

Greenmount December 2020

Tuesday, 1st December 2020

I finished off tidying up the TV programmes we had watched for the past nine or so days and backed up my media.

I was going to go outside and wash the car since it was a nice, sunny, if somewhat cold, morning but Jenny wanted a couple of jobs doing.

Having put out the bins last evening for emptying today, I brought the empty ones back down the drive and picked up a roll of food recycling bags Jenny had requested from our team of refuse collectors and which was lying in the middle of the drive.

I pinned the notice for our village window display on the post Dave Archer had hammered into our front lawn, with my permission, in readiness for the hordes flocking to view the window.

My last outdoor task was to put out Jenny's washing line in the hope it would at least partially dry some of her washing.

On re-entry, my first indoor task was to track down a chap to repair the tumble dryer. I found the telephone number of a local man and left a message for him on his mobile phone.

I had been intending to let the garage know of the additional work required as part of the annual service and MOT in January and had kept forgetting to do so. I worked through the maintenance schedule and wrote a letter of what was due, intending to drop it in at the garage as we passed tomorrow on our way out, grocery shopping.

I put a lamp in the window, ready to shed some light on the nativity in the evening.

It was time for lunch and I took a leisurely break, reading more of the last issue of Private Eye, a must for anyone who wanted to know the true facts about current affairs instead of the propaganda, half-truths, inaccuracies and outright lies peddled by the average journalist and politician.

After lunch, I had a call from my GP, Sanjay, to discuss my reflux problem. He wanted me to undertake a test for the presence of a nasty bacterium in my stomach which (a) required me to collect a stool test kit from the surgery and (b) to abstain from taking the Esomeprazole tablets for two weeks or, failing that, as long as I could stand without medication. Meanwhile, he would prescribe another month's supply of tablets – just in case.

Being the beginning of another month, I needed to update my web site with last month's blog and a new advertisement for the sale of our piano. I also made the corresponding changes to version 4 of the web site, still very much work in progress.

By 5 p.m. there was no sign of our British Gas engineer to service our boiler. I checked the BG web site. Apparently, our appointment was for 19th January 2021. I assumed I had made a mistake in my diary entry.

I finished off my day by switching on the lights for the first day of our window display and editing some TV recordings ready for viewing.

Wednesday, 2nd December 2020

We set off grocery shopping at about 8:20 a.m. Traffic was heavy all the way to Unicorn in Chorlton and we arrived just as the store was opening to the elderly and those with special needs at 9:30. Jenny went in while I stayed in the car listening to a CD of Louis Armstrong and Jack Teagarden.

We had called at Finney's Garage on the way to drop off my letter about the extra work that needed doing as part of the annual service and MOT in January. I waited in the car while Jenny went in and delivered my letter.

Our journey from Unicorn to Waitrose in Broadheath was not too bad and the shopping there went well, if a trifle expensive this week. Could that be because I had bought a bottle of 10-year-old Glenfiddich, on offer at £29? I was going to buy a bottle of Talisker, on offer at £25 but, strangely, it didn't say what age it was on the box or on the bottle inside.

The traffic coming home, in the early afternoon, was also heavy and I wondered whether the volume of heavy lorries on the road, both this morning and this afternoon, was anything to do with the country coming out of the pandemic "lockdown" and regions moving back into their respective "tiers", meaning that retail shops and restaurants, including pubs serving meals, could open again.

Nevertheless, the complete mismanagement of the pandemic by our inept politicians had

- virtually bankrupted the country
- resulted in the closure of some major retail chains, of which Debenhams was the latest
- put at least a quarter of a million people out of work and, more realistically, by the time it would be over, double that figure
- made a lot of people very rich, most notably some with very close connections to the ruling political party.

All I could say was "Don't blame me. I didn't vote for them." But I digress.

On the way home, I called at the health centre in Tottington to collect my bowel testing kit after my telephone consultation with my GP, Sanjay, yesterday.

It was 3:30 by the time Jenny had put the groceries away, we'd had a late lunch and we had washed the dishes. I decided to start looking through the TV listings for next week.

Thursday, 3rd December 2020

Routine jobs like dishwashing and tidying were followed by me putting the finishing touches to cleaning the lounge, having forgotten to dust the light fittings which were covered in dust and the odd cobweb and omitted to clean the door to the entrance hall.

I had a quick look for an organic turkey for Christmas dinner. Marks and Spenser, from which we normally ordered our turkey, were sold out. Tesco had no delivery or click and collect slots left. Sainsbury's turkeys were a bit on the small side. Waitrose turkeys were quite expensive, as were those at a couple of farm shops. We decided to give up and wait to see what large joints we could purchase in store.

I helped Jenny with squeezing an orange and a lemon into her dried fruit for her Christmas cake to add flavour and moisture. She left her cake to soak overnight and then we had lunch.

The man to whom I had eventually spoken (Rick, according to the website I found) about repairing the tumble dryer and who I was expecting around lunchtime didn't turn up. Nor did he contact me to let me know he could not come. Seemingly, he was not that reliable and not particularly professional.

I spent what was left of the afternoon working through the rest of the TV listings.

Friday, 4th December 2020

The weather was foul so we didn't exactly leap out of bed at the crack of dawn. We had planned to go for a potter round Ramsbottom but we decided to stay in and keep dry and warm.

I finished off listing the TV recordings for the coming week and then searched for instructions for fitting the new drive belt to the dryer.

I found the web site <https://www.how-to-repair.com/help/replace-vented-tumble-dryer-belt-aeg-electrolux-zanussi-etc/>, watched the video and followed the instructions.

What a load of proverbial. No matter how I tried, I couldn't get the drum to move backwards to create the gap at the front of my AEG Lavatherm 37320 Electronic dryer, as in the video. The back of the frame did seem to have some play in it though, so I decided to investigate further.

I had already removed the top and both sides and all the screws holding the back in place.

I removed the cover on the back to reveal the thermostat and the fan and removed both of those. I also removed the three screws in the middle that held the drum mount in place and that created a gap at the back, with Jenny holding up the drum to take the strain off the front. That enabled me to slide off the old belt and slide on the new one.

I reassembled the back of the dryer and then had a look at feeding the belt round the tensioning roller and the motor driveshaft pulley. It was a case of working out how to

feed the belt round the two so it would be in tension using the tensioning spring attached to the motor, which was easier once I removed the end of the spring from the chassis.

Having positioned the belt correctly, the challenge was to reattach the spring, which took some doing.

I reassembled the dryer, having removed the 17 years or so of accumulated fluff using the vacuum cleaner as I dismantled it and it was back in operation.

I finished at about 5 p.m.

Saturday, 5th December 2020

The good news was the dryer was working fine.

The bad news was that there was some water on the kitchen floor in front of the sink and further investigation found water on the bottom shelf of the unit under the sink.

We mopped up the floor and removed all of the cleaning items from inside the unit, including the upper shelf. We mopped up inside the unit as well.

There was no obvious sign of a leak and painstaking examination of all the joints and valves revealed that water was seeping out of the valve of the isolator in the hot water supply. The valve was fully open and I tried turning the screw slightly as though to close the valve but that didn't stop the seepage. I put an old yoghurt carton under the isolator to catch the drops.

I did contemplate replacing the isolator but then decided to leave that to a British Gas engineer since I thought our pipe-work was covered in my Home Care contract.

We left the isolator to seep away as we headed for Ramsbottom in the car, our main objective to purchase some Christmas cards from one of the charity shops, which we did. Apart from that, despite all five charity shops being open, our journey was a waste of time.

I finished off putting in the TV programmes to record for the coming week and we had a late lunch.

I logged in to book a British Gas plumber to fix my seeping isolator valve. I thought I'd better check my cover first and it was just as well I did. My cover was for the boiler, controls and central heating system only. It did not cover my hot water supply, so I would have to fix it myself.

I listened to a couple of old Beyond Our Ken recordings while updating the documentation for my revised version of my web site.

Rachel arrived as Jenny was preparing tea.

Sunday 6th December 2020

I was having trouble shaking off my drowsiness when I awoke recently and I felt particularly groggy this morning. I was of the opinion that the central heating didn't help, making the room nice and warm in the early morning.

I occupied myself with various tasks on the computer and started to take another look at the development of the revised version of my web site, requiring some more Java programming.

At about 3:30 p.m. Rachel suggested we all go for a walk to look at all the 24 Christmas windows various residents in the village had decorated to produce a display on a chosen theme, ours being "Away in a Manger". We decided not to put on the lights on our Christmas tree or to illuminate our display while we were out since they posed a potential fire risk.

The stroll round the village took three hours, Rachel taking pictures on her mobile phone at each of the locations. That proved difficult in some places and she decided she would repeat the exercise with her camera.

Needless to say we had a late tea.

Monday, 7th December 2020

I started off by editing some TV recordings from last evening and early this morning before heading off to Asda at Pilsworth in search of an organic Turkey for Christmas.

We had a look round the new, large Home Bargains at Pilsworth first and picked up a few domestic items there before driving to the other side of the retail park to Asda.

The visit to Asda was more or less a waste of time. There was very little organic food at all and the Yellowtail Chardonnay was back in stock – at £7 a bottle. No-way was I paying that price for it.

After lunch at home, I found a large, organic turkey at Waitrose that we could collect, the snag being that the only slots left for collection were Monday, 21st. I placed the order for it.

I continued my editing of TV programmes and then updated my accounts. After that I dealt with my E-mails, one of which was a reminder to put out my waste paper bin for emptying tomorrow, which I rushed out to do.

An update to this diary took me to 5 p.m., almost time for the evening quiz shows on BBC TV (Pointless and House of Games).

I wasn't sure how many of the Pointless programmes were repeats but I didn't seem to have remembered much because I still wasn't doing very well with some of the questions. Sport, in particular, just seemed to switch off my brain.

Tuesday, 8th December 2020

We were not up early and we spent almost all of the day cleaning the cooker. Jenny did the scrubbing and washing while I cut new pieces of foil to line the hob, comprising four bays of burners, being a range gas cooker. I also cleaned all the grease off the left oven door using the razor-blade scraper I deployed on the log fire glass, having fitted a new blade.

I noticed the rubber seal on the door was broken so I ordered a new one from the same place as last time for the other oven door, a company on Amazon, over two years ago. The price of £20 had risen to £26, an increase of 30% in two years – profiteering or what? Still, it was the same price as elsewhere so there was not much one could do about it – except buy a better range cooker than the Rangemaster Professional Plus, like a Miele if they made one, next time.

Wednesday, 9th December 2020

We had a morning's outing grocery shopping at Sainsbury's store at Heaton Park and Tesco at Prestwich.

Jenny called in at Home Bargains at Heaton Park for some long-burning tea lights but there were none on the shelf, as at the store at Pilsworth we visited on Monday.

We stopped off at Matthew and Carrie's house to collect a few groceries Carrie had ordered for us with their Ocado delivery and we had a quick look at the enclosure on their patio which was taking shape nicely.

Back home, gremlin number four had struck (one being the dryer drive belt, two being the leak under the sink and three being the cooker door seal). The floor under and around the dehumidifier in the conservatory was covered in water. The tank was very full but not overflowing but it was dislodged slightly. Either the drain had leaked somehow, although it had never done so before and if the tank was not positioned correctly, the dehumidifier did not work, or the temperature in the conservatory had dropped low enough overnight to cause the dehumidifier to freeze up and it had thawed out, which was more likely. If there was a probability that the temperature was likely to drop so much, we normally switched off the dehumidifier overnight.

There was an indication that the temperature had indeed dropped very low because the central heating radiators were just a little warm when we arrived back from shopping, around lunchtime, even though the central heating had been switched off by the timer. That meant the frost thermostat in the garage had overridden the timer and had switched on the heating.

After we had dealt with that, I sat down and started looking through the TV listings for next week.

I also did a little more work on the revision of my website design.

Thursday, 10th December 2020

We spent the day writing out the Christmas cards and posting them.

We walked round the village, hand-delivering those we could and called at the post office at Holcombe Brook for the stamps to send the rest further afield. The walk itself took a good couple of hours.

The remainder of the day I used to finish off picking out the TV recordings for the coming week, incorporating those Jenny had also chosen.

Friday, 11th December 2020

It took me the whole day to program the TV recordings, to tidy up the programs we had watched during the previous week and to back up my data.

Saturday, 12th December 2020

It was a dull, grey, wet day, the rain lashing at our bedroom window as we awoke, somewhat later than intended, having ignored the alarm at 7:30, when it was still dark.

A leisurely breakfast and the usual morning chores took us to almost noon. It was bathroom cleaning day and my job was to clean the stainless steel radiator. Well, it beat cleaning the elevator! (If you haven't seen the film "Dark Star", ignore the last sentence because you won't understand it.)

My next task was to remove the accumulated ice from the freezer compartment of the old Bosch fridge/freezer. First, I had to move it to clean behind it. That seemed to go well, except that the cheap and flimsy interior was falling apart and, about fifteen minutes after I had finished, the alarm sounded, indicating that the temperature inside was too high. Why it took it fifteen minutes to realise that, after I had closed the door when it had been open for the same period, was a mystery. I silenced the alarm and put it on fast freeze for a short while.

I went into the garage to see if I had a spare isolation valve to repair the small leak under the sink, requiring the existing valve to be replaced. I didn't. Wickes in Bury had them in stock and I made a mental note to call in to buy one as we went grocery shopping on Wednesday.

My late lunch comprised a piece of fruit, a cup of tea and a piece of fruit cake, since we had been up late and were planning an early tea.

I used the rest of the afternoon to edit the TV recordings that were outstanding, ready for viewing and to look for DVDs for my Christmas list. Some of them were difficult, if not impossible, to find and the Marx Brothers collection I wanted was priced at over £100 including delivery. I decided to think about that one.

Matthew informed me he had an isolating valve and Carrie arranged to drop it off the following morning on her way grocery shopping for her mum and dad.

Sunday, 13th December 2020

We tidied up the conservatory, which was something of a challenge with all the junk in there, a lot of it Jenny's car booty, some in need of repair and items from the old school jumble for testing/repair.

The objective was to create enough room for the bed-settee Matthew and Carrie had given us so we could restore our dining room to normal use (if one ignored the boxes of car booty, by the units, at the foot of the stairs).

We succeeded by moving some items into the front of the garage and stacking some in the kitchen for taking into the back of the garage when the torrential rain stopped.

We moved the bed-settee into the conservatory and our dining room reverted to more or less normal, in preparation for Christmas dinner.

Matters would no doubt improve once we restarted car boot sales and jumble sales at the old school and I finished the back bedroom.

My next job was to fit the new oven door seal that arrived while we were working on the dining room. That took more than the anticipated ten minutes because I had to clean the oven door thoroughly after removing the old, broken seal. It also made a mess of the kitchen floor, so I wiped that over around the area in front of the cooker while I was on my knees, both of us noting the whole tiled floor needed a good scrubbing.

Lunch beckoned and I updated this diary entry while Jenny prepared whatever we were having.

I whiled the afternoon away wading through the TV listings for Christmas week and picking out the recordings. Jenny had already selected items she wanted from the double-issue of the Radio Times.

Rachel arrived for tea as I was listening to this week's edition of Jazz Record Requests, which wasn't bad. There were two good tracks played, one being Benny Goodman's band's rendering of "We'll Meet Again" with vocals from a young Peggy Lee, recorded in 1942 and the second a more modern offering from 2019 in New Orleans traditional style from Tuba Skinny called "Say Si Si". That was from their latest CD, "Quarantine Album". I had been aware of this relatively new band, playing traditional jazz, for a few months, having had a request of one of their tracks played on JRR some months ago and it was refreshing to hear that the jazz scene was not dominated by modern rubbish that was offensive to the auditory senses, even though the majority of requests on JRR would make it seem so. My view was that Jazz was a musical style that was meant to be enjoyed, not admired for its technique.

Monday, 14th December 2020

I hadn't slept that well when the alarm woke me at 6:30 a.m., probably because I knew I needed to get up early, to put on the heating in good time for Rachel's shower.

I went back to bed and dozed until nearly 9 a.m., coming downstairs in my dressing gown to see Rachel off to work and join Jenny, also in her dressing gown, for breakfast.

I wasn't feeling that lively and we sat in the lounge for a while. I dealt with the recorded TV programmes from last evening and earlier this morning, one of which had failed to record for its full duration, probably because I made a mistake with the end time. I also dealt with my E-mails, one of which was from Tony Tickle who had put his pictures of the village Christmas window displays on Dropbox, which we viewed.

Jenny then suggested she went for her shower while I cut my hair and trimmed my beard before my shower. I trimmed Jenny's hair before I disappeared into the bathroom.

It was now lunchtime. How time flew by.

It was bin collection day tomorrow and this week I had to put out the brown (food and garden waste) bin and the blue (glass, plastic and metal) recycling bin. It was raining fast again (it seemed like we hadn't seen the sun for months) and I decided to wait until it stopped.

We took advantage of a dry spell to pop across to our friendly, village health centre – friendly, that is, once the layer of impersonal, lengthy messages at the beginning of a telephone call had been penetrated and the persistent directives to use the internet to communicate with a computer instead of talking to a real person had been ignored. I had a sample for analysis to drop in and I preferred to hand it to someone rather than post it through the letter box, since one of our friends had done the latter and the sample had been lost.

I put the bins out as we returned home.

The rest of the afternoon and early evening was taken up with Jenny's application to renew her driving licence before it expired in January 2021.

I had submitted an online request for renewal on Jenny's behalf in early November and that had resulted in a request for her to complete a form and to supply a picture by post. It was that form we were going to submit, except that its submission in conjunction with the online application had a time-limit of 21 days and we had exceeded that.

We did have the original paper application form that came with Jenny's renewal reminder and we started to complete that.

The first task was to take and print her photo, which took a little while to obtain a picture with the correct dimensions.

The form was fairly straightforward until we reached the section on health and we had to declare Jenny's glaucoma in both eyes. Details of that had to be provided on a separate form, V1, which took some finding on the web page to which we were directed. The form comprised SIX pages. Perhaps the form should have been named VI. Jenny's details (name, date of birth and driver number) were required at the foot of each page.

Having provided details of Jenny's GP and of her hospital department and contact, we moved on to proof of ID.

I had to root out Jenny's birth certificate, evidence of her state pension and our marriage certificate for proof of her change of name.

Her photo remained to be signed by someone who knew her and the signatory had to complete a section of the application form to verify their identity. That was a job for tomorrow.

Tuesday, 15th December 2020

After breakfast, I continued thumbing through the double issue of the Radio Times, picking out TV recordings. By now I was into the second week of the Christmas period.

Meanwhile, Jenny tried to find someone to countersign her driving licence renewal application. Liz Kirkby, across the road, agreed to help and Jenny took her form over.

We walked up to Holcombe Brook post office where we obtained two A4 envelopes and two large-letter, first-class stamps. I stuck our address label and a stamp on one, for the return of our documents and put it with all the documentation into the other, attaching the address label for the DVLA and a stamp. We brought the envelope home to add sticky tape to the seal for added security. Unfortunately, we could not post it into a pillar-box because the envelope was too large.

After lunch, I edited a couple of TV recordings from this morning and finished off scanning the Radio Times Boxing Day pages for TV programmes to record.

I was going to tackle the leak under the sink but time was moving on swiftly and it turned very dark after the nice, sunny but cold morning. I was also feeling quite drowsy.

I had a look at the development of my revised web site. The present phase was the family tree and I needed to start writing some Java code to reformat the data in the pages generated by Family Historian, which was something of a challenge because it was a while since I wrote any Java and I had forgotten a lot of what I had learned, which wasn't much to start with.

Wednesday, 16th December 2020

We went grocery shopping to Unicorn in Chorlton and Waitrose in Broadheath. We left later than intended and traffic heading down towards Prestwich to join the M60 motorway was heavy and slow going. Covid-19 didn't seem to be picking off many drivers.

The M60 wasn't that bad when we joined it but it slowed down to a crawl very shortly afterwards, until we reached the exit for the M62 west-bound.

Despite the delays, we reached Unicorn just after it had opened and Jenny went in while I sat in the car, listening to Kenny Ball's Dixieland Christmas CD and reading the last issue of Private Eye, before purchasing the current one at Waitrose, which I started reading as I pushed the trolley round for Jenny. What an excellent publication it was.

The drive home round the M60 was horrendous in the very wet conditions, the spray making visibility quite poor. Very few vehicles had the fog lights on, though and some didn't have any lights on at all, which was asking for trouble.

We called at the post office at Brandlesholme on the way home to drop in Jenny's driving licence renewal application and had a late lunch after unpacking the groceries.

I continued to scan the TV listings for the week after Christmas for programmes to record for an hour or so and looked online for some fresh, organic cranberries to make the sauce for our traditional Christmas Day turkey dinner. I couldn't find any that were suitable in the UK, only ones that had been handled and/or packaged in an environment where they may have been contaminated with allergens, including gluten, from other food items. Why this should be the case was beyond my comprehension.

Thursday, 17th December 2020

We started our day at about 11 a.m. by delivering the latest batch of leaflets for the village community round our neighbourhood in the late morning sunshine, before the inevitable rain started, which it did at about 1:30 p.m.

By that time, we had returned home, washed the dishes from last evening and breakfast this morning, emptied the recycling and general waste into the appropriate bins and moved some frozen food from the freezing compartment of the old Bosch fridge-freezer in the kitchen into the old chest freezer in the garage, this short exercise being extended to include removing the surplus ice from around the inside top and lid of the freezer, wiping it with warm water containing a small amount of anti-bacterial liquid and drying it with a clean cloth, it was time for a lunchtime snack.

While Jenny prepared that, I went into the garage to fetch the equipment I needed to repair the leak under the sink.

After lunch I fetched in some wood to light the fire and finished off the Christmas TV listings.

Friday, 18th December 2020

We nipped into Ramsbottom for a few items. Our search for organic cranberries was unsuccessful. Plentiful had some that were pre-packed but they contained a label stating they may have been contaminated with gluten, which, for us, was a no-no.

After we had lunch at home, I put in the TV recordings for the coming week which I had catalogued from the listings.

Saturday, 19th December 2020

After the usual morning jobs, I tidied up the TV programmes we had watched the previous week and dealt with more administration work on the PC.

Rachel arrived for tea.

Sunday, 20th December 2020

Mr Scrubbit was back at the sink as usual, after a leisurely breakfast, with the dishes from tea last evening and the plates and pans from a full English breakfast this morning, a frequent Sunday treat.

That was followed by a short session with the clocks, winding and adjusting, keeping a record of the changes, trying to get both chiming clocks in synchronisation, a task that was proving most difficult.

I finally had a go at repairing the leak under the sink. That needed the isolating valve in the hot water supply to be replaced.

Having gathered all my tools and accessories, I turned off the gate valve on the hot water supply in the garage. That was hidden behind a pile of boxes full of books and jigsaws for the car boot and I had to move those first.

I placed a container underneath the lowest point on the hot water feed under the sink, conveniently fitted with a hot water feed and tap, for a supply to a washer, that was not used (ours was cold-feed only). I turned on the tap using a spanner, since there was no plastic head fitted and drained the water, turning on the kitchen sink tap to ensure all the water drained out. There was one moment of shock and surprise when Rachel turned on a tap upstairs and a load of water came out at speed but it wasn't enough to fill the container, fortunately.

I undid the compression nuts on the old fitting, which were exceedingly tight (compression fittings should not need to be so tight). That gave me enough play on the pipe-work to remove the old valve and slide in the new one. I had to use the old compression fittings to connect it. To replace them would have been a much bigger job and it was worth a try.

I tightened up the fittings and turned on the water. The front compression fitting was leaking slightly and I tightened it far more than should have been necessary because it had been over-tightened in the first place – and that was by a so-called plumber.

As I have said before, trades-people were not easy to find and ones that actually did their job well were very few and far between.

I believed I had tightened up the fitting enough to stop it leaking and left a piece of folded kitchen-roll underneath for a short while to make sure it was not leaking.

After tidying up, I dealt with some paperwork and put the renewal of my house insurance at the top of my agenda for tomorrow.

I pottered round doing some more tidying.

I cleaned and refitted the base to the unit to the right of the dryer. I had removed it to gain access to the exhaust vent so I could disconnect it before I repaired the dryer.

I also cleaned and refitted the shelf in the kitchen sink unit now I had repaired the leak.

I repaired the rustic reindeer Jenny had bought from Alistair's wood turning stall outside his home when we wandered round the village looking at the festive windows. The reindeer's neck had become detached from the body and it was a case of making the hole in the body a little deeper and applying some wood glue to the hole before pushing the neck piece back in.

I removed some unwanted files from the laptop PC and scanned a few documents.

While it had been something of a bit here and a bit there type of day, I had completed several small jobs that needed doing.

Monday, 21st December 2020

We went to the Trafford Centre in search of a few items, most importantly a Christmas present for Rachel, which we obtained from John Lewis.

We drove down to Waitrose to collect our Christmas turkey we had ordered to feed ten people, the plan being to have seven round the table on Christmas Day.

Matthew's in-laws, Bob and Marie had decided against joining us; the Covid-19 risk was too high for them and we had to agree it was probably for the best. Jenny arranged to plate up two meals for them and Marie was coming to collect them.

Matthew and Carried had also changed their plans for the same reason, the argument being that it wasn't worth the risk with a vaccine only a couple of months away. Again, we had to agree with them.

Rachel was still coming to stay with us since she came every week-end, being in our "bubble" because she lived alone.

So there would just be the three of us for Christmas dinner.

We had a late lunch at home and I dealt with a backlog of E-mails.

The news was full of the rapid spread of the new strain of Covid-19 in the London and south-east areas of the country. The news of this development had resulted in many other countries closing their borders to travellers and traffic from Great Britain, which explained the motorway messages on the electronic notice-boards advising all drivers that all routes to France were closed. That was playing havoc with freight to and from Europe which was bound to prove devastating to our economy as well as that of other European countries, particularly at this time of year. With our withdrawal from the European Union taking effect at the end of the year and with no trade deal for the future yet in place between the UK and the EU, a total disaster was looming.

It was not going to be a very merry Christmas and certainly not a happy and prosperous New Year unless someone handed out a few miracles.

On a happier note, it seemed that our village, Christmas windows had proved to be very popular and the schedule had been extended for another week. It was due to end on Christmas Eve and, instead, would now continue until the New Year.

Tuesday, 22nd December 2020

I was about to prepare to go down to Matthew and Carrie's house with my trailer to collect some wood to assemble another raised bed and timber for the bench on which to stand it, together with 3 3 x 2 concrete paving flags, when Carrie's mum, Marie, called to deliver some Christmas goodies for us and we had a chat on the doorstep.

The plan was for Matthew to come back with me to help me unload the trailer and then cycle home on his bike, which he was also going to put in the trailer.

Carrie helped Matthew load the trailer while I made sure all the car and trailer tyres were properly inflated and Carrie also gave me some diluted, windscreen-washer fluid top-up.

Carrie and Matthew followed me home in their car and they unloaded the trailer for me. Their reward was six frozen, gluten-free, mince pies to take home.

I had some lunch and filed away the receipts from yesterday's shopping and post, which was a fairly routine task, except that, this being the year end, I emptied the 2013 file, shredded the contents, emptied and lubricated the shredder and then completed the filing, including one item for the 2021 folder, for which I printed a label.

Next, having received a dubious, recorded telephone call this morning informing me that there had been some fraudulent activity on my debit card, I checked my accounts. All was well. I decided to let the bank know, except that their online chat service didn't work. It threw up a technical (XML) error. I telephoned them to let them know and eventually managed to speak with a real live person. I provided the telephone number of the dubious call and also, having traced the company to which the number belonged, those details as well.

I finally managed to contact my buildings and contents insurer to remove the automatic renewal on the policy in January. Miraculously, the renewal quote dropped from £370.01 to £312.20 for the same conditions but it still didn't compete with an offer I had received from elsewhere, so I decided to look at the alternative before deciding whether or not to renew my existing policy, having been with the company for eight years, my reward being, seemingly, an excess charge of £58.

I had a go at contacting the competitor to obtain the Ts and Cs for their policy, which looked like a really good offer. "Was it too good to be true?" I wondered. I ended up in a queue for ages but at least it was free-to-dial number. I was right, the flyer I received was too good to be true. The insurance worked out more than the original quote from my existing insurer and almost double that on the misleading flyer.

I wasn't going to waste any more time shopping around. I intended to renew with my existing company – after checking their Ts and Cs and arranging any necessary changes.

I turned my attention to my revision of the web site and hit a stumbling block trying to place a line at the end of each page.

Wednesday, 23rd December 2020

We went grocery shopping as usual and this week it was the turn of Sainsbury's store at Heaton Park and Tesco at Prestwich to benefit from our custom, the bulk of it at the former and, while in the vicinity, Jenny took a few minutes to nip into Home Bargains for good measure.

We called at Matthew and Carrie's house to drop off some goodies for Christmas on the way home and left them in a safe place as they were out walking.

After lunch at home, I helped Jenny a little in the kitchen and then turned my attention back to my web site development. I compromised on the positioning of the line at the bottom of each page and then added another Datacare publication to my current web site and also to my revised version.

Thursday, 24th December 2020

We had a leisurely start to the day. Following breakfast, I listened to a recording of a "Beyond Our Ken" episode from earlier this morning on BBC radio 4 Extra. It was the seasonal programme from 1960 and quite funny, certainly for those of us who lived through that age. The announcer said that the content and attitudes were somewhat dated, from which I gathered that some people might even find it offensive. What some people did not seem to grasp was that, while attitudes changed over time, we all had to accept, however unpalatable, the past did not. Having lived through that age, I could listen to and enjoy such humour in the context of the time.

After the programme finished, I washed the dishes and then togged up in thermals and waterproofs to go out to wash the car. The earlier blue sky had started to cloud over a little and there was a cool breeze which had a tendency to blow the spray from the hose pipe back at me but it didn't matter. I stayed warm and dry underneath my three layers of clothing.

It took me over two hours to prepare for this burst of enthusiasm, clean the car and tidy up afterwards.

After a quick rest and a snack, I gave Jenny some help upstairs. Before you get too excited, Jenny needed me to help put the clean bedding on our bed. That was followed by a bathroom radiator cleaning session and then assistance with putting the clean bedding on the top bunk bed, which Rachel used while the back bedroom was being decorated.

I finally sat down again at about 4 p.m. to listen to some Christmas CDs we had acquired and not yet heard.

Friday, 25th December 2020

After breakfast, we opened our presents, as usual.

My day up to our Christmas dinner was one of helping with the preparation in the kitchen in between scanning the TV listings for programmes next week. Putting in the programmes for tomorrow was all for which I had time.

Apart from dinner for Rachel, Jenny and me, we had arranged to prepare dinner for Matthew's in-laws, Bob and Marie and they came down to collect it when it was ready. Were it not for Covid-19, they and Matthew and Carrie would be joining us at our home.

As it was, Matthew and Carrie dropped by in the morning to wish us a Merry Christmas and then went home to spend Christmas on their own.

After dinner, we played a couple of games. The first was a beetle drive, which Rachel had never played and the second was Cluedo.

Saturday, 26th December 2020

My morning started late with programming the TV recordings for the coming week. That was followed by a time-consuming assault on my e-mails. The latter task resulted in two updates to my web site, all of the changes to be published on 1st January 2021.

We went for another stroll round some of the village, Christmas windows so that Rachel could take some more pictures to improve on the previous ones and a picture of the window she missed out last time.

We played trivial pursuit when we came home.

Sunday, 27th December 2020

We were up late and after the usual tidy-up after breakfast, I did a little work on the computer and then we finished off the game of trivial pursuit and played monopoly.

Monday, 28th December 2020

Jenny and Rachel ended up playing Beetle Drive again while I had a long session downloading the pictures of all the Christmas Windows Tony Tickle had taken and posted on Dropbox.

Tuesday, 29th December 2020

Rachel went back to work.

Jenny went to have her hair done.

I started filling in the holes in the back bedroom walls and stopped work, just before Jenny returned, for lunch, resuming shortly afterwards. Progress was slow. The really large hole to the right of the window needed filling in stages and would probably need two more days to finish off after I put in a base layer. The two strips of scrim I almost finished, with just a small piece at the bottom to do. I left off at about 3:30, just before it started to go dark.

I had received a response to my query to “We Buy Books” via Amazon about a second-hand box set of Marx Brothers films and, having had confirmation that the DVDs should be alright and that the box set, being in PAL format, should play on my Region 2 player (why such a restriction exists I shall never understand), I placed my order.

I also had a look for some organic, raw, cane sugar and, to my surprise, there it was on the Waitrose web site for online orders. So why wasn't it on the shelves in the store at Altrincham, like it used to be? I sent an E-mail to customer services asking that question.

Wednesday, 30th December 2020

We went grocery shopping to Unicorn in Chorlton and Waitrose in Broadheath, via Tesco in Bury, where I filled up the car with diesel.

We called at Matthew and Carrie's house on the way back to drop off a couple of items and collect a few things Carrie's mum had given her for us. What a complicated life we led.

Our last port of call before home was Home Bargains, on the way home from Bury.

After lunch at home, I dealt with my e-mails and the accounts, confirming that our monthly spend was on the right side of the anticipated amount with only one day remaining. I then started thumbing through the TV listings for the coming week to pick out items for recording.

Thursday, 31st December 2020

As another year drew to a close, two major disasters loomed.

The first was the Coronavirus epidemic which had claimed over 70,000 lives this year, not counting those who had died as a result of not being able to obtain the care they needed because of the effect of the epidemic on the provision of treatment and the availability of hospital beds. All of this could have been avoided if our Government leadership had acted quickly and decisively in January/February of this year, as other countries, like New Zealand, for example, did. I sincerely hoped that the voting public did not forget this ineptitude when the next parliamentary election took place.

The second was that we formally left the EU at midnight tonight. Admittedly, we did have a trade deal, which was better than not having one but my guess was that it was not going to benefit the public; quite the reverse. The major concerns were, firstly, that we may have compromised on the fishing rights in our territorial waters, which was one of the main reasons many small fishermen voted to leave the EU in the first place and,

secondly, that our food and environmental standards and agricultural policies would be adversely affected because it would not be in this government's interest to protect and strengthen them. To maintain and improve these would compromise too many vested, financial interests and this Government relied on contributions from many rich and influential people.

Admittedly, at the time of the referendum regarding our EU membership, Jenny and I both voted to leave, on the basis our Government would have more control over our own affairs. The assumption was that they would do what was in the best interests of the people instead of what was in their own and their close allies' interests, which, on reflection, was somewhat naive. We weren't the only ones who were misled by the propaganda at the time; we were just two of the 51% who voted to leave the EU.

I started my day as last week, listening to a recording of Beyond Our Ken from BBC Radio 4 Extra, first broadcast in 1960.

That was followed by a dish-washing session and a brief spell outside in the snow, a small amount of which had fallen overnight, emptying the sorted, recycling rubbish into the appropriate bins.

I then settled down to update this diary entry and to read through it prior to publication on my web site, tomorrow.

For the rest of the afternoon, I tidied up the TV programmes we had watched over the past couple of weeks or so and backed up my files.

Rachel joined us for tea and we stayed up to see the old year out and the new year in, not that it was the usual joyous occasion.