

Greenmount - October 2015

Thursday 1st October: I spent the morning cutting the grass on the side of the house while waiting for the gas man to come and service the boiler. That he did while I continued my task.

I finished just in time for lunch, the gas man having long departed and, afterwards, Jenny and I went into Ramsbottom for our usual tour of the charity shops, where Jenny found a book and I found a DVD.

Friday 2nd October: Another grocery shopping day dawned and our first scheduled stop should have been at the Sainsbury supermarket at Heaton Park, being a diversion from our usual route in an attempt to acquire some varieties of gluten-free breakfast cereal I had located in the shop's on-line store. Unfortunately, a late start resulted in a direct route to Unicorn, followed by the usual excursion to Waitrose at Broadheath for lunch and further grocery shopping, returning through heavy traffic as the school run was commencing.

Safely home, I embarked on yet another update to the village web site and then I dealt with the snail-mail and my E-mail before tea. The latter involved getting to grips with Facebook once more and I had to leave that task unfinished. For some strange reason, I found Facebook far too complicated and time-consuming. I much preferred my own web site I had written in HTML and CSS with a bit of Java Script. Is that perverse, or what?

If you really want to get geekish, I had also started writing the odd Java application to make some of my computer tasks easier, assuming anybody out there knows what I am talking about.

Saturday 3rd October: The day was divided between preparing Christine's old Vista desktop tower system for the next jumble sale, later in the month, fixing yet another problem on my desktop computer and a trip to Sainsbury's at Heaton Park for some organic cereal. While there, we found a few other useful items, including organic Honeydew beer.

I finished off fixing my desktop computer, the task made much simpler by using Acronis software to make cloned copies of my system disc and by keeping a back up copy of it in the computer, just waiting to be powered on and connected up. Switching to it did require my data and E-mail files on it to be brought up to date and, while time consuming, that was simple enough.

I took the opportunity to back up my account on Jenny's laptop to an external hard drive as well, the laptop having an identical copy of my desktop files. It was a sort of belt and braces approach.

Tea was followed by a late-night session packing the car for the following day's car boot sale.

We should have been at the 50th Scout anniversary reunion meal but I really didn't feel much like socialising with my impediment. The day's activities were an attempt to try to live with the condition as normally as possible and to distract me from it.

Sunday 4th October: Yet another 5 a.m. start saw us at our pitch in Ramsbottom by 6:50 and we set up our table of goods in the cold, dark, misty morning and it was almost lunchtime before the sun finally managed to beat its way through the cloud, raising the temperature considerably and encouraging the visitors to our stall to part with some money. We ended the day's trading with modest takings at about 3 p.m.

I rounded off the afternoon by removing the old active disc from my desktop computer and making another clone of the back up system disc, the new clone becoming the live system disc. The reason for this was that I suspected the retired disc of being on the brink of failure.

The whole process was complicated by the need to remove and reinstall Acronis software and while removal was problematic, the reinstallation was quite straightforward.

Monday 5th October: Not feeling like doing anything particularly energetic, I spent the day on the computer, finishing off the repair to my desktop computer, updating the village web site and the Tottington web site, dealing with my more urgent E-mails and generally tidying up and synchronising my files between the desktop and Jenny's laptop, to keep both in step.

Tuesday 6th October: The day started much the same, scanning some outstanding documents onto my desktop and synchronising those files with Jenny's laptop. I wasn't sure I was winning the battle to go paperless, though. That process was briefly interrupted by a need to empty the car from Sunday's car boot sale and I then left Jenny to sort out her books in readiness for next Sunday, weather permitting.

We managed a quick foray into Ramsbottom in the afternoon in search of some organic soya "milk", having forgotten to purchase a pack of six at Unicorn on the previous Friday. Following our usual tour of the charity shops, we made our way in the light rain quickly to Morrisons. They had no organic soya and we were stranded there for several minutes while a heavy shower passed, I recalling Jenny's words as we had left the house, "You won't need your coat, it isn't going to rain".

We made it to Tesco without getting too wet and that was a waste of time too.

We finally found some organic soya "milk" on the shelf at the Co-operative store at Holcombe Brook, on the way home. Seek and ye shall find.

Wednesday 7th October: The morning was spent working on Christine's old desktop computer, continuing the reinstallation of the Vista environment in preparation for the jumble sale.

The afternoon we spent at the Old School testing and pricing electrical equipment for the jumble sale.

Thursday 8th October: A 7 a.m. start saw us at Fairfield General Hospital for 9:30, in good time for my ultrasound scan, scheduled for 10 a.m., having dodged the heavy traffic through Bury due to a collision between two lorries on one of the local motorways.

There is no room for modesty when it comes to problems with one's more personal parts and the first words of the nurse were "Drop your trousers and your underpants".

My enlarged, dangly bits were thoroughly scanned and I was told all the pictures would be sent online to my doctor at the hospital. Lucky him. If MI5 were monitoring any communications connected with me, they were in for a bit of a surprise.

We were on our way back well within the hour and I just about finished off putting the finishing touches to Christine's old desktop system, finding a slot for a bit of lunch, before we headed off to the Old School. Jenny went to her Yoga class and I resumed the testing and pricing of the electrical jumble. Jenny joined me after her session and we finished about 5 p.m.

A quick cup of tea and Jenny was out again, for the second night in the week, this time with the Beavers, supervising them selling tickets for the Scout bonfire door-to-door. Meanwhile, I boxed up Christine's PC and managed to switch on the oven to warm up tea for when Jenny returned about 7 p.m.

Friday 9th October: Another early start put us at Unicorn in Chorlton for 10:45 a.m. for our usual, weekly grocery shop there and at Waitrose, Broadheath, near Altrincham. We needed the early start because Jenny had to be back early because she was going out with the Beavers again at 5 p.m.

We left Waitrose in what I thought was a good time to miss all the traffic – until we hit the M60. There was a long queue of almost stationary traffic, tailing back from the exit two junctions further on. Once past that, we made reasonable time until we arrived close to our exit at junction 17, where there was another three-lane queue.

I came to the conclusion there were too many vehicles on the road and it was time our useless government did something about it, like weeding out all the bad drivers and getting more heavy traffic back onto the railways and even canals.

We made it home with about an hour to spare, which gave us time for a quick cup of tea, after I had fetched the delivery of organic, gluten-free flour from next door. We had decided to order a 16 Kg bag direct from Doves Farm, being unable to obtain any in reasonably-sized bags in the shops. We had until May 2016 to use it so Jenny was going to be quite busy baking.

Saturday 10th October: We had intended to go to the Old School to test and price more electrical equipment for the jumble sale. Unfortunately, I failed to read the village web site I maintain and run. It was the day of the Greenmount Synod. So after a brief visit to Holcombe Brook for some greetings cards and some cash, we came back home.

I spent most of the day working on the Tomlinson family tree, Charles having been married to Jenny's sister, Cath. I had recently received Charles' birth certificate, courtesy of Jenny's sister-in-law, Anne, who had gone to the Rotherham registrar in person to request and pay for it.

Having traced the family back to 1840, I liaised with a contact on Genes Reunited who had similar information but with some significant discrepancies. I decided I really needed some further documentation to check my research and that meant a visit to the Rotherham archives for someone. I decided to ask Anne if she fancied a day out since she was nearer than I.

I managed to break off briefly to collect the remaining blackberries of the season, which had not been a good one. We had no blackberry jam this year.

The mail Jenny brought me while I was in the middle of typing away contained a provisional date for my operation and a date for my pre-operative assessment. They were just after the scheduled jumble sale, so I would be available for that after all.

Another success of the day was to finally get BBC iPlayer working with Mozilla Firefox on Rachel's laptop. The reason for using that was quite devious. I had missed the recording of the last episode of the last series of New Tricks earlier in the week and I decided to attempt to play it back from iPlayer through an audio/video link from Rachel's laptop to my Hauppauge TV box. That had an audio/video input and a built-in Mpeg2 hardware encoder, sending the Mpeg2 stream over a USB link to Jenny's laptop. Have I lost anybody yet? Jenny's laptop had the Hauppauge WinTV recording application installed that allowed me to record the Mpeg2 stream from the TV box.

In short, I could record an ordinary video played from Rachel's laptop on Jenny's laptop and that got round the restrictions placed on the downloaded file from iPlayer. I could then add the recording to my collection.

Of course, TV and Radio recordings are nowhere near the quality of DVDs and I was slowly replacing my recorded collection of music and videos with proper CDs and DVDs and my collection of these was already greater than the planned available storage.

Sunday 11th October: Another fine, if somewhat slightly overcast, Autumn day saw us at our usual car boot pitch about 7 a.m. and a fairly good, early sale of a whole box full of Subbuteo items that were quite collectable put us into profit even before our stall money had been collected. The overall day's takings were not as good as the previous week and, for some strange reason, despite our low prices and good quality items, we did not sell any of our winter coats, suits or jackets. And it was quite cool.

I was too tired after the sale to do much else.

Monday 12th October: Jenny launched into her washing and ironing, the latter being a job she hated. I spent the morning updating the village and Tottington web sites.

I spent much of the lovely, sunny afternoon cleaning the cat's latrine, tidying up the autumn leaves from the back garden and the block paving at the back and round the house and removing the few weeds that had re-grown in the block paving.

Tuesday 13th October: It was finally time to unpack the car, putting the car boot stock back in the garage during the morning. Then we decided I should to take all the rubbish we had gathered together from our bits and pieces and from the Old School jumble to the tip while Jenny toured the isles of Tesco in Bury.

After lunch, we went round to the Old School to test and price yet more jumble for a couple of hours and I concentrated on all the computer equipment this session. The following day, I intended to deal with all the bits and pieces requiring a TV for testing. Lucky me.

Wednesday 14th October: We were up a little later than I would have liked and it was about 11:30 before we made our way to Asda at Pilsworth for a potter round the store looking for the odd item we thought we might need, as one does in supermarkets.

The plan was to go to the Old School and continue testing and pricing electrical equipment for the jumble sale. Unfortunately, as we were leaving Asda I had one of my funny turns.

For some years, I have had the odd moment when I have felt quite faint, lacking energy and I put this down to fluctuating blood sugar or possibly dehydration. Recent blood tests ruled out a blood sugar problem. When I got home, I had a drink and some fruit, rested and then had lunch. All of that did not significantly improve matters and I fell asleep for a couple of hours in the Conservatory, being the warmest room in the house this time of year, in the autumn sun. Now that did make me feel better.

I must have been tired, though I had not been doing anything too strenuous for some time.

I started work on putting another batch of pictures on my web site but the task was made a trifle difficult due to a lack of concentration.

It had been a strange day.

Thursday 15th October: We had made arrangements to go to see Jenny's niece, Tracey, in Sheffield. We took the trailer and came back with a car and trailer loaded with car booty.

While there, I had a look at Simon's new house and the work being done there. It was in the middle of being rewired.

We arrived home somewhat later than planned and just as the car gave up on us. It failed to start after reversing the trailer half way down the drive and I managed to roll it backwards down the drive without engine power, not an easy task when there is no servo power to the brakes or steering.

The following day being a grocery shopping day was faced with two issues, the first being a car loaded with car boot goodies and the second being that the engine wouldn't start. I decided to rise early and telephone the local garage. Then I had a late evening brainwave, not a frequent occurrence at my age. My car insurance was with the RAC and included the breakdown service so I telephoned them on their 24 x 7 free phone number. The lady who answered my call said she could have a chap with me within two hours. I explained I was off to bed and around 8 a.m. in the morning would be better. That was a busy time and all she could do was to offer me a three-hour window between 8 and 11 a.m., to which I agreed.

As I retired, it struck me that the problem might be that the chip in my car key had somehow become defective and no longer communicated with the engine management system and that Jenny's key might work better. I left that for the morning.

Friday 16th October: Although awake, I was still dozing in bed when the RAC man telephoned at 8:15 to say he would be with me in 15 minutes. Getting out of bed, washed and dressed in 15 minutes was something of a record for me of late.

Jenny and I went to unload the car booty and had just started when the RAC man arrived. Jenny carried on unloading single-handed while I dealt with the car. The RAC chap tried my key and, after a brief hesitation, low and behold, the engine started. The engineer spent about an hour and a half trying to diagnose the problem that seemingly had disappeared and we concluded that it was most likely due to a lack of fuel, possibly as a result of a temporary blockage or air bubble.

Just in case of any problems while grocery shopping, Jenny and I hunted round for my jump leads to put in the car. We couldn't find them and resolved to carry out a more thorough search under the piles of car boot stock in the garage the following day.

We eventually set off on our grocery shopping trip that, fortunately, went without a hitch.

The rest of the afternoon I spent putting in the TV recordings for the following week.

Saturday 17th October: Jenny spent all day outside sorting out her car boot stock. I spent most of the day inside, where it was a little warmer, except when Jenny kept the front door open so she could keep coming in and going back out again, providing me with electrical items to test and price and a small batch of old English and foreign coins to price. That, with the odd stint outside to do some heavy work and crawl about in the garage loft, as one does as one gets older, kept me busy all day.

Jenny did manage to find my jump leads, buried under a large pile of car booty, not that I needed them.

We finished off the long day by packing the car ready for another assault on Ramsbottom at around 7 a.m. the following morning, catching the unsuspecting public while it was still on the dark side, not that we expected many of them to be around at that time.

Sunday 18th October: We arrived at our selected spot before 7 a.m. As we left home, it was damp and there was moisture in the air, which should have told us something. By the time we reached Ramsbottom it was raining and that eventually turned to the kind of mist and drizzle associated with low cloud. By 8:15, there was little sign of it abating, even though a brief dryish spell had tempted us to put up our tables and then the excessive moisture forced us to cover them with polythene sheeting. We decided to pack our tables away and come home, which was a shame because there were quite a few cars there and there was a pie festival in Ramsbottom, so trading would probably have been reasonably good.

It did eventually dry up a bit but it was very cold and we spent the day indoors apart from removing the few wet items from the car and putting them out to dry or in the garage.

I updated the village web site and then received a further update from our Chairman which required a supplementary modification.

I dealt with a few E-mails, including one from Greenpeace about John West's appalling fishing methods and human rights issues. If you have shares in the company, my advice is to dump them and if you buy their products, switch to a different brand, one

displaying the [MSC](#) label () , if you can because the MSC promotes sustainable fishing and that will ensure there are enough fish left for your grandchildren.

I also had to read my gas and electricity meters for the first time for ages and submit those.

Jenny had received an E-mail to say her Mastercard statement was ready. I tried logging in to inspect it so I could pay it. The log in failed to identify the laptop even though I had used it to access the bank before and that was because I have a nice piece of software that tidies up all the nasty little web site cookies daily. So the web site wanted to send a one-time code to Jenny's mobile telephone. Normally that would not have been a problem. On this occasion, the telephone refused to recognise its SIM card and it wasn't the device because I tried the SIM card in my mobile telephone with the same result. I gave up and paid the bill from my bank, knowing what we had bought and how much it would be, resolving to buy Jenny a new mobile telephone, retaining her existing number, at the earliest opportunity.

I also managed to process my media recordings and listen to the radio recordings, catching up on the Last Night of the Proms 2015 at long last.

All that was in between making a fire and feeding the log-burning stove.

Monday 19th October: I decided to order Jenny a somewhat expensive present and Dyson would be arranging delivery of her new vacuum cleaner the following day, with any luck.

We spent most of the morning tidying up the garage and unloading the car. After lunch, we headed out to Bury.

The man from the council arrived to plough up the greens with his ride-about grass cutter. The way he drove it, he would be more at home at Silverstone. Thankfully, he left the bit I cut alone again. Everyone tells me what an excellent job I make of it and some have asked me why I don't cut it all. I might if my cord would reach.

Our first stop was at the Old School to drop off some items for the jumble sale and where we met up with one of the other regulars, Nikki. I left Jenny to help Nikki empty the jumble repository while I walked across to the church to drop off a large, white sack from the Incredible Edible plot I had used to take rubbish from the plot to the tip and which had been taking up room in my garage.

On the way back to the car, I called at the chemist to collect my Tamsulosin tablets and they also had my Omeprazole tablets, saving me a trip to the medical centre just down the road.

We took the scenic route via Ramsbottom to the tip in Bury so we could drop off a birthday card for Jenny's friend, Karen for the following day, Jenny having forgotten to post it. Given that we were driving around at school-finishing time, the roads were not that busy.

We dumped various items from our car boot supplies and from the Old School jumble items for recycling before heading home for a nice cup of tea.

I tidied up a few loose ends on the PC and retired to watch the remainder of Pointless followed by tea and other pointless media.

Tuesday 20th October: My first allocated tasks of the day were to wash the pots, empty the vacuum cleaner and the general rubbish in the bin outside, fetch the bin down after it had been emptied and vacuum the carpets and floors downstairs. I wanted to wait for the new vacuum cleaner to arrive but the last task was regarded as urgent because Jenny was suffering from a suspected allergy and we couldn't work out whether it was due to the dust or the cat. I didn't vacuum the cat thought.

The next chore was to clean out the fire from its last use a couple of days previously and that turned into a thorough spruce-up of the hearth, fire surround, mantle-shelf, ornaments and mirror, leaving off to take delivery of the new vacuum cleaner and then rushing down to Bury to collect the cat's renal-diet biscuits from the vet and drop off a load of clothes at the cash-for-clothes weigh-in.

It was a quarter to beer time when I finally sat down to relax, while Jenny prepared tea. We were having an organic, gluten-free, roasted-vegetable quiche and Jenny was making the base from scratch using the bulk bag of organic, Dove's-farm, gluten-free flour we had bought.

Working with gluten-free pastry was not easy and Jenny was best left to deal with it without my inept kitchen experience.

Wednesday 21st October: After rising later than planned and showering, half the morning was gone. I resolved to set the alarm in future.

To add to my present woes, I discovered a rather nasty red rash on the back of my lower right leg. I thought I must have caught it against something in the garage and not noticed at the time. I applied some Faith in Nature body lotion to it and decided to check it daily.

It being rather late and the village meeting coming up in the evening, I thought it best to update the village web site. That was followed by a day of testing electrical equipment for Jenny's car boot and pieces I had brought home from the jumble sale that I could not test at the Old School because the church was too mean to sanction the cost of broadband. During my testing, I checked our own microwave for leakage and discovered there was a sign of some so we consigned it to the tip and decided not to replace it.

After an early tea, I went to the village A.G.M. followed by the regular meeting at the Cricket Club. Since it was raining, I decided to drive the short distance. The secretary was handing out freebies. I received four packs of dog poo bags to hand out to people with dogs as part of the drive to stop fouling. Thankfully, most people in these parts were responsible enough to clean up after their dogs.

Thursday 22nd October: It was a reasonable morning and I went out to rake up the leaves on the patio and the back lawn. It was a thankless task at this time of year but very necessary. Unfortunately, rain prevented me from further outdoor work and I came in to type this.

We planned to go to the Old School to test more electrical equipment for the jumble sale when the pre-school finished at noon so it wasn't worth starting anything else. And so we did, at about half past twelve, the delay being due to a message from Andy to say

Jenny's niece, Tracey had been admitted to hospital again. We had a quick chat with Andy.

Friday 23rd October: An alarm call at 7 a.m. saw us on the road to Unicorn at about 9:30 and we were home again about 2:30 with our week's groceries. We had a brief rest and a cup of tea before going to the Old School at 3:30. We unpacked all the equipment we had tested and priced and placed it on the tables in the electrical section for the jumble sale. All of the equipment still requiring testing we left in readiness for the following day.

We came home and I was allocated the task of feeding the cat. Then it was time for a beer, placing the tankard on the carpet by my lounge chair to keep it as cool as possible. I drank about a quarter of it before Jenny decided a small part of the carpet required a beer shampoo and waltzed in, kicking over the tankard as she rushed by. The living room certainly smelt better.

Saturday 24th October: The alarm went off at 7 a.m. I switched it off and ignored it. It didn't really start to become light until nearly 8:30 and by the time we had showered and had breakfast it was approaching 10:00 a.m. It's not that I was obsessed with time, it's just that we had told people at the Old School to expect us between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. In the event, it was nearly 11 a.m. because I decided to update the village web site while Jenny was pottering around and that took longer than I expected.

We spent all day testing and pricing electrical equipment for the jumble sale and didn't get home until turned 5 p.m. I had brought a few items for which I needed the Internet with me to price up and that done, we set about packing the car for the following day's car boot sale, the weather forecast being favourable, assuming they got it right.

A quick salad tea was ready for about 8 p.m. and I was shattered. The prospect of a 5 a.m. start the following day did not bode well. Maybe a beer would help, I thought. I didn't get the chance to find out.

Sunday 25th October: We awoke to the alarm, set on my mobile telephone for 5 a.m. Unfortunately, the rather old piece of simplistic equipment did not automatically adjust itself for British Summer Time and, more importantly, the end of it. This being the morning the clocks were set back an hour had me fumbling for the off switch at 4 a.m.

We dozed on until about 5:30 and were out of the door somewhat later than usual, just after 7 a.m.

Despite the weather forecast for a dry night, the ground appeared exceedingly wet and as we headed up the road to Holcombe Brook we discussed the need to lay plastic sheeting on the floor before placing any of our stock on it, round our tables. We didn't get as far as putting our plan into practice, hitting precipitation as we passed the Hare and Hounds, contrary to the met office's predictions. I thought they should be moved to the Rossendale Valley.

We decided to turn round and come home. With the car safely on the drive, we unpacked it (at least we'd had some exercise), came in, undertook a few chores, including resetting all the clocks and then headed to the Old School at about 9 a.m., the weather turning decidedly brighter and no doubt dryer in Ramsbottom, by this time.

We were working on the jumble until about 4 p.m. The pace was more relaxed and pleasant than usual, having put in the effort earlier in the month to deal with a good deal of electrical items and by the end of the day I had just about finished, which left a few remaining telephones to test the following day, together with any additional items that came into the jumble before the sale at 4 p.m.

The cat was pleased to see us and we relaxed and listened to another of the excellent Trad Jazz CDs I had acquired. Then Jenny prepared tea, Rachel arrived and we settled down to a relaxing evening with a bottle of Yellow Tail Shiraz.

Another item we had acquired from the jumble was a DeLonghi dehumidifier and, having left that working in the kitchen for a couple of days, augmenting our own in the conservatory, it had collected at least two pints (that's about a litre to those to whom a Britain is somewhat less than Great and more part of a bed of financial corruption called Europe) of water, so it was working well. I contemplated putting it in the garage but low temperature protection would be a problem there.

It also occurred to me that, while I was doing my best to give at least as much as I take from life, there are those who should know better just taking everything they can get. The recent agreements between David Cameron and Xi Jinping were the biggest blunder any UK leader had ever made and would lead to nothing but misery far beyond these once idyllic shores. Did Tiananmen Square mean nothing to our glorious leader? Did he understand the long term (like, for ever) problems of dealing with highly radioactive nuclear waste from nuclear power stations? This was the man who was supposed to be looking after all our interests. How could he look after anything with his head firmly in the sand?

But why should I worry? First, at my age, whatever happened wouldn't make much difference to me. Second, I didn't have any grandchildren to worry about. Third, the Good Lord would take care of matters anyway, although many would suffer in the process. Finally, we would all reap the consequences of our actions in this life in the next. I didn't give much for David Cameron's or Xi Jinping's chances. And don't think for one second that non-believers will be exempt.

Here endeth this month's sermon.

Monday 26th October: We spent yet another day at the Old School, culminating in the jumble sale at 4 p.m. The electrical equipment went well, which was encouraging considering the amount of time we had spent testing and pricing it.

Tuesday 27th October: We went to Sheffield to see Jenny's niece, Tracey. Tracey had come out of hospital the previous day, having suffered from heart problems and she was looking much better than the last time we saw her. She was also feeling much better.

We called at the Heaton Park Beefeater on the way back for tea. It was very nice but the portions seemed to have shrunk and it was becoming expensive.

Wednesday 28th October: We took all the rubbish we had and from the Old School jumble sale to the tip in Bury and went into the market for a few odds and ends from the Health Food shop. We took a scenic tour of the old, world-famous(?) market in search of the pet stall where a waitress, Jackie, from the Beefeater worked and eventually found

it, stopping for a chat. That was followed by an unsuccessful search for a decent mobile phone shop and we decided to head back to Tesco, where we had parked the car.

We tried the mobile phone shop in Tesco which wasn't much help because they only sold mobile phones connected with the Tesco network and Jenny's phone was suffering from a deceased Orange SIM card.

There was nothing on the shelves at Tesco to tempt us either and we left empty-handed, which must have been a first.

I spent the afternoon updating the village web site – twice – the second time being as a result of the November Digest, which I scanned and put online as well. I discovered how to produce a web link to a specific page in a PDF document. I also discovered that, on my desktop PC, Firefox insisted on opening PDF documents on my PC (when testing the web page updates) in an Adobe Reader window as opposed to the Adobe within Firefox, as a web page. Opening files in this way required a space between the PDF file name and the page parameter for the document to be opened at the correct page from the web link. I thought it strange and, of course, when I copied the tested pages to the server and checked the live web site, it didn't work with the space in the link, so I had to remove it. I didn't have the same problem with Internet Explorer when testing pages on Jenny's laptop, so I deduced it was a problem with Firefox.

Thursday 29th October: I had to be at North Manchester general Hospital for my pre-operative assessment at 9:15, requiring a 7 a.m. start and I had set the alarm accordingly. I didn't sleep well, the problem with a bad throat and catarrh being back and I decided to get out of bed at about 6:30 a.m., switching off the alarm. We were out of the house by 8 a.m. and I expected a long slow drive in heavy traffic for a journey that should have taken about 30 minutes.

This being a half-term, there was surprisingly little traffic and, despite being held up by road works on Bury Old Road near Heaton Park, we arrived at the hospital at about 8:50.

I had been advised to allow two hours for my appointment and this not being due until 9:15, the next option on the parking machine was six hours for £3.

We parked in the main car park and had a good five-minute walk along the main corridor in the large complex to the pre-operative assessment suite. I checked in early and was taken form my tests almost immediately. My height and weight were measured, whereupon I advised the nurse I was too short for my weight. She took my blood pressure, which was alright considering I had been rushing to arrive on time, temperature and pulse. So far, so good. Then she asked me to stick a swab up my nose and another one round my unmentionables. Apparently, this was to see if I had any of the MRSA virus on me, as if they didn't have enough of it already.

I was also asked to provide a urine sample, which subsequently tested positive for sugar, resulting in yet more blood to be extracted. Well, it was coming up to Halloween.

The final test was electrifying. I was hooked up to an ECG machine for the second time in the last few months.

I left with a letter advising me that I was on the afternoon shift on Monday 2nd November and when and where to report for slicing and dicing. The whole process had taken a little over an hour, which I thought was most efficient.

On the way back we called at the new, organic, community co-operative at Prestwich and came out with £18 worth of groceries comprising several items we could not acquire elsewhere and a couple for which we had been searching, namely organic, gluten-free oats and organic currants. I had the feeling we would be back.

We popped into one or two charity shops while in the shopping precinct, a couple of which were quite expensive as charity shops go. That wasn't really surprising considering the area.

I took a quick detour along Kingswood Road and the old place (the Data Centre, originally of the North West Regional Health Authority) was long gone. In its place was a row of town houses with very little frontage, making the road look quite claustrophobic and behind there were crammed several other new dwellings, the sign boasting four and five bedroom houses. I was of the opinion they must be small bedrooms.

We came home for lunch, after which I spent ages trying to find a way of talking to someone at Orange (now EE) to request a new SIM card for Jenny's phone. I finally managed to reach a very helpful lady on a free phone number (0800 956 6060, open 08:00-20:00), listed on the EE web site as their complaints number for mobiles, etc., who, after taking some details and checking we were who we said we were, told Jenny a new SIM card would be with her in a day or two.

My next productive task was to fill the washer bottle on the car with fluid, using that which was already diluted for use and another two and a bit litres I had to prepare.

Looking for yet more tasks, it being too late to start cleaning our bedroom as planned, I decided to try to repair Tracey's Hitachi L24VC04U television, for which I had to find a long aerial lead in the garage loft.

When connected up, I eventually managed to make the TV work and retuned the digital channels for the north west. I thought I had fixed it and sent a text message to that effect to Jenny's nephew, Simon, to ask him to tell Tracey. It was soon after that I discovered the fault was back. When powered on, the standby LED went red, then flashed blue for a few seconds, then went blank. This sequence repeated itself, countless times before the TV eventually burst into life. Research suggested that this was due to a fault on the power board, not uncommon on some Hitachi models, and the solution was to replace it. The indicative cost was about £50.

I could not find a source for the part I needed so I sent an E-mail to Hitachi Europe asking where I could obtain one. I also decided to have a workdwith our local TV repair man in Ramsbottom the next time I was passing his shop.

As the day wore on, I became increasingly unwell, with nasal catarrh and a rather nasty cough. I did not sleep very well that night.

Friday 30th October: By 4 a.m. I was coughing so badly that I started to bring up some blood and that was a little worrying at the time.

We went shopping as usual, although I was struggling more than usual to keep within the bounds of reality. Our first stop was at Asda, where I cheered up a little. Yellow Tail Shiraz was on offer at £25 for a box of six bottles. Yellow Tail Chardonnay was £6 a bottle and, although there were none on the shelves, a very helpful young man found me a box of six bottles in the store room.

We pressed on to Unicorn, the journey round the M60 being quite slow and I had forgotten to bring my jazz CDs. By the time we had reached Waitrose, my internal bleeding seemed to have stopped and I surmised my coughing must have burst a blood vessel and that my repair system had kicked in and fixed it. I had a bacon sandwich for lunch, hoping the grease would help lubricate my internals. Any excuse.

The journey home was even slower than the outward excursion and the forty minute journey took well over an hour. My coughing and nasal congestion was not as bad as the previous night and I slept more comfortably.

Saturday 31st October: We went into Ramsbottom, primarily because I wanted to see the TV repair man. We set off on a tour of the charity shops while working our way down the main street and a new, vegan shop called Lolo's caught our eye. The shop had only been open three weeks and there was a good selection of organic items, including some for which we had been searching for some time. The Delicatessen, next door and the restaurant, next door to that were not open yet. The proprietor was a jazz fan and the restaurant was planned to have a 1920s theme. We were told a band will be playing there on New Year's Eve.

The TV repair man wasn't much help in obtaining a replacement power board for Tracey's TV but he did say that if I took the faulty one in he would repair it. There aren't many chaps around who could do that or would take the trouble to do that if they could these days. He said he had been repairing equipment for many years and was thinking of retiring. I suggested he shouldn't because his kind is rapidly becoming extinct in this throw-away world.

After lunch at home, I helped Jenny with a recipe for a gluten-free pizza base for tea. Unfortunately, it wasn't ready in time to eat before we were due at the Old School for the community quiz night, so we took it with us, along with lots of other goodies and some booze. We had a good evening, making up a team of four with Frank and Gwen and we scored 45 out of 60, which wasn't bad, although we didn't win. The winning score was 50 and a team with 49 came second.

Yet another month in the grand scheme of things came to an end and another exciting adventure began as we approached the day of my operation and Guy Fawkes' night, the two events being wholly unconnected. I couldn't help wondering how much different the world might have been had Guy Fawkes succeeded.