

Greenmount – January 2015

What better way was there to start New Year's Day with a visit to Asda at Pilsworth? Having consumed a good few bottles of white wine the previous evening, I decided it was worth checking (a) if Asda was still selling Yellow Tail Chardonnay at £5 a bottle and (b) if they were, whether they still had any in stock. It was my lucky day and I hoped this was the start of a trend for 2015. Armed with enough bottles to replenish our stock, for which Wilf insisted on paying and some other goodies for Wilf and Anne, we made our way home to help Jenny, who was keeping warm, still nursing her 'flu, prepare lunch for eight.

Carrie's mum and dad, Marie and Bob and Mike and Lorna joined us for the superb meal of roast lamb.

Jenny and I took Wilf and Anne up to Winfields at Haslingden to have a look round the large store selling outdoor clothing and equipment, shoes, household goods and such on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> January. They had nothing to suit us and we left empty-handed. Our run of good fortune hadn't lasted long.

Our next stop was at Helmshore textile Museum, which was closed. That was no great disappointment as we parked the car there and walked across the road to Musbury Fabrics for a potter round the store and lunch.

On returning home, it was time for Wilf and Anne to depart and we drove them to Piccadilly station in Manchester so that they would not have to do battle with the Metrolink, currently in some disarray due to the development work on extensions to the track. Instead, we did battle with the rush-hour (now, there's a misnomer) traffic on the way home.

Jenny spent most of Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> January in bed, nursing her 'flu. There was no possibility of our involvement in the Old School table-top sale and the "Drop-in" and lunch held on the first Saturday of every month, much to our disappointment.

After the Christmas festivities, things seemed to be going downhill rapidly, as Rachel sent us a text message to say she also had 'flu and wouldn't be with us the following day.

Meanwhile, my account on Jenny's computer had developed a most peculiar fault which I had been trying to repair for the past three or four days and I was getting nowhere fast. The problem was that, while I could connect to all the three web sites I run on my server here at home from both my desktop and Jenny's account on her laptop, I could only connect to two of them from my account on Jenny's laptop. I could not connect to my own ([www.networking-consultancy.com](http://www.networking-consultancy.com)) web site from my account on Jenny's laptop. There had to be something wrong with my personal account settings but I couldn't find what it was.

I finally decided to create myself a new account, copy all my personal documents from my old account to the new account, set up all the software I needed in the new account, make sure everything worked as it should and then delete my old account. And good riddance. I had, thus far, achieved step one and checked the new account connected to all three web sites.

Our one major achievement on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> January was to take down all the Christmas cards we had received and cross-check them against the list of the ones we sent out. Our list was getting shorter each year.

On Monday 5<sup>th</sup> January, we managed to take down the Christmas tree and pack everything away for another year.

On Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> January, Jenny and I strolled round to the Pharmacist for a bottle of cough linctus and some cough sweets to ease Jenny's tickly cough so that we could both get some sleep.

We decided to treat ourselves to fish and chips for tea and we went to the English chip shop on the way to Ramsbottom, next to Bargain Booze. We had previously discovered they did a gluten-free batter on request.

On Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> January, Jenny decided to clean the fridge (as opposed to the elevator)<sup>1</sup> and I helped. I do have my uses.

Gwen called round to collect her cardigan she had left on New Year's Eve and she and Jenny left together. Jenny went to see the practice nurse for her check-up and came out with an A1 rating. Mine would be more like Z9.

I had placed a bulk order for more church candles for one of our dining-room, floor-standing holders with The Scented Candle Shop and the box of 24 was delivered by UPS to number 44 and left there, outside, on the drive, a note being placed through the letter-box to say as much. The recipient was supposed to have signed for it. Alan, our neighbour, brought the parcel up to us.

My previous experience of deliveries from The Scented Candle Shop was that the odd one or two of the candles had been broken on arrival. I decided to check this shipment straight away. 17 of the 24 candles were damaged, mostly with hairline cracks and one quite badly. The repeated, big, red letters "FRAGILE" on a white background on the tape all round the parcel might as well have been written in ancient hieroglyphics as far as UPS was concerned.

I contacted the Scented Candle Shop immediately to request a replacement and to suggest they should cancel their contract with UPS. I also suggested they might consider including a phial of nitro-glycerine with their fragile parcels on the basis that UPS would only make a mistake with such a parcel once.

I was advised UPS would deliver a second shipment the following day and that someone from UPS would telephone me to make arrangements to collect the damaged parcel for investigation into the cause of the damage. I didn't have any nitro-glycerine readily available. To me, the cause of the damage was fairly obvious. Some idiot(s) employed by UPS either couldn't read English or were too lazy to handle the parcel with the delicacy required.

Later that day, a second delivery arrived from Amazon. This was Jenny's birthday present and I inspected it after she had gone to bed. That was fine and I hid it away until the 27<sup>th</sup>.

Sure enough, on Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January, UPS arrived at our door (they got it right this time) and delivered the new bunch of candles I had been promised. What's more, I had to sign for them. A second chap with a hand-held electronic device took away the damaged shipment and I signed to say that had been collected. As for the telephone call.... I informed The Scented Candle Shop.

I have to say that The Scented Candle Shop had been very helpful, as always and my criticism is of UPS.

Friday 9<sup>th</sup> January saw us back into our weekly, grocery shopping routine with lunch at Waitrose. I was surprised to find we spent a lot less than usual and certainly than of late, on this trip, which was just as well because I had received a Council Tax demand for an additional £151 to pay for a 2% rise in policing.

It occurred to me that the increase coincided with the shooting in Paris at the offices of Charlie Hebdo and this increase may have been to fund additional security officers to counter such attacks in the UK.

This is a good opportunity to dispel a few myths perpetrated by the media when such events occur.

First, I do not believe there is an international terror organisation as such and certainly none that is a match for international security.

Second, killings and bombings by terrorists, whether groups or individuals, has nothing to do with religion, except in the minds of these cowards and, let's face it, if they go around harming helpless and unarmed individuals, they are nothing but cowards. I know of no religious text that condones violence and murder, whatever justification individuals might think they have. As for Muslims, my only experience, as a Christian, of these people is their kindness, unselfishness and their willingness to help people in need. I have often reflected that, perhaps, we could learn a lot from them.

Third, whether these people are brought to justice or not in this world, they will certainly face it in the next. They have no hope of eternal salvation, whatever they might think. And this begs the question. They claim to be defending their religion, yet they do not have enough faith to believe that those who blaspheme will be held to account in the next world.

Fourth, irrespective of the freedom of speech, it is wrong to blaspheme and that should apply to any form of disrespect of the recognised religious sects, places of worship and their holy scriptures. That is as irreverent as using religious excuses for terrorism and should be deterred by the law of the land.

Here ends the sermon for this month.

We managed a trip into Ramsbottom on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> January and toured the charity shops. Rachel, who had just recovered from a bad attack of 'flu, came for tea and stayed overnight.

The first task on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> January, after feeding the cats while Jenny finished her shower,

was to remove the memory from Jenny's laptop, clean the contacts and reseat the memory in an attempt to overcome the recent sudden stops and crashes of Windows 7, this long-standing problem having reared its ugly head again. I came to the conclusion that one of the two 2 Gb memory modules had an intermittent fault after a detailed memory test at system load time stopped working after completing only 21% of its tasks.

I carried on with my computer administration work on my desktop.

On Monday 12<sup>th</sup> January we made a start on our house redecoration programme, the plan being to work our way through the house from top to bottom starting with the small bedroom. The day was taken up with preparation work, moving out junk and distributing it to other rooms, moving our bits of furniture to the back bedroom and packing away Jenny's novels we keep in the bookcase in the room.

Our work continued on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> January, laying dust cloths and moving furniture to the centre of the room before commencing serious work on the ceiling. It was a case of removing the textured paint I put on the ceiling to cover up the cracks many years ago and, after a tentative start, the ceiling was back to bare plaster and the floor was covered in debris.

The rest of the day was spent cleaning up the mess. That might seem somewhat slow progress until I mention the work was interrupted by a broken air hose on our Dyson vacuum cleaner.

This was the third hose that had suffered a tear near the end into which we plugged the tools and it didn't seem long since we last purchased this one. I decided to try to repair it rather than fork out £25 or so for yet another one.

I started by pulling the hose at the tear from the plastic end. It unwound, tearing the flexible, plastic cover as it did so and, with a bit of brute force, the wire, reinforcing spiral came free from the plastic end. The next obstacle was to remove the black plastic clip that held the hose in place inside the end. That was achieved by inserting a screwdriver to distort the end so that the lugs on the clip were dislodged from their securing holes in the end. The clip came out and I cleaned up the grooves into which the hose had been attached.

I made a clean cut on the hose to tidy up the end of the hose and then wrapped the end of the hose round the clip and pushed it into the plastic end to secure it, ensuring the lugs locked into place.

A test proved that the repair had been effective and I finished tidying up before the daylight failed.

So, if you ever need to repair a Dyson hose, you now know how to do it. Not that Dyson will tell you.

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January saw the decorating work in the small bedroom progress rapidly as most of the plaster above the window fell off the wall when I attempted to deal with the cracks that resembled the British railway system before that idiot Beeching was let loose on it. The floor was once more covered in debris and the room was full of plaster dust.

I managed to clean the whole lot up before the light faded once more.

I could have been walking part of the Lancaster canal with Mike, Frank and Steve.

On Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> January, the time had arrived to start filling in the holes, including the one where half a brick was missing in the internal wall on the right hand side of the lintel.

Unfortunately, I had to take the car in for its MOT, I didn't have enough materials in stock and what I did have had been stored in the garage for some considerable time and had probably gone off. I decided to apply my skills to dealing with Jenny's ongoing laptop problem. Having run a thorough memory test overnight that had finished (when I ran it last on the 10<sup>th</sup> January, I had obviously been too impatient) and found no memory problems, I backtracked my thinking and came to the conclusion it was, after all, a software problem.

I knew Internet Explorer (version 11) was behaving oddly so I decided to uninstall it and reinstall it, not that Microsoft made it easy to do either. The first challenge was to find where it was on the Programs and Features list. Would you believe it wasn't listed as a program but as an update (one of the many Microsoft updates to the operating system that fix bugs and supposedly enhance the system). I did manage to uninstall the "update" successfully but the removal did not delete the icon in the quick-launch task bar! I had to do that manually.

Fortunately, I was able to use Mozilla Firefox (I used this as standard on my desktop XP system since XP was no longer supported by Microsoft and Internet Explorer no longer worked properly under XP) to download IE 11 so I could reinstall it. The only problem was that the reinstallation failed part way through. It failed the second time as well. Then I found a note tucked away at the bottom of the Microsoft IE 11 installation web page that said that one of the issues with reinstallation is that it doesn't always work immediately after an un-install because it can take up to twenty minutes for the files to be deleted from the latter. Stretching, straws and water sprang to mind.

The web page kindly allowed me to leave an anonymous comment as to its effectiveness, which I did. I hope nobody from Microsoft ever reads both this and the comment.

Having left the car at the garage at 8:30 that morning, before breakfast and walked back in the very cold wind, it was 4 p.m. before I received a call to say the car needed a new track rod end on the near-side. It was nearly 5 p.m. before a second call told me it was ready for collection and Jenny, who said she wanted to come for some fresh air and I walked up to collect it in conditions not far short of those we encountered in the simulated summer storm in the Antarctic Centre in Christchurch, N.Z. The wind was gusting at a rate of knots and then some and the chill factor felt well below zero. We arrived home to find the heating had kicked in and the cats were huddled next to the radiator in the hall. We joined them.

We took the car shopping earlier than usual on Friday 16<sup>th</sup> January, having crawled out of bed at just after 8 a.m. to bring in a grocery delivery from Abel and Cole, feeling rather worse for wear following the second night during the week when the intruder alarm sounded in the wee small hours and I had come downstairs to investigate. Needless to say, there was no sign of an intruder and we were somewhat puzzled as to what had set off the alarm.

To our surprise, there was little traffic, both coming and going and I managed to average 58 miles to the gallon on the whole trip, which was much better than usual. We had been at Waitrose for lunch by 11:30 and we were home before 3 p.m., when the roads become very busy during term-time because children of the time had not discovered for what legs were intended.

The rest of the day was spent on computer administration work (accounts, TV recordings for the week, e-mail and so on).

On Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> January, we commenced our preparation work for the next jumble sale on 16<sup>th</sup> February, testing and pricing electrical items at the Old School. We were back home for 4 p.m. for a light snack before washing up the pile of dirty pots that had accumulated over the previous 24 hours. Jenny remained in the kitchen, preparing tea while I had a gruelling hour in the lounge listening to Jazz Record Requests on BBC Radio 3. During the course of the evening, Jenny's HP laptop froze twice and crashed once and I decided it was time to completely reinstall Windows 7. I got as far as backing up my documents on the laptop when I discovered a whole load of pictures I had stored there and I couldn't remember whether I had processed them or not. I gave up and went to bed.

I picked up where I had left off the previous evening after breakfast on Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> January only to discover I had never loaded the pictures of the Hoghton Towers visit the previous September on the village and Civic Society's web sites. That and other updates to both web sites took all morning.

In the afternoon, I backed up my documents on Jenny's laptop. It's amazing how time flies.

On Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January, I went round to the surgery for a repeat blood test of my sugar level. That didn't take long and on returning, I completed backing up Jenny's laptop (Jenny's documents and the recorded TV programmes we had not watched) and started the reinstallation process from the recovery partition on the hard drive. That went well, once I had sorted out the wireless network connection, until the Windows Microsoft Update process failed. I decided to start from scratch again.

The second attempt at recovery actually got a bit further, until the computer declared it was short of memory. This I couldn't understand because it had 4 Gb to play with. It was then I discovered it had lost 2 of the 4 Gb again. I let the update continue, hoping it would finish because it was near the end. I should have been so lucky. On update 122 of 122, at around midnight, it stopped and had not moved on when I rose from my slumber the following morning, Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> January. I shut down the computer and foolishly reloaded it to check on the updates that had been applied. They had all failed.

Enough was enough. I decided to take the computer to PC World, offering a fixed-fee (£50 plus parts), no fix, no fee repair. Unfortunately, as I shut the computer down, it had other plans and started to reinstall the updates again. This time, they all worked and the computer closed down. I seized the opportunity and the computer and took it to PC World.

On the way, we returned two bags of cat food we had purchased for Treacle under a 3 for 2 scheme to Pets at Home for a refund because, being unwell, the cat wouldn't eat it.

I explained the problem with Jenny's laptop to the chap at PC World. The first thing he did was to power on the laptop. What a mistake that was. It started to process the updates it had installed earlier. Not deterred, he closed the lid and the computer closed down. This is not something one should do when in the final stages of installing updates and I was inspired by his technical insight.

The chap assured me all would be well, boxed up the laptop and took my details and my money. He told me it should be back in a couple of weeks or so but could take up to four weeks. I was assured someone would contact me before they installed any new hardware.

Back home, I decided to try to make the Hauppauge HVR-1900 TV receiver box, which I use to record programmes in the lounge, work with Rachel's laptop. I had tried this before we went on our extended vacation, last year, without success and I invoked the procedure suggested from a technical chap at Hauppauge. That didn't work either.

By the end of the day, I had made no progress with this and decided to use the obsolete, but still functional, Showshifter software on my XP desktop with my Hauppauge PC card to record programmes for the present, the problem being that the signal is not very good in the conservatory and recordings were prone to breakup.

I also managed to install the Mezzmo DLNA server on Rachel's laptop and connect my external hard drives to it so that we could, at least, still watch recordings on the TV screen, across the wireless network. This wasn't perfect because playback sometimes stuttered due either to lack of CPU power on the PC or something overloading the wireless network but at least it was better than nothing.

On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> January, Jenny and I discussed taking the cat, Treacle, who was not eating and had lost weight again, to the vet and we made an appointment for later in the day.

I received a telephone call from the doctor's surgery to inform me that my blood sugar was still a little high and the doctor wanted to speak to me. We agreed on a telephone appointment for the following Monday. It obviously wasn't life-threatening.

Jenny and I went to B&Q at Heap Bridge in search of filler for the holes in the wall of the small bedroom. I managed to find some Polyfilla that was supposed to be shrink and crack resistant and I bought two boxes, hoping, optimistically, that it would be enough. When it came to sand and cement mortar, there were so many different types it took me a good half-hour to work out which would be best for my needs. I finally settled on a 10Kg tub of dry mix that seemed to be what I needed. Only time will tell. If the house was still standing in a couple of years' time, it would be a miracle. At least, being Wednesday, I got 10% off with my over-60s card.

A couple of employees asked us if we had found everything we wanted and I had to admit that their plaster coving was not the right size, not matching that which we had in the lounge.

Neither was that at Wickes, we later discovered, being the same as B&Q.

After we had returned home and had lunch, I tackled the WinTV problem on Rachel's laptop again, following further instructions from my contact at Hauppauge, not that I had great hopes of success. I was right.

We took Treacle to the vet because she was not eating very much, she had been sick a couple of times and she had lost weight again.

On Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> January, work commenced filling in the holes in the plaster in the small bedroom. The large hole, between the lintel and the block in the internal wall took some filling with sand and cement mortar but, being the determined kind of chap I am, with a large colourful vocabulary, the mortar eventually plugged the gap. I started on the plaster, filling in some of the smaller cracks first, working my way to the gap over the window. I rapidly concluded I didn't have enough Polyfilla to finish the task and I was beginning to wonder if B&Q had enough in stock.

I had a break from the plastering on Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, as we went grocery shopping as usual.

We spent Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> January at the Old School, working on the electrical jumble again.

On Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January, I worked on the WinTV problem on Rachel's laptop, without success and I sent several E-mails to my Hauppauge contact, the last concluding that in the version 3.9f I had installed, which worked on Jenny's old Fujitsu laptop, the WinTV application would not communicate with the WinTV Service that was running.

I installed Norton Utilities 16 on Rachel's laptop to sort out any registry problems. That failed each time I tried to register the licence I held.

It wasn't my day and it was about to get worse.

I tried installing Norton Utilities 16 on my desktop system. That failed because I already had Norton Utilities 15 (a previous version) installed. I uninstalled version 15, restarted the computer and installed version 16 again. This time that failed to register the licence as well.

I gave up.

On Monday 26<sup>th</sup> January, I took an early morning call from my GP regarding my raised blood sugar level (I always have been a sweet person). He reassured me it was nothing to worry about – yet. I was OK up to the “yet” bit. He advised that I cut down on my sugar intake and lose some weight, neither of which came as a surprise. Unfortunately, winter is not the best time for losing weight since the weather is not conducive to exercise in the fresh air. Cutting down on sugar was a distinct possibility though.

After breakfast, I contacted Norton support and a chap there took control of my desktop to try to fix the problem with NU16. This first-line support chap seemed to think it was a network or routing error and proceeded to delete items from my hosts file, which I needed to access my web pages on my internal network and to change my network card's settings, not that it made any difference to the problem. He eventually gave up and passed me on to

second-line support. By 2 p.m., it was time for me to go to the dentist and I had to tell the support chap I needed to disconnect him. By this time, he had concluded the problem was at Norton. I could have told him that earlier.

While all this was taking place, I made the dangerous decision to multitask, venturing into female territory. I applied a fix recommended by my Hauppauge contact to WinTV on Rachel's laptop and it worked a treat.

Before departing to see my friendly dentist, I just had time to reset my PC configuration to its proper state, as it was BN (Before Norton).

My dentist had decided to replace an old amalgam filling that was beginning to break up and, while the anaesthetic was taking effect, she cleaned my teeth. A nice, pearly-white set of teeth, one delicate filling, a numb, lower-right jaw and a dribble down the right-hand side of my mouth later, Jenny and I walked back home, stopping only at Holcombe Brook Post Office to stamp an envelope for Edith's birthday card that would, later that day, be wending its way across the globe.

Back home, I finished off Edith's card and walked round to post it in the box in the village, outside where the post office used to be before some idiot decided village residents would be better off walking the mile round trip to the one in Holcombe Brook. On returning, it was time to relax and to reflect on one of those rare events, a relatively successful day.

Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> January was Jenny's birthday and I gave her a present of the next three series of Heartbeat on DVD. I had not had chance to buy her a nice card this year because I had not been out alone. It was probably just as well because she had so many cards, there would have been nowhere to put it. At least, that's my excuse.

I updated the village web site with a new Belly Dancing Beginners' Course, starting the following Monday and a couple of other items before taking Jenny out for a stroll round Horwich, a small town between Bolton and Chorley. It was not one of my most successful ideas and we came home for lunch, followed by more PC work.

Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> January was another day full of activity. The man from British Gas arrived to service the boiler just as I was leaving to take Treacle to the vet again.

Treacle was much improved and had gained quite a lot of weight, eating and drinking normally again, just like me. The vet suggested we keep her on the kitten food, which we were supplementing with roast chicken, and monitored her weight to make sure she gained at least another half a kilo.

After lunch, Jenny and I went to Asda for a few bits of pieces. We were also almost out of wine and we were astonished to discover we had consumed six bottles of white wine and five bottles of red wine in four weeks. Some of this was attributable to the New Year's Day dinner for eight but even so, it seemed a lot. We vowed to reduce our intake and limit alcoholic beverage to week ends only, especially since the price for Yellowtail Shiraz and Chardonnay at Asda had gone up from the special offer of £5 a bottle to £6.98 a bottle. This still beat the prices at Tesco and Waitrose though. We settled on three bottles of

Chardonnay for the present, having three bottles of red wine still in the wine rack.

It was time to clean out the log fire again on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> January, having used it for the first time for ages the previous evening. That and other routine chores took all morning. After lunch, Jenny went off to Cream in the village to have her hair washed, cut, coloured, dried and goodness knows what else while I tackled more plastering in the small bedroom. I made some progress but it struck me it was going to take some time, especially if I didn't do a bit every day – and some plastering.

On Friday 30<sup>th</sup> we went grocery shopping as usual with lunch at Waitrose. I had received an E-mail from Waitrose to say that the free tea/coffee in the café, to which “My Waitrose” card-holders are entitled, will, during February, cease to be free unless an item of food is purchased in the café at the same time as the drink. I sent a message back to Waitrose informing them that Jenny is gluten-intolerant and for this rule to apply to her, they needed to supply gluten-free alternatives in the café. We would see what transpired.

Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> saw us back at the Old School for a rather full day of testing, pricing and boxing electrical goods for the coming jumble sale in a couple of weeks' time. There was still a lot to get through when we left about 4 p.m.

We showered and changed and Rachel and her young man, Matthew, arrived about 6 p.m. Rachel drove us all to the Waggon and Horses in Hawkshaw, run by Liz and Steve, for an excellent meal.

It was a nice end to a busy, wet and very cold month.

## Notes

- 1 If you don't understand this comment, you need to watch the excellent, science-fiction film “Dark Star”.