

Greenmount January 2023

Sunday, 1st January 2023

This year started where the last one finished, with little prospect of improvement, politically or meteorologically.

In other words, it was a wet and miserable day and not a particularly productive one, mainly because we didn't rise from our slumbers very early.

The highlight of my day was discovering that my efforts to write a VBA macro in Microsoft Excel to produce a cross reference of my web site links didn't work because, although the pages look like they were coded in plain text, they were, in fact, saved in UTF-8 format which was, as far as VBA was concerned, totally different. Comparing a string of characters with identical-looking characters read from the HTML page did not prove to be a match.

While I found an explanation on the Internet, finding any code that made any sense was an entirely different matter so I logged a request on the [Stackoverflow](#) web site.

Monday, 2nd January 2023

Things were looking up. The sun was shining and I could see no clouds in the bright, blue sky from the centrally-heated living room, where I sat in several layers of warm clothing with the central heating on.

I didn't feel well. Having woken about 5 a.m. in a very hot sweat and braved the cold to visit the bathroom, it took ages for me to drop off again, which I did just before the "wake-up" alarm went off at 7 a.m. That was when the heating came on so I went back to sleep, but not for long. Various alarms went off between then and 10 a.m. as reminders for medication, some of which we ignored and the medication deferred until later. The problem then was remembering to take it. Jenny was better at that than was I.

I managed to crawl downstairs for breakfast just as Jenny had finished hers. She wasn't expecting me to appear so quickly. Neither was I. It was the next but last alarm at 9:30 that made me stir, somewhat reluctantly. I felt cold and ached all over.

I sat in the lounge finishing my cup of tea after breakfast, hence my earlier observations.

Next on the agenda was the usual pot-washing session.

Jenny and I went for a walk down the Kirklees Trail to Tottington, then up the road into Tottington and back home down Holcombe Road and through Brookside Crescent. The trail took us across the viaduct over Island Lodge on which there were several species of birds, including swans and coots. This was the lodge Bury Council had neglected and which needed a lot of expensive restoration work, something which The Tottington District Civic Society was trying to achieve and for which we were seeking funding.

I spent the afternoon working on the PC.

Tuesday, 3rd January 2023

Jenny and I had thought of going down to Bury but it was raining persistently.

Instead I ended up following Rachel down to Finney's garage where her car was receiving treatment for a slow puncture in one of her car tyres, something they had attempted to repair once before. We had also discovered it needed a new battery.

On returning home, I dealt with the minutes from the first meeting to discuss Island Lodge, updated my calendar for the next two meetings and I had a look for somewhere to celebrate Jenny's birthday with a family meal but Jenny could not decide on a venue. A decent, gluten-free restaurant was hard to find.

I resumed work on the back bedroom at last. The first job was to fill in the remaining gaps between the new skirting and the wall, with the walls being uneven.

I fetched two of Jenny's car boot tables from the garage and erected one in the back bedroom. The plan had been to put two end-to-end and then place the 4 metre coving lengths on them but after erecting one table, I discovered there wasn't enough room. There was just enough room to lay the coving on the floor, diagonally, corner to corner.

Over lunch, I pondered how to get the long lengths of coving into the back bedroom. I decided it would take three of us and a fine day, since I would have to use a route that would take the coving outside. It wasn't going to be easy and I would have to move quite a few obstacles around first. Once stored in the room, the plan was to finish the small, built-in cupboard first and then utilise the extra length that gave to the room to put up two tables end-to-end and put the coving on them to work.

After lunch, I updated this diary and then took Rachel down to Bury to collect her car.

Wednesday, 4th January 2023

I started tidying up in the lounge a little since it was looking like a dump. I didn't get very far as we went down to Bury in the car.

We parked in a disabled spot near the library and went in. I had a look at the Which publications for information on range cookers while Jenny pottered round. I didn't find much so I asked if I could use the computer to search the Which site online. My session was timed out after five minutes so I didn't achieve much. My search for a report on range cookers only came up with Leisure models and after our experience of our present cooker, I had no intention of buying another Leisure model. They were not exactly cheap and nasty, more like expensive and nasty. My search did flag up two makes I had not considered thus far, Siemens and Helena Senna.

We wandered along The Rock to Victor Wright's electrical shop where I obtained a plug with which to repair the set of Christmas tree lights for the old school.

Jenny had suggested driving down to Tesco but she decided to come home for lunch instead.

After lunch, I had another look at our kitchen refurbishment options, discovering that neither of the two new manufacturers had anything of interest. We finally settled on the Belling Farmhouse 110EI range cooker and a Kohler SS 1.5 bowl sink to replace the porcelain one we had. I also discovered that our original supplier of the kitchen we had, Paul Davies, also supplied the Belling range cooker so we planned to go and see them in Bolton.

Thursday, 5th January 2023

It was the twelfth day of Christmas and time to put away the Christmas tree for another year.

First, though, I had to leave early to take the car to Finney's garage for its annual service and MOT. That I did before breakfast.

I had arranged a courtesy car for the day, which, as expected, had very little fuel in the tank and the first task was to drive down Manchester Road to the nearby garage to put in around £10 worth of unleaded fuel. That took ages as there was a long queue of traffic heading towards Manchester and I was wondering whether the car would make it. At least it wasn't a long walk back to Finney's garage.

As luck would have it, I managed to reach the garage and put more than enough fuel in the tank for the day.

I had asked for the courtesy car in case the amount of work required on my vehicle and the delay in obtaining any spare parts needed meant it was necessary to retain it overnight, in which case we would do our weekly grocery shopping tomorrow using the courtesy car.

After breakfast, Jenny wanted to rest for a while so I caught up with a few tasks on the laptop.

I managed to finish my web cross reference coding thanks to some very useful advice on the Stackoverflow web site and I obtained a list of pages and the links they accessed in a spreadsheet so I could search the sheet for any page to find out from where it was referenced. I toyed with the idea of modifying the code to request a page and provide me with a list of pages that referenced it as well as a list of pages it referenced but that was a possible task for another day.

I started to look at what was required in order to start implementing version 4 pages of my web site piecemeal. That was more complicated than I expected and required careful planning.

Meanwhile, the chap from Finney's garage rang around mid-day to let me know my car was ready and I went down to fetch it and return the courtesy car.

Friday, 6th January 2023

I woke at about 6:30 a.m. to answer a call of nature and I decided it wasn't worth going back to bed so I washed, dressed and came downstairs and washed the dishes from last evening's meal, before preparing breakfast, for which Jenny joined me.

Our early start meant that we were on the road, grocery shopping, by 8:40 and at Unicorn about an hour later. Then disaster struck. I had forgotten my bag of equipment for having a pee. There was not much I could do except carry on.

As a result, Jenny's shopping at Unicorn took less than an hour. There wasn't much traffic on the way to Waitrose and Jenny didn't hang about there either.

On the return journey, it was a little more busy and there were a couple of dawdlers on the way back to the M60 which made life just a little frustrating. The M60 traffic was lighter than usual and we made good time back to Bury, where the road works on the ring-road were still ongoing, with one lane closed during the day. Nevertheless, we were home by about 12:30 p.m., six hours since my last toilet visit and I was in some discomfort.

Needless to say, my first port of call was the smallest room for a little light relief.

After lunch, we went to the old school to lay out our stall of electrical goods for the table-top sale the following day, calling at the newsagent on the way for the Radio Times, which had gone up in price yet again.

When we came home, I started on the TV recordings for the coming week, completing them up to and including Monday and entered those for tomorrow and Sunday before retiring for the day.

Saturday, 7th January 2023

It was another early start, at 7 a.m. We were at the old school at about 8:45 a.m. and sold about £50 worth of goods, packing up at 11:15 a.m. as the customers disappeared, even though the sale was not due to end until noon. It wasn't the nicest of days, with heavy rain in the morning.

We came home for lunch and we put away the Christmas items in the garage loft for another year.

We also tidied up the trailer of junk, destined for the tip and put in the dehumidifier I had brought home to test, which didn't work and for which spares were no longer available.

I had intended taking the general rubbish from the old school as well but I had found this morning that Graham had kindly taken it for me, which was fortunate, because my trailer was already full, mostly of electrical rubbish from the old school.

Sunday, 8th January 2023

I thought I ought to pay some attention to the house insurance since the policy was due to expire in two days' time. That proved to be something of a nightmare, trying to work out all the Ts and Cs and make sure everything was covered and which expensive items needed to be declared.

It occurred to me that an inventory of possessions would be a good idea and I took a look at what information I had already gathered. Consolidating and updating it was going to be a time-consuming job, especially when it came to putting today's replacement costs against everything. I decided the best course of action was to speak to someone before renewing my cover, with a view to proposing an upgrade, if necessary, when my inventory was complete. Just one more little job to do.

Since the rain had stopped, I went out and brought the paper recycling bin back to its resting place. It had been emptied on Friday. I took a minute to lubricate the lock on the side-passage gate with some WD40. It was stainless steel, or so it said, but there seemed to be some rust spots on it. It obviously wasn't Sheffield stainless steel; it was most probably cheap foreign rubbish, like everything was else these days.

I suggested to Jenny we could take the opportunity of a dry spell to bring in the coving from the garage and store it in the back bedroom, ready for use. I enlisted Rachel's help as well.

The plan of clearing a route via the conservatory into the dining room and opening the window on the landing to poke the end of the coving outside as it was manoeuvred into the doorway of the bedroom worked well, the only obstacle I had overlooked was that the landing window would not open fully because the top of the window was higher than the lip of the fascia board outside. That was something that occurred when the UPVC fascia was installed many years ago. Fortunately, there was just sufficient room to ease the coving far enough outside.

We brought in the 3m lengths of coving first to obtain some idea of how to manipulate the longer lengths and it helped that there were only two of those as opposed to four of the shorter ones. The 4m lengths also had a wooden support under them, which helped to keep them rigid.

I finished off my day with a backlog of scanning documents that needed to be filed. I didn't finish it all, though.

Monday, 9th January 2023

I wasn't up early and I didn't feel too well. Apart from the usual household duties, the only really productive aspect of my day was sorting out the house insurance for the coming year.

Tuesday, 10th January 2023

I got off to another slow start. I asked Matthew to order some baking items from Amazon for Jenny and finished last week's Radio Times Crossword.

Jenny started to clean the bathroom and I went to join her, starting a more thorough job and tackling the parts Jenny couldn't reach. That took care of our day with a bit left over for tomorrow.

Jenny took time out to pop round to the pharmacy/news agency and we both dealt with the engineer from British Gas who had come to give our central heating/hot water boiler its annual service.

The payment for the annual maintenance contract had still not been taken by British gas and I had contacted them earlier to make sure the engineer was still coming. I also asked the lady with whom I chatted online to sort out my account to which I did not have access as a result of the payment not being made, all down to a mistake at British Gas according to my bank. This she did but I could still not access my contract, something the technical chaps would take seven days to resolve.

Wednesday, 11th January 2023

We spent our morning in Bury as planned, pottering round various shops and, of course, Tesco, where I parked the car.

Since Curry's was in the same retail park as Tesco, I took the opportunity to pop in to see if the new Kenwood electric kettle I ordered a couple of days ago had arrived for collection. I was in luck! The delivery had just arrived and a very helpful chap called Neil said he would check if my parcel was amongst those delivered and if it was, he would book it in so he could book it out for me to take. It was and he did. The service was quick and efficient.

We came home and had lunch, using the new kettle to make the tea, which tasted a damn site better than tea made with boiling water from a saucepan, which is what we had been drinking for the last couple of days.

There was no sign of the Amazon delivery of items for Jenny that Matthew had ordered at my request yesterday, despite his Premium account.

After lunch, I spent a little time dealing with the TV listings and programmes to record next week until it was time to take Jenny for her dental appointment at Holcombe Brook, where I waited in the car, listening to Bix Beiderbecke.

My Amazon delivery arrived!

Thursday 12th January 2023

We set off early, allowing an hour to reach Fairfield Hospital, for my Urology appointment. The hospital was on the other side of Bury and I expected the traffic to be heavy at 8:15 in the morning.

We arrived at the hospital with a good half hour to spare, which was just as well because the car park was full, including all of the disabled parking bays and it was by good fortune that we found a parking spot on the second tour of the top car park just as someone was leaving.

I reported to the outpatients reception at about 9 a.m. and waited for my appointment, scheduled for 9:15 and which I had at about 9:35.

The result of the consultation was that there did not seem to be any physical reason why I could not urinate without the aid of a catheter. My prostate gland was small and not a problem and there did not seem to be anything wrong with my abdomen. The next step was an unintrusive examination of my urethra and bladder and that would be scheduled, hopefully, soon. That would confirm whether the problem was physical or, as the consultant seemed to think, neurological, caused either by nerve damage or brain damage.

I was resolved to taking the investigation one step at a time and the internal examination would either locate or rule out a physical issue.

Meanwhile, it was business as usual for the catheter manufacturer.

We called at Tesco on the way home for a few top-up groceries since we would not be grocery shopping until Saturday.

Rachel had arrived late the previous evening and was at home to greet us when we arrived. This was her 40th birthday and we gave her the presents to open.

After lunch, I caught up with some computer work while Jenny and Rachel made one cake in the shape of a number four and a second one in the shape of a zero.

We had booked a table at Owens restaurant in Ramsbottom for 6:30 p.m. on the basis that their usual meals were very good and that the appalling Christmas dinner was a one-off occurrence. Matthew was away on business so he and Carrie could not come to the meal.

The meal was alright; I'd had better elsewhere, though not recently and it didn't compete with the quality of food we ate at home, most of which was organic and all of it gluten-free. The Pino Grigio wine we had was very nice, but it should have been at £25 a bottle.

Friday, 13th January 2023

Having finished going through the Radio Times listings for programmes to record for the coming week, I turned my attention to scanning the electronic listings for regular series that we watched to make sure I hadn't missed anything and added a couple of items.

We went to help out at the dementia café, D-CaFF, in the afternoon. Lorna, one of our neighbours, came with us. This month, we started the year with chair exercises and some yoga exercises that could be done seated. As usual, it was very busy.

We had tea and finished off with a piece of Rachel's 40th birthday cake.

Saturday, 14th January 2023

I didn't feel at all well and Jenny was tired so we did not rise early as we intended.

It was mid-morning before we set off grocery shopping and we were too late to call to see Matthew and Carrie.

I called at Tesco in Bury for some fuel since the car was complaining its tank was nearly empty and we headed to Sainsbury's store at Heaton Park. The shopping seemed to take ages, as Jenny liked to browse as well as buy what we needed. I spent most of the time leaning on the trolley. I had, for the third time, forgotten to bring my medical bag with me, to add to my woes.

After we had finished, Jenny managed to lose the token she had put in the trolley to release it, rather than using a £1 coin. She was not best pleased.

We decided we did not require any items from Tesco at Prestwich and we came home via the M66 motorway and the Bury ring road.

After lunch, I dealt with a few e-mails and prepared the TV programmes I had recorded during the past week for viewing.

Sunday, 15th January 2023

We didn't make it to the old school as planned. We didn't get up early and I felt terrible. I was tired and ached all over, although the abdominal pains that had plagued me for the last few days seemed to have faded somewhat. I felt like I had some sort of 'flu bug.

After a late breakfast and washing the dishes, I dealt with a few e-mails, edited the TV recordings from yesterday and updated this blog. Meanwhile, Jenny had walked up to see Gwen to borrow some covered trays in which Rachel could take some goodies into the office tomorrow for the staff in celebration of her birthday last Friday, which she took as leave.

I decided to prepare for a tip run since the weather forecast was for a fine spell with some actual sunshine. When Jenny returned, we set off with a trailer-load of rubbish comprising mostly electrical items from the old school that were non-functional.

The weather forecast lied. We passed through a couple of showers on the way to the tip, or, more correctly, the recycling transfer station.

With this being a Sunday and the weather not being brilliant, I didn't expect the tip to be busy. The queue to the entrance was the longest I had ever seen and it took us a good ten

minutes to reach a spot where we could unload. Emptying the trailer took about twenty minutes and we called at the old school to drop off a couple of items I had tested at home, one being a car vacuum cleaner with no attachments and the other a quartz, two-bar heater Christine had given us to keep warm while working in the hall, testing equipment and which didn't seem to work when we were last there.

After lunch, I watched a recorded episode of *The Outer Limits* and then listened to Jazz Record Requests. Surprisingly, there were four tracks of interest this week, *Weary Blues* from Humphrey Lyttelton and His Band, *After You've Gone* from Eddie Condon, Bud Freeman and Gene Krupa, *Gimme a Pigfoot and a Bottle of Beer* from Bessie Smith and *St Louis Blues* from Billie Holiday.

That was followed by another episode of *The Outer Limits* before tea.

Monday, 16th January 2023

I spent a good hour and a half dealing with the dirty dishes while Jenny helped Rachel prepare for leaving for work.

By the time I had finished, the snow had stopped and the sun was out, so I took advantage of the change in the weather to empty the recycling rubbish that had formed quite a pile in the kitchen. It took a fair while to sort it into the various bins and putting a few items of waste paper in the can and bottle bin, resulting in my having to empty it to sort it out didn't help. I came back for a second load.

I decided to have a look at the cistern in the small toilet that had not worked for some time. I turned off the water supply to it, flushed it to empty the tank and then tried the flush buttons. Both worked but one of the air tubes came off and I refitted it. I also squirted a fair amount of WD40 onto the syphon. I turned on the water supply and the tank filled. Both buttons worked and I tested it a couple of times.

Jenny asked me to vacuum the kitchen floor, which I did, followed by the entrance hall, the lounge and the dining room.

After all of that feverish activity, we had lunch.

I took some time out to finish this week's Radio Times crossword, on which I found it hard to focus and therefore difficult, although it wasn't that bad really, when I thought about it, once I had finished.

I had a look at the old Dualit electric kettle and I managed to unassemble it. That wasn't easy and fitting a new switch and reassembling it would be nigh on impossible as well as expensive. We had bought a new Kenwood kettle so I confined the Dualit kettle to the electrical scrap. It was so sad that these appliances were not designed to be repaired. It was time we had a law to prevent the sale of items that could not be repaired.

I sat down to watch the entertaining quiz programmes, *Pointless* and *House of Games* on TV while Jenny prepared tea.

Tuesday, 17th January 2023

I started my day by tidying up my Skype contacts and removed all those with whom I had not communicated of late.

I prepared Edith's birthday for posting to New Zealand and then hit a stumbling block: I had no address for her other than the general address of the retirement village in which she resided. I sent an e-mail to the village reception to request what address I should use for Edith. I also sent an e-mail to Mike Nottage, with whom I was in telephone contact occasionally, to ask if he would take the car to Edith if I sent it to him. I thought that might be the better option if he was agreeable. The card had to be posted before the 24th and preferably earlier to allow for air-mail delivery.

Jenny went off to meet her friend, Gwen, for lunch.

I went to the news agent and pharmacy to purchase next week's Radio Times and pick up my regular supply of medication for the month. It was damn cold and the overnight frost was still on the ground.

Having dropped off the items from the village shop at home, I took the car into Ramsbottom to buy a birthday card for Jenny. The car registered the outdoor temperature as -2°C.

Back home, I prepared Jenny's card and squirrelled it away until the 27th, then it was lunchtime and I put on the CD of Brassed Off brass-band music. Both the film and the CD were excellent.

Not long after lunch, Jenny returned home, minus her glasses. A lens had dropped out at the café where she had lunch with Gwen. The screw that had held the frame together had been lost but, fortunately, the lens was undamaged and Gwen had put it back into the frame, although it was not secure enough for Jenny to wear the glasses and she could not see very well without them.

I spent quite a while trying to repair them but I did not have a screw to fit, so we decided to take them to Specsavers in Bury tomorrow, having bought them from Specsavers in Sainsbury's store at Heaton Park.

As it was late in the afternoon, I thought I would manually enter the list of telephone contacts into the new house telephone, not that we used it much because all the house calls could be picked up on our mobile phones anywhere in the UK and we could use our mobile phones to make calls using the house phone line rather than the mobile number if we so wished. It was all very clever technology.

I finished about half of the list before I became too tired to continue and decided to finish the job tomorrow, which needed to include a comparison between mobile contacts and the house phone contacts.

Wednesday, 18th January 2023

We started our day with a visit to the post office at Tottington, primarily to post a birthday card for my sister, Edith, in New Zealand. The post office was not taking any overseas mail due to a cyber attack on its computer systems, reported to have been initiated by Russian criminals demanding payment to restore normal service. I'd be inclined to pay them with a very long jail sentence of solitary confinement.

Our next task was to have Jenny's glasses repaired at Specsavers in Bury. That went well and we came home for lunch.

We went into Ramsbottom to buy a card for Jo's birthday. Jo was married to my old school friend, Terry.

We toured the charity shops as usual and I found quite a few DVDs that were of interest and purchased them.

After our potter round, we went to see Bob and Marie, Carrie's parents. Marie showed us her new piano and played several short tunes for us. I could follow the music but I couldn't play it! I guess I could learn if I made the effort to do so.

Thursday, 19th January 2023

We eventually got off to Paul Davies in Bolton to talk about refurbishing our kitchen. I obtained prices for two electric cookers with induction hobs, one being the Belling Farmhouse 110EI, which is the one I was considering but would have to be ordered and the other the Smeg Victoria TR410IP2, similar to the one we saw in the showroom but not the same model number. The Smeg looked pretty robust.

We also discussed our sink and worktop options and settled on new worktops since the existing cracks in the surface could not be repaired because the covering was obsolete. We went for an under-mounted bowl and a half with no drainer. We were advised we could purchase a worktop drainer that could be hidden away when not in use. We dealt with the same gentleman, Martin, who designed our original kitchen back in 1979. He would put a quotation together for the worktop and sink.

We came home and had a very late lunch, followed by submitting this month's gas, electricity and water meter readings, dealing with e-mails and more cooker research.

That resulted in a very late "snack" tea.

Friday, 20th January 2023

We set off grocery shopping later than planned. The journey down to Unicorn in Chorlton did not go well. The roadworks in Bury to construct cycle lanes had the two-lane dual carriageway down to a single lane yet again and there were temporary traffic lights on Manchester Road at the junction of Dumers Lane where another water main had burst and was being repaired. To add to our delays, all three lanes of the M60 Manchester ring

road at Prestwich in an anticlockwise direction were stationary and I took the route through the centre of Manchester instead.

From Unicorn, we had a fairly quick and uneventful run on to Waitrose at Broadheath where we shared the only remaining gluten-free, chicken-salad sandwich for lunch before starting our shopping.

The journey home was another nightmare. Having left at about 3 p.m., traffic was heavy along the A56 back to the M60 and we had the usual long, slow crawl back to Prestwich for most of the way. I thought matters were improving back up the A56 towards Bury but there was another long, slow-moving queue at the approach to Dumers Lane again. I had hoped the job had been finished by the time we returned but obviously it was still ongoing.

I decided to divert up to the M66 at Pilsworth and approach Bury from that but we joined another long queue of traffic and made very slow progress. We would have probably been better staying where we were.

Once in Bury, we managed to pick up speed. It was 5 p.m. by the time we reached home and I had averaged just over 43 miles to the gallon of fuel when I normally achieved over 50 m.p.g.

I was tired and not best pleased.

Saturday, 21st January 2023

It was a day of more administrative work, tidying up a few things, bringing the accounts up to date and planning the budget for next month, which, despite having to put an extortionate amount towards my fuel bill, the credit having almost been swallowed up by the previous three months, wasn't looking too bad. This month showed a bit of a deficit but that was expected with the anticipated high expenditure and which was well covered by last month's surplus. I was perfectly happy if the income over the year was at least enough to cover the expenditure while maintaining a reasonable standard of living and quality of life, something this government was determined to wreck for the vast majority of people.

Sunday, 22nd January 2023

We went to the old school to work on the electrical jumble. Christine and a few other people came into the hall after church. She told us that there was a party booked in the hall from 12:30 so we started packing up at about 11:45 having been there for only 1½ hours. Neal, one of our ministers, also came in and informed us that there would be a new pre-school group starting after the next jumble sale in a few weeks' time and that the area where the electrical jumble was stored may be required for their use. I was of the opinion there was enough room for both of us and would wait and see what happened. We had been messed about enough and if any new arrangements did not suit us, we would simply not volunteer any more.

We came home and had our lunch in our dining room rather than in the old school hall.

I helped Jenny track down a film of which she could not remember the title. It was Blott on the Landscape based on the book by Tom Sharpe.

After fetching in the spuds for tea from the garage and peeling them, I settled down to listen to Jazz Record Requests, which was mostly trash. The one saving grace was a track from a young Louis Armstrong with his Hot Five, called "Come Back Sweet Papa" which lasted around 2½ minutes out of the hour.

Monday, 23rd January 2023

We met Crrie and Matt on their return from their weekend away in Chester at Leckenby's Tea Room in Bury for lunch, which was very nice. It was the best place in Bury for gluten-free meals.

After lunch we dropped Matthew and Carrie off at their house and we came home for an afternoon of more administrative work. I'd had a quotation from Martin at Paul Davies for our new worktops and sink and I needed to purchase the new cooker and have it installed first. I had decided on the SMEG Victoria TR4110IP2, which wasn't cheap and I sent an e-mail to SMEG to check out some details before deciding from where to order it.

Tuesday, 24th January 2023

I started by emptying the rubbish into the various recycling bins and then I spent most of the morning sweeping up the leaves on the patio. I was joined by a very friendly robin which was keen to look for spiders I had disturbed and he was so close I had to be careful not to harm him. I stood back while he foraged amongst the leaves I had moved and I watched as he flew at the garage wall and pecked spiders off it. He also grabbed a rather large spider and it took him about a minute to eat that while I stood back and talked to him.

I moved all the patio furniture I could on my own and Jenny helped me move the large picnic bench.

Although it was quite cold, I was well wrapped up and came in feeling quite warm when I had finished.

We walked round to the village store and pharmacy for Jenny's eye lubrication, which wasn't on her repeat prescription list and which the pharmacist said she would order for her. That would be ready on Thursday.

Jenny had called at the hair salon to arrange a trim on Thursday, before the family birthday meal on Friday and she joined me in the village shop. I bought next week's Radio Times and we walked back home for lunch.

I worked on the new cooker installation requirements.

Wednesday 25th January 2023

I spent all day sorting out the new cooker. The problem was obtaining an electrician to undertake the work.

I worked out in detail the requirements for a new consumer unit and all the components and I also checked on the power needs of the new cooker. From what I could gather it needed to be hard-wired to a double-pole circuit breaker using 10mm² 3-core cable. That was capable of carrying up to 64 amps at 220-240 volts.

I decided to approach Paul Davies since they were installing a new sink and worktops. A chap there matched the offer from SMEG for the cooker and Martin, who we spoke with in store, said he would arrange the electrician and a gas engineer to cap off the existing gas supply at installation time.

I awaited an invoice from Paul Davies.

Thursday, 26th January 2023

I received the invoice from Paul Davies for the cooker and contacted them to pay it. The method of payment was to follow a link sent to me in a text message, which I did and it didn't work! I telephoned them again and arranged to go in tomorrow to pay in store.

I went out to wash the car and finished just as Jenny went to have her hair cut. I had my lunch and listened to a Jazz CD.

I prepared for the Civic Society meeting this evening and attended the meeting at 7 p.m. in the old school. I ended up with the job of Secretary, taking the minutes and spent the rest of the evening typing them up while the meeting was fresh in my mind.

I sent Christine a draft copy.

Friday, 27th January 2023

It was Jenny's birthday and I had put my birthday card on the breakfast table for her to find when she was first downstairs.

We had a fun day shopping.

First we went to Paul Davies in Bolton to pay for the cooker. From there we crossed to the other northern side of Greater Manchester where we shopped at Sainsbury's store at Heaton Park, followed by Tesco at Prestwich.

I finished off the list of programmes to record next week and then we went out to the China Cottage restaurant in Ramsbottom for Jenny's birthday meal with Matthew, Carrie, Rachel, Bob and Marie. We had an excellent meal with very good service. I wished the staff a Happy New Year for the new Chinese year but I did not attempt to use my limited knowledge of Mandarin – limited to that one phrase and not used for some time.

It was a nice end to a busy day.

Saturday, 28th January 2023

We spent a good part of the day working on the electrical jumble at the old school. Marie dropped by for a chat.

Sunday, 29th January 2023

I was working on the computer most of the day.

Monday, 30th January 2023

The plan had been to make the Seville orange marmalade using the oranges we bought from Unicorn a week ago last Friday and which we had prepared yesterday during one of my more productive half-hours.

Jenny had a podiatry appointment in Bury at 9:45 and we called at Tesco in Bury for some lemons to help the marmalade to set and a few other items.

When we came home, I put out Jenny's washing lines, did a little preparation work for the Island Lodge meeting this evening and then I was called into the conservatory. All the windows were covered in condensation even though the dehumidifier was on.

The windows and the PVC were a mess and there was water on the ledges as well as a lot of black mould everywhere. Jenny started to deal with it but I took over, mopping everything up and wiping the windows using kitchen roll. It took 1½ rolls to clean everything, including mopping up the floor where moisture had dropped onto it or condensed on it. I told Jenny to put on the underfloor heating to dry thing out as well.

Inspection of the dehumidifier showed that it had collected very little water since yesterday and my guess was that it had given up working. I left it running just to make sure.

We had lunch and I did some more preparation work for tonight's meeting.

Jenny had put the marmalade on to simmer and I had a look at it. It needed about 1½ hours to soften the peel.

I returned to the computer and dealt with a few e-mails.

We made the marmalade, tweaking the recipe to suit my palate and we took a guess at the setting time, allowing 15 minutes rapid boiling. It seemed to be adequate and we bottled the marmalade. We would see if this worked out well enough in the morning.

I inspected the dehumidifier in the conservatory and it seemed to have collected a little more water. I left it to permanently dehumidify.

Back on the laptop, I suggested to our village chairperson, Julie Southworth, two possible, though not very probable, sources of funding for the Island Lodge project.

After tea I went to the Island Lodge Meeting at the old school.

Tuesday, 31st January 2023

I made room for the engineers to work in the garage to fit the new gas and electricity meters. That went smoothly enough, except that smart meters were installed when I expressly requested plain, ordinary meters. This might not seem that significant but when people's consumer rights were ignored, it was a degree of freedom lost and if large, commercial organisations and politicians started down this slippery slope, where would that leave the individual? Just how free were the people who lived in this country?

We had lunch and then we went into Ramsbottom for a tour of the charity shops and a few groceries. Yellowtail wine was on offer at Tesco for those of us with a Clubcard and we bought two bottles each of Chardonnay, Pino Grigio and Shiraz since our stocks were low.

Jenny made two loaves of bread when we came home while I, amongst other bits and pieces, installed a new colour ink cartridge that had arrived today in the Canon 2950 printer and printed off the labels for the marmalade we bottled yesterday.