

Greenmount – December 2014

We rose on Monday 1st December to the pungent perfume of the cat's (Treacle's) litter tray. We had kept her in the conservatory again overnight as she continued to gain weight and her health improved. This was the third night we had kept her in and she had produced three lots of solid matter to celebrate, only one of which had been squarely in the tray.

That smelly task completed and an opened window, together with a scented candle and an air freshener bottle, helped to dispel the remaining odour as Jenny tackled the preparation of breakfast, while I processed the new boiler maintenance contract with British Gas.

More administration work dealing with E-mails after breakfast was followed by a pot-washing session, dealing with the breakfast dishes and those from the previous evening's meal.

Then it was time to go in the garage loft and bring out the Christmas tree and all of the decorations. My job was to assemble the tree ready for when Rachel came to dress it, which she did and she made an excellent job of it, as always.

I also found time to clean out the fire again before commencing more computer administration work, interspersed with a visit from Doug, who had been looking after the village web site while I was away, a task I said I would resume, though I wasn't sure when I'd find the time.

Tuesday 2nd December was another day when we didn't seem to achieve much. I cleaned the cat's litter tray, cleaned out the fire and Jenny and I decided to prepare the Christmas cards for posting to New Zealand. That done, we sped off to Holcombe Brook Post Office with two objectives, the first being to buy a local calendar to send to Bill and Edna and the second to post the cards. After queuing for what seemed like a lifetime, we discovered all the calendars had been sold so we achieved a 50% success rate.

We hit on the idea of looking for a calendar at Summerseat Garden Centre with a success rate of 0% and came home for lunch.

We decided to try Ramsbottom and bought a local calendar from the newsagent there, after doing the rounds of the charity shops.

That was more or less another day gone.

I started Wednesday 3rd December at 7:30 a.m. with good intentions and an irritating cough, being unable to shake off the catarrh from which I had been suffering since our return to this cold climate.

I was greeted by the cat's litter tray in the conservatory. Treacle had produced a runny motion that had almost made it into the tray. Jenny had the bright idea of putting newspaper down on the floor under and surrounding the tray and this had caught the overflow, so to speak. Unfortunately, Treacle had taken the newspaper as an extension of the tray when it came to having a pee and it was soaking wet.

I grabbed the bucket, disinfectant, rubber gloves, antibacterial wipes, kitchen-roll and an empty bag in which to put the soiled items and proceeded to clean up the mess. I was getting good at this.

The dehumidifier had stopped late the previous evening and I emptied it. I was getting good at that too.

By this time, Jenny had appeared and fed the cats. She prepared breakfast while I dealt with the accounts on the computer and printed some photographs for Bill and Edna in New Zealand, a task I finished after breakfast.

I had intended to start cleaning the fire and putting the lights on the Christmas tree in the lounge that Rachel had decorated for us on Monday but Jenny wanted to go to Bury to do some grocery shopping.

Jenny called at the hairdressers, Cream, in the village to make an appointment for the following day. Not having been near a stylist since we left England two months previous, her hair really did need some attention, unlike mine which I had dealt with myself and a little bit of Jenny's help a few days earlier.

I nipped round to the post box with the penultimate Christmas card for New Zealand and then into the Chemist's shop for some good quality rubber gloves for cleaning the cat's litter tray, where Jenny joined me. She waited in the car while I called at the doctor's surgery in response to a message Rachel had relayed while I was in foreign parts. All they wanted to know was whether I wanted a 'flu and pneumonia jab. I didn't.

Our next stop was at Brandlesholme Post Office to send off a calendar, a card and some photographs to Bill and Edna, friend's of Edith, in whose bach we stayed on Waiheke Island. That was the last of the cards to NZ.

We finally made it to Bury. I called in at B&Q on the way for some screws. They didn't have the ones I wanted.

After parking the car at Tesco's car park, I went to Wilkinsons in Bury for the screws. They didn't have them either. I could see the day was shaping up well.

We called at Marks and Spencer to exchange some Chino trousers I had purchased before leaving for New Zealand. I had mistakenly picked up a 32 inch waist instead of a 38. That was obviously wishful thinking on my part. Jenny spotted a pair of pyjamas she fancied so we bought them even though they weren't on our list.

After a brief but expensive visit to the health Food Shop in the market for a few essential, mainly organic, supplies that were unobtainable elsewhere, we finally reached Tesco. Having complained about the time we waste in shops, Jenny was a little more focussed on this trip. Even so, it was 2:30 before we'd returned home and had lunch. We'd been up for seven hours and achieved very little.

I had another bash at the accounts and balanced the books before starting on the fire. By 4 p.m. I was about to put the lights on the tree when Jenny complained she was cold and I lit the fire I had just finished laying.

The lights did finally find themselves on the tree but we still couldn't finish dressing the tree because Rachel still had a few more things to hang on it later that evening. In the event, Rachel arrived late and had tea, being too tired to tackle the tree.

I gave up and went back to computer administration work.

On Thursday 4th December we finally finished off the Christmas tree. It had only taken four days! I also tidied up the fire, again and put up some Christmas lights round the patio doors in the kitchen. I even got round to putting the cover back on the car battery, having taken it off before we went on holiday so that I could attach the battery charger while we were away.

Apart from that burst of activity, I spent the rest of the day processing TV recordings that had been scheduled while we were away. Jenny went off to have her hair done at Cream and left me to it.

Friday 5th December saw us on our usual shopping trip to Unicorn and Waitrose, after a brief stop in Bury at Pets at Home to buy Treacle some biscuits. Treacle seemed to have found her appetite again and was much improved. Our journey back from Broadheath took two hours, the traffic being at a crawl most of the way. Back home I settled down to insert the TV programmes for recording for the week while Jenny cooked tea. That was another day gone.

We went round to the village drop-in at The Old School on Saturday 6th December. Everyone was pleased to see us back in Greenmount after our two-month absence and we spent most of the two hours there chatting.

After lunch at home, I started on a marathon update of the village web site. Doug Paul had done a good job of keeping it up to date while I was away and there were a few bits and pieces to tidy up, a few events that had passed in the last couple of days and needed removing and some events that had come to me by direct E-mail that Doug would not have seen. That took much of the afternoon, after which I started work processing some of the outstanding TV recordings from when I was away until tea time and we settled down as usual afterwards to watch some of the programmes that had been recorded.

On Sunday 7th December, we braved the hail and rain showers and went into Ramsbottom.

Our first port of call was the Craft Fair in the Civic Hall, or it would have been if they had not been charging an entrance fee.

We went to have a look at the Christmas market in Bridge Street that had been closed to traffic for the day. It was quite disappointing in that there were very few stalls; I expected more. We took a brief look at the lone reindeer in the church grounds, visited the table-top sale in the church and came out to have a look at the Christmas play, "The Gift", being performed in the church grounds. It was a little too modern for me.

We toured the charity shops as usual before popping into Morrisons for a few bits and pieces, taking a route back to the car to avoid the deafening, obnoxious noise (I hesitate to use the word "music") from one of the stalls in Bridge Street.

After lunch at home, I spent the afternoon continuing the processing of the TV recordings and after tea we went to the Tottington Public (Brass) Band concert in The Old School, organised by the Greenmount WI. It was a most entertaining evening.

On Monday 8th December, Rachel telephoned before I had chance to sit down for breakfast and asked me if I would fetch her from Tottington Motors. She had taken her car in because it was showing a couple of faults on the dashboard.

Later in the afternoon, I went down with Rachel to her flat to meet the engineer who was coming to look at her washer. The last time I had powered it on, there was no sign of life. When the engineer powered it on, it worked first time. Apparently, there is no indication it is alive and well until a programme is selected. Had there been a manual for it, I might have discovered that. The engineer's visit was not wasted because Rachel told him the door seal was filthy; despite all our attempts to clean it, it was still coated in mould and the engineer took a picture of it so he could report back to the letting agent.

The priority was to sort out the electric radiators that didn't work. The letting agent hadn't told the engineer about those. I finally discovered that the lounge and bedroom radiators did work if you pressed the right switches in the right order. The programmer for the lounge radiator bore no resemblance to the instructions for setting it and the bedroom radiator had so much dust inside it repeatedly set off the smoke alarm. The hall radiator did not work at all and the programmer was completely dead. I left Rachel to advise the engineer accordingly so he could inform the letting agent.

We fought our way back home through the heavy traffic and by the time we arrived, Jenny had collected Rachel's car from the garage, which was not completely fixed and was rushing off for a meal with the girls, already being fifteen minutes late. Rachel stayed until Jenny came home so I had her company for tea and for the evening.

Tuesday 9th December was a nice enough day, a rare occurrence of late. I was disturbed from my bed up by the postman delivering a parcel from Amazon not expected for about another week. We had ordered a packet of organic dark-brown sugar for baking, not being available elsewhere and a gluten-free cook book for Jenny, which she said would do for her Christmas present.

Jenny and I walked up to the Dentist for our regular check-up, delivering Christmas cards on the way up, posting some and delivering the remaining couple by hand on the way back. We came through the door just as it started to hail. I had an appointment in January for a filling to replace an old amalgam filling that was beginning to disintegrate – something to which I could look forward, I suppose.

On Wednesday 10th December, Jenny went for lunch with Gwen to Summerseat Garden Centre, taking the car. The plan had been to walk down but the weather didn't look too good and, as it turned out, it was a wise decision. Meanwhile, I pressed on with processing and listening to my media recordings.

In the evening, I had arranged to help out at the church at 6 p.m. and went round with various scrapers to assist in removing the old carpet in readiness for a new one to be fitted. The old carpet had a latex backing and had been stuck down and pulling it up left the backing stuck to the wooden floor, so it was a hands and knees job, one of the rare occasions I was to be found in such a position in church for the best part of two hours.

The small group of us made good progress and arranged a further session the following week. This was an ongoing project and had been so for the past few weeks in my absence.

We braved the bad weather on Thursday 11th December and went into Bury on the bus for a potter round the shops.

We dropped off the order for our organic Christmas turkey at Marks and Spencer and took the opportunity to inspect the food hall in search of organic produce. That was a complete waste of time. Jenny did find a good gluten-free section and purchased a couple of items for herself.

We pressed on. Jenny was looking for a jumper and some warm trousers and we tried both Marks and Spencer and Debenhams. Neither had any jumpers in pure wool and neither had any trousers she liked that fitted, being designed for ladies with figures like Barbie. We gave up and came home.

I started the complicated task of putting our holiday pictures on the web site while Jenny prepared meatballs for tea. Jenny enlisted my help after cracking an egg into two packs of minced lamb because she thought the egg was bad. Indeed it was, even though it was still well in date and that was two packs of mince and an egg, all organic and from Waitrose and all wasted at a cost of about £7. We weren't happy. Fortunately, we had another pack of lamb mince in the freezer and Jenny made do with that.

Friday the 12th's sunny start didn't last long and the heavens opened just after we entered Unicorn for our weekly grocery shop, having called in at Pets at Home in Bury to exchange a bag of cat food. That had been a waste of time because there were still no bags of the food we wanted on the shelf despite a supposed delivery the previous Sunday.

We lunched at Waitrose as usual, Jenny first obtaining a refund for the two packs of mince ruined by the bad egg the previous day. The generous refund extended to half a dozen eggs as well, with which we were more than satisfied.

The journey home was painfully slow in the heavy traffic but at least the car heater kept us warm.

Jenny went to Bury with Rachel on Saturday 13th December after having her car fixed at Tottington Motors. That left me free for the whole afternoon and then some to progress with my computer administration work, otherwise known as my Davros impression. We invited Rachel to stay for tea, which she did.

Jenny had designs on going to the Christmas market in Ramsbottom again on Sunday 14th December. We might have gone to the Christingle service had it been in the church but that was still being renovated and the service was being held in the Old School, which had limited capacity. Instead, I helped Jenny put some new foil on the cooker hob to protect it from grease and grime, which took all morning. After lunch, I started work on my 2013/2014 tax return and gave up just in time to help prepare some vegetables for tea, to which Rachel and her young man, Matthew, had been invited.

We did not rise until 11 a.m. on Monday 15th December. Given the recent, prolonged,

cold, dull, wet weather, I had considered hibernating until March the following year. After breakfast, I fixed the broken spring in one of the overhead cupboards in the kitchen, put one of the hooks on one of the lounge curtain back on the ring from which it had become dislodged and cleaned the pile of dust off the top of the grandfather clock. Then it was down to some serious work as I completed my 2013-14 tax return online. What a shock that was. The tax calculation said I owed the tax man more than it would cost me to fly to New Zealand and back. I double checked the figures and it wasn't so far off. The problem was that tax was not deducted at source from one of my employer pensions, so I owed tax not only for 2103-14 but also for 2014-15 and the tax man had decided it was time he collected something on account for this year rather than wait until I submit my return next year. I, on the other hand, considered the money to be better off in my account than his.

Since the tax man is not someone with whom one should argue without good reason, I thought it best to take this one on the chin, or, to be more precise, in the wallet.

I spent most of Tuesday 16th December with Frank, Steve and Mike. The plan was to meet at the Old School at 9 a.m., walk down to Summerseat, presumably for a coffee/tea at the garden centre, then on into Ramsbottom for our Christmas lunch. The tea/coffee turned into a full breakfast for at least one of our party, who shall remain nameless. When Mike had finished (oops!), we continued chatting before moving off on the path to Bury, in the opposite direction to Ramsbottom, heading for Tesco and another tea/coffee stop. There was some debate there about lunch and we ended up at the Robert Peel, a dreaded Wetherspoon pub. I played safe and had the chicken pepper skewers with rice, accompanied by two pints of some very decent ale. It must have been decent because I forgot what it was.

We caught the bus back to Greenmount, something of a rarity, since the chaps usually prefer a taxi to waiting in the draughty bus station. Being a Yorkshireman and having a free bus pass, I had no objection to the wait at all.

Jenny and I went into Ramsbottom on the bus on Wednesday 17th December. Since the pathetic bus service only runs from our village into Ramsbottom every hour, we walked down to Longsite Road (about ten minutes) and caught the bus there. Longsite Road had a bus every ten minutes or so. That sounds sort of equitable, don't you think? No, perhaps not.

We potted round the charity shops and would have caught the last bus back to Greenmount at 14:12 (Greenmount obviously closes early) except it would have meant walking all the way up to the Market Place, so we settled for the bus in Bridge Street that went back down Longsite Road and had the ten minute walk back home.

It was an early start on Thursday 18th December because we were due at the Co-operative Funeral establishment in Sheffield at 10:30 for the service for my cousin Jean at Hutcliffe Wood crematorium at 11 a.m. All went as well as can be expected on these sad occasions and the service was excellent, giving us time to reflect on our meetings with Jean and her husband, Harry, while Edith was with us, during the year.

Jenny and I joined Ann and Trevor, Ann being Jean's sister, Harry, Rosemary, Jean's niece and her husband and a few friends and neighbours for a buffet at the funeral parlour afterwards before leaving for home.

The order of service is available on the Family History pages of this web site.

Friday 19th December was our usual shopping day at Unicorn in Chorlton and Waitrose, Broadheath. We were back home in good time to prepare for our evening meal at the Red Lion, Hawkshaw with Frank and Gwen, Mike and Lorna having been unable to come because of Lorna's work commitments.

We collected Frank and Gwen on the way and the Christmas dinner at the John Willie Lees pub was quite good. We did think of retiring to the bar afterwards but we persuaded Gwen and Frank to come back for a drink at our home and we ended up chatting until 11 p.m. It was a most enjoyable evening.

We were back in Sheffield on Saturday 20th December, paying a visit to Jenny's niece, Tracey, who we had not seen since before Edith had arrived in England at the end of May. We came back with a car load of car boot stock, not that we would be at any car boot sales until March the following year.

Sunday 21st December was a bit of a lazy day. Jenny emptied the car into the garage while I sorted out a few administrative things and then washed the pots. My other two constructive efforts were to clean out the fire from the last time we used it and lay a new fire ready for lighting and to clean my hiking boots from the muddy outing the previous Tuesday. It was the maid's day off.

I awoke on Monday 22nd December doing an impersonation of that well-known, deformed Chinaman, Wan Hung Low. A few days after the church carpet event on the 10th December, I developed some rather worrying abdominal pains. I decided to nurse these for a few days rather than rush round to the doctor and, sure enough, by yesterday, they had subsided somewhat. The pains had been accompanied by a swelling of the abdomen, which had also disappeared and I put all this down to over-exertion, something for which I am not usually known. Another symptom I thought I had discovered was a swelling of the scrotum but I couldn't make up my mind whether I had imagined that or not, so I gave that a few days as well.

On this particular morning, I noticed one of my beloved parts was larger than its close neighbour and, after a second opinion from Jenny, I swiftly made a bee-line for my local G.P., managing to obtain an appointment at the end of surgery, with, as luck would have it, my regular and very nice M.D., John Hampson.

My personal effects were examined most carefully, as were my abdomen and prostate. Blood was eventually taken from my right arm, having tried the left one and missed, to check my blood sugar, kidney function and PSA count (for the prostate). I was also being referred, in all probability in the New Year at this late stage, for an ultrasound scan. The preliminary diagnosis was that the swelling was nothing serious, did not require medication and was just as likely to disappear as it appeared. In all probability, something has resulted in excess fluid being where it shouldn't and it was a case of waiting for the body to absorb it. The tests were all just to be sure there was nothing nasty lurking in the background.

All that came as a bit of a relief as I was suspecting something necessitating a sudden and unscheduled visit to the solicitor. Then again, I hadn't had my three score years and ten thus far.

While I was in the surgery, my G.P. did sneak in a 'flu jab, just for good measure.

By the time I arrived back, Mike, who had popped in for a chat before I left, had gone home, one cup of coffee and one home-made, all-butter-pastry, organic mince pie to the good.

After lunch, Jenny and I made the mistake of driving to Asda at Pilsworth, currently only accessible from the M66 due to the closure of Croft Lane. Once we reached Bury, we travelled the couple of miles to the M66 at less than walking pace. The volume of traffic in both directions was unbelievable and at 2 p.m. in the afternoon. To add to our enjoyment, it started to rain as we reached Asda and was coming down in buckets when we came out. We were pretty wet by the time we reached the car and the icing on the cake was that I had left the sunroof tilted open from Saturday. The fact that the sunroof seal has started to let in water as well (no pun intended) didn't help.

The one good aspect of our trip to Asda was that Yellow Tail Chardonnay and Shiraz was still only £5 a bottle, so we bought six of each, probably with the intention of drowning our sorrows (still no pun intended).

I decided to miss out Bury on the way home and came up the M66, taking the turning off to come down through the single-track road at Summerseat. That was another mistake. Stationary traffic was queuing to go down the lane. Obviously, motorists were ignoring the signs at each end of the lane that advised no more than two cars in each direction at a time down the single-track section, causing an impasse. These idiots need their driving licences revoking.

I eventually pulled out of the line of traffic and came back through Ramsbottom. That was a four or five mile detour but I'm willing to bet it got me home quicker. Had I made that move a few minutes earlier, I wouldn't have been stuck behind a bus into Ramsbottom and at the level crossing there for the Santa-Special, steam train.

This was not one of my better days.

We were still in bed when the telephone rang on Tuesday 23rd December at 9:38 a.m. It was Amy calling from Matthew and Carrie's house to say she would see us for lunch and I arranged to pick her up at 1 p.m.

Jenny and I went to Bury, primarily to collect the organic turkey we had ordered from Marks and Spencer, fitting in visits to the market, Poundland and, inevitably, Tesco.

We collected Amy, brought our shopping home and made for Summerseat Garden Centre for lunch. Afterwards, I dropped Jenny off at home and took Amy into Bolton to take the first part of her nursing examination, the theory test. The purpose of the test was to qualify Amy for nursing in the UK. A degree in nursing from New Zealand and three years working as a theatre nurse in Brisbane apparently didn't count for much. Had she been from an obscure EU country with a dodgy degree, no practical experience and unable to speak a word of English, she would have been welcomed with open arms. Such is the stupidity of British bureaucracy.

Matthew collected Amy after the examination and we were expecting them calling in. They postponed their visit until early the following morning, so we were up reasonably

early for us at just after 8 a.m. on Wednesday 24th December.

Amy collected a few things and Matthew took her to Piccadilly station in Manchester to catch her train to Wales where she was spending Christmas with friends before returning to Monaco early in the New Year.

I spent most of the morning tidying up the patio, which had been covered with leaves since the autumn and this was the first real chance I had, a fine, mild (for the time of year), day with some sunshine, since returning from our holiday. Amy telephoned to say that she had passed the examination and we were extremely pleased for her.

I spent the afternoon on general administration work, filing paperwork and shredding rubbish. This was the time of year when one prepares for a new one.

Rachel came for tea and we had a Chinese take-away, having, some days earlier, failed to obtain a table at the China Cottage in Ramsbottom. We expected Rachel staying over but she needed to return to her apartment.

On Thursday 25th December, I helped Jenny commence the preparation of the back bedroom for Wilf and Anne's visit the following week. We moved the single bed from the small bedroom to the back bedroom to keep the other one company and so that our guests had twin beds in which to sleep.

That was enough exercise for one day and we concentrated our efforts preparing the Christmas dinner. Rachel arrived and the rest of the day faded into oblivion. We did manage to rally round in the evening to play a game of Cluedo, dominoes (fives and threes) and Trivial Pursuit. After that had exhausted us mentally, we resorted to watching a couple of Agatha Christie Poirot DVDs, *Evil Under the Sun* and *Death on the Nile*, both starring Peter Ustinov. We all retired about 1 a.m.

Friday 26th December was a miserable day, being dull and wet. Needless to say we didn't do a lot. I managed to scan some documents onto my computer as part of my ongoing paperless programme. Matthew and Carrie called in on their way to see Carrie's mum and dad and we had a chat, catching up on events.

The plan on Saturday 27th December was to go a-walking with the local villagers on the annual two-hour stroll along local footpaths with a stop half way for mulled wine and mince pies. Unfortunately, Jenny was not very well following an attack in the chest by a flying Christmas pudding she was stretching to reach out of the kitchen cupboard and a subsequent encounter with one of the cats as she hurtled headlong towards the piano the previous afternoon. The Christmas pudding, the bewildered cat and the piano all survived the onslaught.

We took the day as it came, performing light duties which involved washing pots, moving plants around the conservatory, the odd flick of a duster and the movement of a few light-weight items that were cluttering up the lounge to clutter up the small bedroom, now devoid of bed.

I finally managed to find an hour or two to update the [village web site](#) and that for [Tottington District Civic Society](#). Both are worth a quick glance, the village web site containing a lot of information about our locality and the Civic Society web site being

focussed on Tottington, dating back to Roman times (the village, not the web site), just up the road on the way to Bury and separated from Greenmount by the smallest of green belts.

I spent the afternoon completing the mammoth scan of a 46-page document and scans of some other paperwork to almost empty my folder containing items for "action" I compiled and which has been gathering dust for the best part of a year. From that you may deduce that I am not in the habit of acting on impulse.

We thought it might be as well to do some grocery shopping on Sunday 28th December, having deferred our usual Friday trip to Unicorn and Waitrose. It seemed appropriate; the proverbial cupboard was not exactly bare but it was decidedly scant and we were expecting at least nine people to turn up for a buffet on New Year's Eve and eight people for dinner on New Year's Day.

Monday 29th December started somewhat earlier than days of late and I was washing the pots by 9 a.m., as Jenny prepared for her MOT with our local practice nurse. In fact, this was just the visit to give some blood samples for analysis and by the time she was back, I had not only finished the pots but taken all of the rubbish to the various recycling bins as well.

Our next job was to change our bed linen and Jenny remained upstairs to dust, vacuum and make up the beds ready for Anne and Wilf while I continued my paper elimination drive by typing up some jazz history notes I had made a good while ago. It was so long ago that I had difficulty in deciphering some of my shorthand scribbles. It was too cold in the conservatory to finish this task, having turned off the electrically heated floor the previous day.

The floor had been left on constantly with the thermostat set to 10°C so that the dehumidifier did not ice up. Unfortunately, the under-floor heating seemed to be on more or less constantly and I thought that might prove a tad expensive so I turned it off and switched off the dehumidifier overnight.

After lunch, I lit the fire, much to the approval of the cats. I left Jenny dusting as I went off to collect some more renal tablets for one of the cats, Toffee. The vet only had 8 in stock and ended up owing us 82 which I said I would collect the following day, together with a 4 Kg bag of renal biscuits. I decided it would be simpler to pay for everything up front and came back minus several limbs.

The journey down in the freezing fog was bad enough. On the return trip I encountered what I can only describe as inmates from the local establishment for the mentally challenged who had been allowed out for the festive season and given cars and driving licences for Christmas.

One stupid woman (at least, it looked like a woman) in a small red car (possibly a Fiat) stuck in a short queue of cars behind one turning right in the right hand lane at the bottom of Brandlesholme Road suddenly pulled out to the left as I drew almost level with her (i.e. the car's) rear end and sped off in front of me as I swerved quickly left and executed an emergency stop with the aid of the ABS., missing her vehicle by inches (or centimetres, for those not voting UKIP). Without ABS, one of the vehicles would almost certainly have been in the junk yard and one of the drivers in hospital, not necessarily as

a result of the impact between the cars. As it was, I did not even have time to sound my horn, not that it would have added anything to the defensive manoeuvre. As this woman turned off Brandlesholme Road to the left a little further up, my thought was that she was going to kill somebody one day.

My day ended with a telephone call from Rachel to say she was stuck at work in Manchester with a car that wouldn't start. I advised her to lock it up, go home, telephone Tottington Motors the following morning and let me know the outcome.

Tuesday 30th December started with a telephone call from Rachel to say that Glenn at the garage had advised her that the problem was a flat and probably faulty battery and that he didn't have anybody available but he would lend me his jump leads and battery pack if I could collect them from the garage and drive down with them.

I had a quick shower and even quicker breakfast and drove down to meet Rachel at work with my own jump leads at about 11 a.m. It was then that Rachel was told that they keep a starter pack in the gate-house for occasions like this. Nice timing, we thought.

Rachel's car started first time when her battery was connected to mine and she followed me up to Tottington Motors for them to check the battery and, if necessary, replace it.

We came home, had some lunch and I went into Ramsbottom for Jane at the Spectacle Studio to fix a problem with my frames. She effected a temporary, but sound, repair using a substitute part that was not quite the right one, but good enough for the present and asked me to go back in the New Year when the new stock of spares arrived.

I collected Jenny from home and we went into Bury to collect the cat's food, the remaining tablets and then fought our way through the traffic to Tesco.

We hadn't been back home long before Glenn telephoned from the garage to say they had fitted a new battery in Rachel's car and it was ready for collection. I gave Rachel a lift to the garage.

I was about to start the original set of tasks for the day, like tidying away a few odds and ends from the kitchen that belonged in the garage and cleaning the fire in the lounge from the previous evening when Jenny raised several objections and I abandoned the attempt in favour of watching the recording of the previous evening's Royal Institute Christmas Lectures – part one of three.

Afterwards, I decided to resume my chores to find that Jenny had been in the freezing-cold garage to tidy up all her car boot stock and had returned the suitcases we had borrowed for the NZ trip from our neighbour, Sylvia, across the back, despite suffering from 'flu and when she should have been inside keeping warm.

I completed the tasks as planned and updated the village web site, something I had promised to do the previous day, in a spare couple of hours, waiting for Jenny's brother Wilf and his wife Anne to telephone to say they had arrived in Bury. I collected our guests from Bury about 8:30 p.m. and we had a late tea, a long chat and an even later night.

We all went for a walk in the fresh air in Ramsbottom and toured the charity shops

before preparing for the New Year's Evening gathering on Wednesday 31st December. We were joined by Mike and Lorna and Frank and Gwen for an evening of lively discussion, a lovely buffet prepared by Jenny, Anne and Wilf and a copious supply of liquid refreshment to help celebrate the New Year.

On that note, it seemed fitting to wish everyone a Happy New Year for 2015.