

Greenmount – January 2017

Sunday January 1st: We finished breakfast around lunchtime! We must have been tired, having slept for a good 10 hours, although I was somewhat restless, the pain in my left hip waking me on a couple of occasions.

I decided it was time to give my aches and pains some exercise and I went out and washed the car. I had intended to cur some wood for the fire too but by the time I had finished drying off the car, the light was starting to fade. I came in and joined Jenny and Lorna, who had popped up to have a word with Rachel, for a cup of tea. In Rachel's absence, Lorna stayed and chatted with us for a while, after which I went outside briefly to check a suspected slow puncture in the nearside rear wheel of Rachel's car. If there was a puncture it was very slow indeed, the pressure having dropped by 1.5 bar since the previous evening.

It was far too cold to remain outside, so that was the end of the day's activities.

Monday January 2nd: It was a lovely sunny day with a pale-blue sky and not a cloud in sight. The northerly/north-easterly made the 2 degree temperature seem more like -2 degrees. Cutting logs for the fire kept me warm enough and I tackled some of the larger chunks of wood that had been lying around for some time. They took a while to saw (I use a bow-saw) and chop (I have two axes, a large one and a small one), each piece yielding at least enough wood for a day's burning.

I left off the wood cutting to fetch Rachel from her flat, her car being here, suffering from same – well, a slow puncture in the off-side rear tyre, anyway. Rachel was staying here the night and taking her car into the garage the following morning.

Tuesday January 3rd: We woke to a dull, miserable morning and followed Rachel down to Tottington Motors, where she left her car, giving her a lift to work in Bury. We parked in Tesco's car park and walked across to Bury, mainly to pick up a few items from the Health Food Store in the indoor market. Needless to say we called at the pound shop and found a couple of useful items before discovering the market was closed.

Back at Tesco, we purchased a couple of items there as well and came home for lunch. I spent the afternoon working on the computer.

Wednesday January 4th: It was another nice, sunny day and we decided to deliver the latest village newsletter to the residents on our round, bumping into Frank and Gwen and their new pup, Ruby, a lovely, inquisitive, playful, black spaniel.

Having completed our mission, we returned home and started making marmalade using the mandarin oranges we had purchased from Unicorn. That took a good couple of hours, Jenny having processed the fruit and soaked it overnight.

I then set about tidying up the recorded TV programmes we had watched on the computer.

The planned wood cutting session had been put on hold.

Thursday January 5th: This was the twelfth day of Christmas and, as such, it was time to put away all the Christmas items for another year.

The priority, though, was an early start on the electrical jumble at the Old School in readiness for the week end. We were up before the sun, for a change and I was at the Old School for about 9:15 a.m. Jenny joined me a little later and we made an impression on the electrical jumble still waiting to be tested and priced as well as all the items that recently arrived and which had not been stored away.

We were home just before 5 p.m. and we fetched the empty boxes for the Christmas items from the garage loft before having a refreshing cup of tea while I checked the accounts and paid the window cleaning bill, the chaps having been while we were out, setting off the burglar alarm.

We packed away all the Christmas items and tidied up the lounge, leaving the boxes in the kitchen for the night. We were too tired to put them in the loft and decided to leave that chore for the following day.

Friday January 6th: Our grocery shopping trip down to Chorlton and Broadheath was, for a change, not bad, traffic on the M60 outbound being quite light and not too bad on the return journey. A late start and a visit to the tip with electrical jumble from the Old School made it a late finish.

Saturday January 7th: A morning at the Old School commencing at 8:30 a.m. for a mini jumble sale until noon, followed by an afternoon of playing with E-mail filtering on the server, filled my exciting day.

Sunday January 8th: The day of reckoning had arrived. It was time to start decorating in earnest and the first task was to prepare the dining area, which is open-plan to the staircase, so we could remove the cork tiles from the staircase wall.

We decided to start by moving the two book-cases into the lounge and placing them behind the settee as a temporary measure. That would remove the need to pack away all the books and the items stored on top of the book cases and would also create more working space in the dining area.

Since the book cases sat against an outside wall in the dining area and had not been moved since we last decorated, many years ago, it was a surprise that the state of the wall behind was not in a worse state than that in which we found it.

Monday January 9th: The second phase of decoration commenced with the emptying and moving of the oak cupboards and display cabinet. We packed away all of the items on open shelves and on the top of the display cabinet in three plastic storage boxes we had borrowed from the Old School, carefully wrapping each item in bubble-wrap and stored the boxes in the conservatory.

We then emptied the cupboards so we could move the units. Fortunately, the whole, large piece of furniture disassembled into six reasonably manageable units and we started with the

small end unit on the right. Having emptied the display cabinet and the cupboard underneath, we moved the two to a temporary position, turned round with the back up to the dining table. Next, we emptied the centre, main units in the same way and turned those round, placing all the items we had removed on the dining table, which was, by then, fully covered.

The plan was to reassemble the units in their temporary position and place the items back inside the cupboards for the time being. Unfortunately, the floor was not level. It seems British builders simply do not have the ability to produce level floors. Even the wooden floors upstairs were not level. It was a little late in the day to start messing around with a spirit level and packing so we left that task for another day.

We took out our frustration on the wallpaper, peeling off the surface layer with great enthusiasm. The surface of the paper, particularly low down, was suffering from mould due to condensation and I remarked how much worse it would have been had we not deployed two dehumidifiers, one in the conservatory and one in the kitchen. Jenny polished the units as we removed them and cleaned the wooden skirting with anti-bacterial wipes before polishing it. I also sprinkled some carpet cleaning granules where the units had stood and rubbed them in with the appliance provided for that purpose. The instructions stated that they should be left for thirty minutes to remove the dirt from the carpet and then they should be vacuumed off, hopefully, taking the dirt with them. We left them overnight.

We did not even attempt to remove the final end unit. Instead, we made room on the table for tea and afterwards, settled down to watch a couple of recorded TV programmes.

Tuesday January 10th: Joani collected me at 9:45 a.m. for another Dementia Friends training session at the Skipton Building Society in Bury. Once again, I provided the technical input for the Powerpoint presentation. I also took a CD of the presentation to give to one of the managers there so he could install it and future sessions could be run without me, leaving me free to continue my decorating at home.

I was home for about 1:30 and, after lunch, Jenny and I continued with the rearrangement of the dining area in readiness for decorating. The afternoon consisted of packing away most of the contents from the cupboards and display cabinet, leaving off due to lack of time and light.

Wednesday January 11th: Being market day, we decided to go to Bury. I needed a coupler for the cord that rotated the blinds fitted to one of the windows in the lounge as the original plastic one had disintegrated. I purchased three metal ones for £1 from a market stall.

We next paid a visit to our usual haunt, the health food shop in the market, for some cereal flakes and a few other items we could not obtain elsewhere.

After abortive visits to T J Hughes for a thermos flask and the card shop for a birthday card for Rachel, we stopped off at Waterstones book shop where Jenny purchased a gluten-free cookery book for which she had been searching and could not find elsewhere, including online at Amazon.

Our last stop was at our bank to obtain some cash and then it was back to dump our purchases in the car in Tesco's car park before acquiring more groceries from the store itself.

We came home for lunch, calling at the Old School to borrow a couple of cardboard boxes for packing away the rest of the dining-room items and then nipped into Ramsbottom for Rachel's card, taking the opportunity to tour the charity shops as usual, finding a box-set of *The Lord of the Rings* in the RSPCA shop for £3.99.

It was approaching 5 p.m. by the time we made it home and I decided it was too late to start work in the dining room so I settled down to organising my media on the PC. I had to keep a catalogue of my DVDs, CDs and my collection of recordings in order to find them and to keep a record of what I had to avoid purchasing duplicates. My audio collection had around 375 titles and some of those were simply titles of collections, such as *The Goon Shows*, so the actual total was far greater. As for videos, I had almost 3,000 titles of which DVDs accounted for about half, although those figures did include the expansion of individual DVDs into separate episodes where applicable. The figures did not include the 200 or so TV recordings we had not yet watched. The long-term plan was, of course, to replace all the TV recordings we kept with DVDs. Needless to say, it was a very long-term plan. As for storage....

My BT bill finally arrived and a larger piece of fiction I had yet to encounter. It was around twice the cost I expected. It seemed that the incompetence of BT knew no bounds.

Thursday January 12th: After just nodding off, I was awakened about 1 a.m. by a strange sensation and it took me a few minutes to realise that we were suffering from yet another power cut. I came down stairs and frantically searched for an electric company emergency telephone number to find out what was happening. I located one in my account on Jenny's laptop, running on battery power and discovered that there was an equipment fault and the anticipated fix time was 4 p.m.

Rachel's birthday present was the opportunity to collect me from Tottington Motors in her car at 8:30 a.m. and give me a lift home and then to spend the day with us working on the dining area while my car was being serviced and receiving its MOT certificate for another year, before giving me a lift to Tottington Motors to collect it.

In the event, traffic was horrendous and instead of taking me the allowed 15 minutes to reach the garage, it took me over half an hour. Rachel arrived some twenty minutes later, traffic from Manchester being equally bad. And the political powers that be were still planning an extensive building programme in Greater Manchester that would put at least another 250,000 vehicles on the road. Idiots.

Back home, I went in search of the fleet of vans and repair men from the electricity company. I found one man up a pole in a very wet field replacing a fuse. He told me that if the replacement fuse fixed the fault, our supply would be back on within half an hour. If not, it would require an underground team and how long that would take was anybody's guess.

Fortunately, no sooner had returned home that everything burst back into life...except me.

We managed to pack away all the remaining bits and pieces from the dining area, manoeuvre the large, central display unit on top of the base unit, away from the outside wall and lift down the last end display unit onto the carpet before the electricity supply failed again.

We went off to Bury with Rachel and treated her to a birthday lunch at Automatic before wandering up The Rock towards Debenhams and Marks and Spencer. We called at Deichmann where we bought Rachel a pair of boots and went on to potter round the other two stores. That was a waste of time. Clothes of quality had disappeared in favour of drab rubbish constructed from obnoxious, chemically-manufactured fibres. M & S did have some cotton products but Jenny did not like the design of the pyjamas and I couldn't find the one item I needed – 100% cotton socks. I would have settled for 100% lamb's-wool but they didn't have any of those either.

We made our way to the car and came home to discover the power was back on. I loaded up the computers. The server and Jenny's laptop were alright but my desktop system had lost its BIOS time and date setting. I had to leave that while I fetched my car from the garage, Rachel giving me a lift down.

The annual service, MOT and replacement of the timing belt kit (belt, tensioning roller and, it seemed, water pump came as a kit) cost me my monthly, government pension.

It took me another good hour and a half to sort out my desktop system and even then, I later discovered it did not record one of the TV programmes I had scheduled.

We rushed off to the Bull's head for tea, again my treat and I had to leave at ten minutes past eight for a village committee meeting in the church at 8:15 p.m. That took a couple of hours and by the time we all left, there was a good covering of snow and it was still coming down thick and fast.

My final task for the evening was to sort out the recorded TV programmes and update this record of events while it was still fresh in my mind. Correction, while it was still in my mind. I thought I must be spending too much time at the D-CaFF.

Friday January 13th: I spent the morning updating the documentation of the ongoing battle to move my telephone and broadband services to BT. Technically, it was all working well. Now it was time to sort out the bill. I spent some time trying to reconcile the charges with what was on my contract, a task similar to searching for dung from a rocking-horse. I eventually gave up and sent an E-mail, with the bill attached, to my very helpful contact at BT, Stephen Antonson. He replied to say he was very busy and would try to resolve the account without recourse to the BT billing department, which I thought was a very wise suggestion. When I worked in telecommunications for a living, I always found resolving BT billing issues like plating fog and the accounts people about as useful as a chocolate tea-pot.

I finished that exercise with about five minutes to spare before the start of the D-CaFF dementia café and, despite the snow, which was melting quite quickly, we headed off for an afternoon of music and activity.

My late afternoon/evening was taken up with scheduling the coming week's TV recordings.

Saturday January 14th: What had been scheduled as a day out in York with Rachel turned out to be a day at home set back about a hundred years or so. Yet another loss of power occurred about 4:20 a.m. and it was not back on until 3 p.m. In one of the coldest spells of winter so far, we had no heating and no hot water. I could have lit the fire if I had been prudent enough to find time to cut come more wood. As it was, we kept warm by pottering around in the dining area with more decoration preparations until the light started to fade.

The electricity did come back just before we left off for a quick snack and a cup of tea and I powered up the web server and Jenny's laptop.

Our village chairman, Alistair, sent me a message containing the details of a contract he had negotiated through an acquaintance in the village for the professional hosting of our village web site and I spent the rest of the afternoon uploading files to the remote server. That was slow going, even with my improved Internet connection (high-speed fibre broadband) because there were a lot of quite large files (photographs for the picture gallery). Needless to say, I did not finish the job.

Sunday January 15th: We went on our weekly, grocery shopping spree. Being Sunday, traffic was not as bad as usual, although there was some congestion around the approach to the Trafford Centre. I had no idea why the exit to the Trafford centre should stop traffic in the so-called fast lane but it did.

Back home, I had a few problems with the computers. Jenny's E-mail refused to recognise her password and further investigation revealed that, due to several BT accounts having been hacked, Jenny was required to change her password, which also meant reconfiguring her E-mail client on the laptop. I did all that for her. Then my desktop computer would not communicate with any other computer on the network because it thought it was connected to a public network and not a private one. The only way to change the network configuration was to edit the registry (not something the average user could be expected to do) and then reload the system. So much for Windows 7 being user-friendly. That worked to some degree but the desk top would still not communicate with Jenny's laptop. The only way to resolve that problem was to reboot the laptop and, on reloading, Windows performed a disk check on the system drive and recovered an "orphaned file". That was something else to which the average user would not know how to react. Since I could find no trace of the recovered file, I decided to ignore it. No doubt the significance of the error would come to light eventually. I just hoped it was not a critical system file, although, if it were, I could probably import it from the desk-top system.

As if I did not have enough to keep me occupied, the timer/clock switch on the cooker disintegrated in Jenny's hand and she could not turn off the timer. I managed that with a pair of long-nosed pliers and made a mental note to order up a new switch and, when it arrived, worry about how to fit it.

It occurred to both of us, not for the first time, that this Rangemaster cooker was nowhere near as robust as its predecessor and we would have been better keeping that and having it repaired instead of replacing it. We gave some thought to ditching the Rangemaster and replacing it with a Miele, if Miele made cookers and one to fit the gap in the kitchen. You

couldn't beat German engineering, which, again, made me wonder how they managed to lose the last war. It's not that we didn't have talented engineers and designers with brilliant ideas. It's that good ideas were stifled by lack of investment and vested interests in built-in obsolescence, lack of reliability and no respect for the customer. Having made that point, VW rather let the side down by allegedly fiddling their vehicle emission results and they weren't the only ones.

Monday January 16th: We started work on the staircase and landing. I worked on the cork tiles, scraping them off while Jenny worked on the wallpaper, removing the vinyl coating, leaving the paper backing on the wall, as we had in the dining area.

The reward for my day's labours was three large blisters on the palm of my right hand, a large blister on my left thumb, a small blister on the side of my right middle finger and several cuts and bruises on my hands. I was obviously not used to manual labour.

In the evening I managed to complete the upload of the village web site to the managed service. The configuration of the public access to the web site was another matter. I checked the instructions for doing this but did not have the credentials to follow them. I awaited a response to an E-mail I sent to the help desk.

I received the confirmation, made the changes and the hosted web site went live.

Tuesday January 17th: The first task of the day was to try to remove the rest of the broken timer knob from the cooker. I switched off the power supply to the cooker. To access the timer I had to remove the front panel just under the hob, pulling off the control knobs first and then undoing the three screws underneath, for which I had to open the right oven door and pull down the grill cover. There should have been four screws but one was missing!

Opening the oven door, I noticed that the door catch I had repaired some months previously was broken again. I added that to my mental list of required spares.

I pulled down the front panel and, after marking the electrical connectors so I knew where they fitted, I pulled them off to free the panel completely.

The metal plate holding the timer unit was held in place by three screws and I removed those. I now had the timer in its plastic cover, having pushed it out from the metal plate. I still needed to remove the circuit board from the cover and that was a case of gently prizing the lugs on the inside of the plastic case free of the circuit board, working round the board until it was completely free and it dropped out. I was then able to remove the remainder of the crumbling, plastic sleeve of the broken knob from the spindle on the timer and to free up the hole in the plastic housing through which it passed. It looked like some of the plastic had melted due to the heat from the oven rising and it occurred to me that the design was rather poor, placing the timer directly above the hot oven and using plastic instead of metal. I reassembled everything in the reverse order, having cleaned all the bits well first, powered on the cooker and checked everything worked.

I ordered up the spares (both timer knobs and the oven door catch) from E-spares. The cost of the items was not what I would call excessive but the postage and packing with next day

delivery at almost £7 was somewhat extortionate.

I spent much of the rest of the day resting my sore hands and working on the computer.

I discovered there was a problem with the hosted web site and it took a technical support chap at Zen to find the problem. I had not strictly adhered to case sensitivity in the various links when writing the web site. In Windows, this was not a problem and it worked so I did not really concern myself with it. Now the site was hosted on a Linux server (running Unix), it was a different matter. Unix is a stickler for case sensitivity and I did seem to recall that from my Technical Support days, although, having a really good and reliable Unix team manager in Ray Pemberton, I never needed to get my hands dirty, so to speak, so my Unix knowledge and experience was as scant as money in a Yorkshireman's wallet.

I started to deal with the problem.

Wednesday January 18th: The spare parts for the cooker arrived as we were having brunch. It would have been breakfast but it was approaching lunchtime since we had risen late.

I fitted the spare parts to the cooker, which took all of half-an-hour. The timer knobs just pushed on and the door catch was held in place by two small bolts, access being behind the inside door, fixed to the outer door on the edge by two smaller bolts. I removed those with the aid of an Allen-key. The only slight difficulty was that, being newly milled, the bolt holes in the new catch were a tight fit for the bolts and I had to make the bolts go into the holes before fitting the catch.

That done, I removed the cork from the rest of the staircase wall and also the vinyl coating from the wallpaper at the higher level, all with the aid of my stepladders, designed for use on stairs as well as conventional use. I protected my hands with a pair of cotton gloves and, for the heavy work, leather gardening gloves on top to cushion the pressure of the scraper on my skin.

After quickly tidying up, I carried on with the case-sensitive corrections to the village web site, something that was going to take a while.

Thursday January 19th: The first major task of the day was to remove the cork tiles from the small wall on the dining area side of the staircase, which didn't take long.

Once I had tidied up, I set about a few administrative tasks.

The first was to try to organise a plasterer and I left messages for both the builder and the plasterer who were involved when we had our fire fitted and lounge plastered.

The second was to sort out my TalkTalk account. I had received my final bill and I was due a rebate of £28 on the 16th January. That had not reached my bank account and I contacted the company using their live chat. A very helpful contact arranged for a cheque to be posted to me, which would take around ten working days. The refund would probably have been paid directly had I not prematurely cancelled my direct debit. The reason I cancelled it was that TalkTalk billed me for a month after my contract with them had ceased.

The third was to sort out my BT bill and, having E-mailed my contact, Stephen, he telephoned me. We agreed I should contact billing directly and he gave me their number. He said he would call me the following day to see what happened.

I telephoned BT billing and managed to negotiate some credits, although I was informed the bill had already been paid. Not according to my bank, it hadn't and it wasn't due to the 23rd. Anyway, I said I would accept the proposed credits, to be applied to the next bill, and see how the bill settled down when I received my second one. I was not convinced that BT billing was in any way, shape or form related to BT sales and a similar relationship existed between those two parts of BT and the technical provision, itself double-headed at least, with the physical part of the business (BT Openworld) about to be sold off as a separate company, or so it was rumoured. I was always taught that if you dug a hole, to stop before it grew any deeper. If BT were excavators, they would probably have reached Australia by now. I had never known a company in a leading field of technology be so inept. And it wasn't so much the people at the sharp end who were at fault but the faceless, contactless idiots in senior management who couldn't see past the "£" sign. For their information, BT has people called customers who expect to (a) receive value for money and (b) to be respected.

I brought the household accounts up to date and then decided to return to the decorating.

I had a quick look at the ceiling. The plan was to scrape off the textured paint. In the past, this has flaked off other ceilings easily but, on the landing, it seemed to be fairly stubborn.

Jenny and I turned our attention to the backing paper on the wall in the dining area and started removing that. Two full lengths later, we decided enough was enough for today and Jenny went off to make tea while I went back to the computer.

Friday January 20th: We were up early, although not on our way until about 10 a.m. The first stop was at Tesco's car park in Bury, where we left the car while we went to the health food shop in the market for a few items before returning to Tesco for some Yellowtail Chardonnay, on offer at £5.75 a bottle until 30th January. Needless to say we came out with a few other items as well.

Our next halt was at the tip in Bury to, not surprisingly, drop off some rubbish. This comprised the cork we had removed from the walls on the staircase and some paper backing we had removed from the dining room walls, plus the odd electrical item left over from our car booty.

Finally we headed to Unicorn and, for once, the standard of driving on the M60 was pretty good.

Having fulfilled our needs (and bought some groceries) there, we trundled to Morrisons supermarket at the end of the street for some Yellowtail Shiraz, on offer at £5.50. Then it was on to Waitrose at Broadheath, the A56 being more like a dodgem track than a public highway.

We left just after 3 p.m., having lunched and shopped, braving the congested M60 for much of the journey home.

Our fridge and cupboards replenished for another week, I settled down to schedule the TV recordings for the following week while Jenny prepared our line-caught tuna for tea.

Lorna came round to inform us that she had been up to tend our house alarm that had sounded during the afternoon, alerting Dave, one of our neighbours, who took a look round to make sure everything was secure. It seems I had left the small window in the toilet open and that was, presumably, the cause of the problem. Lorna had stopped the alarm but had not reset it. We had noticed the alarm was off when we came back from grocery shopping and, while the house seemed to be intact, we could not figure out why.

While Lorna was here, she mentioned Mike had a problem with his desktop system and I said I would pop down the following morning.

Saturday January 21st: The alarm on my mobile telephone on my bed-side table went off at 7 a.m. for the second morning in a row. I switched it off and ignored it for the second morning in a row, having had a rather restless night, due to the cat walking on me. It wasn't until I heard the cat retching that I leapt out of bed with the intention of rushing to the cat's aid and of protecting the carpet in the process. I succeeded only in generating an intolerable pain in my left, upper leg, thigh and lower back, with the urgent need to place the latter on the bed, between which the water bottle that was still quite warm was sandwiched.

Instead, I eventually managed to rouse a not-best-pleased Jenny from her slumbers to investigate.

The cat was snuggled up on the bed in the back bedroom, pretending to be fast asleep after successfully stirring the rest of the household. Jenny had a good look round and could find no evidence of the cat's regurgitated stomach contents and came back to bed.

I slowly rose from the horizontal position and managed to stand on two feet, which was just as well because that was all I had. I hobbled to the bathroom, washed and hobbled back again. My dressing was a performance worth witnessing (or maybe not). I made it downstairs and prepared breakfast while Jenny did whatever women do in a morning that takes ages.

The plan was for me to go and investigate the fault with Mike's desk top system and then for Jenny and I to go to the Old School to process more of the electrical jumble. Needless to mention, events had no respect for the plan. Mike's computer was in a worse state than my back. I telephoned Jenny to let her know I would be some time and, eventually, persuaded the computer to run a disk check on the system drive. When it became apparent that checking the 2 TB drive was going to take a further four hours on top of the two hours or so I had been there, I came home for lunch, asking Mike to telephone me when the disk check had finished.

I found Jenny on her knees. Before this conjures up any misconception or excitement, let me clarify the situation. She was removing more of the backing paper from the dining room wall.

Jenny was not in a good mood and I asked her what she had broken this time. It was the grandfather clock. She had wound it up but couldn't make it go. I knew the feeling.

The clock's problem was that the minute hand was stuck. Sometimes, when it is wound on manually, the mechanism seemed to jam and the solution was to wind the minute hand back a little and then forward to free up the cogs. It took me about thirty seconds to put it right and get it going. I wish.

We had lunch and I rested a little, processing the TV recordings from the previous evening and updating this record of events for your delight and digestion.

Jenny and I whiled away the afternoon stripping. Wallpaper, that is, from the dining room wall. We packed up about 4 p.m. and I returned to the case of the Greenmount Web Site until Mike telephoned me to say that the four hour disc check on his internal 2 TB drive had finished.

I went down to Mike's house to discover that Windows 7 seemed to be working alright, the disc check having found a few disc errors, until I started to delve deeper. I did suggest that I thought the hard drive might be on its way out and I suggested Mike ordered a 2 TB portable hard drive for back up, just in case, which he did.

First, Internet Explorer 11 wouldn't load due to some undefined error. Now, you would think that uninstalling and reinstalling IE 11 would, like any other piece of software, have solved the problem. But this was Microsoft software. Uninstalling the IE 11 update left IE 10 working. Reinstalling IE 11, both manually and via Microsoft Update failed for some inexplicable reason.

Second, after uninstalling Google Chrome, I discovered another browser, Chromium, that started automatically with Windows. My first thoughts were to remove the automatic start process and I ran msconfig from the Start Menu search box. I removed the offending entry. I also had a look at Task Manager from Administrative Tools in Control Panel. That led to problem number three.

Almost all the tasks were corrupted. I looked on the Internet for guidance and found a very useful web site that provided software and step by step instructions on how to recover the tasks. It also explained that mass corruption of tasks was caused by reverting from Windows 10 to either Windows 8.1 or Windows 7. Another Microsoft goodie. The automatic scan of the tasks fixed all but 31 of the 90 corrupted tasks. A second scan using a task library (part of the downloaded package) to reinstate corrupted tasks fixed all but 12 of the remaining tasks. Of these, 11 were specific to Windows 10 and could be ignored. The remaining MacAfee task needed to be resolved manually.

Fourthly, after including optional updates for drivers, including the Nvidia graphics card, Mike's old Microsoft Flight Simulator software caused the screen to flash rapidly. Rolling back the driver did not seem to fix the problem.

At that point, around 8 p.m., I decided it was time for tea and the outstanding issues would

wait until the following day.

Sunday January 22nd: After a late breakfast and washing the pots, I whizzed off to Mike's house again to finish off his desktop, one way or another.

I first resolved the McAfee task problem by following the advice of McAfee (now Intel) online chat support and reinstalled the product. That required a Windows restart.

I next tested the flight simulator again and that worked. Obviously, the reversion to the old graphics driver did not fully take effect until after a restart.

Being on a roll, I decided to attempt the installation of IE 11 again. This was my lucky day. That worked as well.

The only remaining issue seemed to be a persistent attempt of Windows Update to try to migrate the PC to Windows 10, the update having previously failed. I resolved to try to find a way to remove this annoying update as I came home. As I left, I asked Mike to let me know when his new portable hard drive arrived so I could help him back up everything.

After lunch, Rachel arrived and she and Jenny set to work removing the wallpaper in the dining room. Being somewhat redundant, only having two scrapers, I made two copies of a DVD Mike had asked me to copy. The DVD was of his holiday in South America.

I also processed the recording of Jazz Record Requests (BBC Radio 3), picking out the tracks I liked.

After tea, I finished off all the outstanding work on the village web site and performed an update. The updates were quite frequent because of the events list which changed on a weekly basis, at least.

Monday January 23rd: I started work on a Java program to change the upper case picture file extensions (JPG) to lower case (jpg) on my computer for all three of the web sites I managed, essentially to save me time in doing it manually.

That was interrupted by a stroll down to Summerseat Garden Centre. Jenny wanted a couple of birthday cards and she thought that was the best place to try. It wasn't. We left empty-handed and walked back up Summerseat Lane, one of the wealthier areas in the locale, onto and back down Longsight Road to the post office, where Jenny found the cards she wanted almost immediately.

Back at home, I continued my development over lunch and finally verified the software was working properly. It then took me a few minutes to change the case of the picture extensions instead of days.

The plasterer I had been trying to reach for the past few days telephoned me and we arranged for him to visit the coming weekend to inspect the house and the required work.

Jenny also finalised the arrangements for an evening out with Lynn and John on Wednesday,

lunch out with Mike and Lorna next Thursday and booked a table at the Swan and Cemetery on Saturday for her birthday celebration. I did intend to invite Bob and Marie but Matthew told me they were away for the weekend.

I started on the design of a presentation on behalf of John and Lynn's daughter, Alison who needed to raise £55,000 for a private, potentially life-saving operation in Barcelona in May, an operation that probably would not have been required had the NHS medical teams been able to diagnose her illness earlier and that was not available on the NHS because there was insufficient evidence to suggest the outcome justified the cost since the condition was extremely rare. My intention was to deliver the presentation at a meeting of the local community the following evening.

Tuesday January 24th: I spent the morning at Mike's. The plan was to image his hard drive to the portable drive he had just purchased. That did not go well. There were read errors on his hard drive. I resorted to copying his data files to the back-up drive, creating a Windows 7 recovery disc from which he could boot the system and running another disc check. I left that running and came home for lunch.

After lunch I was back on Jenny's laptop, trying to pay my car tax, amongst other things.

John Turner arrived just before 3 p.m. to discuss the presentation about his daughter's, Alison's, medical condition I was preparing for the evening's village meeting. He provided me with some additional information and I factored that in after he left.

I had an early tea and gathered my things together for the meeting at the Cricket Club, arriving shortly before Alistair, our village chairman, to find the club in darkness and locked up. Alistair had a set of keys and we opened up the club, setting up the projector, the PC, the tables and the chairs ready for the meeting at 8 p.m.

The meeting was well attended, over sixty people being present, to discuss a number of contentious items, including the introduction of charging for parking at the Toby Carvery in the village, the Manchester expansion building programme and the recent rise in crime in the area. There was a macabre hush in the room following my presentation of Alison's illness and her urgent need for private surgery, which I took to be a good sign in as much I had captured people's attention and raised awareness of her rare illness.

I came part of the way home with Donna, who had brought back some organic Sorghum flour from California for Jenny's gluten-free baking. I was home for about 9:45 and set about an update to the village web site, finishing off the day with processing the recorded TV programmes from the evening and updating this diary of events.

Wednesday January 25th: Jenny and I spent the day removing the wallpaper backing from the staircase and landing. Jenny finished about 5 p.m. and tidied up while I continued for a little longer while Jenny prepared tea, finishing and tidying up for about 6 p.m. and sitting down with a beer by 6:15 p.m.

We had planned an evening out with Lynn and John but Lynn telephoned to say John had to take Alison to A&E so the evening was cancelled. Alison's health was more important to all

of us.

Frank had invited me, at the village meeting, to join him and the chaps for a ramble round Littleborough and it was a nice day for it. I told him I had too much to do. I had mentioned it to Jenny when I returned home the previous evening and she reminded me I couldn't have gone because of our arrangement with Lynn and John. As it turned out, I could have spent the day walking in the sun.

Thursday January 26th: It was not a particularly productive day. We were tired and a late start didn't help.

After breakfast and a round of pot washing, we went outside in the freezing cold to empty one of the frost-proof plant pots that wasn't we had purchased from Newbank Garden Centre in Bury for £20 each so we could take back the bits for a refund the following day at the beginning of our grocery shopping trip. I carefully manoeuvred the large pot full of compost/soil into the wheelbarrow and tipped out the soil, scraping out the inside of the pot. Jenny put the bits into a plastic bag and then helped me level out the soil on top of frozen the raised beds.

Having packed everything away and remembering to turn down the temperature of the hot water on the boiler in the garage, back in the warmth of our cosy and untidy house, with the central heating on, we finished off removing the wallpaper from the landing and staircase. In working my way round the light switched and the socket on the landing, I discovered the socket was crackling. This is the one that had a loose wire a few months previous and I had tightened it up. I could not see a loose connection, nor was any sparking visible. It did upset the power supply to the sockets in the lounge, as before, causing Jenny's laptop to power off. As a result, it did not record an episode of father Brown in the afternoon. We were not best pleased.

After tidying up most of the mess and some lunch I took a telephone call from BT billing which would result in a further refund of around £11, which would leave an overcharge of around £4 on the account, which was about as close as I could hope to get. I also renewed the car tax for another year.

I raised a post about the niggling problems I was having with Media Center, for which I did have work-arounds, hoping somebody might have an actual fix, although I doubted it.

Finally I tidied up the rest of the mess on the stairs and decided enough was enough as it was 5 p.m. and going dark.

Friday January 27th: It was Jenny's birthday and I had not been out anywhere to buy her a card.

We went grocery shopping as usual with a visit to the dry cleaners at Holcombe Brook to obtain yet another price for dry-cleaning the dining area and landing curtains and a visit to Tesco at Prestwich, essentially for more Yellowtail Chardonnay. We came away with a few other items. Jenny also called at Morrisons at Chorlton, after Unicorn, for some Shiraz but it was sold out. That didn't stop her buying other groceries though. Meanwhile, I popped into

the bank to deposit my cheque from TalkTalk.

The journey back from Waitrose was not too bad, given we left much later than usual, about 4:15 p.m., until we reached the approach to the bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal. We crawled from there to the junction with the M62 at about 10 m.p.h., with the odd halt and then, suddenly, we were back up to the imposed 50 m.p.h. limit with no reason whatsoever for the delay. Traffic was heavy as we approached our exit at junction 17 and vehicles on the downhill stretch into the valley just before the exit, known locally as Death Valley for obvious reasons, were, as usual, travelling far too fast and far too close for the prevailing conditions. Surprisingly, some of the worst offenders were H.G.V. drivers who, since they drive for a living, should know better than to tailgate with such heavy vehicles.

Saturday January 28th: We had intended to go round to the Old School to process the electrical jumble until Mike telephoned to say he had a problem with his desktop computer which seemed to have resolved itself but wanted me to check it out. I left Jenny to potter round and later discovered she had worked tidying up outside, dodging the rain, while I was at Mike's house.

Mike's computer seemed alright but still had the Windows Update problem, refusing to scan for updates, generating a meaningless error message. I checked the message number and followed the first two steps of the three-step procedure described on Microsoft's web site. I stopped short of reinstalling Windows 7. Mike was concerned that it would upset his flight simulator installation.

We had the idea of performing a new installation on another computer to see if we could recover all Mike's application software for him before destroying the existing Windows 7 environment. I later had the idea of reinstalling Windows 7 on another hard drive in the same computer, retaining the existing installation intact, just in case things went wrong. We decided to leave that for another day and I came home about 5 p.m. to wind down and prepare for our evening meal at the Swan and Cemetary to celebrate Jenny's birthday.

Unfortunately, Matthew had been taken ill and he and Carrie could not join us. With Bob and Marie being away, there was just Rachel, Jenny and myself to celebrate the event.

The meal was good and the waitresses were attentive and helpful but a little inexperienced. On the whole, I would still recommend the pub, which has a broad menu, helpful staff, reasonable wine and a fair selection of gluten-free options. Added to that, if you wanted variations on a dish on the menu, all you had to do was ask and, if it could be done, they would do it. The cost was on the high side but if you wanted quality, you had to be prepared to pay for it. The four areas for improvement, I suggest, were:

- a) One of the wine glasses on the table had lipstick marks on it and had not been cleaned properly. When brought to the attention of the waitress, she apologised and replaced it with a clean one. More care was needed when laying the table.
- b) My fish cake starter was very nice but I thought the fish cakes needed more fish and less potato. They were not as good as those I had eaten at the Wagon and Horses at Hawkshaw where Steve (the chef), I believe, made his own. That pub had new tenants and we had not eaten there since the new people had taken up residence.

- c) Jenny's gluten-free bread with her prawn cocktail starter arrived without any butter.
- d) At the end of the meal, Jenny asked for a Grand Marnier and Rachel requested a coffee with Grand Marnier. The waitress did not understand what Grand Marnier was and, worse still, the bar staff did not understand either. Jenny ended up with a Glenmorangie and Rachel with an Irish coffee. A later foray into the bar area revealed that, not only did the bar staff not know what Grand Marnier was but they did not have any. This was a lesson for both the management and the staff to learn and was, essentially, a question of education.

More attention to this level of detail would improve what was currently a good dining experience to very good, bordering on excellent.

Sunday January 29th: We decided to go and sort some of the electrical jumble at the Old School. That was until I received a text message from the plasterer, Steve, to say he would be here about 11 a.m. Jenny went on ahead of me while I busied myself updating the village web site until Steve arrived.

I explained to Steve what needed doing and he and I agreed there was the best part of a week's work involved. I suggested he go away and think about a price for me. Meanwhile, I would see whether I could remove the textured paint from the ceilings to avoid the need to skim them and let him know the following day whether that would need doing or not.

I joined Jenny at the Old School and we spent the rest of the day there. There was still a lot to do and we left it for another day.

Monday January 30th: We received a text message from Steve to say he could not do the work. He had been moved onto another job by the builders for whom he was currently working. In a way that was a bit of a relief because there was still a lot of preparation work to do and it gave me more time to do it. I did have to look for another plasterer though.

I started to try to remove the textured paint from the dining room ceiling. It took a little while to find a starting point and, while it did not come off in sheets like in the small bedroom, I did manage to remove it, slowly. I didn't like to think how long it would take though.

After a spot of lunch, I decided to fit a new blade to the scraper to see if that improved my productivity. It did but the textured paint was quite stubborn in parts and progress was not as good as expected. At the present rate of removal, it was going to take me four or five days just to deal with the dining area. That would leave the landing to do.

On top of all that, Jenny had problems with the twin socket near the door in our bedroom. It didn't work. What's more, plugging in the Dyson vacuum cleaner, switching the socket on and off and the unplugging the appliance had, somehow, caused the double socket in the lounge, behind the TV, to lose power briefly enough to shut down Jenny's laptop, which, I hasten to add, needed a new battery.

It was a case of one step forward and two backwards. It was going to be a busy week.

Tuesday January 31st: We rose much later than intended due to a restless night. I woke about 3 a.m. and didn't get back to sleep until around 6 a.m. The alarm woke me at 7 a.m. and I switched it off and ignored it. The next time I opened my eyes it was light and 10 a.m.

I couldn't wait for the surprise of the day.

Meanwhile, after breakfast, I decided to inspect the ring main wiring to find out what had caused the problem the previous day. Having powered down the server and ensured Jenny was not using any power (well, no more than usual, anyway), I pulled the fuse for the main ring and forgot that this included the sockets on the outside wall of the conservatory, to which the desktop was connected and powered up.

I went upstairs to inspect the wiring behind the two sockets and I could see no obvious problem. I tightened a screw holding the neutral wire on the bedroom double-socket, although it was not particularly loose. When I tried to plug in the fuse again, it sparked a little so I decided to switch off the power altogether before inserting it.

That fixed the problem, although I didn't see why.

Then it was back to scraping the dining-room ceiling. It was better than scraping the bottom of the barrel. Apart from a short snack break at 3 p.m., I didn't finish until 6 p.m. the result was that I had completed about a quarter of what needed doing and that was after two days and just the dining room. My end of March deadline was looking like it might be optimistic.