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THE CATWORK YEAR

2024

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## **Front cover**

Handsome Toby is our front cover cat this year. He is typical of the type of cat we are now helping - bereaved, hyperthyroid and elderly.

He is 16 years old though certainly doesn't act his age. He races about like a youngster!

Read his story on page 12-13.



## The Catwork Year 2024

2024 found us caring for cats mostly in the house and extension.

We have an assortment of older cats now, being too old to take on young FIVs, who, in actual fact, no longer need to be in a sanctuary, there being much better understanding of the virus.

The database for FIV cats has continued and is being added to all the time. There are currently 1209 FIV cats recorded from across the world. So the education part of our FIV work continues even though we cannot take on FIV cats.

2024 saw us welcoming quite a few visitors, some of whom we met for the first time, even though we had been in communication with them for some time.

So, now for an account of the Catwork year 2024.

The early months of the year were taken up as usual putting the yearbook together. It has proved to be such a useful record of events and our sponsors get to find out what their money is spent on!



*Suzanne and partner meet Elvis and Larry.*

In January Suzanne and partner paid a visit to see Toby Tonkinese who was, originally, Suzanne's mum's cat. When Phyllis died we offered to have him at Catwork as he was (and still remains) something of a 'posh feral'. Toby would not have coped in an ordinary household, but we were able to offer him security and leave him to his own devices. Fortunately he has always enjoyed the company of other cats.

Spring 2024 was very busy.

At the end of February I began a six week course on American poets, mornings only once a week, which made a welcome change from the everyday.

Also in February we took on Penny, a sweet and very pretty local cat whose owner had died. The relatives and neighbours who were feeding her were having no luck finding her a new home, so we felt we had to help. Penny had originally been homed by our own vets when a stray, so we knew from her records that she was eleven years old.

Catching Penny was no small feat as she was so scared. Suddenly her whole world had been turned upside down and we were strange people trying to catch her!



*Penny seemed confident on arrival.*

When we had managed to secure Penny in a basket, we took her home and put her in the sick bay of the extension where the two nervous cats, Georgie and Toby Tonk, live. Surprisingly, Penny didn't immediately hide as we expected, but was very affectionate towards us.

We had hoped she would adjust to being with the other cats, but as she had always been an only pet, that was a big ask.

On the same day that I had an operation I needed in early March, a granddaughter, Klara, was born to my son Ted and Anna - a sister to Freddie.

A quick trip up to Maidenhead a couple of weeks later was undertaken to see the new arrival.

*Barbara meets Klara, with other grandchildren Romilly and Freddie.*



April brought a real surprise when friend Jayne invited me to spend a few days at her home near Worcester. Everyone thought the break would do me good, so I decided to accept.

All medicines and food were put out for the cats each day I would be away to give Bob a helping hand.

Jayne and her friend Alan met us halfway at Bristol, and I went on to have a great few days away. No prizes for guessing what we did - we visited a wonderful rescue in the Midlands, Stray Cat Rescue Team, at Maximus Meadows, named after an old stray cat, Maximus, rescued in a sad state after living most of his life on the streets. The rest of his life was spent in comfort where he had the best vet care and food, and became the inspiration for Maximus Meadows where this remarkable group operates.



*Jayne meets one of the resident sheep at Maximus Meadows.*

They take on stray cats needing help, especially those needing specialist treatment for injuries and long-term health conditions.

We also visited Susie, someone we've known and corresponded with over many years but never actually met. She has rescued many cats with the leukaemia virus over the years and currently has two that she took on at my request. It was great to meet them.

Another highlight of the trip was a feeding frenzy by the swans and pigeons back in Worcester. Never have I seen so many swans in one place, it was like a scene from Hitchcock's 'The Birds'. It had all been a very memorable mini-break.



*Jayne in amongst the masses.*



*Barbara joins in the fun.*

The month of May was certainly a month to remember as I reached my 80th birthday. Our Bristol friends came bearing gifts and cake early in the month.



*Sara, Annie, Lyn and Lorna bring cake and gifts to help celebrate Barbara's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.*

My children, Ted and Dora, took me to Bath to see a matinee production of 'A Glass Menagerie' preceded by posh nosh in the famous Pump Rooms, complete with champagne and a live pianist who played 'Happy Birthday'. Certainly a birthday to remember!



*Lots of cards and a cuddle from Oliver, how better to celebrate Barbara's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday?*

Summer saw us welcoming several visitors.

I met up with Brenda, somebody I was at school with and, although having kept in touch, I haven't actually met up with since then! There was much to talk about.



Susie, our lady who does so much to help leukaemia virus cats who I visited when in the Midlands earlier in the year, stopped off with Gary to see us on home territory.

Carol and Rob also stopped off when in the area - animal lovers with whom we have had a long association via email on FIV matters as they have adopted several FIV cats themselves.



*Rob gives Larry a cuddle, whether he wants one or not!*

Friends Jayne and Alan came for their summer visit - always good to see them.



*Aysa and Sandy with Tinker.*

More visitors came in September: Aysa and Sandy spent time with all the cats and we had a good 'catch-up'.

Sara made her usual late summer visit.



*Sara with Larry.*

Autumn was somewhat traumatic as we lost our darling Oliver, aged 17, and also Frankie needed a major surgery.

Storm damage in December caused much destruction in the old Fivory. We were glad there were no longer cats resident in that area of the sanctuary as a huge limb of our ash tree sheared off the main tree and went crashing over the chalet roofs and over the wall, causing a blockage in the private access road for our neighbours. Bob spent all next morning clearing the mess off the road and, over the following days,



*Luckily there are no cats in that area now.*

sawed up parts of the fallen limb and managed to get the rest of the broken section away from the main trunk; quite a business.



*At least we will have logs for next winter.*

Friend Lesley paid us a visit and we had the usual cat chat.



*Lesley has a game with Frankie and his toys.*



*Jayne and Alan watch as Frankie tries to open a Christmas present (a catnip cushion).*

Jayne and Alan also came for their Christmas visit. As usual there was much laughter and updates on all the cats.

I also did one more poetry day on Christmas poems.

We were, by now, fully into Christmas preparations, writing cards and sorting out presents.

When Christmas arrived, we both coughed and spluttered our way through the festive period having contracted one of the many viruses prevalent at the time.

Oh well, we finally got there and before we knew it, we were into 2025.

## The Catwork cats

### Elvis

Elvis came from Wales in 2014, from a rescue unable to accommodate him at the time he was found.



Elvis was, in his younger days, an independent character, not averse to giving the odd swipe. As he grew older he mellowed considerably.

For most of the time he was with us Elvis enjoyed very good health. It was in 2024 that he developed digestive problems which did not respond to the medication he was prescribed, and he even regained a bit of the weight he had lost.

Suddenly, in August, he seemed really out of sorts, not even wanting treats which was very unusual for him. We knew there was something serious going on so took him over the road to the vet surgery. The vet who saw him was very worried by his irregular breathing and suggested we take him straight to the hospital in Bridgwater for a scan.

The hospital vet found from the scan that Elvis had a growth next to his heart which was filling his chest cavity and making breathing difficult. Nothing could be done as treatment, and the only thing we could do was have him put to sleep to prevent any suffering - what a shock!

He had been doing so well with his digestive issues. It just goes to show that one never knows what issues are lurking in the background, undetectable until the tipping point is reached. We are just pleased that our vet recognised the seriousness of his condition and took immediate action to discover the cause.

Sudden death, when unexpected, always comes as a shock, as was the case with Elvis. He was a big character who we think enjoyed his ten years in the sanctuary, and who is much missed.

## Larry

Larry, who had been sharing the remaining main area of the sanctuary with Elvis, had an excellent year healthwise.

We took Larry on in 2021, when the rescue he was at was on the brink of having him put to sleep. He was considered unsuitable for rehoming as he loved the outdoors, and most rescues still only home FIV cats as indoor, only cats.

When we said we would take Larry into the sanctuary instead of being put to sleep, he was neutered, microchipped and vaccinated. Thank goodness we heard about him, through a friend, in the nick of time.

Larry is a lovely cat and very affectionate.



We would like to incorporate him into the household now he's on his own, but unfortunately he's rather intimidating towards other cats.

For now, Larry seems alright in his own area with a choice of chalets to use and plenty of food, fresh air and fusses.

## Georgie

Georgie, who lives in the extension with Toby Tonk for company, had a vet-free year.

She is a sweet affectionate little cat but very nervous who came to us in 2014. Friend Kath, who used to visit in those days, brought her all the way from Skegness where she had been living on a caravan site and fed by the owners.

Fearful for her safety (her brother had been run over, sadly) and



Georgie testing positive for FIV, we were approached to take her on, which we did.

The quiet extension suits her well; such a nervous little cat would never cope in the rough and tumble of the main house.

Georgie can often be seen cuddled up with Toby Tonk.

## Toby Tonk

Toby, a very, very nervous Tonkinese has been with us since 2016, when his owner, Phyllis, a friend of ours, passed away. Phyllis' daughters, who



had given Toby to their mum as a present, were not able to take him on and, knowing the nature of the cat, we thought he would be a candidate for life in the sanctuary where he could live a protected life and not have to bother much with humans.

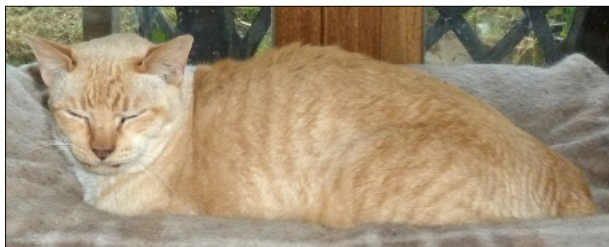
Toby did well in the sanctuary, especially as he liked the other cats.

Toby's nightmare is if he has to be handled at all, so imagine his big trauma when he had a major dental previously and had to go to hospital. Apart from that, we leave him very much to his own devices and, fortunately, 2024 was a good year for him healthwise.

Toby now lives in the extension with nervous Georgie and they get on very well.

Toby is a sweet cat but he was, sadly, never socialised as a kitten so is effectively a 'posh feral' and will never be a fan of humans!

*If he keeps his eyes shut, then we aren't there!*



## Bubbles

Bubbles was originally meant to be only a boarder when her owner, back in 2015, was being evicted and we offered to help until she could find alternative accommodation. As well as Bubbles, we took on the owner's other two cats.

The boarding arrangement never worked out as their owner was never able to take them back.

Only Bubbles remains now, and we brought her into the house to join the housecats.

When she lived in the garden, Bubbles used to suffer from extreme skin allergies every summer; no treatment really



helped and we never knew the cause. Since being in the house Bubbles has not suffered with the allergy though clearly has a sensitivity that

causes her to scratch and lick herself a great deal.



Bubbles is a great attention-seeker and is always looking for a lap to sit on.

## Tinker

Tinker is a lovely quiet old lady who lost her owner and was quite traumatised and shut down in rescue. We were asked if we would consider rehoming her, to which we agreed.



We brought Tinker home in spring 2023. It took her a month to feel confident enough to start building a relationship with us.

Once she did, Tinker formed her own routine, deciding to spend her time on the kitchen window seat above a radiator and rarely venturing into any other part of the house.

In the summer there is nothing Tinker likes better than to be outside, but she still never ventures far from the kitchen door.

In 2024 Tinker had a urinary issue which finally cleared up with the right medication. She has a monthly injection of Solensia to help with her arthritis.

For an old lady she seems fit and well and is quietly affectionate.

## Toby

We offered a home to Toby in 2023 as his owner, who had rehomed him when a kitten, had to be hospitalised. The poor lady had resisted



medical help as she was so worried about what might happen to Toby, who was 14 years old and hyperthyroid.

He wouldn't have been easy to rehome even if there was a rescue willing to take him. In the end, the poor lady had no choice but to go to hospital and then on to a nursing home but, sadly, died soon after, but at least knowing that her beloved cat had found a forever home.

We wondered how Toby's appearance in the house would work out with the existing housecats, as he had not met other cats nor been outside, except for vet visits, since a kitten, but we felt we had to help.

Once careful introductions had been made it was clear that Toby got on very well with all the cats in the house. He especially likes playing and chasing Fred around



*Toby takes charge of a cat food delivery*



*Toby in a sulk after Sarah took his blood test at the Stowey surgery, while Bob mops up his own blood!*

- he's very active for a cat of his age. He also likes to go outside in the safe enclosed garden area at the back of the house.

He has his thyroid checked every few months to ensure he is on the correct dose of medication. It's all hands on deck when he has his blood test

as, being quite a strong, determined character, he doesn't like to be messed with, so it takes both a vet nurse and Bob together to hold him while the vet takes the blood!

We're pleased we could help Toby who has made a nice addition to our feline family.

## Humbug

Humbug is our feral cat who has a little shelter house at the end of the garden where we put biscuits out every night.

We took him from RSPCA Northampton where he had been fed in somebody's garden. When that came to an end he was taken into rescue in the hope he would 'come round' as some ferals do; sadly, Humbug stayed hidden for many months showing he was not likely ever to be domesticated.

We offered to take him into the FIV sanctuary and he was brought to us in 2021.

However, Humbug clearly wanted total freedom and managed to find a way out. After a couple of initial sightings, we saw nothing of him for a whole year, then, one sunny day, Bob spotted him sunbathing on top of the fence looking fit and well. He had clearly coped very well.



We set up a shelter at the end of the garden in the hope he would make use of it. We set up a camera trap which we have running every night. Now, most nights Humbug comes for the dry food and water, sometimes spending several hours in the shelter, and other nights simply having the food

and then disappearing again. We have no idea where he spends the rest of the time, or where he is finding his food, but the evidence of what we see on the camera trap suggests he is well fed!

It has surprised us how much more we've seen on the camera trap - a hedgehog, squirrels, a very cheeky mouse who takes some of Humbug's biscuits when he gets the chance, and several birds. One mother blackbird brought her fledglings to the shelter and pinched a few biscuits, bringing them out to the offspring and feeding them there in front of the camera! We even saw a fox on a couple of occasions just passing through. Who knew so much went on at the end of our garden?

Generally, Humbug, a free spirit seems relaxed, healthy and doing well.

## Penny

We took on Penny in February when her owner in the village died; she had been an only cat who disliked other cats, so we were a little worried. Even though we put Penny in the extension with only two cats, nervous Georgie and Toby Tonk, she was clearly unhappy.

With the help of vet Sarah, we were able to find a new home for Penny. Her new owner came highly recommended by Sarah,



so a meeting was arranged for Andrea to come and meet Penny. The meeting went well and Andrea offered to rehome Penny.

We delivered Penny to her new home and were delighted with the little cat's reaction. Instead of hiding as we had expected, Penny showed all three of us affection and she seemed immediately at home with Andrea and pleased to be the only cat in the room!



Follow-up pictures showed Penny on her new owner's lap soon after she moved. It was such a relief to see Penny so relaxed and happy.



## The House pets

### Frankie

We adopted Frankie as one of our housecats in 2023 from the same sanctuary as Fred and Tinker. He was in a bit of a mess - hyperthyroid and skin issues - a cat we felt we could help. He was in fact an owned cat, but the owners, who were found, didn't want him back!



We found Frankie to be quite a character. He soon fattened up and his skin condition improved, and his thyroid was managed with medication and regular blood tests.

When Frankie started going out we found he was able to get out of the 'secure' garden area (nobody else cold) and he would end up in somebody's house!

We couldn't let this situation continue so now, because Frankie likes the outdoors so much, he is taken out to a spare secure area once used by the rescues. He lets us know when he wants to go out - there's no mistaking what he wants. Frankie is brought back in late afternoon and he is then quite content to spend the rest of the day and night indoors.

All was going well with Frankie's thyroid treatment until towards the end of 2024 when a blood test showed that his medication was no longer keeping his thyroid levels under control. There were various options as to what to do about it:

The 'gold standard' would be Iodine radiation treatment, for which he would have to be away in a referral centre for two weeks of isolation, followed by another two weeks with minimal contact at home. After much thought we felt that Frankie would not cope well with such a long period of isolation away from home.

An alternative would be strict on-going dietary control, which was

also out of the question; with so many other cats around that would be impossible to maintain.

The final option was surgery, known as a thyroidectomy, where a major part of the thyroid is removed leaving sufficient for continued normal operation. This seemed to be the only possible solution for Frankie.

Luckily the operation was able to be carried out at our local practice hospital - not many vets perform this surgery as it is quite intricate. Vet Gill took on Frankie's surgery which was planned for the end of November.

During the operation a growth was found attached to the thyroid which could potentially have been malignant. A biopsy was taken and a sample sent away for analysis, so we had a tense wait for the result.

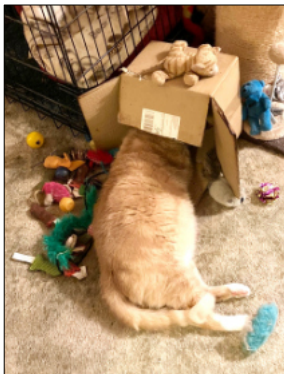
The operation itself went well and Frankie was able to come home, somewhat groggy, the same night.

We gather he had been a real 'hit' at the hospital and gained many admirers amongst the nurses who gave him attention and treats. This may have accounted for the fact that, next day, Frankie didn't want to eat - unheard of for Frankie, and somewhat worrying! As he seemed completely 'out of it' we thought we might have to take him back to

the hospital. However, the following day Frankie was clearly back to his normal self and demanding food.

He didn't look back after that, and at his post-op check three days after the procedure, he was pronounced fine and discharged.

We still had to wait a few days for the biopsy result which, I'm glad to say, was clear. All in all a great result. Frankie soon got back to his old self eating for England and he seemed to be even more affectionate.



*Toy box investigation*

## Fred

We adopted Fred in 2023 from a Somerset animal sanctuary. I had seen him on their website and, simply, it was love at first sight. He had come from a multi-cat household of 36! The cats were redeployed around various rescues.



We were warned our choice of cat might not be easy as he had been adopted and returned because he was hiding all the time and toileting inappropriately. We felt we could rise to the challenge and went to see him. To our amazement Fred came out of his room to greet us. I was even more keen to offer him a home, and the staff seemed pleased too!

Right from the start, Fred seemed to relate to us. He only hides these days when he hears strange voices in the house or something different from his routine happens. He's a stickler for routine is our Fred.

At his annual vaccination Fred gets terrified of being put in the basket and kicks up a fuss. We only have to take him across the road to the surgery and I'm sure the vet can hear him coming! Luckily, in 2024 the booster jab was the only vet procedure he needed.

I remain besotted with the little guy, even though he can be a bit naughty teasing the female cats in the house. Fred absolutely loves being stroked and given attention and he is, in my eyes, very, very handsome.



*Fred enjoys a turn in the garden in summer*

## Oliver

For most of 2024 Oliver did so well coping with his many health issues - heart and kidney problems and pancreatitis. Then, in the latter part of the year, Oliver had a couple of urinary infections. When being checked after one such flare-up was resolved, vet Sarah discovered a lump in his abdomen. From then on we knew we were dealing with a palliative care situation.



For some time Oliver continued to eat well, taking all his many medications and being his sweet self. Then, in late October, he began to look 'out of it' and it seemed as if the little soul had had enough. Upon examination, vet Bianca found the lump in his abdomen was enlarged. Oliver was looking very poorly and the decision was taken to put him to sleep to prevent him suffering.



It was so very hard to let him go. For 17 years he had been such a large part of our life; he was a gentle soul who came to us as a stray kitten.

Oliver had been found by a postman doing his Christmas deliveries in 2007. He was all alone in a country lane surviving on bread put out for the birds by the people in the only house in the vicinity.

On being asked to help, I met the postman and, armed with a carry basket and a tin of tuna, we managed to tempt the kitten out of the hedge and get him into the basket.

At a check-up with the vet that same afternoon, Oliver was given a clean bill of health and he became a member of the Hunt feline family for the next seventeen years. We miss him so very much.



*Oliver gets special attention at the vet's*

## 2024, what a year to be in rescue!

At our age our rescue work is dwindling; only elderly cats / special needs now in our care. FIV cats in whom we specialised for so many years are now not an option as they tend to be fairly young when diagnosed. Then we were mostly dealing with two categories of cat: those with FIV and those with FeLV, as well as a few special needs.

These days rescues are having to cope with an absolute tsunami of abandoned cats, many of whom have serious issues to be dealt with.

The lack of neutering during Covid, the withdrawal of many neutering vouchers by national organisations, the rocketing cost of veterinary care and the cost of living crisis have all contributed to the most severe cat crisis anyone in rescue can ever remember.

Cats are being abandoned through lack of rescue places and unaffordability. They are being dumped in hedges, in boxes in remote places, some with kittens, and, because older cats are more in need of medication usually, they are simply being abandoned.

It is absolutely heartbreaking to read of the situation that smaller rescues, who have to do all their own fundraising, are having to deal with.

There is also a crisis in finding homes, as people are reluctant to take on an animal which they might not be able to afford.

All small rescues are really struggling, yet the people who run them are finding it almost impossible to refuse to help when they see so much suffering even though they can't afford to take on such complex and expensive cases.

All this is not good news for the poor FIV cats, since rescues mostly still insist on homing them as indoor, only, cats. This is such a shame as our research from the project cats has shown that, once careful introductions are made, the virus is not passed on to other cats.

FIV cats in rescue are therefore taking longer to rehome and could be seen as 'pen blockers'. This is a real problem when there are so many cats these days needing to come into rescue.

We must be grateful, however, that since we got involved with FIV cats, the understanding of the virus has moved on and they are not so likely to be put to sleep when found to be positive for the virus.

We must be grateful for small mercies and truly hope that our input on the subject of FIV has helped to save lives.

### **30 years**

2025 marks 30 years of our life in cat rescue. We erected the first chalet for the cats in 1995 - we can hardly believe it!

During that time we have met some really lovely people who care about animals as much as we do.

We have had, and still do have, generous sponsors and supporters who have made it possible for us to help the cats who came our way - mostly FIV and FeLV but special needs as well.

So from us both, a huge thank you to everybody who has made the work possible.

Thanks must also go to our talented and very supportive vets.

We are so grateful to everyone involved in helping us help the cats.

Barbara and Bob



Catwork is a sanctuary for cats with special needs particularly those who test positive for FIV and FeLV

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