

Greenmount – November 2016

Tuesday November 1st: We spent the day emptying the car of all the car boot items we had brought back from Tracey's house the previous day and storing them in the garage in suitably labelled boxes. We also emptied out all the existing stock from the trailer so we could use the trailer the following day and stacked everything at the back of the trailer on the floor, having tidied up and made some space.

Wednesday November 2nd: We hooked up the trailer and set off for Sheffield again, calling at the tip in Bury to dump some rubbish. Traffic was unusually light for a change and we made good time.

We arrived at Tracey's house and Andy was waiting for us. As soon as we entered Jenny found her handbag, contents intact. Andy had been searching for it but had not spotted it sitting on the front window-sill. Everyone was relieved, although I had cancelled Jenny's debit card and arranged a new one for her as a precaution, just in case the bag had been lost.

Not being satisfied with trips to the tip in Bury, we loaded up the car and trailer with rubbish and headed for the tip at Shirecliffe in Sheffield. There was a separate lane for 4x4s and cars with trailers and we queued behind a 4x4 at the barrier while other cars went past in the lane to our right. After a few minutes' wait, I went to speak to the chap in the vehicle in front, at which point one of the operatives came jogging up to the barrier and said we were supposed to sound our horn to attract attention. I pointed out that the 4x4 driver had done so. "Ah!" he said.

Our friend opened up the barrier and asked me if I had made arrangements to come with a trailer. I told him not. Apparently, one had to book in advance. I explained I was a stranger in these parts and he allowed me in.

We ended up queuing behind everyone who had used the other lane, so I didn't really see the point in this rather bizarre procedure. It took us a while to reach a suitable point from which we could start to unload, due partly to some idiots in cars queue jumping and taking up slots nearer the skips vacated by other vehicles before the ones behind had an opportunity to move forward.

It took a while to unload everything into the appropriate skips for recycling. The system there required one to climb steps up to a gantry to throw items into the appropriate skip, unlike Bury where the vehicles parked at a height level with the top of the skips. Bury was much better.

Back at Tracey's house, we started to pack the car and then the trailer and we came home with a heavy load of items.

I unhitched the trailer and we manoeuvred it into the garage as it was to await unpacking, the car remaining on the road overnight.

Thursday November 3rd: After pottering about and performing routine chores for much of the morning, we walked across to Cream, Jenny's hair dresser, where we parted company. Jenny wanted to see if she could have her fringe trimmed, which is a

complimentary service for customers. Meanwhile I went down to the surgery to arrange for my repeat prescription.

The surgery was quite full and there was a queue at the reception desk. When I finally reached the counter and told the lady I had come to request my repeat prescription, she told me I should really complete a form and put it in the box provided on the wall. That's not what I was told when I last called because the doctor had failed to convince the computer system I needed not one type of medication but two on the repeat prescription. As a result, the repeat order he had arranged had to be cancelled, a one off for my Omeprazole was issued and I was told to either call in or telephone to reinstate the normal repeat prescription when I needed it. Not only was this receptionist not familiar with my predicament but she said she was unable to access the information on the computer screen in front of her at the front desk, which is strange, because the previous receptionist had no trouble in accessing my record.

We managed to reach a compromise and I told her what medication I needed and asked if my GP, John Hampson (a very nice and relaxed chap, to whom I usually refer as "laid-back John", meaning no disrespect, although not in the surgery, since I find, for some strange reason, the young ladies have little sense of humour) could deal with it. She said not, since he was on holiday the following day, which is a bit of a shame because I knew he would have done so properly and efficiently.

I met Jenny outside as I left. The hair salon was quite busy and Jenny's hair needed a little more attention than a simple trim of the fringe, so she had arranged an appointment for the following Tuesday.

We came home and I pulled the trailer out of the garage and unpacked it onto Jenny's car boot tables that we had erected at the side of the car port. I put the empty trailer back in the garage and left Jenny to deal with the trailer load of items while I came in and started testing the electrical items from the last load, breaking off for lunch.

Later in the afternoon, after it had started to rain, I unpacked the car and Jenny dealt with some of that load as well, before we stored everything away in the garage, put the rubbish for the tip, items for the Old School, items for Unicorn and the shopping bags and cool box in the car for the morning.

We came in and Jenny started tea while I finished off the monthly diary for October and brought the November issue up to date. And we still hadn't delivered the latest copy of the [Greenmount Voice](#) to local residents on our round and I still hadn't had time to try to resolve my server E-mail problems to circumvent the issues created by Google mail.

Friday November 4th: A routine grocery shopping day was augmented with an initial visit to the tip in Bury, for which we were thinking of obtaining a season ticket.

The journey anti-clockwise round the north-east side of Manchester on the M60 ring road was relatively straight forward apart from a slow section around the adjoining traffic from the A580 and the M61 where, for some inexplicable reason, we almost came to a complete stop. I describe it as inexplicable because just past this short stretch, traffic was flowing well again.

The same cannot be said of the return journey, finding three lanes of stationary traffic as we joined the motorway and travelling at less than 10 miles per hour with frequent halts for up to a minute at a time until we reached the bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal. After descending and passing the junction with the M62, we were back up to speed almost all the way to our exit at junction 17 (Prestwich). Again, there was no obvious reason for the delay except the large volume of traffic joining the motorway and the lack of gaps between vehicles to allow other vehicles to manoeuvre and zip-merge. If only drivers would leave gaps, everyone would reach their destination much sooner, use less fuel and there would be fewer accidents. The combination of stupidity and selfishness exhibited by most drivers, even those who drive for a living, just simply astounded me.

Saturday November 5th: It was turned 2 p.m. before I realised the significance of the date.

We were up soon after 8 a.m., having forgotten to set the alarm, which I usually turned off and ignored anyway. I felt really tired and did not really feel inclined to leave the warmth and comfort of my bed. Still, it was the morning of the village drop-in and Jenny was due at the Old School for 9 a.m. to help out with the sale of bric-a-brac and I was going round to test and price electrical equipment for the jumble sale.

In the event, we were there for 9:15 a.m.

My first task was to pop in to the chemist next door for my tablets.

I set up my test area in the large room next to the hall, which, unusually, I had to myself and then set about my second task, that of reporting the BT line at the Old School because it was still crackling away after four or five visits from BT (or Openreach as the engineering arm of BT was now called) engineers over a seven month span. I decided to use the telephone in the Old School since the noise on it would, I thought, immediately convince the call handler that it needed attention.

It took me several minutes of searching to find a number to use to report the fault. That gave me an automated service that checked the line and generally wasted a good few minutes before deciding I needed to be put through to an actual person, although which had the more intelligence was debatable. At least both spoke English clearly, or what I could hear of the conversation for the interference. Thankfully I did not have to wait the ten to twenty minutes in the queue as suggested by the automated service.

I was asked for the telephone number, the name and address of the account holder and the post code. I was told it was a business line. I said I knew that. I was then told I would have to be transferred to the appropriate department.

I spoke to a second person who asked me for the telephone number and the account holder. I was beginning to wonder if anyone in BT actually communicated with each other. This person said they would have to run some tests on the line and I said the automated service had already done that. I was eventually transferred to a third person.

Would you believe that the third person asked me for the telephone number and the account holder? I answered both questions, preceding my reply with a comment to the effect that this was the third time I had been asked for the information. We eventually arranged for an engineer to investigate the problem yet again. I asked if we could have someone who knew what he was doing this time. I also asked for the engineer to contact

me on my mobile telephone before access to the premises and before signing off the fault so I could check it was resolved. The response was that my comments would be put on the worksheet for the engineer. My interpretation of the spoken words was that the engineer would also ignore my requests. I also pointed out that the previous engineer had replaced the master socket and had not reconnected the interior bell properly because it was no longer working. I was told that an engineer would disconnect any interior equipment to fix a fault, my interpretation being that he would not necessarily reconnect it.

I reflected afterwards that this latter issue put me in a “Catch 22” situation. As a customer, I was not supposed to access the master socket internally. If I did not, I could not fix the external bell. If the BT engineer would not do it, how was it going to be mended?

I returned to testing electrical equipment for the rest of the morning and worked through most of the new items that had been donated during the past couple of weeks and making a sale of a Kenwood Mixer for £10, not that I was there to sell anything.

We came home for lunch, before which I washed a mountain of pots from the previous evening meal and breakfast.

We spent the afternoon working on the car booty we had brought back from Sheffield.

Sunday November 6th: the intended car boot sale was rained off. Instead of spending the morning in the rain at the car boot sale, we went out in the rain to deliver the latest copy of the Greenmount Newsletter, Greenmount Voice, to the residents on our route.

Sorting the car booty took up most of the rest of the day, punctuated by lunch, which was followed by a village web site update. The weather turned very cold and working outside and in the garage became unbearable by 4 p.m. In any case, the light was failing.

I was going to light the log fire around 3:30 p.m. but having decided a shower was overdue, I put on the central heating to warm up the whole house, particularly the bathroom, quickly.

Monday November 7th: This was the day I was expecting a call from the BT engineer to contact me about the fault at the Old School again.

While I was waiting, I continued testing and pricing the rest of the car booty.

The engineer telephoned me about 11:30 a.m. and I went round to the Old School to meet him. We traced the incoming wire back to where it joined the drop wire from the pole and tests showed that there was a possible fault in the drop wire. I left the engineer to go and work up the pole and came home to finish off the car booty and have some lunch.

I met up with the engineer again after lunch. He had swapped the connection onto a spare pair of wires in the drop wire from the pole and the background crackling on the telephone had disappeared. The only outstanding issue was the wiring of the internal bell to the master socket, which the engineer could not repair. I said I would deal with that.

I came home and spent the rest of the afternoon trying to make Google mail messages reach my server. I discovered that the my server was indeed checking that the Internet address of any server sending me mail on behalf of a domain was, in fact, authorised to do so. In Google's case, the sending server was not authorised. My server blocked any such server. I thought I had identified the problem.

I changed the settings and applied them, requiring Administrative rights to do so. When that didn't work, I rebooted the server. When that didn't work, I started to look for a problem elsewhere and couldn't find any other mail receipt restrictions. I spent all afternoon on that and eventually gave up. I logged an update to my enquiry on the Google forum.

It had not been the wholly successful day I expected, after a relatively promising start.

Tuesday, November 8th: The day started well. After breakfast, I washed the pots and cleaned out the fire, which we usually lit in the evenings about 4 p.m., now that the weather had turned cold, to warm up the house a little before the central heating came on at 5 p.m. The fire soon took control and considerably reduced the amount of time for which the central heating was required, although the warmth of the radiators was welcome in the cold mornings, when we often awoke to grass turned white by heavy frosts.

The patio had been covered with leaves from the trees and, while there were more to come, I decided I had been treading on them long enough. I raked the foliage into a heap and piled it into the domestic, garden-waste, recycling bin that was due for collection. Working in the cold, fresh air was pleasant and I finished off by raking the leaves off the back lawn.

That was, of course, the tip of the ice berg and there was much more to do outside.

Jenny went off to have her hair cut before we set off for Sheffield once more to help Andy clear out Tracey's house, which had to be completed by 20th November and to discuss the funeral arrangements. Andy had sent a message the previous evening suggesting that the funeral would be in a couple of weeks or so, which would give us all a kind of closure to the whole process.

The journey to Sheffield, via the tip in Bury, naturally, was uneventful and pleasant, following a convoy of relatively slow-moving heavy good vehicles and I couldn't help thinking, yet again, that all this heavy haulage really ought to be on the railways. Now I knew lorries were somewhat more flexible, so why not have a system of railway haulage between cities with drive-on, drive-off facilities for HGVs? That would get heavy traffic off the roads and still provide flexibility for delivery at the other end of the journey.

We chatted with Andy, Simon and Vicky and helped to tidy Tracey's house in some small way before packing the car with yet more car booty.

The journey home was nothing short of horrendous, taking 2½ hours, all due to heavy congestion on the Manchester side of the journey. There was a long queue through Hollingworth to the traffic lights at the junction at the bottom of Mottram Hill. There was a long queue at the end of the M67 where it met the M60. The worst of it was a half-hour journey from junction 21 to junction 18 on the M60 all because idiot drivers

travelled too fast, too close, giving vehicles no room for manoeuvre when joining or leaving the motorway and many of whom did not know which lane they needed due to a lack of forward planning or just sheer stupidity. There was absolutely no excuse for any driver stopping on a motorway except either due to an accident or when instructed to do so by the police. It was simply a case of judging a speed to suit the conditions and not tearing along as fast as possible, ignoring the speed limit as two drivers did who passed us in the fast lane at around 100 m.p.h. on the outward journey.

I hated to even contemplate what it would be like if the Manchester Spatial Framework ever saw the light of day, with, at a conservative estimate, another quarter of a million vehicles on the roads of Greater Manchester. That wouldn't be economic growth. It would be economic gridlock.

The final straw was some idiot who couldn't make their mind up whether they wanted to be in the left, exit lane for Bury or the middle lane to carry on the M61 as we passed the Pilsworth exit. Leaving to drive through Bury, I took the left lane and as I passed said vehicle on the left, heading for the exit ramp, the vehicle started to veer towards me. I am not normally an aggressive driver but this plonker received a long, loud blast from my horn.

I arrived home to discover that Jenny's laptop had a blank screen and was just sitting, doing nothing. I had left it to record a TV programme, which it had failed to do and had I been home half an hour earlier, I could have fixed it. I was not best pleased.

This was happening with increasing frequency and I decided I needed to do something about it. The trouble was that I didn't know what.

It occurred to me that the last time I had this repetitive problem, I unplugged the Microsoft wireless mouse and keyboard receiver from the laptop. I decided to try this again and left the computer running all night.

Wednesday November 9th: The day started well. Jenny's laptop was still running.

Jenny went outside to work on the car booty from our earlier visit to Sheffield and didn't have time to deal with the car load from the previous day.

I had intended to deal with the stack of printers we had acquired, stored in the garage. An E-mail from Talk Talk informing me my next monthly bill was available put a stop to that. The bill had shot up to nearly £30 which, with my broadband bill from Demon Internet, took my monthly telecommunications contribution to nearly £54 for basic broadband with a fixed Internet address and telephone.

When I checked my telephone bill online, I discovered it included the UK Anytime package. When I first subscribed, I ordered the evening and weekend package and I did not recall changing it. When I chatted online to someone, first they pointed me to a web site that did not address my enquiry and then they told me the package about which I was enquiring and for which I was currently being billed was obsolete and no information about it was available. My contact then disappeared from the online chat.

I decided enough was enough and I spent much of the rest of the day looking at other providers and options. Against my better judgement, I settled for a package from BT that

included everything I currently had plus an upgrade to high speed fibre for roughly the same cost for two years.

A quick update to the village web site and the removal of some software from the server, followed by a reboot to see if that fixed the E-mail problem, which it didn't, left me free to start work on the printers just as Jenny came in to start preparing tea.

I decided to try a little multi-tasking, lighting the fire at the same time as working on the printers. That went well enough.

I sorted out two Canon Pixma printers and a Sony, portable mini-disc player for pricing before moving out of the kitchen and Jenny's way. Tea was more important.

Thursday November 10th: It was another day of testing electrical car booty indoors for me and another day of sorting car booty for Jenny outside in the cold. Luckily the car port sheltered her from the heavy and prolonged rain.

Friday November 11th: We were at the Remembrance service outside the church in the very fresh, very cold air and bright autumn sunshine. I took pictures of the wreath laying for the village web site.

That was followed by a quick trip to Bury to the tip and to collect the cat's remaining fifty renal tablets from the last prescription.

We were back in time to snatch a quick lunch before giving Alex and Doreen a lift to the D-CaFF dementia café at the Cricket Club, where I took more pictures for the web site.

Back home, I updated the village and Tottington web sites. The photographs of the day remained in the camera.

Saturday November 12th: Jenny went for her 'flu jab and then we headed off grocery shopping. We dropped off some clothes at the weigh-in in Bury, called at Village Greens in Prestwich and had a painfully slow crawl down the M60, only managing to approach anything like motorway speed after passing the exit to the Trafford Centre (it was that time of year again). Unicorn and Waitrose furnished the bulk of our weekly groceries as usual and the drive home, again round the M60, was surprisingly trouble-free. Presumably most people were still in the Trafford Centre.

Sunday November 13th: We went into Ramsbottom, mainly to see if the car boot sales were still on, as we had been told. In previous years, these ended with British Summer Time. We found about a half dozen stalls and, talking to the regulars, trading had been mixed, some doing well and most not so, with one not even making his pitch money despite the number of people milling around for the Remembrance Day parade and the Farmer's Market.

We toured the charity shops as usual and ended up in Morrisons for a few odds and ends in the grocery line.

Monday November 14th: We made another trip to Sheffield to collect more car booty from Tracey's house.

Tuesday November 15th: I spent most of the day re-cataloguing my DVD and CD collection while Jenny unpacked the car and sorted her car booty again. I did find time to nip to the tip in Bury with the obligatory quick shop at Tesco. On the way back, we called at Frank and Gwen's house to collect some scones Gwen had kindly baked for Tracey's wake.

Wednesday November 16th: We went to Sheffield for Tracey's funeral. It went as well as these things can. Having left home just after 8 a.m., the journey over the Pennines was surprisingly pleasant with little traffic and we arrived at Anne and Wilf's house at just after 10 a.m. We had a cuppa and left for the Grenoside crematorium at 11 a.m., which only took about fifteen minutes, so we were really early. The service started about 12:15 and it was quite good and moving. We took the excess flowers to the cemetery for Tracey's grandmother's grave and for her aunty Marie's grave, on the way to Shiregreen Working men's Club (where the Full Monty was filmed). We had a drink, some food and chatted. We went back to Anne and Wilf's house for a cup of tea and then down to the Meadowhall shopping precinct for a meal in Wetherspoons, courtesy of Wilf. Jenny and Rachel collected a few things from Lakeland, Anne kindly providing the discount and me providing the plastic. Then it was back to Anne and Wilf's house to collect a few items for our car booty and home for about 9 p.m.

Thursday November 17th: A late start did not result in a very productive day. I updated the village web site and then started to tidy up the pile of electrical equipment in the conservatory I had tested and priced for our car boot sales. That involved a rummage in the garage loft to find a large plastic box in which to store the items only to discover I needed another one.

Friday November 18th: We awoke to the first covering of snow of the season, which soon melted on the road as the temperature rose and it started to rain. The journey down to Unicorn and Waitrose was slow until we passed the Trafford Centre, peppered twice by the same gritting lorry on the way. The return journey on the M60 was even slower once we reached the approach to the bridge over the Manchester Ship Canal, until we left the motorway at Prestwich – and this was in the middle of the afternoon, **before** the schools finished.

I thought they should rename the Manchester Spatial Framework Plan the Manchester Cramped Framework Plan. I was of the opinion that our society was going backwards instead of forwards and I took solace in the fact that no civilisation to date had lasted more than 50,000 years and modern society's time was almost up.

My recent bout of coughing, spluttering, nasal congestion and catarrh was becoming a little more than annoying and I was thinking that I might have to see the doctor again. I retired after sipping a very nice potion of lemon, honey and Laphroaig and covering my throat and chest in Vick's Vapour Rub. I had the best night's sleep for some time.

Saturday November 19th: I woke feeling much better and actually able to breathe, although my brain did feel a little confused. Nothing new there, then.

After writing on Terry Hanstock's birthday card and struggling to persuade my old Canon i990 printer to produce a couple of address labels, we headed up to the post office at Holcombe Brook in the car (it was pouring with rain) to try to post Terry's card before the collection. We arrived just as the collection van was leaving. Not only did we

just miss the post but there was a long queue to the door inside the only post office for miles. That's what you get for closing local post offices. Another nail in society's coffin.

I finally reached the front of the queue, bought a book of twelve first-class stamps, a jiffy bag to post a DVD to Barbara and paid the second class postage on the latter. That cost me just under £10, an extortionate amount for a poor service for which the executive staff are paid more than twice what they are worth. I asked the chap behind the counter if I could find a post box with a later collection time and he suggested I use the sorting office in Bury. Having given him the small package for Barbara, we headed off with Terry's card.

We had not gone far before we caught up with the collection van on Brandlesholme Road and Jenny gave the chap Terry's card to add to his bag.

We came home and completed an order to Abel and Cole before lunch.

The afternoon, or what was left of it, we spent trying to tidy up the rest of the electrical items we had recovered from Tracey's house, testing and pricing them for our car boot sale. We didn't make a great deal of progress and storage was becoming a problem.

Sunday November 20th: I spent the day tidying, testing and pricing more electrical car booty. That ended on a low. The last item with which I dealt was a Fujitsu Siemens laptop running Windows Vista. When I started, it loaded up alright but the system drive was almost full. I decided to delete old accounts and unwanted software. It then refused to load windows. I decided to try installing Windows 7. That stopped when copying old files. The disc threw up some errors when rebooting so I decided to change the disc for a spare. The original disc was held in its caddy by four small screws. The first three came out with a little determination. The fourth proved more difficult, the head having been worn somehow. I thought I had a degree of success when I managed to remove it and throw it away, using only three screws for the replacement. Then it refused to even boot at all. Returning to the original drive did not help matters and I eventually gave up.

Somebody please tell me I was not plagued by gremlins.

Monday November 21st: I finished off most of the bits and pieces left over for testing for the car boot stock and helped Jenny put up the new heated dryer/airer we bought from Lakeland in the conservatory. I made sure the dehumidifier was working.

My next task was to deal with the renewal letter from British Gas for the boiler and central heating maintenance. The cost for the next year had jumped from £297.45 to £331.48 despite British Gas making huge profits.

I telephoned British Gas with the intention of cancelling the contract and taking out a boiler-only plan for £18 a month for two years with Corgi. The call centre was busy and offered an automated call-back, which I accepted and received within ten minutes.

The end result was a 20% discount and a twelve month contract for £265.19, less than I paid for the current year. So why couldn't they have offered me that in the first place?

This was just one example of a trend in British society of the time.

I turned my thoughts back to Remembrance Day. I asked myself why all these gallant men and women fought and died for our country and would the men and women of today do the same? They fought out of loyalty. And what price loyalty today? This was not the free, democratic and fair country for which these people died. It was a greedy, selfish country where the rich became richer and those of us with a sense of fairness and loyalty and those who were most vulnerable were penalised. Essentially, it was a form of slavery. The more people who realised that and challenged it in any peaceful way they could, the better. I did not advocate violence of any description; that solved nothing, a lesson, as a species, we had yet to learn. Perhaps if everyone stopped voting for the mainstream political parties and voted for the Green Party and the Independents, we, as a nation, might make some real progress instead of sliding backwards.

After that, I went on to stir matters elsewhere. Jenny was making a batch of chutney to sell at the local Christmas fair, [Santa's Christmas Cracker](#) and she needed me to stir the mixture to make sure all the sugar had dissolved before heating it to cook slowly.

Back to social and political matters (I hope you do not find this boring – it could adversely affect your grandchildren's future). I received another message from Greenpeace to say that, unlike Tesco and Waitrose, Sainsburys still refused to remove unsustainable John West tuna from its shelves. It was time for everyone to ensure that we did have fish in our oceans for future generations and to send Sainsburys and John West a clear message. If these two organisations refused to be part of the future, we should refuse to give them our hard-earned money by boycotting both of them until they did.

After dealing with my E-mail and a couple of hours passed, we potted the chutney, sampling the last scrapings from the pan and it tasted at least as good as the first batch, made for our own consumption and for one or two chutney connoisseurs we knew.

Tuesday November 22nd: I was up at 6:30 a.m. to receive the grocery delivery from Abel and Cole, only to discover the driver had already been and left it on the drive, behind the car. I fetched it in, facing the very, damp cold morning in my pyjamas and bare feet. It could have been worse.

Checking off the order, I found that Abel and Cole had included a free gift comprising a bottle of organic cider vinegar, a bottle of extra virgin olive oil, a tub of sea salt and a small tub of organic black pepper corn. That was very kind and generous of them.

I put the two tubs of ricotta cheese and one tub of mascarpone cheese in the fridge and went back to bed for an hour or so.

We were ready for Joani Beale at 9 a.m. when she called to collect me for another Dementia Awareness presentation at Skipton Building Society in Bury and to give Jenny a lift to Bury to purchase a few groceries. I provided the technical assistance for the Powerpoint presentation and we met up with Jenny at the car at 12:30 for the return trip home.

After lunch, Jenny and I went into Ramsbottom. The plan was to try to obtain some star-shaped cutters so Rachel could cut shapes in her fondant icing for cup-cakes she was making and two new fluorescent tubes for the lights under the units in the kitchen.

The first of these proved more of a challenge than the second. The cook-shop we intended to visit had closed at 2 p.m. We did find a cake shop that had a single cutter, which we purchased for a charitable donation of 50p. Jenny also obtained some bags for purchases of food at Santa's Christmas Cracker on the coming Saturday.

We toured the charity shops, without success, obtained a card for the wedding to which we had been invited in December and purchased the fluorescent tubes from the hardware shop before returning home via the scenic route, up the steep climb to Holcombe Village and then back down to Holcombe Brook, to avoid the long queue of traffic at the traffic-controlled road-works on the more direct route.

I finished of my chores for the long day by cutting round paper discs to cover the chutney in the jars from the previous day so they could be stored in the fridge.

Wednesday November 23rd: We had another late start and woke to a nice sunny day. My Broadband router arrived from BT during breakfast and I thought things were looking up until I started delving into my order.

I found an hour or so in the afternoon to go down to the garden centre in Summerseat where Jenny found some snowflake cutters for Rachel to make pretty patterns on her cup-cakes and a palette knife for spreading the icing.

Thursday November 24th: I had another morning session with BT on the telephone to discuss the order detail I had received in the E-mail the previous day. It was completely wrong and priced much higher than the package I had ordered.

I received an E-mail from British Gas confirming my maintenance agreement for the coming year. That's one company that seemed to be able to deal with issues correctly and efficiently.

Thursday November 24th: I started my day talking to BT again about my order, trying to make sure the billing was correct. Then I went outside to clear up the leaves on the grass at the side of the house. I managed to complete about a quarter of the work and almost filled our garden-waste bin before a short lunch.

After that and a rest, the sun low in the sky and the light was starting to fade. It was also quite cold. I stayed in and decided to have another go at resurrecting the old Fujitsu-Siemens laptop. All attempts to do so failed with a solid hard drive error. I decided to try to source a spare disc from another computer that had given up completely.

Meanwhile, I scanned some documents that had been piling up and sent a rather abrupt E-mail to Denplan about their huge hike in dental fees over the past four years and asking them to provide me with a more realistic cost for 2017.

I finished off my day by producing the labels for Jenny's chutney for the Christmas sale on the coming Saturday.

Friday November 25th: I spent most of the day outside in the sun raking more leaves off the grass on the side of the house, barrowing them into a large, white (1 tonne) builder's sack, used for delivering soil, sand and the like. I left off, having cleared about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the grass and having filled the sack about 3 p.m., as the sun was making its way quickly

towards the western horizon and it started to turn very cold. The sack took up position on the side of the drive, resting against the top pillar of the car port until I could figure out how to dispose of it. Fortunately, I had another, empty sack for the rest of the leaves when I could find time to deal with them.

After a quick shower and tea, I helped prepare the chutney jars ready for the following day's sale. That involved attaching the Christmas-style labels I had produced and covering the tops with decorative Christmas paper, tied up with twine.

Saturday November 26th: We spent most of the day at Greenmount Old School with a stall at the Christmas fair, "Santa's Christmas Cracker" selling the NGI (No Gluten-Containing Ingredients) produce Jenny and Rachel had baked over the past couple of days and the jars of Dover House Chutney (Mary Berry's recipe with a slight tweak) Jenny and I had made.

Rachel and I helped ferry the produce to the Old School and I helped Jenny move her half-table, shared with the regular cake stall, to her own stall when a stall-holder failed to turn up. I left Jenny and Rachel to manage the stall while I circulated and took photographs for the village web site.

We started to pack up when the event closed at 3 p.m. and were home for about 4 p.m., having had a satisfactory day.

Since we had not been grocery shopping, we had tea at the Bulls Head, the manager of which, we learnt, was planning to introduce metered parking as a result of the car park being used by people other than customers.

Sunday November 27th: Grocery-shopping day had arrived and driving to and from Chorlton and Broadheath was not unpleasant apart from the odd idiot motorist (my definition of idiot motorist is one who persistently hasn't any awareness of and/or regard for other motorists around him or her and/or one who persistently ignores speed limits and other niceties in the Highway Code, on which the Road Traffic Act was based).

Monday November 28th: Having ordered more Renal biscuits for the cat, the plan was to drive over to Shipley to have a look at a health food shop there I had found on the Internet, believing Shipley not to be so far away. When I consulted the AA Book of the Road in the car, it showed Shipley as being just off the A19, just north of York and since we were planning a day in York, we thought we would call at Shipley at the same time.

I invoked Plan B and set about a few odd jobs in the house.

The first task was to fix the lights under the unit in the kitchen. Having replaced the two fluorescent tubes and the lights then working again, I thought that had done the trick, until the new tubes failed to light a couple of days ago. Further investigation revealed a loose neutral wire in the master switch under the unit and having tightened up the screw, the lights were working again. I told Jenny not to dispose of the original tubes, as these were probably alright and would be useful for spares.

The second task was a little more complicated. The new Miele fridge/freezer fridge door squeaked terribly when it was opened and closed and we had come to the conclusion that, although I had levelled the front of the fridge (left to right), it was still unlevel front

to back and this was putting unnecessary strain on the hinges. I decided to revert to the original idea of using a levelled plinth on which to rest the appliance, as we did with the Bosch fridge/freezer. (Incidentally, the latter, which we had kept following the engineer's visit, had reverted to its old trick of icing up inside, so the engineer had not found and repaired the fault for which we paid £90).

Having measured up the size of the plinth required, I discovered that the Bosch plinth was 3 cm too short and I went up into the garage loft to find another piece of wood from which I could cut a new one. That involved some rearrangement of items in the loft and took up the rest of the morning.

A slight diversion occurred when Jenny started packing all the rubbish for the tip in the car and I recovered a SATA disc drive and some memory from one of the PCs I was scrapping.

After lunch I cut the new plinth, positioned and levelled it and then painstakingly manoeuvred the Miele fridge/freezer onto it, having earlier moved it into the middle of the kitchen. Unfortunately, the fridge door still creaked as it opened and closed.

Further inspection and cleaning of the top hinge with a piece of kitchen, paper towel and a cotton wool bud helped and the creaking had diminished somewhat. I decided to give it a couple of days to see if it improved.

I tidied up and came out of the cold to replace the faulty disc drive in the computer I was trying to revive with that I had recovered from the scrapped computer. That seemed to work and I commenced the installation of Windows 7. That all went well and I left it humming away searching long and hard for updates into the night.

Tuesday November 29th: It was not a terribly productive day. We went to Bury to dump yet more rubbish at the tip, pick up the cat's renal biscuits and drop off some handbags at the weigh-in. Apart from that, I spent much of the day testing printers and the last DVD player I had collected from Tracey's house. All but two printers were consigned to the rubbish pile, one of the remaining two needing a power supply and the other having some problem with the paper feed mechanism, at which I was going to have a look.

The laptop on which I had been working defied all attempts to seek further Windows 7 updates, a problem I have had in the past when reinstalling Windows 7 and always managed to circumvent. Unfortunately, I could not recall exactly how I managed to do it.

I succeeded in updating the village web site again, after scanning the latest copy of the church magazine, *The Digest*, for December 2016 and January 2017.

Wednesday November 30th: After the usual routine tasks and persuading the laptop on which I had been working to finally install updates, I went outside to finish clearing up the leaves from the grass on the side of the house. Jenny joined me in the very pleasant sunshine and we put the new batch of leaves in plastic bags that were easier to take to the tip than the builder's 1 tonne bag.

After lunch, I continued with the laptop, scanned a few documents and updated the Tottington District Civic Society's web site while Jenny went to the hair dresser. It turned very cold and I put on the heating early.

Another month came to an end and Christmas was approaching once again. Would BT deliver me an early present and install my new telephone and fibre broadband services I ordered, having missed the original deadline? Would BT score a first by billing me correctly for the services I ordered at the price quoted on the BT web site at the time? Would BT deliver me a second broadband router, having made a complete disaster of my original order?

All these questions and more will be answered in the next, stunning monthly instalment. After all, this was the season of miracles.