

Greenmount – December 2013

Sunday 1st December was the commencement of Christmas for us and the first task of the day was to attend Church for the Scout Group Parade and Toy Service at which Jenny was invited to light the first candle for Advent.

Back home for just after 11 a.m. and a quick change into working clothes found us in the garage loft extracting our Christmas tree and decorations in readiness for Rachel to decorate the tree while we returned to the garage to move any obstacles that might prevent the gas men from installing the new boiler the following day.

That done, following a quick lunch, Jenny and I went to see Matthew and Carrie, leaving Rachel to continue her excellent work. I gave Matthew an old piece of Cicso equipment I no longer needed and a sample of the 40-year-old brandy he had bought me for our 40th wedding anniversary and we invited them and Carrie's parents to lunch on New Year's Day. Matthew loaned me his reel of power cable for the external sockets I was installing at the Old School the following Tuesday.

We returned home just after 5 p.m. to find the tree progressing well and I helped Jenny prepare the vegetables (I can do it when I put my mind to it) for tea. Venison stakes, vegetables and a bottle of red wine later, we settled down in the lounge to watch a recording of the first part of a new television series called The Bible, which I found very interesting.

An early night saw us retire about 11 p.m., having to be ready for the gas men early the following day.

We ignored the alarm clock at 7:30 a.m. on Monday 2nd December and were knocked up by the gas engineer who had come to install the new boiler at about 8. I opened up the garage for him in my dressing gown and promptly went back upstairs to wash in cold water. The engineer had been quicker off the mark than I had anticipated.

After breakfast, we lit the log fire in the lounge and busied ourselves writing out the Christmas cards for posting and ordering Rachel's Christmas present online, with a brief break for lunch in the cold dining room.

Frank called to check what we were doing the following day and Tracey telephoned to check what time we were starting. She also asked if I could install a third socket outside the Old School and I said I would check with Eyre and Elliston to see if they had one in stock. The chap called me on my mobile phone while I was speaking to Tracey on the house phone, which saved me a call and I told him we would collect the bits the following morning instead of this afternoon, as arranged.

While I was talking to him, Jenny's friend Karen arrived and shortly after that, while they were talking in the kitchen, smoke came pouring out from two of the new light fittings.

You couldn't make this stuff up.

A quick check found no overheating or burning problem and I suddenly thought it must be

from the gas man in the garage, soldering copper tubing. I nipped in and sure enough he had just connected up the 28 mm pipe to the meter and joined it to the 22 mm pipe to the boiler, creating a certain amount of smoke in the process. By the time I arrived on the scene, he had extinguished any flames and assured me the smoke was from his flux and the cloth he was using to protect the wooden joist and the plastic central heating pipe work.

About half an hour after that, the gas man asked to try the cooker, which we did. There was no gas supply despite the supply being turned on. So we had a new boiler but no gas. Good eh?

It didn't take him long to discover the 15 mm pipe feeding the cooker was blocked by a lump of flux from the new connection to the 28 mm pipe he had installed from the meter. He cleared this and everything burst into life.

He had worked long and hard, mostly on his own, all day without much of a break and, apart from one minor set-back, he had done extremely well.

I didn't do too badly either, managing to get the lights on the Christmas tree in the lounge after he had gone.

We were up early (7 a.m.) on Tuesday 3rd December as I had to be at the Old School to lay a power extension cable to outside the front of the building in preparation for installing external sockets for the Christmas tree lights on the two trees installed on the wall by Tracey a few days earlier, before Play School commenced.

That done, I went with Tracey to collect the items I had ordered from Eyre and Elliston. So far so good.

We got back to the Old School for just after 10 a.m. to find Frank waiting to assist us in our task.

The first challenge we encountered was that the MK IP66 sockets I had ordered were not switched sockets. I did specify switched sockets but I didn't get switched sockets. This wasn't a major problem.

The second and more serious issue was that I had ordered 25 mm plastic conduit, having measured the external diameter of the blanking discs on similar sockets. Having dislodged the blanking disc to allow the cable to enter the socket casing, I discovered that the hole was only 20 mm diameter. One lives and learns. It would have helped if somebody at Eyre and Elliston had mentioned this when I placed the order. Tracey saved the day by driving down to Bury to source some 25 mm to 20 mm conversion bushes to connect the 25 mm conduit to the socket casings.

It took us all day to install the external sockets, conduit and cable and drill the hole through the wall for the main feed. We ended up being one conduit connector short and again Tracey came up with an improvised solution. We could also have done with a few more saddle clamps. Indeed, it would have been helpful if Eyre and Elliston had supplied the quantities of saddle clamps and connectors for which I had asked.

After a swift couple of halves in the Bull's Head at about 5 p.m., Tracey and I decided to go back to the Old School and temporarily wire up the lights.

Despite all the setbacks and not one of my most successful days, we had lights on the two trees twinkling away at the end of the day.

I was home for just after 6 p.m., had tea and a couple of glasses of wine to put things into perspective. Not one of my most successful days, it has to be said.

After a good night's sleep and a lie-in until about 9 a.m., I awoke refreshed on Wednesday 4th December, breakfasted and made the scheduled Skype video call to my niece's daughter, Amy, in Australia. Unfortunately, she had been working later than planned and was not in a position to talk to me for about another half hour, when she called me back.

We talked for about an hour, mostly about her planned trip here in 2014. It was the first time we had talked at length and it was very nice.

Then it was off to post the Christmas cards and down to Summerseat Garden Centre for lunch before tackling yet another grocery shopping session at Asda, Pilsworth. Just over half the huge (for mid-week) spend was on a dozen bottles of Yellow Tail wine (six Chardonnay and six Shiraz), on offer at £5.98 a bottle. We thought that would last us a week or two.

It was starting to go dark as we approached home and it was good to see the lights working on the trees at the Old School. It meant I didn't have to go in and turn them on.

Back home, I spent a good hour or so sorting out Jenny's Scout training record. The online database had not been updated and Jenny had been requested to provide dates, names, locations etc. I helped her collate the data and sent it off into obscurity by E-mail, no doubt never to be read or seen again. If the web site ever gets updated correctly, it will be a miracle.

I had been invited out on a jaunt with the chaps to Liverpool for a potter round the sights on Thursday 5th December, but, unfortunately, I had to enjoy the delights of our weekly grocery shop instead because our usual day, Friday, was scheduled for another sight-seeing trip.

We would have been back home for about 3:30 p.m. had it not been for two lanes being closed north-bound on the M60 Manchester Ship Canal bridge. The unusually strong winds had blown a lorry over in the late morning and recovery had been delayed until the wind subsided. Sitting in the long traffic queue, I reflected that, given the stormy weather, I had made the right choice.

Impatience eventually gained the upper hand and we left the M60 at the north end of the Trafford Centre and took the scenic route over the old Barton swing bridge, which was, not surprisingly, just as congested as the motorway up to that point. We eventually managed to get into third gear with three to go as we followed the by-way to Worsley, rejoining the M60, on which traffic seemed extremely light. I wondered why.

By the time we arrived home, we had lost an hour and I was completely shattered.

I was at the eye clinic in Fairfield General Hospital for 9 a.m. on Friday 6th December for a check up on my right eye that had suffered a blockage in one of the minor blood vessels the previous year. It took only half an hour for the consultant to give me the all clear and I inferred from his comments that I had been extremely fortunate to have made such a good recovery. The blood flow to the eye had managed to re-route itself and the main blood vessel was unaffected.

Once again, I marvelled at the ability of the body to repair itself. What a miracle of design and engineering it is.

Having had drops put in my eyes to enlarge the pupils, I could not see well enough to drive and so Jenny took charge. Needless to say, we found ourselves back at Asda, Pilsworth and yet more shopping for bits and pieces in the grocery line. No wonder I need to lose weight.

I did manage to spend the rest of the day, after lunch at home, on my computer.

Rachel went out for the evening and I expected a call around midnight to collect her from the tram station in Bury. Sure enough, the call came, except that Rachel was not in Bury. She had taken a friend, who was a little worse for wear, home in a taxi from the social evening they had been attending and was stranded in the east side of Manchester.

It was dark, windy, and wet, the car was out of windscreen wash, one of the headlight bulbs had gone and I had no idea where I was going but by 1 a.m., we were mobile on the clockwise section of the M60, having made up two bottles of screen wash and poured one of them into the tank in the car. This is not the sort of thing one usually does in the wee small hours.

Working from the A to Z when driving does have its limitations, particularly when half the roads have no name plates and it was more by good fortune than navigation skills that we found the address for which we were looking, in the dark, after two stops to consult the map. It would have been nice if there had been room to park the car. As it was, there was barely enough room to drive down the road between the two rows of parked vehicles and, discovering it to be a cul-de-sac, turning round was something more than a challenge.

Finding our way home was a little easier and we were in our beds for just after two a.m.

The clock alarm sounded at 8 a.m. on Saturday 7th December and was switched off within seconds. We finally crawled out of bed and into the shower at about 10 a.m. and, after breakfast, Jenny went off to the Drop-In at the Old School while I continued my PC administration work.

After lunch and a few routine chores, followed by a light, early tea, we made our way for an evening of light and humorous entertainment with a Lancashire theme, courtesy of The Saggy Bottom Girls at the Cricket Club. Jenny was not altogether keen. Sitting with folks we knew well helped things along and winning the first round of the stand-up bingo in the interval, for which the prize was a box of chocolates, made Jenny feel better. By the time the evening was over, Jenny had enjoyed it so much, she bought the Saggy Bottom Girls' CD.

We weren't up particularly early on Sunday 8th December either but early enough for me to be in church for just after 11 a.m., after the morning service had ended, to help prepare for the Christingle service at 4 p.m. It didn't take the half-dozen or so of us long to cover the carpet to protect it from candle grease and strategically place buckets of water and fire extinguishers in case anyone or anything caught fire and I came back home for lunch.

Jenny went off to practice the Christingle performance with her Beavers at 2 p.m. and I resumed the re-write of the village web site on my computer until 3:15 when I went back to church to set up my camera in the balcony to take pictures of the service.

For some reason, I don't think the pictures this year were as good as the previous year and I had a lot of difficulty with exposure, not uncommon in a man of my age.

We had a beef casserole (that's a posh term for stew) that Jenny had prepared in the slow cooker and a bottle of red wine for tea. We finished off the wine with cheese and crackers, the relevance of which is about to be made clear.

Feeling quite tired, we retired about 10 p.m. The house alarm went off about 1:30 a.m., alerting us to a potential intruder in zone 3. The alarm had been doing this a lot in recent weeks and we suspected someone had been throwing apples that had fallen off the tree at the front at the upstairs windows in the wee small hours. I can't think what sort of idiot would wander the streets just to do this and I had contemplated mounting a surveillance camera to try to discover the cause of the disruption.

Anyway, Jenny got out of bed, the alarm keypad being on the wall at her side, silenced it, checked the windows, reset it and came back to bed, a routine she has perfected to the extent she could do it in her sleep, which was just as well.

After that I had a restless night, waking about 4 a.m. with an upset stomach. My hiatus hernia had obviously induced my stomach to object to the excess acid produced as a result of the cheese and wine and the daily dose of 20 mg of Losec which normally controlled my condition was inadequate under the circumstances. A couple of mints helped a little and I eventually got back to sleep about 6 a.m., fortunately without regurgitating my stomach contents.

We had another late start on Monday 9th December as a result and too late to join the local ramble followed by lunch in the Bull's Head. I wasn't in any fit state to go far early on anyway because I awoke with a touch of the Leon's. In my experience, what doesn't come up usually goes down.

I eventually managed a trip to Bury, Jenny's fall-back plan being to go shopping for clothes. I bought a couple of pairs of cotton pyjamas and a thermal cotton jacket. Jenny also bought a couple of pairs of pyjamas, a couple of tops and some unmentionables. The total came to more than a few nicker.

Jenny went to the Beaver party, the last Beaver event of 2013 and came home loaded with presents from the parents. I put this time to good use continuing the rewrite of the village web site.

Jenny was planning on a trip out with her friend Karen on Tuesday 10th December. Unfortunately, Karen had her dates mixed up and thought it was the following week. We busied ourselves with household chores instead, which included cleaning out the fire from the last time it was used, putting away my camera after using it for the Christingle service, picking up the apples that had again fallen from the crab-apple tree at the front of the house and cutting up some small branches that had been stacked at the side of the drive for firewood.

After lunch, I took the car up to Tottington Motors to have a new headlight bulb fitted. I had not realised it needed new rear brake and tail light bulbs as well. I normally check the lights when I wash it but I hadn't found time to clean it for months.

Back home, I decided to order a replacement hose for the Dyson vacuum cleaner. After an hour and a half trying to use my credit card, my debit card and Jenny's credit card and several attempts well into double figures, I gave up. I couldn't get through the online security and I reflected on the wisdom of having money in the bank I couldn't spend. It seemed the banks had some sort of conspiracy designed to prevent me from spending my own money. I resolved to order what I wanted over the telephone the following day and I had visions of a container load of the item arriving in the next few days. I made a mental note to keep checking my bank account.

And that was not all. An item I had ordered on 2nd December was out of stock and my order had been cancelled. That had not stopped the charge appearing on my credit card account, though.

I told my bank that I was seriously considering changing to another one. Personal security is all well and good but when it stops me doing what I need to do, it is no longer useful.

Wednesday 11th December was a later start than planned and all three of us went off to Bolton to have a look round the Hobbycraft and the Dunelm Mill stores.

The Hobbycraft store had a huge variety of items and it made me wish I had more of an artistic temperament. Unfortunately, they did not have the wooden picture frames in the sizes we wanted. Despite my disappointment, the store is well worth a visit.

The Dunelm Mill was a short walk away and had a huge variety of household goods and soft furnishings. Here we found the picture frames we wanted, a couple of church candles for our lounge and a digital meat thermometer so Jenny can tell when the meat she cooks is ready. We had lunch in the café before moving on to browse the PC World store and, again, I think Dunelm Mill is a good place to shop.

We didn't buy anything at PC World, although we did look at a few items. In particular, I looked at new desktop tower computers and Windows 8, the desktop screen of which I definitely do not like. I still maintained that Microsoft would never improve on XP.

We were back home for about 4 p.m., the outside temperature having dropped to 1°C, giving me time to struggle through the last few clues of the Radio Times Crossword No. 50.

The last clue I could not fathom and for which I had to look on the Internet was 3 down. I had the letters –R-C-I- and the clue was “Bishop about to feature Scottish cathedral”. I had worked out it was the name of a Scottish place with a cathedral but couldn’t find it. The answer was BRECHIN (Bishop=B, about=RE, feature=CHIN).

The reason I couldn’t find it was because, although many consider Brechin Church to be a cathedral, it isn’t – not any more. It is part of the Church of Scotland and as such is no longer governed by Bishops and so no longer has cathedral status. People who set crosswords should get their facts right.

The clock alarm went off at 8 a.m. on Thursday 12th December and, ignoring it, we rose in something of a rush, if such a description applied in our case, at 9. The reason for this rare flurry of activity was that Jenny was due at the hair dressers at 10:30. Life is all a question of priorities.

It was my intention to wash the car, another rare event. Unfortunately, the cold, dull dry weather had given way to cold, dull wet weather. In fact, it was so cold *inside* the conservatory our cats would not venture in. I opened the kitchen door while I washed the pots to allow some warmth to penetrate on the off chance that I found time to use my computer later.

After breakfast and washing up I started putting the pictures in the frames we had bought the previous day while Jenny was at the hair salon. Jenny was back just as I had finished the first of three pictures and we all set off for lunch and another shopping spree, this time in Bury.

Rachel drove down, parked her car and we walked to Nandos. This was the first time I had been to Nandos, occasioned by the £20 voucher Matthew had bought me some time ago. The voucher bought my and Jenny’s lunch and I bought Rachel’s. I had not realised the cuisine was Portuguese and I thoroughly enjoyed my Piri Piri chicken.

We spent the following couple of hours pottering round shops, Rachel looking for clothes and Jenny and I (well, not so much I) ended up buying a new hand mixer for the kitchen and a couple of red candles for the lounge for Christmas from Debenhams.

Back home, my ankle was hurting from walking around and I resumed fitting the pictures in the frames. That completed, we left hanging them until the following day. Since I retired, I haven’t seen much point in doing today what you can put off until tomorrow, especially if you don’t really want to do it.

And how time flies. Another Friday (and Friday the 13th) was upon us and this meant yet another grocery shopping trip to Unicorn in Chorlton and Waitrose in Broadheath. All went smoothly except we hit the school run on the way home and traffic was horrendous.

Again I had intended to do a few jobs, like wash the car on Saturday 14th December but I was bogged down with admin work on the computer for much of the day. I brought the accounts up to date, checked these against the bank’s records and partially resolved the bogus transaction on my credit card, having received an apologetic E-mail from C W Sellors

for billing me in error when the goods were out of stock. I was awaiting the credit.

I finally managed to order the new flexible hose for the Dyson vacuum cleaner. My credit card was working on the Internet again. I also managed to order another present for Rachel.

After a relatively early tea, Jenny and I went to the church for the Christmas Concert with the Ramsbottom Choral Society and Orchestra. Jenny had been asked to help in the interval with coffee and mince pies, as usual and I, who had gone along just for the performance, was roped in to help collect tickets and take money on the door.

The concert was most enjoyable and, I am pleased to write, attended by all age groups and there were a couple of musical quizzes for the children, with a dip in Santa's sack as a reward for taking part.

Rachel was watching a TV programme about psychopaths as we returned home and, thinking this was ideal viewing for this time of year, I donned my headphones and listened to a recording of that evening's Jazz Record Requests on Jenny's laptop before retiring.

On Sunday morning, 15th December, I finally managed to hang the pictures for which we had recently bought frames. Finding enough wall space was a bit of a challenge and I managed to do so without nailing through any pipes or wires – or, at least, I think I did.

Jenny decided to clean the dishwasher in preparation for its annual use on New Year's Day, when we expected seven for dinner.

After helping with that, I went off to meet Matthew at B&Q at Heap Bridge in Bury. He was buying some plasterboard for a job at home and the sheets were too big for Carrie's car so he needed mine to carry it home. I took the opportunity to buy the additional bits of black, 25 mm trunking I needed for the Old School wiring, the present state of the wiring inside being temporary.

Meanwhile, Jenny took the opportunity to go and have a chat with our neighbour across the back, Sylvia and she was still there in the conservatory when I returned a couple of hours later.

On Monday 16th December we caught the bus into Ramsbottom for a potter round the shops, finding a Columbo DVD in one of the charity shops for £1.50 and picking up a few groceries in Tesco.

Rachel was out when we returned and telephoned to say she was at the Christmas markets in Manchester and that she would be home late. We waited up for her and when she had not telephoned by 1 a.m., we contacted her to discover she had decided to stay the night at a friend's house. We went to bed, thinking we could have been totally oblivious to reality some hours earlier had we known.

On Tuesday 17th December I decided it was time I washed the car, braving the cold and the overnight frost. Mike called as I was finishing wiping it down and he came in for a coffee and a chat.

Jenny went off to lunch with the girls and came back about four p.m. Meanwhile, I tidied things up on the computers, as one does.

Rachel wanted to go to the Trafford Centre shopping mall on Wednesday 18th December. I had the option of remaining at home but decided to go along for the exercise to my right leg/ankle. Rachel found a dress in Debenhams' Phase 8 she wanted but they didn't have it in her size. She found one on her iPhone in Debenhams Liverpool and the assistant arranged for this to be shipped to their Manchester branch for her to try on.

We lunched at Costa Coffee in the Orient at the Centre and, because their card machine was not working, they could only deal in cash, something Jenny and I rarely have. Neither did Rachel until she made a swift trip to a nearby cash machine and she ended up paying.

Needless to say, we called at Tesco in Bury on the way home for a few items.

On Thursday 19th December, we faced the stark reality that we might not have a turkey for Christmas dinner. Neither Tesco nor Asda were having any organic turkeys this year and it was too late to order one online from anywhere. Jenny telephoned Marks and Spencer in Bury on the off-chance they had one. She discovered they had four being delivered as she called, two medium and two small. She reserved one of the medium turkeys on the basis that she would be there to collect it within half an hour. And so she was – just.

After calling for a few items at the health food store in Bury, we were back home with barely enough time to stuff the turkey in the fridge before we had to dash out to meet Gwen and Frank at noon to walk down to Summerseat Garden Centre for lunch.

We had gone but a few yards when we were waylaid by the postman. He handed us a package from Dyson, a replacement hose for our vacuum cleaner I had ordered. I dashed back home with the package and rushed out again to find Jenny chatting to a passing Dyson engineer.

The engineer had seen us take delivery of the new hose and said if he had known we needed one, he could have supplied one, presumably free of charge. He also explained why Jenny was managing to get through so many of the damn things.

We talked to him about a new Dyson vacuum cleaner and he said he might be able to help and gave us his number. This conversation made us so late that Frank telephoned Rachel to find out where we were, which was somewhat pointless because she didn't know.

Back on track to the Old School, we almost literally bumped into our neighbour Sylvia, walking the dog. The dog took exception to my close proximity to Sylvia and snapped at my hand in passing. This caused no damage and Sylvia was most apologetic. I reprimanded the dog, although I doubt it did much good and, after all, it was only protecting its owner from what it perceived as a threat, I assumed. It was obviously not a very good judge of character. We finally met up with Frank and Gwen and walked down to Summerseat, where we had a nice, cooked lunch, which is most unusual for us.

We didn't get back home until nearly 4 p.m. and didn't do much after the hard day we had had. We settled for a light tea.

Friday 20th December as the usual, uneventful grocery shopping day, which is all one can say about it, really.

Saturday 21st December and Sunday 22nd December were well spent resuming the kitchen cleaning after many weeks of neglect following the injury to my right ankle. Climbing up and down step-ladders for the best part of two days really improved matters. I wish I could have said the same about my ankle.

I managed to drag myself out of bed in time to go for a Christmas breakfast with the lads at Summerseat Garden Centre on Monday 23rd December and, this being a bit of a celebration, I plumped for the full cooked version, minus the black pudding. It's not that I don't like black pudding, it's the fat content, mine as well as the black pudding.

I was back by 11 a.m., as promised, to go to Dunelm Mill in Bolton with Jenny and Rachel. Rachel wanted some new curtains and bedding and I just went for the exercise.

What better way to spend Christmas Eve than by cutting some new kitchen foil to line and protect the trays round the burners on the top of the cooker. My efforts were rewarded with a Chinese take-away for tea from the China Cottage in Ramsbottom, even if I had to pay for it. We would have gone there to eat but we had been too late in trying to make the booking some weeks earlier.

Christmas Day was a lazy one and I spent most of it continuing the re-development of the village web site, which, by this time, was nearing completion.

Boxing Day was spent in a similar vein, after a brief visit to Asda for a few bits and pieces we needed and a couple we didn't. That's the problem with supermarkets. You rarely come out with only that for which you went in.

We would have called at Matthew's house but Carrie had informed us earlier by Skype that she was full of a cold. Well, they did have a barbecue on Christmas Eve and it was outdoors. I didn't want to risk catching it.

On Friday 27th December, Jenny and I had planned to go on the village Christmas walk. Needless to say we didn't make it. Rachel collapsed in the bath. Fortunately, there was no water in it. She had become faint while in the bathroom, preparing herself for a day's work, sat down on the edge of the bath and fell backwards. There was no serious damage and the bath was fine too.

Rachel recovered fairly quickly and we talked her into coming grocery shopping with us to partake of some exercise and fresh air. She was booked in for some tests at the medical centre the following week and off work for the duration.

On Saturday 28th December, the three of us walked into Ramsbottom, again for exercise and fresh air and, despite the odd shower of rain and hail, it was a pleasant day until the

temperature plummeted about 3 p.m. and we all caught the bus back.

To add to our excitement, the bus broke down almost as soon as we boarded it in Ramsbottom, although the driver managed to coax it as far as Holcombe Brook before we were transferred to another one fresh from the garage. I surmised it was fresh from the garage because the interior was as cold as the exterior. At least it got us back to Greenmount and, arriving home, we turned on the heating, put on the kettle and joined the cats huddled to a radiator.

My contribution to the work effort on Sunday 29th December was the renewal of the three outside light bulbs at the back. The new style (as dictated by the European Community, no doubt) does not seem to last as long as the old ones and all three bulbs had failed, the last one a couple of nights earlier.

Normally, changing a light bulb is a fairly simple task. In this case, one of the new bulbs failed to light and it took me a good half hour in the cold with a sore finger to figure out the problem was that the centre contact was not high enough to reach the base of the bulb.

My middle finger on my right hand had suddenly started to hurt on the right hand side of the nail the previous evening and despite frequent immersion in hot water containing a mixture of salt and Epsom Salts was still sore, swollen and inflamed.

I had another halogen bulb to change in the kitchen, acquiring a replacement one from the spare-bulb box in the garage loft.

That done, I returned to the rewrite of the village web site and, having had enough by 5 p.m., decided to bury my finger in an Aloe Vera leaf. My finger seemed to improve a little, enough for me to venture into the shower before tea.

On Monday 30th December I took my finger round to see the pharmacist at the local chemist shop to see if he could shed any light on the problem. He advised me to see the GP a few yards down the road.

The receptionist was surprisingly helpful and asked me to come back in about half an hour, when a doctor would see me as soon as he was free.

Sure enough, after a half-hour or so wait, which wasn't bad to say I did not make an appointment in advance, I was seen by one of the practice GPs. He took one look at my finger and told me I had an infected Wicklow. Bathing it in hot salt-water was the right thing to do to encourage the puss to exude. He also prescribed a course of antibiotics, so it was back to the chemist.

It wasn't long after the first dose of tablets and more soaking in hot salt-water that a large quantity of slimy, grey matter came out from the base of the finger nail and the swelling reduced in size considerably. It also stopped hurting as much.

I was subsequently well enough to help with some cleaning and tidying in the dining room in preparation for the New Year's Day gathering, after which I resumed my work on the village

web site.

Rachel was back at work on New Year's Eve and telephoned from the car park in Bury to say she had forgotten her identity tags and could not get into the building without them. Jenny and I sped to the rescue, going on to Tesco for a few odds and ends, as one does on these occasions.

Back home, I was back on my computer working on the village web site for the rest of the day, until, that is, Rachel came home and subsequently wanted a lift to Bury, having arranged to meet some friends in Manchester for an evening meal.

Jenny and I spent the evening alone, watching recorded TV programmes until nearly midnight, when we tuned in to the live broadcast of the firework display in London. 2014 was upon us and already going up in smoke.

Not only does this bring me to the end of another month but also another year. How quickly time seemed to pass. Next month's instalment picks up immediately where this one leaves off so, while I may not have scored highly on quality, you have to admit I deserve full marks for continuity.