

Greenmount – December 2015

Tuesday 1st December: We made a second trip in two days to Ramsbottom, which must be something of a record. That was after washing up the pots and finishing off the update to the village web site, having left off at about half-past midnight before retiring for the night, or what was left of it.

We purchased some Christmas cards from one of the charity shops and Jenny found some Sojade soya milk and some yeast, both of which we normally buy at Unicorn, in Lolo's shop. Unfortunately, they hadn't started to stock the vegetable suet so that would have to wait. The need to go down to Unicorn was increasing and I thought we might consider making the journey on Friday, although after the previous day's exploits, my wound was weeping again and feeling just a little sore. I think I overdid it, not something for which I am usually noted.

We lunched at Summerseat Garden Centre and it was exceedingly busy. My turkey, cranberry and stuffing I had requested on a brown baguette turned up on brown bread. Jenny's prawns to go with her jacket potato were not particularly appetising and tasted more like crayfish. On the positive side, the side-salad had reverted to its former composition and was very nice. Jenny's slice of gluten-free, orange, polenta cake was also very nice.

We left with a calendar of British scenery to send off to NZ and headed to Morrison's for some cod (not MSC though) which would ultimately result in our fish and chip tea.

Back home, I put up some coloured lights round the kitchen, patio doors and updated the Tottington web site. The back door looked prettier.

Wednesday 2nd December: I spent much of the day relaxing and relieving the boredom by continuing the redesign of my web site. My body might not have been too good but my brain was alright. Well, I thought so even if some people would argue the point.

Thursday 3rd December: The day was much the same as Wednesday. I was psyching up for Friday.

Friday 4th December: I drove to Prestwich and waited in the car while Jenny nipped into Village Greens for a few odds and ends in the grocery line. I was then given the opportunity to tackle the M60 traffic on our first trip to Unicorn since my operation. Since the operation was on my left side and the traffic congestion resulted in a good deal of clutch work, I have to say it didn't do me a lot of good. It was a relief to get out of the car and hobble round the store.

I became a little impatient with some of the numb-skulls on the A56 to Waitrose and managed to outrun most of them while sticking, more or less, to the speed limit, as I always try to do, unlike most drivers, by some skilful manoeuvring.

The journey back was not too bad given that we hit the school run, although I was very tired when I finally reached home and that and a late tea prevented us from attending the Lancashire Evening at the Cricket Club. Well, we were from Yorkshire, anyway.

Saturday 5th December: Saturday was, for me, another day of rest and recovery (no

change there, then) and web site development, requiring some amendments to a piece of Java code I used to generate web pages for my picture gallery. Jenny spent the morning helping out at the Old School Drop-in so it was quite peaceful.

Sunday 6th December: More web site redesign was followed by an evening of entertainment by the Eagley Brass Band in the Church, a concert organised by the local W.I., which included a glass of sherry and a mince pie (for those not having a gluten allergy) in the interval. The evening was reasonably well attended, although I would have expected more people from the village to be there. The concert was not without a certain amount of audience participation.

Monday 7th December: After the usual morning chores, we started work on the Christmas cards and went to post them after lunch, hand-delivering a few in the village on the way.

The highlight (or not, under the circumstances) was a failure of the outside security lights, the outside lights at the front of the garage and the garage internal lights. It didn't take long, even with a torch, to confirm all of these were on the same fuse, as I thought, having done all the wiring for them some years ago and that the five amp fuse had blown.

My storage system was so good that it took me only a couple of minutes to locate the fuse wire (yes, we still have old-fashioned fuses and not circuit-breakers) and about five minutes to rewire the fuse and refit it with all the lights it controlled switched off. Switching the various lighting circuits on one at a time established that everything was working and I deduced, correctly as it turned out, that one of the bulbs must have blown and taken out the fuse with it. I'm not as daft as I look. The bulb in question was one of the six halogen down-lights under the car port and I left the job of replacing that for the following day.

Tuesday 8th December: I decided it was time, at last, for a little exercise and I needed some fresh air to move the lingering, chesty cough and catarrh that had been plaguing me off and on for some considerable time and which I was attributing to an allergy I had acquired to the cat.

We walked the three or so miles into Ramsbottom and performed the usual tour of the charity shops followed by a brief excursion to Morrison's supermarket so Jenny could buy some gluten-free bread and on the way back to the bus stop, we called in at Lolo's.

We caught the 472, which ran every ten minutes or so, back along Longsight Road to Vernon Road rather than wait a further twenty minutes for the 481 to Greenmount which only ran every hour. That doesn't seem quite equitable, somehow.

We had another ten minute walk up Vernon Road back to Greenmount and managed to settle down indoors before the heavens opened once again.

Wednesday 9th December: My cough being no better, we walked the 3½ miles into Bury. We headed straight for Marks and Spencer to place an order for our organic Christmas turkey. That done, we called at the bed shop on The Rock to see if I could obtain some plastic lat holders to repair a fold-up bed belonging to Jenny's niece, Tracey. The chap was very helpful and said he could possibly order me a pack of 24 that might do the trick

for about £10 to £15. I decided to search elsewhere.

We called at the health food shop in the market hall for a few groceries and Jenny went to the pound store while I wandered round the market in search of said lat holders, unsuccessfully as it turned out. I had a quick chat with the waitress, Jackie, we knew from the Heaton Park Beefeater who also worked a couple of days on the pet stall in the market.

We caught the bus home and after lunch, I replaced the bulb in the outside light at the back that was not working. The bulb I removed was the one I had trouble with a few days earlier and, while the bulb was working according to my circuit tester, it would not light in the fitting. The new bulb worked alright and I decided next summer might be a good time to remove the lamp altogether and replace it with a new one. It did occur to me that it might be possible to repair and renovate the old lamp but that would take several days and I didn't want to be without a security light at the back, which was quite dark at night otherwise. (Latterly, it had been quite dark during the day as well).

Thursday 10th December: After two days of fresh air and exercise, we decided to have a day in for a change. I put some of the time to good use, repairing some items that needed gluing, having recently acquired a small tube of super glue. Wisely, I donned a pair of plastic gloves to avoid sticking my fingers together.

Friday 11th December: We had a rather short shopping spree (try saying that after a few pints) to Prestwich via Pilsworth, where we started buying essential items at Asda. Yellowtail wine was on offer at £5 a bottle and we bought a box of Chardonnay and a box of Shiraz. We purchased a few items from Village Greens, the community co-operative at Prestwich before descending on Tesco. We had lunch at Costa Coffee where Jenny had a gluten-free Christmas-style wrap and, being very limited for choice, I settled on a BLT sandwich. The grocery shop went well, this being one of the larger stores and having more organic items than the Bury branch. It was a little annoying that their Yellowtail, normally nearly £8 a bottle, was also on offer at £5 a bottle, plus there was 25% off six or more bottles. If Tesco could afford to sell Yellowtail at what was, effectively, less than £4 a bottle, how come they normally charged nearly double that? Something, somewhere was not right.

Saturday 12th December: I took Jenny to Bury to catch the tram into Manchester. She was meeting Rachel to go round the Christmas Markets in the torrential rain. Needless to say, she had put on her waterproofs, standard attire for venturing out recently.

Wisely, I stayed at home for the rest of the day in the warmth and dry, updating various bits and pieces on the computer, including the web sites I run. I had intended to do an awful lot more but it was surprising how long this IT stuff took. Computers were great time-wasters and I was of the opinion, having worked in IT all my life, life was much simpler without them. As for smart phones and tablets, I wouldn't give them the time of day.

Sunday 13th December: What started off a promising day soon turned wet again. It must have known we were going out. Fortunately, we didn't go far, as it turned out.

Rachel had brought her mum back home the previous day and stayed overnight to go to the Christingle service at the church. The three of us were seconded to help with fire

duty when the Christingle candles were lit and paraded round the church by the children, all members of the Greenmount Scout Group, in uniform and their parents. Fortunately, the whole, enjoyable celebration of Christmas passed without incident and, much to the disappointment of one adult member of the Scout Active Support group, it was not necessary to throw a bucket of water over anyone.

Earlier, I had repaired the electric (battery-operated, quartz) clock fixed in a bedside lamp (not battery operated) and we had yet another item for our car boot stock. Roll on March 2016.

Returning home, I decided to tackle the renewal of Norton Internet Security, due in 20 days' time. Norton was asking £49.99 to renew the product for up to three computers for one year or £89.99 for two years. There was also the offer to move to Norton Security deluxe, the new product for up to five devices for the same cost. Had I not stopped the automatic renewal on the Norton account web site, this would have been processed automatically. I decided to check the cost of Norton products on the Internet and PC World was offering Norton Security for five devices at £24.99.

I contacted Norton support and negotiated a Norton Security deluxe licence for two years for £69.98. I would have to remove Norton Internet Security and replace it with Norton Security, the new product, when the present licence expired but that was no problem. It all sounds a lot more complicated than it was but, then, my life's like that.

Monday 14th December: The plan was to spend most of the day converting a second VHS tape to DVD for a friend, which I had promised to do before Christmas, having given him the first one some months earlier. I was going to model this on the earlier one until I discovered, having moved files around on the PC, none of the files required linked to the DVD configuration. I had to start from scratch, reconstructing two DVDs I had produced before, one for me and one for my friend and it took me all day to produce the first of these owing to the fact that I had forgotten how to do it, not having used the software for some time.

Tuesday 15th December: I successfully reconstructed the second of the two DVDs I had produced earlier in the year, the process being much quicker than the previous day, now being familiar with the software once more.

I also spent a little time looking at Windows Media Centre and its future under Windows 10, which was none at all. Microsoft had retired WMC and since I relied on it heavily, I was not happy and had thus far boycotted Windows 10.

I did find a web site that suggested a mechanism for making WMC work under Windows 10 but this technique was not supported by Microsoft and it was not clear whether the programme guide would still be available. An article on the PC World web site was quite discouraging about the concept of modifying Windows 10 in this way so I gave them a piece of my mind and rubbished Microsoft at the same time. I know how to win friends and influence people.

I did perform three useful tasks too. I made and printed a Christmas card with a yoga theme for Jenny to take to her yoga class on the coming Thursday. Jenny had been tasked with collecting money to buy the group's instructor a present, which she had done and she needed a card for everyone to sign.

The second was to repackage the Star Sindy Home Rachel had when she was very young and which had become a collector's item, fetching anything up to £150. I had been gluing a couple of items that had been broken and which, after repair, looked as good as new and checking all the bits were in the box so the house could be reassembled by the purchaser. The strategy was to have a stall at the Antique and Collector's Fair at the Old School at Easter 2016.

The final task was to print off a discount voucher for The Bull's Head Toby Carvery, just across the main road, where Jenny was having an evening out with the girls.

Rachel joined me for the evening and we settled down to watch a couple of old Agatha Christie DVDs starring Margaret Rutherford and a host of other up and coming actors at that time, including a very young Richard Briers and a very young James Bolam.

I also managed some more development of my revised web site, the plan being to publish the new version by the end of the year.

Wednesday 16th December: We had a very late start and it was almost lunchtime before I was firing on four cylinders. Unfortunately, I was modelled on six but I was of the opinion that two had gone a bit rusty. It wasn't surprising with all this wet weather – yet another dull, wet, depressing day.

I sort of potted round and continued the redevelopment of my web site until early afternoon when we prepared to set off for Sheffield. The plan was to return the TV set I had repaired for Jenny's niece, Tracey and to go for an evening meal with Jenny's brother, Wilf and his wife, Anne. The preparation took longer than anticipated and we set off just before the start of the school run.

Traffic was not too bad until we reached the end of the M67, where we ended up in a half-hour queue to drive through Mottram and the villages leading to the Woodhead Pass.

What on earth possessed the planners to build the M67 from Manchester and terminate it at the foot of the Pennines where it turned into a normal single carriageway road defies any conceivable logic. Towards the end of the motorway, three lanes were squeezed into two and then, at the roundabout, the principle was that the left lane went straight on and the right lane turned right, which seemed quite sensible. Unfortunately, traffic joined the roundabout from the right to join the motorway traffic going straight on, some traffic used the right lane to do a 360 at the roundabout to try to beat the queue in the left lane and there were three sets of traffic lights in Mottram that caused queues. The result was a complete disaster.

Motorists had been campaigning for years for the M67 to be extended to provide a second trans-Pennine route to the M62 and this was one circumstance where, given the volume of traffic using the route, I agreed this was needed. What was more, the old LNER railway tunnel under the Pennines could form the basis of providing an all-weather route for the M67 to join the M1 around the Pennistone area and minimising the impact on the environment.

The alternative would be to move the bulk of the traffic back onto the railways and to re-establish the old LNER track, one of the issues there being the steep gradients involved, actually used in the old days to generate electricity on the downhill stretches using

regenerative braking. Nonetheless, this would be a much preferred option given the political will to do so.

Be all that as it may, we arrived at our destination and I set up and tuned in the TV with Andy's (Tracey's partner's) help.

We arrived at Anne and Wilf's house about 7 p.m. and went to the Meadow Farm at Ecclesfield. In the past, meals there had been reasonable. On this occasion, it was very disappointing. Jenny's salmon portion was almost invisible and her boiled, buttered potatoes looked like they had been left over from the previous week and warmed up, being very soft and discoloured inside. The service was dreadful. We had to ask for our table to be cleared after the main course and when the sweets arrived, Jenny's ice cream came first. The bottom scoop in the dish had just about melted by the time it arrived and she had eaten it all before the remaining three sweets arrived and even then only after asking for someone to find out what had happened to them.

I would strongly advise giving the Meadow Farm at Ecclesfield a wide berth and, if this is typical of the chain(s) of pubs run by Greene King, it might be a good idea to keep clear of all of them.

If you want really good food in that area, try Le Bistro at Wentworth. You will have to book in advance and I recommend it. Good food is not about cheap food or making as much profit as possible. It's about giving good service and value for money, something most modern pubs and restaurants fail to grasp. In fact, it is a principle most modern businesses in general fail to grasp.

A late night run across the Pennines saw us home shortly before midnight.

Thursday 17th December: Another late start foiled our plan to nip into Bury to buy Rachel's Christmas present.

Mike popped round for a chat. I had not seen him since before my operation so there was much to discuss and that ate into early afternoon.

We had a quick snack and a cup of tea before Jenny disappeared off to her yoga class. I continued my computer work and had an opportunity to listen to more Jazz CDs. I didn't, though. I needed peace and quiet to continue the redevelopment of my web site.

Friday 18th December: We set off on our usual grocery shopping trip to Unicorn and Waitrose with a detour to Bury to buy Rachel a Christmas present. Ernest Jones had an offer on Chamelia charms, selling three for the price of two and we bought three of the ones Rachel had put on her wish list.

The drive to Bury was horrendous with long queues of traffic heading towards Bury. I couldn't help wondering why all these people were not at work. The subsequent drive to Unicorn round the M60 was not too bad once we had bypassed the idiots on the A56 to Prestwich.

We arrived at Unicorn much later than usual and it was our biggest grocery bill there ever as far as I could recall.

The A56 to Waitrose at Broadheath was quite busy and, once again, adorned with drivers who I could only assume had escaped from some less-than-secure mental institution. Despite their treating the road like a dodgem circuit, we arrived in one piece and had a late lunch. That was followed by another mammoth grocery shop, the bill being mitigated by a £20 voucher we had received.

The drive home on the M60 at about 4ish was a nightmare and being quite tired, for the first time since I retired from work, I think, I lost my temper with stupid, impatient drivers who seemed to risk life and limb to gain a three or four vehicle advantage and, to make matters worse, in the dark.

I had decided well before this that the next vehicle I purchased would be fitted with video-recording equipment front and rear and I would send recordings of dangerous manoeuvres and speeding motorists to the chief constable demanding that the drivers be prosecuted.

Arriving home safely, we unpacked the car and I was allocated the task of washing all the dirty dishes while Jenny put away the groceries. After that, I poured myself a beer Jenny had left for me on the worktop. Unfortunately, it wasn't the cold one out of the fridge. It was one she had taken out of the grocery bag and had intended to put away in the cupboard but she didn't bother to tell me this. I suggested she shouldn't contemplate a job as a bar maid.

I sat down to relax and drink my beer, feeling more like falling asleep than anything else. Jenny, meanwhile, prepared the organic brown trout and vegetables for tea.

Saturday 19th December: After the morning chores, I strolled across to the chemist to collect the next month's issue of my daily drugs. Actually, I was not doing too badly, being on only two tablets a day, one to keep my stomach acid under control, with varying degrees of success, suffering from a hiatus hernia and the other to ensure my waterworks flowed smoothly, suffering from benign prostatic hyperplasia or in English, an oversized prostate that was squeezing the urethra. I hope you understood all that because there may be questions later on.

I spent the rest of the morning trying to locate suppliers of various organic products and, while I found the odd item at one or two outlets, none seemed to stock more than one, making postage and packing prohibitive.

I gave up for the present and went to my desktop to update the village web site, which, for once was quite quick and simple, there being no new events to add. Unfortunately, Christine had called round earlier with an updated list of activities in the Old School and the separate update of that information took all afternoon, raising more questions for Christine, so I was unable to publish the update on the live web site for the present.

After a quick salad tea, we went to the church in the torrential rain and arrived fairly well drenched for the evening Christmas concert given by the Ramsbottom Choral Society and Orchestra. It was an enjoyable evening and when we left for home, it had stopped raining.

We rounded off the evening with a home-made, organic, gluten-free mince pie and a welcome cup of tea, for which we had not had time earlier. Only coffee was available in

church, during the concert interval.

Sunday 20th December: I was up at 8:30, the alarm having been set for 8 a.m., with the intention of calling my sister, Edith, in NZ on Skype. Unfortunately, she was not online so we had breakfast and then I relaxed catching up on the last two episodes of I'm Sorry I'll Read That Again, being rebroadcast by BBC Radio 4 Extra. It's a pity they did not have the original recordings made in 1969 instead of ones with bits missing.

After that, it was chore time, washing the pots from the previous evening meal and breakfast, followed by putting out the general refuse for collection the following day, a day early this Christmas week.

It was not a bad day and the sun was out so I decided to tackle the cuttings from the old apple tree I had started to demolish before my operation and which I had left lying on the grass at the side of the house. The idea was to trim them, cut them up and use the good bits for firewood.

I put the car on the road to give me room to work on the drive and apart from a break for dinner, I was at it until about 5 p.m. That is when disaster struck.

I reversed the car back down the drive and missed. The offside rear wheel went over the stone wall that curves round at the top of the drive and the car came to rest with the sill on the wall and the rear wheel hanging in mid air. I was not pleased.

Fortunately, I had some wooden planks on the side of the drive, under the car port. Also, I just had enough room to put the jack under the rear jacking point and, kneeling in the dark on the wet path, having had a couple of heavy showers late in the afternoon, I was able to raise the car sufficiently to stack the planks under the rear wheel with Jenny's help so that the wheel was almost level with the wall. It was then a case of getting in the car and driving it forward. Success! I was mobile again. I decided to inspect the damage the following day.

Although this was an unfortunate incident, it could have been worse. I had been contemplating replacing the car and it could have happened in the new car. Also, it could have been throwing it down with rain because more heavy rain was forecast.

I came in and had a beer.

Monday 21st December: Another 8 a.m. start had the previous night's pots washed before breakfast and about half of them done before Jenny came downstairs, not that I expected her up and running that early.

After clearing and washing the breakfast pots, I went outside to inspect the car in the daylight, what there was of it, aided with a wind-up torch. The external bodywork showed no signs of the previous evening's incident and further inspection underneath confirmed that the only damage was a scraping of the under-seal wax coating on a small section of the sill support and a slight scrape on the outer edge of the rear trailing arm support. There was no sign of any serious damage and it was a case of taking it into the body shop at the earliest opportunity to have it touched up. While there, there were a few other items that needed attention, given its age.

The rains were back and the plan to walk up to the dentist with Jenny for her three-monthly clean and polish appointment was abandoned in favour of using the car.

Apart from that brief excursion, I spent the day finishing off my web site redesign and publishing it. Then I started adding the remaining bulk of the pictures I took over a year ago in New Zealand.

Tuesday 22nd December: It was another wash out and I continued the task I had started the previous day, having remembered that I had not reset the date and time in my camera for new Zealand and as such, the timing of the pictures was 13 hours behind what it should have been. Since I had downloaded the photographs by date, you can probably imagine the complex task I had of sorting this out. Or perhaps not.

Wednesday 23rd December: We had decided to do another grocery shop before Christmas and this was the day for it. I was not looking forward to the traffic, crowds and queues. On the positive side, the schools had finished for Christmas. Unfortunately, that meant people had more freedom to shop and most of them did that using their cars since our public transport system had been decimated since privatisation.

The experience was not as bad as I had expected. Asda, Unicorn and Waitrose were all busy but the traffic was actually better than usual and the only minor inconvenience was having to park on the road a short walk from Unicorn because there was a long queue of vehicles waiting for a space in the limited car park. We borrowed one of the Unicorn shopping trolleys to convey our purchase to the car.

We called at Matthew and Carrie's house on the way home and arrived back about 6 p.m. to discover that the vertical blind on the right-hand, living-room window was no longer so. The right-hand, rawl plug had come loose. Also, one of the set of lights on the Christmas Tree was not working.

I decided a glass of wine was in order.

Thursday 24th December: Plan A was to walk down to Bury for a few last-minute items. The heavy, overnight rain was still persisting down and we decided against it. Plan B would have been to take the car but since traffic was likely to be horrendous, we invoked that very rare Plan C. We stayed at home and I tackled the vertical blind and the faulty tree lights.

Have you ever noticed that when you start one job it creates several others? I removed the blinds from the rail and in so doing one of the loops that attach to the hooks on the blind rail broke, having perished. Also, most of the edges of the runners on which the hooks were affixed had also perished, crumbled and dropped off. We had a lot in common.

I eventually removed the rail and we decided it was in need of replacement. Jenny suggested it should wait until we redecorated the lounge again, which seemed like being some time off.

I unscrewed the two supporting clips and removed both rawl plugs, coating each with a generous amount of superglue and replacing them in the holes, hoping that would do the trick. Since I was pushing these upwards and even superglue is subject to the law of

gravity, I took the precaution of wearing plastic gloves, laying a piece of kitchen roll on the sill and hammering the plugs home gently with a small hammer. I left them to set.

The mess of crumbled plastic I had created on the carpet warranted a good vacuuming and I took the opportunity to play with the new Dyson Animal Ball. The animal didn't seem to mind.

Of course, you can't just vacuum a small part of a fitted carpet and I ended up doing the whole lounge, or as much of the carpet I could access, moving the odd bit of furniture around, resulting in a cleaner full of obnoxious-looking grit, grime and dust. What a lovely way to spend Christmas Eve.

After a brief lunch, it was time to investigate the problem with the Christmas Tree lights. I checked the fuse in the plug and that was alright. I then started to systematically check every bulb. Normally, this was a set that remained lit if one bulb failed, so it was odd none of the bulbs were lit. I found one suspect bulb and replaced it but that did not solve the problem. I eventually located a loose bulb and the set burst into life. A thorough retest of the bulb I had removed proved it to be working after all and it went in the spares box.

My next allocated task was to tidy up my bits and pieces I had left on the coffee table. That done, I was back at my computer, writing this drivel.

We watched "Carols from King's" and then had the usual Christmas-eve, Chinese, take-away meal and settled down to watch various recorded TV programmes.

Friday 25th December: I refitted the lounge vertical blind and then updated the village web site. After that, I returned to adding the pictures of New Zealand to my web site until the traditional turkey dinner was ready. After that and several glasses of wine, my recollection of events became somewhat hazy.

Saturday 26th December: This was a good day to remain indoors. After all the recent, incessant, torrential rain in the northwest, there was severe flooding along many rivers in Lancashire, Yorkshire and Cumbria, including the local river Irwell and at Summerseat, part of the Waterside Restaurant collapsed into the river and onto the narrow road bridge that ran alongside. Being part of the old mill, it was built across the river and the supports gave way as the water level rose, spilling onto the road and flooding some properties. The rain continued for most of the day and I just potted round, updating the village web site and so on.

Sunday 27th December: Being a fine, sunny day (I remembered those), we went for a walk down to Summerseat to inspect the damaged pub and restaurant. The road was closed to vehicles for obvious reasons and barriers had been erected well away from the ruins on both sides of the bridge, so it was difficult to obtain any really good pictures. We called at Summerseat Garden Centre for a cup of tea and I had a cake before returning home. Jenny would have had a gluten-free cake had there been one available but they had sold out, being so busy with sight-seers.

Monday 28th December: We just managed to make it in time for the annual, community, Christmas walk, starting at the Old School at 10:30 a.m. The route took us down the Kirklees Trail, left towards Tower Farm and then right down to the old mill ruins. We

crossed the bridge over the stream and followed the path, down, past the bird sanctuary and came out on Brandlesholme Road by the old farm. We crossed over the main road and made our way down the track opposite, a little further up, to the bridge over the Irwell, at which point we took the footpath along the left bank of the Irwell, heading upstream towards Summerseat. We were greeted at the memorial gardens there by Faith with a welcome cup of warm, mulled wine or orange juice and a mince pie.

We followed the road to the junction, crossed over and headed up the lane opposite, turning left just over the stream to emerge at Woodhey, Holcombe Brook. It was here that the party divided, the majority following the road home. The less sensible of us crossed over the main road and headed up on the left bank of the stream, through Redisher Woods and then turned left to come down the track onto the main Bolton Road. We turned right along the road and took the second footpath on the left which took us through some fields to the corner of the golf course and we followed the path through the golf course back to Greenmount. Needless to say, this latter part of the walk from Holcombe Brook to Greenmount was the wettest and muddiest. We had been out for a good 2½ hours and I reckoned we had covered about five miles.

Having removed our wet weather gear and boots and cleaned all the mud off the kitchen floor, we had some lunch.

I spent the afternoon downloading the pictures I had recently taken from my camera and adding them to my and the village web sites.

Tuesday 29th December: I completed three tasks successfully, two of them being productive. After breakfast, I washed the pots, as usual. I spent about an hour on the radio Times crossword 51. Having struggled with it for almost two weeks, I finally managed to make some progress and completed about half of it before it was suggested I should go out into the fresh air and sunshine to cut up some of the wood that had been lying under the car port, making the drive look more like a junk yard, not that the sun actually shone under the car port. This I did and, after a short while, Jenny came out to bag up the wood I had cut.

We broke off for lunch about a quarter to three and it was beginning to turn dull and cold. I managed to finish off the crossword before going back out to tidy up, again with Jenny's help. We had acquired another two full bags of wood for the fire and started a third in the short time we had spent outside.

Jenny had also hung out a load of washing to dry and finished that off in the dryer as well as tidying up the raised beds, one of which was her fresh herb garden and then prepared a very nice lasagne for tea.

Wednesday 30th December: After a somewhat late start we decided to drive to Bury, clad in waterproofs and wellies. The rain was not as persistent as expected, making us look a trifle overdressed.

We parted company behind Bury market. Where better, you may ask. Jenny went her separate way to the market, a new charity shop she found and the pound stores while I went to purchase some more external hard drive storage from PC World. I drove on to Halfords for some air freshener for the car, which had been smelling rather nasty of late and we did not know why. I found some spray that said it had a Fresh Linen fragrance,

suitable for carpets, upholstery and just about all other surfaces. It lied. I sprayed it liberally inside the car and it stank worse than before. I came to the conclusion we needed to clean it well inside with disinfectant.

Braving the obnoxious odour, with the windows down (fortunately, it had stopped raining), I drove on to the body shop to see if they could repair the damage to the underside of the car and tackle one or two other body related items for me – on the car that was. Unfortunately, the chap was not in until the following Monday.

I had arranged to meet Jenny in the Tesco car park. What a romantic I was. Having parked the car, it occurred to me I also needed to go to the market for a spare bulb for one of the Christmas light sets and I telephoned Jenny to arrange to meet her.

We met up in the shopping centre and found the electrical stall in the market. The chap did not have the type of bulb we wanted, everybody having been forced to switch to LED lights now to save electricity. He did have a box of assorted odds and ends and I found some coloured mini-screw lights which I took off his hands for a couple of quid. I thought they might fit another old set I had.

Feeling peckish, our next stop was Costa Coffee in Tesco and then a quick jaunt round the store before making our way home for tea.

Thursday 31st December: Another year was almost over and at least I had a record in this diary of events of where the time had gone, not that I seemed to have achieved a great deal.

It was time to perform the end of year task of shredding financial documents no longer required from seven or more years ago and assessing the end of calendar year finances. The income for December received a bit of a boost from JLT paying my SMS Pension a day early, i.e. today. Given the festive circumstances, it was probably just as well.

Meanwhile, I had started using the first of the two portable hard drives I had acquired the previous day and I was busy backing up two existing 1 Tb drives onto it. The plan was to duplicate this information on the second drive I had purchased to free up the two 1 Tb drives. I then planned to use one of the free drives to back up a third 1 Tb drive so I had two copies of everything.

If you are paying attention, you will have spotted that would leave me with one free 1 Tb drive. I planned to use it to image Jenny's lap top hard drive in case I ever needed to recover it. This technique was similar to the one I had deployed on the other machines that had spare hard drives.

We had a quiet New Year's Eve, just the two of us and Jenny retired before midnight, not feeling too well. I stayed up to watch the fireworks at midnight in London (I had an excellent pair of binoculars but the TV was better) and finished off the back up I had started earlier in the day before retiring.

I close this year's account of life on earth, well the Greenmount bit of it anyway, wishing all of you reading this a very Happy New Year.