

Greenmount – October 2012

As we leave soggy September, we enter soggy October. No change there then.

On Monday 1st October we had to take Jenny's glasses into the opticians in Ramsbottom to have her new lenses fitted. This was scheduled to take a few days because the frames had to be sent away and, in the meantime, Jenny was not able to read anything, being long-sighted.

We caught the 11:03 481 bus into Ramsbottom, making good use of our bus passes while we still have them. Since the frames were not being collected from the opticians until later in the day, we toured the charity shops. Jenny bought a couple of books she wouldn't be able to read before leaving her glasses behind.

Having just missed both the 478 and 481 busses, both of which run at about the same time and at hourly intervals to Greenmount, thanks to excellent planning by the service providers, we started to walk home. As we approached Holcombe Brook, I suggested lunch at the Hare and Hounds where I was hoping to get my hands on a Dizzy Blonde. We discussed the cost and decided to head for Summerseat Garden Centre instead, hopping on the passing 477, which dropped us outside the Garden Centre gate.

After lunch, we walked home and closed the door behind us just as the rain started. So far so good, I thought.

I turned my attention to the business for the day and telephoned Mike at Valley Stone and Soil, Haslingden about the stones he delivered when I wasn't there to receive them and the missing invoice. He said he had posted the invoice the day before, second class, so I was to expect it some time in the distant future.

It was then the turn of JLT, who had still not paid my pension from CSC aka SMS, Torex or iSoft, take your pick. Instead of telephoning them, I hit on the idea of sending them an E-mail, copied to the Pensions Advisory Service, with the letter I sent them the previous week, attached. Needless to say I requested delivery and read receipts, receiving both from the PAS and a simple notification from my E-mail server telling me it had delivered the copy to JLT but not to hold my breath for any further confirmation.

I took the opportunity to reflect on an advertisement in our local Lancashire Living free magazine promoting private pensions and giving several good reasons for investing in one. My experience of private pensions to date compared with government ones was that I could give a couple of good reasons why you shouldn't invest in one.

On the other hand, my experience of government pensions was that those who manage them are professional and pay up promptly. My impression was that independent financial institutions even make the tax man look like a nice guy.

Which doesn't say much for JLT – that's Jardine Lloyd Thompson, www.jltgroup.com. Or was I being unfair?

I settled down to await events and went round to the Old School where I had volunteered to

help supervise the Monday Beaver Colony with their scout-bonfire leaflet-drop. As it turned out, there was enough adult supervision without me so I came back home again for an early tea – or it would have been if it had been warm enough for the dough for the home-made pizza to rise.

On Tuesday 2nd October I should have been at the IE plot for 10 a.m. to meet Frank. Looking out of the window as I rose from my nice, warm, dry bed, I noticed it was cold, dull and very wet outside so I returned from whence I had come.

After a late breakfast and being delayed by Mike, who called round delivering the village newsletter and who stayed for a coffee and a chat, I arrived at the plot about 11 a.m. to the welcome of “What kept you?” Frank had already laid out the area for the soft fruit and I came back home for my barrow and tools to finish off the stone path round the last raised bed, with which Frank helped.

I got back home just as the rains came yet again.

On Wednesday 3rd October, Frank, Mike, Steve and I went walking along the Huddersfield Narrow Canal from Greenfield to the Standedge Tunnel, the longest, highest and deepest canal tunnel in Britain and to pass through which you have to book in advance and take a canal ‘pilot’ with you. There is no tow path through the tunnel and in days of horse-drawn barges, horses were led overland while barges were moved through the tunnel using a technique known as ‘legging’, where barge hands laid across the barge top, in alternate directions, putting their feet on the canal walls and ‘walking’ the barge along by moving their legs from side to side. I’ve never tried this. I gain enough satisfaction from walking upright.

Leaving the canal, we followed the country lanes to the right, passing beneath a war memorial on a hill called, I believe, Pots ‘n’ Pans. There was some suggestion that we climb up to the monument but this course of action was superseded by a wiser decision to lunch in the Cross Keys pub.

We dropped down to Uppermill, where we picked up the canal again and followed this back to Mossley, where we just had time for another pint before catching the train back to Manchester Victoria.

On reaching Bury on the tram, the nice day of sunny periods had turned to grey, menacing skies and, after a brief detour to Next for Steve to acquire some curtains, not something he does on every walk we do, Frank suggested we walk back to Greenmount along the Kirklees Trail. I pointed out that this was not a wise decision, but I was overruled. We had just reached the beginning of the trail as it started to rain and we donned our waterproofs. By the time we had reached Brandlesholme Road, we were pretty wet and Frank conceded this was not a good idea. He called his wife who came down to pick us up in the car.

On Thursday 4th October, we caught the 481 bus into Ramsbottom to fetch Jenny’s glasses with the new lenses fitted, without which she had been like the proverbial bat and returned to the village, for a change, on the 478.

Later in the afternoon, I helped Jenny with her Beavers, dropping leaflets advertising the

Scout bonfire through letter boxes in the village.

On Friday 5th October we went grocery shopping to Unicorn in Chorlton and Prestwich Tesco, as usual. This was followed by a touch of Déjà Vu, as I supervised another Beaver leaflet-drop.

On Saturday 6th October, we went to the Old School for a quick look at the book exchange, run by Faith.

I mentioned to Faith, who is also in the St. John's Ambulance Brigade, that I was having trouble with my right eye.

I had experienced swirling black lines in my eye the previous Sunday morning, which I had thought to be a similar problem to that I had previously in my left eye and which, after several weeks, cleared up by itself, although I was under the supervision of the eye unit at Fairfield General Hospital.

Faith happened to mention that her brother had only recently retired from his profession as optician and telephoned him. I described my symptoms and his advice was to go straight to A&E, diagnosing a possible detached retina.

Five hours in A&E at Fairfield General Hospital later, mostly waiting for the on-call ophthalmic registrar, I was told I had burst a blood vessel in my eye just in front of the optic nerve. The bad news was that there was no treatment for it. The good news was that it should clear up on its own but would take several weeks and then some. The not-so-good news was that if a blood vessel can burst in one eye, it can burst in the other or even anywhere else in the body. That's reassuring.

I was recommended to have my blood pressure and lipid levels checked at my local GP surgery. I was also told that the eye clinic would once again be graced with my frequent presence to monitor my condition and if it didn't improve, it may be necessary to undertake some laser surgery.

So, all I needed were a wooden leg and a parrot.

On Sunday 7th October, I went to church, this being the first Scout Group Church Parade of the academic year and Harvest Festival. I would have worn my Scout Active Support (SAS) or, as it used to be known and we still call it, Scout Fellowship, Uniform but my sweater was in the wash so it was with hair and beard trimmed and suit, white shirt, collar and tie that I strolled into church just before 10 a.m. Not being in uniform, I did not join my fellows in the Fellowship but sat in the pews with the rest of the congregation. The service was interrupted by Andrew's (the Minister's) wife, Kath, to announce that this was Andrew's 25th anniversary as a Minister.

The afternoon I spent at the IE plot, turning over the planned fruit bed. Donna was there planting bulbs and flowers in various beds and tubs around the area and digging compost into the raised beds. We were joined by another colleague who trimmed some overhanging branches off the hawthorn tree and I stashed them away for later collection to produce fuel

for my stove.

On Monday 8th October, we decided to clear the loft in preparation for the laying of loft insulation the following week. A local company specialising in loft and cavity-wall insulation, acquired by British Gas, was undertaking the work at no cost to us, funded jointly by government and local council grants. It was too good an opportunity to miss. Unfortunately, the cavities could be insulated because they have some wires in them, which need to be removed. Guess who put them there in the first place.

The result of our day's efforts was that every room in the house looked like a second-hand shop. So what's new?

On Tuesday 9th October, Jenny spent the morning recovering from the previous day, taking things easy, cleaning and polishing those bits she could still get at. Meanwhile, I resumed my search for the elusive, intermittent fault on my desktop computer, causing it to randomly and repeatedly reboot itself. I almost reached the point at which I was ready to give it some assistance and, while I seemed to have it in a stable condition once again, I was not happy I had eliminated the underlying cause. Subsequent events were to prove me correct.

After Jenny's Yoga class, we went for a trip out to Asda at Pillsworth. For Jenny, this was as much a sightseeing tour as it was to acquire groceries, while, for me, it was an opportunity to stock up on essential supplies of beer and wine, in the latter case, Nottage Hill Chardonnay still being on offer at £5 a bottle and in plentiful supply.

At about 9 a.m. on Wednesday 10th October Jenny dropped four intrepid travellers at the train station in Bolton, where Frank, Steve, Mike and I caught the 09:33 to Carnforth. Alighting at the station about 10:40, we made our way along the Lancashire Cycle route, on foot, towards the coast path and, ignoring the warnings about fast-flowing tides, strong currents and quick-sands, headed south along some of the most uninteresting and desolate coastline of mainland Britain.

The salt marshes of Morecambe Bay are supposed to be a haven for wildlife and teeming with numerous species of birds. There was not much evidence of life and that included us four.

To say the first part of the coast path was undefined is not exactly true, although to actually follow the way-markers, or what we took to be the way-markers, about half way between where we were, close to dry land and relative safety and the sand proper, in the middle of the salt marsh, would have been impossible. The tide had bored holes and gulleys in the grassy areas and these were deep, wide and full of mud and water. As it was, we had to pick our way round them near the shore line and leap over several wider ones, I being the only one to remain vertical throughout. These gulleys became wider and deeper as one went further out, so I could only assume that whoever placed the way markers where they were either did so before the tide had made its presence felt or perished in the process.

It was a couple of hours before we reached our first major stopping point, Archers Café, where we intended to have a cup of coffee, or, in my case, tea. Mike persuaded the three of us to have a bacon bun while he had egg on toast with our drinks. This was our elevenses, an

hour and a half late.

Just under another couple of hours and easier going saw us on a bench near the centre of Morecambe's promenade, overlooking the bay, eating our packed lunches. We could just make out the peaks of the Lake District on the far side of the bay in the distance, the low cloud and dismal conditions not helping much, although the sun did try to break through on one occasion.

Pressing on down the promenade, we found a large, curved, vertical, metal profile of the aforementioned hills, engraved with their names, like Helvellyn and Skiddaw. Further on there was a statue of Eric Morecambe, born John Eric Bartholomew in Morecambe in May 1926, of Morecambe and Wise fame. I didn't see much else of interest.

From there we turned eastward. Had we followed the coast, we would have reached Heysham, known to me for its nuclear plant. We would then have had to come back up along the edge of the Lune estuary to Lancaster, had we been able to find suitable paths and it would have taken a lot more time than we had. As it was, we took a disused railway track, now a walkway and cycle path, 3¼ miles of it, directly from Morecambe to Lancaster, reaching Lancaster in just under the hour, which, for us, wasn't bad going.

In Lancaster, we made our way to the station and with about an hour and a half to spare before our train, set about finding a pub within crawling distance. That took longer than one would have thought, by which time we had developed quite a thirst.

We found a place near the castle, the latter now used as a prison and I can't recall the pub's name. All I can remember is that it served some very decent real ales of which Frank and I managed two pints. Steve went for a further half and Mike managed two and a half pints of Guinness before we realised we had less than ten minutes to board our train. We made the platform just as the carriage doors were closing and we managed to squeeze through them.

Jenny collected us from the station in Bolton, which is probably just as well.

On Thursday 11th October, Jenny woke with what seemed to be the start of a bad bout of influenza and we both had a quiet, uneventful day, resting, with the heating on all day for the first time for ages. Two doses of Lemsip capsules seemed to put enough life into Jenny to allow her to prepare tea and to run her Beaver session, which she could hardly postpone anyway because the Bat Man from the South Lancashire Bat Group was coming to talk to the Beavers about, would you believe, Bats. He was also bringing a live bat with him, since he is one of the few people in the country licensed to keep bats. It seemed appropriate, this being the month of Halloween.

On Friday 12th October, the plan was to do our weekly shop as usual, since I had not heard from the hospital about my eye problem, expecting an appointment at the eye clinic. I thought I'd better check to see what was going on to be sure I had not been forgotten. A wise decision as it turned out.

I telephoned the eye clinic at 9 a.m. They had not heard about me. It was suggested that I contact the people responsible for co-ordinating appointments. They hadn't heard about me

either. I was put through to A&E. A very helpful lady at A&E checked my notes and told me the ophthalmic registrar who examined me should have given me a piece of paper to use to book an appointment at the eye clinic. I said she hadn't and said she would arrange the appointment. After a slight pause, the lady at A&E said she would book me in at the eye clinic and could I be there for 10:10. I could hardly refuse.

We arrived at the hospital in good time, which is just as well because whoever is responsible for its design forgot to cater for the volume of car users. Not an uncommon mistake in my experience. We eventually found a parking spot at the opposite end of the hospital to the main entrance and proceeded to the eye clinic. An hour's wait found me with a nurse who checked my eyesight and put drops in my eyes to enlarge the pupils for a more thorough examination by the doctor. The drops were effective for about two hours.

The effectiveness of the drops was in danger of wearing off as I was called to see the doctor, or, to be more precise, the senior consultant himself. A quick question and answer session and a five minute examination revealed that I had a problem with the blood supply to my right eye and that my chances of making a full recovery were good but by no means guaranteed. There was no treatment for my condition and it was decided to review my natural recovery progress in six to eight weeks' time.

I returned to reception, where, due to the volume of patients for the only eye clinic now operating at the hospital, on Fridays, there were no appointments available to schedule my next visit. Some idiot, who is probably paid far more than I ever was, deemed the Wednesday clinics unnecessary with the result that the Friday clinics are now so oversubscribed as to be impossible to manage. My appointment was referred to the aforementioned bookings system on the basis that they would arrange something. Some hopes. Such is the modern NHS.

We left the hospital, Jenny driving to Tesco in Bury to do a quick shop for essentials, the revised plan (good old plan B) being to go down to Unicorn in Chorlton the following day.

We lunched at Costa Coffee in Tesco and we were home about 3:30 p.m., giving us a brief respite before going to Beavers at 5 p.m., where my duties were to take pictures of the man from South Lancashire Bat Group with his little live bat. Steve gave an excellent presentation to the Beavers about bats and I have to say the highlight of the session was my stroking the furry bat Steve brought with him to show the Beavers. What beautiful creatures they are and how essential they are to our existence, not that many people know that.

On returning home, I continued my battle to try to fix the problem with my desktop computer whereby it keeps rebooting itself. I can't say I was particularly successful and the root cause of the problem still eluded me. Fiddling about with only one good eye didn't help.

On Saturday 13th October, we finally managed to do our weekly grocery shop at Unicorn, calling at Costa Coffee in Tesco Prestwich and picking up a few items there on the return journey. That's two days running I treated Jenny to lunch out. I really know how to spoil a woman.

Not only that but I took her to the village quiz at the Old School in the evening. We met up

with Frank and Gwen, everyone taking their own food and drink and, as a team of four, we came about fourth from the bottom. It could have been worse.

On Sunday 14th October the plan was to start tidying in readiness for the loft insulation from British Gas the following day. This process was delayed by a mad dash to try to recover some of the essential computer services I have lost as a result of my desktop computer being in bits on the dining room table. Fish and chips took on a whole new meaning.

I succeeded in bringing the computer online long enough to transfer some of the main data files to Jenny's lap top and I installed Jenny's old laptop on my desk in the conservatory to act as a server for the printer, used by all the computers on the network and needed by Rachel for some preparation for the Cub Halloween night. I deduced that a new power supply might be in order for the desk top PC.

It was then back to Plan A, tidying the lounge and the garage, the latter only partially as time was running out and it was getting very cold.

On Monday 15th October, my Pension from CSC, being managed by JLT, was still not in my bank account and I telephoned Keren Scott, the Senior Scheme Administrator. It seems that JLT was not actually paying my pension. The money was being managed by a third party and JLT had instructed them to pay me but they hadn't done so up to this point. Keren was going to telephone this mysterious entity and contact me later with an update. Isn't life complicated? My NHS and Age Related pensions were far simpler and paid on time. I think there's a moral there somewhere.

Meanwhile, we decided to finish tidying the garage. After lunch, I continued my work on converting all my audio media to CD and, working through it alphabetically, I was well into the Bs.

This was interrupted by the arrival of the British Gas Loft Insulation Engineers to install my free loft insulation, which was completed in under the hour. The chaps were very nice and seemed very efficient. I hadn't actually inspected the work though. I was saving that treat for another day.

Continuing on the subject of Bs, the lady from JLT did not telephone me back as promised.

Just before tea, I could no longer resist lighting the fire that has been ready for weeks and, for once, the lounge had that air of cosy warmth you don't get with central heating. It also had the approval of one of our cats, sprawled full-length in front of the hearth.

On Tuesday 16th October, the day just flew by and it seemed to be tea time before I knew it. Of course, not being up and about before 10:30 didn't help. I spent the day playing with my media again.

On Wednesday 17th October, I telephoned my contact at JLT about my private pension since she had not telephoned me back as promised. When I spoke with her, she did say she had left me a message. Presumably the pigeon got lost. We had a long, meaningless (to me) conversation about annuity investments and the difficulty in obtaining the correct package to

pay my pension. The result was that Keren would chase up whoever about whatever and would telephone me back the following morning with an update. Meanwhile, my money, remained in someone else's bank account.

The more dealings I have with financial institutions, the more secure and comforting the mattress becomes. If I had my way, I'd shut the stock exchange and sack the lot of 'em.

At Noon it was time for lunch with the chaps, while Jenny disappeared off to Bury in the car. That took care of the rest of the day.

On Thursday 18th October I had decided to remove my power supply from the desktop computer and take it back to Scan in Bolton. The technical chaps there had agreed to test it on their bench and, if it did turn out to be faulty, they would return it to the supplier for a replacement. The task was completed immediately after breakfast, taking only a few minutes, the PC with its innards exposed still adorning the dining room table.

That done and the pots washed, I spent the rest of the morning psyching myself down for my blood pressure check with the practice nurse at 11:40. That went well. My pulse was normal and my blood pressure, surprisingly, exactly the same as it was last year when I had it checked. Even so, I am still recommended to go on Statins to reduce my risk of a heart attack, being about 26% over the next ten years. Apparently anything above 20% is high. The major contributory factors are my age (over 65) and my sex. I obviously can't do anything about my age and, just for the record, I never have contemplated or ever intend to consider a sex change. Of course, that gives me a 74% chance of not having a heart attack and odds of 3 to 1 seem pretty good to me.

Statins do have side effects and one of the main ones that the nurse seemed to stress is that they can upset the liver, an organ of which I am very fond and only having one of them, I am anxious to look after it as best I can. It's had enough to cope with over the years.

Just before lunch, I had a telephone call from JLT. It wasn't Keren with whom I had spoken the previous day but another gentleman. He seemed to be the bringer of good tidings, if not hard cash. It seems that he is arranging to have my capital sum paid into my bank account within the next few days and, what's more, he indicated that a solution to my annuity investment had been found, which means I should get my monthly pension as well, although that might take a little longer. He said my case was at the top of the list and receiving priority and he promised to call me with an update the following afternoon. JLT appears to have woken up, just after I had E-mailed the Pension Advisory Service again.

We (notice the WE) decided to postpone the trip to Scan until the following morning. I'm not sure why.

Our usual Friday grocery shopping trip on 19th October was preceded by an outing to Scan Computers in Bolton to take my suspect PC power supply for testing and rather than hang around for half an hour while the returns department did so we headed out to the M61 and the joys of junction 15 where it merges with the M60.

The traffic on this particular morning was backed up firstly because drivers were slowing

down, rubber-necking as they passed a large police presence on the hard shoulder of a junction a little further on and secondly because the majority of drivers simply don't know how to drive properly. If only, when faced with congestion, drivers slowed their speed so everyone could keep moving, stayed in their lanes instead of swerving from one to another, causing other drivers to slow down even more and left a gap so traffic could merge with ease, everybody would get to where they were going much quicker and by using much less fuel. If I had my way, anyone not leaving a gap as directed in the highway code and anyone stopping on a motorway without good reason would lose their licence for life. That would reduce traffic by about 90%.

Lunch at Costa Coffee in the Prestwich Tesco store was a welcome break and the staff, as always, were most pleasant. This has to be, without doubt, the best Costa Coffee café I have visited, thanks to the guys and gals who run it.

Arriving back home, I found two messages from Scan, both quoting the same RMA (Returns) number and authorisation, asking me to return the item to them, which was a bit odd because they already had it. I asked for clarification.

Saturday 20th October, Sunday 21st October and Monday 22nd October were all fully occupied by the jumble sale preparation at the Old School and the sale itself from 4 to 6 p.m. on the Monday. On this occasion, I had some good items in the electrical section and we did pretty well, selling most of these in the first twenty minutes and some of which we could have sold two or three times over. Disappointingly, a fully-working, Sony hi-fi system, with record deck did not sell and I now have two of these squirreled away for future opportunities. On a personal note, Jenny acquired some more items to stuff into the odd corner where the floor is still visible and I snaffled two or three CDs, including a double CD album of Kenny Ball's PYE recordings.

We rounded off Monday with a well-deserved meal at the Bull's Head.

Tuesday 23rd October saw the Incredible Edible plot development more or less completed before lunch, before which I had swept up the leaves covering the back lawn and which, on my return, was covered again. It's nature's way.

After lunch, Jenny went off to her Yoga class and I settled down to listen to my new Jazz CDs while cleaning out the fire after having used it for three or four evenings recently.

I decided to compile an outline specification for a new PC, Scan having advised me that my power supply was not faulty. Fortunately, on checking my bank account, I discovered that the lump sum part of my pension from SMS had been paid into my bank account by JLT so I can afford to buy one. Easy come, easy go.

My nose had been running all day and by tea time it had come back. IT brought tiredness, aching limbs and a sore throat with it. That's what you get for going to the doctors' surgery.

I awoke on Wednesday morning 24th October feeling just as bad as I had the night before with the addition of a bit of a cough. Still, it's not the cough that carries you off, it's the coffin they carry you off in.

I managed to summon up enough strength to drive to Asda at Pilsworth and back, the latter being something of a bonus. I spent the afternoon converting more cassette tapes and LPs to CD.

On Thursday, 25th October, I felt even worse. Drawing on my reserve tank, I went to Scan in Bolton to collect my computer power supply on which they hadn't found any fault. This means that my computer is probably in a slightly worse state than me and I talked to a very helpful chap there about a new one, hopefully without giving him what I've got. The plan was to have a go at fixing my old PC once more in the afternoon but I was too worn out and continued my media conversion work and listening to CDs.

The journey to Scan was more eventful than I had expected. Before I set off, I had to pump up the car tyres using a Halfords electric compressor, powered from the cigarette lighter outlet. A couple of the tyres were almost flat and the whole process took about twenty minutes, much to Jenny's displeasure. She was anxious to get back to do her ironing.

Having driven as far as Hawkshaw, all of five minutes, we found road works controlled by traffic lights where they were relaying the road surface. At the time I reflected that we should have gone the other way, through Tottington. We resolved to come back that way and, would you believe, found traffic controlled road works on Holcombe Road in the village on the way back from Tottington.

We lunched at Summerseat Garden Centre and I am pleased to report that we did not encounter any road works, just a tight squeeze between two cars parked opposite each other on Vernon Road in the village. If the owners of the vehicles happen to read this, just let me remind them of two things. Firstly, Vernon Road is a bus route and secondly, if there were an emergency and a fire engine were to speed along Vernon Road, it is worth remembering that these vehicles, being well built and extremely heavy, have been known to simply push obstructions out of their way.

In the evenings we are watching recorded repeats of the old, medical Yorkshire Television series set in Scarborough, the Royal and Jenny suggested I look on Amazon for the DVDs, which I did. The excellent series (I never thought I'd say that about a soap opera) stopped abruptly after number 8 because Yorkshire Television went bust. Unfortunately, only the first 2 are currently on DVD so I'm keeping the recordings on Jenny's computer for now.

While on Amazon, Jenny said I should look for "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre", an excellent film, directed by John Huston and starring him in a cameo role with the lead taken by Humphrey Bogart and support from John's dad, Walter, about gold prospectors in Mexico. Finding a DVD of this is like looking for rocking-horse droppings, or, possibly, gold. I've no idea why but it's hard to get and so expensive. Maybe it's because they found the gold.

My health did not improve on Friday 26th October as I was dragged coughing and spluttering to Tesco in Bury for groceries, preceded by a collection of boxes of VHS tapes left over from the Old School jumble sale, destined for the tip and, you've guessed it, a visit to the tip.

The decline in my energy levels and will to live continued on Saturday 27th October as I

dropped Jenny and Rachel off at the tram station in Bury for their trip to York, sightseeing, shopping and generally having a good time, which they both deserved.

I'm not what one might describe as a good cook at the best of times and given my predicament, I had to summon up all my strength to make my own tea and feed the cats, the two events being linked only by timing and not by content. To be fair, I did cheat in as much as I warmed a nice dish of pork and apple in pear cider, which Jenny had left me. I peeled and cooked my own vegetables though.

I did manage to put the power supply back in my PC but it didn't work and I was back to square one. A new one was inevitable, as soon as I felt well enough to deal with it. Had I felt better, I would have been outside in the sun, not that it was warm, tidying up the garden.

On Sunday 28th October I was coughing for England with my sights on a gold medal. I was so cold I resorted to putting the heating on all day and I stayed in playing with my media again. I managed to warm up a nice beef Balti with samosa and onion bargee for tea, challenging my culinary skills to the limit by boiling the rice. This went down well with a couple of Oxford Gold organic beers.

On Monday 29th October, I slept later than planned to find my cough was subsiding somewhat, thank goodness, probably due to the copious amount of Vick's Vapour Rub I had smeared on my chest and throat the night before. Either that or the previous night's curry. I still felt like death warmed up and put the heating on again, settling in the lounge under a blanket, listening to CDs.

I had declined a meeting with Mike, Frank and Steve at 10:00 at the Old School and probably missed out on a pub lunch.

It turned out to be a reasonable afternoon and I decided I could do with some fresh air so I walked up to the post office and back, emptied the recycling bins and swept all the leaves off the patio, by which time the cats were demanding their tea. The cats fed, I turned my attention to my own tea, reheating a shepherd's pie, which proved quite challenging without instructions and preparing and cooking the vegetables which was a doddle.

One side effect of my current affliction was that of losing my voice, a bonus some would say. Since I have no-one to talk to at the moment, this is not a problem and, in any case, I have picked up a bit of sign language over the years, mostly through motoring. I discovered that Glenmorangie didn't help but it was a most enjoyable experiment.

On Tuesday 30th I was up just after 7 with my lingering cough and feeling quite rough again. The grey skies, cold and damp didn't help. Still, it could have been worse. I could have been in New York. I am of the opinion the USA is getting what it deserves, being one of the largest greenhouse gas emitters in the world and with no strategy for reducing emissions. As ye sow, so shall ye reap, as the Good Book says. Let's face it, all our eastern chums who despise the western culture have to do is sit back, wait and watch us destroy ourselves. We can do the job much more effectively than a few suicide bombers.

I spent the morning updating the village web site and meddling with my music.

I swung into action, albeit in slow motion, on Wednesday 31st October, feeling a little better. I got as far as cleaning the log burning stove and the hearth before succumbing to this damn virus again.

I decided the best course of action was to listen to some Jazz records I borrowed from a friend and it took me all day to convert the first double album, Creole Love Call, featuring Chris Barber's Jazz Band, to CD for him. Not all the tracks were particularly to my taste, some being quite long; I have this theory that the length of a Jazz tune is inversely proportional to its appeal. While I find this generally holds true, for me at least, there are a few exceptions. Another theory I apply to Jazz tunes is that the later they were recorded, the less desirable they are. Again, I find this to be a fairly good guide but not a hard and fast rule; I find most modern Jazz, or what passes for Jazz these days, is more about technique than melody, meaning, rhythm and swing. Like most things people produce these days, in my opinion, it's mostly rubbish, lacking in style, quality and durability.

And there being nothing worth watching on the hundred or so TV channels we can receive on Freesat, I settled down in the evening to watch the original Frankenstein on DVD, this being Halloween, interrupted by several Trick-or-Treaters, braving the cold and rain, some of whom were very well made up. When things had quietened down, I started to watch the History of Jazz on DVD, only having time to watch the first of four DVDs, each being three hours long.

And there is no nicer way to hit the hay than with the sound of Louis Armstrong ringing in your ears.