

Greenmount – December 2017

Friday December 1st: It was grocery shopping day and we left about 10 a.m., an hour or so later than intended.

We called at Joani's house to drop off some music CDs for the Christmas D-CaFF sing-along so that Rita, who led the singing, could familiarise herself with the music and fit the lyrics I had printed off to the tunes. While I was there, I collected my Santa suit, which had been donated by one of the councillors, for the event.

There was quite a lot of traffic as we headed to Tesco in Bury, primarily for some wine, since it was on offer with a 25% discount on six or more bottles and we bought six each of Yellow Tail Chardonnay and Shiraz, equating to £5.25 a bottle, which was a very good price.

It was busy as we made our way to Prestwich to pick up a bottle of Vogel Bronchosan, a herbal cough tincture for catarrh and chesty coughs I had been taking, off and on, to relieve my cough. When it started, it was due to a tickly irritation and soon turned into an attempt to produce phlegm, hence the expectorant nature of the tincture. Using it seemed to have just about dispelled my cough and I did have a bottle of the tincture in use when I needed it but I thought it useful to have a spare one in case I ran out.

We took the scenic route to Unicorn at Chorlton, missing the right turn again at Old Trafford and taking a slightly longer route than intended but at least we didn't have to consult the map this time.

The run to Waitrose was also busy and we were ready for lunch when we arrived. Jenny was unlucky, as usual, in that the café still had no gluten-free sandwiches and had run out of the carrot and coriander soup that was gluten-free. What a shambles it was. Jenny settled for a lone banana, which really was not enough.

We completed our shop and headed off just before 3 p.m. The roads were still busy, although we made decent progress, even on the M60, for the first couple of minutes. After that, we averaged less than 10 m.p.h. and we diverted off onto the M61, making our way home along the A666 to Bolton and via Harwood and Hawkshaw. That was much faster than crawling through the traffic on the M60 to Prestwich and up through Bury. A journey that should have taken us about 40 minutes took nearer 90 minutes. The only word to describe our traffic situation was hopeless and it was only going to become worse.

At home, I put in the few TV programmes worth recording for the coming week, breaking off to wash the pots from breakfast and the previous evening (I should add that while I washed them, Jenny almost always wiped them and put them away) and for tea.

Jenny made and baked a cake for the villager's drop-in at the Old School the following day and then we settled down to watch a Poirot DVD before retiring for the evening.

Saturday December 2nd: Our day started later than intended owing to the fact that I switched off the alarm and went back to sleep. We just made it to the Old School for the start of the monthly villager's drop-in at 10 a.m. and Jenny eventually found us somewhere to work on the electrical jumble. We started to pack up about 11:30 a.m.

because we needed to come home to deal with a few jobs here. My paying a visit to the gent's toilet resulted in removing the two fluorescent tubes from the light fitting, with Graham's help, because neither of them was working. I made a note of the details for Graham and he said he would buy two new tubes and two new chokes (or "starters") since it was easier to replace everything while we had the fitting apart. I put the plastic cover in the cellar for safe keeping.

Part of the packing up process involved stuffing the car boot full of rubbish that needed taking to the tip. Thankfully, Graham had already put most of the rubbish in black sacks, which made it easier to handle.

We came home and had lunch, after which I decided to renew my subscription for my anti-virus software for another two years since it had only another 33 days to run.

Jenny and I washed the pots that had accumulated from the previous evening, breakfast and lunch while Rachel started tidying up in the lounge, after which Rachel helped me rearrange the furniture in the lounge so we could put up the Christmas tree. Jenny and I fetched all the Christmas items from the garage loft, I erected the tree and Rachel started to dress it.

Meanwhile, with Jenny's help, I put the door from the dining room into the kitchen back on the jamb I had painted. I had intended smoothing some rough parts of the fresh paintwork with fine sandpaper before touching it up with gloss paint and then cleaning out the brush but I ran out of time. It was 4 p.m. and time to light the fire, which we had not used for the past few days, relying on the central heating instead. Once lit, of course, it needed feeding with logs every hour or so.

I reflected that it had been a rather busy day.

Sunday December 3rd: Despite not seeing the light of day until lunchtime, which had nothing to do with the weather conditions, we managed to finish off the Christmas Tree, adding the lights and tinsel. Normally that would be a straight-forward, ten-minute exercise but when one set of (the conventional) lights failed to illuminate before we put them on the tree, it took some time to trace the fault to a loose bulb.

I updated the three web sites, as always, the village web site taking some considerable time, during which Jenny and Rachel had problems with a set of lights they were fitting round the mirror in the entrance hall. These all lit when tested but several bulbs failed to light when installed. Owing to their design, with two sets of twenty, serial lights in parallel, tracing the fault was not easy and I decided to remove all forty bulbs, test each one, put it back in starting with one set of twenty at the beginning and working my way along, testing the continuity after each bulb to check the integrity of the wiring. What a painstaking and time-consuming task that was. I managed to finish one set by tea-time with Rachel's help.

Monday December 4th: We were up about eight a.m., breakfasted and washed the pots.

The second chore of the day was to sew a button back on my mackintosh. The button on the front had a backing button and lining those up proved to be a considerable challenge. It was turned 11 a.m. by the time we had finished that. It was amazing, not to mention frustrating, how long the smallest of jobs took.

I sanded down and touched up the gloss paint on the two door jambs where I had caught them with my woolly sweater after first painting them, resulting in bits of wool sticking to them and causing them to dry with a rough finish.

After a shower, Jenny and I had lunch and then I attempted to finish repairing the set of lights on which I was working the previous day. I gave up on them and consigned them to the recycling pile in the car, from the Old School, waiting for its trip to the tip. I found a set of lights we were selling on our car boot stall and put those up in the entrance hall, round the mirror.

We put the empty Christmas boxes back in the garage loft and I prepared the fire for the evening.

My last useful little job was to dismantle an old cake stand, removing the support from the base. The base was consigned to become a bird feeding tray, ideal because of the hole in the middle for drainage when it rained and the support for storage as a spare, should we ever need one.

Tuesday December 5th: The first useful job I completed was to screw the metal latch retainer back onto the door jamb of the kitchen/dining room door.

The second piece of useful work was to wash the pots.

I completed a couple of surveys for our new MP, James Frith (Lab) and I also replied to an E-mail from one of his researchers who had responded to mine about the plan to dump mud dredged up from around Hinkley Point just off the Welsh coast, the significance of this act, from what I have read, being that Hinkley Point was a nuclear installation and that the mud was radioactive, being close to an existing discharge pipe from a reactor used to produce nuclear weapons. Hands up all those who thought Hinkley Point was solely a domestic installation, producing electricity for us all?

After that, we sat down in the lounge and I ordered an organic turkey for our Boxing Day meal from Marks and Spencer, for collection on 24th December.

The plan was to tidy up the dining room ready for New Year's Day, when we were expecting to seat seven round the table but we aborted that following a quick telephone call to Richard who was installing our wooden floor. The good news was that he would be with us either the end of this week or next Monday and the even better news was that our radiators were at the plumber's merchant. I said I would collect them the following day as we had planned a visit to B&Q, being discount day for us old fogies.

I checked the availability of the 64-Litre, Really Useful, stackable, storage box at B&Q in Bury and they were out of stock. I was about to order one for click and collect when I realised I would have to pay online and I would not receive my 10% discount. The alternative was to fetch them from the Bolton store. I did a quick search online for the boxes and discovered they were £3 cheaper at Amazon and, since I was ordering three, they qualified for free delivery. That was a no-brainer.

I decided to go to Bury today, first to drop off the rubbish from the Old School at the tip and then to collect my radiators. It was time for lunch first.

The trip to the tip was fine. When it came to the plumber's merchant, the chap suggested delivering the radiators for us the following day as they were on a pallet and rather heavy. I said that was fine.

We came home, with a brief stop at the Brandlesholme Tesco Express and Jenny suggested I should chop up the logs for the fire into smaller pieces since the larger ones did not burn very well. I tackled the first log in the bag for burning and the large axe wedged firmly in the wood but did not split it because of a knot. In attempting to free the axe head, the shaft disintegrated inside the head and came away leaving the head firmly in the block of wood. I gave up and came in with enough wood for the evening.

I telephoned a contact involved in a local woodworking scheme for young people, called the Greenwood Project, to ask him if he could fit me a new hickory wood handle in the axe head. He said he would if he had one and he would scout round to see if he could find one, letting me know later in the week, which would give me time to free the head. If he couldn't find one, I could always order one online.

I also checked online for a new axe and found a really nice one, made in Sweden, for £44 plus £3.40 delivery. I decided to keep my options open.

Wednesday December 6th: What a busy day. While eating breakfast, the radiators arrived. I helped the chap carry them in and we temporarily stored them in the kitchen.

After the usual chores, we moved six of the dining room chairs upstairs, storing them on the spare bed in the back bedroom until the dining room was back to normal. Pulling the table more towards the centre of the room allowed us to move the boxes of wood for the floor alongside the outside wall. We brought in the radiators, leaning one against the middle of the sliding door into the conservatory and laying the other flat on the floor in front of the sliding door.

My next job was to free the axe head from the piece of wood in which it stuck the previous day and tidy up afterwards.

I telephoned K Supplies in Rawtenstall to see if they had the 21 inch bow saw blades. They had three in stock, just the number I needed and they put them on one side for me.

While waiting for Jenny, who was busy preparing our lamb meatballs for tea, I started a back up of my files on Jenny's laptop computer to my desktop computer.

We headed off to collect the saw blades and we were served by a chap Jenny knew from when she was a Beaver Leader, with his son in her Friday group. He was kind enough to give me a discount on my purchase.

On our way back we called at the house of a chap in Ramsbottom who sharpened blades. I took my axe head, a set of wood chisels and a couple of screwdrivers. We met the chap and his wife and we chatted for some time. Their living room was full of old items, including a nice collection of oil lamps and a very nice model horse-drawn coach Ray had made. Ray insisted on showing me his "Sherlock Holmes" room and I could only say that the room looked like a museum, with an impressive and awesome collection of old items. What a lovely couple and what an unusual and quaint home they had.

Chatting away, I discovered he was a friend and colleague of Fred Dibnah and that he knew the Winfield family, which owned the large retail outlet in Haslingden.

We came home for a later-than-planned lunch to discover that Amazon had delivered the storage boxes I had ordered to a neighbour and I went down to collect them. Alan helped me bring them home.

After lunch, I unpacked the storage boxes and helped Jenny put all her gluten-free baking equipment for her Christmas fair stall into one of them, tidy out the cupboard under the stairs and store the box in there.

The empty packaging and two other storage boxes we placed in the garage for the present.

By this time the fire needed lighting and tending.

Thursday December 7th: After dressing, I thought I had better try on my Santa suit, which fitted a treat. There was a slight pull at the bottom of one of the legs which needed stitching.

After my usual four-course breakfast of orange juice, Omeprazole tablet, cereal with semi-skimmed milk, pumpkin and sunflower seeds and blueberries, tea and two slices of toast with butter and home-made, blackberry jam, all organic and gluten-free, it was pot-washing time.

I was interrupted briefly by a call from Alistair who transferred me to his colleague, Robin. They were interested in the lathe Ray, my blade-sharpening contact, had for sale and Robin was going to call in to see me the following morning. Robin had also located a spare, hickory, long axe handle and he was bringing that to see if it would do for my axe head. I explained this was currently with Ray and Robin said he could compare it with the old handle if I still had it, which I did.

I telephoned Ray and left a message with his wife to let him know I had a contact who was interested in his lathe.

I briefly checked my E-mail and my anti-virus security status following the recent renewal.

Jenny decided to stitch the Santa suit. Since that was proving awkward, I said I would have a go at it and I managed to make good the pull. It looked fine from the outside but I can't say the stitching was particularly neat. Since it didn't show, it wasn't a problem.

Jenny and I removed six new pieces of skirting from the garage loft, storing one in the dining area to make sure it would fit and five in the kitchen, temporarily. I also brought down the pre-varnished off-cuts from when I replaced the lounge skirting and they joined the kitchen collection. Manoeuvring the 390 cm lengths of wood into the dining room proved to be something of a challenge and reminded me of the game where a loop of wire had to be moved along a number of twists and turns on another wire without touching it, otherwise an alarm sounded.

I sat down to work out the cuts for the dining room, small bedroom and landing with the aid of a tape measure and Microsoft Excel.

I took some pictures of the recently painted door jambs and the radiators and wooden flooring and skirting stored in the dining room.

Jenny made poached egg and beans on toast for lunch which beat the usual sandwich.

After lunch, I prepared the fire for the evening and went out and cut some wood for burning. I had to rely on the old roofing lats because I did not have my axe with which to split the logs.

While I was sawing away, Robin turned up with my axe handle and collected Ray's contact details for the lathe. He said I could have the axe handle in return for putting him in touch with our neighbour regarding the first lathe, which was purchased for the Greenwood Project, helping youngsters.

I came in as it turned dark, about 4:20, having stepped on a nail that had penetrated my shoe, sock and skin and which was sticking up out of one of the lats I had pulled back out of the rain and left under the car port to dry. I washed my foot in Dettol, with some Tea Tree soap and Jenny came up to the bathroom with some Savlon. I found it was always best to make sure wounds from rusty, old metal were thoroughly cleaned with anti-septic products, especially when the metal was wet.

The next task was to light the fire. Pre-warming the flue with candles and using fire-lighters with dry kindling seemed to be the way to avoid smoky backdraughts.

There's nothing like seeing the flames flickering, especially at Christmas time.

Friday December 8th: We had an early start for a change and I felt better for it.

After breakfast etc., I moved the antique commode, used by my mother's mother around 70 years ago and on the odd occasion since, out of the dining area and onto the landing.

I moved the dining table to make room for Jenny's car boot tables on which I planned to varnish the 3.9 metre lengths of skirting before fitting. Unfortunately, there wasn't enough floor space with all the oak flooring wood stored in there and it was necessary to find somewhere else to put it until it was needed. With every room in turmoil, we were running out of space.

I finally found there was room under the twin beds in the back bedroom.

I changed into my Santa suit and we drove down to D-CaFF. That attracted a few waves and smiles from other drivers. The Christmas dementia café attracted 90 or so guests and, with the volunteers and the children from the local primary school, with their teachers, who came to sing, the total was around 130. Everyone had a most enjoyable time.

As well as attracting attention on the way home, we called at a couple of neighbours' houses to drop off some food that was left over from the Christmas meal.

I was pleased to finally come home and take off my Santa outfit; it was so warm.

Saturday December 9th: I sanded and cleaned the wood skirting and then gave it its first coat of varnish. I was hoping to do that the previous day but I did not have time.

We had lunch in the kitchen because the dining room smelled from the varnish and white spirit fumes.

We went shopping to Asda at Pilsworth and then Village Greens and Tesco at Prestwich. We had brought a prescription for a neighbour that was proving difficult to dispense. Neither pharmacies at Asda and Tesco had all the items prescribed so we decided to try elsewhere.

When we returned home, there was a message from Ray, my blade sharpener, to say my items were ready for collection.

Sunday December 10th: After breakfast, I gave the skirting a quick, between-coats sanding, a clean and another coat of varnish.

After a quick lunch, we headed for Bury with the prescription. The pharmacy at Boots in the Woodfields retail park had all the items in stock and we left it to be dispensed while we nipped into Tesco next door.

As we entered Tesco, our mayor, Dorothy, was there with her husband, Mike, promoting her three charities, Bury Hospice, Bleakholt Animal Sanctuary and the R.N.L.I. I stopped to chat with Mike. It was very good of them both to give their Sunday to such a worthy cause.

Jenny bought a few items Prestwich Tesco did not have the previous day, including this week's Radio Times. The one I had snatched from the shelf at Prestwich was the one for next week, which wasn't supposed to be issued until next Tuesday.

We collected the prescription from Boots and called at the Old School to borrow a four-foot, folding table as a temporary dining table in the lounge since we were expecting our new dining area floor to be laid this coming week, requiring our oak dining table to be dismantled and stored out of harm's way.

We dropped off our neighbour's prescription and came home for a rest, a cup of tea and, in my case, an organic, home-made (including the filling), gluten-free mince pie.

We dismantled the dining table and stored the top, the glass cover and the bottom cross-bar in the lounge and the legs, with the bits for putting it back together, on the landing.

Not a bad day's work, really.

Monday December 11th: I managed to sand down the skirting again ready for varnishing before it was time to go and collect my chisels, the axe head and a couple of small screwdrivers that had been sharpened and ground accordingly from Ray in Ramsbottom.

On the way back to the dentist at Holcombe Brook, I dropped some letters into the post box outside the dentist's practice for Ray and his wife. They couldn't drive their large 4 x

4 out from their narrow, winding, steep street because of the ice.

While waiting to have my chipped, front tooth repaired, I called Richard for the third time that morning to try to find out why he hadn't turned up to start work on my floor, ending up talking to the answering service again.

The repair to my tooth took about 15 minutes and I arrived home in good time for Joani to collect me for the dementia awareness session at a local care home.

While I was waiting for Joani, Richard rang to say he had me in his diary for next Monday so I said that was not a problem because I needed more preparation time. I could relax a little now I had a few days in hand.

The session went very well except that I had doubts about the dedication of most of the carers and, although the care home was very nice aesthetically, I certainly had no desire to end up there.

Having missed lunch, I had a quick snack before tea was ready and had some time to carry on with the redesign of my web site.

Tuesday December 12th: I did some web searching for Christmas presnets and placed an order with Amazon for a few items.

While Jenny went to the hair dresser, I managed to give the skirting its final coat of varnish while listening to two Jazz CDs a couple of visitors to our D-CaFF had lent me. When Jenny came home, I was sorting out some TV recordings and listening to a third Jazz CD, one of mine I had not yet had time to play.

We had a snack, not having had lunch because we had a late and, in my case, a full, breakfast and I continued my PC work.

Wednesday December 13th: We did some tidying, storing the newly-varnished skirting on the stairs and putting away Jenny's car boot tables, clearing up the dining room in readiness for the following week. I updated my web site.

Thursday December 14th: I spent most of the day cutting up the old roofing lats for the fire. As the daylight (what little there was of it) started to fade, I tidied up, came in and updated the village web site.

Friday December 15th: The usual grocery shopping day took in Tesco in Bury for some diesel, Unicorn, Sainsburys and Waitrose, not to mention the M60 ring road. Going down was not so bad. Returning was a long, slow nightmare of repeated episodes of start, crawl and stop. As we approached the M61 junction, I'd had enough and made my way, gingerly, from the offside lane of four (I shall refrain from using its official title – the "fast" lane) to the nearside lane and shot off up the M61 and almost immediately afterwards, the A666, towards Bolton. That was a longer but much faster route home.

We had a little time for sorting ourselves out, a cup of tea and preparing for an evening out before we left for a Christmas gathering of the D-CaFF volunteers at Joani's house. Everyone took food and drink, except we forgot the wine! There was plenty to go round and we ate, drank and chatted, finally making it home and into bed about 3 a.m. the

following morning, reflecting on a most enjoyable evening.

Saturday December 16th: We were awoken by Karen, who helped a neighbour to care for her husband. She had brought a Christmas card and present round from our neighbour who was moving home to Cornwall on the coming Monday. As a result, it was unlikely we would be seeing Karen again, either.

After a late breakfast, we decided to go into Ramsbottom to the Christmas market rather than go to Manchester after Robin had called, expected around 11 a.m. While I was waiting, I updated the village web site again.

Robin arrived, as expected and we had a brief chat before he collected my axe to fit the head on the shaft for me.

We walked down to catch the bus on Longsight Road rather than take the car into Ramsbottom, expecting it to be busy and it was.

We started off in the civic hall, wandering round the stalls and chatting with some of the stall holders. Bridge Street was closed to traffic and busses faced a somewhat awkward diversion round the back streets. The main street was full of stalls, mainly selling food of one sort or another, as were the church grounds. Inside the church were more stalls and we also visited the charity shops.

We caught the bus back to Longsight Road, since we no longer had a bus service from and to Ramsbottom through the village and walked home from there.

Having had a late breakfast and no lunch, we had an early, cold, make-do tea and settled down, still recovering from the previous evening!

Sunday December 17th: I started my day dealing with a letter from Esure concerning my house insurance renewal. The cost had jumped from £320 for the current year to £350 for next year. I decided to shop around.

I tried Money Supermarket without much success. I then tried Compare The Market and what did I find? Virtually the same policy with more or less the same information as on the renewal, including taking into account my claim for the conservatory roof repair (that's another, never-ending saga), from Esure at £245! I grabbed the telephone and eventually spoke with a very nice and helpful lady who arranged my renewal at the web site price. So for an hour's work, I saved £100.

The first major task of the day was to take up the carpet in the dining room. That involved shunting two chairs and the folding table into the kitchen, followed by the two new radiators (still boxed), leaving room for the rolled-up carpet.

Having rolled and tied the carpet and dumped that in the kitchen, we tackled the underlay that disintegrated as soon as it was touched. We bundled handfuls of underlay into a very large cardboard box that was surplus to requirements and destined for the tip. It was soon joined by strips of grippers, carefully avoiding the rusty, sharp nails and broken into manageable lengths. A few nails that held the rods in place remained in the floor and were removed using a trusty, old pair of nippers that used to belong to my mother's father, taking a little of the solid, asphalt floor with them.

We manoeuvred the box into the car and managed to squeeze in the rolled carpet as well, ready for the tip.

Jenny swept up the excess dust and bits of underlay and I gave the solid floor a good vacuuming to take off the residual, fine dust.

Finally, we placed the new, boxed radiators back on the dining room floor, set up the folding table and brought in the chairs ready for a spot of lunch.

After lunch, I sorted out my pile of rubbish in the lounge, much of which was media we had acquired and not watched or to which we had not listened as yet. It was amazing how much time tidying up and putting things away took. It did make things subsequently easier to find though, ultimately saving time.

Monday December 18th: Richard arrived and commenced work on the radiators. The installation was not so easy, particularly in the dining area where the long radiator had six wall mounts with no lee-way, so the fittings had to be spot on. The uneven walls didn't help and Richard and a joiner colleague, Jim, who came to discuss the flooring took a little while to manoeuvre it into position.

Richard did an excellent job on the pipe work, which ran in capping down the wall and then inside the plaster so that it would be hidden by the skirting.

The radiator in the small bedroom was slightly easier to fit, being smaller and only having four mounts and Richard had no difficulty removing the floor boarding to access the pipes for which I had already lifted the carpet and underlay. I told Richard I would put back the flooring but he relayed it for me and left me to secure it to the joists.

The only problem was that when the system was refilled, the four new radiator valves all leaked. Richard was quickly onto the problem and averted what could have turned into a major disaster. The instructions for fitting the valves did not make clear that to seal them they needed an "O-ring" which was supplied and which Richard thought was a spare for the internal part of the valve. The problem was sorted quickly and we had a working heating system with hot water again.

In the mean time, I had lit the fire about 2 p.m. and that kept us warm all day.

Joani collected me for another Dementia Awareness session at a local care home. What a fiasco that was. The session, which was in two parts, each about an hour long with a short break in between, was scheduled for 7 p.m. The five members of the care home staff who attended the session thought it was only an hour and four of them were due on night duty at 8 p.m. The fifth lady had arranged to be elsewhere just after 8 p.m.

Joani delivered both sessions in just over an hour. To say the least, it was rushed and I doubt it all sank in. In any case, four of the five did not seem that interested and did not take various handouts on the subject of dementia with them.

On a positive note, all five did sign up to be Dementia Friends and there was one of the five who showed a keen interest.

My major concern was that there were people caring for vulnerable and often confused senior citizens who obviously did not like what they did, showed no interest in it and who seemed to have had no formal training whatsoever.

It brought to mind the old adage that if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys, although I believe that, first, you shouldn't be doing a job you don't like, second, if you do a job you should always do it to the best of your ability, third, if you don't receive the formal training you think you need you should go and find out what you need to know for yourself and fourth, it is never about the money.

Tuesday December 19th: Richard came again and removed the rest of the skirting in the dining area and tidied up before applying a PVA coating to the floor so that the self-levelling compound would adhere to the floor.

The previous day, Richard and Jim had noticed how uneven the floor was, not apparent when the carpet was down and it would need some considerable amount of filling. That in itself was not too much of a problem, although it did complicate matters. The main issue was the drying time and given the work required, the wooden floor was unlikely to be ready for Christmas. Another revised deadline was about to be missed.

The critical date for having everything back to normal now was New Year when we were expecting seven for dinner.

Meanwhile, we had to move the 6-foot, decorated Christmas tree so we could use the door from the lounge near the bottom of the stairs to reach the stairs instead of passing through the dining area from the kitchen. We normally blocked that door off at Christmas, placing the tree in front of it and used the other lounge door into the entrance hall.

Jenny went off to Bury to meet Rachel to do some shopping while I tidied up the small bedroom, vacuuming, screwing down the boards that had been lifted, relaying the underlay and carpet and vacuuming that.

Lunch beckoned, followed by a little rest.

I spent the rest of the day lighting and tending to the fire and continuing the redesign of my web site.

Wednesday December 20th: Richard arrived just after 10 a.m. and applied some deep-fill, self-levelling filler to the dining room floor. When he had finished, we went to Bury, Richard's plan being to call round later in the day or early the following morning to see how the screed was drying and, if it had set sufficiently well, to apply a finishing, self-levelling compound on top of it.

We dumped a car load of rubbish at the tip, mostly comprising the old carpet from the dining room and what remained of its underlay.

From there, it was a short trip to the vet's practice to collect Toffee's month's supply of medication (thyroid trans-dermal gel and renal tablets) and another bag of the renal diet food.

Before paying the inevitable visit to Tesco, leaving the car in the retail park, we walked across to Bury, called briefly at the bank to deposit three old £1 coins and went to Ernest Jones, the jewellers, to buy some Camellia charms for Rachel's Christmas present. Rachel had indicated the ones she would like and since there was an offer of three for two, we purchased three. Unfortunately, two of the preferred ones were sold out.

Jenny bought a few items from Tesco and we came home for a late lunch, after which I lit the fire again and did some PC work. We allowed the fire to die down about 9:30 p.m. as the temperature in the hall had reached 23.5°C. Since we were sitting much closer to the fire, it was a little overpowering even with both of the air intake vents closed.

Thursday December 21st: We were up reasonably early, expecting Richard. He didn't arrive.

After breakfast, I finished off and submitted the answers to the Radio Times Crossword, the prize being a collection of Humax appliances. I also brought the accounts up to date, our balance having taken something of a battering of late. The latest bill from Bulb for our gas and electricity supply had left us with a debit balance for the first time since we switched to Bulb a few months ago, owing just under £10, which I thought was not unreasonable. It was a lot cheaper than our previous supplier and all the energy supplied was ecologically sourced.

The organic meat we ordered from Coombe Farm, for our New Year dinner for seven, arrived, still frozen and packed in ice, insulated with natural wool that still smelled of sheep, which I found not unpleasant. Fortunately, the meat was in sealed packs.

I gave Jenny a hand with her Christmas puddings and we had lunch, after which we rested for a while.

As I had done for the past few days, I made the fire and once that was roaring away, I carried on with more computer work.

Friday December 22nd: We set off on our weekly forage for food and drink. The first stop was Asda at Pilsworth and then we had a relatively comfortable journey round the M60 to Unicorn. The subsequent trip to Waitrose along the M56 and the journey home were both much quicker and far less stressful than usual, despite all the shops being very busy. The roads were noticeably less congested with very few heavy goods vehicles and no school traffic.

The plan had been to arrange for Richard to lay the finishing levelling screed on the dining room floor on our return but we were about an hour later than planned and he said he would come round the following morning.

As we were leaving to go shopping, Robin, the chap who was fixing my axe, was on his way to see one of our neighbours and we chatted about a problem they were having with their dishwasher. I had arranged for Robin to come round on our return with the combined pump and water heater from the appliance which he thought was faulty.

I checked the electrical contacts on the suspected part for shorts and could not find any so I could not confirm his suspicions, the symptoms being that the device tripped the circuit breaker when it heated the water. I suggested he replaced the pump/heater but

did not connect the power to the heating part of it and then run a full cycle to see if it tripped the breaker.

I spent some time configuring the computer to record the TV programmes for the first couple of days of the next week and then, after tea, we settled down to watch some of the programmes we had already recorded.

Saturday December 23rd: I finished off putting in the week's recordings. Richard did not arrive as expected and I spoke with him. He sounded rough to say the least. He said he would come round later in the day, when he had recovered. He didn't and I was becoming increasingly concerned that our planned dinner for seven on New Year's Day was going to be somewhat problematic.

Meanwhile, I tidied up my recorded media, we had lunch and then I eventually went out to cut some more wood for an hour or two, coming in as the light faded.

I made a little more progress with my web site redesign and listened to Jazz Record Requests.

Sunday December 24th: First, I hope you had a very Merry Christmas.

To those we know and love, we did not send cards out this year and if you did send us one, a very big thank you. Just because we didn't send cards doesn't mean we're not thinking of you. Please see [our Christmas message to you](#).

Robin arrived with my axe, well and truly shafted and gave me instructions on how to keep the shaft well oiled, together with some linseed oil in a dispensing container and an oily rag. He insisted he required no payment, which was very kind of him.

I telephoned Richard and he said he was going out with the family today but he would telephone me when he returned home to arrange to come later in the day to lay the self-levelling screed.

I spent my morning fitting new aluminium foil on the cooker hob. The old foil was quite soiled and needed replacing. We did this to protect the cooker hob itself from spillages and grease and it seemed to work quite well.

After a late lunch, we went to fetch the organic turkey we had ordered from Marks and Spencer in Bury, parking in the Woodfield Retail Park. Surprisingly, the car park was not much busier than usual, arriving and leaving being relatively easy.

On the way home, we called at Bargain Booze in Tottington for the Vitalia Prosecco they did not have on Friday and came out with the last two bottles from the cooler.

I had a look at Rachel's toaster, which seemed to be tripping her RCD breaker. I couldn't find a problem and it worked when I plugged it in at home so I assume the thorough clean she had given it and a piece of bread I had dislodged from the element had fixed whatever the problem was.

Rachel and Jenny headed off to Tesco in Ramsbottom and I started sorting out my TV recordings when Richard arrived. I said I was sorry to drag him out on Sunday and

Christmas Eve and he apologised for not being in any fit state to come the previous day when he said he would.

Richard examined the dining room floor for low spots, marked where they were and proceeded to mix and spread the self-levelling screed. It took him about an hour to cover the whole floor and he left just before Rachel and Jenny returned.

I carried on with the TV recordings only to discover that the clock was slow on the desktop computer. That meant that the recordings had started and finished early, missing the end of the two recordings I processed. I deleted them and rescheduled one of them for later in the week, when it was repeated.

Monday December 25th: The first and most enjoyable task of the day was opening our presents.

I dealt with the large number of TV recordings from the previous evening.

We were all ready for the taxi Matthew and Carrie had ordered to collect us for Christmas lunch at about 1:15 p.m.

We had a lovely meal and a lovely time with Matt, Carrie, Bob and Marie.

The taxi brought us home, although my memory of the rest of the evening was somewhat hazy.

Tuesday December 26th: I spent most of Boxing Day cutting wood for the fire.

Wednesday December 27th: There had been no word from Richard as regards the flooring so we did not attempt an early start and, as a result, we were too late for the annual, village, post-Christmas walk, which was a shame, because it was one of those rare occasions, a nice day.

Instead, I spent most of the day cutting wood for the fire.

Following a couple of prompts, Richard telephoned in the evening to say he and his colleague, Jim, would be here at 8 a.m. on Friday morning to lay the floor. Now, that was the most awkward day because we normally went grocery shopping on Fridays. Given the circumstances (it was the only day this week Jim could make it), I decided to switch the shopping day to Thursday.

Thursday December 28th: We went grocery shopping a day early. On the outward journey to Unicorn, I had intended to call at John Lewis in the Trafford Centre. Jenny needed some of her Omega 7 capsules, so we went via Dennis Gore, the chemist, in Prestwich. Jenny's said item was obtained and from there, we took the scenic route to Unicorn in Chorlton, thus by-passing the huge shopping mall and, this time (third time lucky), I actually managed to turn right onto Upper Chorlton Road at the appropriate junction instead of going the long way round. In Chorlton, I did subsequently miss the turning on the back street that went directly to Unicorn's car park and, instead, turned left on the main road through Chorlton and left again onto the usual road to Unicorn.

The onward trip to Waitrose was uneventful. As always, there was no choice of a gluten-

free meal for Jenny and I had to settle for a second choice because they had run out of bacon in the café. My chicken salad sandwich was much healthier though and it would have been even better if it had been gluten-free. Better still, it could have been organic and gluten-free.

On the subject of organic, neither Unicorn nor Waitrose had any organic mangos or melons and Waitrose still did not have the organic, gluten-free sausages we normally bought and which we wanted for New Year's Day. Nor had they any organic blue cheese left for the same occasion. On the positive side, they did have some organic, fillet steak.

Our journey home was a breeze compared with the usual stop, start, crawl cycle and we had the company of a Traffic Officer's vehicle for much of the way, which had a tendency to bring a certain amount of order to the surrounding vehicles.

After tea, I decided to fill the gaps in the plaster where the old skirting had been in the dining room. Unfortunately, I ran out of Polyfilla half way round.

Friday December 29th: We were up just after 7 a.m. and Richard and Jim arrived shortly afterwards, the overnight modest fall of snow not proving too much of a hazard. They started work on the dining room floor, we had breakfast and it kept on snowing.

After three rows of flooring, Jim decided that the floor was not level enough to continue and suggested an alternative method of fixing that would not result in "bounce" irrespective of the unevenness of the floor. First, that meant starting again and second the suggested adhesive would not be available until the first week in January.

The good news was that it stopped snowing and started to thaw.

We decided to plod on regardless and I sent the following message to Matthew on Skype:

"The floor laying has been aborted.

Even after self-levelling compound, the floor is still extremely uneven. After three rows of wood, it bounces like a trampoline.

Plan B is to lay the wood on the floor as it is using a thick adhesive that also fills gaps and sets hard so, although the wood won't be absolutely level, it won't bounce. At least, that's the plan.

Unfortunately, the adhesive cannot be obtained until the first week in January so New Year's Day dinner will be served with a building site theme and everyone has to wear donkey jackets and hard hats. Reflective jackets will be provided. Cones with flashing amber lights will be placed to mark the route to the dining room. I have it on good authority that the sweet will be Rocky Road."

The chaps apologised, packed up and went away. Jenny and I started to make the best of things and clean up the dining room as much as we could in preparation for New Year's Day.

I cleaned the double-glazed, UPVC, patio door that led to the conservatory, the light fitting and preceded to put up the brackets for the patio door vertical blind. Screwing in the right hand fitting split the plaster and all the plaster surrounding the rawl plug split and fell out.

We wondered what additional disaster could befall this decorating project that will have lasted over a year by the time it was finished.

It was time for lunch and afterwards, we went to Bury for some Polyfilla, which was cheaper at Wickes than B&Q and Wickes was closer. While there, I also purchased a short length of 6 mm dowelling to make pegs for the adjustable shelves in a CD stacker since the original pegs had been lost.

On the return journey, we called at Tesco for a few items and we bought four bottles of Yellow Tail Chardonnay since it was on offer at £6 a bottle and our stock was running low.

Safely home in the slush and driving rain, I set about plastering the hole I had created earlier, the plan being to sand it and paint it the following day and put up the bracket and vertical blind rail on Sunday so the dining room looked a little more hospitable, if one ignored the floor.

The final task of the day was to bring some order back to the lounge.

Since the dining room floor was no longer out of bounds and would not be so until well after twelfth night, the tree went back into its usual position, blocking off the direct access to the stairs. It no longer obstructed my view of the television.

The settee moved up to accommodate the tree and the coffee table went in its usual position, in front of it.

Jenny's laptop went back on the pouf in front of my chair.

A quick run round with the vacuum cleaner and the lounge did not look so much of a tip.

Saturday December 30th: Following the previous disastrous day, we were not motivated to rise early.

After breakfast and pot-washing, I sanded down the previous day's plastering and painted it. While I had paintbrush in hand, I also touched up the cracks that were beginning to appear round the patio door frame. If they persisted, I would need to apply a thin run of flexible filler or sealant. Cracks between the PVC frames and the plaster were not uncommon.

After washing out my brush and tidying up, we headed off to the Trafford Centre, Jenny wanted to look at food processors for her gluten-free baking, I wanted to look at laptops for Rachel's birthday and also the Dyson Pure Cool fan and air filter, all at John Lewis.

I ended up buying Jenny a top of the range Kenwood processor and the Dyson Pure Cool fan. I also ascertained that the new Microsoft Surface 2 laptop, with a new model due out in January 2018, was exactly what Rachel wanted. It was also expensive.

Back at home, I put in the TV recordings for the week, something I should have done the previous day and forgot about.

Sunday December 31st: It was time to prepare for our guests the following day. Apart from tidying up Jenny's worktop in the kitchen by putting away all my junk that cluttered it, the major task was to assemble a table in the dining room such that seven people could eat in there. That also involved making the dining room look reasonably pleasant, given the state of the floor.

I put up the vertical blind track, although the blinds themselves needed washing and this was not exactly the time of year for drying them.

We put up the newly-cleaned curtains and tie backs and then laid some decorating cloths on the floor on which to stand the table.

Jenny suggested using the paste tables we had for our car boot sales since these were not heavy, easy to handle and could be erected quickly. We placed the two side by side to create a sizeable table area. Unfortunately, when we brought in the two chairs we had been using in the kitchen to try them, we discovered it was impossible, once seated at the table, to place our legs under it to be close enough to eat comfortably. We put the paste tables away and decided to reassemble to proper dining table.

We brought in the bits of the table and I spent some time grovelling on the floor and flat on my back reassembling it. Being made of solid oak, the bits weren't exactly easy to lift and manoeuvre. Neither was the large, glass, protective top.

I also brought the six side chairs downstairs and we were set to seat eight once more, although there were only seven for dinner.

I finally managed to find a few minutes to unpack and install the Dyson fan on the landing, leaving it on its automatic setting.

My final job of the day was to make the fire, which we hadn't used for a few days, relying on the central heating.

I tidied up my media on the computer again.

We spent the evening watching TV recordings of Victoria Wood, a very talented and versatile, comedy writer and performer, although I did not find all of her humour terribly funny. That kept us going until almost midnight and we watched the New Year firework displays around the world and in London on ITV, the entertainment on the other main channels being utter rubbish.

We retired just after midnight.

On that note, a Happy New Year to everyone.