nice hospitality. The sea is only a few minutes walk from the house, and we went on a number of bracing walks next to the beach with great views of the Isle of Wight in the background. Most of the time the weather was fine. While I was there we went to the cinema in Portsmouth to see the latest remake of the film "Murder on the Orient Express".



The picture here is at Gosport, Michael is on the left, I am in the middle and John is on the right, and the two dogs belong to John's friend Julie. The sea is just out of view to the right. It was one of those fine early evenings shortly before sunset.

In addition to seeing members of my family, my main reason for visiting the UK was to sort out some private business, in particular my UK, French and German pensions, having lived and worked or contributed to the systems in those countries. This involved quite a lot of phone calls, emails and filling in forms, which took up quite a lot of time. My UK pension was sorted out quite quickly and got it partly backdated to when I turned 65, and await having the process completed to take full account of the period since turning 65.

Originally I thought that I would have to travel to France and Germany to deal with the paperwork in those countries, but as the UK is still in the EU, I took advantage of the agreement between EU countries to handle foreign pensions, and submitted my French and German pension claims through the UK system just before returning to Tucson. This saved me travelling to France and Germany, so saved time and money, and enabled me to see more of my family in the UK, but missed out on seeing some friends in those countries. I am still waiting for the outcome of these applications.

On my flight back to the USA I flew Virgin Atlantic, as originally booked, and saw some spectacular views of Greenland from the 787 I was flying in, as shown on the right here. However, I had a rather long and irritating layover in LAX before completing my trip to Tucson.

I returned just in time to get over jet-lag and enjoyed an excellent Thanksgiving meal at St. Philips Church, as shown below on the left. The food was excellent, but a lot was left over, so I took some home.





The patron saint of Scotland is St. Andrews, and his day is 30 November. I well remember this when I was a student at the University of St. Andrews. Because of the start of Advent, it is usually celebrated at St. Philips on the Sunday before then with the Tucson Highlanders Pipe and Drums, as shown here on the right.



I was not happy with me previous accommodation in Tucson, and packed up and left it when I flew off to the UK. On my return I fixed up some temporary accommodation, and have been looking at some much better places to move into in January. I have also been busy sorting out new health insurance.

Usually at this time of year I go the Tucson Festival of Lights in the Winterhaven area. However, I have come down with a cold and it does not fit in with my schedule, so may not go. However, I did go to a candlelight Christmas Eve service.

I wish everybody a Merry Christmas and a Happy 2018.

Christopher M. Sharp (25 December 2017).

PS. I am trying out Adobe's InDesign for the first time, rather than the usual format using HTML as I have done in previous years. As a result some of the text and pictures may not be formatted very well. I may have some work making use of InDesign in 2018, so I thought it would be useful to practice with this newsletter.